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

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper presents the importance of critical interpretation, a teaching practice, through a close analysis of Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess* (1749). This practice was outlined not only by various male educationalists from the seventeenth century such as Baruch Spinoza, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau but also by various female educationalists from the eighteenth and the nineteenth century such as Madame de Genlis, Catharine Macaulay, Sarah Fielding and Hannah More. This paper argues that Fielding prioritizes enhancing critical interpretative skills of children for their intellectual development and for the acquisition of knowledge.[[1]](#footnote-1) She creates Mrs Teachum as the ideal educator in *The Governess* who focuses on critical interpretations of the books her students read which furthermore lays emphasis on a proper early education. The central argument of this paper which focuses on critical interpretation as the primary lesson in Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess* is explored through Mrs Teachum’s larger plan.

Interpretation, which means understanding the meaning of anything one reads, listens or observes, is an essential term in this thesis and is emphasized by various thinkers with respect to the education of children. When we add the word critical to interpretation it further emphasizes that whatever we read, listen or observe must be understood with an even more attention to detail. It is thus a skill which, with constant practice, helps students in gaining knowledge, both moral and practical. However, it must also be noted that it is the teacher’s responsibility to teach this skill to students, thus making it an educational practice of improving students’ interpretative skills. This educational practice has not only been mentioned but also greatly emphasized by earlier thinkers. Plato termed it the ability to differentiate between the allegorical and the literal, Spinoza termed it the ability to ‘distinguish and separate the true idea from other perceptions’, John Locke mentioned it as a method which must be used to direct children towards differentiating the good and the bad, and Rousseau, too, called it a ‘good method’ which helps in nurturing the love for learning in the child.[[2]](#footnote-2) However, this age-old educational practice prescribed for teaching both boys and girls succumbed to patriarchy over time. This serves as a point of entry for this paper. It shows how the first ever children’s novel *The Governess* (1749) by Sarah Fielding lays emphasis on this teaching practice.

The plot is set in a female academy where nine young girls study under the care of a governess, Mrs Teachum. Critics argue that Mrs Teachum fulfils the qualifications of an ideal educator set by Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning* Education.[[3]](#footnote-3)Mrs Teachum not only tries to enhance the intellect of students through her larger plan in the novel but outdoor activities for a healthy body also find equal importance in her weekly schedule. The larger plan which constitutes Mrs Teachum’s unique method of punishing children, allowing them the time and space for self-analysis, and teaching them important life lessons by critically interpreting for them the books they read is discussed in detail below. It is also within this larger plan that critics such as Moyra Haslett and Mika Suzuki criticize the absence or the rare presence of Mrs Teachum not only in the classroom but in the novel itself. Haslett points out that the reformation of girls from bad to good is ‘effected through the behaviour of other girls rather than the encouragement of the teacher.’[[4]](#footnote-4) Suzuki, too, applauds the benevolent nature of Jenny Peace, the eldest student at the academy, for bringing all the other girls to a realization of their mistakes by developing in them the spirit of companionship. I argue that a deeper and critical study of the novel allows us to understand that it is Mrs Teachum who instructed and directed Miss Jenny to do so. A deeper exploration into the character of Mrs Teachum allows us to further understand how she fulfils the essential qualifications of Locke’s ideal educator who lays emphasis on teaching the eldest for the young to follow in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education.*

**SARAH FIELDING AND *THE GOVERNESS* (1749)**

The educational method that underpins *The Governess* with its focus on an institutional context that works to develop the imagination and interpretative abilities of its students draws on Fielding’s own experience of education, both at school and via the friendships she developed as a young woman. A deep exploration of the biography of Sarah Fielding is not the purpose of this paper but a mention of her childhood school in order to understand the inspiration for the character of Mrs Teachum in *The Governess* is necessary. Sarah Fielding’s childhood saw the death of her mother and witnessed separation from a flamboyant father at the age of nine. Following this separation Fielding’s maternal grandmother took the responsibility for her education (alongside the other Fielding children) and sent her to Mary Rooke’s Boarding School, a non- academic institution in Salisbury. The school and its governess Mrs Rooke are often considered as an inspiration for Mrs Teachum’s academy in *The Governess* but the type of education provided differentiates the two. Christopher Johnson writes, ‘The curriculum at Mrs Rooke’s school, at least as it was described by Edmund’s servant Frances Barber, does not appear quite as intellectually challenging- and ultimately liberating- as the one created by the fictional Mrs Teachum.’[[5]](#footnote-5) The academic education at Mrs Rooke’s school was limited to teaching French and thus lacked the possibility of providing any professional opportunity to Sarah. However, later on with the help of Jane Collier and Samuel Richardson she published her first novel *The Adventures of David Simple* in 1744 and later *The Governess* in 1749.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Women writers of the early eighteenth century represented a radical superiority of women over men. Margaret A. Doody writes that ‘In the novels or novellas of writers like Elizabeth Rowe, Mary Davys, Jane Barker or Eliza Heywood, the heroine, however disadvantaged, can implicitly defy the world of masculine authority around her by becoming the centre of the narrative.’[[7]](#footnote-7) However, *The Governess’* central theme is the education of children which separates it from the works of these women writers. It is the first full-length children’s novel, and it underwent seven editions with the last edition being published in 1789.[[8]](#footnote-8) It describes the work of Mrs Teachum who transforms her nine female students at her academy into virtuous students and dutiful citizens without inculcating any obligation towards Christianity. Instead, she inculcates the skill of critically interpreting every book they read, from fairy tales to contemporary play texts, for moralistic lessons. She allows the imagination of the students to roam free whilst the stories are being read but develops in them the ability to question and critically interpret those stories later for virtuous morals.[[9]](#footnote-9) This paper explores the larger plan of Mrs Teachum in transforming the girls from undisciplined students with an immature fascination for selfish amusements to disciplined students with the ability to choose the best for themselves. It explores in particular the motive behind the punishments that Mrs Teachum delivers, and the critical interpretation provided by her regarding fairy tales and a play read by the fourteen-year-old Miss Jenny Peace, the eldest student at the academy.

In his analysis of *The Governess* Christopher Johnson writes, ‘Hoping to foster personal happiness, she sets out to train young girls to think independently, so that they can forsake their own self-interest.’[[10]](#footnote-10) Johnson’s central argument in his interpretation of Mrs Teachum’s larger plan is that she wants freedom of thought for the girls. He argues that Fielding constructs an academy whose governess teaches her students to think independently. I argue instead that the governess teaches her students to interpret independently any knowledge they encounter because freedom of thought allows children’s imagination to grow without any restrictions, whereas critical interpretation directs the imagination of a child towards a proper analysis of the books he reads, and for the purpose of this paper, towards a proper interpretation of fairy tales and plays.

Mika Suzuki, as mentioned earlier, considers *The Governess* (1749) as a book which has the child at the centre and the teacher at the periphery. Undoubtedly the novel is a children’s novel which revolves around improving the intellectual lives of nine young female students but, as I argue, it is their governess who is the protagonist. She is not at the periphery, as Suzuki argues, but at the centre of the plot. The absence of the governess (Mrs Teachum) around those nine girls in the novel is a very important aspect and a tool employed by Fielding to make her readers understand the importance of freedom in education. However, Suzuki terms it as Mrs Teachum’s failure as a teacher in the novel and as Sarah Fielding’s failure as an educationalist writer. As a result she substitutes Mrs Teachum with Jenny Peace, the eldest student at the academy, for educating the other girls and thus shifts all the credit from the teacher to the student.[[11]](#footnote-11) This provides an opportunity for me not only to explore the teacher-student relationship in *The Governess* in detail but also to bring to light Sarah Fielding’s educational philosophy on interpretation which remains hidden in the novel and unexplored by Suzuki. Fielding’s *The Governess,* Suzuki writes, is merely a moral philosophy borrowed ‘from the thoughts on activities of people in general.’[[12]](#footnote-12) Suzuki’s disregard for Fielding’s educational philosophy helps us in understanding that initial women’s academies did much better than their successors but at the same time she leaves open for exploration the type of education that was provided in those academies and how Fielding struggles to re-employ (because it was already mentioned by Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau as discussed above) this educational philosophy for the education of women in the eighteenth century.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**CRITICAL INTERPRETATION: MRS TEACHUM’S TEACHING OBJECTIVE**

Mrs Teachum, the governess of the academy and Fielding’s central character in the novel observes a distant authority over the girls and is seen giving instructions to them only at the end of each chapter. She makes limited appearances, but a critical exploration of her instructions justifies her absence. Until recently the role of Mrs Teachum has been characterized by critics as ineffective, as a substitute for patriarchal authority and as one that fades away in the novel’s progression. I argue instead that Fielding’s prime objective in creating Mrs Teachum is not to do with her physical presence in the novel but with the effect of the lessons she provides. Mrs Teachum in *The Governess* teaches from a distance in order to provide a sense of freedom to the girls for them to interpret any knowledge they receive but corrects them at the end if they fail to deduce a proper conclusion.

Fielding dedicates *The Governess* to Mrs Poyntz and expresses her aim of teaching interpretative skills to young girls in order for them to develop benevolent passions into habits.[[14]](#footnote-14) 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.[[15]](#footnote-15)

In these lines Fielding asks young girls to be habitually benevolent and virtuous. In order to live a happy life, it is necessary to keep boisterous passions in check and to develop an interest in acquiring knowledge from every available source. These lines also describe Fielding’s intent on developing interpretative skills in girls by trying ‘to shew them’ the advantages of exercising benevolence and virtue. The ultimate advantage is happiness and if the girls become efficient in segregating virtues and morals in various sources of knowledge available to them, then happiness is ‘allotted’ to every ‘station’ of their ‘Female Character’. The different ‘station[s]’ of the ‘Female Character’ refer to the different stages of her life in childhood, in adulthood and in old age. Fielding, however, does not provide a process or a solution for developing efficiency in segregating virtues and morals in the above lines. It only becomes clear to her ‘young readers’ after the perusal of *The Governess* that critical interpretation is that process.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The reading of fairy tales is considered as the major driving force in the transformation of the girls during which Mrs Teachum’s absence raises criticism. The girls are unable to deduce a moral for themselves after listening to the first fairy tale of the giants. Miss Sukey is pleased with the decapitation of Barbarico, Miss Lucy is amazed with Mignon’s fearlessness, Miss Dolly is happy to see the reunion of Fidus and Amata and so on.[[17]](#footnote-17) The girls, therefore, are unable to interpret a moral until Miss Jenny asks them to focus on the wrong deeds of Barbarico that led to his demise. She asks them ‘to consider the moral of the story, and what use they might make of it, instead of contending which was the prettiest part.’[[18]](#footnote-18) The girls then all agree ‘that certainly it was of no use to read, without understanding what they read.’[[19]](#footnote-19) Thus, Miss Jenny’s remark allows the girls to correct their observations and teaches them to focus on the moral of the story rather than on certain parts of it. However, the critics fail to acknowledge in their appreciation of Miss Jenny’s guidance that it is Mrs Teachum in the preceding chapter who asks Miss Jenny to convey the proper interpretations of her fairy tales to the girls; Jenny has no such intentions until Mrs Teachum instructs her to do so.

It is to be noted that Mrs Teachum’s curriculum does not include the teaching of any fairy tales, but she does not discard or refuses their perusal if it is deemed necessary in delivering instructions. She tries to interpret them and provides instructions on their proper reading for the acquisition of virtues and morals. The second important thing to be noted is that Miss Jenny reads the first fairy tale without Mrs Teachum’s permission. When she hears of this from Miss Jenny on the next day, Mrs Teachum says, ‘Let me observe to you (which I would have you communicate to your little friends) that giants, magic, fairies and all sorts of supernatural assistances in a story, are only introduced to amuse and divert […] by no means let the notion of giants or magic dwell upon your minds.’[[20]](#footnote-20) Mrs Teachum explains that the attractive language and the fantastic elements employed by a writer in fairy tales serve as a superficial layer of amusement over moral lessons which can only be removed through critical interpretations of the tales. The next day Jenny says to the girls that ‘you must follow the example of the giant Benefico, and do good with it; and when you are under any sufferings, like Mignon, you must patiently endure them till you can find a remedy.’[[21]](#footnote-21) As a result, Miss Sukey recognizes her mistake of plotting revenge against any person who behaved badly towards her, and narrates her autobiography. Therefore, Miss Sukey’s change of heart seems a result of the instructions given by Miss Jenny on the next day but in reality is a result of Mrs Teachum’s instructions to Miss Jenny on the day before.

Mrs Teachum’s emphasis on critical interpretation which is clear from her instructions on fairy tales extends to yet another form of literature read by the girls later in the novel which includes the dramatic arts. Fielding incorporates a comic play, *The Funeral; or, Grief-a-la-mode* (1701) by Richard Steele in *The Governess.* The play presents themes of ‘Simplicity of Mind, Good-nature, Friendship and Honour’ as observed by George Sherburn.[[22]](#footnote-22) However, Fielding only provides a summary of the play in The Governess which presents it as a tragedy rather than a comedy, irrespective of its accuracy. Miss Sukey explains that The Funeral is the story of a servant named Trusty who helps his master, Lord Brumpton, see the wickedness of his wife in declaring him dead whilst he was alive. Lady Brumpton initially contrives a plan with her former husband to marry Lord Brumpton and to acquire his wealth after his death. However, their designs are altered by Trusty who catches the former husband in a conversation with Lady Brumpton and later derives a confession from him. Lord Brumpton is made to watch from behind a curtain as Trusty brings the former husband on stage and confronts Lady Brumpton with the truth. Being caught Lady Brumpton flees the scene with her husband and Lord Brumpton rejoices in the marriage of his son, Lord Hardy, with a fine lady named Charlotte.

Mrs Teachum is an educator who ‘explicitly corrects her students’ thinking and behaviour’ and tries to inculcate critical interpretative skills in the pursuit of knowledge.[[23]](#footnote-23) Similar to fairy tales, she considers the reading of plays without proper supervision as a harmful influence on children. She explains to the girls that,

Where that moral is not to be found, the writer will have it to answer for, that he has been guilty of one of the worst of evils; namely, that he has clothed vice in so beautiful a dress, that instead of deterring, it will allure and draw into its snares the young and tender mind. And I am sorry to say, that too many of our dramatic performances are of this latter cast.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Irrespective of moralistic endings, the explicit presentation of vice in plays has harmful influence on children. This, according to Mrs Teachum, is the result of a playwright’s insensitiveness towards his audience. Fielding, thus, excludes the play from the novel in order to protect her own readers from its useless amusement and tempting dialogues. Mrs Teachum criticizes playwrights for their writing styles which entrap young and tender minds towards vice because of their inability to present virtues more explicitly than their representation of vice in tempting dialogues. Miss Sukey’s summary of *The Funeral* provides a perfect example. After Miss Sukey finishes Mrs Teachum once again lays emphasis on critical interpretation and says that ‘you forgot to describe what sort of women those two young ladies were, though, as to all the rest, you have been particular enough.’[[25]](#footnote-25) Mrs Teachum instructs her to focus more on analysing characters rather than being amused with the events of a story. To the other girls she says,

Moral does not arise only from the happy turn in favour of the virtuous characters in the conclusion of the play, but is strongly inculcated, as you see along, in the peace of mind that attends the virtuous, even in the midst of oppression and distress, while the event is yet doubtful and apparently against them; and on the contrary, in the confusion of mind which the vicious are tormented with, even whilst they falsely imagine themselves triumphant.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Mrs Teachum here explains that happiness and peace of mind come not as a result of happy endings but as a result of constant virtue. She also explains that momentary success can never bring permanent happiness as experienced by Lady Brumpton in the play. Mrs Teachum instructs the girls to interpret Trusty’s loyalty and honesty as virtuous characteristics that lead to happiness and success.

Mrs Teachum’s larger plan of teaching interpretative skills to the girls is initially formulated after the girls fail to comprehend her punishment in chapter one of *The Governess.* Mrs Teachum is an ideal instructor who dedicates her life to the betterment of children at her academy and is often compared with Locke’s educator in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693).[[27]](#footnote-27) Brian McCrea suggests that *The Governess* has its ‘sources in Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education’* and Warren Wooden emphasizes that ‘Rational Moralists including Sarah Fielding […] were under the influence of Locke.’[[28]](#footnote-28) When Locke writes that ‘He that has found a way how to keep up a child’s spirit, easy, active and free; and yet at the same time to restrain him from many things he has a mind to […] has in my opinion, got the true secret of education’, Mrs Teachum ideally personifies his educator.[[29]](#footnote-29) Locke’s views help us in establishing further differences and, at the same time, similarities between the two educators but the focus here is on their different styles of punishing children. Both educators agree that punishment for wrong deeds is as important as appreciation for good actions. According to Locke, love must follow punishment for the former to be effective. He writes that ‘Fear and awe ought to give you the first power over their minds and love and friendship in riper years to hold it’.[[30]](#footnote-30) Therefore, it is necessary for an ideal educator to develop friendship with the student in order to have a deeper effect of his lessons but Fielding proposes a different method. Unlike the appreciations and friendships of Locke’s educator with his students Fielding’s Mrs Teachum distances herself from the girls after delivering the punishment in *The Governess* in order to provide an opportunity for them to assess their actions themselves and learn.

The only punishment inflicted by Mrs Teachum occurs in the first chapter of the novel when the girls fight over an apple and are bereft of being entertained with any amusements in the future until they prove their worth. The punishment, however, is not mentioned. Fielding only writes, ‘But this is certain, the most severe punishment she had ever inflicted on any misses, since she had kept a school, was now laid on these wicked girls.’[[31]](#footnote-31) Before publishing *The Governess* Richardson insisted Fielding to describe the punishment but Jane Collier explained to him the importance of this omission in a letter dated October 4, 1748.[[32]](#footnote-32) She writes,

I think, rather better that the girls (her readers) should not know what this punishment was that Mrs Teachum inflicts; but they should each, on reading it, think it to be the same that they themselves had suffered when they deserved it; for though Miss Fielding is an enemy to corporeal severities, yet there is no occasion that she should teach the children so punished that their punishment is wrong.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Collier in these lines hints towards Fielding’s design of a teacher’s teaching methods. She explains that punishment should only be inflicted on children when they are capable of understanding its justification. Irrespective of Mrs Teachum taking away the apples from the girls and making them embrace one another, the girls continue with a ‘grudge and ill-will in their bosoms; everyone thinking she was punished most, although she would have it, that she deserved to be punished least.’[[34]](#footnote-34) This makes it clear that the girls turn a blind eye toward their own mistakes and are equally incapable of comprehending Mrs Teachum’s punishment for its future benefit. It is for the same reason that Jane Collier justifies the omission of Mrs Teachum’s punishment in the novel. The readers must interpret, according to her, its necessity along-with the girls in the academy through the lessons of Mrs Teachum.

**CONCLUSION**

The effect and the objective of the punishment becomes clear when we observe Mrs Teachum’s actions in the following chapters of the novel. After Miss Jenny reads the first fairy tale to the girls Mrs Teachum asks her to provide an everyday account of their time spent in the arbour ‘with a desire to know their different dispositions’ and to correct them before they leave the academy.[[35]](#footnote-35) Her instructions on fairy tales and plays, thus, forms her larger plan and the readers along-with the girls at the academy are instructed to interpret them critically. It is to be noted that Mrs Teachum executed the entire plan of teaching interpretative skills in order to make the girls review their past mistakes and finally understand the objective of her punishment because she says to Miss Jenny that ‘She herself had only waited a little while, to see if their anger would subside and love take its place in their bosoms, without her interfering again.’[[36]](#footnote-36)

Students (children) form only one half of the educational equation. They are at the receiving end of this whole process. The teachers form the other half, and the three selected authors put an equal emphasis on the importance of an ideal educator without whom this entire educational practice ceases to exist. This is an important finding of this thesis because the fictional representation of schoolmistresses of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century is an understudied topic, especially when we compare it with the number of studies done on fictional representation of schoolmasters from the same time period. The educational practice of teaching students to critically interpret books only becomes relevant after an educator understands its importance and works towards improving his students’ interpretative skills. This creates an opportunity for future researchers to explore this important aspect which is directly related to the philosophy of critical interpretation. There are two important advantages in pursuing this research further. Firstly, it will helps us in understanding the history of the representation of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England and secondly, it will help in establishing how the legacy of this educational practice is carried forward by writers of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries.

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13. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded (1740),* ed. by Peter Sabor with an introduction by Margaret A. Doody, (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), p. 8.
1. *The Governess,* a literary work in the genre of children’s literature represents an aspect of the education of women in eighteenth-century England. It is to be noted that Fielding addresses ‘young readers’ in her preface to the novel, irrespective of all the characters in the novel being girls. Therefore, Fielding’s ideals regarding education in *The Governess* are applicable to both boys and girls. However, I intend to explore only girls’ education in the first half of the eighteenth century in this chapter and the term is substituted with ‘children’s education’ only when I refer to *The Governess* as part of a literary genre written for children. Sarah

Fielding, *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy,* Printed for A. Bradley and R. James, (Dublin: 1749), p. iv. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Plato, *The Republic,* ed. by Benjamin Jowett, (Auckland: Floating Press, 2009), pp. 73-5; Benedictus De Spinoza, *Ethics,* trans. by Andrew Boyle, (London: Heron Books), pp. 238-45; John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education,* ed. by John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 45; Rousseau, *Emile; or Concerning Education,* translated by Barbara Foxley, (Read Books Ltd., 2007), pp. 78-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Arlene Fish Wilner observes that Mrs Teachum trains these nine young girls in a way that was adopted for the education of boys by Locke, Rousseau and Thomas Day. See ‘Education and Ideology in Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess*’, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture,* 24 (1995), pp. 307-27, p. 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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5. Christopher D. Johnson, *A Political Biography of Sarah Fielding,* First Ed. (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2017), p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Richardson was greatly interested in the punishment Mrs Teachum delivers in chapter one and asked Fielding to elaborate on it in the novel. However, Jane Collier on October 4, 1748 explains to him in a letter the importance of keeping the readers uninformed about the punishment in view of Mrs Teachum’s larger plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded (1740),* ed. by Peter Sabor with an introduction by Margaret A. Doody, (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The difference in editions majorly comprised of changes in the novel’s title whenever published by a

different publisher. The information given below is taken and available at University of Sheffield’s Star Plus Library Catalogue which provides the different versions of the novel. The first publisher was A. Miller, who printed the first edition for the author in 1749 along-with six more editions in 1749, 1751, 1758, 1768 and 1781. Apart from six editions published by A. Miller, A. Bradley and R. James had published another edition in 1749. The 1791 version of the novel does not mention the edition, or the publisher’s name. It only mentions Dublin as the place of publication. However, the British Library Catalogue provides other versions of the novel published in 1765, 1769, 1789, 1804, 1968, 1987 and 2005, each under a different publishing house. DOI:

<[http://explore.bl.uk/primo\_library/libweb/action/search.do?ct=&pag=&indx=1&pageNumberComingFrom=2](http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?ct&pag&indx=1&pageNumberComingFrom=2&vid=BLVU1&mode=Basic&ct=Next%20Page&tab=local_tab&fn=search&indx=11&dscnt=0&vl(freeText0)=the%20governess%20or%20the%20little%20female%20academy&dstmp=1586553844459) [&vid=BLVU1&mode=Basic&ct=Next%20Page&tab=local\_tab&fn=search&indx=11&dscnt=0&vl(freeText0)=the](http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?ct&pag&indx=1&pageNumberComingFrom=2&vid=BLVU1&mode=Basic&ct=Next%20Page&tab=local_tab&fn=search&indx=11&dscnt=0&vl(freeText0)=the%20governess%20or%20the%20little%20female%20academy&dstmp=1586553844459)

[%20governess%20or%20the%20little%20female%20academy&dstmp=1586553844459#](http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?ct&pag&indx=1&pageNumberComingFrom=2&vid=BLVU1&mode=Basic&ct=Next%20Page&tab=local_tab&fn=search&indx=11&dscnt=0&vl(freeText0)=the%20governess%20or%20the%20little%20female%20academy&dstmp=1586553844459)>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Teaching the skill of interpreting various sources of knowledge differentiates *The Governess* from John Newberry’s *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1744) which teaches morals to children through games. Newberry

merged didactic literature with children’s literature for the first time and re-defined children’s novel as a genre with potential beyond amusement. For further reading on *A Little Pretty Pocket Book,* see Patrick C. Fleming, ‘The Rise of The Moral Tale: Children’s Literature, The Novel and *The Governess*’, *Eighteenth - Century Studies*, 46 (2013), pp. 463–77. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Christopher D. Johnson, *A Political Biography of Sarah Fielding,* First Ed. (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2017), p. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jenny Peace has been applauded and Mrs Teachum criticized at the same time for her absence by other critics such as Moyra Haslett and Courtney A. Weikle-Mills whose comments are mentioned above. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Mika Suzuki, ‘The Little Female Academy and The Governess’, *Women's Writing*, 1 (1994), pp. 325-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Suzuki explains that the early eighteenth-century academies were gentile and had a ‘kindly atmosphere’ whereas they turned dull and ‘grim’ towards its end. However, she writes further that Sarah Fielding’s ‘personal foresight’ had nothing to do with the kindly atmosphere that was in the earlier academies. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Sarah Fielding’s association with Stephen Poyntz remains unclear, but she mentions him to have inspired

the design of the novel. In the dedication to Mrs Poyntz, Fielding writes, ‘The Consideration, Madam, made me first hope, that a Design of this Nature, would not be unacceptable to you; and particularly, as this Scheme was, in a manner directed by Mr Poyntz.’ Sarah Fielding, *The Governess*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Fielding addresses young readers in the preface to the novel which helps us in understanding that Mrs Teachum’s instructions are applicable to both boys and girls. Ibid*,* p. iv. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid*,* p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Sarah Fielding, *The Governess,* p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. George Sherburn, *A Literary History of England: Vol. 3: The Restoration and Eighteenth-century (1660-1789)*, 2nd ed., (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Jameela Lares, ‘Written Maternal Authority and Eighteenth-Century Education in Britain: Educating by the Book, by Rebecca Davies’, *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 40 (2015), pp. 298-300. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Sarah Fielding, *The Governess,* pp. 94-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid, p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The comparison is also sometimes made with Rousseau’s *Emile; or On Education* (1762), but since *The Governess* (1749) is published twelve years earlier, its influence on the French philosopher seems more likely. Arlene Wilner observes the same and writes that Rousseau picks up after Locke on the education of children but ‘there is no reason to claim *The Governess* as a source for Rousseau’. Arlene Fish Wilner, ‘Education and

Ideology in Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess*’, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture,* 24 (1995), pp. 307-27. Rousseau lays emphasis on restriction contrary to Locke or Fielding when he writes, ‘With children use force, with men reason; such is the natural order of things […] There is no more, is an answer against which no child ever rebelled unless he believed it untrue.’ Rousseau, *Emile; or Concerning Education,* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1889), pp. 53-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Brian McCrea, ‘*The Governess* (review)’, pp. 197-98; Warren W. Wooden, ‘Classics of Children's Literature and: From Instruction to Delight: An Anthology of Children's Literature to 1850 (review)’, *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 7 (1982), pp. 62-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Postulate 46 in Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education,* ed. by John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Sarah Fielding, *The Governess,* p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Johnson explores the reader-writer relationship in this letter but focuses more on Fielding’s unconventional writing style in order to reach a wider audience in the eighteenth-century. However, he misses a more severe message which Collier highlights through this letter and which justifies my exploration of imagination as Fielding’s prime objective in *The Governess.* He writes, ‘As a writer living by her pen, Fielding no doubt saw writing for children as a profitable opportunity. A letter from Jane Collier to Richardson demonstrates the degree to which Fielding and her circle were becoming savvy to the dynamics of marketplace.’ Christopher D. Johnson, *A Political Biography of Sarah Fielding*, p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson.* Vol.2, Printed for R. Phillips by Lewis and Rodem, (1804). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Sarah Fielding, *The Governess,* p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)