

# CRITICAL INTERPRETATION: AN EXPLORATION OF THIS EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE THROUGH SARAH FIELDING'S THE GOVERNESS (1749)

## Abstract

This paper highlights two important aspects regarding girl's education in England from the early to the mideighteenth century when interpreted through Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* (1749). Former exploration of differences in education on the basis of gender and class in institutions founded by the Church or established by the English government provide extensive information on the type of education given to girls. This chapter, however, explores the type of education deemed necessary for girls and establishes, one, proper instruction for directing their imagination and two, critical interpretation of every knowledge they receive to be the distinguishing features of a good education. Such an education not only helps them in becoming exemplary students whose investigative minds aim at interpreting reasons behind every line written in books but also dutiful citizens who aim for personal happiness and social development. Sarah Fielding through her ideal educator tries to persuade the eighteenth century educational institutions to redirect their objectives toward the betterment of young readers. According to her, teachers in such institutions should aim at the intellectual development of their students through proper instructional teaching rather than preaching religion that remains irrelevant as a subject for children to study. Fielding's only children's novel, *The Governess*, which was published in 1749 presents an educational practice that lays emphasis on improving students' interpretative skills, especially of girls, in the eighteenth century. It alienates itself from the early eighteenth century educational ideas of Mary Astell and the later religious educational ideas of Hannah More. *The Governess*, which

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is also considered to be the first book in the genre of children's literature, encapsulates the ideas of philosophers such as John Locke and the Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu on good education and presents them in a much simplified form to her readers. Like Montagu, Sarah Fielding uses fairy tales, fictional autobiographies, fables and dramatic plays to communicate her message and asks her readers to interpret the actions of these characters for learning important morals. It is the induction of such genres of literature (fairy tales, plays) into the education of children which distinguish her novel from the complex and lengthy educational tracts of other prominent thinkers mentioned above, and which help us in understanding how teaching children to critically interpret the books they read strengthens the foundation of their intellectual development.

**Keywords:** Sarah Fielding uses fairy tales, fictional autobiographies, fables and dramatic plays to communicate her message and asks her readers to interpret the actions of these characters for learning important morals.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the significance of critical interpretation as a teaching method by closely analysing Sarah Fielding's novel, *The Governess* (1749). The concept of critical interpretation was not only advocated by male educationalists like Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, and Jean Jacques Rousseau in the seventeenth century but also by female educationalists like Madame de Genlis, Catharine Macaulay, Sarah Fielding, and Hannah More in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The main argument put forth in this paper is that Fielding places a high value on developing children's critical interpretative skills for their intellectual growth and knowledge acquisition. In *The Governess*, she portrays Mrs. Teachum as the ideal educator, emphasizing the importance of critical analysis in her students' reading materials and highlighting the significance of early education. The paper delves into Mrs. Teachum's comprehensive plan to demonstrate how critical interpretation serves as the primary lesson in Sarah Fielding's *The Governess*.

The chapter emphasizes the significance of interpretation, which involves comprehending the meaning of what we read, hear, or observe, and its significance in educating children. When the term "critical" is added to interpretation, it emphasizes the need for a more meticulous understanding of the material we engage with. This skill, when consistently practiced, helps students acquire both moral and practical knowledge. The responsibility of imparting this skill to students falls on the teachers, making it an educational practice aimed at improving students' interpretative abilities. Earlier philosophers and thinkers have stressed the importance of this practice. Plato referred to it as the ability to distinguish between allegorical and literal meanings, Spinoza called it the capacity to 'distinguish and separate the true idea from other perceptions', John Locke advocated using it to guide children in discerning between good and bad, and Rousseau praised it as a 'good method' to cultivate a love for learning in children. However, as time passed, this age-old educational practice, which was meant for both boys and girls, became overshadowed by patriarchal norms. This serves as the starting point for this paper, as it explores how Sarah Fielding's novel *The Governess* (1749), the first-ever children's novel, places significant emphasis on this teaching practice.

The setting of the story in a female academy run by Mrs. Teachum provides an important backdrop for the themes explored in the novel. The academy serves as a microcosm of society, reflecting the norms and expectations placed on women during the 18th century. Mrs. Teachum, as the governess, embodies the ideals of education prevalent during that time. Drawing inspiration from John Locke's educational principles, Mrs. Teachum takes a holistic approach to education, focusing not only on intellectual development but also on the girls' physical well-being. Locke's ideas emphasized the importance of nurturing the mind and body in tandem, and Mrs. Teachum's approach aligns with these ideals. This comprehensive approach is evident in her carefully planned weekly schedule, which includes both indoor learning activities and outdoor exercises.

By providing the girls with a well-rounded education that includes outdoor activities, Mrs. Teachum challenges the prevailing notion that women should be confined to domestic roles and lack physical strength and vigor. This progressive approach highlights the novel's themes of empowerment and breaking gender stereotypes. As the plot unfolds, readers witness the personal growth and development of the nine young girls under Mrs. Teachum's guidance.

The novel delves into their individual journeys, struggles, and triumphs as they navigate the challenges of education and societal expectations. Through their experiences at the academy, the girls gain not only knowledge but also valuable life skills and moral lessons, shaping them into well-rounded and capable individuals.

The emphasis on outdoor activities not only contributes to the girls' physical health but also fosters a sense of camaraderie and teamwork. These experiences in nature allow them to develop important social skills and resilience, preparing them for the challenges they may face in the outside world. Moreover, Mrs. Teachum's character represents an idealized image of a nurturing and wise educator. Her commitment to the girls' well-being, both intellectually and physically, makes her a role model not just as a teacher but also as a mentor and guide. Her dedication to fostering a supportive and nurturing environment encourages the girls to become confident and self-reliant.

In the novel, Mrs. Teachum's unique approach to discipline is a central aspect of her larger educational plan. Rather than resorting to harsh punishments or rigid rules, she allows her students the time and space for self-reflection and personal growth. She believes in the power of empathy and understanding, encouraging the girls to learn from their mistakes and make amends for their wrongdoings. Critics like Moyra Haslett and Mika Suzuki have raised concerns about Mrs. Teachum's infrequent presence in the classroom and the novel itself. Haslett argues that the transformation of the girls' behavior is more influenced by their interactions with each other than by the direct encouragement of the teacher. Suzuki, on the other hand, praises the benevolent character of Jenny Peace, the eldest student at the academy, for fostering companionship and guiding the other girls towards self-improvement.

However, this paper argues that a closer examination of the novel reveals Mrs. Teachum's active instruction and direction of Miss Jenny's actions. Mrs. Teachum may not be omnipresent in every scene, but her influence on the students is evident through her teachings and the values she instills in them. She encourages the older students like Jenny to take on leadership roles and serve as positive role models for the younger ones, aligning with John Locke's notion of the ideal educator in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Mrs. Teachum's hands-on approach to teaching is best exemplified through her critical interpretation of the books the girls read. She doesn't merely present the texts for passive consumption; instead, she engages the students in thoughtful discussions, encouraging them to analyze and reflect on the lessons and morals contained within the stories. Through this process, she imparts valuable life lessons that extend beyond the academic realm.

Furthermore, Mrs. Teachum's emphasis on fostering a sense of companionship and mutual support among the girls aligns with Locke's ideas of building a strong sense of community within an educational setting. By creating an environment of trust and cooperation, she encourages the girls to learn from each other and collaborate for the common good. While critics have raised concerns about Mrs. Teachum's limited presence in the novel, a more profound examination reveals her active involvement in guiding and instructing her students. Through her unique approach to discipline, critical interpretation of books, and encouragement of student leadership, Mrs. Teachum fulfills the essential qualifications of Locke's ideal educator. She plays a crucial role in shaping the girls' characters and values, fostering their personal growth, and ultimately preparing them to become responsible and empathetic individuals in society.

## II. SARAH FIELDING AND THE GOVERNESS (1749)

The educational approach depicted in *The Governess* is rooted in an institutional setting that aims to nurture the imagination and interpretative abilities of its students. This method draws inspiration from Sarah Fielding's personal experiences with education, both during her time at school and through the friendships she developed as a young woman. While this paper does not delve deeply into Sarah Fielding's biography, it is essential to mention her childhood school to understand the source of inspiration for the character of Mrs. Teachum in *The Governess*.

Sarah Fielding's early life was marked by adversity and loss. Losing her mother and being separated from her father at a young age undoubtedly had a significant impact on her upbringing. Fortunately, her maternal grandmother stepped in to take care of her education and that of her siblings. Sending her to Mary Rooke's Boarding School in Salisbury was a pivotal moment in shaping Sarah's educational experiences. While some scholars believe that Mrs. Rooke's school could have served as an inspiration for Mrs. Teachum's academy in Sarah Fielding's novel, *The Governess*, it is essential to recognize the significant differences between the two educational institutions. According to Christopher Johnson's analysis, Mrs. Rooke's school did not provide the same intellectually challenging and liberating curriculum that is portrayed in *The Governess*. The focus on teaching French and the lack of opportunities for professional growth at Mrs. Rooke's school stand in contrast to the comprehensive and enriching education offered by Mrs. Teachum in the fictional work.

Sarah Fielding's own experiences and education at Mrs. Rooke's school likely played a role in shaping her portrayal of Mrs. Teachum's academy in *The Governess*. Having personally experienced the limitations of her early education, Sarah may have sought to create a more empowering and intellectually stimulating environment through her literary work. The creation of Mrs. Teachum's academy as a place of growth, self-reflection, and character development may have been her way of expressing the kind of education she wished she had received. Later in life, Sarah Fielding ventured into the world of writing and publishing. Collaborating with Jane Collier and Samuel Richardson, she published her first novel, *The Adventures of David Simple*, in 1744. This was followed by the publication of *The Governess* in 1749. Her own educational journey and experiences, including her time at Mrs. Rooke's school, may have influenced the themes and educational philosophy she explored in her literary works.

In the early eighteenth century, women writers were increasingly using their literary works to challenge traditional gender norms and portray women in positions of power and agency. Novels and novellas by writers like Elizabeth Rowe, Mary Davys, Jane Barker, and Eliza Heywood often featured heroines who, despite facing various disadvantages, were able to assert themselves and challenge the authority of the male-dominated world surrounding them. These heroines became the focal point of the narrative, representing a form of radical empowerment for women during that time. However, Sarah Fielding's novel, *The Governess*, takes a different approach and stands apart from the works of these women writers. Instead of focusing on the empowerment of adult women, *The Governess* centers its theme around the education of children. The novel revolves around Mrs. Teachum's academy, where young girls are the central characters. The emphasis on education, moral development, and character building for the younger generation sets *The Governess* apart from the more adult-centric narratives found in the works of other women writers of that era.

As the first full-length children's novel, *The Governess* held a unique place in the literary landscape of its time. The novel underwent multiple editions, demonstrating its popularity and enduring appeal. Its lasting influence can be seen in its continued publication up until the year 1789. Sarah Fielding's choice to focus on children's education and moral development aligns with the broader trends of the Enlightenment period, which emphasized reason, education, and the cultivation of virtuous character. Through *The Governess*, Fielding sought to impart valuable life lessons and moral guidance to young readers, presenting a formative narrative that aimed to shape the minds and characters of the next generation.

The novel revolves around Mrs. Teachum's efforts to transform nine female students at her academy into virtuous and dutiful individuals without imposing any specific religious beliefs. Instead, she instils in them the critical interpretative skill, encouraging them to scrutinize and derive moral lessons from every book they read, ranging from fairy tales to contemporary plays. Mrs. Teachum allows their imagination to roam freely while listening to stories but nurtures their ability to question and critically analyse those stories later to draw virtuous insights. This chapter delves into the comprehensive plan devised by Mrs. Teachum to transform undisciplined students, initially fascinated by self-indulgent amusements, into disciplined individuals capable of making wise choices. It particularly explores the reasons behind Mrs. Teachum's methods of punishment and the critical interpretation she provides concerning fairy tales and a play read by Miss Jenny Peace, the oldest student at the academy.

In his analysis of *The Governess*, Christopher Johnson posits that Mrs. Teachum's objective is to cultivate independent thinking in her students, aiming to foster personal happiness and encourage them to act beyond their own self-interest. According to Johnson, the academy is designed to instill the skill of independent thinking in the young girls under Mrs. Teachum's care. However, the author of this paper offers a different perspective, suggesting that while independent thinking is indeed important, Mrs. Teachum's primary focus lies in teaching her students the art of critical interpretation. This interpretation entails guiding the children to analyze and understand the knowledge they encounter independently, rather than merely promoting unrestricted freedom of thought.

The distinction lies in the fact that while freedom of thought encourages children's imagination to flourish without constraints, critical interpretation ensures that their imaginative faculties are directed towards a proper analysis of the texts they read. This includes fairy tales and plays, which serve as significant aspects of the educational experience within Mrs. Teachum's academy, as outlined in *The Governess*. Critical interpretation is a key aspect of Mrs. Teachum's approach to education, wherein she encourages her students to think deeply about the stories they read. By teaching them to question and analyze the moral lessons and values portrayed in these texts, Mrs. Teachum fosters a sense of discernment and intellectual curiosity in her students. This skill equips them to engage with literature on a more profound level, enabling them to derive meaningful insights and moral lessons from the stories they encounter. The focus on critical interpretation aligns with the broader educational ideals of the Enlightenment period, which emphasized the cultivation of reason, discernment, and intellectual autonomy. Through this approach, Mrs. Teachum strives to nurture not only the imaginative capacities of her students but also their ability to engage critically with the world around them.

The disagreement between Mika Suzuki and I revolves around the interpretation of Mrs. Teachum's role and presence in *The Governess*. Suzuki perceives the novel as a children's story where the child protagonists take center stage, and Mrs. Teachum is portrayed as a peripheral character, lacking active involvement in the girls' lives. In contrast, I argue that Mrs. Teachum is, in fact, the true protagonist and central figure in the plot, with a deliberate absence that serves a specific purpose. Suzuki's analysis views the absence of Mrs. Teachum as a weakness in both her character as a teacher and in Sarah Fielding's portrayal of an educationalist writer. Suzuki suggests that Mrs. Teachum's lack of presence around the nine girls indicates a failure on her part to fulfill her role as an effective educator. Instead, Suzuki posits that Jenny Peace, the eldest student, takes on the role of educating the other girls, effectively replacing Mrs. Teachum as the central figure in the girls' development.

In contrast, I presents a different interpretation of Mrs. Teachum's absence. Rather than seeing it as a weakness, it is viewed as a deliberate technique employed by Sarah Fielding to emphasize the importance of freedom in education. By allowing the girls to have space and autonomy, Mrs. Teachum empowers them to develop their own thoughts and ideas, fostering their independence and critical thinking skills. The deliberate absence of Mrs. Teachum aligns with the novel's broader theme of providing children with the freedom to explore and learn on their own terms. Mrs. Teachum's role as a guide and mentor is not diminished by her physical absence but rather highlighted by her trust in the girls' ability to make their own decisions and learn from their experiences.

In conclusion, by exploring the teacher-student relationship in *The Governess* and delving into Sarah Fielding's unique educational philosophy of interpretation, I offer a comprehensive analysis of the novel's themes and Fielding's contribution to the field of education. This in-depth exploration can shed light on the progressive nature of Mrs. Teachum's academy and how it challenges traditional views of women's education in the eighteenth century. By examining the novel in this light, I present a more nuanced understanding of Fielding's work and its significance in the context of educational philosophy and women's education during that time period.

### **III. CRITICAL INTERPRETATION: MRS TEACHUM'S TEACHING OBJECTIVE**

Mrs. Teachum's teaching approach challenges traditional notions of education and authority. In a patriarchal society, where male authority figures were prevalent, Fielding's portrayal of a female governess exercising distant yet influential authority presents a progressive and empowering image of women in education. To support this argument, I analyze Mrs. Teachum's interactions with specific characters and how her guidance shapes their actions and decisions. I also examine the moral lessons that the girls learn through their interpretations and how these lessons contribute to their personal growth and development.

Fielding dedicates *The Governess* to Mrs. Poyntz and explicitly expresses her aim of teaching interpretative skills to young girls, enabling them to develop benevolent passions into habits. She writes,

The design of the following sheets is to endeavour to cultivate an early Inclination to Benevolence and a Love of Virtue, in the Minds of young Women, by trying to shew them, that their True Interest is concerned in cherishing and improving those amiable Dispositions

into Habits; and in keeping down all rough and boisterous Passions; and that from this alone they can propose to themselves to arrive at true Happiness, in any of the Stations of Life allotted to the Female Character.

In these lines, Sarah Fielding's message to young girls is clear: cultivating benevolence and virtue is the key to leading a happy life. Fielding urges them to restrain boisterous passions and instead develop an eagerness to acquire knowledge from all available sources. By doing so, she aims to foster interpretative skills in the girls, teaching them to discern virtues and morals in various aspects of life. Fielding's intent is not to impose rigid rules or preach directly but rather to show the girls the advantages of exercising benevolence and virtue. She believes that by demonstrating the positive outcomes of such qualities, the girls will be motivated to adopt them willingly and naturally. Fielding understands that happiness comes from within and can be achieved by cultivating inner virtues.

The emphasis on interpretative skills is significant. Fielding wants the girls to become adept at understanding and interpreting the world around them. By developing their interpretative abilities, they can discern valuable lessons and wisdom from different sources of knowledge, be it literature, experiences, or interactions with others. Fielding's emphasis on benevolence and virtue as the path to happiness is also tied to the concept of self-improvement and character development. By cultivating these qualities, the girls can better navigate life's challenges and relationships, ultimately leading to a more fulfilling and contented existence.

While Fielding does not explicitly outline a process or solution for developing this efficiency in segregating virtues and morals in the mentioned lines, she conveys to her 'young readers' through *The Governess* that critical interpretation is the key to achieving this goal. The novel serves as a means for young readers to comprehend the importance of critical interpretation as the process through which they can effectively discern and understand virtuous and moral lessons from the knowledge they encounter. In essence, Fielding's message to young girls is to prioritize benevolence and virtue in their lives and to develop their interpretative skills through critical analysis, enabling them to find happiness and lead fulfilling lives in every stage of their female character. *The Governess* acts as a vehicle to impart this valuable educational philosophy to its readers.

The reading of fairy tales indeed plays a significant role in the transformation of the girls in *The Governess*. Initially, the girls are drawn to the captivating elements of the stories, such as the thrilling adventures of Barbarico or Mignon's fearlessness, without necessarily deducing any moral lessons from them. This reflects a common tendency among young readers to focus on the surface-level excitement of stories without fully grasping their deeper meanings. However, it is Miss Jenny, the eldest student at the academy, who takes the initiative to intervene and prompt the girls to consider the moral implications and lessons within the fairy tales. She encourages them to think critically about the stories and contemplate the use they might make of the knowledge gained from reading them, rather than merely arguing about which parts they find prettiest. This indicates that Miss Jenny has internalized Mrs. Teachum's teachings about the importance of understanding what they read and applying it to their lives.



While Mrs. Teachum may not be physically present during these specific moments of interpretation, her guidance and influence are evident through Miss Jenny's actions. In a previous chapter, Mrs. Teachum had instructed Miss Jenny to convey the proper interpretations of the fairy tales to the other students. This shows that Mrs. Teachum actively fosters independent thinking and critical analysis among her students, entrusting them to take on leadership roles in guiding their peers. Mrs. Teachum's absence during these moments does not imply ineffectiveness; rather, it exemplifies her teaching philosophy of empowering the girls to think for themselves and become active participants in their education. She wants her students to take ownership of their learning and draw their own conclusions from the stories they read, rather than passively accepting pre-determined morals. The role of Miss Jenny as a mediator between Mrs. Teachum and the other girls demonstrates how Mrs. Teachum's teachings have a lasting impact on her students. Through her guidance and instruction, Mrs. Teachum instills in Miss Jenny a sense of responsibility to lead by example and share her knowledge with her peers.

Indeed, Mrs. Teachum's curriculum does not explicitly include the teaching of fairy tales. However, she does not discourage the girls from reading them if they find it necessary for their learning or enjoyment. Instead, she takes the opportunity to interpret these tales and provide guidance on their proper reading to instill virtues and morals in her students. An important incident occurs when Miss Jenny reads the first fairy tale without seeking Mrs. Teachum's permission. When Mrs. Teachum becomes aware of this the next day, she uses it as a teachable moment for the girls. She explains to them that the inclusion of giants, magic, fairies, and other supernatural elements in a story is meant to amuse and entertain the readers. However, she also advises the girls not to dwell on these fantastical elements and to look beyond the surface of the story to uncover the moral lessons hidden within.

Mrs. Teachum emphasizes that the attractive language and fantastical elements in fairy tales serve as a superficial layer of amusement, but the true essence lies in the moral lessons that can be derived from critical interpretations of the tales. She encourages the girls to approach these stories with a discerning eye and extract the valuable life lessons they convey. The following day, inspired by Mrs. Teachum's instructions, Miss Jenny takes the lead in guiding the girls to follow the example of the giant Benefico and use it for good purposes. She encourages them to endure suffering like Mignon patiently until they find a remedy. This shows that Mrs. Teachum's guidance has a ripple effect on her students, empowering them to apply the lessons learned to their own lives.

While it may seem that Miss Sukey's change of heart and sharing her autobiography result from Miss Jenny's instructions the next day, it is essential to recognize that this transformation is ultimately a result of Mrs. Teachum's initial instructions to Miss Jenny. Mrs. Teachum's teachings and philosophy of critical interpretation have a profound impact on Miss Jenny, who, in turn, imparts these values to her fellow students. Mrs. Teachum's educational approach is not limited to immediate instructions but involves empowering her students to become independent thinkers and apply the moral lessons they learn to various situations. This fosters a sense of responsibility and accountability in the girls, enabling them to make positive changes in their behavior and outlook on life.

Mrs. Teachum's emphasis on critical interpretation extends to the dramatic arts as well, as seen in her approach to the play *The Funeral*; or, *Grief-a-la-mode* by Richard Steele,

which is incorporated into *The Governess*. The play presents themes of 'Simplicity of Mind, Good-nature, Friendship and Honour' as observed by George Sherburn. Despite providing only a summary of the play in the novel, Fielding presents it as a tragedy rather than a comedy, which may not accurately represent its original form. Miss Sukey explains the plot of *The Funeral*, in which a servant named Trusty helps his master, Lord Brumpton, realize the wickedness of his wife, Lady Brumpton, who falsely declared him dead to marry him off and acquire his wealth. Trusty foils their plans by exposing Lady Brumpton's deceitful intentions, leading to the happy outcome of Lord Brumpton's son, Lord Hardy, marrying a fine lady named Charlotte.

Indeed, as an educator, Mrs. Teachum takes on the responsibility of explicitly correcting her students' thinking and behavior. She understands the importance of guiding them in their pursuit of knowledge and instilling critical interpretative skills. Mrs. Teachum believes that proper supervision is essential, especially when it comes to the reading of plays. In *The Governess*, there is an incident where Miss Jenny reads a play without Mrs. Teachum's permission. When Mrs. Teachum learns of this, she becomes concerned about the potential harm it may cause to the girls' impressionable minds. Plays, with their dramatic and often intense content, can have a powerful impact on young readers. Mrs. Teachum believes that children may not have the maturity or discernment to fully understand the complexities and moral implications portrayed in plays without proper guidance. Therefore, she emphasizes the need for supervision and interpretation when engaging with such literature. Mrs. Teachum is vigilant in protecting her young readers from harmful influences in literature, particularly from plays that explicitly present vice. She believes that such presentations can have a detrimental impact on children, as playwrights may be insensitive to the impressionable minds of their audience. Fielding's decision to exclude the play *The Funeral* from the novel is likely motivated by her desire to shield her readers from its potentially harmful influence, as it contains useless amusement and tempting dialogues that could lead young minds astray.

Mrs. Teachum's critique of playwrights in *The Governess* highlights her concern about the potentially negative influence of literature on young and impressionable minds. When Miss Sukey summarizes *The Funeral*, Mrs. Teachum points out a crucial aspect that was overlooked – the description of the characters. Mrs. Teachum believes that simply narrating events and actions in a story is not enough. She emphasizes the importance of understanding and analyzing the characters' personalities, virtues, and flaws. By doing so, the students can gain a deeper insight into the moral lessons embedded within the narrative.

Mrs. Teachum's instruction to focus on character analysis reflects her commitment to promoting critical thinking and moral discernment among her students. She wants the girls to move beyond being amused by the events of a story and instead engage with the underlying themes and messages. Through her guidance, Mrs. Teachum encourages the girls to think beyond the surface level of a story and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the human psyche and behavior. By scrutinizing the characters' actions and motivations, the girls can better grasp the ethical implications of the story. In essence, Mrs. Teachum's criticism of the playwrights and her emphasis on character analysis serve as a means to teach the girls how to apply critical interpretative skills to the literature they encounter. She aims to empower them to recognize and appreciate virtuous behavior while also discerning negative traits that may lead to vice. This aspect of Mrs. Teachum's teaching philosophy aligns with her broader educational approach, where she strives to cultivate independent thinking and

moral values in her students. By encouraging them to analyze characters and look beyond the surface of a narrative, Mrs. Teachum aims to equip the girls with the tools to navigate the complexities of literature and, by extension, the complexities of life itself.

The character of Mrs. Teachum in *The Governess* exemplifies an ideal educator, drawing inspiration from John Locke's educational philosophy as outlined in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Mrs. Teachum's dedication to the betterment of the children at her academy and her focus on teaching interpretative skills align with the principles advocated by Locke. Locke emphasizes the importance of maintaining a child's spirit as active and free while also setting appropriate boundaries and restraints. Mrs. Teachum embodies this concept by encouraging her students' independence and critical thinking. When the girls fail to comprehend her punishment in the first chapter, she devises a larger plan to foster their interpretative skills and moral understanding.

Brian McCrea's suggestion that *The Governess* has its sources in Locke's work underscores the influence of Locke's ideas on Sarah Fielding's educational philosophy. Warren Wooden's observation about *Rational Moralists*, including Sarah Fielding, being under the influence of Locke further solidifies this connection. However, while both Locke and Mrs. Teachum agree on the importance of punishment for wrong deeds, they differ in their approach to it. Locke emphasizes the use of fear and awe to gain power over a child's mind initially, with the eventual goal of developing love and friendship as the child grows older. He believes that a deep connection with the student is essential for the effective delivery of lessons. In contrast, Fielding's Mrs. Teachum adopts a different method. After delivering punishment, she distances herself from the girls, allowing them to reflect on their actions independently. This approach provides the girls with an opportunity to assess their behavior and learn from their mistakes without relying solely on external authority. Mrs. Teachum's style of punishment aligns with her broader educational philosophy, which emphasizes critical thinking and personal growth. By giving the girls space to reflect and learn from their experiences, she encourages them to take responsibility for their actions and make informed decisions.

The incident of the girls fighting over an apple in the first chapter of *The Governess* highlights an important aspect of Mrs. Teachum's approach to discipline and punishment. When faced with this misbehavior, Mrs. Teachum chooses not to specify the penalty immediately, instead opting for a more nuanced and reflective approach. Fielding's decision to omit the details of the punishment was significant and intentional. It allowed for a sense of mystery and anticipation, creating an opportunity for the readers, especially young girls, to ponder and contemplate the consequences of the girls' actions. By leaving the punishment open-ended, Fielding prompts her audience to consider the moral lessons and the girls' growth as they await the resolution of the situation.

It is noteworthy that *The Governess* Richardson, who was pressuring Fielding to specify the punishment, might have preferred a more explicit approach to discipline. However, Jane Collier, in a letter to Richardson dated October 4, 1748, recognized the significance of this omission. Collier understood that Fielding's decision to withhold the punishment allowed for a more thoughtful and didactic reading experience for young readers. By leaving the penalty open-ended, Fielding encourages her young audience to engage in critical thinking and moral reflection. The focus of the story shifts from the immediate

consequences of the girls' misbehavior to their personal growth and development as they grapple with the consequences of their actions. This aligns perfectly with Mrs. Teachum's broader educational philosophy, which aims to foster independent thought and virtuous behavior in her students.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Mrs. Teachum's actions in the subsequent chapters of *The Governess* highlight the purpose and impact of her punishment approach. When Miss Jenny reads the first fairy tale to the girls, Mrs. Teachum seizes this opportunity to gain insight into their individual dispositions. She asks them to provide an account of their time spent together, indicating her desire to understand their different personalities and behaviors. This approach exemplifies Mrs. Teachum's dedication to the betterment of her students by taking an active interest in their emotional and intellectual growth. Mrs. Teachum's use of fairy tales and plays as teaching tools is part of a broader educational plan. By exposing the girls to these stories, she encourages them to think critically and draw their own moral conclusions. Her intention is not to impose specific morals upon them, but rather to instill interpretative skills that prompt them to reflect on the stories and discern the underlying virtues and lessons.

Mrs. Teachum's ultimate goal is for the girls to develop a deeper understanding of their past errors and the reasons behind the punishment. This reflects her belief in the importance of self-evaluation and comprehension. Rather than enforcing discipline through fear or coercion, Mrs. Teachum empowers her students to take responsibility for their actions and make informed choices. Her approach is not merely about delivering punishment but also about allowing the girls the space to experience their emotions and develop their sense of empathy. By waiting for their anger to subside and love to take its place, Mrs. Teachum demonstrates her sensitivity to their emotional well-being. She understands that impulsive reactions may not always lead to lasting growth, and that genuine change often arises from self-reflection and understanding.

Mrs. Teachum's diligent execution of this plan exemplifies her role as an ideal educator, guided by the principles of critical thinking, moral reflection, and empathy. Her emphasis on interpretative skills and independent thought aligns with the broader educational philosophy of *The Governess*, making her a central figure in the girls' transformative journey towards virtue and self-awareness.

The acknowledgment that students and teachers both play vital roles in the educational process is a significant finding of this chapter. While students are at the receiving end, teachers form the other half of the equation and are instrumental in shaping students' educational experiences. The three selected authors, including Sarah Fielding, emphasize the pivotal role of an ideal educator without whom the practice of teaching critical interpretation cannot thrive. This highlights the importance of understanding the fictional representation of schoolmistresses, an understudied topic compared to the extensive research on schoolmasters in literature from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In conclusion, Mrs. Teachum's approach to punishment and education is a nuanced and thoughtful one. Her use of fairy tales and plays as teaching tools allows the girls to engage in critical thinking and moral reflection. By encouraging them to analyze stories and draw their own conclusions, she fosters interpretative skills that promote self-evaluation and comprehension.

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