Volume 8, Number 2, November 2026
p. 223-240
http://journal2.uad.ac.id/index.php/notion/index

Discipline and moral labor: A literary-sociological reading of schooling in George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter

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Citation: Madrah, M.Y., Warsiyah, W., & Muna, N. (2026). Discipline and moral labor: A literary-sociological reading of schooling in George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter. *NOTION: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture, 8*(*2*), 223-240. https://doi.org/10.12928/notion.v8i2.15171

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received: 2025-12-02
Accepted: 2026-09-30

Keywords:
Literary sociology
Disciplinary power
Symbolic capital
Gendered moral governance
George Orwell

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ABSTRACT

George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter (1935) has received relatively limited sociological attention as a critique of education, despite its rich portrayal of disciplinary practices, moral regulation, and gendered inequality within interwar Britain. This study examines Chapter IV of George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter through a qualitative literary-sociological approach based on close reading, drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, Paulo Freire's critique of the banking model of education, and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital. This study contributes by proposing an integrated literary-sociological framework showing that disciplinary power, pedagogical practice, and symbolic capital operate as mutually reinforcing mechanisms that produce gendered moral governance within Orwell's educational setting. The findings reveal that Ringwood House operates as a disciplinary institution where surveillance, moralized pedagogy, and female respectability function together to normalize obedience while reproducing classed and gendered hierarchies. Rather than portraying an ineffective school alone, Orwell exposes education as a moral economy where virtue itself becomes symbolic capital sustaining institutional authority. These findings extend literary sociology by illustrating how fictional narratives can illuminate enduring mechanisms of educational power and moral governance. As an interpretive analysis limited to one chapter of a novel, the conclusions should be understood within this analytical scope.

I. INTRODUCTION

George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter (1935) is often read as a minor work, yet its fourth chapter—where Dorothy becomes a teacher in Mrs. Creevy's private girls' school—offers a striking microcosm of how education can function less as intellectual formation and more as

social control. While fictional, the novel draws on Orwell's own experience as a teacher and reflects documented practices of interwar British schooling, lending it sociological as well as literary significance (Barnard, 2020; Hoberman, 2015). Although the novel has attracted literary and historical interpretations, its educational dimension has rarely been examined through an integrated sociological framework capable of explaining how disciplinary power, pedagogical authority, and symbolic capital operate simultaneously.

Set against interwar Britain's unsettled educational landscape, the novel exposes a school culture oriented toward parental satisfaction and outward moral order rather than the cultivation of understanding. In this sense, the text resonates with contemporary contemporary sociological critiques of schooling as an instrument that reproduces classed and gendered norms. While Orwell's later oeuvre crystalized totalitarian surveillance, A Clergyman's Daughter stages a quieter, everyday disciplinary regime in which teachers, pupils, and proprietors internalize expectations that normalize obedience and respectability.

A sociological reading of the novel requires theoretical frameworks capable of illuminating how institutional power operates through everyday practice rather than overt coercion, a task for which Foucault's analytics of power are particularly well suited. Michel Foucault's analytics of power provide a precise vocabulary for this scene. In schools, surveillance need not be spectacular to be effective; its "major effect," Foucault argues, is to induce a state of "conscious and permanent visibility" that assures the automatic functioning of power (Foucault, 2008). Education scholars have extended this analysis to schooling, showing how routine monitoring, assessment, and the gaze of administrators and parents create panoptic conditions that calibrate behavior and conform learning to institutional norms (Çeven et al., 2021). Mrs. Creevy's establishment exemplifies such normalization: an economy of observation—of appearance, deportment, punctuality, and docility—produces compliant bodies and performances that read as "good" education irrespective of students' understanding.

If Foucault helps us see how power circulates through the school's routines, Paulo Freire clarifies why the results are intellectually thin (Ball, 2013). In Freire's "banking" model, teachers deposit information while students store and reproduce it; the arrangement suppresses critical consciousness and positions learners as manageable objects rather than speaking subjects (Freire, 2005). In Orwell's narrative world, the point of lessons is not dialogic inquiry but the smooth delivery of what pleases fee-paying parents—a dynamic that Freire identifies as pedagogically dehumanizing. Dorothy's uneasy complicity—both surveilled and surveilling—dramatizes the moral strain of teaching within a system oriented to appearances and marketable propriety.

Historically, this depiction aligns with the gendered purposes of girls' schooling in Britain. Well into the early twentieth century, curricula for many girls emphasized accomplishments, domestic preparation, and respectability rather than advanced intellectual training, especially

in lower-status or private "proprietary" schools. Interwar debates about secondary schooling and comprehensive reform further underscored classed inequalities, with rural and suburban settings often reproducing local hierarchies under the banner of community values. Recent historical work on working-class girls' education between 1902 and 1944 shows schooling frequently framed as moral socialization for future domestic roles rather than pathways to equal economic participation (Barnard, 2020; Kirke, 2016). Orwell's fictional school thus resonates with broader patterns: discipline over dialogue, conformity over curiosity, and a moral economy in which pleasing adults substitutes for educating children.

Previous scholarship has provided valuable insights into A Clergyman's Daughter from theological, psychological, historical, and educational perspectives. Smyer (1975) and Meyers (1991) read it as a spiritual allegory of faith and loss, focusing on Dorothy's crisis of belief rather than the institutional mechanisms shaping her experiences. Recent scholarship helps refine this intersection between classed education, moral discipline, and ideological control. Törzsök (2025) argues that A Clergyman's Daughter exposes "the capitalist ethos that pervaded the educational climate of fourth-rate schools," in which Dorothy's failure to reform the curriculum reveals the structural limits of education under market logics. Barnard's (2020) historical research corroborates this, showing that early twentieth-century girls' schooling in Britain was deliberately moralized to maintain class hierarchies, teaching "domestic thrift and Christian virtue" rather than intellectual autonomy. When read through Freire's (2005) critique of the banking model, Mrs. Creevy's school becomes a site where students are positioned as passive recipients of moral dicta—an arrangement that suppresses critical dialogue and reproduces compliance. Orr (2002) extends this Freirean insight by foregrounding mindfulness and emotional awareness in anti-oppressive pedagogy, which exposes how unexamined affective attachments perpetuate domination even when explicit ideology is questioned. Similarly, Çeven et al. (2021) reinterpret Foucault's panopticon within modern schools, emphasizing how surveillance, grading, and self-monitoring constitute disciplinary mechanisms that normalize docility. Together, these perspectives reposition Orwell's portrayal of education not merely as moral farce but as a microcosm of capitalist, patriarchal, and panoptic power—a system where both teacher and pupils internalize obedience as virtue. However, existing scholarship has yet to offer a sustained, integrated reading of Chapter IV through the combined lenses of Foucauldian discipline, Freirean pedagogy, and Bourdieuian symbolic capital, the gap this study addresses.

Despite renewed attention to Orwell's political allegories, the educational critique embedded in A Clergyman's Daughter has received comparatively less sustained sociological treatment. Emerging readings suggest the novel indicts the "fourth-rate" private school as a capitalist enterprise where curricular reform is structurally foreclosed by proprietorial interests and parental expectations. Building on such insights, this article offers a focused sociological reading of the "Dorothy as teacher" chapter through the combined lenses of

Foucauldian discipline/surveillance and Freirean critical pedagogy. Our analysis asks: (1) How does the novel stage panoptic mechanisms that normalize gendered, classed behavior in a girls' school? and (2) How does the "banking" logic of instruction translate into moralized performance for parents rather than understanding for students? By situating Orwell's fiction within interwar educational contexts and critical theories of schooling, we show how the chapter illuminates enduring tensions between public claims about moral education and the lived realities of pedagogical power.

The integration of these three theoretical perspectives is not intended simply to combine influential social theories. Rather, each framework explains a distinct dimension of educational power. Foucault illuminates the disciplinary mechanisms through which institutions regulate bodies and conduct; Freire explains how pedagogical practices normalize obedience through anti-dialogical instruction; and Bourdieu reveals how moral respectability operates as symbolic capital that legitimizes social hierarchy. Considered together, these perspectives provide a more comprehensive literary-sociological interpretation of Orwell's educational critique than any single theoretical lens alone.

II. METHOD

This study employs literary sociology as its methodological orientation, an approach that reads fictional texts as culturally embedded artifacts capable of illuminating social structures and ideological formations (Eagleton, 1976; Wolff, 1993). Rather than treating the novel as a transparent window onto historical reality, this study reads Orwell's narrative as a site where social relations of education, gender, and class are imaginatively constructed and critically staged. This interpretive stance justifies applying post-publication theoretical frameworks — Foucault, Freire, and Bourdieu — as analytical lenses rather than as claims about Orwell's conscious intentions.

Data sources

The primary text is George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter (1935), particularly Chapter IV, where Dorothy becomes a teacher. This chapter was selected because it most explicitly portrays the intersection of educational practice, disciplinary authority, gender relations, and moral regulation. Secondary sources comprise scholarly works on disciplinary power, critical pedagogy, symbolic capital, and the history of interwar British education, providing the conceptual and historical context for interpreting Orwell's educational critique. These sources—such as Çeven et al. (2021), Hoberman (2015), Freire (2005), Barnard (2020), and Törzsök (2025)—were used to establish a theoretical and historical foundation for interpreting the novel's educational scenes.

Data collection and analysis

The analytical process was conducted in three interconnected phases. First, contextual mapping situated Chapter IV of A Clergyman's Daughter within the broader context of interwar British education, particularly the capitalist ethos of proprietary schooling, drawing on relevant historical scholarship (Barnard, 2020; Kirke, 2016). Second, close reading was employed to identify recurring textual patterns of classroom discipline, surveillance, pedagogical interaction, moral regulation, and symbolic capital. Third, theoretical synthesis brought these textual interpretations into dialogue with Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power and panopticism, Freire's critique of the banking model of education, and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic capital. Rather than being imposed as predetermined explanatory frameworks, these theoretical perspectives were used as interpretive lenses through which Orwell's representation of education could be examined in relation to broader sociological debates.

Interpretive credibility in literary sociology is established not through replication but through coherence, transparency, and theoretical grounding (Wolff, 1993). This study ensures coherence by consistently anchoring interpretations in specific textual evidence; transparency by making the theoretical lenses explicit before applying them; and grounding by situating readings within established scholarly debates. The study does not claim to generalize its findings beyond this text. Where resonances with contemporary educational sociology are noted, these are offered as theoretical provocations for further empirical investigation, not as empirical claims derived from this analysis.

Analytical rationale

This methodological approach enables the study to bridge literary criticism and educational sociology by demonstrating how fictional narratives can illuminate broader social mechanisms of discipline, pedagogy, and symbolic legitimacy while remaining grounded in close textual interpretation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analytical findings and their interpretation through sociological and literary perspectives. Applying theoretical frameworks developed after 1935 is a recognized practice in literary sociology: the analytical value lies not in claiming Orwell consciously anticipated these theories, but in using them as interpretive lenses to illuminate dimensions of the text that remain otherwise underarticulated (Eagleton, 1976; Wolff, 1993). This section discusses the findings through an integrated literary-sociological interpretation of George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter. Rather than treating Foucault's, Freire's, and Bourdieu's concepts as historical claims about Orwell's intentions, the discussion employs them as contemporary analytical lenses for interpreting how educational power, pedagogy, and symbolic legitimacy are represented in the novel. The analysis is organized into three

interconnected themes: (1) disciplinary surveillance in Ringwood House, (2) Dorothy's moral labor as a teacher, and (3) the intersection of gender, class, and symbolic capital within the novel's moral economy.

Discipline and surveillance in Ringwood house: A Foucauldian reading

Ringwood House, the private girls' school where Dorothy teaches, is portrayed as an environment governed by routine observation, moral discipline, and carefully regulated behavior. Mrs. Creevy's management extends beyond academic instruction to the cultivation of order, respectability, and parental approval, transforming the school into a space where visible conformity becomes more important than intellectual development. Read through Foucault's concept of disciplinary power (1980), these institutional practices illustrate how surveillance and normalization operate as mechanisms through which educational authority is maintained.

Dorothy's daily classroom interactions demonstrate how surveillance is internalized. When she instructs her pupils to sit upright and fold their hands, the discipline is not pedagogical but moral:

> "Fold your hands and keep your eyes front," she says mechanically (A Clergyman's Daughter, ch. IV, p. 165).

The command constructs a visible order of docility—each child learning to regulate her posture and gaze as a mark of obedience. In this scene, Orwell portrays education as a choreography of compliance, echoing Foucault's idea that the panopticon produces "docile bodies" trained for conformity rather than understanding. This is not an isolated command. Throughout Chapter IV, Orwell systematically depicts bodily regulation as the primary mode of classroom management:

> Mrs. Creevy instructs Dorothy that girls must sit "as still as mice" and that any noise signals "bad management" (ch. IV, p. 163)
>
> Dorothy monitors her own tone, gestures, and expression under the constant threat of parental complaint (p. 166)

The curriculum itself is organized around appearances — neat handwriting, polite recitation — rather than understanding. The cumulative pattern across these scenes constitutes the panoptic regime Foucault describes: not a single gaze but a sustained, normalized architecture of visibility.

The mechanisms of control extend beyond the classroom. Dorothy herself becomes both subject and agent of surveillance. She polices her own tone of voice, her gestures, and even her moral conscience, aware that Mrs. Creevy or the parents might be watching. The novel notes her anxiety:

> "She was afraid of giving the wrong impression—of appearing too soft, too uncertain" (p. 166).

This self-surveillance mirrors what Foucault calls the "internalization of the gaze," where individuals discipline themselves without external coercion. Dorothy's concern with appearing competent and morally appropriate can be read through what contemporary sociologists of education describe as performativity: the pressure on teachers to embody institutional ideals of efficiency, morality, and control (Çeven et al., 2021).

To clarify the relationship between textual evidence and theoretical interpretation, the following table maps key patterns of discipline within the novel.

Table 1. Maps Key Patterns of Discipline within the Novel

Theme of discipline	Illustrative example from text	Foucauldian concept	Interpretation
Bodily regulation	"Fold your hands and keep your eyes front." (ch. IV, p. 165)	Panopticism; docile bodies	Students' obedience is produced through visible posture and repetition.
Teacher self-surveillance	"She was afraid of giving the wrong impression." (p. 166)	Internalized gaze	Dorothy performs self-discipline to sustain institutional respectability.
Institutional morality	"The parents are to be satisfied, whatever happens." (p. 170)	Power-knowledge nexus	Moral education functions as social control rather than enlightenment.
Curriculum as performance	"Her duty was to keep them quiet and make their parents believe they were learning" (p. 170)	Power-knowledge nexus	Knowledge serves appearance, not understanding
Moral self-governance	"She felt ashamed of being tired, for tiredness seemed to her a kind of moral failure" (p. 168)	Governmentality	Dorothy internalizes institutional values as personal conscience

These examples are representative rather than exhaustive, selected to illustrate the range of disciplinary modes — corporeal, psychological, and institutional. As an interpretive literary analysis, the table serves as a heuristic organizing device rather than an empirical data matrix.

Table 1 demonstrates how disciplinary mechanisms in A Clergyman's Daughter operate across bodily, psychological, and institutional dimensions. Viewed through a Foucauldian lens, these examples illustrate disciplinary practices maintained through bodily regulation, repetition, and surveillance. The school's moral discipline appears benign, yet the repeated emphasis on orderly behavior, neatness, and respectability suggests that students are being shaped to conform to broader social expectations associated with middle-class respectability. Taken together, these scenes invite a broader reading of Ringwood House as more than an

isolated school setting. They suggest how everyday educational routines may reflect wider forms of social regulation, making the school a useful literary microcosm through which panoptic relations can be interpreted.

Foucault's notion that powers "produces reality" resonates throughout Orwell's depiction of Ringwood House. The girls' manners, speech, and even handwriting become signs of moral worth. Dorothy, though sympathetic to the children, becomes complicit in this symbolic economy of discipline:

> she repeats rituals she secretly despises, finding herself "teaching without meaning, instructing without conviction" (p. 171).

The tension between Dorothy's faith and her labor may be interpreted, through a Bourdieusian perspective, as positioning her within processes of symbolic violence, whereby domination is reproduced under the guise of moral service (Bourdieu, 1990).

At the same time, Orwell's narrative allows glimpses of resistance. Occasionally, Orwell depicts Dorothy's fatigue through small departures from the discipline expected of her, including moments of hesitation, quiet kindness toward her pupils, and brief lapses of attention. These seemingly minor gestures suggest that the disciplinary order governing Ringwood House is never entirely secure. As Foucault reminds us, "where there is power, there is resistance," yet such resistance rarely escapes the field of control. Dorothy's fleeting compassion toward her students—such as when she quietly corrects their mistakes rather than scolding—momentarily suspends the apparatus of surveillance but never dismantles it.

Viewed through a contemporary sociological lens, Orwell's portrayal of discipline at Ringwood House invites comparison with educational settings in which teachers and students remain accountable to multiple audiences, including administrators, parents, and increasingly, digital systems of evaluation. The culture of standardized assessment and image management echoes Mrs. Creevy's obsession with appearances. Read in this way, Dorothy's unease invites reflection on tensions that continue to shape educational work, particularly the balance between ethical commitment and institutional expectations. A Clergyman's Daughter stages the school as a microcosm of disciplinary power. Through spatial arrangement, routine surveillance, and moral scripting, the novel portrays how education transforms from an act of learning into an instrument of normalization. Yet this mechanism of control extends beyond bodily discipline toward a subtler form of governance—the shaping of conscience and conduct itself.

This dimension resonates with Foucault's later concept of governmentality—the "conduct of conduct," or the ways institutions cultivate self-regulating subjects (Burcchell et al., 1993; Dasion et al., 2023; Foucault, 1978). In this sense, discipline in the novel operates not merely as physical control but as moral rationality. Dorothy's constant anxiety to appear proper, efficient, and devoted reflects what Foucault calls governing through freedom: she disciplines

herself according to the values of respectability and service that the institution defines as virtue. Her obedience is not enforced by coercion but sustained by her own conscience, shaped by an educational rationality that links morality with productivity. This reading also resonates with Ettlinger's (2011) discussion of governmentality as an epistemological process through which knowledge and ethical practice become intertwined in the normalization of social behavior. Similar insights have been extended to educational institutions, where governance operates through professional expectations and pedagogical relations rather than overt coercion (Larner, 2015). Read through this perspective, Ringwood House may be understood as a setting in which moral education functions as a form of governance, encouraging both teachers and students to internalize social order as personal virtue. This broader rationality of moral governance paves the way for examining Dorothy's pedagogical role, which reveals how teaching itself becomes a moral labor within a capitalist education system.

Pedagogy, morality, and the banking model: Dorothy's moral labor

While the disciplinary logic of Ringwood House reflects external control, its pedagogy reveals an even deeper mechanism of power—the transformation of teaching into moral Labour. Dorothy's classroom is not a site of learning but a moral theatre, where the teacher's virtue is performed for the satisfaction of parents and employers.

> "Her duty was to keep them quiet and make their parents believe they were learning" (A Clergyman's Daughter, ch. IV, p. 170).

In this phrase, the passage suggests an underlying economy of appearance: education becomes an act of simulation, an exchange of moral semblance for social approval.

Freire's (2005) critique of the banking model of education offers a critical vocabulary to interpret this scene. The banking logic positions students as passive recipients and the teacher as a depositor of information. Dorothy's classroom practices closely resemble this pedagogical arrangement—knowledge as deposit, morality as transaction. There is no dialogue, only instruction; no awakening, only endurance. This pattern becomes visible across several classroom scenes: Dorothy drills geography through rote repetition with no expectation of comprehension; she assigns copying exercises that require mechanical reproduction rather than engagement; and she explicitly avoids any discussion that might prompt independent thinking, fearing it would displease Mrs. Creevy. The teacher deposits, the students store — there is no exchange, no questioning, no dialogue. Orwell captures this most starkly when Dorothy reflects that

> "the point was not to interest the children but to keep them quiet" (ch. IV, p. 170).

Freire saw such education as a tool of domination: it domesticates consciousness and preserves oppressive hierarchies by disguising obedience as virtue. In Orwell's narrative, the pupils' silence and Dorothy's weariness reflect what Freire describes as anti-dialogical action, where "the word is emptied of its transforming power."

Freire's followers have expanded this critique to highlight the moral and ideological dimensions of schooling. Giroux & McLaren (1992) argue that pedagogy is never neutral—it is always inscribed within relations of identity, ideology, and power. Viewed through Giroux and McLaren's perspective, Dorothy's gender and class position her simultaneously as both the enforcer and the subject of moral regulation. The school demands from her not intellectual creativity but emotional servitude—a distinctly feminized form of labor. Such institutions cultivate a "pedagogy of possibility turned inward," where teachers' compassion is redirected toward sustaining conformity rather than transformation (Giroux & Simon, 1988).

> "She felt ashamed of being tired," Orwell writes, "for tiredness seemed to her a kind of moral failure" (p. 168).

This shame is the symptom of moral labor: an exhaustion sanctified as devotion, a fatigue mistaken for faithfulness. Read through Foucault's (1978) concept of governmentality, Dorothy's sense of shame extends beyond personal emotion. Her anxiety about appearing devoted suggests that institutional expectations have been internalized as moral obligations. Rather than being imposed through direct coercion, discipline operates through Dorothy's own conscience, leading her to regulate both her teaching and herself. In this way, the classroom becomes a setting where moral conduct is sustained not only through external supervision but also through self-governance (Ettlinger, 2011). From this perspective, moral language functions not merely as ethical instruction but also as a symbolic system that naturalizes obedience and virtue (Tawakkal et al., 2021).

Building on Freire's critique, Thomas (2009) emphasizes that education should cultivate responsibility toward others rather than reinforce alienation. He reminds us that education must awaken the sense of responsibility toward others; otherwise, it becomes an instrument of alienation. In this light, Dorothy's moral labor—framed by faith yet devoid of dialogue—appears as a parody of salvation. Her desire to "do good" is absorbed by a system that measures goodness by obedience. Her exhaustion, then, is not only personal but structural: the inevitable fatigue of serving an institution that has transformed ethics into performance. As Aronowitz (2012) observes in discussing Freire's legacy, teaching risks becoming a ritual of compliance when institutional procedures overshadow its emancipatory purpose. Dorothy's experience vividly illustrates this tension.

Dorothy's experience at Ringwood House stands in sharp contrast to Freire's ethical vision of education. Rather than cultivating dialogue, responsibility, and freedom, the school replaces love with duty and reflection with repetition. This contrast resonates with Peters and Besley's (2015) discussion of Freire's educational legacy, which understands education fundamentally as an act of love. Her classroom is a moral factory producing polite ignorance, echoing Freire's warning that "the oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination."

Bailey and Graves (2016) add a crucial gendered dimension to this analysis. They argue that education often reproduces the gendered division of labor by moralizing women's work as care, devotion, and sacrifice. Dorothy illustrates this contradiction particularly clearly. Her pedagogical virtue becomes closely tied to her social precarity as the daughter of a poor clergyman; moral purity functions as one of the few resources available to sustain her social respectability. Through Dorothy's experience, Orwell portrays teaching—particularly for women—as a social role in which moral identity often substitutes for material security, while piety comes to outweigh personal agency.

Rather than being confined to its historical setting, Orwell's portrayal invites interpretation through later sociological discussions of affective labor and performative ethics. Dorothy's kindness, fatigue, and guilt are presented not simply as personal emotions but as responses shaped by broader social expectations. These patterns can be read alongside what Freire and Giroux later describe as the hidden curriculum, in which submission is reproduced beneath the surface of formal moral instruction (Giroux, 1983).

A Clergyman's Daughter exposes the moral contradictions of pedagogical authority. Dorothy's faith, sincerity, and compassion are transformed into tools of regulation. The teacher's conscience becomes the site where domination and devotion converge. From a Freirean perspective, Dorothy's experience suggests that she remains unable to reach conscientization, the awakening of critical awareness—because her morality has been colonized by institutional rationality (Freire, 1998). Yet Orwell leaves open a faint possibility: in the tremor of her fatigue, in the silence between her words, one perceives the yearning for another kind of pedagogy, a pedagogy of love, not labor; of dialogue, not duty.

The contradictions that shape Dorothy's moral labor cannot be separated from the wider social structures that define her identity. Her exhaustion and obedience are not merely psychological states but social products—rooted in the intersections of gender, class, and moral expectation. These intersections become particularly visible when the educational world of the novel is examined through the idea of moral economy, where virtue functions as a form of symbolic capital exchanged for survival and social recognition.

Gender, class, and the moral economy of schooling

Dorothy's position as a teacher at Ringwood House is defined not only by pedagogical hierarchy but also by her precarious place in the social order. As the daughter of a poor clergyman, she occupies what Bailey and Graves (2016) call the moralized space of feminine respectability—where a woman's worth is measured by piety, service, and restraint rather than autonomy or intellect. In the interwar years of British society, the teaching profession represented one of the few respectable employments available to educated yet impoverished women. But this respectability was fragile, contingent on performance and reputation. As Orwell writes,

> "She was tired of being poor, tired of having to think about pennies, tired of having to be good" (A Clergyman's Daughter, ch. IV, p. 162).

The sentence captures the paradox of gendered virtue: goodness becomes labor, morality becomes survival. Gender stereotypes often operate through the internalization of female virtue—discipline, obedience, and modesty—which limits women's participation in intellectual and public life. Dorothy's moral training similarly disciplines her body and mind to sustain patriarchal order (Arifatin, 2019).

The novel thus situates education within what Bourdieu (1986) would call a moral economy of capital—where virtue functions as symbolic wealth exchanged for social legitimacy. Dorothy's identity as "a good teacher" and "a modest woman" serves as moral currency that temporarily shields her from destitution. Yet, as Barnard (2020) argues, Orwell's women are often "entrapped within the contradictions of moral individualism and social dependence." Dorothy's virtue, rather than liberating her, tightens the chains of expectation. The very discipline she enforces in her pupils becomes the mirror of her own subjugation. Her decency, humility, and diligence are not choices freely made but conditions for economic survival in a world that punishes female deviance.

This dynamic is demonstrated in the novel's social mechanics: when Dorothy maintains decorum and defers to Mrs. Creevy's demands, she retains her position and avoids destitution; when she momentarily asserts pedagogical judgment attempting to make lessons more engaging she is immediately reprimanded. Her virtue circulates as currency: spent in exchange for employment, withdrawn the moment it threatens institutional authority. The line

> "She was tired of having to be good" (p. 162)

Thus carries a precise sociological meaning — goodness is not a choice but a labor condition. This dynamic resonates with what Foucault (1978) identifies as pastoral power: the regulation of conduct through moral guidance rather than coercion. In Dorothy's world, the church and the school intersect as two faces of the same moral apparatus. She has internalized the belief that her poverty and pain are tests of virtue—a sign of moral superiority in suffering. "It was wicked to complain," Orwell notes, "and wicked to despair" (p. 161). This moral economy transforms oppression into sanctity. By converting endurance into holiness, society ensures that women like Dorothy sustain the very system that exploits them.

Törzsök (2025) expands this reading by describing Orwell's female characters as subjects of gendered asceticism—their virtue inseparable from self-denial. In Dorothy's case, asceticism functions both as faith and as social performance. Her femininity must be modest, her intellect subdued, her compassion disciplined. Each attribute that marks her as "good" simultaneously erases her agency. Education, instead of offering emancipation, becomes a ritual of gendered containment. The discipline of the classroom mirrors the discipline of the body: both train women to accept invisibility as grace. Similar mechanisms of silencing and

moral containment are visible beyond Orwell's Britain. Suandi (2024) demonstrates how subaltern women in Pad Man are marginalized through patriarchal customs that define purity, obedience, and silence as virtues, thereby restricting their access to voice and agency. Both Dorothy in Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter and the women in Pad Man illustrate how female virtue becomes a social performance sustaining patriarchal order. This parallel underscores that moral education and gendered subjugation operate transnationally, linking British interwar respectability with postcolonial patriarchy in South Asia.

The interplay between gender and class in A Clergyman's Daughter also exposes the hypocrisy of moral capitalism. The private school where Dorothy teaches caters to the aspirations of the lower middle class—families who purchase moral education as proof of status. "The parents are to be satisfied, whatever happens," Mrs. Creevy insists (p. 170). Here, virtue becomes a commodity exchanged between the teacher and the parents, a transaction that converts moral authority into economic value. Bailey and Graves (2016) note that such exchanges "locate women's pedagogical labor within circuits of care and consumption," where emotional and ethical labor are commodified as signs of cultural refinement. Dorothy's teaching thus embodies what Bourdieu would term the conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital—moral respectability as a substitute for wealth (Willis, 1977).

Read through later feminist sociologies of education, Orwell's depiction of Dorothy reveals how fatigue, humility, and faith can be interpreted not simply as personal experiences but as structural consequences of gendered moral expectations. The emotional economy of her labor reflects the logic of the marketplace: the more she gives, the less she owns herself. This echoes Freire's notion of dehumanization—a state where human potential is absorbed by systems of domination. Dorothy's piety has been turned into social capital; her faith into institutional obedience. Her virtue sustains her, but it also sustains the hierarchy that confines her.

Further, Orwell's treatment of class and gender is "neither sentimental nor purely critical," but diagnostic: he reveals the mechanisms through which moral discourse justifies inequality (Barnard, 2020). In portraying Dorothy's exhaustion, Orwell invites the reader to see how ideology operates not through oppression alone but through affection—through the desire to be good, to be needed, to be loved. This is the emotional contract of the moral economy: women offer care, patience, and virtue, and in return, they receive validation instead of freedom.

From a contemporary sociological lens, Dorothy's experience prefigures the conditions of modern teaching, especially for women. The expectation to perform compassion, to real integrity, and to sustain emotional stability despite exhaustion continues to define the profession. What Orwell captured in 1935 has only intensified under neoliberal education regimes, where teachers' moral worth is quantified through evaluation metrics and public

perception. As in Dorothy's case, "being good" remains both a survival strategy and a form of captivity.

In conclusion, A Clergyman's Daughter illuminates the intersection of gender, class, and morality as a system of social reproduction. Dorothy's virtue operates as capital—earned through obedience, displayed through labor, and exchanged for dignity. Her classroom becomes a microcosm of a moral economy where power disguises itself as care, and control as love. Orwell's insight transcends its time: it exposes how the feminine ideal of virtue, sustained by religious and educational institutions, perpetuates inequality under the name of respectability. The novel thus challenges us to reconsider education not as the preservation of virtue but as the liberation of conscience (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Across the three strands of analysis, A Clergyman's Daughter emerges as a sociological parable of education under moral capitalism. The disciplinary order of Ringwood House reveals how surveillance and normalization infiltrate daily pedagogical routines, producing conformity through the silent choreography of bodies. The moral labor of teaching demonstrates how conscience itself becomes a tool of regulation, transforming the teacher's faith and sincerity into institutional obedience. Finally, the entanglement of gender, class, and morality exposes the economic logic beneath virtue—the way respectability functions as symbolic capital that sustains both hierarchy and hope.

Together, these analyses suggest that Orwell's school is not simply an allegory of failure, but a mirror of modern society's governing rationalities. His depiction of Dorothy resonates with enduring tensions experienced by educators who navigate between belief and bureaucracy, care and control. Through the lenses of Foucault's governmentality, Freire's critical pedagogy, and Bourdieu's moral economy, the novel illuminates how power persists not through coercion but through love, duty, and the desire to be good. In revealing this subtle machinery of virtue, Orwell invites a rethinking of education as an ethical practice—one that must reclaim dialogue, empathy, and human dignity from the structures that seek to discipline them.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to literary sociology by demonstrating that A Clergyman's Daughter is not merely a novel about education but a literary exploration of how educational institutions produce moral subjects through the intertwined processes of discipline, pedagogy, and symbolic capital. Bringing these three perspectives into dialogue makes it possible to understand Dorothy's experience not as isolated personal suffering but as a literary representation of how institutional power operates simultaneously through surveillance, pedagogy, and moral legitimacy. The analysis suggests that Ringwood House functions as more than a school. It is portrayed as a social space in which discipline shapes bodily conduct,

pedagogy transforms learning into moral labor, and symbolic respectability becomes a resource for negotiating gendered and classed inequalities.

Methodologically, the study also demonstrates how literary sociology can employ contemporary social theory not as a framework imposed upon literature but as an interpretive lens that remains grounded in close textual analysis (Tyson, 2015). Read through these contemporary theoretical perspectives, Orwell's fictional school continues to offer a productive site for examining enduring questions about educational authority, morality, and institutional power. Ultimately, A Clergyman's Daughter invites reflection on the ethical dimensions of education. Dorothy's fatigue, compliance, and fleeting gestures of resistance illuminate the human cost of schooling organized around discipline rather than dialogue. From a Freirean perspective, her inability to reach conscientization — the awakening of critical awareness — is not a personal failing but a structural outcome. Orwell's portrait does not prescribe an alternative pedagogy, but it makes the absence of dialogue visible — and that visibility is itself a critical act.

This study is necessarily limited in scope: it offers a close reading of a single chapter of one novel, and its findings are interpretive rather than empirical. The value of such analysis lies in its capacity to make visible the ideological and moral dimensions of educational practice as they are imaginatively constructed in literature. Future research might extend this approach to other fictional representations of schooling, or bring this literary-sociological reading into dialogue with empirical studies of teacher experience, gendered labor in education, or the history of interwar British schooling — areas where Orwell's critique may find productive resonance.

DECLARATION

Author contribution: MYM conceptualized the study, developed the theoretical framework, carried out the literary-sociological analysis, interpreted the findings from sociological perspectives and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. W helped to analyze the educational theories and schooling practices represented in the novel, and helped to refine the pedagogical interpretation and critically reviewed and revised the manuscript for intellectual content. NM contributed to the literary analysis including close textual reading, narrative interpretation and contextualization within literary studies. NM also contributed to manuscript editing and final revision. All authors discussed the results, contributed to the interpretation of the findings, approved the final version of the manuscript, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Funding statement: No funding for this manuscript**.**

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Declaration: During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Claude for improving language quality, enhancing readability, and editing grammar. Following the use of

this tool, the authors critically reviewed, verified, and revised the manuscript as necessary and took full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the content in the published work.

Additional information: No additional information is available for this paper.

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