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THE RISE OF THE MORAL TALE: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, THE NOVEL, AND THE GOVERNESS

Patrick C. Fleming

Children's literature and the novel developed in tandem. Critics often date the rise of both to the 1740s, when Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding produced the bulk of their work and when John Newbery began publishing books for children. Today the two overlap in the genre of the children's novel, but when discussing the origins of this genre critics risk oversimplifying either children's literature or the novel, or both. Only in a very vague sense, for example, can *Goody Two-Shoes* (1765) or *Giles Gingerbread* (1764) be called novels,¹ and to focus only on children's adaptations of the major novelists is to ignore the care that writers (not just publishers) took in constructing works specifically for children.² In this article I will argue that when discussing works like Sarah Fielding's *The Governess; Or, the Little Female Academy* (1749), "moral tale" is a more useful phrase than "children's novel." Recognizing the moral tale as a distinct narrative form can help us to understand the concurrent rises of children's literature and the novel, and the boundaries between these two genres.³

John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly with Two Letters from Jack the Giant Killer; as also a Ball and Pincushion; The Use of which will infallibly make Tommy a good Boy, and Polly a good Girl* (1744) is often called the first work of children's literature.⁴ The long title consciously marks the work as both amusing and instructive, an idea of literature that is of course not unique to Newbery: he draws on the Horatian ideal of literature that is both pleasant and useful ("dulce et utile"). What earns Newbery the title "founder of children's

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literature” is that, unlike most of his predecessors, Newbery treated books for children as literature, amusing *and* instructive, not just the latter.⁵ Newbery’s purported goal is to make Tommy and Polly “good,” but he aims to do so through games rather than lessons.

The eight-page preface to *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* explains Newbery’s method to parents. The preface begins: “The grand Design in the Nurture of Children, is to make them *Strong, Hardy, Healthy, Virtuous, Wise and Happy*; and these good Purposes are not to be obtained without some Care and Management in their Infancy” (N 5). These lines, as many have noted, echo John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). Locke has long been recognized as an important precursor to early children’s literature: his emphasis on sensory experience necessitates a worldly education, which differentiates children’s books in the Lockean tradition from the Puritan books for children which had existed since the seventeenth century.⁶

Locke’s influence is reflected in the secularity of eighteenth-century children’s literature, a formal feature of the genre that has important narrative repercussions. Patricia Demers has argued that early children’s texts appealed to readers whose worldview was based in a Puritan ideology. “In this value-laden literature,” she writes, “the reader’s final destiny, though a matter of life and death, is always predicated on an acute examination of the here-and-now.”⁷ The afterlife, in these books, is the motivation for changing one’s behavior, and the absence of this motivation is a crucial difference between Evangelical tales and moral tales. If, as I will argue, children’s stories demonstrate proper behavior through rewards and punishments, then Evangelical texts have a ready-made system: the ultimate reward is heaven, and the ultimate punishment is hell. Even if neither figures explicitly in the text, as potential endings they determine the structure of the narrative. In the absence of this structure, secular tales must find another way to motivate their readers.

The secularity of *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* is reflected in the language of the preface. In John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), Morality is one of the cities that Christian must avoid: Evangelist warns him of Worldly-Wiseman, who “favoureth only the Doctrine of this World.”⁸ By the mid-eighteenth century the word “morality” had lost its pejorative connotations, and Newbery’s preface tells readers, “Would you have a *Virtuous* Son, instill into him the Principles of Morality early” (N 7). The focus here is on secular morality, rather than Puritan piety, and children are to acquire this morality through reason. “Would you have a *Wise* Son,” Newbery’s preface continues,

teach him to reason early. Let him rea[d], and make him understand what he reads. No Sentence should be passed over without a strict Examination of the Truth of it; and though this may be thought hard at first, and seem to retard the Boy in his Progress, yet a little Practice will make it familiar, and a Method of Reasoning will be acquir’d. (N 7–8)

As Heather Klemann puts it, Newbery establishes his book as a “training ground for reasoning.”⁹ This laborious, rational model of reading dominated writings about children’s literature until at least the end of the century.

Two letters from Jack the Giant Killer follow the preface of *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*. They are addressed to Tommy and Polly, respectively, and are identical except for the gendered pronouns and exchanging a ball for a pincushion. Jack praises the reader for being good, and then presents the text as a prize: “while you continue so good, you may depend on my obliging you with every Thing I can. I have here sent you a *Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, which will teach you to play at all those innocent Games that good Boys and Girls divert themselves with” (N 14–15). While the preface for parents emphasizes the instructional use of Newbery’s book, Jack’s letters focus on amusement. The “innocent Games,” though, are still means to an instructive end. The ball and pincushion, which Newbery sold with the book, are presented as rewards for good behavior, and directly involved in the instruction. Jack tells the reader that he (or she) should stick a pin into the red side of the ball (or pincushion) for each good action, and into the black side for each bad action. When there are ten pins on the red side, says Jack, the reader has earned a penny.¹⁰

Newbery is in many ways a follower of Locke’s pedagogical theories, but his reliance on material rewards is distinctly anti-Lockean. In Jack’s letters, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* itself is a reward, and readers can earn pennies by keeping track of their moral behavior. In *Some Thoughts*, though, Locke writes:

To flatter children by *Rewards* of things, that are pleasant to them is as carefully to be avoided. He that will give to his Son *Apples* or *Sugar-plumbs*, or what else of this kind he is most delighted with, to make him learn his Book, does but authorize his love of pleasure, and cocker up that dangerous propensitie, which he ought by all means to subdue and stifle in him.¹¹

Locke goes on to clarify that he is not opposed to all rewards and punishments, only those that focus on the “Pains and Pleasures of the Body” (L 54). Parents instead should use esteem and disgrace as pedagogical incentives (L 55). Newbery, then, breaks from Locke in his use of material rewards, which provide the link between amusement and instruction, and are perhaps the most important feature of Newbery’s publishing strategy (his mantra as he continued in the children’s publishing trade became “trade and plum-cake forever, huzza!”).

The preface and the two letters from Jack the Giant Killer suggest that *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* is a more unified text than it later reveals itself to be. A list of games immediately follows the preface. These games are presented as an alphabet, two games for each letter (one upper-case and one lower-case), but there is no obvious connection between the letter and the game. The first game (The *great A* Play) is chuck-farthing; the second (The *little a* Play) is kite-flying. Each is accompanied by a moral or rule of life, but again, the connection between the game and the moral is weak at best. The moral appended to chuck-farthing is: “*Chuck-Farthing*, like Trade, / Requires great Care; / The more you observe, / The better you’ll fare” (N 24). The moral has little to do with either the letter A or with the game.

Other letters of the alphabet become characters in stories: “Here’s W and X, / Good Friends do not vex, / All Things go well / Dear W and X” (N 53). Y and Z are both fables. The story is presented with the capital letter, and Jack the Giant Killer returns to explain the moral with the lower case letter. The fable presented

with the letter Z is numbered “fable III,” and the numbering continues when the alphabet finishes: fable IV stands by itself, without a letter. This numbering suggests that the alphabet is entirely incidental, and the rest of *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* lacks any real sense of unity. Alongside the fables are several rhymes and songs, and the work finishes with “Select Proverbs for the Use of Children” (N 82–85), followed by an advertisement for Newbery’s other works. Although Newbery would later produce more “literary” children’s literature, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* is a miscellany, clearly envisioned more as a product than as a work of art.

Based on what he knew, or guessed, about the potential market for children’s books, Newbery combined instruction with delight, and presented a secular didacticism based on material rewards. Later children’s literature would retain these characteristics, and combine Newbery’s ideas with the burgeoning genre of the novel.¹² Much of what Samuel Johnson says in his famous *Rambler* essay applies equally well to early children’s fiction. Instruction is at the heart of Johnson’s essay. “[T]he greatest excellency of art,” he writes, is “to imitate nature; but it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature, which are most proper for imitation.”¹³ In the first clause, authors “distinguish those parts of nature” which their work imitates. But when Johnson writes “proper for imitation” he also means proper for the *reader* to imitate:

The purpose of these writings is surely not only to show mankind, but to provide that they may be hereafter with less hazard; to teach the means of avoiding the snares which are laid by Treachery for Innocence, without infusing any wish for that superiority with which the betrayer flatters his vanity; to give the power of counteracting fraud without the temptation to practice it; to initiate youth by mock encounters in the art of necessary defence, and to increase prudence without impairing virtue. (J 22–23)

The reader’s role is clear from the verbs Johnson chooses (provide, teach, give, initiate): it is the reader who is taught to avoid snares and given the power to counteract fraud. Johnson’s idea of fiction is didactic, in that fiction should convince the reader of moral propositions. But it is also mimetic, in two senses of the word: fiction should imitate nature, and readers should imitate fiction (or at least certain elements of fiction).

Only realism has the effect Johnson desires. Romance and fantasy, he says, are “so remote from all that passes among men, that the reader [is] in very little danger of making any applications to himself” (J 21); “what we cannot credit,” Johnson claims, “we shall never imitate” (J 24). Johnson firmly believed that fiction could instruct its readers, and that realism was the best method through which to do so. But even realism can be dangerous, for there are “those parts of nature” which are *not* proper for imitation. Johnson continues,

Many writers, for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their adventures with delight, and are led by degrees to interest ourselves in their favor, we lose the abhorrence of their faults because they do not hinder our pleasures, or perhaps regard them with some kindness for being united with so much merit. (J 23)

Johnson again shifts the subject from “writers” to “we, the readers,” but here imitation is unwanted. Readers should imitate virtue as it is portrayed in a text, but vice, says Johnson, “should always disgust” (J 24). If the reaction towards virtue is mimetic, the reaction towards vice can be termed emetic.

Johnson is by no means the only eighteenth-century writer to offer such a notion of literature. Compare for example Lord Kames’s *Elements of Criticism*: “The fine arts are intended to entertain us, by making pleasant impressions . . . but in order to make pleasant impressions, we ought, as above hinted, to know what objects are naturally agreeable, and what naturally disagreeable.”¹⁴ Elizabeth Thomas rendered an emetic notion of character about thirty years before Johnson’s essay, in “The True Effigies of a Certain Squire” (1722). This poem portrays a character type, of which, to quote Johnson, “everyone knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance” (J 20). Thomas calls on the muse to describe the foppish squire, then interrupts: “Enough, O Muse! thou has described him right, / Th’ emetic’s strong, I sicken at the sight.”¹⁵ Thomas’s poem satirizes this character, and these lines reveal both the accuracy of the description and the expected reaction. Like Johnson’s ideal readers, Thomas responds with disgust to the description of the squire.

Contrary to the Aristotelian conception of narrative, character, rather than action, is at the heart of Johnson’s theory of fiction. Characters, not events, provoke mimetic or emetic responses, and Johnson chastises authors for mingling “good and bad qualities” in their principal characters. He anticipates those critics who would argue that his conception of character is contrary to the mimetic realism he promotes:

Some have advanced, without due attention to the consequences of this notion, that certain virtues have their correspondent faults, and therefore that to exhibit either apart is to deviate from probability. . . it follows not that they will be equally indulged when reason is consulted; yet, unless that consequence be admitted, this sagacious maxim becomes an empty sound, without any relation to practice or to life. (J 23)

Johnson’s language—employing phrases like “some have advanced,” “and therefore,” “it follows”—appeals to the reader’s capacity to reason. Readers recognize mimetic and emetic characters “when reason is consulted;” reason is what allows the reader to recognize the precept that the example demonstrates. The sentiment resonates with Newbery’s preface, in which he encourages parents to “teach [children] to reason early” (N 7). For both Johnson and Newbery, the ultimate goal of fiction is to present realistic characters that demonstrate moral precepts. Readers should then deduce these precepts from the narrative examples.

As Johnson recognizes, there is a conflict inherent in his theory of fiction. Authors can either “follow nature” and portray realistic characters, or “deviate from probability” and portray characters that are purely mimetic or emetic. Johnson makes the distinction a moral one, but it is also a question of form. As Ian Watt rightly claims, literary realism must remain true to individual experience, not to traditional literary practices. By definition, then, the novel, as a realist genre, is not simply an amalgamation of literary forms: “the poverty of the novel’s formal conventions,” Watt writes, “would seem to be the price it must pay for its real-

ism.”¹⁶ He does not mean to assert that the novel does not have identifiable formal features, only that studies of the novel must account for other factors as well.

Fictional realism is important both to children’s literature and to the novel. Based on Newbery’s children’s books and Johnson’s notions of fiction, two likely features for a children’s novel would be overt didacticism and a digressive structure. But as many historians of the novel have pointed out, didacticism and passages that break from the main plot are characteristic of much eighteenth-century literature, for both children and adults. J. P. Hunter notes that didacticism is a prominent tonal and rhetorical feature of the novel, particularly “open and intense” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: “it is no favor to the novel as a literary species,” Hunter argues, “to ignore or explain away so prominent an early feature.”¹⁷ Passages that divert from the main plot to moralize or offer extraneous stories are also a prominent early feature (the Man on the Hill episode in *Tom Jones* is the classic example). Patricia Meyer Spacks historicizes such passages: “Up to, and even after [the 1750s],” she writes, “it was by no means a foregone conclusion that unity would prove preferable to diversity as a basis for plot structure.”¹⁸

Realism, didacticism, and digression are key formal features for both children’s literature and the novel in the eighteenth century. Still, children’s literature must have its own formal conventions, and simply calling a work a “children’s novel” elides crucial differences between the two genres. Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess*—which was published in 1749, the same year as her brother’s *Tom Jones* and only five years after *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*—brings together Johnsonian notions of fiction with Newbery’s secular didacticism and instruction through delight, and helps elucidate what these differences might be.

Before the 1980s, Sarah Fielding featured in critical discussions mostly, if at all, as “Henry’s sister” or “Richardson’s disciple,” and early critics were dismissive of her works. F. J. Harvey Darton rather patronizingly remarks, “Sarah had something of her great brother’s power of drawing ordinary English character,”¹⁹ and Geoffrey Summerfield sees her as merely “dealing in the social and moral commonplaces of the early eighteenth century’s mercantile class . . . under the rather unfortunate influence of Richardson.”²⁰ Eager to reclaim Sarah Fielding, later critics like Deborah Downs-Miers argued that she was “far ahead of her time,” and that *The Governess* represents the first novel for children.²¹ Linda Bree’s biography places *The Governess* alongside Sarah Fielding’s other works, and makes a strong case for Fielding’s contribution to the development of the novel.²² Bree’s and Downs-Miers’s arguments brought critical attention to Fielding’s writing, rather than mere coincidences in her biography. But an emphasis only on the novelistic aspects of her works does not offer a complete picture. The emerging field of children’s literature is equally important for a study of *The Governess*.

Identifying the audience and voice of children’s literature is notoriously difficult. In *The Case of Peter Pan: Or, the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, Jacqueline Rose argues that in children’s literature,

the question of form turns into a question of limits, or irrationality and lost control, of how far the narrator can go before he or she loses his or her identity, and hence the right to speak, or write, for a child . . . When children’s fiction touches on this barrier [between adult and child], it

becomes not experiment (the formal play of a modern adult novel which runs the gamut of its characters' points of view) but molestation.²³

By addressing a child reader, Rose argues, adult authors both construct a child and take on the characteristics of that construction: the result is an authorial voice that verges on irrationality and instability. Rose's book has had an immense impact on children's literature studies, an impact that is still very much felt today.²⁴ By raising the question of the tension between the adult's voice and the child's, Rose called attention to children's literature's "rich and paradoxical ideological ambiguity,"²⁵ and the problems inherent in a genre that claims to speak to an audience it both constructs and embodies.

Fielding addresses these problems with her frame narrative, a point that critics like Darton miss when they refer to *The Governess* as merely "a collection of stories."²⁶ Whatever we say about *The Governess* as a whole, there is never a doubt who narrates the individual stories, nor is there a doubt about audience. Mrs. Teachum's pupils listen to each story, and the frame allows Mrs. Teachum (or sometimes her pupil Jenny Peace) to correct any potential misreadings. Yes, *The Governess* is a "collection of stories:" each student tells the story of her life before she came to school, and between these autobiographies the girls read fictional stories to each other. But the primary importance of this work, in terms of its narrative form, lies in how these stories are framed.

Several critics have argued that the frame of *The Governess* represents an early example of the monitorial system of education that would become popular by the end of the century. These critics emphasize the role that Jenny Peace plays in the story. Jenny records the girls' stories and shows them to Mrs. Teachum, and at times takes a more direct pedagogical role, helping the girls arrive at their interpretations of the stories they read or the experiences they share. "Although Mrs. Teachum runs the school," Andrew O'Malley notes,

she remains largely in the background as an observer, having delegated authority to the oldest and wisest of the girls . . . Through the direct intervention of Jenny and the indirect gaze of Mrs. Teachum, the students learn to correct and regulate their own behavior and that of their peers.²⁷

O'Malley makes a strong case that *The Governess* leads children to become, in his words, "self-regulating subjects." As his title *The Making of the Modern Child* suggests, he is primarily interested in how eighteenth-century children's literature espouses the middle-class ideologies (like "self-regulation") that created our modern conception of childhood. O'Malley is not alone in his interest in how eighteenth-century writers envisioned their child readers. Many critics have noted that Fielding's work reflects "a growing awareness of the diversity of incidents, interests, and problems which may occur in the life of a child."²⁸

But is not enough to recognize that Fielding espouses a certain ideology, or that she recognizes the diversity of her child readers. *The Governess* represents, in 1749, a new kind of writing. In order to participate in the ongoing project of "making the modern child," Fielding first has to teach her readers how to use her book. Determining how she does so requires questioning the narrative form that she develops: what constitutes a mimetic or emetic character; how and to what

extent characters are rewarded or punished; who decides upon and administers these rewards and punishments; and whether the form allows for character development.

The form of *The Governess* is perhaps best exemplified by a fairy tale Jenny Peace reads aloud to the other girls. In this tale, the cruel giant Barbarico enslaves a dwarf named Mignon. Barbarico is cowardly, and afraid of another giant, Benefico, even though Benefico knows he is no physical match for Barbarico. Mignon finally escapes by putting a magic ribbon around Barbarico's neck, which paralyzes him. He then summons Benefico, who kills the immobilized Barbarico.

After telling this story to the other girls, Jenny shows it to Mrs. Teachum, who responds:

A very good Moral may indeed be drawn from the Whole, and likewise from almost every Part of it; and as you had this Story from your Mamma, I doubt not but you are very well qualified to make the proper Remarks yourself upon the Moral of it to your Companions. But here let me observe to you (which I would have you communicate to your little Friends) that Giants, Magic, Fairies, and all sorts of supernatural Assurances in a Story, are introduced only to amuse and divert; For a giant is called so only to express a Man of great Power; and the magic Fillet round the Statue was intended only to shew you, that by Patience you will overcome all Difficulties.²⁹

Mrs. Teachum's speech amounts to a theory of children's literature, consistent with Fielding's preface to *The Governess* and combining elements of Newbery, Locke and Johnson. In the preface Fielding tells her "young readers" that "once you fix this Truth in your Minds, namely, that the true Use of Books is to make you wiser and better, you will have both Profit and Pleasure from what you read" (F v). The "profit and pleasure" here recall Newbery's "instruction and amusement," and Mrs. Teachum supports the preface's claim that the "true use of books" is to make one wiser and better.

In *Some Thoughts*, Locke warns of servants who tell frightening stories to children: "such *Bug-bear* Thoughts," he claims, "once got into the tender Minds of Children, sink deep, and fasten themselves so, as not easily, if ever, to be got out again" (L 159). Locke isn't opposed to fantasy per se; he supports, for example, giving Aesop's fables to children. Rather, he worries that the stories will terrify children and that servants will corrupt children's minds.

Locke's concerns are mainly pedagogical. He discusses literature only as it relates to his larger educational project, and while he is not as extreme as Rousseau, who in *Emile* claims to "hate books" (except, of course, *Robinson Crusoe*), Locke does not see reading as a particularly important part of this project.³⁰ Johnson, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with fiction and reading, and he differs from Locke in his view of fantasy and romance. Johnson writes about fiction generally, not specifically for children, and he opposes fantasy and romance because "What we cannot credit, we shall never imitate" (J 24), rather than because it will terrorize readers. For Johnson, the problem with fantasy is that it does not suit the didactic ends to which all fiction should aspire.³¹

Mrs. Teachum's view on the fantastic differs from both Locke's and Johnson's. She neither (like Johnson) belies the effectiveness of didacticism in romances,

nor (like Locke) worries that the girls will be terrified by the story. Rather, she interprets the fantastic as the embodiment of virtue or vice: “giant” means only “powerful,” and the magic ribbon is just another way of saying “patience.”

Karen E. Rowe categorizes Fielding this way: “Fairy tales, embedded and contextualized, become exemplary pedagogical instruments to be, however, carefully mediated so that these amusements never exist as ends to themselves.”³² Rowe sees the story of Barbarico as a fairy tale, albeit “embedded and contextualized.” Mrs. Teachum’s mediation, though, shifts the genre of the tale from fantasy to allegory. For authors and critics of early children’s literature, fantasy brings to mind chapbooks and fairy tales. Allegory, however, has roots in evangelical texts like Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and so, as Pickering notes, “escaped general condemnation.”³³ This distinction grants an immense rhetorical power to adult characters. When Mrs. Teachum moves the story of Barbarico from one genre to another she both ensures the tale’s pedagogical value and changes the historical and ideological context in which her readers will understand it.

When discussing morals and fantasy, Mrs. Teachum focuses mostly on the text of the fairy tale. But equally important is the context in which it is told. The story is acceptable to Mrs. Teachum because it came from an adult (Jenny’s mother), and Mrs. Teachum authorizes Jenny as “well qualified to make the proper remarks” to the other girls (F 41). The story cannot stand by itself, but needs to be properly interpreted: the adult voice controls the child’s interpretation. The proper meaning of the story is filtered three times: first through Jenny’s mother, then through Mrs. Teachum, and finally through Jenny.

Having been sanctioned as an interpreter, Jenny returns to the other girls. She asks how they liked the tale, and they respond, “[it is] a very pretty diverting story.” Jenny replies,

‘Tho she was glad they were pleased, yet she would have them look farther than the present Amusement; For, continued she, my Mamma always taught me to understand what I read: otherwise, she said, it was no manner of Purpose to read ever so many Books, which would only stuff my brain, without being any Improvement to my Mind.’

The Misses all agreed, that certainly it was of no Use to read, without understanding what they read; and began to talk of the Story of the Giants, to prove they could make just Remarks on it. (F 42)

Jenny listens to the girls’ interpretations until Polly Suckling, the youngest student, says she likes the dwarf Mignon the best because she is the smallest and Mignon makes her think of herself. Jenny here interrupts, and provides the “correct” moral: that Benefico’s happiness arose entirely from his goodness, and Mignon is rewarded for his patient submission to his suffering. Her voice is now the voice of the adult, repeating Mrs. Teachum’s interpretation and correcting the other girls’ misreadings.

Jenny repeats Mrs. Teachum’s warning not to believe the fantastic parts of the story, and concludes, “whenever you have any power, 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” (F 44). Having led the girls to the proper interpretation Jenny presents the next step, the proper use of the tale. Fielding’s model of reading is an active

one: Benefico and Mignon are mimetic characters, and the girls (and the reader) are encouraged to imitate them.

Just as Johnson would wish, no characters in Jenny's story mingle good and bad qualities: Benefico and Mignon are purely mimetic characters, and Barbarico is purely emetic. And yet Mrs. Teachum and Jenny still must interpret the story. Pickering claims that "most allegory in early children's fiction was clear and clearly instructive,"³⁴ but the reading practices portrayed in this text do not support such a statement. Through the adult voices of Mrs. Teachum and Jenny, Fielding makes the story seem more like a clear, simple allegory than it actually is. She cannot preclude *all* potential misreadings: neither Jenny nor Mrs. Teachum, for example, draws a lesson about retribution from the tale, although Benefico executes the paralyzed Barbarico in a surprisingly violent scene: Barbarico is bound, "gnashing his horrid Teeth, and again rolling his ghastly Eyes" and Benefico "with one Blow severed his odious Head from his enormous Body" (F 37).

As Peter Hunt argues, it is hard to know whether any readers, especially child readers, will "clearly" recognize a story's moral.³⁵ *The Governess* reflects this difficulty. Polly offers an interpretation that is inconsistent with the way in which Mrs. Teachum wants the story to be used, and she must be corrected. Emily Friedman notes that readers should see their own misreadings in such scenes: "potential misreaders . . . identify their reading practices in the fictional misreaders, and, through those misreaders, find ways out of that reading."³⁶ The relationship between the frame story and the embedded tales trains the reader in the practice of interpretation, and *The Governess* continues this pattern of characters telling stories to each other, with either Mrs. Teachum or Jenny leading the girls toward the correct interpretation.

In addition to these embedded stories, each of the girls in the school tells about her life before arriving at Mrs. Teachum's. Within the frame of *The Governess*, these are autobiographical tales, not fiction. Because they are presented as true, the girls' stories differ significantly from the embedded fairy tales. Johnson accepts that to present purely mimetic (or emetic) characters is to "deviate from probability" (J 23), and Fielding shares this belief: none of the girls is as purely mimetic or emetic as Benefico or Barbarico.

As I have argued, a key feature—a formal feature—of *The Governess* is that it does not rely on the afterlife as a reward or punishment. The consequence of this difference is that Fielding had to find other ways to convince her readers to change their behavior. That is to say, she had to develop her own system of rewards and punishments. We can see one such system in the story of Barbarico and Benefico: at the end of the tale Barbarico is executed, and his treasure makes the other characters rich. Such an ending is impossible for Mrs. Teachum's pupils, both in degree and in kind: not only are death and immense wealth too excessive, but these rewards and punishments are material. Fielding uses a different strategy in the girls' own stories, and in the frame.

Jenny Peace, two years older than the next eldest girl, is closest to a mimetic character, and the best candidate for a model whom the reader should emulate. She is the first to offer her own story, and tells how when she was younger she fought with her brother and disobeyed her mother. Since her arrival at Mrs. Teachum's

school, however, she has corrected these faults: she misbehaves only in retrospectives. Jenny is present in many more scenes than Mrs. Teachum, and often takes on the adult's role. *The Governess* ends with her departure from the school, and in this sense the narrative is a kind of mini-bildungsroman: Jenny leaves the school when she has sufficiently mastered the art of telling, interpreting, and applying didactic stories. But she takes on the role of instructor from the very beginning, and although she admits that she used to misbehave, throughout the story she is essentially perfect. The text merely demonstrates her abilities: it does not show how she got there.

As a nearly mimetic character, though, Jenny is the exception. Lucy Sly is more typical. In her story, Lucy tells how, when her mother became sick, she was left in the care of a governess who, rather than take the trouble to punish her when she did wrong, blamed others. "I thought," says Lucy, "that I was never in Fault; and soon got into a way of telling any Lyes, and of laying my own Faults on others." Lucy's governess even praises her for her "Cunning and Contrivance" (F 62). Things change, however, when Lucy comes to Mrs. Teachum's school:

The Life of endeavouring to deceive I led till I came to School. But here I found that I could not so well carry on my little schemes; for I was found out and punished for my own Faults: And this created in me a Hatred to my Companions. For whatever Miss I had a mind to serve, as I used to serve the Foot-boy, in laying the Blame falsely on her, if she could justify herself, and prove me in the Wrong, I was very angry with her. (F 62-63)

Certainly there are class issues at stake here: at home Lucy successfully blames the footboy, but she is not as successful in blaming her social equals. Her story also, like Locke's *Some Thoughts*, brings up the danger of leaving one's children in the hands of servants. But more important, in terms of narrative form, is the temporal relationship. As with Jenny's story, the progression is from wickedness to virtue: Lucy used to lie, but has been unable to get away with lying since she came to school. After telling her story, Lucy says that "She doubted not but she would find the Advantage of amending, and endeavouring to change a Disposition so very pernicious to her own Peace and Quiet" (F 63). This sentiment posits a character development that is not possible in the story of Barbarico: Lucy can learn and improve, while Barbarico never could.

Lucy is still not perfect (she fights with her schoolmates and occasionally lies) but she recognizes her faults and is beginning to change them. With the exception of Jenny, none of the girls is entirely virtuous while at Mrs. Teachum's school. Each has improved since before arriving, but none has reached moral maturity. They are characters in transition: the girls misbehave now, but if they continue under Mrs. Teachum's tutelage, the implication is that they can become more like Jenny Peace.

Those who treat *The Governess* as merely a "collection of stories" are perhaps quantitatively correct: the majority of the text is made up of fictional stories and the girls' autobiographies. As I have argued, the frame story is important primarily because it allows Jenny and Mrs. Teachum to guide the other girls toward the correct interpretations of the stories. But the frame is not made up only of interpretations and applications. There are a few narrative events in the frame worth

mentioning, since it is only in such scenes that Fielding reveals Mrs. Teachum's system of rewards and punishments, and it is this system that must account for the changes the girls undergo during their time at the school.

Jenny's graduation is the ultimate reward. She departs the school having won the affections of Mrs. Teachum and all her pupils, and she lives on in the memories of subsequent generations of students: even after she leaves, "Miss *Jenny*, tho' absent, still seemed (by the bright Example which she left behind her) to be the Cement of Union and Harmony in this well-regulated Society" (F 145). This reward, it should be noted, is not material. In the tale of *Barbarico*, the villain's treasure rewards the other characters. Jenny's only reward is her reputation. Locke provides the justification for this ending, in his belief that "to flatter children by *rewards* of things that are pleasant to them, is as carefully to be avoided" (L 51). Locke favors esteem and disgrace over rewards and punishments, and Jenny not only earns the esteem of her schoolmates, but lives on as an example to later generations.

Fielding's punishments are a bit more complicated than her rewards. Punishment comes up in the very first scene, in which the girls fight over who gets the largest apple. Jenny tries to break up the fight, but it is not until Mrs. Teachum arrives that "Fear of Punishment began now a little to abate their Rage" (F 5). The depiction of this punishment is conspicuously absent. The narrator remarks:

Mrs. Teachum's Method of punishing I never could find out. But this is certain, the most severe Punishment she had ever inflicted on any Misses, since she had kept a school, was now laid upon these wicked girls, who had been thus fighting, and pulling one another to Pieces, for a sorry Apple. (F 6)

The shift to first-person narration in this scene elides the physical punishment that language like "inflicted" and "laid upon" seems to suggest. The fight itself, which occurs right before this scene, is described in some detail: the girls "fought, scratched, and tore, like so many Cats, when they extend their Claws to fix them in their Rival's Heart" (F 5). Fielding is not opposed to depicting violence, and the violent fight intensifies the absent depiction of the punishment that immediately follows it.

This instance of physical punishment is glossed over, but the following scene demonstrates a punishment more consistent with Locke's model. After the fight about the apple, Fielding depicts "A Dialogue between Miss *Jenny Peace* and Miss *Sukey Jennett*." The dialogue is Socratic. Jenny asks questions like, "What did you get by your Contention and Quarrel about that foolish Apple?" and "If you had not been in the Battle, would not your Cloaths have been whole, you Hair not torn, your Mistress pleased with you?" Sukey is no match for Jenny's rhetoric: "as Miss *Jenny* was in the Right, and had Truth on her Side, it was difficult for Miss *Sukey* to know what to answer. For it is impossible, without being very silly, to contradict Truth" (F 7–8). Sukey thinks about the dialogue overnight, and ultimately realizes that Jenny is correct: "When the morning came, Miss *Sukey* dreaded every moment, as the Time drew nearer when she must meet Miss *Jenny*. She knew it would not be possible to resist her Arguments, and yet Shame for having been in Fault overcame her" (F 11). Shame is ultimately the punishment Sukey receives, and it is Jenny, not Mrs. Teachum, who leads her to this conclusion.

The dialogue between Sukey and Jenny reads like a series of precepts and syllogisms, as Fielding switches from a narrative mode of instruction to a logical-rhetorical one. The dialogue interrupts the plot, and it is scenes like this one that most reveal the episodic form that privileges instruction over amusement. When *The Governess* was first published, these elements of the story would not have distinguished it from the novel. But the novel would ultimately move away from didacticism and episodic plots. Spacks's *Novel Beginnings* opens with the claim that if early novelists "paid lip service to the classic ideal that literature must both please and instruct, they increasingly emphasized the first of these goals even while proclaiming allegiance to the second;"³⁷ Hunter writes that non-narrative passages now "seem to threaten the simplistic notions of unity and organicism that sponsor most discussions of structure."³⁸ In *The Governess*, however, didacticism and an episodic plot are the two most important formal features, and they would continue to be central traits of children's literature until the end of the nineteenth century. As I have argued, the text achieves its didactic goals by presenting interpolated tales, and then allowing adult characters to offer the "correct" interpretations. We miss the centrality of these features if we consider Fielding's work only as a novel for children.

The Governess represents a new form of narrative: the moral tale. In this article I have been emphasizing the formal features of this genre. The next step would be to investigate the relationship of these formal features to other eighteenth-century novels, to other earlier genres, and to the development of the novel in the nineteenth century.³⁹ Distinguishing the form of the moral tale from that of the novel sheds light on the rise of the novel by showing what happens when a genre emphasizes, rather than downplays, didacticism and interpolated stories. John Marshall, a successor to Newbery, published dozens of moral tales in the 1780s, and Maria Edgeworth wrote the first truly literary moral tales in *The Parent's Assistant* (1796) and *Moral Tales for Young People* (1800). Given the renewed critical interest in the Romantic-era novel,⁴⁰ and the fact that Victorian novelists like Charles Dickens and William Thackeray were raised on moral tales, I believe that a formalist approach to the moral tale can teach us much about how children's literature and the novel diverged from their common origins.

NOTES

1. Mary Jackson uses these two works to argue that John Newbery fathered the novel for children in *Engines of Instruction, Mischief, and Magic: Children's Literature in England from Its Beginnings to 1839*. (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1989), 94–99.

2. For two examples, see Emily C. Friedman, "Remarks on Richardson: Sarah Fielding and the Rational Reader," *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 22, no. 2 (2009): 309–26; and Bonnie Latimer, "Leaving Little to the Imagination: The Mechanics of Didacticism in Two Children's Adaptations of Samuel Richardson's Novels," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 33, no. 2 (2009): 167–88.

3. Whether children's literature is a genre at all, and if so what the genre's characteristics might be, has been a major source of contention for critics. For a detailed summary of these arguments, see Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008).

4. Editions of this work vary in their particulars. I quote from John Newbery, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly with Two Letters from Jack the Giant Killer; as also a Ball and Pincushion; The Use of which will infallibly*

make *Tommy a good Boy, and Polly a good Girl*. The tenth edition. (London: J. Newbery, 1760. From *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. 2 February 2010). Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as N.

5. For more on Newbery as the founder of children's literature, see F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1932, 1982); Samuel F. Pickering, *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth-Century England* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1981); and John Rowe Townsend, *John Newbery and His Books: Trade and Plum-Cake for Ever, Huzza!* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994).

6. See Pickering, *John Locke and Children's Books* and Robert Bator, "Out of the Ordinary Road: John Locke and English Juvenile Fiction in the Eighteenth Century," *Children's Literature* 1 (1972): 46–53.

7. Patricia Demers, *Heaven upon Earth: The Form of Moral and Religious Children's Literature, to 1850* (Knoxville: The Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1993), 7.

8. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Cynthia Wall (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2009), 21.

9. Heather Klemann, "The Matter of Moral Education: Locke, Newbery, and the Didactic Book-Toy Hybrid," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44, no.2 (2011): 223–44, 230.

10. For a nuanced discussion of the interaction between physical objects and moral lessons in Newbery's books, see Klemann, "The Matter of Moral Education."

11. John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London: Printed for A. and J. Churchill, 1693; from *Early English Books Online*, Chadwick. 27 April 2010), 51. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as L.

12. For a discussion of fictional forms as they relate to changes in the market, see Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994) and Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998). Neither discusses children's literature specifically, but their approach to formal features as the result of changes in book markets provides a valuable background for understanding the formal developments of children's fiction.

13. Samuel Johnson, "No. 4," in *The Rambler*, Volume 1, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969): 19–25, 22. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as J.

14. Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, Volume 1, ed. Peter Jones (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2005), 14.

15. Elizabeth Thomas, "The True Effigies of a Certain Squire," in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990): ll. 35–36.

16. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1957), 13.

17. J. P. Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990), 54–55.

18. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2006), 20.

19. Darton, *Children's Books in England*, 157.

20. Geoffrey Summerfield, *Fantasy and Reason: Children's Literature in the Eighteenth Century*. (London: Methuen and Co., 1984), 89–90.

21. Deborah Downs-Miers, "For Betty and the Little Female Academy: A Book of Their Own," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1985): 30–33.

22. Linda Bree, *Sarah Fielding* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

23. Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan: Or, the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 70.

24. See the special issue of the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, "The (Im)Possibility of Children's Fiction: Rose Twenty-Five Years On," 35, no. 3 (Fall 2010).
25. Perry Nodelman, "Former Editor's Comments: Or, The Possibility of Growing Wiser," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2010), 236. For a more detailed discussion of Rose and current scholarship on children's literature, see Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult*.
26. Darton, *Children's Books in England*, 157.
27. Andrew O'Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 94–95. For similar arguments, see Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 136; Seth Lerer, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008), 125–27; and Judith Burdan, "Girls Must Be Seen and Heard: Domestic Surveillance in Sarah Fielding's *The Governess*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1994): 8–14.
28. T. G. A. Nelson, *Children, Parents, and the Rise of the Novel* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1995), 100.
29. Sarah Fielding, *The Governess; Or, the Little Female Academy. Calculated for the Entertainment and Instruction of Young Ladies in their Education*. Second edition, revised and corrected. (London: A. Millar, 1749. From Google Books). Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as F.
30. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile; or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (USA: Basic Books, 1979), 184.
31. When Johnson features in discussions of children's literature, it is usually for his argument that it is "better to gratify curiosity with wonders than to attempt planting truth, before the mind was prepared to receive it" (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*; quoted in O'Malley, 127). Boswell dates this comment to about 1780, three decades after *The Governess*. By this time, Johnson is reacting to the emerging genre of children's literature and to works like Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (1778–79). Since I am more interested in how he views fiction and character than how he views children's literature, I focus on his earlier writings.
32. Karen E. Rowe, "Virtue in the Guise of Vice: The Making and Unmaking of Morality from Fairy Tale Fantasy," in *Culturing the Child, 1690–1914: Essays in Memory of Mitzi Myers*, ed. Donelle Ruwe (Lanham: The Children's Literature Association and The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), 2–66.
33. Samuel F. Pickering, *Moral Instruction and Fiction for Children, 1749–1820* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1993), 21.
34. *Ibid.*, 3.
35. Peter Hunt, "Necessary Misreadings: Directions in Narrative Theory for Children's Literature," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 18, no. 2 (1985): 107–21.
36. Friedman, "Remarks on Richardson," 311.
37. Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 1.
38. Hunter, *Before Novels*, 48.
39. A large body of critical work has already investigated the relationship of the novel form with other genres and works. See Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*; Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 2002); and John Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns, 1700–1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) and *The English Novel in History, 1700–1800* (New York: Routledge, 1999). My hope is that children's literature can take its place alongside epics, popular fiction, and fiction by women writers, as a genre important in the development of the novel form.
40. See the special issue of *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34, no. 2 (2001); Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowler, *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001); and *Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780–1830*, ed. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2008).