

Sarah Fielding: Disrupting the Moral Ideas of Education

Rational moralists of the romantic era argued children should be led to reason and discipline through engagement, affection, and action. Stemming from the ideals of Locke and Rousseau, they believed children were already rational people, and learning should not be seen as a laborious task for children, but that they can learn through engagement and fun. However, Locke's and Rousseau's ideas were initially based for the education of middle and upper class boys only. In her novel *The Governess*, Sarah Fielding's teachings for children are of similar principles -- learning to reason and obey through engaging stories and action. But, she is educating females in the novel, something that was not anticipated through Locke's and Rousseau's ideology. Sarah Fielding gives *girls* ability to understand self-examination, repentance, and reformation, all through listening to the light-hearted fun of fairy tales. Sarah Fielding gives a book of educational tools for females in this way. Fielding uses ideas from Locke and Rousseau in this romantic period, but she disrupts these norms through contradictions--showing both sides of a moral coin. She contradicts the idea that females should submit to men and politeness, that ugliness is tied to a moral foundation, and allows females of the time to reason and self reflect in ways they were not allowed to before her time. She does not come out and say how females should break against the norms of engendering roles of the romantic period, she teaches the pupils the norms up front. But in the stories, contradictions occur. She does this all through the rational moralists' idea that education should be pleasurable, as Fielding gives story after story for the pupils in her book. This paper will explore these contradictions of Sarah Fielding, and how she explicitly writes morals of the day, while giving females the room to progress romantic, rationally moralistic norms.

