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# Culture and Continuity through Institutional Change

## INTRODUCTION

Has there ever been a more winsome protagonist than David Copperfield in the universe of coming-of-age stories? David, Charles Dickens' own favorite child, remains plucky against tremendous adversity, sweet-tempered in the face of foul treatment, optimistic against all odds, and triumphal against the injustices of nineteenth-century Britain. The mature David recollects with pride: "I never could have done what I have done, without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence…whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well" (Dickens 1850, 574). In sharp contrast, young Conrad is the architect of his own near demise in Danish author Thomasine Gyllembourg's *Montanus the Younger* (*Montanus den Yngre* 2019/1837). Like David, Conrad is proud of his vision and determination; however, Conrad's arrogance, self-congratulation and disregard for society nearly derail his compelling plans for improvements in textile manufacturing technology. Life improves for Conrad when he submits to the sound judgment of his elders, who share with Conrad a deep regard for industrial progress.

Travel a century back in time and the pattern holds. Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (2011/1719) ignores his father's advice, leaves home without saying goodbye, and succeeds with entrepreneurial ingenuity in becoming wealthy beyond measure. Meanwhile, Ludvid Holberg's Niels Klim (1845/1741) learns to suppress his immature judgments and to accept the wisdom of elders. While British novelists credit the individual's struggle against repression for the victories of their young protagonists; Danish authors locate success in interventions that bring their young heroes back in touch with societal norms.[1]

[1] Authors in both Britain and Denmark recognize structures of repression, and both countries have the *novel of accountability*, in which the protagonists confront their own limitations, and



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This chapter explores how repeating cultural narratives, such as the ones found above, help us to understand how successive generations of education reform resonate with familiar assumptions about educational goals, society, class, and state. First, I consider how cultural touchstones play a role in processes of institutional continuity and change. Repeating cultural tropes in fiction influence the drivers of institutional change: the ways that new *ideas* about education are interpreted in different countries, the ways that *interest* groups imagine their preferences for education reform, and the manner in which *institutional* norms shape processes of negotiation over education. The repeating narratives within a country make it more likely for some types of reforms to be more easily implemented and sustained than others; reforms that align with cultural values tend to be more durable across time. But these iterative cultural tropes also shed light on the continuities within processes of institutional change: Why even at the moment of radical change, new institutions retain some familiar cultural assumptions.

Second, the chapter develops a theoretical model explaining the structure of cultural artifacts as found in literature and the transmission of these symbols and narratives from one generation to another. Cultural work transpires through the *agency* of cultural actors (as was discussed in Chapter 1), but the *structure* of national cultural tropes also plays a role in long-term processes of institutional change. At a structural level, each country has a distinctive "cultural constraint," or a set of cultural tropes (symbols, labels, narratives, and repertoires of evaluation), that appears in the national-level aggregation of cultural products (such as literature), persists through successive epochs, and helps denizens of the country to make sense of the world (Geertz 1973; Swidler 1986; Lamont 2000; Alexander 2003). Fiction writers inherit symbols and narratives from their literary predecessors and are influenced by the core cultural assumptions of these inherited literary narratives as they write fiction addressing new social and political issues (Williams 1963; Jameson 1981). In this way, literary tropes are passed down through generations. These cultural influences do not determine the outcomes of specific political struggles, as the force of cultural interpretations depends on the clash of interest group politics. As was discussed in Chapter 1, writers help to make specific cultural frames relevant when they join forces with other activists in political struggles. Yet from the bird's eye view, clear cross-national differences in the structure of literary symbols and narratives persist collectively over the longue durée. Authors collectively renew and reproduce cultural touchstones that persist across time, differ cross-nationally and resonate with British and Danish educational trajectories.

Third, I develop an empirically quantifiable method of assessing cross-national distinctions in literary depictions of education. The raw materials for this analysis consist of corpora of national literature from 1700 to 1920

the *novel of empowerment*, wherein they battle external demons. Yet even in British novels of accountability, a personal struggle with morality rather than a process of conforming to society generally enables the hero's coming-of-age (Brown 2013).

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(including 562 British, and 521 Danish major fictional works). Using quantitative text analyses, I construct snippets of text around education words and calculate the frequency of words within these education snippets associated with the dimensions of education. Topic modeling and cluster analysis are used to further investigate cross-national differences.

If distinctive cultural symbols and narratives broadly resonate with diverse national paths toward education, then we would expect to find strong cross-national differences in these cultural tropes. These cross-national differences should pertain to the goals of the public education system (for the individual versus society), access and differentiation (perceptions of the working class and emphasis on skills), and mechanisms for educational oversight (views toward the state and regulation). As predicted, Danish snippets of text are more likely to include references to society, workers, skills, and state than British snippets. British snipped are more likely to include references to individuals and assessment than Danish snippets. The cross-national differences in the corpora appear to contribute to institutional change processes in education. With respect to ideas, literary references to education build in advance of reform movements, suggesting that authors helped to put issues on the public agenda. With respect to interests, literary depictions associate different qualities with the working class. With respect to institutions, literary depictions in the two countries demonstrate diverse attitudes to the state and cooperation.

This model suggests a new way of thinking about mechanisms for continuity within processes of institutional change. Cultural touchstones provide a somewhat autonomous channel for institutional continuities that is separate from the path dependencies associated with institutional and policy legacies. Unlike policy legacies that build on lessons from the past, cultural touchstones influence our mental frames each time we engage in political negotiation. Our repeated behaviors are not about remembering policy legacies but about acting according to culturally constructed norms. The cultural constraint sheds light on why people repeat their mistakes even though negative policy legacies should warn them away from a given policy option. The approach offers a measure of cultural influence that is independent from the cultural element within institutions.

Moreover, this method for evaluating the transmission of cultural depictions over centuries allows us to observe that a nation's set of cultural symbols and narratives have a physicality that may be measured and mobilized politically (Orlikowsky and Scott 2015). Identifying cultural inspirations and processes of meaning-making are vexing to those who wish to interpret historical events correctly. Yet with this method, intangible culture is expressed in tangible cultural depictions that reveal deep cross-national differences in cultural assumptions about collective life. Literature lets us engage with the past in real time and expand our capacities for assessing historical cultural transmission (Watts 2002). Political scientists only fleetingly use literature in their work (Yazell et al. 2021), yet this analysis also suggests that literature constitutes a promising new direction in the cultural turn within political science.

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## THE PUZZLE OF INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Despite major institutional changes in education system development, both Britain and Denmark sustained some continuity in their apparent cultural assumptions about education. In Britain, cultural themes included a commitment to individual self-development; a view that the working class was flawed by a culture of poverty; expectations of high levels of class, party, and religious conflict; and continuous battle over the role of the state versus the church and other private actors in education (Green 1990). These cultural expectations permeated successive British institutional experiments: the late development of a public primary education system (in 1870), the reliance on private voluntary church schools, and the 1902 secondary education act that effectively ended earlier experiments in vocational training.

While sharply divergent from the British path, the Danish trajectory also evidenced cultural continuities through major institutional shifts. Denmark readily accepted a central role for the state in education and created a public primary school system in 1814; however, primary education was expanded with subsidized private religious schools. Grammar schools for classical studies were established by the state in the early 1800s; yet the multi-faceted secondary education system in 1903 included multiple tracks and a post-primary course to prepare students for vocational training programs (Gjerløff and Jacobsen 2014). Yet throughout these shifts, Danish reformers sustained cultural views in their commitments to the strengthening of society, comparatively positive views of farmers and workers, and expectations of cooperation. Even when national policymakers satisfied activists' demands for parental rights and the right to develop private alternatives to the state schools in the mid-nineteenth century, they created strong governing bodies with local school boards. Moreover, private schools never served more than eight percent of students and these largely disappeared by century's end (Kålund-Jørgensen 1953–6, 481).

The puzzling endurance of cultural values through major shifts in education systems has bearing for broader questions about development, continuity, and change in historical institutional theory.[2] Two historical-institutional models are particularly important to our understanding of institutional change processes. *Punctuated equilibrium models* describe acute, abrupt, discontinuous changes that are prompted by exogenous economic, political and social dislocation; and these dramatically transform institutions. Path-altering institutional changes often follow paradigm shifts that transform overarching political goals; choices taken at critical junctures have lock-in effects or increasing returns, and time-based sequencing matters enormously (North 1990; Weir 1992;

[2] Douglass North (1990) defines institutions as the "humanly devised constraints" on social, political and economic exchange and he includes both formal (constitutions) and informal structures (norms) (North 1991, 97). Alesina and Giuliano (2015, 902) argue against including informal norms and customs in the definition of institutions, as these are also incorporated into definitions of culture, and I ascribe to this more narrow definition.

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Hall 993; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Pierson and Skocpol 2002; Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010).

*Incremental models* of institutional change explore processes that transpire over time, often underlie apparent institutional stability, and entail endogenous erosion (rather than exogenous shocks) that undermine the status quo. Bottom up models of change may happen without exogenous shocks and occur as coalitions of actors convert institutions to new purposes. Processes of displacement, layering, drift, conversion, and exhaustion may lack intentional action, yet they may transform radically the status quo through evolutionary dynamics (North 1990; Hacker 2002; Streeck and Thelen 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010). While these models describe slightly different processes of institutional change, both incorporate a role for ideas, interests and norms for collective political engagement as drivers of institutional change.

Both punctuated equilibrium and incremental models confront puzzling aspects of institutional change processes. First is why countries differ with respect to the drivers of institutional change: the adoption of new ideas, the expression of interests and the performance of institutional rules. A second puzzling aspect concerns the variation in the scope, durability, and legitimacy of institutional innovations. A third question concerns continuity within institutional change, and this is particularly perplexing when full-scale displacement brings new institutions to diverge significantly from policy legacies so as to constitute a profound redistribution of authority (Orren and Skowronek 2016).

The following section considers how cultural frames provide context for the *drivers* of institutional change, the *endurance* of institutional change processes and the *persistence of continuities* at moments of profound institutional dislocations.

## CULTURE AND PROCESSES OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

### Culture and the Drivers of Institutional Change

First, cultural frames help us to comprehend new ideas, interpret our interests, and apply institutional norms during reform moments (Dacin et al. 2002). Cultural symbols and narratives are important to the *ideas* that set new institutional trajectories. New ideas and paradigm shifts inspire institutional change when former ideological organizing principles lose explanatory value, because ideas provide blueprints for diagnosing economic crises, reduce uncertainty, suggest policy solutions, organize collective action and constitute a weapon in struggles over resources (Hall 1993; Blyth 2002, 35; Culpepper 2008). At the same time, however, these new paradigms often motivate *different* policy choices across countries. How can this be? Public intellectuals, pundits and policymakers – the domestic translators of international ideas – develop these new paradigms in accordance with indigenous norms and values of their nations (Ban 2016, 18; Blyth 2002). Of course, culture is not the whole story.

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Cross-national variations in the adoption of new policy ideas certainly reflect diverse interests and knowledge regimes for deliberating political problems (Schmidt 2008; Carstensen and Schmidt 2016; Campbell and Pedersen 2014; Morgan and Hauptmeier 2020; Carstensen 2011). But cultural expectations also shape the adaptation of a new policy idea or development of new institutions (Cox 2001; Martin 2004; Griswold and Engelstadt 2008; Edling et al. 2014; Ban 2016), and institutional choices may have different cultural meanings across countries. Thus, private evangelical schools were a triumph for community activism and a means for accomplishing national goals in Denmark, but church schools were a tool for internecine religious wars in Britain.

Béland and Cox (2011, 21, 14) and Hay (2011) suggest that quantitative research on ideas is challenging because most ideas are not repeated occurrences. But cultural narratives do repeat, as I show below, and one must distinguish between transitory policy ideas and longer-term cultural expectations that influence nationally specific articulations of new institutional forms. At fluid political moments, new ideas may constitute oars that set new directions and yet dominant cultural tropes influence the translation of these new ideas and provide anchors that tether policy to the past.

Cultural assumptions also have bearing on the expressed *interests* of political actors, construction of collective social identities and class-cleavages. Cultural work matters to the construction of collective social identities, because narratives and symbols convey expectations about the psychological articulation of "self," the relationship between individual and society, and conformity to the social order (DiMaggio and Markus 2010, 351; Griswold and Wright 2004; Polletta et al. 2011; Korsgaard 2004). Economic imaginaries inform norms of economic exchange, actors' preferences, social cleavages, and the expressions of class interests driving political change (Fourcade 2011; Spillman 2012, 159; Carpenter et al. 2012; Engelstad 2015; Beckert and Bronk 2018) Cultural values constitute systems of meaning that shape micro-level strategic political choices (Morrill 2008, 16); for example, norms of trust enhance strategic choices for cooperation in game theory (Guiso et al. 2006, 29). Macro-social shifts in expressed preferences require attention to the collective origins of preference that transcend the rationalist paradigm (Meyer and Jepperson 2000, 100–2). Culturally constructed collective identities influence patterns of engagement with the social world (Scott 2001; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Beatty Riedl and McClendon 2019).

In particular, cultural assumptions influence antagonisms toward the working class. Industrial relations institutions affect the expression of class interests (Thompson 1980; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Paster 2012); yet cultural attitudes toward workers also have bearing on the evolution of social class (Sahlins 1976; Van Kersbergen and Manow2009; Martin et al. 2022). The characteristics of cleavage formation – the strength of antagonisms, individual attachment to the collective, and distance between core and peripheral groups – may well endure through the shifting power relations driving institutional change.

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Cultural views of government, markets, cooperation, and competition also influence *institutional norms and rules* for collective political engagement. Countries differ in their conceptions of state and citizenship (Brubaker 1992); Moreover, cultural constructs legitimize institutions, set boundaries between states and markets, and justify forms of regulatory control (Lacey 2001, 350; Carpenter et al. 2012; Spillman 2012). Cultural projects were essential for nation-building (Anderson 1993; Gellner 1983; Boli and Meyer 1985; Benavot et al. 1991; Soysal and Strang 1989; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Slater and Kim 2015; Spillman and Faeges 2005; Zhang and Lee 2020). Nation states may be thought of as regimes that are consolidated by using cultural repertoires to bolster institutional configurations (Berezin 2009). Cultural beliefs underlie assumptions of coordination and conflict in processes of policymaking (Putnam 1993; Martin et al. 2022).

It is important to note that cultural influences on institutions do not flow only in one direction; rather, economic and political structures have a reciprocal influence on cultural articulations and cultural values and institutions undoubtedly coevolve (Santana-Acuña 2014). Thus, Alesina and Giuliano (2015, 928) posit that cultural values influence choices of institutions, even while institutional choices reinforce cultural values. Differences in conditions at the birth of capitalism lead to differences in perceptions of poverty and the need for government intervention. The medieval church had a crucial impact on the formation of nation states, by providing a vital source of both institutional models of administration and ideas about medieval law (Møller and Stavnskær Doucette 2022; Grzymala-Busse 2023). At the same time, in medieval England, the practice of living in nuclear families (unlike in continental Europe) reinforced norms of individualism and vice versa (Macfarlane 1978). Murrell and Schmidt (2011) suggest a reciprocal interaction between legal statutes and the rising references to Whig cultural norms of freedom and independence in seventeenth-century British pamphlets.

### Culture and the Dimensions of Institutional Change

Second, cultural constructs have bearing on the dimensions of both acute and incremental change: the scope, durability, and legitimacy of change. While punctuated equilibria and incremental change models describe somewhat different processes of institutional change, both fall on a continuum in their level of "discredit to the status quo" (Baumgarnter 2010, 239). In discontinuous change models, the *scope* of change captures whether new institutions replace the old or simply duplicate the efforts of other organizations (Orren and Skowronek 2016, 114, 86). In incremental institutional change processes, "conversion" is more likely to constitute replacement while "layering" simply adds to the status quo (Streeck and Thelen 2005, 42). Discontinuous, enduring changes are *durable* when they constitute a stable alteration in governing authority (Orren and Skowronek 2016; Hall 1993). In incremental change processes,

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durability depends in part on the enduring strength of coalitions supporting the changes. Perceived *legitimacy* is important to both types of change and to whether transformations seem motivated by considerations of justice and universal as opposed to particularistic principles (Stinchcombe 1997, 5). Change accepted as legitimate is more likely to be driven by substantive (rather than political) motivations, to apply to a broader cross-section of citizens and to rise above ideological divides (Pettigrew et al. 2001, 699–700).

Cultural values have bearing for cross-national variations in these dimensions of change processes. Some cultural values foster a broader *scope* and greater *durability* in change processes, when these encourage ongoing cooperation and solutions for a broad population (Carpenter et al. 2012). Changes are more durable when they are consistent with cultural norms. Culturally inspired norms of cooperation increase the *legitimacy* of institutional choices by inspiring political negotiators to develop value-creating policies that impose short-term costs for long-term gains (Dobbin 1994, 3, 12; Jacobs 2011; Carpenter et al. 2012; Bellamy et al. 2012; Martin 2015). Positive views of the state and norms of trust may foster economic development (North 1991, 97–8, 102; Hall and Soskice 2001; Fukuyama 1995).

## Culture and Institutional Continuity and Change

Finally, cultural assumptions constitute a mechanism for preserving continuity within institutional change processes. Historical institutionalists generally attribute continuity within institutional change processes to path dependencies that are established at an early point in time and crucially shape choices of new policies and institutions thereafter, even when exogenous shifts significantly alter the policy terrain (Weir 1992; Sewell 2005, 100–1). Time-based sequencing of reforms is particularly important to the durability of policy legacies (North 1991; Orren and Skowronek 2016, Pierson and Skocpol 2002; Pettigrew et al. 2001, 699). Even in endogenous change processes, when new interests capture and repurpose old institutions, these interests often follow nationally specific playbooks, as is apparent in national experiences with implementing liberalizing reforms (Thelen 2014). Moreover, complementarities across domains bolster institutional stickiness (Hall and Soskice 2001; Berger 1996, 2005; Iversen and Soskice 2019).

Yet at critical junctures, multiple paths are possible responses to challenges (Dobbin 1994; Dunlavy 1994). There is a tension between full-scale displacement (discarding useless elements) and policy legacies (emphasizing the weight of the past), and colliding institutions offer divergent solutions to policy problems (Orren and Skowronek 2016). Specific policy solutions may be vested with very different meanings across countries, and episodes of political creativity may produce new institutional rules and collective identities (Berk et al. 2013).

I posit that cultural frames also provide a source of continuity during processes of change. Institutional elements may be recombined in new ways through

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processes of bricolage and creative syncretism (Campbell and Pedersen 2014; Berk et al. 2013); and cultural influences contribute to these processes of recombination. Agents help to forge new directions when economic development and institutional stickiness come into conflict (Orren and Skowronek 2016), and cultural motifs may influence (but not determine) agents' institutional choices. Policy and institutional paths are robust when cultural expectations bolster path dependence and reinforce norms (Berman 1998; Berezin 2009; Steensland 2006; Capoccia 2016). Cultural artifacts even may insinuate meaning when explicitly ideology is absent (Berezin 2009).

Unlike policy legacies that presuppose a historical starting point, interpretive schema come into play every time actors sit down at the table to negotiate. The schema are not deterministic and they leave ample opportunity for political creativity; yet they contribute to the familiarity of political choice. Whereas policy legacies hold both positive and negative lessons, deep cultural values shape the familiar habits of the mind that we may almost subconsciously bring to bear when engaging in political processes and coping with new challenges. Thus, deep cultural values may provide a source of continuity within processes of institutional change.

## CONCEPTIONS OF CULTURE

That cultural conceptions have some bearing on institutional design and policy choices seems instinctively true; yet, one wonders from whence these cultural values come and how they are transmitted across time periods and shifting economic, political, and social circumstances. How do we define ideational variables and demonstrate their relevance to institutional change processes (Berman 2013)? How do we study cultural values from centuries past when empirical assessments of public opinion date back only to the twentieth century? Many agree that culture constitutes a system of meaning and suggest that durable dispositions, cognitive frames, and culturally proscribed collective identities – in addition to individualistic materialist interests – shape political preferences and action (Bourdieu 1993; Geertz 1973; Wedeen 2002; Swidler 1986; Lamont and Thévenot 2000). Yet we must understand the precise mechanisms by which cultural influences contribute to political practices.

This section surveys the ways that scholars study cultural work and I then explore the role of literature in cultural analyses. First, as we discussed in Chapter 1, some authors identify cultural agents as vessels of cultural influence. A relatively autonomous, separate stratum of cultural actors (including writers of literature) developed in Europe by the eighteenth century, constituted a social field that was separate from political and economic fields, and established its own set of rules and laws (Williams 1963; Foucault 1981, 58; Bourdieu 1991; Znaniecki 1952, 26; Keen 1999). Cultural actors became increasingly autonomous from power relations rooted in the political economy, and this allowed authors to serve functions associated with

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nation-building, legitimizing governance structures and reproducing class structures (Bourdieu 1991, 655; Williams 1963). Eighteenth-century members of the state nobility increasingly derived their legitimacy from cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991, 655).[3] Religious actors and ideologies constituted a special group of cultural influence, particularly on social policy and educational development (van Kersbergen and Manow 2009; Kahl 2005; Petersen et al. 2010; Grzymala-Busse 2015, 2023).

Second, others explore cultural values as these are embodied in institutions. Cognitive or symbolic elements (together with social practices and material resources) constitute a core component of institutions (Scott 2001, 48–51; DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Dobbin 1994). The cultural, symbolic element of institutions are crucial to the evolution of public policy regimes (Fourcade 2011, 1724) and modes of cooperation in industrial relations (Martin and Swank 2012; Morgan and Hauptmeier 2020). Yet the manifestation of cultural constructs in institutions does not fully meet the criteria for cultural autonomy posed by Alexander (2003, 13), namely that cultural influences be observed in a medium that is separate from the political institutional manifestations of culture that one wishes to explain.

Third, culture appears as a phenomenon of *everyday practice*, for example, in citizens' civic activity. Cultural practices put into place at revolutionary moments matter to the trajectories of the revolution, to the nature of status quo politics thereafter and to the authenticity of democratic regimes (Fishman 2019). Cultural symbols and narratives help to legitimize new forms of governance; in this regard, they contributed to the development of collective identities in the European Union (Halle 2014; McNamara 2015).

Finally, a view of culture as *code* suggests that symbols and narratives constitute a web of social meaning and have a patterned influence on social interactions (Geertz 1973, 5). For example, culture as code may be observed in the structure and logic of cultural scripts in texts and other media (Sewell 2005, 167).

While all of these approaches have much merit in shedding light on cultural work, Alexander (2003, 13–23) suggests necessary rules for the use of culture as a political variable. One must establish the *relative autonomy* of cultural influences or find ways to assess manifestations of culture apart from their embodiment in political policies and institutions (Guiso et al. 2006; Spillman and Strand 2013, 95). It is also necessary to articulate the *transmission mechanisms* for cultural reproduction. A theory of cultural work should include a role for both *structure* (culture as systems of meaning) and *agency* (users of cultural practices) (Sewell 2005, 156–66).

[3] While Bourdieu (1991, 659–62) assumes that authors have similar interests across societies in defending the autonomy of their field of cultural production, this functionalist assumption neglects the stark cross-national differences in authors' views of their political and social worlds.

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## MECHANISM FOR CULTURAL TRANSMISSION: THE CULTURAL CONSTRAINT

With Alexander's warnings in mind, I develop a model for the manifestation of culture in literature in the tradition of looking at culture as code; namely, the model analyzes the coded cultural artifacts found in the symbols and narratives of fictional works that appear over time in literature. Certainly, transmission of cultural code operates through *both* the structure of literary code (explored in this chapter) and the agency of writers (presented in Chapter 1). Indeed, writers create cultural artifacts to have a specific impact and their target audiences interpret social and political experiences with reference to these cultural artifacts (Griswold 1987). But the accumulated symbols and narratives have a force that exists somewhat independently of the cultural actors who created these touchstones.

At a structural level, each country has a distinctive "cultural constraint," or an aggregation of cultural symbols and narratives that appears in corpora of national literature and that is produced by all authors as a group. The cultural constraint is predicated on the idea that political and social actors draw from a country-specific "cultural toolkit" – which includes symbols, narratives, labels, and mental maps – to formulate strategies and to ascribe meaning to social problems (see also Swidler 1986, 273–6; McNamara 2015; Wedeen 2002, 713; Idriss-Miller 2018; McDonnell et al. 2017; Schudson 1989, 160). Lamont and Thevenot (2000, 5–6) document the "repertoires of evaluation" – or cultural scripts organized around concepts such as market performance or civic solidarity – that suggest symbolic boundaries among social groups, mold our assessments about what is worthwhile, delineate positives and negatives, and help to articulate the collective good. For example, countries espouse diverse constructions of social goods and social evils (Alexander 2003, 6). The tool kit is heterogeneous and does not predict specific choices; yet it provides some continuity in style of action, even when goals of action change (Swidler 1986, 273–6).

Fiction writers act collectively as purveyors of the cultural touchstones; they inherit cultural tropes of their national literary traditions from the past and rework symbols and narratives to address current issues (Williams 1963; Guy 1996, 71). The national aggregation of symbols and narratives are passed down through generations, are used by cultural actors to depict social and political phenomena, and help citizens to interpret their world. We may observe not only the agency of individual writers, but also collective trends within the body of national literature, and even highly original writers draw upon the cultural touchstones of the past. As each generation redraws cultural touchstones, one finds continuity in tropes and the reiteration of master narratives over successive epochs.

The silence of the corpus is telling: What authors do not address with their works is as important as their intended ambitions for influence. Familiar touchstones inform the political unconscious, (or gap between authors' intended

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goals and their subtext messages) that is unacknowledged by the text (Jameson 1981). For example, in *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys portrays the insane and incarcerated first wife in *Jane Eyre* from the vantage point of race and gender in Victorian England and highlights the gap existing between Bronte's intended goals and the sub-textual messages (Fessenbecker 2016). Kipling recognizes the political power of the national corpus when writing: "The magic of Literature lies in the words, and not in any man. Witness, a thousand excellent, strenuous words can leave us quite cold or put us to sleep, whereas a bare half-hundred words breathed upon by some man in his agony, or in his exaltation, or in his idleness, ten generations ago, can still lead whole nations into and out of captivity" (Kipling 1928, 6).

This view of culture as code suggests that each country has its own cultural DNA or a particular assortment of symbols and narratives in its cultural toolkit and that distinctive cultural profiles resonate with perceptions of policy problems and solutions. Cultural touchstones and repertoires of evaluation are unevenly distributed across nations, and some countries are more likely than others to access certain cultural tropes (Lamont and Thevenot 2000, 5–6). Nation-specific meanings – and some relative cohesion in the interpretation of core issues – provide the basis for collective political identities (Spillman and Faeges 2005, 424). We might further surmise that cross-national differences in these accumulations of cultural touchstones have deep, historical roots. Certainly, Danish author activists grounded their notions of Nordic collectivism in the Nordic myths and made claims that the Vikings had high levels of internal social solidarity, even while they engaged in predatory practices abroad (Grundtvig 1832; Oehlenschläger 1974/1830; Korsgaard 2019). British writers were more likely to draw inspiration from Greek and Roman mythology, and more Gothic, conflict-embracing versions of myths from the north (Gross 2008).

At least four cultural dimensions differentiate societies from one another and have bearing on political choices. Countries vary along an *individualistic-collectivist* fault line that matters to conceptions of society and collective social identities (Znaniecki 1952; Petersen et al. 2010; Korsgaard 2004; Stråth 2015; Oyserman et al. 2002). Countries diverge in their cultural conceptions of *class cleavages* (Crouch 1993; Lamont 2000; Martin et al. 2022). Symbols and narratives in novels may politicize or demobilize marginal groups; and stories of resistance become vital weapons in movement mobilization (Swidler 1986; Lamont and Thévenot 2000; Ewick and Silbey 2003). Countries vary in their notions of trust and *patterns of cooperation* (Rothstein 2005; Tabellini 2010; Putnam 1993; Alesina and Guiliano 2015, 914). Cultural attitudes also vary cross-nationally in attitudes toward *government* (Brubaker 1992; Alesina and Giuliano 915) and the relationship between states and markets (Fourcade 2011; Beckert and Bronk 2018; Griswold and Engelstad 2008).

Some caveats are in order. First, authors base their depictions of problems and solutions on other sources, besides symbols and narratives inherited from literary works. Authors certainly write about life as they know it and their

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depictions may reflect shifting paradigms of political philosophy, changing hegemonic interests, patterns of class conflict, religious beliefs and shifting political institutions. Dickens' portraitures most certainly describe his childhood in the London slums. Moreover, authors' own creative renderings of reality may realign perceptions; in particular, great artists with unique voices may create new interpretations (Schwarz 1983). Cultural actors do not simply reflect national values and reproduce perfect images of life (Griswold 1987). Thus, Dickens chooses to emphasize certain themes, such as the mistreatment of children, in his depictions of Victorian poverty.

Second, individual authors vary and dissenting voices challenge the master narratives of their literary traditions (Gravil 2001, 1–3). Economic and social domains are built upon diverse logics; groups compete to assert their own logic in the formation of national identities; and canons of national literature and their cultural touchstones evolve over time (Poovey 1995, 15, 7). Writers construct stories that both resonate with and rework cultural tools when they write about new social problems (Poovey 1995; Guy 1996, 71). The dialectic between cultural persistence and change also reflects the mobility of people, ideas and political authorities across national boundaries (Greenblatt 2010, 2). The content of pulp fiction is driven by market-strategies (Corse 1995, 1279–81).

Third, national cultural models raise red flags. Older versions of cultural arguments relied on national values that were difficult to identify empirically, posited hazily understood causal processes, and resonated with imperialistic overtones about the superiority of American political institutions. Moreover, these theories were often tautological, giving political institutions as both cause and evidence of cross-national cultural divergence (Huntington 1996). Theorists often portrayed national cultural tropes as a coherent system rather than as objects of contestation and they focused in particular on the narratives of white men (Znaniecki 1952). Yet cultural invention was a subject of struggle among competing factions (Breuilly 1994; Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 15).

Fourth, it is doubtful that contemporary authors continue to play such a critical role in shaping contemporary public views, when so many other sources of information compete for our attention. Literature as a conduit of symbols and narratives was particularly influential before the twentieth century, after which technological innovations ushered in other types of intellectual exchange. Moreover, while literature provides a rich source of symbols and narratives, the cultural constraint also appears in other national collections of cultural products (see Halle 2014).

Fifth, it is important to stress that the structure of cultural artifacts does not have a *causal* impact on institutional development and change. As we saw in Chapter 1, many historically contingent factors contribute to policy outcomes and cultural influences interact with other political actors and structures. Quantitative evidence, however, makes it possible to verify cross-national

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differences in cultural depictions of political problems and demonstrate their correspondence with cross-national variations in institutional solutions. Following Falleti and Lynch's (2009) model of context in causal processes, I suggest that the structure of cultural touchstones contributes to the context that mediates the mechanisms by which a cause has an effect. Context becomes particularly important under conditions of multicausality, context-conditionality, and endogeneity (Denk and Lehtinen 2014; Franzese 2009). This is similar to how public opinion structures the effect of political parties (Busemeyer et al. 2020). Thus, a factor may be relevant without being causal or fully accounting for the outcome (Mahoney and Goertz 2006; Martin and Chevalier 2022).

Yet, despite these caveats, the cultural constraint suggests some endurance of cultural touchstones through epochs, despite individual differences, global contagion, and temporal shifts. Certainly, there is also a reciprocal impact of power relations on cultural development, because dominant interests give preference to certain cultural voices. Yet one may see a continuity in characteristics of cleavage formation – the strength of antagonisms and distance between core and peripheral groups – across time, even as the outcomes of class conflicts vary. At the sweeping bird's eye view, the conflicting perspectives of individual writers fade away and one may observe enduring cross-national differences in the overarching structure of cultural ideas.

## RESEARCHING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

I develop a method to investigate long-term, cross-national distinctions in cultural symbols and narratives by analyzing with quantitative methods large corpora of fictional works in Britain and Denmark. Computational linguistic and machine learning techniques (in Python) allow one to test observable differences in depictions of education appearing in corpora of British and Danish novels, poems and plays between 1700 and 1920 (after which copyright laws limit access). Full text files for the Danish corpus of 521 novels, poems and plays are obtained from the Archive of Danish Literature, and an online list of major Danish literature from the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries supplements the works from the archive. The Danish corpus includes virtually all literary works available online. The corpus of 562 British works is constructed from multiple online lists of authors and fiction from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries; HathiTrust provides full-text files. Choices about what to include in the British corpus are settled by choosing from the online lists. I include all entries from the list of important works from 1700 to 1920 and select at least one novel, poem or play from each author on the online lists of authors from this period. Available full-text files are often not first editions; therefore, I alter manually the dates of works to reflect their initial publication. Timing of publication is critical for establishing the sequential relationship between cultural artifacts and reform moments. Bias certainly

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exists in both in the initial publication of works (slanted toward upper-class male authors) and in online lists of important works, but I avoid additional bias by deferring to expert judgment about the collections. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses include works such as Charles Kingsley's *Yeast* and William Morris' *News from Nowhere* that were widely read and highly influential in the nineteenth century but that are much less familiar today.

To evaluate word frequencies, I construct snippets of fifty-word texts around education words, stem the corpora and take out stop words. I then calculate within these snippets the frequencies of dictionary words (or bags of words) that pertain to a specific concept. Major concepts (e.g. government) are derived from theoretical discussion, but I must make choices about specific words included in each concept. I generate lists of words for each category by identifying the top 200 words in major novels using the HathiTrust word cloud software and coding these words into appropriate groups. These words provide the basis for my categories of society, state, class, skills, etc. I, then, add synonyms derived from online dictionary searches. I want to give both languages an opportunity to perform in each category; therefore, I study the actual performance of words within the corpora and choose words that are used during each era in order to get the most appropriate historical representation of a concept. I avoid words with multiple meanings such as "society," which in English refers to both upper-class high society (most prevalent usage), and the community of people living in a country with shared customs, laws etc. The term "social" is used instead. Political terminology for a concept often changes over time. I control for this problem by including relevant terms from all historical periods under investigation and by including varied spelling of words (e.g. Dannemark and Danmark). Reading fiction from this era also helps in choices of historically appropriate words.

The analysis relies on both a supervised learning technique (with the Python Natural Language Tool Kit code for calculating word frequencies) and an unsupervised topic modeling technique. A supervised learning model is appropriate because the categories are specified by theory: My object is not to assess how an individual document fits into a corpus, but to assess cross-national and temporal differences among works that are presorted by country, language and time (Hopkins and King 2010; Laver et al. 2003). Moreover, a supervised learning model is appropriate because I am analyzing literature rather than nonfictional essays to address a specific topic. Passages about education in fiction include many topics related to the plotline, character development, etc. that are largely extraneous to our concerns.

I supplement the supervised learning technique with unsupervised probabilistic topic modeling. Rather than beginning with keywords, this method asks the computer to identify the main topics in snippets of text surrounding a word. One specifies the number of topics in advance; the topic model algorithm allows one to infer the hidden topic structure and to compute the distribution of topics that best capture the collection of words in a document. This

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provides a check on the word frequencies; while the results are probabilistic (and therefore changing with every iteration), they are consistent with what I find in the word frequencies.

I also use a clustering method to evaluate the distribution of views among authors in Britain and Denmark. I calculate the term frequency/inverse document frequency (tf-idf) scores for each author. Tf-idf calculates how important a word is to a document in a corpus. I then cluster the authors based on their scores on a given list of words and use a visualization technique, BDSCAN, to demonstrate the k number for the clusters. I calculate difference of proportions tests to evaluate significant differences between countries.

Linguistic structures of English and Danish could skew the results; for example, because "the" in Danish is a suffix ("mand" becomes "manden"), nouns could have higher word frequencies in Danish than in English. I address this by removing stop words (e.g. "the") and by observing that neither country has consistently elevated frequencies across categories. I also compare word frequencies of the British "give" and the Danish "giver" to ensure that these words track closely as expected.

It is now time to think about hypotheses to guide our study of cultural symbols and narratives. If cultural depictions set the context for both education system choices and processes of institutional change, then we should observe statistically significant cross-national differences and somewhat enduring within-country similarities in literary depictions. British and Danish authors should have diverse cultural depictions of the goals for the *public system* (which are also relevant to the ideas driving institutional change). They should portray class differently: This matters to the educational dimensions of *access*, *differentiation,* and *pedagogy* and is also relevant to the construction of interests. Authors in the two countries should offer varied depictions of *state* involvement and *administrative oversight* in education and these also inform the perceived legitimacy of rules guiding institutional change.

I do not make a causal argument, namely, that cultural values definitely cause specific choices of educational system dimensions. Rather I posit hypotheses about what one would expect to find in cultural scripts if these scripts are associated with cross-national distinctions in education system choices and with the ideas, interests, and institutional rules driving change processes in each country. An analysis of cross-national differences in cultural scripts about education allows us to rule out the null hypothesis that culture does not matter.

First, cultural symbols and narratives in literature may have bearing on the goals of the public education system and the ideas driving institutional change in education (Gonon and Deissinger 2021). If authors play a crucial role in putting education on the political agenda, authors' references to education words should increase in both Britain and Denmark in advance of major education reforms. If different ideas about the goals of education matter to education system development, we expect to find these differences in word frequencies in snippets of text about education. British authors should make more references to *individualism*

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words than Danish authors. Danish authors should make more references to *society* words in depictions of education than British authors.

(H1) Denmark should have more early references to education than Britain and cultural depictions should predate major reform moments in both countries.

(H2) Frequencies of words associated with individuals should be higher in British snippets of text surrounding education words than in Danish snippets.

(H3) Frequencies of words associated with society should be higher in Danish snippets surrounding education words than in British snippets.

Unsupervised topic modeling should reinforce findings from the word frequency analyses: topics appearing in snippets of text surrounding "education," "instruction" and "school" should suggest that education is developed to benefit the individual in Britain but society in Denmark.

(H4) Using unsupervised topic modeling, topics associated with individual self-development should appear more in British snippets surrounding "education," "instruction" and "school" than in corresponding Danish snippets.

(H5) Using unsupervised topic modeling, topics associated with societal goals should appear more in Danish snippets surrounding "education," "instruction" and "school" than in corresponding British snippets.

Second, cultural scripts may inform choices about education for workers and for the construction of interests driving institutional change processes. If so, we should find different depictions of labor in discussions of education by British and Danish authors. As Denmark expanded access to workers earlier than Britain, we expect to find that Danish authors would more frequently mention *workers* (and farmers) in discussions of education. Because Denmark created more differentiated educational tracks and varied pedagogical approaches to provide worker skills, we expect that Danish authors would be more likely to view peasants and workers as making an economic contribution to society and would more frequently refer to *skills* than British authors. British authors may well worry about workers' poor living conditions but they should think less about workers' economic merits and the need for social investments in worker skills than their Danish counterparts.

(H6) Frequencies of words associated with labor should be higher in Danish snippets of text surrounding education words than in British snippets.

(H7) Frequencies of words associated with skills should be higher in Danish snippets of text surrounding education words than in British snippets.

Moreover, if cultural depictions accentuate or diminish the cleavages among social classes, we might also expect to find cross-national differences in the distribution of authors' views within each country. If authors contribute to the lower levels of class antagonisms in Denmark, we might expect that Danish authors hold to more uniform depictions of the working class than their British counterparts. Class conflict has historically been much more pronounced in Britain; therefore, we might expect British authors to have a more varied distribution in their perceptions of labor that reinforces the contesting views of

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labor expressed in political circles. Authors' divisive views of labor would thereby reinforce sharp class cleavages.

(H8) Cluster analysis should demonstrate that Danish authors converge more in their depictions of labor than British authors.

(H9) Cluster analysis should demonstrate that Britain has more nodal points in the distribution of authors' depictions of labor than Denmark.

Third, if cultural work provides context for choices about educational oversight and has bearing on institutional rules for negotiation, we expect to find different depictions of the state in discussions of education by British and Danish authors. As Denmark established a public system earlier than Britain and had less conflict over education system development, Danish authors should make more references to the *state* and *cooperation* in discussions of education than British authors. But because Denmark had stronger cultural norms about community control, Danish authors should make fewer references to *assessment* words than British authors.

(H10) Frequencies of words associated with the *state* should be higher in Danish snippets of text surrounding education words than in British snippets.

(H11) Frequencies of words associated with *cooperation* should be higher in Danish snippets of text surrounding education words than in British snippets.

(H12) Frequencies of words associated with *assessment* should be higher in British snippets of text surrounding education words than in British snippets.

## FINDINGS

A cross-national quantitative analysis largely supports hypotheses that cultural tropes provide context for the ideas, interests, and norms driving institutional change in Britain and Denmark. First, cross-national comparisons support predicted differences in depictions of the goals of education, suggesting that authors' cultural frames may well contribute to the distinctive *ideas* driving institutional change in the two countries. Figure 2.1 confirms the predicted differences in the *timing* of references to education words. Denmark has significantly higher levels of references to education words than Britain in the years leading up to the 1814 creation of primary education. After passage of the act, Danish authors turned their attention to issues of constitutional reform and references to education declines over the nineteenth-century, a period when less governmental action was taken in education reform. In Britain, scant attention is paid to education in the early years; however, references to education words then climb steadily in Britain in advance of the 1870 act, during a period in which Victorian authors made access to and quality of schools a cause célèbre.

Figure 2.2 shows that the British corpus has much higher frequencies of individual words in snippets of text about education than the Danish corpus; and this supports our hypothesis that British cultural producers thought about education in terms of individual self-development. A close reading of texts shows

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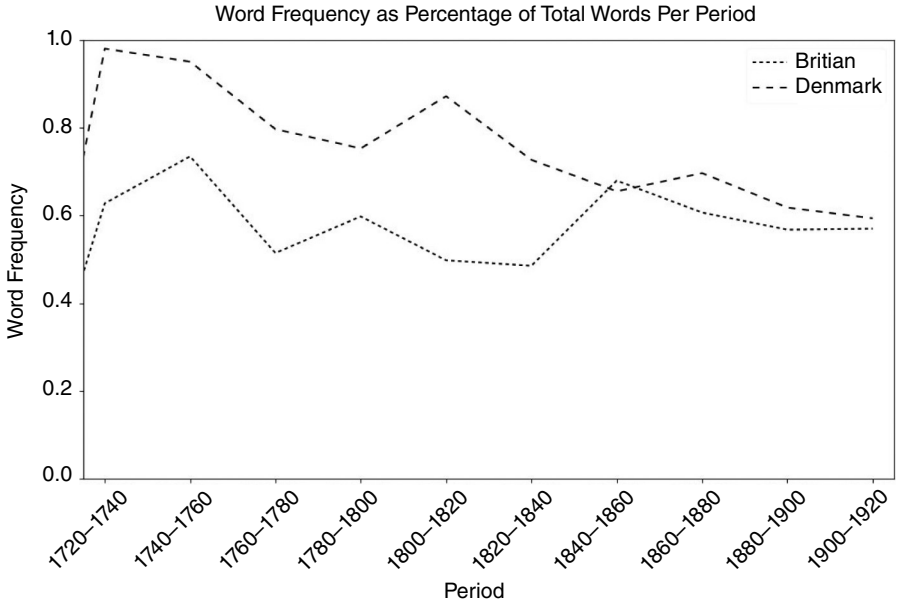



FIGURE 2.1. Timing of education words in entire British and Danish corpora

English education words include: "education, instruction, school, teach, learn, history, knowledge, read, student, write, count, arithmetic, mathematic, book, word"

Danish education words include: "uddannelse, undervisning/underviisning, skole, undervise/underviise, lære, historie, viden, læse, studerende, skrive, tælle, regn, matematik, bog, ord"

A similar figure appeared in Martin 2018.

that British authors repeatedly depict education as a vehicle for perfecting the individual, rather than as investment in society. Early eighteenth-century authors barely mention education, other than to make fun of the stereotypical bumbling tutor; thus, Daniel Defoe largely ignores education in both *Robinson Crusoe* and his journalism (Marshall 2007). Crusoe readily admits that formal schooling holds no allure; only on the desert island does he learn to create products (Defoe 2011/1719). Romantic writers around 1800 pay greater attention to education, frame learning as a path for individual self-discovery and provide poignant narratives that stir public interest in schools. Coleridge warns that "a man…unblest with a liberal education, should act without attention to the habits, and feelings, of his fellow citizens"; education would "stimulate the heart to love" (Coleridge 1796, #IV; Foakes 1989, 191). Matthew Arnold is perhaps the most ardent advocate of education for self-development. Thus, Arnold writes that the primary goal of education was not to make good citizens, but to create the best individual: "The best man is he who most tries to perfect himself" (Arnold 1867–8, 46).

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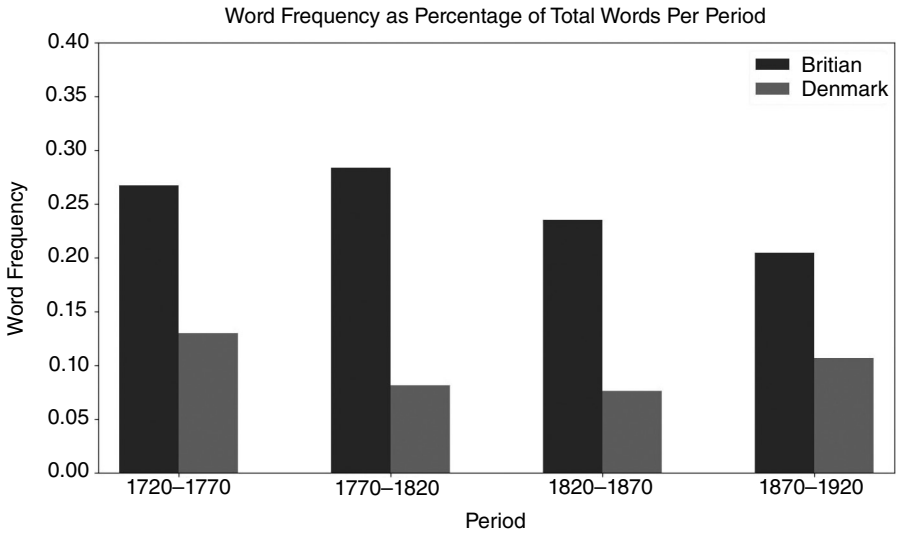



FIGURE 2.2. Frequency of individualism words in education snippets in Britain and Denmark

English individualism words include: "individual, independent, person, character, liberal, self"

Danish individualism words include: "individual, uafhængig, person, karak, liberal, selv"

A similar figure appeared in Martin 2018.

In Figure 2.3, Danish authors make many more references to society words than British authors, and this finding supports our hypothesis that cultural tropes link education to society, long before the development of a modern education system. Even in the mid eighteenth century, Ludvig Holberg views education and employment as important benefits to society as well as to the individual: "Merit ought to be rewarded, but the reward should be adapted to the object, that the State may not suffer" (Holberg 1845/1741, Loc. 807). Later the Romantic poets also frame the education of peasants as necessary to the general good and a strong society. Adam Oehlenschläger, who writes one of two Danish national anthems (entitled "It is a beautiful land"), links learning to the virtues of society. Denmark is strong as in the old Nordic myths; sciences and art are the hope of the future; and hearts beat for girl, country, and king. Still later, priest, poet, and philosopher N.F.S. Grundtvig believes that peasants and workers – the "workmen of the sun" – should be educated with Danish literature and history so that they may participate fully in society. For Grundtvig, this is a matter of national identity and essential to the collective folk (Grundtvig 2013/1838; Fain 1971, 78–82; Bjerg et al. 1995, 31–2). In *Only a Fiddler*, H.C. Andersen (1908/1837, 38) regrets that "there was no regulated school for poor children in the whole town."

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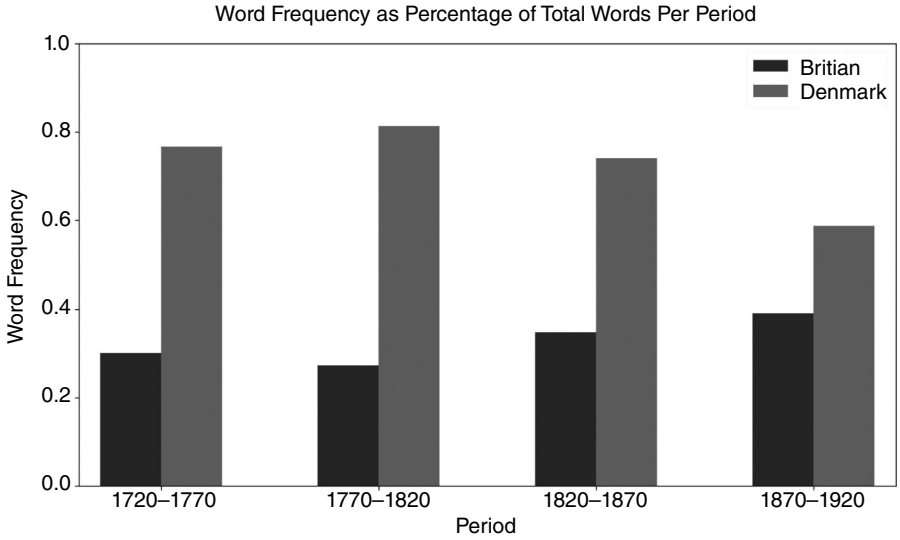



FIGURE 2.3. Frequency of society words in education snippets in Britain and Denmark

English society words include: "England, English, Britain, country, folk, people, collective, communal, mutual, custom, social"

Danish society words include: "Danmark/Dannemark, Dansk, land, folk, mennesker, kollektive, fælles, gensidig, skik, social"

A similar figure appeared in Martin 2018.

Unsupervised topic modeling confirms the findings of word frequencies about cross-national differences in the ideas surrounding the words "education," "instruction," and "school." While topics change slightly in each country over time, the cross-national differences in topics are stark. Topic modeling applied to the British education snippets produces topics about individual personality attributes (goodness, greatness, nature, honor, mind and sport) and upper-class terms (which are nonexistent in Danish findings). Danish topic modeling emphasizes nation-building (languages, history), society (spirit of the Danish people) religion, the state and skills.

Topics in the British school snippets are quite different from those in the Danish collection, and resonate with the British emphasis on schools as a vehicle for self-development, especially among the upper classes. The topic of goodness/greatness is by far the most important one in the British snippets throughout all periods, although this topic declines somewhat in the final period of 1870–1920. Thus, good/great appears in the British topic modeling output twenty-six times, compared to five times in the Danish output. Nature, honor, and the mind (all associated with individual self-development) are also important topics in the first two periods, and sport appears in the third period. Denmark does not mention any of these topics. Upper class terms constitute

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another important topic, particularly in the first and last periods; thus, upper class terms appear as a topic eight times in the British snippets compared with zero times in the Danish ones. This count does not include the British term "master," which is a frequently found topic and can mean either a school teacher or an upper-class child, that is, "the young master." Government words (law, crown) appear only twice as topics in the British snippets, compared to five times in the Danish ones. Similarly, language words appear only twice in the British snippets, compared to seventeen times in the Danish ones. British topics do not include religion, equality or spirit; the topic of work appears once in the third period in Britain compared to four times in Denmark.

In contrast, the Danish corpus emphasizes nation-building, religion, society, and the state. During 1720–1770, languages emerge as the strongest topic, followed by religion, state, and work. These findings are consistent with authors' ardent campaign to teach in the Danish vernacular rather than in Latin or Greek, and to use schools for more practical purposes. Religion, nation-building (state, history), language, and spirit of the Danish people continue to be the dominant topics from 1770 to 1820. Languages, religion, society (the people, spirit, history), and the state are the most important topics from 1820 to 1870, a period in which the folk school movement developed in the countryside and national liberals worked with authors to build up Danish culture as tool in the battle over Slesvig-Holstein. The topics change somewhat during the fourth period of 1870–1920: language (but now modern foreign languages), the people, and equality are important topics, and religion disappears. These topics are consistent with the development of the 1903 secondary education act, in which modern foreign languages was created as a new track within gymnasium, reformers sought greater equality among primary schools, and religious influences were scaled back in education.

Second, the quantitative data also support the hypothesis that authors' depictions of class relations provide context for the construction of *interests* and social cleavages in the educational realm. Figure 2.4 shows that Danish authors have significantly more and earlier references to *workers* (and farmers) than British writers in education snippets, and this is consistent with the earlier extension of educational access to the working classes in Denmark than in Britain. This finding fits with the cultural story that Danish authors expect workers and peasants to strengthen economy and society. In *Niels Klim's Journey Underground* (*Niels Klims Underjordiske Reise*), Ludvig Holberg makes the case for some measure of equality in his utopian society of Pontu; individuals who are considered great are "noted for virtue and industry" (Holberg 1845/1741, Loc. 404). Laws favoring some classes are not "conducive to the general interest" (Loc. 446 to 457). With the end of serfdom, authors celebrate peasants as essential to nation-building. In his 1790 poetic play, *The Harvest Festival* (*Høst Gildet*), Thomas Thaarup describes a peasant boy's ardent desire to be educated so that he can defend Denmark (Thaarup 1822/1786). In Bernhard Severin Ingemann's heroic stories about the Danish middle ages, the people constitute the power in

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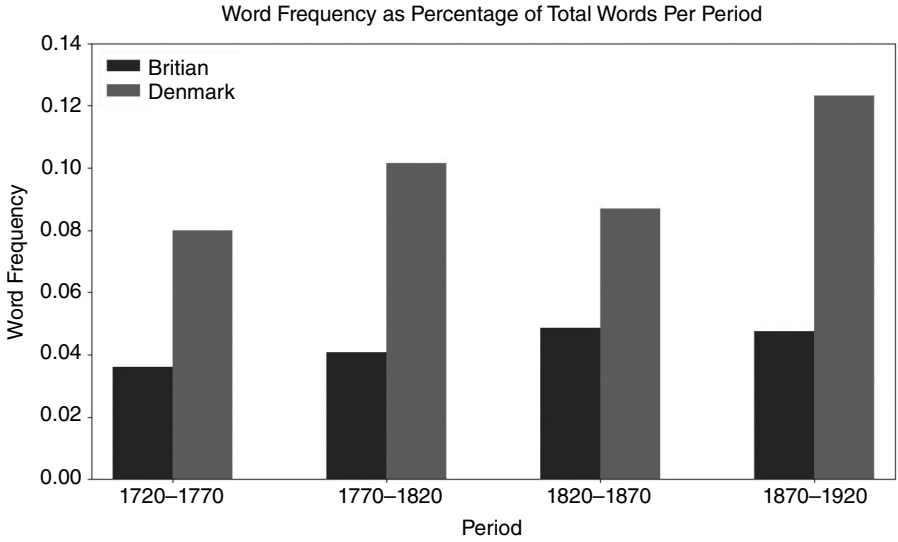



FIGURE 2.4. Frequency of labor words in education snippets in Britain and Denmark

English labor words include "worker, guild, craftsman, journeyman, apprentice, farmer, peasant, serf, mechanic, labour"

Danish labor words include "arbejder/arbeider, laug, håndværk, svend, Lærling, landmand, bond, liveg, mekanik, arbeidskraft/arbejdskraft"

those "days of departed glory…If it [the power] flashes not from many thousand eyes united, and pours not forth from every heart in Denmark, the greatest king in the universe cannot…restore to the people the lofty spirit of our ancestors" (Ingemann 1913/1828, loc 7602).

In sharp contrast, British writers scarcely comment on workers' contributions to society and many authors fear that excessive education will pose problems for social stability and create unrealistic expectations among the working class. Sara Trimmer's idea of schooling for the poor are Houses of Industry for the able-bodied poor and residential schools where five-year-old girls can learn spinning (Trimmer 1801, 69–70). In an undated letter, Wordsworth notes that "Mechanics' Institutes make discontented spirits and insubordinate and presumptuous workmen (Wordsworth/Knight 1907, 191).

Some progressive writers support education as a means of alleviating poverty; yet even they largely ignore the contribution of the working class to society. Coleridge writes that some schooling for the poor can limit alcoholism (Coleridge 1796). In Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (2015/1818), education transforms the monster, making even more poignant the novel's tragic ending. In *North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell (2011/1854) suggests that educational opportunities and charitable interventions would allow the poor to

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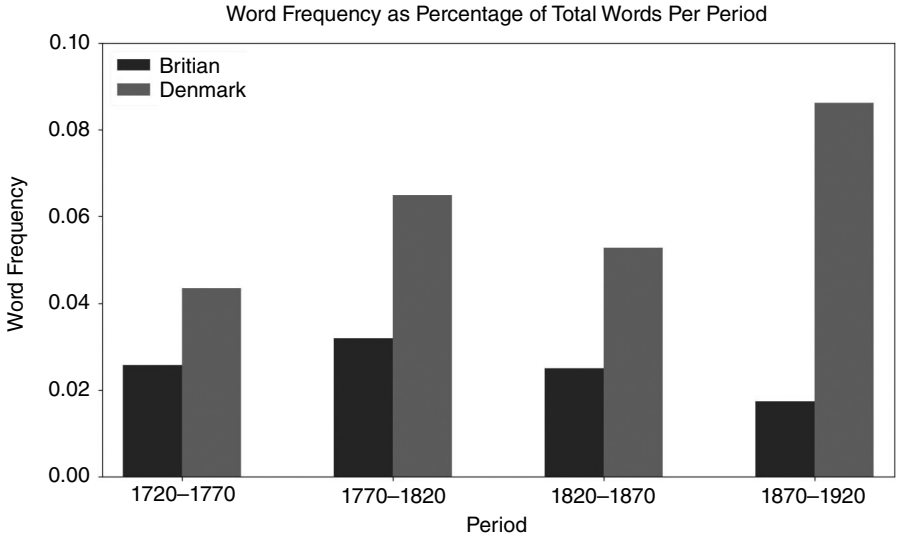



FIGURE 2.5. Frequency of skill words in education snippets in Britain and Denmark
English skill words include: "skill, ability, competency, proficiency, qualification"
Danish skill words include: "færdighed, evne, kompetence, dygtighed, kvalifikation"

improve their own position. Dickens and Gaskell are famously sympathetic to the tribulations of the working class, but they highlight the suffering of (especially) women and children (Poovey 1995, 57; Guy 1996; Steinlight 2018), rather than the loss to society from an ignorant working class. Indeed, even the most progressive social reform novelists share Malthusian views about the culture of poverty and overpopulation. In *Yeast* (Kingsley 1848, loc 2125), Charles Kingsley blames the social missteps of the working class on poverty: "Our daughters with base born babies have wandered away in their shame. If your misses had slept, Squire, where they did, your misses might do the same." George Gissing (2016/1889) stresses the cruelty of the urban poor in *The Netherworld*. Writers believe that the disorganization of the working class exacerbates afflictions of industrialization, a view also shared by liberal reformers such as James Kay-Shuttleworth (Armstrong 1986, 642–55).

Figure 2.5 demonstrates that Danish authors make greater reference to *skill* words in education snippets than British authors. Their fiction fits with the choice to have *differentiated* secondary educational tracks that satisfy the varied practical skills needed by society and that accommodate workers' diverse learning styles. A close reading of texts suggests that Danish authors consistently viewed workforce skills as strengthening economy and society. Nineteenth-century authors consider industrialization to be an important collective project and seek expanded mass education of workers to meet the

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collective goals of building society, national strength and economic prosperity. They depict advances in agricultural and industrial productivity as a national project, and workers' skills become an issue of national security. In *Montanus the Younger*, Thomasine Gyllembourg connects social solidarity and investment in workers' skills to economic productivity and industrialization. Her forward-thinking protagonist suffers from arrogance and has to learn to conform to society, yet he has excellent ideas that will benefit the country. He writes a treatise on foreign technology, connects prosperity to the freedom of working men and argues for skills training to offset unemployment related to mechanization (Gyllembourg 2019/1837; Heitmann 2011, 11–19).

Danish authors stress the importance of practical skills and the problems with education that is disconnected from the real world. In Niels Klim, Holberg notes that "Intelligence resulting from methodical and practical study is preferable to the torpid insanity incident to much learning" (Holberg 1845/1741, Loc. 645–55). Similarly, in Ingemann's "Erik and the Outlaws," a character from the fourteenth century reflects on the uselessness of education dominated by classics and religious studies: "Our common-place scholars still chew the cud of mysticism, the useless learning of the schools, and the dry, worn-out Aristoteles" (Ingemann 1843/1833, loc 20435–9). Playwright Johan Ludvig Heiberg shares Ingemann's disregard for useless knowledge and enthusiasm for experiential learning in the concluding song of his vaudeville, *April Fools*. The setting is a small girls' school where the headmaster is a thief and students learn little from the schools' poor instructional method; for example, one student believes that Amsterdam is the capital of England. But students know much about life and the play ends with a song that celebrates experiential learning. Noting that "the promise of school falls short," the characters declare that "Life is short but art will last; Life itself is a school class" (Heiberg 2018/1828, 35, trans. CJ Martin).

In contrast, even when Victorian novelists are sympathetic to the tribulations of the working class and write achingly sad stories designed to pluck at our heartstrings, they are more inclined to support worker education as a mechanism for extending charity and reducing social instability rather than as a source of valuable skills (Poovey 1995, 57; Guy 1996; Childers 2001; Dzelzainis 2012). For Bronte, educating working-class youth in Jane Eyre is akin to imperialistic evangelicalism (Gargano 2008, 19). Many accepted that class injustices are a natural part of the capitalist order; even radical William Godwin writes about social class: "I believe that distinction is a good thing, and necessary to the peace of mankind. But, however necessary it may be, we must acknowledge that it puts some hardship upon the lower orders of society" (Godwin 2013/1794, 78).

Figures 2.6 and 2.7 present the results of our cluster analysis. Clustering and visualization analyses allow us to observe the distribution of depictions of labor within the British and Danish corpora. The data confirm that British authors have much more varied views of the working class than Danish authors. In the

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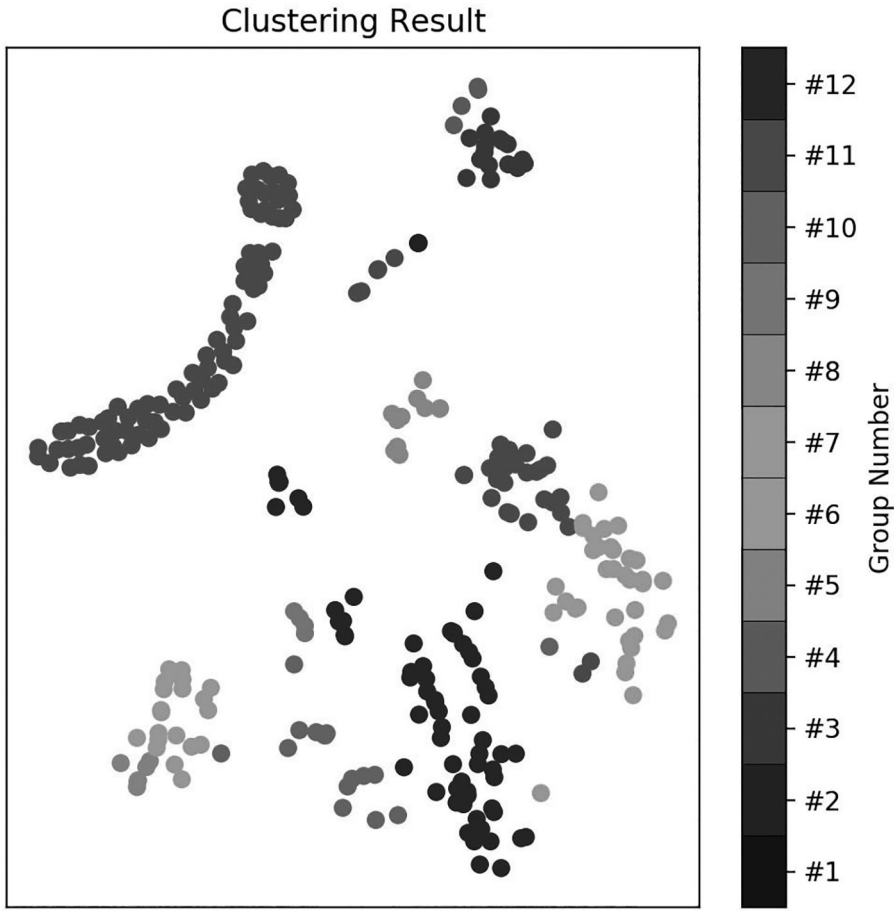



FIGURE 2.6. Clusters of writing about labor in Britain

cluster analyses, each color corresponds to a distinctive depiction of labor in fictional works within the corpora.

Figure 2.6 shows many distinctive depictions of labor (in color clusters) in British fictional works: one may easily see that British authors' depictions of labor are quite varied, with little consensus, and this picture of many competing views seems fitting in a country with high levels of class conflict. In sharp contrast, Figure 2.7, consists almost entirely of dots of a single shade; this demonstrates that Danish authors across the political spectrum essentially converge in their depictions of labor. This convergence in depictions of labor may well reinforce the more cooperative, consensual relations that exist between social classes in Denmark, and resonates with the weaker class cleavages in Denmark than in Britain.

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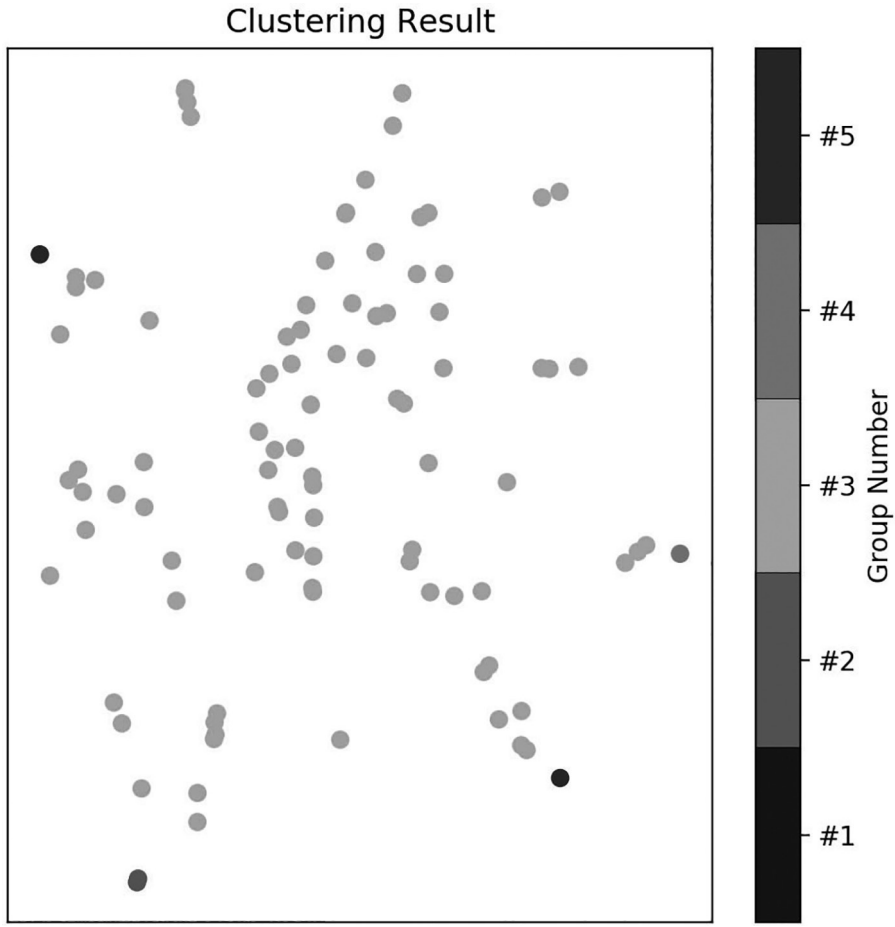



FIGURE 2.7. Clusters of writing about labor in Denmark

Third, the quantitative data also support the hypothesis that authors' depictions of institutions are consistent with the institutional rules driving education reform in Britain and Denmark. Figure 2.8 demonstrates that Danish authors make significantly more references to government in education snippets than British authors until the end of the nineteenth-century, when British reformers on the left struggle against the church to strengthen the public system. This is what we expect from a country (Denmark) where a public system is established quite early and the government (including at the local level) continues to play a major role. The importance of the state appears in Bernhard Severin Ingemann's view of the king as the guardian of the collective good who unites the people in harmony for the good of all: "If variance and discord are not soon to rend asunder all…we must necessarily be united…in lawful obedience to the majesty

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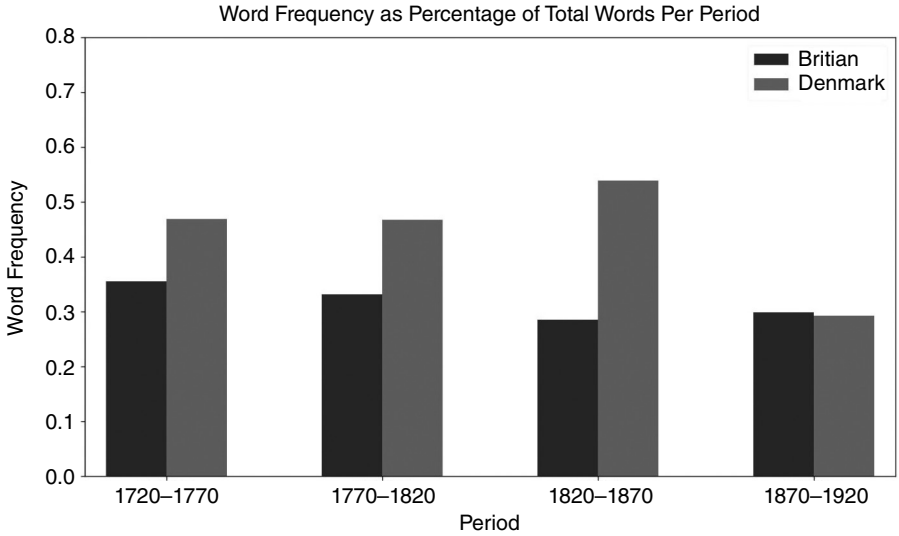



FIGURE 2.8. Frequency of state words in education snippets in Britain and Denmark

English state words include: "nation, government, ministry, authority, law, legal, illegal, judgment, judge, council, commission, committee, public, municipality, parish, king, kingdom, crown, throne"

Danish state words include: "stat, regering, ministerium, myndighed, lov, gyldige, ulovlig, vudering, dom, råd, commission, uvalg, offentlig, kommune, sogn, konge, rig, krone, trone"

A similar figure appeared in Martin 2018.

and divinity of the crown" (Ingemann 1913/1828, loc 5225–6). Writers recognize that government serves a positive role in promoting industrial projects, as when the protagonist in *Lucky Per* (*Lykke Per*) develops an ingenuous plan for a waterway to capture power from waves and wind that is greeted with great interest by local authorities and investors (Pontoppidan 2019/1898). Moreover, government interventions help to offset corruption. Jacob Knudsen in *The Old Priest* (*Den Gamle Præst*) describes the corruption of a private school-building project. The cabal leading the project is "almost unregulated, in any case erratic – also in a moral sense"; therefore, external regulation and oversight are necessary to stop private abuse of power (Knudsen 1901, 29).

How different is the view of government offered by British novelists, as even the most progressive writers continuously disparage government capacities to redress social ills. Dickens ridicules self-interest in the legal system, as when *David Copperfield's* Mr. Spenlow remarks, "the best sort of professional business…[was] a good case of a disputed will…[with] very pretty pickings" (Dickens 1850, 366). William Morris – a pillar of the Democratic Socialist

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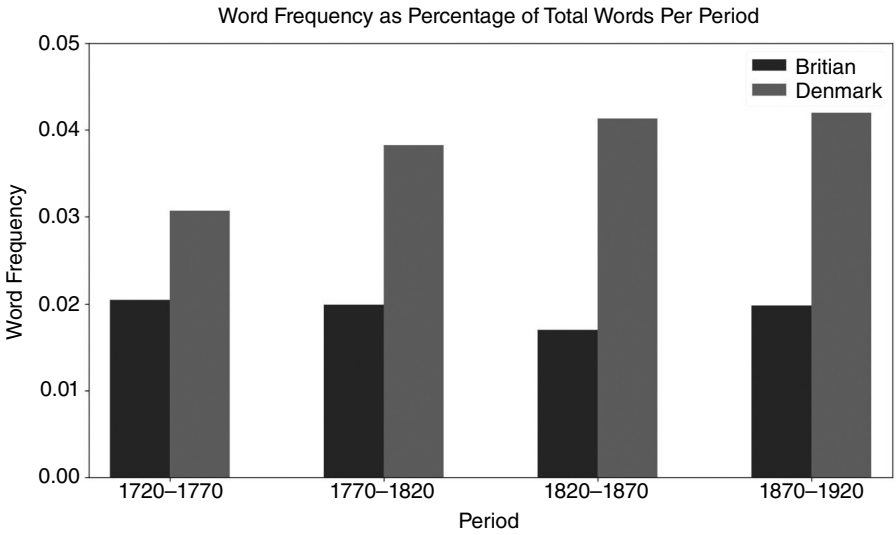



FIGURE 2.9. Frequency of cooperation words in education snippets in Britain and Denmark

English words include: "agreement, arbitration, bargaining coalition, collaboration, collective, compromise, cooperation, coordination, negotiation, pact, settlement, unanimous, unity, confederation, federation, union"

Danish words include: "aftale, voldgift, forhandling, coalition, samarbejde, fælle, krompromise, medvirkning, samordning, overenskomst, forlig, ordning, enstemmig, enhed, forbund, forening, fagforening"

Federation and later the Socialist League – is deeply sympathetic to workers, yet in his utopian novel, *News from Nowhere*, all institutions (states *and* markets) disappear. A guest from the past is told that the "whole people is our Parliament" (Morris 1890, 72).

Danish frequencies of government words in the education snippets decline in the late nineteenth-century. This reflects the modernist genre, in which authors are less normative and more experiential in their writing. Moreover, although education under the absolute monarchy is an elite project, schooling becomes more of a bottom-up process that is apparent, for example, in the folk high school movement inspired by NFS Grundtvig. The 1864 war strengthens the importance of civil society (Korsgaard 2004; Kaspersen 2020, 184) and the balance between state and society also shifted with the increasing importance of self-regulation by the social partners (Martin and Swank 2012).

Figure 2.9 shows that Denmark has significantly higher levels of cooperation words than Britain. This again shows some correspondence between cultural touchstones and the more consensual, cooperative politics of education reform in Denmark than in Britain, where extensive partisan and religious struggle contributes to a fractious politics.

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Expectations of cooperation and peaceful negotiation are a constant drumroll in Danish literature. A favorable view toward industrial cooperation appears in Henrik Pontoppidan's Nobel-prize winning *Lucky Per* (Pontoppidan 2019, 480). In Johannes Ewald's (1889/1773, 30) wildly popular poetic play, *The Death of Balder* (*Balders Død*), heroine Nanna rails against useless conflict and male bellicosity. Balder loves Nanna; Nanna loves Hother; Hother wants to fight Balder for honor's sake; Nanna would only suffer from Hother's "heroic" death. This 250-year-old he said/she said debate gets at an essential truth about the cultural underpinnings of cooperation in Denmark – conflict is a waste of time.

**Hother:** The slave only feareth.
**Hother:** Ah then his fame cheereth
**Nanna:** Ah then his bride weeps!
**Nanna:** She weepeth!
**Nanna:** And weepeth.
**Hother**: Ah, then his fame cheereth
**Both:** Ah, then his fame cheereth
**Nanna:** Ah, if thou now fallest?
**Nanna**: Then I shall be wasted
**Hother**: But were my fame blasted

**Nanna:** The hero can fall!
His bride in her thrall.
**Hother:** She's honour'd.
**Hother:** She's honour'd.

His bride in her thrall.
His bride in her thrall.
**Hother:** And if I now fall?
By ne'er-ceasing smart.
Then break would thy heart

In Britain, fighting the good fight is bred in the bone. Hughes celebrates the fighting spirit of the fictious Brown family in Tom Brown's Schooldays, who are the "chief cause of that [British] empire's stability" (Hughes 2012/1857, 2). "One may question their wisdom, or wit, or beauty, but about their fight there can be no question." The British nation should be "properly sensible of how much of its greatness it owes to the Browns…Whenever the fleets and armies of England have won renown, there stalwart sons of the Browns have done yeomen's work" (1). Charles Macay's famous poem, "No Enemies," finds fault with those who miss an opportunity for conflict: "You've never turned the wrong to right. You've been a coward in the fight" (www.poetrynook.com/poem/no-enemies).

Figure 2.10 demonstrates that, as expected, Britain authors make significantly more references to assessment words than did Danish authors. This fits with British expectations that government should engage in quality control, regulation, and assessment to assure that education meets the requirements to fully educate the individual. By the mid-nineteenth century, British writers increasingly lament the deplorable quality of schools and they come to support greater oversight by a centralized educational administration, a strong assessment regime and expanded regulation to improve quality. John Stuart Mill posits the need for government intervention: "The uncultivated cannot be competent judges of cultivation…Education, therefore, is one of those things…that a government should provide for the people" (Mill 1848, 947–8). Thackeray abhors

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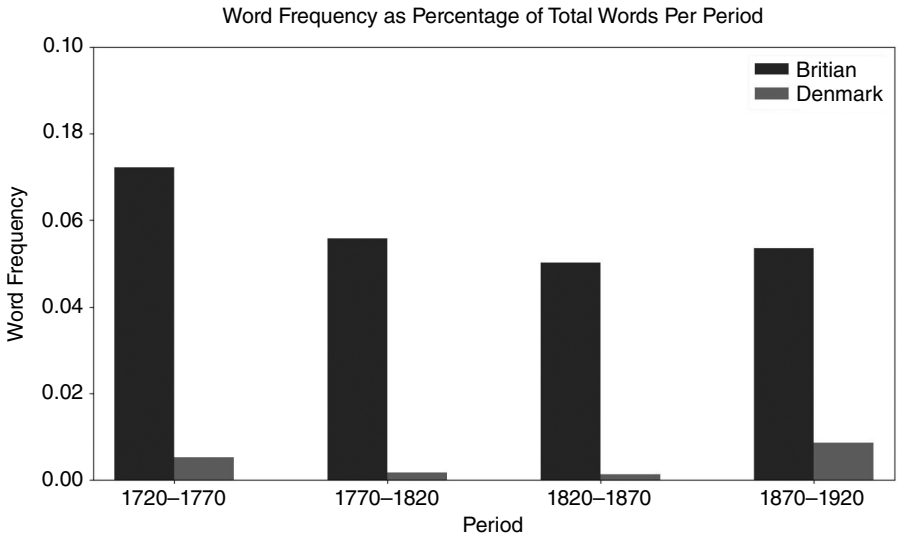



FIGURE 2.10. Frequency of assessment words in education snippets in Britain and Denmark

English words include: "quality, regulation, standards, assessment, evaluation, monitor, examination, inspect, inspection"

Danish words include: "kvalitet, regulering, standard, vudering, evaluering, overvåge, eksamen, inspicere, inspection"

the state of English education and his own school, Charterhouse, becomes "Slaughterhouse" in *Pendennis* (Gargano 2008, 44–55). Dickens sees merit in some schools: for example, in *David Copperfield*, Doctor Strong's school makes "an appeal, in everything, to the honour and good faith of the boys" (Dickens 1850, 225). Yet David suffers greatly at Mr. Creakle's Salem House where "Half the establishment was writhing and crying, before the day's work began" (88). David learns little, because the "boys were…too much troubled and knocked about to learn" (93). Dickens' *Nickolas Nickleby* (1839) depicts an abusive Yorkshire cheap school and the novel's immense success helps to close a huge number of the Yorkshire schools in the wake of its publication (Collins 1963, 104).

## CONCLUSION

A cultural turn in political science is increasingly inspiring scholars to explore the dynamic relationship between cultural artifacts, cultural practices and political outcomes, and literature provides a promising avenue for exploration in this cultural turn. This chapter explores cultural work that transpires collectively at a structural level, or the level of the "cultural constraint." Generations

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of fiction writers rework literary symbols and narratives inherited from past literary works to address the political challenges of their times. The transmission of national literary symbols and narratives passed down through the ages provide a subtext for the manner in which authors, policymakers and citizens interpret the world, construct preferences and engage in collective political struggle. Thus, one may observe empirically how literary corpora in Denmark and Britain differed enormously in representations of education, state, society and the working man over hundreds of years and how these recurring literary tropes set the context for choices about the dimensions of education systems.

An analysis of cultural touchstones in works of art constitutes an important source of cultural frames in institutional change processes, and provides an analytically distinct mechanism from path dependence for institutional continuity. Unlike policy legacies laid down at a specific moment of policy creation, cultural tropes are a recursive and repeating phenomenon. Even as they are subject to alteration over time, they sustain essential assumptions. Cultural work consequently sheds light on the moral economies underlying political economic systems such as diverse varieties of capitalism; for example, cultural touchstones anticipated the contemporary Nordic practices of consensual negotiation led by a strong state (Martin and Swank 2012). As early as the eighteenth century, Danish authors converged on a view of workers as central to the good of society; whereas, many British authors viewed workers with suspicion and feared the mob.

This work fills lacunae in the analysis of historical differences in institutional development across countries. Making cultural arguments about the distant past is more challenging than capturing cultural influences today, and an analysis of literary touchstones (and other cultural artifacts) provides a way to evaluate norms and values in the historical moment. Apart from process tracing with case studies, we have few tools for measuring historical cultural inputs and views, assessing empirically verifiable cross-national differences, evaluating how cultural symbols and practices transmit across generations, and exploring the interaction of cultural symbols with institutional change processes. We lack broad, cross-national data (e.g. from survey experiments and public opinion polls) to assess cultural distinctions and their associations with historical political developments. Social scientists risk making assumptions from the perspective of modern logics and this threatens to misrepresent historical dynamics, something that Ahmed (2010) refers to as reading history backwards. Studying fiction writers and their narratives, however, offers a tangible way to evaluate how culture matters to political outcomes. With computational linguistics and a close reading of texts, we may observe significant cross-national differences in historical literary images of education. Thus, the use of literature allows us to read history forward.

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