

La crème de la crème

The Teacher's Role in Muriel Spark's

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

And Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*

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A teacher affects eternity,
He can never tell where
his influence stops.

Henry Brooks

Adams

It is fascinating how teachers can affect our characters, lives and careers tremendously. When reading the autobiographies or biographies of many celebrities, one finds them speaking either positively or negatively of their teachers and giving them a great space in their works. To name only a few, we have Helen Keller's autobiography *The Story of My Life* (1903), E. R. Braithwaite's autobiographical novel *To Sir, With Love* (1959), Edward Said's memoir *Out of Place* (1999) and Samia Serag el Din's autobiographical novel, *Cairo House* (2000). Besides, many movies have documented the effective role of teachers; notable are *The Miracle Worker* (1961), *Dead Poet's Society* (1989), *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) and many others. It is the same in the two works examined by this paper, Muriel Spark's novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) and Mitch Albom's memoir, *Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997). In the two texts, the protagonist or one of the major characters is a teacher whose influence is indelible. In fact, certain parts of the character of Miss Brodie are based on Christina Kay, Spark's school teacher at James Gillespie's High School for Girls for two years. Albom's work is also based on his actual Tuesday meetings with his college professor, Morrie Schwartz, of twenty years ago.

Spark's novel was first published in *The New Yorker* magazine and then later as a book. It presents and is actually named after its main character, Jean Brodie, a school teacher in Marcia Blaine School for Girls, one of the conservative schools in Edinburgh, Scotland. The text features certain years in her life with a group of her students, known as the Brodie set: Monica Douglas, Rose Stanley, Sandy Stranger, Jenny Gray, Eunice Gardiner and Mary Macgregor. We see the development of the relationship of these six girls with their teacher over the years, since they were in her class, then after joining the Senior School and finally after her death. As for *Tuesdays with Morrie*, it is, as the subtitle indicates, about "an old man, a young man, and life's greatest lesson". It records and documents the last weeks in the life of Morrie Schwartz, Albus's sociology professor at Brandeis University. He was forced to retire after he was afflicted by ALS, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gherig's disease, "a brutal, unforgiving illness of the neurological system" which caused his body to disintegrate, making him lose control of it (Albus 7). However, Morrie's mind remained alert and articulate. Realising that his life would soon come to an end, he decided to share his wisdom on "The Meaning of Life" with his old student Mitch. This took place on 14 consecutive Tuesdays, which explains the title of the book.

Objective and theoretical background of the study

This paper discusses these two texts which, though located in different contexts and settings, share certain themes in common. Some of them, the focus of this study, are related to the power of education and the never-ending, whether negative or positive, disempowering or empowering, roles of teachers in the process of education and the lives of their students. These themes, along with the analysis of the characters of Brodie and Morrie, will be discussed in light of the pedagogical theories

propagated by the great educational thinker, the Brazilian Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997) and two psychological concepts discussed by the German social psychologist Erich Seligmann Fromm (1900-1980). Emphasis will be mainly laid on Freire’s revolutionary book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (first published in Portuguese in 1968, and translated and published in English in 1970). It is a book that “has outlived its own time and its author’s” and “will continue to stimulate and shape the thought of educators and citizens everywhere” (Macedo 11, Freire 9). In relation to Freire’s theories, this paper will refer briefly to two of Fromm’s concepts, biophilia and necrophilia, examined in his *The Heart of Man* (1964). Fromm is a psychoanalyst, a member of the “Neo-Freudian school of psychoanalytical thought,” and a humanist who was concerned with studying the essence of man; having theories regarding human character and nature.

Paulo Freire sought a liberating form of education; hence he refused and criticized what he called the “narration sickness,” taken on by conventional teachers (71). He notes that a thorough examination of the teacher-student relationship shows clearly that it is made up of “a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient listening objects (the students),” which makes any kind of content offered “lifeless and petrified” (71). Worse, “this narrative education” is characterized by “the sonority of words, not their transforming power;” (Freire 71) for “Education ... becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (Freire 72).

Freire enlists from a-j the opposing characteristics and roles of teachers and learners in this banking concept or process: the teacher teaches, knows everything, thinks, talks, disciplines, “chooses and enforces his choice,” acts, “chooses the program content;” while the students are taught, know nothing, are thought about, “listen meekly,” “are disciplined,” comply, “have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;” and adapt to program content (73). Besides, the teacher “confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students” (Freire 73). Therefore, he rightly describes this banking concept as oppressive, one that does not allow any practice of freedom or critical thinking. Rather, it brings about conformity and dehumanization, “anesthetizes ... inhibits... minimize[s] or annul[s] the students’ creative power” and turns them into passive and manageable beings who simply

“adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them” by the oppressors who oppose any form of experimentation and any attempt to reveal and transform the world (Freire 81, 73).

But Freire does not denounce banking education only because of its negative and oppressive impact on the learners, but also for psychological reasons, taking in this regard Erich Fromm as his reference. Fromm distinguishes between two concepts, biophilia and necrophilia, but he makes clear that a person is not necessarily totally necrophilous or biophilous (35). The former is defined as “the love of life,... for humanity and nature, and independence and freedom,” a tendency towards growth, preserving life and fighting death; and “a productive psychological orientation and state of being” (35, 41 101). A biophilous person is adventurous, with a functional approach to life; he “prefers to construct rather than to retain. He is capable of wondering, and he prefers to see something new to the security of finding confirmation of the old. He wants to mold and to influence by love, reason, by his example; not by force...[or] the bureaucratic manner of administering people as if they were things” (43).

Contrary to biophilia, is necrophilia, which Fromm relates to Freud’s death instinct and defines as the love of the dead, which makes the person drawn to everything that is dead, and love “all that does not grow, all that is mechanical. The necrophilous person, [whom he finds best embodied in characters like Hitler and Stalin or any person who tends to strangle the joy of life and infect people with his/her necrophilous orientation] is driven by the desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach life mechanically, as if all living persons were things. All living processes, feelings, and thoughts are transformed into things” (37). Such a person is “cold, distant, devotee of ‘law and

order,'... enamored of force" and cares only about "Memory, rather than experience; having, rather than being" hence he/she cannot relate to anything, a flower or a human being, unless when he/she possesses it: "He loves control, and in the act of controlling he kills life" (Fromm 36, 37). Interestingly, Freire directs our minds to the analogy between necrophilia and banking education which- instead of promoting the development of biophily- produces its opposite, necrophily, due to its oppressive and controlling tendency and its assumption of the learners as mere passive entities and "docile listeners" who are to remain "outside of history and agency" (Freire 77& Bartlett 2). Hence, this education has a deadly effect on the learners.

In contrast, Freire proposes problem-posing education, which is revolutionary and "dialogical par excellence;" (Freire 109) since it depends on interaction, dialogue, and critical consciousness. Hence it requires a democratic, egalitarian and respectful teacher-student relationship. Freire asserts that problem-posing education "cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and its people.... Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is a logical consequence" (89, 91). Hence we can relate it to biophilia.

However, though Freire propagates a democratic classroom, he does not by any means deny the superior knowledge and position of the teacher. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, he explains: "Dialogue between teachers and students does not place them on the same footing professionally; but it does mark the democratic position between them" (116-117). In this regard, he distinguishes between authoritative and authoritarian teachers when he insists that the difference between teacher and learners "must not be antagonistic;" it becomes so "when the authority of the educator,

different from the freedom of the pupil, is transformed into authoritarianism. This is the demand I make of the revolutionary educator. For me, it is absolutely contradictory when the educator, in the name of the revolution, takes power over the method and orders the pupil, in an authoritarian way, using this difference that exists (Freire, Politics 76). This is an important issue, especially when taking into consideration that by default “teachers are authorities;” for they decide the methodology of the curriculum and sometimes its content, as well as the grades of the learners (Kurland 81).

Still, despite the teacher’s superior knowledge, he should “remain humble about the limitations of ... [the students’] own knowledge” and respect the fact that problem posing education “is constituted and organized by the students’ view of the world;” and that “teachers’ thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking. I cannot think authentically unless others think. I cannot think for others, or without others” (Freire 109, 77). Moreover, education should start with, but go beyond student’s local knowledge; and teachers should never think of themselves as knowing everything; nor do learners consider themselves ignorant of everything. In the process, Freire warned teachers against “the two risks of elitism and basism,” that is rejecting or exalting popular knowledge (Schugurensky 24).

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

Examining Spark's text and its protagonist from Freire's and Fromm's perspectives offers a different reading of Jean Brodie who haunts the reader's attention from the beginning until the end. Her character can be associated to authority in its different forms, which is one of the most recurrent themes in Spark's fiction where "questions about authority and authorship overlap" and where the settings, as is the case in this novel, "emphasizes the already prominent theme of obedience to established rules" (Shaw 279-280). Brodie is one of the most famous teacher characters in fiction, who is often described as "this most monumental of schoolmistresses" (McWilliam v). One of the elements that have created this memorability is her elusive character and her statements which with time have become classical quotes regarding education and the effect of teachers; statements such as "To me education is a leading out of what's already there in the pupil's soul," or "Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life" and others. Spark presents her in such a playful way that makes us wonder if we should take her seriously or not; for example, when showing her dedication to her pupils, she remarks that they are her vocation and proceeds to tell them: "If I were to receive a proposal of marriage tomorrow from the Lord Lyon King- of-Arms I would decline it. I am dedicated to you in my prime" (23). Brodie's quotes reveal the typical philosophical reflections that we find blending with playfulness in all of Spark's writing and the apparent frivolousness which masks great profundity (Shaw 287). But in all cases Brodie fits in Freire's discussion of how educators and education can be a double-edge weapon, constructive or destructive, liberating or oppressing.

On the one hand, she is an unconventional teacher who holds and applies progressive notions and methods of education, and creates- what Paulo Freire advocates- a dialogical relationship with her pupils whom she befriends and at times invites to her house. But on the other one, she is a possessive person who picks up a group of her pupils and thinks of them as her own. She even manipulates their lives, a dangerous game that she eventually pays a high price for when she is betrayed by one of them, Sandy, and thus is forced to retire.

As an unconventional teacher, Brodie is presented as an intellectual and well-read person who differs from other teachers and the headmistress of her school, Miss Mackay. It is not surprising that the only two teachers who like her and actually fall in love with her are the art and music teachers, Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Gordon. The “advanced and seditious aspects of her educational policy” get her in trouble and cause controversy not only among the authorities and some teachers at school, but also among some of her pupils’ mothers (26). On the one hand, for years she becomes the subject of many plots to remove her from the school, and Miss Mackay summons her more than once to question her tutoring methods. On the other hand, some parents, like Jenny’s mother, believe that she gives her pupils “much freedom” whereas Sandy’s mother likes the fact that Brodie “takes an interest in ... [their] general knowledge” (25).

However, these debates and plots do not deter her from applying her “principles of education:” that teachers “are employed to educate the minds of girls ... [not] to intrude upon them” (36, 38). Elaborating on the radical difference between Miss Mackay’s vision of education and hers, she notes in one of the famous quotes (that brings to mind Freire’s celebration of problem posing education versus banking education):

The word ‘education’ comes from the root *e* from *ex*, out, and *duco*, I

lead. It means a leading out. To me education is a leading out of what's already there in the pupil's soul. To Miss Mackay it is a putting in of something that is not there, and that is not what I call education, I call it intrusion, from the Latin root prefix *in* meaning in and the stem *trudo*, I thrust. Miss Mackay's method is to thrust a lot of information into the pupil's head.... (36)

Having as her goal to put "old heads on [the girls'] young shoulders," to make them all "la crème de la crème" and to place in them the values of "Goodness, Truth and Beauty," Brodie provides them with unorthodox education, opens to them the gate of knowledge and, as Freire advocates, takes them beyond their local knowledge (8,10). This makes them "vastly informed on many subjects [regarded by Miss Mackay as] *irrelevant* to the authorized curriculum ... and *useless* to the school as a school" (5, italics mine). The subjects she exposes them to include travels, different forms of art, religion, authors' life stories and love life, including Charlotte Bronte's and hers, beauty products, interior decoration and others.

For example, she tells the girls about her trips to different parts of the world and informs them of such figures as the Buchmanites, Mussolini and Einstein. She also takes them to art galleries and museums and introduces them to the Italian Renaissance painters and other talented artists, such as the ballet dancer Anna Pavlova whom they watch performing and whom Brodie praises for her dedication to her art. In that regard, she tries to install in them the idea of dedication to some vocation. Besides, she presents them to the paintings exhibited in an Italian gallery in London, making use of Mr. Lloyd to explain the physical representation of the models, and teaches them history not only in the classroom, but also in the streets and old town of Edinburgh, itself a great historical city. She introduces them to what Sandy later calls

“other people's Edinburghs” quite different from theirs by taking them to places they have never seen before such as the Canongate, and the Lawnmarket (34). During these walks, they see the poor and the unemployed, and learn about the dole, “the weekly payment made by the State for the welfare of the Unemployed and their families” (39). She encourages them to care for these people, telling them: “They are our brothers You must all pray for the Unemployed, I will write you out the special prayer for them” (39). Years later, Sandy still remembers these walks.

Thus she practically opposes the dehumanizing banking education and seemingly acts as a biophilious person, being adventurous, independent and non-conformist who helps the girls to be themselves and transform the world. Her success manifests itself in that the members of her set, except Mary McGregor, end up being “among the brightest girls in the school,” which was “a stumbling-block” to Miss Mackay’s attempts to discredit Brodie (117). They stand out from the rest of the students; and from the very first page of the text they are stigmatized as different: “The five girls, standing very close to each other ... wore their hats each with a definite difference. ...immediately recognisable as Miss Brodie’s pupils...” (5) Besides, they achieve the best result though ironically this takes place through rote learning, which she ridicules. Brodie understands that to safeguard her tutoring methods, the girls need to be equipped for the end-of-term examination and to get good marks. So she asks them to memorize the content of their school books which they will never make use of: “I trust you girls to work hard and try and scrape through, even if you learn up the stuff and forget it next day” (38).

Apart from school result, her unconventionality and defiance of conventional authority make her “‘hip’ in the eyes” of the girls who look up to her, regard her as the leader of their set, “a Roman matron, ... an

educational reformer” and remain preoccupied with her, one way or the other (111). For example, Sandy and Jenny write a short story called “The Mountain Eyrie,” about Hugh Carruthers, Brodie's late fiancé, imagining that he was not killed in the war, but rather came back alive seeking to reunite with her. Later, they get occupied with her love affair with Mr. Gordon, imagining their intimacy taking place in an extraordinary setting, like Arthur's Seat, or writing her imaginary decline of his marriage proposal by quoting words that she actually says in class such as her dedication to her students. The two girls would even think of her as superior to their parents who did not have “primes” like Miss Brodie (16).

Long after Brodie’s death, Sandy, who has become Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, admits her teacher’s influence. When a young man visits her at the convent to enquire of the strange and famous Treatise on psychology which she wrote, he asks her about the main influences of her school days, “Were they literary or political or personal? Was it Calvinism?” Sandy’s answer is: “There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime,” (128) which is actually the novel’s final sentence and also its title. And when he remarks, “The influences of one’s teens are very important,” she confirms his words: “Oh yes... even if they provide something to react against” (34, 35). When years after her teacher’s death, Sister Helena is visited by her former school mates, Rose and Monica, they are still preoccupied by Miss Brodie and talk about her. Similarly, Eunice goes to the Festival of Edinburgh and decides to put flowers on her grave. When asked by her husband about Brodie, she says “A teacher of mine, she was full of culture. She was an Edinburgh Festival all on her own” (27).

However, despite all these apparent positive and constructive features of her tutoring methods, which seem to engage the girls and offer them

ample freedom, she ends up being as oppressive and authoritative as the conventional teachers criticized by Freire. In her attempt to make the girls copies of her, she turns them into “containers” and “receptacles” of her ideas, influences their choices and directs the course of their lives (Freire 72). For example, when she asks them about “the greatest Italian Painter” and one girl answers “Leonardo Da Vinci,” she regards the answer as incorrect simply because Giotto is her favourite (11). She does not respect Mary’s desire to read comic papers, takes them away from her and throws them into the waste- paper basket (12). Besides, she constantly ridicules her, calling her a clumsy girl, “stupid and disagreeable,” which is a totally unacceptable attitude, especially from a teacher (28-29).

She also acts in an unacceptable way when while introducing her pupils to different fields of knowledge, she almost neglects the set curriculum and asks them to lie when having a sudden visit by the principal to the class: “Hold up your books...prop them up in your hands in case of intruders. ...we are doing our history lesson... our poetry... English grammar” (10-11). Later, she praises them for lying by not answering a question put to them by Miss Mackay. Further manipulation is clear when she involves her pupils in the battle between her and the headmistress; she “recruits them in her crusades. This makes them feel more ‘adult’ than they are. They are ‘in’ on the secret” (New Visions). She even “made it a moral duty for her set to rally round her each time her battle reached a crisis” (112). The two women do not make an effort to hide their hostility and competition over the loyalty of the girls. For example, we learn of the headmistress’s attempts for seven years to indirectly “pump” them hoping that “they would be tricked into letting fall some piece of evidence which could be used to enforce Miss Brodie’s retirement,” (115) such as a possible love affair with the music

teacher. On other occasions, she would try to demean Brodie in what McWilliam regards as “a poem of alternation, smugness and menace;” (xi) she would tell them that though their teacher prepares them well for the Senior school, the culture she is offering them “cannot compensate hard knowledge,” and she reminds them that their loyalty “is due to the school rather than to any one individual” (66). Brodie is vindictive as evident from her remarks ridiculing Miss Mackay’s vision of education or when speaking lightly of her and other teachers before the pupils.

Besides, contrary to Freire’s renouncing statement, “the teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them,” (77) Brodie decides for the girls whether they should choose the Classical or Modern side of education when joining the senior school. She tells them: “You must make your *free* choice. Not everyone is capable of a Classical education.’ Hence the girls were left in no doubt as to Miss Brodie’s contempt for the Modern side” (61, italics mine). With time, she grows so possessive that she tells them: “... you are mine... I mean of my stamp and cut....” (97) Hence, she scorns their new subjects and even some of their teachers, especially Miss Lockhart, the science teacher, who can be regarded as a competitor-alternative to her; for Miss Brodie’s “main concern was lest the girls should become personally attached to any one of their senior teachers, but she carefully refrained from direct attack....” (83)

Thus while presenting herself as a role model to her students, which is the norm of any teacher/ student relationship, she makes them directly or indirectly believe and follow whatever she says or wants. She does so though she ironically denies Miss Mackay's accusation of "putting ideas into ... [the] girls' heads" claiming that this is the headmistress's "practice" not hers: "Never let it be said that I put ideas into your heads" (37). Interestingly, this attitude fits in Freire's description of the pedagogy of the oppressor which, he notes, "begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) [in this case we can call it maternalism]" which makes them give themselves the right to dominate their students because "the oppressor's consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination' regarding them as things or others" (54, 58). In fact, one of her famous and repeatedly said statements, which echoes Freire's and reveals the influential role of teachers, is: "There needs must be a leaven in the lump. Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life" (9). This is exactly what she tries to do with these girls.

Worse is how she becomes "dangerous" by ideologically influencing the girls and indoctrinating them as when she installs in them her admiration for Fascism, Franco of Spain and Mussolini, praising the latter for having put an end to unemployment and making the streets of Rome very clean. She even brings from Italy a picture of "the triumphant march of the black uniforms in Rome" and shows it to her pupils (31).¹ In her naïve admiration for the fascists and underestimating their evil, she reminds one of Lord Darlington in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*; he too was deceived by the intentions of Hitler and Nazi Germany. Yet, she is no more harmful than when she manipulates the girls and endangers their lives, causing the death of one of them, Joyce Emily

Hammond. Brodie encouraged her to join the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War: “I made her see sense,” said Brodie to Sandy; “however she did not have the chance to fight at all;” (124) for she was killed on the train taking her to Spain. Ultimately, this will be used by Miss Mackay to force her to retire. Brodie’s callous reaction is: ““Of course...this political question was only an excuse. They tried to prove personal immorality against me on many occasions and failed.... It was my educational policy they were up against which had reached its perfection in my prime...But they used this political excuse as a weapon”” (153).

Brodie also acts in an unethical way when she tries to sexually manipulate Rose by thinking of and actually planning for her as her substitute or proxy in an affair with the art teacher, a married man with five children. Brodie loves him, but decides not to get involved in a relationship with him: “It was plain that Miss Brodie wanted Rose with her instinct to start preparing to be Teddy Lloyd’s lover, and Sandy with her insight to act as informant on the affair” (109). In this manipulative act, she “sets morality aside and denies the humanity of her students” (Gale 2). Acting in such an authoritative way and trying to make her girls copies of her make the Set “increasingly inculcated with a brand of 'Brodiesm' that marks them apart from other girls their age. At first they are glad of the distinction. But as they grow older, Miss Brodie's hold over them becomes increasingly ominous and they are drawn into a world of adult games and intrigues” (BBC). Her strong influence could be one of the reasons why when Lloyd painted each one of the girls, the portraits resembled her, which might also be an indication of the art teacher’s obsession with her. Hence McWilliam rightly describes the set “as being limbs of a body whose head is Miss Brodie, a body integrated by carefully regulated use of power and cruelty, like a corps of Fascists or a state (x). This menacing control, possessiveness and manipulation

make her character fit in the notion of necrophilia described by Fromm.

Hence, Brodie, especially as a teacher, is a controversial character, one who eludes any attempts to pin her down. When Sandy and Jenny wrote a story about their teacher, they wanted to present her “in both a favourable and an unfavourable light,” (72) which is exactly what Spark, the writer, did by depicting this woman with opposing sides that make her necrophilous and biophilous at one and the same time. Indeed, Fromm states that one cannot be totally both; yet in her case the two traits stand powerfully and eminently. These two contradictory sides also make her, like many of Spark’s characters, both an individual and an archetype, and bring out the theme of “doubleness” and “twinship” as well as the “doubleness,” of her character, an element discussed by many critics, making the book and Brodie herself funny and tragic at the same time (Christianson 95 & McWilliam v, viii). We do not know much about her life, or the elements shaping her character, but she once tells Sandy and Jenny proudly that she is the descendant of Willie or rather William Brodie, who was a respectable cabinet maker and a member of the Town Council of Edinburgh by day and a burglar by night and who “died cheerfully on a gibbet of his own devising” in 1788 (88). This is a real Scottish character, who is believed to have been the inspiration of R. L. Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).ⁱⁱ Could this doubleness be hereditary? For she tells the girls “This... is the stuff I am made of,” and just as her ancestor had two mistresses who bore him five children, Brodie had two men in her life: she loved Lloyd, but had a relationship with Gordon (88). Besides, William Brodie was a thief, not out of the need for money, but “for the sake of the danger in it” (88). She, too, seems to be enamoured of certain dangerous and charismatic things designated by McWilliam as 20th century “tropes” such as Fascism, romantic death, war, and others (vii).

So like her ancestor, a gambler who “played much dice and fighting

cocks,” Brodie seems to be playing and gambling with the characters and lives of the girls (88). Yet, the game turns upside down when Sandy, the anti-heroine, gets sexually involved with Mr. Lloyd. The scene of Brodie’s and Sandy’s golf playing, taking place in the last year of the teacher’s life, shows that she is no longer the master of the game; for the girl was her match during the game. Ultimately, though she is the one Brodie most trusts of her set, Sandy ends up betraying her, a fact that remains unknown to the teacher until her death, and an act that was a harsh blow: “What hurts and amazes me most of all is the fact, if Miss Mackay is to be believed, that it was one of my own set who betrayed me and put the enquiry in motion” (153). It seems like the created has outdone her creator and avenged herself on her, possibly representing a new version of Pygmalion? Sandy partly explains her attitude when she remarks: “The influences of one's teens are very important... even if they provide something to react against” (35). This is reflected in her “odd psychological reatise on the nature of moral perception called the ‘Transfiguration of the Commonplace,’” (35) which can be a reference to what her teacher did for/to her and the rest of the set, trying to transfigure their characters and lives, and making them in her own image. Thus, Sandy brings again the theme of doubleness and the motif of the double; for if Brodie suffers from duality of character, Sandy can be seen as her double and foil.

It is ironic that Brodie long ago told her, “One day, Sandy, you will go too far.... Yes... I *have my eye upon you*, Sandy. I observe a frivolous nature. I fear you will never belong to life's elite or, as one might say, the *crème de la crème*” (23, italics mine). Though she could not keep an eye on her, the prophecy was fulfilled in Sandy’s betrayal which can be interpreted in many ways. One explanation can be given in light of Freire’s remark: “In their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them” (62). This is exactly what happened; Sandy became as manipulative as Miss Brodie and took her revenge. Her affair with the art teacher is the result of the influence of both Brodie and Lloyd. She notices that all the portraits he paints of the set “terribly look like” (99) her teacher, which shows his obsession with Brodie; this intrigues her and makes her obsessed with the man, and then with his mind. She ultimately deserts him, gets interested in psychology, and adopts his creed, Roman Catholicism, only to become a nun in 1946, the year after the war. Interestingly, this was the last year in the lives of both Brodie and Sandy in different ways: Brodie died in that year whereas Sandy joined the monastic life, another form of death to the world, or possibly a form of self-inflicted punishment! During their meeting in that year, Brodie was still wondering who betrayed her while Sandy was saying inwardly, “It is seven years since ...I betrayed this tiresome woman. What does she mean by ‘betray’?” This callous thought brings to mind the same careless reaction of Brodie when speaking of Joyce Emily’s death on her way to Spain. Hence, can Sandy’s betrayal be a form of poetic justice?

Can Sandy's attitude be reflective of her "struggle for freedom and self-affirmation"? (Freire 64) in the face of this autocratic teacher of whom she spoke later in the novel as "think[ing] she is Providence ... think[ing] she is ... God" (101). She even felt that betraying her is a must: "the course to be taken was the most expedient and most suitable at the time for all the objects in hand" (101). This is a possible reading since one feels that after being away from Brodie's direct influence, Sandy created a new persona for herself and possibly tried to assert and recover her individual identity from the group identity created by Brodie. This reading makes this text a tool through which "Spark exposes the fragility of contemporary society's civilized façade and shows at the same time the outcome of actions performed by people who elect themselves to grace" (Shaw 283) like Brodie or, even on a broader sense, like the Fascists and the Nazis who thought of themselves as the elect and with whom she was fascinated. Thus we can read the text as an attack of despotism in general, of "the desire for conformity, ... [of] political romanticism and propaganda," colouring the years covered by the novel, from 1931 until the end of the Second World War. This makes one wonder if we can consider the betrayal of Brodie and her enforced retirement - which took place in 1939, the beginning of the War- and the consequent decline of her prime and career leading finally to her death, an ironical representation of the downfall of the British Empire, which, like Brodie, though too sure of itself, faded away and lost its prime after the War? For at one point, Brodie was too sure of herself that she thought that if the authorities had to get rid of her, they would have to assassinate her. Similarly, her pupils never doubted that she would prevail in all her battles (9). And we also see her influenced by the legend of the great British Empire "you are all heroines in the making. Britain must be a fit country for heroines to live in" (30). Of course she

assumes that she is the one who is going to make them heroines or “la crème de la crème”. Thus this brilliant text ends with a number of questions about this ever stimulating, infuriating, interesting and eccentric woman/ teacher, all at the same time. One feels with Shaw that “Understanding is never complete” in Spark’s novels “and usually the heroine, along with the reader, is brought to a final mood, not an intellectual posture” (288). But if Spark’s teacher is a controversial one, Albom’s is uncontroversial; he is a teacher whom readers almost unanimously choose as a role model.

Tuesdays with Morrie

This book presents a different learning experience; for unlike the case in Miss Brodie, we are not in a school venue with students attending classes since most of the text takes place in Morrie’s house. However, Albom takes us back to his university classes with Morrie; for the book is structured in such a way that we have a chapter of two pages recollecting days from college or the past and a longer one from the present with Morrie. Interestingly, Morrie and Albom call themselves “Tuesday people;” for they used to meet on Tuesdays during the college years and later in the last months of the professor’s life (51-2). Besides, we have three audiovisual parts, referring to Morrie’s three TV interviews by the famous Ted Koppel in his “Nightline” show. During all of them, Morrie retained his job as a great humanitarian teacher, instructing people by example in different values and later answering the letters he received, such as the one sent by a schoolteacher in Pennsylvania who taught a special class of nine children; each one of whom had suffered the death of a parent (71).

Albom’s memoir focuses on the last class given by Morrie or, as the title of an article written about him stated: “A professor’s final course: His own death” (19). The course’s subject is “The Meaning of Life,”

which Morrie discussed with his student while choosing death as “his final project,” and deciding to “walk that final bridge between life and death, and narrate the trip” to the people who wanted to learn from him what to pack (10, 11). Knowing that he was on the last journey, he was faced with two questions: “*Do I wither up and disappear, or do I make the best of my time left?*” (10) Hence his decision to live with dignity and courage, and to prove “that the word ‘dying’ was not synonymous with ‘useless’” (21, 12). Later, he would decide to hold his “living funeral,” being depressed by the sudden death of a friend who did not have a chance to hear what people said of him (12).

This last course required no books since it “was taught from experience;” and the topics in the order they were discussed on 11 Tuesdays included the world, feeling sorry for oneself, regrets, death, family, emotions, fear of aging, money, how love goes on, marriage and culture. During the last three Tuesdays, Morrie’s state deteriorated, so they were not talking much; still Albom was learning from the last days of his professor’s life. The course requirement included oral exams (for Albom was expected to answer and pose questions,) and physical tasks such as lifting the professor’s “head to a comfortable spot on the pillow” or “placing his glasses on the bridge of his nose” (1). Kissing Morrie good-bye earned Albom extra credit. Instead of the final exam, a long paper was expected, which is Albom’s memoir; Morrie told him: “This is our last thesis together, you know” (133). And finally, “A funeral was held in lieu of graduation” (1).

From the beginning, we are before a special character, a lover of life and people, a biophilous person in the true sense of the word. He was a respected professor with many published books; and at the same time a great dancer who used to dance every Wednesday night in Harvard Square. When he couldn’t dance anymore, he realised that there was

something wrong with him and felt that death was approaching. The text speaks of his gradual disintegration: his inability to drive and then to walk without a stick or a walker and finally having to use a wheelchair and hiring a student to dress and undress him when he went swimming. Eventually, he had to disclose his secret to the students and stop teaching. In the meantime, Albom lost touch with Morrie after his graduation when his life took a different course as a result of the premature death of his favourite uncle. He became workaholic, immersing himself in work as a sport writer, feeling alive only when seeing his articles printed, and thinking that with his many accomplishments, he could control things. He made huge money and was a great success in his job. Yet when he unexpectedly knew of his ex-professor's coming death through his TV interview, he was for the first time out of job and a check.

Throughout the text, we see, like Miss Brodie, how Morrie has always created "a permanent relationship of dialogue" with his students (Freire 63) and offered them, whether in college or at home problem-posing education. Like Spark's teacher, he took them beyond their local knowledge and widened their horizon by opening the world of knowledge through his wisdom, experience and the new books he introduced them to. However, unlike the dialogues created by Brodie in which she is the dominant figure, Morrie's depended on interaction and critical consciousness since they were based on a democratic, egalitarian and respectful teacher-student relationship. He was indeed a manifestation of the love, humility and faith required for Freire's aspired to education, and of his advocacy for teachers' and students' learning from one another; resulting in the emergence of "a new term...: teacher-student with students-teachers" and the production of new knowledge from the interaction between the two parties' knowledges. (Freire 80).

For the Brazilian educator believed: “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopefully inquiry men [sic] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other,” (72) which Morrie practised through spending his energy on people, making them feel special, respecting his students and listening to them with attention, a lesson that Albom considers one of the best he learnt at college (137). In this regard, the professor labelled Albom’s generation as one “of small talk,” observing the alienation of youth and the absence of “*connectedness*” among the people, who were always in a hurry and unwilling to give enough time to talk and listen to each other (137, 46). He even believes that the many people who came to see Morrie in his last days came “not because of the attention they wanted to pay to him but because of the attention he paid to them” (137-8).

Yet, unlike Brodie, while talking and listening, he never attempted to possess or influence his students, but rather gave them enough space and encouraged them to pursue their dreams. And when like her, he invited them to his house, it was not to gossip or to ascertain his power over them, but to take them to higher humanitarian levels, teaching them about such values as those of giving, not money, but time, concern, love and care: “Better love others and be committed to your community” (43). He assured Albom of the pleasure of giving even while dying; it lives on: “love is how you stay alive, even after you are gone” (133). So it is not surprising to learn from Albom that every lesson taught by Morrie was meant to make him “fully human” (46). More importantly, he practised what he preached since his life was exemplary of the humanitarian and peaceful values he advocated. During the 1960s, he played a role in the Civil Rights Movement by helping the black students in their strike. If Brodie was an advocate of fascism who drove one of her students to her death, here we have an anti-war professor who encouraged his students

to advocate and fight for peace. Unlike Brodie, he truly educated his students, rather than indoctrinated them.

In his attempt to present to his students these values, which were among the topics of his course, he shares with Brodie, despite their different characters, her unconventional methods of teaching. For example, we learn that in one of his Social Psychology classes, Morrie entered the class and remained silent for some time, an attitude that made some giggle at the beginning and others uncomfortable. But “eventually a deep silence falls and we begin to notice the smallest sounds, the radiator humming in the corner of the room, the nasal breathing of one of the fat students. Morrie finally breaks in with a whisper. ‘What’s happening here?’ he asked” (16 net). This was meant by the professor to show “the effect of silence on human relations... are we embarrassed by silence? What comfort do we find in all the noise?” (16) Similarly, in a 1978 class on issues like trust and faith in others, Morrie delivers the theme to his students in an innovative way and Albom calls it “the ‘touchy-feely’ course” (60). Hence, it is not surprising that like Brodie, but for different reasons, Morrie left a permanent effect on his students; and on learning of his approaching death, hundreds came to see him from different parts of the world.

Through him, Albom gives a critique of the consumptive capitalist American culture, which makes people “sleepwalking. We really don’t experience the world fully, because we’re half-asleep doing things we automatically think we have to do” (83). Morrie accuses the culture of brain washing people by having them confused between what they want and what they need, by urging them to get more things, “gobble up a new car. ...a new piece of property... the latest toy” (123-5). Worst of all, they become aggressive and take money as their god and put their values in the wrong things instead of investing in the human family. Ultimately,

the Americans lead disillusioned lives as their culture instils in them negative feelings about themselves: “*The culture we have does not make people feel good about themselves. And you have to be strong enough to say if the culture doesn’t work, don’t buy it*” (42). Once more Morrie was an example when he did not succumb to the culture, but developed one of his own and created “a cocoon of human activities” (43) through helping and interacting with people, whether friends or strangers, through wasting no time before TV or other trivialities and through avoiding a consumptive attitude contenting himself on his wealth of love, friends and family. The latter was to him “the foundation where people can find secure ground and where he personally, being married for 44 years, found the affection that made his illness easier (91).

Morrie’s defiance of the culture helped him to be positive in dealing with his illness and his growing dependence on people, especially in the last stages. Once more he conveyed this attitude to his student. He reminded himself and Albom that it is the culture that makes us feel ashamed when we are dependent; but having rejected it almost all his life, he found it all right to be dependent and even started to enjoy it! (114-6) It is also his clever and deep analysis of the American materialistic society that made him - prior to his diagnosis of ALS - embrace aging, having no fear of death: “Mitch...We’re wrapped up with egotistical things.... we’re involved in trillions of little acts” which make people forget about dying and become aware of it only when they are near it (64-5). Hence he tries to make his students reconsider all these values and in an extremely competitive culture he teaches them a different value. During a 1979 basketball game in the Brandeis gym when their team was playing well, he heard the students chanting: “We’re number one! We’re number one!” (159) Puzzled by the cheer, Morrie “rises and yells, ‘What’s wrong with being number two?’” so the

students stop chanting. Which makes him sit down, “smiling and triumphant” (159).

If Spark’s teacher has offered us classical quotes regarding teachers, Alбом’s too has given us aphorisms that emanated from his wise and unique look at life, from his thoughts “about living with death’s shadow” making him “a lightning rod of ideas ” (18, 65). The aphorisms he jotted down mounted up to more than fifty. Dissecting the American society, he remarked: “America had become a Persian bazaar of self-help;” (65) and advising his student to invest in the right things- love, compassion and family- he noted: “learn how to give out love, and to let it come in” (52). And in his attempt to fight death, he tells Alбом repeatedly: “When you’re in bed, you’re dead” (131, 153). Hence, contrary to some of Brodie’s sayings, which reflect a necrophilous orientation, Morrie’s abound with biophilia and are contagious with a positive spirit and attitude.

Thus Morrie’s ideals, life and the serenity surrounding him made Alбом contemplate his own life, only to realise how much he had changed, becoming a consumerist who had “traded his dreams for a bigger pay check” (33). He had become a victim of his culture: “I had become too wrapped up in the siren song of my life. I was busy. Work. Over the years, I had taken labor as my companion and had moved everything else to the side” (33, 43). Hence, Alбом was like many people, a confused and tortured soul; and despite his apparent success, fame and wealth, he was unhappy and unsatisfied. Worse, he was growing cold, apathetic and emotionally detached; he admits that while covering stories and interviewing people who lost dear ones or when attending funerals, he never cried unlike his professor who had genuine feelings for others’ suffering, even when they lived as far away as in Bosnia. In other words, Alбом was becoming rather necrophilous,

but his visits to his professor were “like a cleansing rinse of human kindness,” thus helping him to turn into a biophilous and to find true happiness (55). The change was evident. For example, on one of his business trips, he would no longer waste his time reading silly or mindless things; nor did he spend his time on needless cases and gossips. In the case of Brodie, Sandy reacted to her teacher’s possessiveness by plotting against her, whereas with Morrie, Albom changed for the better in light of his professor’s ideals. So both reacted to their teachers’ attitude and characters. Morrie even affected Ted Koppel: “My old professor had even coaxed compassion out of the television business” (46).

Morrie’s, one may say, balanced and humanistic character was formed, interestingly, by/ in reaction to certain tragic experiences that he faced. Since his father was a Russian immigrant who could not read English, it was young Morrie (aged eight) who read the telegram announcing his mother’s death. He had to live with this trauma and later with that of his young brother David’s polio disease, for which he felt guilty and responsible. Worse, was his father’s cold attitude, never showing him or David any sort of emotion; when young, “Morrie wished he would ... talk to them, but he rarely did. Nor did he tuck them in, nor kiss them good-night” (138). Hence, he “swore” that he would do these things for his children; and “he did” (138). He even acted in the other extreme, turning into an extremely emotional man who never hid his feelings or felt ashamed to cry before people, an attitude that brings to mind in a different way Sandy’s remark: “The influences of one’s teens are very important... even if they provide something to react against” (Spark 35). Yet, his attitude was not only a reaction to his father’s, but also a result of the lively character of his Romanian stepmother, Eva, whom he described as “a saving embrace” (75). To quote Fromm, she

had a biophilous orientation, being full of energy and warmth. Young Morrie found a surrogate mother in her; and she made up for his father's silence through her constant talking and singing, especially at night. She "would kiss them good-night. Morrie waited on those kisses like a puppy waits on milk...." (76) Another trauma that affected his character was having no chance to say good bye to either parent. His father died suddenly when Morrie was married with children; and the son was asked to come to the morgue to identify the father's body. It was an unforgettable experience: "Morrie looked at the body behind the glass, the body of the man who had scolded him and molded him and taught him to work, who had been quiet when Morrie wanted him to speak, who had told Morrie to swallow his memories of his mother when he wanted to share them with the world" (139). This tragedy "helped" to prepare him for his own death, and made him determined to say good bye properly to all his loved ones, to do "all the things he missed with his father and his mother" (139).

Thus Morrie, the man and the teacher, offers us an exemplary lesson of a proper life lived and a great job done. Interestingly, he practises what Brodie preaches regarding the importance of dedication to a vocation; we see a teacher who cherished his job and remained dedicated to his students. More importantly, he wanted to be regarded as a teacher until the end and was always keen on reading and learning until his last days: while "melting into his chair," he would insist to be carried to his study among his books and papers (131); and he asked for the following sentence to be written on his tombstone: "A teacher to the last" (135). Moreover, the content and methodology of his classes not only perfectly fit in Freire's problem -posing education, but also in what is now labelled as civic education, which highlights such values as love for and acceptance of all people regardless of religion or ideologies. He was

open to all religions and in his final months “he seemed to transcend all religious differences” (82).

Conclusion

Examining *The Prime of Miss Brodie* and *Tuesdays with Morrie* reveals that we are before two rich texts which, short as they are, yet raise many important political, social and humanitarian issues. Through Brodie, Spark presents a playful yet a profound critique of dictatorship in different forms and levels, in a teaching context- through Brodie- and on a global level, referring to Franco and Mussolini and the deluding effect of their war propaganda. The consequent downfall of the teacher can be symbolic of the fall of these dictators and even of the once great British Empire itself. Through Morrie, we have a critique of the capitalist society and its obsessive/possessive materialism and consumerism, deluding the Americans into a happy life while enslaving them and bringing about misery in different ways.

However, this paper mainly focused on the characters of the two protagonists, their effective roles as teachers and their immeasurable, at times, dangerous influence. Both fit in Paulo Freire’s discussion of education in its two forms, the banking education reflective of *the pedagogy of the oppressed* versus the liberating and empowering problem-posing education. Brodie and Morrie create dialogical relationships with their students, teach them in unconventional methods and widen their horizon by opening the gate of knowledge to them. Yet, on the one hand, the former’s dominating and possessive character makes her a controversial teacher since she ends up being oppressive like the conventional educators criticised by Freire and herself. On the other hand, the latter represents the positive empowering example advocated by Freire. In all cases they make clear Freire’s belief that “authority must be *on the side of freedom, not against it*” and that teaching ought to be a

shared experience between both teachers and learners: “People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are ‘owned’ by the teacher”.

The two characters win their students’ love and admiration, and continue to live and be remembered long after their deaths. Both prove how every one of us had a teacher who has contributed to our making, which, to quote Candia McWilliam when speaking of Spark’s masterpiece, explains “the power of” these two books which can be read “by all nationalities;” for despite the Scotsness of the former, and the Americanness of the latter, their “themes ...[are], in their concrete specific evocation of the commonplace, wonderfully transfigured, unforgettable and universal” (xii). Through Brodie and Morrie, Henry Adams’ epigram regarding the teacher’s affecting eternity is fulfilled, but the kind of influence created by the two differs. Interestingly Albom quotes Adams’ words in reference to his favourite teacher. The two teachers redirect the paths of their students, but whereas Brodie imposes or indoctrinates, Morrie teaches by example. Whereas one is naively impressed by fascism and inflicts this poisoning ideology into the minds of her pupils, bringing about the death of one of them, Morrie is a life saver to Albom by helping him to transform his world and life and by kindling his humanistic spirit, love and compassion for others. In this regard, using Fromm’s terminology, we can regard the first as creating a necrophilous effect - due to her “overwhelming control” which ends up with the death of a pupil- and the second as generating a biophilous one, installing the love of life and actually saving a life.

In both works poetic justice is fulfilled: while Brodie’s *prime* is gone when forced to retire, Morrie keeps his and continues to teach despite the deterioration of his body. However, despite their contradictory attitudes and fates, what I find interesting and ironic at the same time is that the

fictitious character of Brodie (though containing elements of reality from Spark's real life teacher) is more elusive and complicated than the real flesh and blood Morrie. Whereas the first puzzles us and eludes any attempt to categorize her, the second is much easier to assess and label. Is fiction more complicated or truer than real life? Apparently a difficult question to answer, but the fact remains that they continue to enchant readers of different generations and places; and the two texts leave us with two characters that keep haunting us long after reading them, two of *la crème de la crème* characters who inspire us, for good or bad, regarding education and the indelible role of teachers.

End Notes:

1. Like Brodie, Miss Kay, Spark's school teacher, placed posters of [Renaissance](#) paintings on the wall as well as pictures of [Mussolini](#) and Italian fascists marching.
2. ¹On 1 October 1788 William Brodie, who was then 47 years old, was hanged before a huge crowd of 40,000 for theft in the Lawnmarket. "He strode out to the gallows in fine clothes and a powdered wig. A fitting end to an extraordinary life" (Brocklehurst).

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