

**THE MODERN PRINCIPAL'S VICTORIAN HANGOVER:
BRITISH 19TH CENTURY LITERATURE
AS A SOURCE FOR EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP**

by

Adam Stanley
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Approval

Name: Adam Guy Stanley

Degree: Master of Education

Title of Project: The Modern Principal's Victorian Hangover: British 19th Century
Literature as a Source for Educational Leadership

Examining Committee:

Chair Maureen Hoskyn

Eugenie Samier, Associate Professor
Senior Supervisor

Yaroslav Senyshyn, Associate Professor
Member

Dr. Linda LaRocque, Associate Professor
Faculty of Education
Examiner

Date Approved: June 15, 2004

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ABSTRACT

Examines British Victorian literature as a source for educational leadership, focussing on the evolving role of the headmaster through the thematic analysis of selected novels by Dickens and Brontë. Discusses the derivative nature of education and the continued impact of the Victorian frame of mind on thinking and practice in Canadian education. Overviews the present use of literary sources in educational administration and leadership scholarship.

Provides a summary of the socio-political, legislative, and educational history of the nineteenth century prior to the passage of the *Elementary Education Act* of 1870. Considers hermeneutics and past and present literary criticism in this field, suggesting a connection between literary analysis and Weber's ideal typology.

An extended series of colourful vignettes from Dickens' Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield, Hard Times, and Brontë's Jane Eyre are presented and analysed with reference to the novelists' portrayal of educational leaders, instructional methodology, power hierarchy, disciplinary measures, school culture, and reform strategy, which are related to current theory and practice.

Considers the advantages inherent in the role of the novelist as opposed to the scholarly writer when catalyzing educational reform. Concludes with implications of literary sources for educational administration and leadership theory, strategies for the training of administrators, and the improvement of current practice in the field.

DEDICATION

For Martine, Ben, and Zoe, for their patience and refusal to complain.

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CHAPTER ONE:

Containing divers matters of an introductory nature concerning pen and sword. The scope and approach of this essay are considered.

The literature surrounding educational leadership and administration theory is complex and abstract, a protracted academic discourse in which little is immediately resolved and progress is incremental, except for an occasional revolutionary blow that permanently alters the landscape of the domain. In this respect it is an elite pursuit most reminiscent of a duel of honour. There is much protocol and attention to tradition, and after fencing, most retire from the field with honour satisfied or wounds to their dignities, only to return to the fray when another contentious point causes a glove to be cast to the ground. It is not so with the work of the novelist, which is broadly conceived and diffuse by comparison while retaining advantages of its own that make it a valuable source for educational leadership.

It has been said that we can know characters in fiction better than the acquaintances of our daily lives. The author of fiction can dispense with the random events and sporadic insanity that constrains the reality of human affairs, compressing time and manipulating circumstance to produce models of human behaviour with an almost clinical precision. Framed as social commentary, narrative permits its reader to be both spectator and analyst, examining characters, decisions, actions and consequences with the omniscience provided by the freedom from prescriptive limitations that a fictional context provides. This research focuses on the exploration of the characterization of educational leadership figures in reform-oriented British Victorian literature and the narrative in which they are embedded, in order to determine its value as a source for contemporary educational leadership and administration theory.

One would like to imagine that there have been great advances in the delivery of public education over the past century; the truth is that the reality of change has limped gracelessly behind the rhetoric of reform. If anything, it would be charitable to suggest that the present era in education is any better than a transitional phase: a flatly uninspiring network of compromises caught in the gears between the utilitarian nineteenth century model from which it sprang and an as-yet unelaborated form into which it will eventually evolve.

Even a speculatively-minded Victorian aeronaut would find it difficult to guess, seeing them side by side, that a hot air balloon and a Boeing 747 serve essentially the same purpose and were inspired by a similar vision. Assuming that he was told, it is unlikely that he could find the jet's door and learn to open it, let alone guess at the meaning of the controls on the flight deck. The confusion of the aeronaut should be a source of pride for us, as it indicates an astonishing and rapid evolution in the field of aviation. Sadly, however, a Victorian teacher, set free to wander the halls of a modern secondary school, would have little difficulty apprehending in it many features of its nineteenth century counterparts. Fewer coal fires, head boys, and gratuitous beatings, to be sure – more soundproof glass, air conditioning, and whiteboards. Classrooms, however, with desks in rows, bored students stealthily vandalizing tabletops, teachers waspishly droning behind podia, tests, wrongdoers facing discipline, principals meting out punishments, tired pedagogy, and a highly structured and ritualized leadership hierarchy. Instructional methodology and classroom design have evolved only slowly and haltingly over the course of more than a century, since the passage of the *Elementary Schools Act* of 1870

made public schooling¹ a reality in Great Britain. We, as educators, have made a dog's breakfast of the grand promise of free, universal education articulated for us so long ago.

One has only to look to the body of fiction bequeathed by numerous Victorian authors to come to a startling and unpleasant conclusion about the environments in which we struggle to teach and learn: there has not been much substantive change. We are still driving forward by looking in the rear-view mirror. Worse yet, we can recognize ourselves and our colleagues in the Victorian novelists' satirical parodies of educational leaders. Distressingly familiar archetypes then presented for middle class amusement and edification still set much of the agenda for public schooling. While it is depressing to dwell on this certainty, it is in fact a pleasant occurrence for us, gentle reader, for it is around this meaty joint in the bowl of narrative that this paper principally revolves.

My interest in this area stems from a long delight in the Victorian novel, and a sense of great appreciation for the power it wielded as an agent of social change. As will be shown later, one might be forgiven for remarking on the propensity of educational leadership theorists to quote from fiction of the time, pulling tracts out of context to support whichever oblique contention that they are trying to market. It seems an injustice to the philosopher-novelists of that bygone age to use their work in such a piecemeal fashion without at least attempting to come to terms with the breadth of the message that they were trying to convey. At one point, a few years ago, I was engaged in one of the inane and inevitable arguments which form the core backdrop for the daily life of a high

¹ used throughout this thesis in the North American sense.

school teacher, approaching the principal as a humble supplicant asking for an increase in my photocopy allotment. (As a teacher of AP English with a shortage of textbooks, my requirement for paper was tantamount to deforestation.) In the course of a prosaic denial, the principal noted that his leadership style had deteriorated to one little better than Mr. Bumble's in Oliver Twist. Sadly, the parallel to the Dickensian caricature was apt, and it occurred to me that there must be others to be drawn.

To any observer stumbling over unstable modern educational terrain, it must seem reasonable to assume that we are on the verge of considerable change in the administration of schooling in Canada. Curriculum is constantly diversified as it extends into new and explosively developing academic fields, while advocates for traditional studies attempt to fortify their diminishing dominance. A vastly accelerating information-based technology network refuses to be ignored any longer, and must be incorporated into the delivery of education, raising the possibility of a reduced dependence on the physical plant of schools. Increased pressure for accountability has led to new roles for parents and communities in the oversight of schools. All of this places great stress on a system which is more than a century old and riddled with stress fractures. It would be charming to imagine that the changing nature of educational leadership is being reflected in revised hiring practices as the patriarchal notion of what a principal 'should be' continues to wane. Fullan suggests that deep and sustained reform in education will require that new challenges be met head-on. In an evocative and much-italicized effort to delineate the emotional turmoil that administrators are subjected to, he attempts to quantify conflicting descriptors of the change forces confronting them:

On the one hand, *fear, anxiety, loss, danger, panic*; on the other, *exhilaration, risk-taking, excitement, improvements, energizing*. For better or for worse, change arouses emotions, and when emotions intensify, leadership is key (Fullan 1).

The aspiring student of leadership or administration theory is led to imagine that the changing trend is toward more dynamic administrators who embrace the idea that the mandate of the school system must be renegotiated if it is to efficiently deliver relevant services in the future. Unfortunately, this is exactly that type of saccharine rhetoric that is helping to maintain a pitifully inadequate status quo and avoid real change in education. As it stands, educational leaders are trapped by who they were and unable to redefine leadership in a manner that is consistent with an understanding of the fluid nature of the new topography of education. The modern student of educational leadership theory is caged on one hand by hollow yet eminently profitable reiterations of tired platitudes, and on the other by entirely impracticable scholarly treatises destined to be stored deep in the disused filing cabinets of academia.

If we accept then, for the moment, that reform in educational leadership is necessary and imminent, it seems reasonable to look back and review other comparable eras of renewal in education. Particularly useful is the dramatic Victorian advance into a genuinely accessible and publicly funded scheme, the principles of which concerning roles, structures, and administrative processes still underpin Canadian education, as reflected by authors such as Bezeau². Only by looking at the origins of the present system can we determine whether or not we have made false assumptions about the reform process and

² Bezeau, Lawrence M. Educational Administration for Canadian Teachers. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989.

the notion of principalship, such as the persistent belief that schools can be operated effectively as mechanical bureaucracies.

Authors such as Briggs³ and Altick⁴ have recognized the importance of using literature as a tool for exploring social and cultural history. Others, Like Calder⁵ and Collins⁶ have broadly documented the portrayal of schools in specific Victorian works. The focus of this thesis uses the understanding of educational leadership and characterizations of educational leaders in reform-oriented mid-to-late 19th century British literature to investigate the connections between such representations and the dire state of schooling during the ascendancy of the infrastructure that has become the bedrock of our instructional model. It strives to understand and demonstrate how literature can be used as a source for educational administration leadership studies, looking closely at the evolving role of the headmaster as a leadership figure. To this end, it examines, through a series of narrative vignettes, the context of the educational reform movement in Victorian British Literature, and explores the manner in which leadership figures and the complex relationships created through them are portrayed. Using this lens, its aim is to determine what construct of educational leadership can be created through thematic analysis to frame a discussion of the role of leadership figures in education, and to challenge the supposition that we have made great strides in the management of schooling.

³ Briggs, Asa. The Age of Improvement. 3rd. rev. ed. London: Whitefriars Press, 1962.

⁴ Altick, Richard D. Victorian People and Ideas. New York: Norton, 1973.

⁵ Calder, Angus. Charles Dickens. London: Penguin, 1971.

⁶ Collins, Phillip A. Dickens and Education. London: Macmillan, 1963.

There is consensus around the fact that Victorian novelists had a powerful voice in a society that was increasingly literate and interested in educating itself about the social and political issues that surrounded it. “The unorthodoxy, the habit of incisive criticism which had earlier characterized the thought of some of the nation’s greatest literature now spread from the prophets to some of the people” (Altick 16). The idea of promoting a social reform agenda was indisputably sound. As it has been said of Dickens:

His views were not given in the form of ordinary didactic treatises, but in the form of object lessons in the most entertaining of all stories. Millions have read his books, whereas but hundreds would have read them if they had been written in the form of direct, systematic exposition (Hughes xi).

During a time of dramatic growth in literacy, the novel was an efficient instrument with which to provoke discussion of social issues. Delivered in comprehensible contexts and with the popular hackneyed sentimentality so endemic to the narrative of the time, the Victorian novelist was in a strong and unprecedented position to catalyze reform.

This essay is heavily dependent on the use of primary source material to achieve its objectives, and addresses the following research questions:

- How is the need for change of the unreformed educational system addressed by Victorian novelists in the context of their works?
- How are the authors’ conceptions of educational leaders characterized?
- How do themes in educational leadership evolve through the descriptions, actions, and dialogue of headmaster figures?
- Is there evidence of literary works influencing educational policy?

- Does the construct of educational leadership formed through the analysis of Victorian British literature correspond to or inform any current philosophy of educational leadership?
- What does literature as a source bring to the discussion of educational leadership and how does it change the field?

Inherently tied as it is to primary source narrative literature, my work focuses on the use of thematic analysis as its predominant tool. Contextual support is drawn from literary criticism, historical documentation, and contemporary literature from educational leadership and administrative theory.

The foundation of this work is the analysis of leadership figures and the educational environments in which they operate in prominent novels of the Victorian period. A sampling of novels, rather than a single source, has been used in order to embrace the possible intertextuality of multiple sources. As Atkinson and Coffey note:

This is derived from contemporary literary criticism, in which context it is used to refer to the fact that literary texts, (such as novels) are not free-standing, and that they do not refer just to a fictional world. Rather, they refer, however implicitly, to other texts. They include other texts of the same genre, or other kinds of textual data. We can therefore analyse texts in terms of these intertextual relationships, tracing the dimensions of similarity and difference (57).

In this case, it will be seen that intertextual relationships can be traced between the novels examined, other contemporary works of the same type, legislative documents, and commentary in modern literature related to the field of educational leadership and administration theory.

It is estimated that more than 40,000 novels were created during the Victorian era (Altick 33) and this research deals only with a few of them. In order to optimize this slice of the available fiction, works dealt with within have been selected based on the following criteria:

- 1) The selected works' initial dates of publication fall within the three decades prior to the passage of the *Elementary Education Act* of 1870. This will place narrative in the context of reform. Novels such as Jane Eyre, which were published within the specified time period but, being retrospective in nature, are set earlier also meet this criterion. They are included to establish contextual breadth for the discussion of other novels, in this case, David Copperfield, Nicholas Nickleby, and Hard Times.
- 2) The selected works deal extensively with the description of the school environment of the time, discuss issues related to education, or have well-developed headmaster figures as significant characters.
- 3) The selected works enjoyed considerable popularity at the time of publication. This criterion is added in support of Altick's (67) notion that the novels which enjoyed the greatest success were those which most closely mirrored the social and political sentiments of the public.

Under the premise that novels written in the period preceding the passage of the *Elementary Education Act* are most likely to convey impressions of leaders at the key period of reformation, much data collection is focused on the works of Dickens, who was considered by many to be the foremost critic of education at the time (Smith⁷, Hughes⁸, Calder⁹). The discussion of some material from literary works prior to this period, such as selections from Charlotte Brontë, Swift, and Fielding is presented to establish a sense of the persistent themes that have existed in leadership issues through representations of schools in English literature.

In addition to Victorian novels, a sample survey of historical documents from the period is included to assist in the assembly of a contextual structure for the examination of leadership issues in education. The legislative history of Victorian education has been extremely well documented and frequently considered in modern literature, as it reflects the roots of most modern public education systems. Equally interesting, and perhaps just as useful, is some consideration of the correspondence of the novelists who have been chosen for this work. Thankfully, prolific correspondence (in the obvious absence of less durable forms of communication) exists in which authors discuss philosophy and criticism. The zeal with which these have been preserved has created a remarkable resource. The sheer proliferation of Victorian writing is astonishing:

As we read Dickens' letters, of which over 12,000 (presumably a mere fraction of the total) have been preserved, we are forced to believe that his days must have been forty-eight hours long, because in addition to writing a long series

⁷ Smith, Mabell S. *Studies in Dickens*. New York: Haskell House, 1972.

⁸ Hughes, James L. *Dickens as an Educator*. New York: Haskell House, 1902.

⁹ Calder, Angus. *Charles Dickens*. London: Penguin, 1971.

of novels and editing (in many cases extensively rewriting) the contributions to his weekly journals, he was active in public causes, in amateur theatricals, and as a platform reader. Trollope wrote some fifty novels, many of them while working full time as a post office inspector (Altick 98).

From the wealth of supporting documentation that has been left in the wake of this body of work, data have been collected to frame the historical background for this discussion.

Another aspect of this approach is the survey of contemporary literature in the field of leadership studies in education, with a specific emphasis on the modern conception of the role of the principal as an educational leader. In addition to much scholarly writing in this area, such as that of Greenfield¹⁰ and Hodgkinson¹¹ consideration is given to some of the popular resources published for the benefit of hopeful administrators and current principals. Literature of this type abounds. Books by authors such as Fullan, Sergiovanni and Starratt sell well, offering what is tantamount to self-help guides to bolster the weak self-esteem of floundering educational leaders. From the success of such manuals we can only assume that a significant proportion of modern educational leaders perceive that they are in need of some sort of refocusing in their careers (not enough of them are considering real estate). The most striking thing that can be learned from cross-referencing the portrayals of Victorian literary figures and the images generated by modern theorists is that the concepts being wrestled with remain fundamentally the same. There is a demonstrable overlap between contentious issues in the Victorian era and modern discussion. The fact that there has been so little growth over the course of a hundred years must again lead us to question the accuracy of many

¹⁰ Greenfield, Thomas B. and Peter Ribbins. Greenfield on Educational Administration. London: Routledge, 1993.

¹¹ Hodgkinson, Christopher. Administrative Philosophy: Values and Motivations in Administrative Life. Trowbridge: Redwood, 1996.

assumptions which have been made about the nature of leadership in education and its reform, such as the evolution of the role of the educational leaders in schools, the efficacy of the organisations to which they belong, and the nature of power relationships within them.

It is suggested here that the themes of novels are developed in at least three ways which are suited to thematic analysis. They are evolved through direct description of events and contextual matter such as setting, characterization, the introduction of dialogue, and through the narration of events. The multiple techniques used to set the agenda for the reader's experience of a novel and the sympathetic identification with its characters (without which it is contended that its message, however valid, would remain misconceived) pose a challenge which is met by combining the categorizing and contextualizing strategies suggested by Maxwell (79).

The novels of the period were replete with characterizations of educational institutions and leaders who personified all aspects of education, from benevolent and lofty goals to cruel and inhumane treatment of students. This research places an emphasis on the discussion of characters portrayed as leadership figures, regardless of their formal designation. Although these are typically headmasters, other figures occupying roles of direct authority over instruction, such as head teachers and board members are discussed. It is through the traits and behaviours of these characters that the values of reform-oriented authors of the time are reflected.

Given the extensive discussion of educational issues in Victorian Novels, analysis is centred on themes that have remained consistently present in the discipline, including the overall philosophy of education, the management of staff, discipline, instructional method, organization, and economic issues. These data have been organized in an effort to determine the thematic patterns that have informed the representation of headmaster figures, to construct an overall vision of the mantle of leadership figures intended by the authors, and to provide a lens through which to examine our own perception of modern educational leadership and administration theory.

CHAPTER TWO:

*In which an historical background is provided,
that the reader may better enjoy the succeeding
chapters.*

One of the challenges faced when discussing the Victorian era in even the most general terms is the extent to which the common perception of it has been romanticized. Perhaps because there is still such a strong connection with many of the issues it grappled with and the conventions it passed on to us, we tend to see it either as a quaint time characterized by the delicate interplay of manners within the landed elite or burgeoning middle class, or else a pitched battle for the extrication of the oppressed poor from the shackles of oppression, depending on our socio-political orientation and what we choose to read and view on public television.

In many respects, this familiarity is yet another tribute to the power of the Victorian novelist. The bombardment of "A&E" mini-series interpretations of Pride and Prejudice and its many contemporaries have shaped the public perception of the era, while academics still struggle with the almost unimaginable misery conveyed by Engels' Blue Books. Educators face a similar dilemma; we look back, perhaps as far as Ryerson in Canada, to see the face of the present system of public education. At once we are astonished by the notion that so much of our Victorian legacy has remained so viable for so long, while at the same time we are bemused to wonder how we can have advanced so little in our understanding of teaching, learning, and the relationship between them.

In a sense, everybody is an expert on education because they went to school; it is only necessary to look as far as the provincial government to see evidence of this level of expertise in action. While this common-ground mentality opens the door for tremendous social dialogue on educational issues, it also means that we fail to examine the inequities

and fallibilities of the institution because 'it worked for us'. It is almost as if criticism of education implies an admission of failure on the part of everyone who participated in it. Equally problematic is the indisputable truth that teachers, administrators, and for that matter, academics, are in too favoured a social position to be able critics of the field. All of these, after all, are among the most successful products of the system and therefore the least likely to level effective criticism at it. As Bourdieu suggests, there is a "...contribution made by the educational system to the reproduction of the structure of power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes" (487). It seems reasonable to assume that if they have attained an acceptable level of personal accomplishment, the model of pedagogy applied to them must have resonated on some level, even if only to drive them to reconcile it to their own intellect and motivation. Pointedly, the same problem is explored by Victorian novelists. Times change, it seems, but people fall behind. Educators today are struggling with anachronism in the same way that weary travellers suffer from jet lag. It's hard to stay awake, let alone keep up with any obligation to reflect and improve.

This leads to another pivotal problem faced by any researcher coming to terms with the British nineteenth century – the sheer volume of change that needs to be discussed in an era of such unprecedented activity. It is the breathtaking magnitude of upheavals occurring during the seventy years or so embraced by this project that has caused its tight specificity. Any broader analysis is impracticable if a substantive focus is to be maintained, and even then some digression is unavoidable. The Victorian era saw the blossoming of economy, industry, social awareness, activism, and a plethora of social

nightmares that were ill-considered as the increasing urbanization of British society was conceived and effected. The rabbit-warren row houses that must have seemed to have sprouted overnight and the pestilence that they brought with them, and the constant drive to increase production and exports at all costs to support an imperialist political mandate exacted a terrible cost from the working populace. The immediacy of the need for more labour to perform mind-numbing tasks in mills and factories and the pressure to improve education to keep innovation ahead of international competition caused unmanageable human catastrophes that we still see in the overseas factories of the United States' running shoe companies.

Rushworth Kidder, the American founder of the Institute of Global Ethics, and a highly-marketable speaker on the profitable organic muffin-and-philosophy conference circuit, suggests that technology leverages ethics and constantly causes shifts in our social paradigms. After explaining definitively why the Chernobyl disaster took place, he notes:

What's new, then, is not simply our knowledge. It's the sheer scale and power of our systems – scientific, technological, financial, governmental, educational, and so forth. Widespread, designed for great speed, often decentralized, such systems are increasingly susceptible to misuse or manipulation by a single individual making a wrong decision. Why is that fact so important? Simply because such systems leverage our ethics so highly. Like megaphones, they amplify small whispers of wrongdoing into vast bellows of amorality (35).

Kidder feels that “in our coolly technological age, we feel we've outgrown the need for an education rooted in philosophical wrestlings” (34) and that this notion has the potential to be the final ethical downfall of mankind. Other than being one of the rare authors to seriously use “coolly” as an adjective, Kidder's work is interesting in that it

draws heavily on Victorian literature for support – not as a direct logical progression but as a means to illustrate his ideas. In this aspect we will return to him in Chapter Five when authors who strip Victorian fiction out of context are discussed. Expansively alluding to the vast tapestry of human history, Kidder lets his internal monologue run away with him and asks:

Hasn't every age had its egregious and unconscionable actors, its endemic amorality, its towering selfishnesses? Are we any worse than our ancestors? Does not every generation envision some apparently ethical golden age of the past and contrast it with the moral corruption of the present? (34).

In addition to coming into contention for any prize awarded for the longest series of rhetorical questions outside a campaign speech, we are led to wonder whether the Victorian era could in any way be considered an 'ethical golden age'. In hindsight it seems unlikely, given even a cursory review of the literature of the period, which, if nothing else, would save Kidder a lot of trouble. While it would be foolhardy to attempt an extended analysis of nineteenth century history in a thesis of this scope, it is important to provide a brief historical overview, expanding occasionally on some of the major events and the legislation that surrounded them.

The conceptual framework of this project is founded on a consideration of the events of 1870 and works backwards from there. After 1870, as far as education is concerned, the rules of the game are set, and everything since has been minor tweaking and jockeying for position. It is a critical year for this project, having at once seen the untimely death of Charles Dickens and the vital signing into law of an Act of Parliament which finally led

to a true national system of education in Great Britain¹. It was an era of great change and transition, coupled with an increasing awareness of the political power held by the newly influential middle and working classes manifested in the demand for increased representation and reform in many aspects of public policy. It was a time when the iniquities that can be transmitted through the naked desire for wealth came to be recognized for what they were, and thanks in large measure to Charles Dickens, children came to be seen as individuals with their own set of needs to be addressed.

The social and legislative turmoil reflected by the likes of Eliot, Gaskell, Thackeray and Gissing was endemic to the time and transmitted to an increasingly literate society through many exceptional works of fiction that graphically illustrated the dark underside of economic prosperity, and demonstrably urged change.

In addition to poverty, disparity, and the political impotence of those most in need of intervention by policymakers, Victorian authors dealt commandingly with the unsatisfactory nature of educational institutions, responding to them through the depiction of school environments, the creation of unforgettable characters who put a face on the plight of childhood, and the illumination of the early loss of innocence in Britain during the nineteenth century. While it is not the mandate of this essay to provide a comprehensive discussion of the history of Victorian England, some review is needed to frame the thematic analysis of the novels presented later.

¹ Except as otherwise specified, historical background information in the introduction is drawn from Altick, Richard. D. Victorian People and Ideas. New York: Norton, 1973.

As participants in the explosive growth of what has been termed “The Information Age” we have become accustomed to, if not entirely comfortable with, the progressivist fallacy that progress and history are undergoing a constant and increasing acceleration. We are victims of temporal inertia perpetually made aware of the almost immediate obsolescence of much that is introduced around us: our century might one day be measured by the transitional nature of our existence. According to Houghton, this notion of transition is one that we can find paralleled by nineteenth century Britain. He points out that perception of mankind occupying a stepping stone position between two ages:

...is the basic and almost universal conception of the period. And it is peculiarly Victorian. For although all ages are ages of transition, never before had men thought of their own time as an era of change *from* the past *to* the future. Indeed, in England that idea and the Victorian period began together (Houghton 1).

The importance of the novel and its relationship to socio-political history is clearly evident in the following summary of critical nineteenth century events from Johnson and Johnson’s useful book The Social Impact of the Novel. This overview is offered to provide an orientation to Great Britain’s history between 1837 and 1870; events of particular significance will then be examined at greater length:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1837 | Poor harvests throughout the British Isles create even greater hardships for the poor. |
| | The “People’s Charter,” presented by the Chartists, who were trade unionists, calls for an end to discrimination in legal and political arenas. Their six points include a demand for the vote for all males over twenty-one; election by secret ballot; and annual parliamentary elections. Their appeal is refused. |
| | Thomas Carlyle’s <i>French Revolution, a History</i> is published in which he enlarges on the problems of the poor. |
| 1837-39 | Charles Dickens publishes <i>Oliver Twist</i> serially (Johnson 77). |

Oliver Twist, while it does not specifically embrace a discussion of educational philosophy, is significant in that its protagonist is a child who does not advance into adulthood in the course of its plot. The loss of innocence became a consistent theme for Dickens, and as Collins notes, “This recurrent view of childhood as pathetic has an obvious relevance to Dickens’s educational ideas, and the almost universal admiration it then evoked was an important element in his contemporary influence” (173).

- 1837-1867 These years are defined by laissez-faire economics and the “Victorian Compromise.”
- 1837-1901 Queen Victoria’s reign dominates most of the century.
- 1838-39 The Anti-Corn Law League is organized, led by reformers Richard Cobden and John Bright.
- 1839 A Chartist Petition, recommending voting reforms of the People’s Charter, is presented and again refused after hundreds are injured and arrested.
- 1839-43 Britain engages in the first Opium War with China, which tries to halt the importation of opium into China.
- 1840s Because of widespread poverty throughout the British Isles, many writers call the decade the “Hungry Forties.”
- 1841-73 David Livingstone maps uncharted areas of Africa, and his efforts there as a medical missionary endear him to his African patients and encourage others to go on errands of mercy to Africa. Unintentionally, however, he also helps to open Africa to European exploitation.
- 1842 A demonstration on the part of the Chartists is two miles long. Child labour protection laws extend for the first time to children working in the mines.
- 1844 English tailors publish a report regarding clothing made and contaminated in the slums.
- 1845 Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sybil, or the Two Nations*, is published, showing that England is composed of two worlds – one of

the rich and one of the poor.

- 1845-47 John Henry Cardinal Newman, once an Oxfordian and Anglican convert to Roman Catholicism, publishes his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.
- 1846 In response to widespread starvation, Prime Minister Robert Peel repeals English Corn Laws, excepting small tariffs on wheat.
- The "Ten Hours Bill" is passed, limiting workers to a maximum number of work hours a day.
- 1847 Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is published (Johnson 77-78).

Jane Eyre is dealt with extensively in Chapter Four, as it contains not only superb descriptions of life in the 'Lowood Institution', but also addresses the reforms that were undertaken in order to improve that establishment. It deals at length with the doctrine of religious stoicism in schools maintained in part by charities and parishes.

- 1848 William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is published. The setting is England before and after the Battle of Waterloo.
- Revolutions wage throughout Europe.
- Mrs. (Elizabeth) Gaskell's *Mary Barton* is published.
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *The Communist Manifesto* is published in London. It issues the call: "Workers of all countries, Unite!"
- Another Chartist petition asks for broadening of suffrage. It is again turned aside, but all except the call for annual parliamentary elections will eventually become law.
- 1849 Britain adds the Punjab to its crown of colonial jewels.
- 1850 Charles Kingsley's pamphlet on the distressing conditions under which clothes are tailored is published as "Cheap Clothes and Nasty."

Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* is published.

Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* is published (Johnson 78).

David Copperfield provides readers with some of Dickens' most colourful and fearful educational settings and characterizations. In the form of Mr. Creakle, the archetypal villain-headmaster is portrayed, creating a standard against which all others can be judged.

- 1851 By mid-century there are more industrial than agricultural workers in England. The industrialism, an explosion in population, laissez-faire economics, and the unquestioned profit motive create unparalleled slums and disease-ridden living conditions in industrial towns. Workers are housed in decrepit shacks and unheated basements. It is not unusual to find as many as 215 people who must use one toilet.
- 1852 British imperialism seems secured with its final successful fight for control of Burma.
- 1853 Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* is published.
- 1854 Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* is published (Johnson 78).

Hard Times represents a departure from Dickens' earlier educational themes. No longer preoccupied merely with the patently cruel and unjust treatment of children, he uses it as a platform to examine and condemn the utilitarian trend in schooling during the High Victorian period. Within, he considers the instructional methodology of his subject school at length, including the long-term impact of such strategies on the emotional development of the students.

- 1854-56 Britain fights in the Crimean War.
- 1857 England's Ecclesiastical Courts are abolished. This automatically ends the requirement of seeking Church permission to receive a divorce.

In the Sepoy Rebellion, Indian revolutionaries war unsuccessfully against the British.

- 1859 Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* is published.
- John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* provides the theoretical basis for his support of civil liberties.
- 1860 Benjamin Jowett's *Essays and Reviews* is published. This controversial Anglican minister translates and interprets the work of the Apostles, contributing further to a re-evaluation of older religious concepts.
- 1861 George Eliot's *Silas Marner* is published.
- 1863 T.H. Huxley's *Zoological Evidence of Man's Place in Nature* is published, a work that more than any other clarifies and gives credence to Darwin.
- J.S. Mill publishes *Utilitarianism*, arguing for the public ownership of natural resources.
- 1867 The Fenians, a secret Irish society, work to overthrow British rule of Ireland. The charismatic Irish leader in Parliament is Charles Stuart Parnell.
- Benjamin Disraeli is largely responsible for the passage of the Reform Bill of 1867, extending the suffrage to many working-class men.
- 1867-95 The multivolume work by Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, is published.
- 1868-94 William Gladstone, leader of the Liberal Party, is the prime mover in reforms. For fourteen of these years, he is prime minister of England.
- 1869 Physicist John Tyndall, along with Darwin and Huxley, promotes the New Science by disproving the theory of spontaneous generation.
- The Corn Laws are totally abolished.
- 1869-89 Henry Morton Stanley explores Africa, claiming areas of that continent for England and working for King Leopold of Belgium to exploit resources there.

1870 The Education Act of 1870 made elementary education compulsory for all (Johnson 78-79).

Although Victoria herself ascended to the throne in 1837, the commencement of the era is usually measured from the passage of the first *Reform Bill* in 1832. The High Victorian period was inaugurated by the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1850, and the late years are dated from the passage of the second *Reform Bill* of 1867, which extended voting privileges to the male working class. Throughout these periods, novels critically followed the development of social and political change.

The *Reform Bill* of 1832 can be regarded as a damage control measure adopted to placate an agitated public clamouring for reform. While the measure granted suffrage to the rising middle class under the stewardship of Prime Minister Charles Grey by reducing the quantity of property a citizen needed to own in order to vote, it still meant that only twenty percent of the population could exercise this right, and played into the hands of mill owners who were not interested in the reform of working-class living conditions (Johnson 77). As Briggs notes:

The Whigs, exclusive and aristocratic though they were in their attitude to government, were ready to accept political innovations. Indeed, they believed that unless the privileged sections of the community were prepared to adapt and 'improve', waves of dangerous and uncontrollable innovation would completely drown the existing social order. While their opponents in 1830 believed that a considerable measure of parliamentary reform would lead to a national catastrophe, the Whigs maintained that only a considerable measure could prevent a catastrophe (Briggs, *Modern England* 239).

Briggs goes on to point out that Grey felt that social change had to be seriously addressed because of the "universal feeling' that reform was necessary at the time" (239). This

notion that reform was undertaken rather reluctantly in the face of popular pressure is common in much discussion of the legislation. Incorporating some redistribution of House of Commons seats,

The choice of new constituencies was not determined simply by a population formula but by the desire to have a fair representation in Parliament of the interests of 'manufacturing capital and skill'. The composition of the new House of Commons would thus facilitate a more careful attention to the problems of a changing society. Most important of all, *not* to introduce a carefully-thought out plan of reform would be to open the door to an uncontrollable popular demand for reform, which would be certain to destroy the constitution of both government and society (Briggs 243).

In addition to the parliamentary debate, the public was becoming much more aware of the ramifications of such discussion:

The experience of such political movements as those at the time of the Reform Bill agitation in the early 1830s and those associated with the Chartists during the years 1836 to 1848 was a very real education itself for the illiterate millions of the working class. They learnt new aims among which was the demand for education, a demand based on its individual, rather than its social, benefits (Musgrave 9).

It is apparent that the political climate of the time must have seemed an excellent one to authors hoping to forward a reform-oriented agenda through their work, with an eye to 'tipping the scale'.

The passage of the *First Reform Bill* coincided with the continued rise of Great Britain to economic supremacy, with the ruling classes becoming dimly aware that the rising pressure of competition from Germany and the United States that would lead to its downfall. In the Late Victorian period, the strength of the church over people was beginning to fade as Darwin's theory of evolution led to an atmosphere of secular scepticism bred from the unavoidable confrontation between religion and natural science.

Moreover, “the unorthodoxy, the habit of incisive criticism which had earlier characterized the thought of some of the nation’s greatest literary figures now spread from the prophets to some of the people” (Altick 16).

Change was underway: the *Factory Act* of 1833 introduced the first steps to ameliorate the deplorable conditions in the nation’s rapidly expanding manufacturing sectors. It is difficult to imagine the physical hardship and punishing monotony of life in the factory.

During the decades when factories went unregulated, men, women, and children worked at monotonous tasks, the forerunner of the twentieth century’s production line, for as many as fourteen or even sixteen hours a day, six days a week. They were deafened by the noise of the steam engines and the clattering of the machinery and stifled in air that was not only laden with dust but, in the absence of ventilation, was heated to as high as eighty-five degrees (Altick 43).

Kitson-Clark is quick to point out the many benefits that were accruing to the working class from industrialization, from steam transportation to the availability of washable clothes and soap. He goes on to contend:

Yet none of this establishes the fact that the Industrial Revolution was a benevolent movement designed by far-sighted philanthropists for the good of humanity. It probably should be considered as nearly void of moral significance as a change in the weather which happens to produce in some year a good harvest; probably the human agents who promoted it were in many cases as innocent of any far-sighted visions for humanity as the human agents who caused the increase in population (94).

The *Factory Act* stated that no children under nine were permitted to work in mills, while children between nine and thirteen were restricted to eight hours of work per day. Those under thirteen had to attend ‘school’ for a period of two hours per day. Regarding the schooling, it is important to realize that “Compliance in many factories was limited to setting up a classroom in the boiler room and appointing the stoker, a crippled former

mill hand, or some other illiterate to do the teaching” (Altick 47). Additionally, “Often factory inspectors who were checking whether employers were fulfilling the educational provisions of the Factory Acts were not signed with the teacher’s signature, but with his mark...” (Musgrave 10). Altick further notes that the *Factory Act*’s provisions, “considered drastic at the time, suggested the magnitude of the evils to be remedied” (46).

A further *Factory Act* in 1844 again reduced the work day of children to six and a half hours, that of women to twelve, and yet paradoxically decreased to eight the age at which children could undertake employment in the factories. Even more bitterly disputed by mill owners, the *Ten Hours’ Act* of 1847 limited women and children to ten hours of factory work per day. This caused uproar among industrial owners because restricting the length of time that women and children could work effectively reduced the men’s hours as well, as they could not complete their tasks unassisted. At this time, novels such as Gaskell’s Mary Barton and North and South vividly brought the conditions of hands including women and children onto the public agenda.

The final, and most critical piece of important legislation to be passed prior to 1870 was the *Second Reform Act* of 1867. Driven on to the agenda by public demand,

The most numerous protesters were the workingmen themselves. They may not have appreciated the serene logic of political economy; they may not, indeed, have known what political economy was or the names of its leading apologists. But they knew all too well that they were ill-fed, ill-housed, ill-clothed, not to say recurrently out of work – and they were persuaded they knew who was to blame (Altick 135).

The *Act* still based enfranchisement on the possession of property, but in terms so liberal that almost any male householder or lodger was eligible. This in turn led to a groundswell of calls for reform in the next election.

The success of incisive and often bitter social criticism found in Victorian novels suggests that the issues they portrayed were tailored to the opinions of the reading public, which was expanding rapidly as education became more widely available and overall literacy rates began to rise. Based on the ability to write one's name on a marriage register, Altick suggests that overall literacy rose from approximately 67% (male) and 51% (female) in 1841 to 97% for both genders in 1900 (60). Despite the "silliness of a great deal of the reading matter that the steam presses ran off" (Kitson-Clark 93), the demand for literature must have seemed insatiable, and authors like Dickens and Brontë used it as a tool to keep education at the forefront of the public mind.

Throughout the early nineteenth century, schooling for young children was carried on largely under the auspices of the church, enabled by a system of grants from the state.

Many of the schools were 'monitorial' with their aim being:

...to teach the bare three R's to working class children so that they could receive the faith. In addition, girls were sometimes taught a little needlework. Obedience was the main quality of character to be inculcated, since this was seen by many as a social necessity if the growing cities were to be kept free of rebellion during and after the Napoleonic wars. Given the aims and the spirit of the times this was one possible means of channelling resources into an educational system for the masses (Musgrave 20).

Under this system, illustrated well in Jane Eyre's Lowood Institution, one teacher could provide a lesson to a group of student monitors, who would then in turn deliver it to

groups of students. This enabled curriculum to be disseminated as cheaply as possible to a large number of learners, in accord with the emergent utilitarian spirit of the day.

In 1836, David Stow published his 'Training System' which drew from the works of continental theorists and proposed a system of class teaching as a more effective model than the monitorial model. In 1839, a Committee of the Privy Council was formed to administer grants of up to 30,000 pounds to societies providing education, and Dr. J. P. Kay-Shuttleworth was appointed as the first true educational administrator. Among many insights, Shuttleworth recognized from his travels in Europe that it was essential to address the training of teachers if better education was to be achieved, eventually establishing the concept of pupil-learners, similar to the student teaching method that is still employed to this day:

Kay-Shuttleworth had visited Holland whilst a Poor Law Commissioner and seen how elementary school teachers learnt their job by undergoing a form of apprenticeship. He had briefly tried out this pupil-teacher system in a workhouse school in Norfolk. He realized that the first priority in any expansion of the English educational system was to improve the quality and supply of teachers. When he became Secretary of the Committee of Privy Council he set about this as his major task (Musgrave 21).

From 1840, school inspectors were appointed to determine how well schools which received government grants were performing, and in 1856 an Education Department was created to handle the ever-increasing administrative burden. Still, the Newcastle Commission of 1861 found that out of a child population of 2.5 million only 1.5 million were in school. Class size was a pressing issue, and schools built in the 1850s generally aimed for a maximum ratio of one teacher per 150 students (Musgrave 23). The overcrowding of classes is a recurrent theme in the descriptions of schools of mid-

nineteenth century, particularly those of most questionable repute (repute, in this case, being a question of degree) such as Salem House in David Copperfield and Dotheboys Hall in Nicholas Nickleby. Continuing efforts to develop some sort of consistency in the delivery of education, a newly centralized curriculum was also explored, although it was hardly comprehensive:

The Newcastle Commission defined education in terms of the ability to 'read a common narrative', writing 'a letter that shall be both legible and intelligible', and 'knowing enough of ciphering to make out, or test the correctness of a common shop bill', together with a little geography and the ability 'to follow the allusions and arguments of a plain Saxon sermon' (Musgrave 36).

There was further pressure to improve the mind of the underprivileged in the 1850s on the grounds that a reasonably well-informed and literate workforce was required to meet the threat from foreign competition, specifically from Germany and the United States. The 1860s saw expansion in the provision of services impeded by bitter debate over the religious nature of instruction, with factions contending for non-secular or denominational schools actually preventing the construction of schools while the argument raged. As noted above, legislation had restricted the use of child labour, but many children, prohibited from work by law, were also not attending any sort of formalized instruction. Of children between three and twelve in Manchester in 1865, 6% were at work, 40% at school, and 54% at neither (Musgrove 64).

The *Second Reform Act* of 1867 sparked a chain reaction of reform. It enfranchised the urban working classes as voters (including a substantial body of nonconformists) who voted the Liberals into power, leading to the introduction of the *Elementary Education Act* of 1870, with the aim of bridging the shortfalls in the publicly subsidized voluntary

system. Where religious institutions were unable to provide services, the state would do so, providing elementary schools under the guidance of elected School Boards. This was followed by an ambitious building program, and elementary education became compulsory in 1880, with further legislation in the form of the *Education Act* of 1902 providing the restructuring that framed England for more than one hundred years, replacing the ad hoc school boards with Local Education Authorities, which were given power over the provision of education of an elementary and 'other than elementary' nature. Eventually, this would lead to further legislation in 1944 dividing public schools into the familiar forms of 'grammar', 'modern', and technical institutions (Dent 34).

Throughout the era of Victorian educational reform, the voices of great authors and poets were consistently among its most ardent advocates. Matthew Arnold, among others, was a staunch defender of the need for meaningful public education, as opposed to the factory preparation centres described by Dickens in Hard Times. He suggested that if a mandate for public education was to be truly valuable, it must break away from the teleological ideologies that were too often its impetus, ideologies that seemed to suggest that if measures needed to be adopted to placate the public, they might as well be useful to the economic elite. Arnold felt that only through diversification could such an enterprise succeed:

Against this background and drawing on his experiences as an inspector of schools (1851-86), Arnold pleaded above all else for a genuine national education system which would go far towards guaranteeing the achievement of his main purpose. He disliked views of elementary education which concentrated on the commonplace and the practical; he attacked the 'commercial academies' of the middle classes on the grounds that they were designed simply to enable children to 'get on in the world'; he criticized equally strongly

the limitations of public schools, particularly those which were mainly concerned with turning out 'gentlemen' (Briggs, *Age* 478).

It is to be noted that Dickens, a highly visible figure, never articulated a coherent vision for a publicly supported system of education in anywhere near as much detail as one might expect. He was "not thinking of a state-wide system of education as we understand it today, but of a special class of children that he wished to become wards of the state" (Manning 172). It has been said that while Dickens did not really initiate any of the movements under way in Britain to establish schooling for all, he certainly gave it additional momentum by providing a deeper understanding of the true cost of not doing so:

At the outset it may be said that Dickens contributed a unique picture of the elementary schools of his day, making public exposure of the intolerable abuses which were current of the vestiges of them which remained (Manning 202).

The novels of Dickens and his contemporaries appeared at a time in British history when each printed word added to the maelstrom of pressures on the government to undertake change. They contextualized the struggle for the literary public, and demonstrated the clear brutality of a social order rife with abuses.

The ubiquity of the Victorian novel is astonishing. It has been estimated that some 40,000 novels were written during the Victorian period to cater to an increasingly literate public, many of which drew attention to the cost that industrialism was exacting amid the working classes. Novels such as Dickens' Hard Times (1854), Brontë's Shirley (1849), and Gaskell's Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1854-55) illustrated the conditions that were prevalent in many of the nation's factories, and motivated their

readership to take an increased interest in public affairs . These novels underscored the shocking revelations that had been made public in Engels' Blue Books (1842-43), which graphically described the experiences of five year old boys and girls labouring in the complete darkness of coal mines, as well as women in the last stages of pregnancy toiling as cart-pullers. The need for reform had been brought onto the public agenda before, but in the High Victorian era the face of hardship in novels galvanised public opinion and created sympathy for suffering and sense of empowerment that was altogether fresh. Dealing with the impact of schools and education on societal conflict, this basic principle of questioning the purpose and role of the school is the same one that we face today.

CHAPTER THREE:

*Relating to matters of literary criticism, with visits
from many illustrious authors.*

In 1919, Henry Burrowes Lathrop published an entertaining guide for the readers of the 'modern' novel which endeavoured to explain, in high prosaic style, why longer works of fiction had become exponentially more popular over the last half-decade, beginning with a sentimental glance at the displacement of works of philosophy, science, and theology which had been so unapologetically tossed aside. He eventually concludes:

One reason for the popularity of the novel is that it is a loose and flexible form of literature, -- that its field has no definite boundaries, so that one steps easily into drama, romance, while yet the novel has a distinguishable form and a central tendency (11).

Apparently warming to the novel as he hits his stride, and after several pages of rumination about the relatively late emergence of the novel as a dedicated literary genre, he later determines that:

The novel, then, came late because it is the expression of conditions and ideas which had no existence until modern times. It is the most free, most flexible, the most various form of literature; it offers the highest possibility for the exhibition of character independent of circumstance, and thus it exalts the worth of the individual human soul. It offers the freest play for the humorous observation of the eccentricities of life and the panorama of society. It gives the opportunity of a minutely accurate psychological truth; it may be the most scientific of imaginative writing. More than any verse, it may feel social wrong and grief (32).

Although perhaps not representative of the type of cutting edge monograph analysis of literature available to any student perusing the stacks of SFU's library, Lathrop's work, when stripped to its essential purpose, remains relevant. Removed to the realm of imagination and enhanced by characters who are larger than life, the Victorian novel reflected the concerns of the burgeoning populace in a more palatable and appreciable form than any other type of literature. It continues to hold a social mirror before us and urge us on toward reforms which either did not take place at the time of writing, or in the

case of education, were left substantially incomplete. As Altick suggests, “It is impossible to tell how much the fiction and, to a smaller extent, the poetry of the period, including such philippics as Carlyle’s *Past and Present*, had to do with arousing the nation’s conscience” (Altick 47). While post-Victorian novels continued to exert significant influence on society, the nineteenth century was perhaps the last epoch in which the genre reigned supreme before being displaced by increasingly dominant forms of alternative media.

The Victorian period can best be seen as an age of transition, similar in many respects to the state of society today, suspended between high ideals and dashed hopes – a tension that was well-illustrated in the field of education and its administration. Considering the competing philosophies that underscored the temper of the times, Houghton notes, “This evidence, and much more could be given, suggests that continuity rather than contrast is the conclusion to be drawn from comparing the Victorians with ourselves” (Houghton 13). Nowhere is this more visible than in the social pressure and emerging legislation in support of schooling, where the gap between the dissociated and diffused approach to public education coalesced, by 1870, into a system of legitimate, if fragile, infrastructure to support public instruction similar to our own.

The novels this project focuses on are replete with rich description, broad character development and colourful vignettes which clearly establish a critical focus on educational leadership in the period leading up to the passage of the *Elementary Education Act*. Although Houghton claims that among the general public “doubt never

reached the point of positive or terminal skepticism” (13) during the Victorian era, the condemnation of education and its leaders in the literature of the period is damning. This thesis uses the thematic analysis of narrative to encourage a critical dialogue between past and present, and draw forth the value of Victorian writers’ ascerbic criticism of the system of which they witnessed the birth. Rather than offering a summary analysis of the educational leader’s role in Victorian literature, I intend to facilitate a different understanding of our relationship to it.

To the modern reader, many of the tracts in nineteenth century novels related to education may seem unnecessarily heavily handed, even dogmatic, in their criticism of a system that is so clearly being branded as corrupt, anachronistic, inefficient, and plagued by leaders who are poster models for those and many other patently reprehensible qualities. Houghton, in his analysis of readership, reminds us that “the dogmatism not only of critics but of all Victorian writers was fostered by the ignorance of the audience. The new reading public...had much less knowledge than the analogous audience would have today” (141). This is an astounding claim in itself, given the blinding ignorance demonstrated towards educational issues by both the modern public and its elected representatives, and as such difficult to accept if not refute outright. While granted access to a greater range of information than our Victorian counterparts, this very bombardment inhibits awareness. It is enough for most people to maintain a grasp of general current events without examining educational legislation in detail. Even if one could do so, the fluid nature of the legislative environment, as witnessed by the B.C. government’s recent indecisive management of the British Columbia College of Teachers

fiasco² and constant shifting curriculum implementation goals³ make it difficult to keep track . Both examples reflect the difficulty that the government has faced in maintaining a uniform mandate under public pressure. The resulting confusion is enough to keep even teachers (whom we would hope are paying attention) off balance. In fairness, at least the average member of the public today has the questionable benefit of being a product of the system that they criticize, a luxury unavailable to their the vast bulk of middle class Victorian readers struggling to come to terms with the revised vision of contemporary education provided for them through the interpretive lens of the novel.

Any analysis of literary texts must breed questions of hermeneutics, and there are several pitfalls associated with the interpretation of Victorian texts, not least among them the yawning lapse of time between publication and the contemplated analytical discussion. In general, there is no difficulty presented by the language itself; it is perhaps more prosaic and punctuated with terms have receded into relative obsolescence, but diction and form remain eminently readable with no loss of nuance. Denotative meanings of most of the text remain the same, and connotation is still clear to a reader of average perception. Fortunately, we are the direct beneficiaries of a literary heritage which has remained, in many respects, firmly rooted in Victorian narrative principles. Comfortingly for the thematic analyst and distressingly for everybody else, the issues that are grappled with by Victorian authors are still socially relevant, making the analytical process less enigmatic.

² British Columbia Teachers' Federation. "BC College of Teachers becomes BC College Against Teachers." BCTF News Release: April 23, 2004.

³ British Columbia Ministry of Education. "The Graduation Program 2004." Victoria: Queen's Printer, 2003.

Despite the uncompromising lucidity of the texts, the consideration of literature that was published a century and a half ago requires a refocusing on the part of the reader, an orientation to a world view which is similar to ours, and yet intensely geared to the address of social and political issues which are, despite their direct relationship to those we face, distorted by the passage of time.

As the vast body of scholarship in this area testifies, there is tremendous scope for interpretation of various social aspects of the Victorian prose and poetry; the inherent risk of decontextualization is especially problematic, and is, in itself, fertile research ground for the theorist in pursuit of educational literature. Drawing literary references out of context and using them to support whatever leadership panacea is the mantra of the week is a pastime apparently second only to rhetorical infighting – duelling through periodical publication - for many academics writing in the fields of educational administration and leadership theory. Comprehension of the text should not be an issue for even the uninitiated novice – but critical interpretation remains a more complex realm.

The perception of the average reader's ability to critically evaluate the material he or she reads is held in low esteem by authors such as Altick, who maintains that:

...the great reading public is made up of people who want to be amused or instructed without pain, cost, or obligation. They want what they read to be custom made for them. It must contain few words they do not understand, no allusions to anything they have not permanently learned early in high school, no ideas that would force them to do any serious thinking (Altick, *Preface to Critical* 21).

Having delivered that sharp rap on the knuckles to what high school teachers (and here I speak from experience) are always condescendingly referring to as 'the unqualified reader',⁴ it must be accepted that a countless number of Victorian novels were produced largely as entertainment pieces, written to provide broadcast amusement for the newly literate middle class. The works forming the basis of this research are those which, while they possess significant narrative escapism, tell of social and cultural truths and demand reform through the skillful manipulation of plot and character. The assumption that must be made of these novels is that the author is genuine in his or her desire to instruct us about our world, and offer us insight into our relationship to society. Altick suggests:

His intention is not to deceive; on the contrary, it is to offer his readers a vivid experience, the essence of which is the transmutation of life, of actuality, into an imaginative adventure. He may wish to present before our inward eye a person or scene that he himself has either actually witnessed or imagined, and to present it with as much color and credibility as he can; or he may wish to play upon our emotions, so as to make us feel as he has felt concerning love or death or religious devotion; or he may wish to communicate an intellectual idea to us in such terms that we cannot help apprehending its force and truth (*Art of Literary*, 28).

All of these factors are displayed in many Victorian writers' works. Dickens, especially, strove to create vivid, powerful scenes in his novels that drive home the iniquities of a social structure of which he was keenly observant. This is especially true of many of his schoolroom vignettes, which were based on his broad range of traumatic experiences as a child and later on his infiltration of corrupt Yorkshire schools as a journalist. The sections of novels with which this essay will deal serve not only as narrative passages that fire the imagination, but also as windows onto another time.

⁴ Doubtless this is a subconscious nod to the notoriously haughty literary critic Laurence Perrine, on whose anthology of fiction and criticism *Story and Structure* most high school teachers did, and their students still do, cut their teeth.

As noted earlier, any interpretation of text gives rise to questions of hermeneutics. In the analysis of the Victorian novel, however, the basic frames of reference – the universality of human experience and the filter of a common cultural background - allow us to continue to accurately interpret the intentions of the author and receive the message relayed through the text. As will be shown, there are few educational leaders in nineteenth century British literature from which the modern schoolchild could not draw a parallel with a teacher or principal of one's own immediate experience. Educationally speaking, there is little to find in the Victorian British novel that does not still make sense, and given the authors' ability to manipulate circumstance and guide us toward his or her targeted social imperative, scant clarity of meaning is lost to the modern reader.

The controlling feature of this thesis is the extrapolation of the lessons that can be drawn for the study of modern educational leadership from the novels of Brontë, Gaskell, and predominantly Dickens. This is challenging, as it necessarily involves the reconciliation of the Victorian drive for reform through the lens of modern leadership and administration theory. In attempting such an analysis, it is recognized that the interpretation of literature is, like culture itself, in flux. As Lionel Trilling said of poetry:

The poem as it has existed in history, as it has lived its life from Then to Now, as it is a thing which submits itself to one kind of perception in one age and another kind of perception in another age, as it exerts in each age a different kind of power (186).

Recently, Suchoff noted that “American perceptions of cultural criticism, particularly the determining works of Lionel Trilling, were powerfully shaped by liberal readings of Dickens, Melville, and Kafka” (3). He goes on to contend that while the impact of the

Victorian novel on mass culture is undeniable, even contemporary criticism has “shared cold war modernism’s limited view of its critical power.” Thus, before literature can be considered from a modern critical perspective, the interpreter must attempt to trace the shifts in meaning that have taken place over time to avoid underestimation of the work in question’s impact at its time of publication. In my discussion of educational leadership issues this is not as inhibitive as it might at first seem. In concurrence with Houghton, it can be suggested that although public perception may have shifted around it, the classroom and the educational leader have changed little enough over the last century to render comparisons between the Victorian conception of educational leadership and our own current and viable. In addressing similar concerns with the relevance of the study of literature as foundation for sociological research, Spearman asks, “If literature is tied to a particular social setting, how is it that no literature which is incomprehensible to us has been found?” (Spearman 5).

In her lucid discussion of the period’s novelists, the comparison of Victorian society and our own is pursued with vigour in much of Gertrude Himmelfarb’s work. In fact, she contends in The De-moralization of Society that we cannot even claim to have remained on a par with the Victorians; in our slide from “virtues to values” we have retained much of the infrastructure inherited from the 19th century while casting aside the ethos that rendered it socially useful. Himmelfarb is cautious not to confuse the moral values of the Victorians with the social realities they faced; an important distinction that is still serviceable to us. She suggests that Dickens, Trollope, Ruskin, Carlyle and Arnold must

be viewed primarily as moralists, and not merely critics of the “vulgarity, philistinism, and intolerance” of their time (13). She goes on to point out to contemporary scholars:

Similarly, Dickens’s novels, so far from refuting the idea of Victorian values, actually reinforce it. Those who cite some of his more memorable characters (Fagin or Bill Sykes) as evidence of an amoral or immoral “underclass” (another anachronistic word – “dangerous class,” the Victorians would have said) miss Dickens’s point, which was precisely to contrast these “low” characters to those among the very poor who made a determined effort to be moral, law-abiding, and self-supporting. If we remember Dickens for his gothic characters and scenes, we should also remember him for those other characters and scenes that meant so much to him and his readers... (14).

Himmelfarb considers today’s “New Victorians” to be a poorly replicated copy of their past counterparts. Any educator striving to encourage students to determine their own identities amid the thundering of the New Right’s curricular battering ram could clearly identify with this. Consider the eerie proposed “Character Education” curriculum that presents students with twenty personal characteristics that they should strive to emulate, including thrift and honesty. It reads much as the handbook for Orwell’s “Junior Anti-Sex League” might be expected to, and lends a great deal of support to Himmelfarb’s arguments. She concludes her book with a dire warning:

Today’s moralists have that same far-away fanatical glint in their eye – “telescopic morality,” we might call it. Telescopic morality disdains the mundane values of everyday life as experienced by ordinary people- the “bourgeois values” of family, fidelity, chastity, sobriety, personal responsibility. Instead it embodies a new moral code that is more intrusive and repressive than the old because it is based not on familiar, accepted principles, but on new and recondite ones, as if designed for another culture or tribe (Himmelfarb 261).

Therefore, if we are in the midst of a massive misinterpretation of the Victorian message, nothing could be more timely than a reframing of its original intent.

Publication of the novels considered in this research occurred as middle class readership and literacy continued to blossom, and packaged social demons such as economic disparity, rabid bureaucracy, and a pitifully inadequate and often cruel system of education into narrative that was readily identifiable, and yet mythical enough to allow for dispassionate analysis. In his consideration of the relationship between Dickens and the prevailing 'culture of consumption', Suchoff noted that:

Popular figures such as Little Nell were recognized in his analysis as sentimental and regressive representatives of a pre-bourgeois era shaped for middle class consumption. Such mythical characters, however, who contributed so significantly to Dickens' popularity, were able to present the distortions of the exchange principle with critical force (25).

Suchoff's analysis, while geared as a critique of modernist Cold War approaches to the interpretations of Dickens' social impact, is important in that it considers in depth the fact that Victorian authors viewed themselves as purveyors of literary commodity, tailoring their products to match current political climates and build upon them to increase sales. It also recognizes the potential for powerful characterization to influence public sentiment. This idea, which will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Four, has been presented by many authors and underscores Bakhtin's notion of the efficiency of the polyphonic point of view and narrative voice in demonstrating the ethnographic and historiographical value of the novel. As Hirschkop and Shepherd note of Bakhtin's methodology:

In the development of the ethical import of the concept of polyphony, 'distance' is the hinge upon which everything phenomenologically observable swings. The analytical categories used to describe narrative reveal an inter-subjective plane of interaction upon which the author's characters appear to have a consciousness distinct from the author's himself: they lie at a distance, have a position of their own. Distance allows them to speak in their own 'voice', to utter their own 'word'(118).

Bakhtin notes in his discussion of Dostoevsky:

Self-consciousness, as the artistic dominant in the construction of the hero's image, is by itself sufficient to break down the monologic unity of an artistic world – but only on condition that the hero, as self-consciousness, is really represented and not merely expressed, that is, does not fuse with the author, does not become the mouthpiece for his own voice; only on condition, consequently, that accents of the hero's self-consciousness are really objectified and that the work itself achieves a distance between the hero and the author (qtd. in Hirschkop 51).

Bakhtin was much taken with Dickens' skillful mastery of 'voice', especially in his consideration of Bleak House's "Bleeding Heart Yard" and its inhabitants (Hirschkop and Shepherd 167). It is this same technique, applied to school settings, that creates such powerful visions of educational leadership.

Seventy years before any such discussion, Lathrop, apparently with his purist hat on, had considered a similar notion and turned his back on it: "Market novels, however, are not of so much interest to the student of literature as of sociology; they are the creation of business, not of art; made to meet a demand, not to reveal a vision" (Lathrop 10). It might be successfully argued that one of the primary features of the success of the Victorian novel was its ability to reach such a wide audience through the accurate reading of the public's desire for the villains, be they individual or collective, to be unmasked, regardless of whether or not the authors were driven by altruism or a sound business acumen.

The discussion of literature as material for sociological study has also been criticized by authors who claim that it is impossible to determine the effect of the author's political bias with sufficient precision to elucidate their true goals. As Spearman, who chose to

base her treatise on the social impact of the novel through consideration of DeFoe, Richardson, and the (inimitable and still underrated) Fielding, suggested of Victorian authors:

It might be thought that the nineteenth, rather than the eighteenth century novelists should be chosen because they are more familiar to most people, and because they attempted not only to reproduce 'the manners of the age' but also to delineate the conditions of the people, and the relationship between classes, and thus to illuminate social problems. The connection with politics, while it might make discussion more interesting, would also make it more difficult to get an impartial view (8).

She claims that Fielding and Richardson, for example, rouse less debate than Victorian novelists about the accuracy of their social depictions. While this may be true, it seems reasonable to suggest that eighteenth century authors must have faced similar constraints and biases resulting from their dependence on patrons for support of their work, the inclinations of whom would undoubtedly have been taken into consideration by the novelists in question. Furthermore, the nineteenth century novel is less distant to us than Fielding and his contemporaries, and the more we can identify with the setting and characterisations in a novel, the more qualified we feel to critique it. While the threat of bias demands attention, it is reasonable to assume that it can be incorporated into a thematic analysis to provide a balanced perception. Taking an opposing view to Spearman, LaCapra suggests of his own examination of the impact of the novel,

I did not choose texts in accordance with any theoretical principle or aesthetic conviction that in literature only the indirect relation to politics is legitimate. The direct, even the militantly didactic... may have its place at least insofar as it does not descend to the level of manipulative propaganda (1).

Rather than peddling overt dogma, La Capra suggests that "it is conceivable that the novel may at times contain programmatic elements in outlining desirable alternatives. Most likely, they would be embodied in the perspectives of characters" (4).

Of perhaps greater concern is the personal relationship of author to the subject at hand. In David Copperfield, for example, the fidelity of Dickens' view of the schools that form the subject of his narrative is clouded by the generally autobiographical nature of the experiences he relates. In Nicholas Nickelby, it is generated from his own experience as a journalist writing expose material on the plight of students in Yorkshire schools. This returns us to the Bahktin's notion of 'distance' already discussed. Relating his own work to that of Mikhail Bakhtin, La Capra took this into consideration in his exploration of narrative 'voice', a particularly powerful element in Victorian fiction and thus, perforce, significant for consideration in this paper. La Capra notes that:

One issue with far-ranging implications is that of the historian's "voice" or "voices" in narration and analysis – an issue that may cast the debate over objectivity and subjectivity in a different light and bring out the limitations of an assumed unity between the authorial and narratorial voice in historiography (La Capra 9).

This is especially relevant to Dickens, whose use of 'voice', especially in later novels, was a powerful tool for the development of characterization.

As was noted earlier, the Victorian era brought with it an explosion of novels, varying in quality from abysmal to brilliant, and this essay deals only with a few of the best. In order to optimize this literary core sample, works dealt with within have been selected with initial dates of publication that fall within the thirty years prior to the passage of the *Elementary Education Act* of 1870, placing the narrative in the context of Victorian school reform. Novels such as Nicholas Nickelby epitomize the harsh criticism that was aimed at conditions in generally tyrannical classrooms. The selected works deal

extensively with the description of the school environment of the time, discuss issues related to education, or have well-developed headmaster figures as significant characters. Importantly, they enjoyed considerable popularity at the time of publication, improving the possibility that they can be regarded as catalysts of reform.

Under the premise that novels written in the period preceding the passage of the *Elementary Education Act* are most likely to convey impressions of leaders at the key period of reformation, data collection focuses on the works of Dickens, who was considered by many to be the foremost critic of education at the time by many critics such as Smith, Hughes, and Calder. David Copperfield, with its autobiographical slant, is a natural choice. In a manner similar to Brontë's discussion of Lowood, it presents a pair of schools and their headmasters, including the introduction of the benevolent Dr. Strong acting as a foil for the reprehensible Mr. Creakle. Nicholas Nickleby, representative as it is of Dickens' earlier period, contains among the most graphic descriptions of schools in need of reform and the most laboriously articulated characters. Hard Times, which, as an aside, contrasts superbly with Nicholas Nickleby as a sample of Dickens grown older and clearly more urgent in his desire for immediate reform, provides a biting analysis of the teleological model of education being hawked at the time, and, to a considerable extent, today.

The introduction of material from other literary works of the period, such as selections from Charlotte Brontë, are presented to establish a sense of the persistent themes that have transcended the scope of the individual authors' works and existed in leadership

issues throughout the representations of schools in Victorian British literature. In Jane Eyre, for example, Brontë's discussion of the Lowood school, demonstrates at once the critical shortcomings that early Victorian institutions were subject to, and ascribes the seed of corruption to the leadership figures of the institution. The Lowood sections of Jane Eyre are especially useful in that they display the process of reform undertaken at a substandard school, attribute blame, offer analysis, and then proceed to render a second image of the school after it had been substantially improved. Encapsulated thus we find a reflection of Brontë's own experience, similar to that of Dickens' discussed at length in David Copperfield. In support of these fictional works, reference will be made in Chapter Four to the speeches and letters of the authors at the time of their publication, in addition to relevant contemporary criticism.

A general focus on Charles Dickens as the foremost author in the field is inevitable and requires no apology. As one author summarizes: "Dickens was no philosopher; but a novelist who writes so often about schools that he tells us much thereby, implicitly as well as explicitly..." (Collins 7). There is no doubt that Dickens, above all others, provides us with the most stirring narratives of school life in this period. While those that describe the horrific conditions of the worst schools and the rampant injustices perpetrated on their students come most presently to mind, he frequently presented flawed institutions and hopelessly dysfunctional leaders with foils to establish a dialectical approach to the evolution of his narrative which, while it was probably deeply satisfying to the sentimentalist Victorian reader, tends to provide a somewhat saccharine flavour to the modern.

Bearing in mind Bakhtin's notion of 'distance', it is perhaps because of Dickens' vivid and intimate characterizations that the understanding of Dickens' intention as a novelist has been subsumed into the body of his work itself. In his engaging book The Dickens Aesthetic, Lettis traces much early criticism of Dickens in an attempt to continue the work of Chesterton and his contemporaries in separating the author from the attributes of his fictional works. He argues that Dickens' aesthetic sense was profound and was honed over Dickens' authorial career. He concludes that:

The aesthetic he developed was founded upon a set of carefully researched and firmly-held principles. He began with a love of feeling, of the emotional response to life that art can both render and arouse, confident that the power of the imagination to awaken and invigorate the psyche was the most important sustenance that the human spirit could receive. He saw drama as the best means of doing this, and he looked for dramatic qualities in every kind of art. While he appreciated nature and worshipped the Deity, it was humanity that fascinated him, and he placed mankind at the centre of the aesthetic experience....He believed that art should imitate life, and was critical of anything that clouded the mirror held up to nature....He despised conventional representation, artificiality, the contrived effect – although he was capable of huge enjoyment of such things, and probably developed something of his own technique out of his delight: a fondness for the ridiculous formed no insignificant part of his aesthetic (270).

Others have not been as generous in their assessment of the craftsmanship of Dickens' educational narrative. Collins' significant analysis of Dickens' attempts to breathe life into his schoolroom vignettes is rather more critical, or at the very best, a mixed review:

In his novels, most of the schools are bad, though their organizers may be well-intentioned: he satirises or indicts certain educational practices of his age, from a point of view which, though obviously unsubtle, was nevertheless wholesome and timely.

Indeed. Continuing to damn Dickens with faint praise, he continues:

If, as in this instance, Dickens's mode of stating his views on education is artificially clumsy, it nevertheless shows how urgent was his interest in the matter, and we may honour the man for his generous impulse, though

criticising the artist for his error of decorum (6).

Characters in the works of Dickens are larger than life, and at first glance seem grossly exaggerated; and yet, examined more closely, it often seems that the intense realism of which he is capable is born directly out of that magnification which allows the reader to identify and with his characters and critically interpret their actions. Nowhere is this more evident than in his vitriolic portrayal of intolerable educational leaders, for whom he reserves his most acid and cynical depictions. Throughout his lifelong assault on education and the parade of headmasters and governors who march through his works, Dickens seems unable to separate the pathos bred of suffering from the humour presented by the ridiculous figures his characters cut when viewed objectively by the reader. As a result, his narrative and characterizations are powerful, memorable, and inimitably effective.

This notion of the aesthetic of Dickens' work is central to the purpose of establishing the viability of British Victorian literature as a source for educational leadership. Both the literature and current leadership theory seek to present a paradigm of educational and leadership issues in such a way as to suggest that some sort of reform is necessary.

Having said that, there are perhaps no two thematically related genres of writing that are more diametrically opposed to each other.

Realistically speaking, the effectiveness of Dickens and his contemporaries in urging reform through literature was fuelled by an understanding of their medium and the audiences they were addressing. The novel was merely the most effective weapon of

choice in their arsenal. Unlike scholarly writing in educational administration and leadership, the public read Victorian novels and paid attention to them. More importantly, the fiction was imbued with a grounded sincerity that seemed to share some contextual commonality with the experience of day-to-day life.

Fiction is the shotgun of philosophy – it needs only to be vaguely aimed at its target to yield a devastating effect. The scholarly literature of educational leadership and administration, on the other hand, is a rapier only truly appreciated by an elite who comprehend the art of fencing, purchasing foils, and, should they choose to be more than dilettantes, devoting years of studious application and training with other members of what is essentially an exclusive club.

Sadly for those of us who are in the field and like nothing more to curl up next to the fire with a nice turgid essay by Greenfield⁵, Bates⁶, or Hodgkinson⁷, the foil is an ineffective weapon to brandish at a madding throng (for example, a group of educators or education-minded citizens in dire need of a catalyst for reform). Someone, possibly confused by the graceful yet mincing posture that convention demands the fencer adopt, is likely to take a pre-emptive strike at the swordsperson with a cantaloupe, brick, or other handy object, rendering our academic hero senseless before even a single enemy can be run through the heart with the cold steel of carefully supported research. As for the madding throng itself,

⁵ Greenfield, Thomas B. "Research in Educational Administration in the United States and Canada: An Overview and Critique." Educational Administration 8.1 (1979-80) : 207-45.

⁶ Bates, Richard. "Educational Administration, the Sociology of Science, and the Management of Knowledge." Educational Administration Quarterly 16.2 (1980) 1-20.

⁷ Hodgkinson, Christopher. "Beyond Pragmatism and Positivism." Educational Administration Quarterly 22.2 (1986) : 5-21.

there is nothing that educators in the field (or, more accurately, in actual schools with real people's children) like to ridicule more than scholarly writing aimed at their own field.

One only has to use the word 'elide' or 'personological' once or twice to lose the sympathy of such a group. Even 'societal' is risky.

There are enough metaphors here to fill a book: fiction – hockey, scholarly writing – chess; fiction – chocolate; scholarly writing – raw sea urchin. There is no doubt that chess and sashimi are admirable in their own ways – but they fail to arouse enthusiasm among an apathetic public in search of identifiable purposes and instant, entertaining gratification.

However, this thesis is not intended to be manifestly discursive, and it might do well to end this chapter and introduce the next by referring to Matthew Arnold, perhaps the most famous (or infamous) critic of Victorian prose and poetry. It is Arnold, unexpectedly enough, who in an obscure essay on the *Irish Land Bill* called "The Incompatibles" provides the design for a direct link between the discussion of schools in the Victorian novel and its application to contemporary studies in educational administration and leadership. True to form, and in sympathy with Lathrop, Arnold brushes aside reference to most of the novels so popular during the late Victorian period: "Of the contemporary rubbish which is shot so plentifully around us, we can, indeed, hardly read too little"

(318). However, it seems that at least one work of the time caught his imagination:

Much as I have published, I do not think it has ever yet happened to me to comment on in print upon any production of Charles Dickens. What a pleasure to have the opportunity of praising a work so sound, a work so rich in merits as *David Copperfield*! "Man lese nicht die mit-strebende, mit-wirkende!" says

Goethe: "do not read your fellow strivers, your fellow workers!"...But to contemporary work so good as *David Copperfield*, we are in danger of not paying respect enough, of reading it (for who could help reading it?) too hastily, and then putting it aside for something else and forgetting it....

Intimately, indeed, did Dickens know the middle class. He was of its bone and of its flesh. Intimately he knew its bringing up. With the hand of a master he has drawn for us a type of the teachers and trainers of its youth, a type of its places of education. Mr. Creakle and Salem House are immortal. The type, it is to be hoped, will perish; but the drawing of it will not die (318).

Unfortunately for Matthew Arnold, we would have some bad news for him were he alive today.

CHAPTER FOUR:

*Of matters most extraordinary, including a lively discussion
of colourful headmasters in the works of Mr. Dickens and Ms. Brontë.
To our undiminished surprize, Mr. Arnold and Mr. Weber
begin an acquaintance.*

To an incalculable degree literature forms a substratum of cultural memory that manifests itself as a shared understanding of common constructs implicit in our understanding of the world around us and those with whom we interact. Teaching literature in a self-directed environment, I have found it surprisingly easy to draw on literary exemplars for student learning despite the fact that most of the 240 students in my care are pursuing their study of novels, short fiction, and poetry through eclectic works comprising different genres. In seminar, however, it is always possible to find plots and characterizations that are so pervasive in our culture that they can be used to scaffold learning based on shared experience. A Christmas Carol, for example, has demonstrated a propensity toward near-universal recognition and, as it is simplicity itself in its economic plot construction, makes an ideal vehicle for discussing authorial techniques. Ebenezer Scrooge is the classic miser-villain, and his characteristics are confirmed by the many subsequent iterations of him that are delivered to us through a diverting array of media reiterations. Using the Scrooge character as a basis for English 12 lectures, students comprising wide multi-ethnic and cultural groups have told me that they are intimately familiar with him either from the original short story (still a staple of many high school reading lists), a broad range of film and television adaptations (beyond the singular good version with Alistair Sim, Canadian Tire radio commercials, and perhaps most troublingly of all, the “Scrooge McDuck” interpretation brought to them by the pop-culture iconoclasts at Disney). Interestingly, it doesn’t seem to matter where the understanding of the character was bred; it is simple enough and has such sharply defined traits that it withstands the manifold distortions of these efforts to perpetuate it and emerges intact, even through the beak of a duck.

On a related note, I recently attended the ground-breaking ceremony for a new public high school which was attended by a number of stellar luminaries from the Ministry of Education, including the Minister of the time. Appropriately for this subject, the entire affair took place under suitably Dickensian conditions at a secluded rural location that was uncompromisingly reminiscent of a blasted heath. In the middle of nowhere on the outskirts of a town that is locally nicknamed 'Resume Speed', a plot of trees had been cleared over the space of several acres that, in an unprecedented torrential rainstorm on a cold late fall day, had been pummelled into a muddy quagmire that was six inches underwater by the time the ceremony was scheduled to begin.

The various teachers, committee members, district officials, local community elders and other gathered onlookers clustered under an inadequate number of hastily borrowed umbrellas and had plenty of time to reflect on the bleak surroundings prior to the Minister's impressively late arrival. Eventually, the government car pulled up and Ministry officials poured out of it, glancing with distaste at the leaden sky before smiling for the cameras that had not already gone home, and then losing the last remnants of their enthusiasm upon realizing that the Minister would be required to wade a significant distance to the roped off square where the official spade was waiting to turn an elevated patch of sod. (The ground-breaking itself was originally to have been undertaken by a small, remote-controlled backhoe, but during an earlier trial it had overturned in the mud, leaving the Minister's entourage to fend for themselves.) The wading was undertaken, the sod was turned, and bright speeches about class sizes and special needs students and

the need for corporate partnerships in education were made. Brief conversations were had all around before the official car drove away leaving us to wallow away as best we could.

Reflecting on the meeting afterwards, the contingent of well-wishing teachers were trying to find an appropriate description for one of the visiting dignitaries who had struck everyone as curiously odd, and, in some immeasurable way that one couldn't put one's finger on, intensely disagreeable. Various descriptions were bounced around until someone suggested 'Uriah Heep'. This, in fact, was the type of metaphor that we were looking for to appropriately characterize the individual in question. The worming quality, the damp hands (although perhaps excusable in the downpour), the invidious, ingratiating, obsequious writhing that came served with each snippet of conversation, each attribute exactly fit the bill. More to the point, this comparison, when proposed, met with unconditional approbation from those who had met the individual. Whether they had read David Copperfield or not, the common conception of Uriah Heep had made the connection between a modern figure in public administration and the hearts and minds of teachers, with the exception of one basketball coach who was thinking of the '70s rock band of the same name, and thus missed the point of the discussion entirely.

References to Victorian literature are ubiquitous in western society even after more than a century of literary forgetfulness. Educators, it seems, are especially fond of references to them and yet the use of literature in the discussion of educational leadership has been largely overlooked and can hardly even be classified as an emergent field. Many authors,

such as Collins¹, Hughes², and Manning³ have used novelists such as Dickens and his contemporaries to explore the history and evolution of education, while there is an increasing trend toward the use of literature as a source for administrative theory.

Public administration authors have tended to draw on literature either to critically question assumptions or examine specific characteristics of the field based on the work of individual authors or particular novels to examine pedagogy, administrator traits, management issues, discipline, organisational structure of schools and other areas of research.

Examples of this type of scholarly writing used to support administration and organisational theory include Bivona's use of Conrad's Heart of Darkness and its implications for the theoretical approach of agency and bureaucracy⁴, Dobell's use of John Le Carré's discussion of the characterization of espionage in public service⁵, Marini's analysis of classical works for ethical domains in public administration⁶, and Whitebrook's examination of the broader implications of the novel for political science⁷. Other authors have explored the integration of literature more specifically as a source for

¹ Collins, Phillip A. Dickens and Education. London: Macmillan, 1963.

² Hughes, James L. Dickens as an Educator. New York: Haskell House, 1902.

³ Manning, John. Dickens on Education. London: Oxford, 1959.

⁴ Bivona, Daniel. "Conrad's Bureaucrats: Agency, Bureaucracy and the Problem of Intention." Novel: A Forum on Fiction 26.2 (1993): 151-169.

⁵ Dobell, J. Patrick. "The Honourable Spymaster: John Le Carré and the Character of Espionage." Administration and Society 20.2 (1988): 191-215.

⁶ Marini, Frank. "The Uses of Literature in the Exploration of Public Administration Ethics: The Example of Antigone." Public Administration Review 52.5 (1992): 420-426.

⁷ Whitebrook, Maureen. "Taking the Narrative Turn: What the Novel has to Offer Political Theory." Literature and Political Imagination. Eds. J. Horton and A. Baumeister. London: Routledge, 1996. 32-52.

educational administration, such as Breischke's work on employing administrative characterizations for teaching purposes⁸.

The texts that will be used as primary sources in this project are now more than one hundred and fifty years old, yet as argued previously, do not present any problematic hermeneutical implications for analysis. As Anderson, Hughes, and Sharrock noted of the initial problems faced by this science:

Unwrapping and recovering the 'original meaning' of the text became a delicate process...such texts were also historical documents in their own right. They reflected societies and cultures which were very different to those of the scholars who sought to understand them. Any attempt to penetrate to the meaning of the text and get some kind of 'objective' understanding of it would have to overcome the linguistic problems of translation and language change, the revisions and reconstructions by successions of authors, as well as grappling with the fact that the texts were part of ways of life no longer directly accessible to us except through other texts and similar 'archaeological' remains (63).

In a broad sense, no great difficulty is posed by these English novels in that no language boundary need be transcended, and the cultural constructions on which characterization and action are founded are still familiar to us. It is possible to trace the lineage of the works being evaluated and obtain uniformly edited editions with consistent adherence to the original editions. For this project, modern editions of the texts have been chosen for their faithfulness to definitive first impressions.

As for whether or not the ways of life discussed are directly accessible to us, a short walk through any modern high school setting should be enough to convince even the most

⁸ Breischke, P.A. "The Administrator in Fiction: Using the Novel to Teach Educational Administration." Educational Administration Quarterly 26.4 (1990): 376-393.

ardent sceptic that we have not travelled far enough away from the Victorian conception of education for that to cause any significant interpretive dissonance; concurrently, we have at least progressed far enough to be able to effect a new interpretation of these texts to inform the belief systems which surround current research in educational leadership.

Recalling Matthew Arnold's assertion that David Copperfield's "Mr. Creakle and Salem House are immortal" (318), it is suggested that what he is effectively doing is equivalent to collecting data conforming to the construction of a Weberian ideal type. Whether such typing is implicit, such as when a group of teachers gather around after a wet groundbreaking ceremony and liken a Ministry of Education official to Uriah Heep, or explicit, when Arnold suggests of Mr. Creakle that "The type, it is to be hoped, will perish; but the drawing of it will not die" (Arnold 318), it provides a useful instrument for the evaluation of educational leadership figures. The inherent flexibility of Weber's theory of ideal typologies provides a framework suitable for addressing thematic understandings within the scope of literary analysis:

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct (*Gedankenbild*). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct (*Gedankenbild*) cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a *utopia*. Historical research faces the task of determining in each individual case, the extent to which this ideal-construct approximates to or diverges from reality, to what extent for example, the economic structure of a certain city is to be classified as a "city-economy" (Weber 90).

To clarify further, Cahnman suggests that:

The ideal type, then, is not a description of concrete reality, or even of the essential features of such a reality (*eigentliche Wirklichkeit*); it is not a hypothesis; it is not a schema under which a real situation, or action, is

subsumed as one instance; it is not a generic concept or a statistical average. Rather, it is “an ideal limiting concept with which the real situation, or action, is compared,” so that it may be properly appraised in line with the categories of “objective possibility” and “adequate causation” (116).

Thus, from the action and characterization in the Victorian novels within this project, a construct of types may be extracted from which to draw comparisons to real situations and actions that are presently encountered in the field of educational leadership. As

Burger contends:

“Ideal” means that the conceptual content is abstracted from empirical reality in an idealizing or exaggerated fashion. It means that the constellation of facts described in the definition of an ideal type would characterize to an equal degree the phenomena to which the type refers, if empirically certain – ideal – conditions were fulfilled (154).

As people cannot be relied upon to act in a consistent manner even in stable circumstances, and even stable circumstances are to some degree fluid, the notion of the ideal type must be understood as a theoretical abstraction describing conditions that would frequently exist could those conditions be met. Given this abstruse connection to reality, the novel seems to be an excellent conceptual proving ground for ideal typology, as the action and characterization is controlled by authorial tendency and technique and thus exempt from the fluctuations of circumstance caused by random behaviour and circumstantial change in the accepted reality against which comparisons must be drawn.

Continuing his discussion of the ‘type’ presented by Mr. Creakle in *David Copperfield*, Matthew Arnold presents a case to prove how prevalent such characters were in England at the time of writing by entering into a discussion of German experiences with English schools:

A man of much knowledge and much intelligence, Mr. Baring Gould, published not long ago a book about Germany, in which he adduced testimony which, in a curious manner, proves how true and to the life this picture of Salem House and of Mr. Creakle is. The public schools of Germany come to be spoken of in that book, and the training which the whole middle class of Germans gets in them; and Mr. Gould mentions what is reported by young Germans trained in their own German schools, who have afterwards served as teachers of foreign languages and ushers in the ordinary schools for the middle class in England. With one voice they tell us of establishments like Salem House and principals like Mr. Creakle. They are astonished, disgusted. They cannot understand how such things can be, and how a great and well-to-do class can be content with such an ignoble bringing up. But so things are, and they report their experience of them, and their experience brings before us, over and over again, Mr. Creakle and Salem House (Arnold 319).

Travelling along this road of discourse at great length, and, perhaps realizing that he is running a significant risk of systematically alienating his readership, Arnold is quick to point out that noble Englishmen are yet bred from such establishments notwithstanding their sadistic nature and manifold secondary flaws. After a quick unfavourable general comparison of the English constitution to the Irish (it is in 'Irish Essays' after all), in which he contends that the Irish look at English schoolmasters and note, "They are all tarred with one brush, and that brush is Creakle's" (321), he returns to the discussion of David Copperfield as a novel which provides 'types' by which to draw comparisons with the reality of schooling in England:

We may go even further in our use of that charming and instructive book, the *History of David Copperfield*. We may lay our finger there on the very types in adult life which are the natural product of Salem House and of Mr. Creakle; the very types of our middle class, nay of Englishmen and the English nature in general, as to the Irish imagination they appear (321).

Concluding his commentary, Arnold considers other characters in David Copperfield, such as the pernicious Mr. Murdstone, stepfather to the protagonist, as direct outgrowths of the influence of the type of educational leader as exemplified by Mr. Creakle:

Now, a disposition to hardness in perhaps the special fault and danger of our English race in general, going along with our merits of energy and honesty. It is apt even to appear in all kinds and classes of us, when the circumstances are such as to call it forth...But the genuine, unmitigated Murdstone is the common middle-class Englishman, who has come forth from Salem House and Mr. Creakle. He is seen in full force, of course, in the Protestant north; but throughout Ireland he is a prominent feature of the English garrison. Him the Irish see, see him only too much and too often. And he represents to them the promise of English civilisation on its serious side; what this civilisation accomplishes for that great middle part of the community towards which the masses below are to look up and to ascend, what it invites those who blend themselves with us to become and to be (323).

The impact of the 'type' of education leader drawn by Dickens in David Copperfield was clearly recognized by Arnold in 1882, with Creakle already deeply entrenched as a cultural icon more than forty years after the initial publication of the novel. The character that Dickens created for the headmaster of Salem House was powerful because it was so readily identifiable with those we see around us. Although Creakle was a broad literary caricature comprised of a constellation of attributes that are unlikely to be aggregated in any one real person outside prison, and Salem House was a school of imagination based on Dickens' own experiences that pulled together the least favourable elements of many schools, the type that can be constructed from analysis of him is easily recognisable. It is one that scores enough hits in our conscious interpretation of how bad schools and headmasters can really be that the affective recognition is profound, intimate, and disturbing. To explore this idea, some further examination of Dickens' construction of Salem House and its residents is necessary.

The Salem House of David Copperfield represents all that was reprehensible about the worst of schooling in the Victorian era. Cruelly managed, or mismanaged, the children sent to learn within it are subject to the relentless despotic tyranny of their headmaster,

Mr. Creakle. Dickens' technique for the establishment of his fictitious schools are fairly consistent throughout his novels; mood and tone are functions of his elaborate settings, which commence, in this case, with the young David Copperfield's first impressions of the dreary atmosphere of Salem House itself under the stewardship of a master, Mr. Mell.

Salem House was a square brick building with wings; of a bare and unfurnished appearance. All about it was so very quiet, that I said to Mr Mell I supposed all the boys were out; but he seemed surprised at my not knowing that it was holiday-time. That all the boys were in their several homes. That Mr. Creakle, the proprietor, was down by the sea-side with Mrs and Miss Creakle; and that I was sent in holiday-time as a punishment for my misdoing, all of which he explained to me as we went along.

I gazed upon the schoolroom into which he took me, as the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen. I see it now. A long room with three long rows of desks, and six of forms, and bristling all round with pegs for hats and slates. Scraps of old copy books and exercises litter the dirty floor. Some silkworms' houses, made of the same materials, are scattered over the desks. Two miserable little white mice, left behind by their owner, are running up and down in a fusty castle made of pasteboard and wire, looking in all the corners with their red eyes for anything to eat. A bird, in a cage very little bigger than himself, makes a mournful rattle now and then in hopping on his perch, two inches high, or dropping from it; but neither sings nor chirps.

There is a strange unwholesome smell upon the room, like mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books. There could not well be more ink splashed about it, if it had been roofless from its first construction, and the skies had rained, snowed, hailed, and blown ink through the varying seasons of the year (Dickens, *Copperfield* 129-130).

The image conveyed is a dark and mournful one, hardly consistent with a pleasant learning environment, but nonetheless recognizable today in a diminished form. This type of intense and sensual description is characteristic of the complex background development that Dickens undertook in order to set the scene for the action of plot and character revelation, both of which either fit comfortably with their surroundings or contrasted to them dramatically.

Mr. Creakle, the headmaster of Salem House, is introduced by the narrator thus:

I heard that Mr. Creakle had not preferred his claim to being a tartar without reason; that he was the sternest and most severe of masters; that he laid about him, right and left, every day of his life, charging in among the boys like a trooper, and slashing away, unmercifully. That he knew nothing himself, but the art of slashing, being more ignorant (J. Steerforth said) than the lowest boy in the school; that he had been, a good many years ago, a small hop-dealer in the Borough, and had taken to the schooling business after being bankrupt in hops, and making away with Mrs Creakle's money (*Copperfield* 138).

The characteristics of cruelty and ignorance are often found together in leadership figures in Dickens' work, and the physical descriptions of them only serve to reinforce the impression:

Mr Creakle's face was very fiery, and his eyes were small, and deep in his head; he had thick veins in his forehead, a little nose, and a large chin. he was bald on the top of his head; and had some wet looking hair that was just turning grey, brushed across each temple, so that the two sides interlaced on his forehead. What impressed me most, was, that he had no voice, but spoke in a whisper. The exertion that this cost him, or the consciousness of talking in that feeble way, made his angry face so much more angry, and his thick veins so much thicker, when he spoke, that I am not surprised, on looking back, at this peculiarity striking me as his chief one (*Copperfield* 134).

It is difficult to draw Creakle out of context; he is the ideal headmaster for Salem House, and Salem House is the archetypal representation of a corrupt school in the imagined world of Charles Dickens. It is the confluence of characterization, setting, and action which render this school vignette so memorable. Creakle has all of the qualities that one would hope would not be attributed to an educational leader: he is cruel, vindictive, arbitrary, and, seeming to rankle most with the narrator, pathologically unfair:

I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite. I am confident that he couldn't resist a chubby boy, especially; that there was a fascination in such a subject which made him restless in his mind, until he had scored and marked him for the day. I was chubby myself, and ought to know.

I am sure when I think of the fellow now, my blood rises against him with the disinterested indignation I should feel if I could have known all about him without ever having been in his power; but it rises hotly, because I know him to have been an incapable brute, who had no more right to be possessed of the great truth he held, than to be Lord High Admiral, or Commander-in-Chief: in either of which capacities he would have done infinitely less mischief (*Copperfield* 141).

The relationship of Mr. Creakle to the boys in his charge does not differ greatly from his interactions with the teachers in his employ. The hierarchy of power might be graphically represented as a thumbtack sitting upside down. At the uppermost point of the inverted tack we find the despot headmaster, and after a sheer vertical drop of great distance, we arrive suddenly at the masters and boys together at the same hierarchical level beneath them. In David Copperfield the teachers fare little better than the children and their condition is characterized thus:

I heard that Mr Sharp and Mr Mell were both supposed to be wretchedly paid; and that when there was hot and cold meat for dinner at Mr Creakle's table, Mr Sharp was always expected to say he preferred cold; which was again confirmed by J. Steerforth, the only parlour-boarder. I heard that Mr Sharp's wig didn't fit him; and that he needn't be so 'bounceable' – somebody else said 'bumptious' – about it, because his own red hair was very plainly to be seen behind (*Copperfield* 139).

One of the interesting features of the power relationship in David Copperfield is the extent to which the boys, themselves victimized, in turn harass the masters who in so many respects share the common burden of poor treatment at the hands of the headmaster. Instead of developing a sense of camaraderie, which might be expected, (and indeed can be seen in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre) they turn on them whenever circumstances or demonstrated weakness provides them with an opportunity. This is portrayed as a packing mentality by Dickens, whose individual characterizations of the boys are otherwise quite favourable. It is Mr Mell, the junior teacher, who suffers the

most in this novel, and yet the portrait of him in the classroom must seem fairly familiar to anyone who has ever taught a class on a Friday afternoon right before the end of school. Certainly, in my mind, it brings a sudden recollection of a particular class of grade eight English students that I used to teach in that time slot some years ago:

If I could associate the idea of a bull or a bear with anyone so mild as Mr Mell, I should think of him, in connexion with that afternoon when the uproar was at its height, as one of those animals, baited by a thousand dogs. I recall him bending over his aching head, supported on his bony hand, over the book on his desk, and wretchedly endeavouring to get on with his tiresome work, amidst an uproar that might have made the speaker of the House of Commons giddy. Boys started in and out of their places, playing at puss in the corner with other other boys; there were laughing boys, singing boys, talking boys, dancing boys, howling boys; boys shuffled with their feet, boys whirled around him, grinning, making faces, mimicking him behind his back and before his eyes; mimicking his poverty, his boots, his coat, his mother, everything belonging to him that they should have had consideration for (*Copperfield* 148).

This is a pivotal scene in the novel, as Mr Mell's authority is challenged by a favoured boy of Mr. Creakle's (the ill-starred J. Steerforth, who goes on to cause nothing but trouble for the rest of the novel), forcing Mell to defend himself against Steerforth's allegation that he is unfit to teach because of his mother's poverty:

- 'To insult one who is not fortunate in life, sir, and who never gave you the least offence, and the many reasons for not insulting whom you are old enough and wise enough to understand,' said Mr Mell, with his lips trembling more and more, 'you commit a mean and base action... (*Copperfield* 150).

Mell admits that it is in fact true that his mother lives in an alms-house supported by charity, and Mr. Creakle immediately terminates his employment under the most ignominious circumstances.

A variety of factors are worth consideration in this scene, such as the discrimination based on financial disparity and the similarity of punishment methods used by the

headmaster on both the boys and the teachers, but perhaps the most relevant lesson is that what really disturbs the protagonist in this scene is not the action of the plot itself, but the obvious unfairness of it. In fact, this remains a common complaint among students everywhere; the most popular leaders in education are sometimes those who are very strict, so long as they are perceived as clearly fair in the administration of their authority. In David Copperfield, those who succeed either as students or masters are those who manage to retain a low profile. Those who are morally in the right but unwilling to assert themselves in the power hierarchy are as doomed to failure as the antagonists.

Mr. Creakle's administration is characterized by the retention of power through brute force, cruelty, misplaced values, and the willingness, which is worse, to warp the hierarchy when it suits his needs, thus creating a wholly unstable environment. This imbalance is primarily instigated by the maintenance of favourites within the system, and the advancement of their agendas before all others. It is also worth mentioning that the philosophy of punishment and discipline used by Creakle is applied similarly to both students and staff, so that the dissatisfaction with the school is pervasive. As Altick notes, schooling was not at a glamorous point in its development during the mid-nineteenth century, as "the atmosphere in most public schools had degenerated into an evil combination of somnolence, brutality, and anarchy" (Altick 253). A description that is well borne out by Salem House.

To digress briefly, it falls outside the scope of this project to examine the meting out of discipline in Dickens' schools at great length, however, this must be fertile ground for

further research. In David Copperfield alone, we find the protagonist subject to corporal punishment, isolation, humiliation, belittling, and public ridicule - including having a placard hung around his neck to warn other students of his behaviour. While everyone would point at the fact that students are no longer publicly horse-whipped as evidence of great advancement and maturation in this area, it seems as if we have moved away from corporal punishment only to work hard on the evolution of the less invasive but equally damaging measures. Isolation, ridicule, humiliation and belittling remain well-loved arms in the stockpile of the modern teacher. We have learned to make them less objectionable to public perception, but the effect remains much the same. Having been deprived of the cane, we have learned to hone our skills in different areas. This in an area which merits further investigation and for which British Victorian literature is a valuable source.

Mr. Creakle and Salem House, as reprehensible as they may appear in David Copperfield, actually represent an intermediate evolutionary stage in Dickens' development of the educational leader in his fiction. While Mr. Creakle is perhaps the most memorable character, his prototype was presented a decade earlier in the form of Nicholas Nickelby's Mr. Squeers, the headmaster of Dotheboys Hall in Yorkshire, a caricature based directly on Dickens' investigative journalism into the corruption that was rife in those institutions⁹.

⁹ Hughes, James L. Dickens as an Educator. New York: D. Appleton, 1906.

Nicholas Nickelby, the protagonist, provides us with an especially useful lens through which to examine the school and Squeers, as he is posted there as a master and offers an additional professional perspective that is lacking in David Copperfield. Having an omniscient point of view instead of the first person employed by David Copperfield also provides a less intimate tone, but at the same time it is more analytical and allows Dickens to range freely through interpretive discussions of the various characters.

The headmaster operates the school largely for the benefit of parents who wish to have their children unseen and unheard for years at a time, and the squalor of it more than matches its successor Salem House. Another similarity between the institutions is that in both cases the headmaster demonstrates unfair treatment of favourites, with those being presented as a contrast foil for the treatment of the learners, inasmuch as that term can be applied to an institution like Dotheboys Hall, where as Squeers notes the boys are kept “Just as long as their friends make quarterly payments to my agent in town, or until such time as they run away...” (*Nickelby* 95). The same notion of the inequity of treatment is forwarded in both books; in the less-complex action of Nicholas Nickleby this takes the form of nepotism.

The introduction to the character of Squeers takes place during the negotiation with a step-father who wishes have his two sons sent to Dotheboys Hall:

‘You see I have married the mother,’ pursued Snawley; ‘it’s expensive keeping the boys at home, and as she has a little money in her own right, I am afraid (women are so very foolish, Mr Squeers) that she might be led to squander it on them, which would be their ruin, you know.’

‘I see,’ returned Squeers, throwing himself back in his chair and waving his

hand.

‘And this,’ resumed Snawley, ‘has made me anxious to put them to some school a good distance off, where there are no holidays – none of those ill-judged comings home twice a year that unsettle children’s minds so – and where they may rough it a little – you comprehend?’

‘The payments regular, and no questions asked,’ said Squeers, nodding his head.

‘That’s it exactly,’ rejoined the other. ‘Morals strictly attended to, though.’

‘Strictly,’ said Squeers.

‘Not too much writing home allowed, I suppose?’ said the father-in-law, hesitating.

‘None, except a circular at Christmas, to say that they never were so happy, and wish they may never be sent for,’ rejoined Squeers.

‘Nothing could be better,’ said the father-in-law, rubbing his hands.

‘Then, as we understand each other,’ said Squeers, ‘will you allow me to ask you whether you consider me a highly virtuous, exemplary, and well-conducted man in private life; and whether, as a person whose business it is to take charge of youth, you place the strongest confidence in my unimpeachable integrity, liberality, religious principles and ability?’

‘Certainly I do,’ replied the father-in-law, reciprocating the school master’s grin.

‘Perhaps you won’t object to say that, if I make you a reference?’

‘Not the least in the world.’

‘That’s your sort,’ said Squeers, taking up a pen; ‘this is doing business, and that’s what I like’ (*Nickleby* 96).

These contracts of mutual convenience represent the foundation on which Dotheboys Hall is built: the elimination of a pest for the parents, and the latitude to deprive the children to the most shocking degree on the other. Note that other than morality, no

educational requirement at all is specified, although it is the one characteristic conspicuously lacking in the adults.

Wackford Squeers differs from his counterpart in David Copperfield in being a more comical characterization. He has an (albeit black) sense of humour and a rather festive cruelty more apt to favour the infliction of emotional, rather than physical, damage on the boys in his charge; this is not to say that he does not employ physical punishment as well, merely that it appears farther down on his list of priorities. Rather than being openly despotic, his preferred style of administration is to practice a habitual deceit, veneration his cruelty with the semblance of a professional demeanour.

The Squeers establishment is founded on much the same principles as that of Creakle; there is a clear, inescapable hierarchy and no deviation from utter obedience to the higher authority is anticipated or tolerated. Dickens summarizes the Squeers philosophy of educational administration as follows:

Now, the fact was, that both Mr and Mrs Squeers viewed the boys in the light of their proper and natural enemies; or, in other words, they held and considered that their business and profession was to get as much from every boy as could by possibility be screwed out of him. On this point they both agreed, and behaved in unison accordingly. The only difference between them was, that Mrs Squeers waged war against the enemy openly and fearlessly, and that Squeers covered his rascality, even at home, with a spice of his habitual deceit, as if he had a notion of some day or other being able to take himself in, and persuade his own mind that he was a very good fellow (*Nickleby* 150-151).

This is notable in that this quality of self-deception is one that is all too familiar to anyone who has worked in education long enough to get a good feel for the variations of management style that persist in public education. The reflection of it in Dickens is

unpalatable to our sensitive dispositions, but to refute that it is still commonly present is as futile as disputing human nature itself.'

Like Salem House, Dotheboys Hall is richly described in Nicholas Nickleby, and as less time is devoted to the development of the boys' characters, they are dealt with in summary at the outset of this section of the novel:

It was a crowded scene, and there were so many objects to attract attention, that at first Nicholas stared about him, really without seeing anything at all. By degrees, however, the place resolved itself into a bare and dirty room with a couple of windows, whereof a tenth part might be of glass, the remainder being stopped up with old copy books and paper. There were a couple of long old rickety desks, cut and notched, and inked and damaged, in every possible way; two or three forms, a detached desk for Squeers, and another for his assistant. The ceiling was supported like that of a barn, by cross beams and rafters, and the walls were so stained and discoloured, that it was impossible to tell whether they had ever been touched with paint or whitewash.

But the pupils – the young noblemen! How the last faint traces of hope, the remotest glimmering of any good to be derived from his efforts in this den, faded from Nicholas as he looked in dismay around! Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons on their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining...With every kindly sympathy blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts, eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding there! (*Nickleby* 151-152).

This example is redolent of the broadcast pathos of which Dickens was so indisputably fond, and which might now be considered rather melodramatic, having an excessive

sentimentality not geared toward the more minimalist modern taste in literature. As Collins notes of Dickens,

...his books and periodicals and his life display that earnest concern for the poor and deprived, which led him energetically if sporadically to urge reforms, and to busy himself with various practical schemes for improving the condition of afflicted groups and individuals. All these features of his outlook help to shape his ideas on education, in their strength and their weakness (22).

Whether or not his renditions can be thought of now as somewhat heavy handed, they were drawn with the best of intentions and a noble purpose. This is similar to reform efforts today: there is no lack of positive intent among those who seek to reform education, even if there is a frequent conflict of values.

In a manner to be echoed in the altogether more serious Hard Times, Dickens offers a scathing look at the instructional methodology offered in such schools. The headmaster sets the educational philosophy for the school and dictates it to his subordinates, who have no professional autonomy whatsoever (nor could we expect them to have) under such circumstances. In Nicholas Nickleby, the order of the day includes classes such as 'English spelling and philosophy' (155) of which highly-suspect components are disseminated through didactic instruction and retained through rote memorization, much as they are to this day in so many enlightened classrooms.

As an aside it is interesting to note that, for whatever reason, Dickens saw fit to repeatedly use the definition of the word 'horse' and the reference to students by number (to demonstrate ambivalence in one case and utilitarian depersonalization in the other) as

a vehicle for conveying this instructional strategy, both in Nicholas Nickelby and Hard Times.

As the protagonist of Nicholas Nickleby assumes his duties, he undertakes a reading class for the younger boys at the instruction of the headmaster, in which

The children were arranged in a semicircle round the new master, and he was soon listening to their dull, drawling, hesitating recital of those stories of engrossing interest which are to be found in the more antiquated spelling books (*Nickleby* 156).

Again, still a strategy of great utility to the present day, revitalized by the upsurge of 'literacy' initiatives, which seem, for all intents and purposes, to be the most retrograde and Dickensian programs available, although praised for their 'back-to-basics' utility. Such programs are touted widely for their simplicity (or single-mindedness, depending on your perspective) and appreciated by teachers for the accountability they provide and the convenience of their delivery.

Another aspect of Squeers' administration in Nicholas Nickelby is that he is intensely protective of his establishment, of which he is unaccountably proud, although it is inferred that this refers more to his capable management than the service which is provided to the boys. Given this, he also jealously guards his authority and is incensed when the younger schoolmaster in his employ rapidly gains influence over the boys, especially in light of the fact that he does so using compassion, reason, and the respect for individuality as the tools of his trade.

Shot through with inequity and injustice, Mr. Squeers and his employee resolve matters most satisfactorily when Nickelby beats the tyrannical leader half to death before taking his leave of him. A pleasingly implausible situation more in keeping with the younger Dickens' flights of fancy, rather than the elder's greater attention to realism in social commentary.

In both of these novels, the boys themselves, especially in the characters of Smike in Nicholas Nickelby and Steerforth in David Copperfield, demonstrate the perils of an educational system gone terribly awry. Smike, a victim of constant cruelty and neglect, devolves into a subhuman character unable to express his own personality except in deference to those who protect him, while Steerforth, the archetypal headmaster's pet, becomes a vain and immoral young man, suffering deep internal conflict about his relationships to his peers and following a path of psychological self-destruction until his eventual death.

"In his novels, most of the schools are bad, though their organisers may be well-intentioned" (Collins 6). This is important to bear in mind in examining Hard Times, a novel originally dedicated to Thomas Carlyle. Characteristic of Dickens' later, more serious social criticism, it differs from Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield, and Dombey and Son – a novel remarkably similar to Hard Times in plot construction, setting, and intent – in that the organizers operate their school not for the naked acquisition of wealth with the spice of power, but with the serious intention of doing good in the community. It is Dickens' attempt to look at the ills which might befall a

system of education, even were it to be reformed, and it is largely comprised of an unforgiving examination of the utilitarian educational philosophy being dogmatically expanded in the new urban industrial centres of England. Having said that, the educational component, complete with the usual cast of colourful characters, remains as comic relief in a novel that is otherwise short, dark, and reflective.

Throughout Hard Times, Dickens weaves the theme of industrialisation throughout his discussion of education, which reflect many of the same themes as we see in the current corporatisation and commercialisation of education in North America. It has been said of the novel's examination of the hardships carried forth by industrialization that,

It took artistic determination to come as near the heart of the industrial matter as Dickens did, and equally it led to several swerves into evasion as the good-hearted radical novelist strove to come near the truth without committing himself too ruinously.

The stress on schooling is certainly no evasion. This linking of classroom and mill turns out to be one of Dickens's most telling ways of composing his sense of English civilization into a coherent, many-sided image. Both school and town were owned, or at least controlled, by the same men, the masters, some of whom were fanatically eager to try out on the populace the theoretical social systems which they had drawn up on strict Utilitarian principles. (Calder 20).

As with his other novels, Dickens follows his conventional pattern of offering a deeply descriptive paragraph each dealing with the school in question and its headmaster. As Hard Times opens, Dickens, uncharacteristically, begins with the dialogue of the headmaster:

‘Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and rood out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children. Stick to Facts, Sir!’ (*Hard* 47).

Beside the point that this sentiment would no doubt find great favour with the Ministry of Education and the residue of the current government, this speech is unique for two reasons. In the first place, it actually has an articulated philosophy of education, such as the dissemination of fact is, as opposed to the haphazard and morally-oriented foci of Dickens' other schools, allowing the author to comment to a far greater degree on the attributes of the instructional method. In the second place, it considers the possibility that children might in fact be reasoning creatures, who would respond to intellectual stimulation as well as the strap.

The ruthlessly one-track preoccupation with the empirical is not lost on the reader, but at least it is an improvement over the brutality of the other novels' environments, even if the children are viewed as 'little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim' (*Hard* 51). At least there's a long-term vision.

The atmosphere of the classroom could not be any more different from those in Nicholas Nickleby and David Copperfield. It is brightly whitewashed, immense, full of sunlight, neat, and well-organized – clinical, perhaps. The squalor and pestilence of previous iterations has departed, to be replaced with a room doubtless intended to convey a sense of the mill rather than the school.

Thomas Gradgrind, the benefactor of the school, is full of enthusiasm for the utilitarian principle to be propagated by a new type of education:

Indeed, as he eagerly sparkled at them from the cellarage before mentioned, he seemed a kind of cannon loaded with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away (*Hard* 48).

There is nothing immediately hateful about Gradgrind; he is not the tyrannical oppressor of Salem House, nor the self-deceiving despot of Dotheboys Hall. A function of his philosophy, he is delighted with what he has achieved, which he perceives to be a radical breakthrough in education. “It was his school, and he intended it to be a model. He intended every child in it to be a model – just as the young Gradgrinds were all models.” (*Hard* 53). He is, in fact, defined primarily by the humanistic attributes that he lacks and blinded by his own belief in the pre-eminence of his theory.

Among the memorable scenes in Hard Times, the fact that Sissy Jupe (or “Girl Number Twenty”) is unable to define a horse has long since fallen into social memory. The boy who can do so, Bitzer, is more difficult to recollect yet more important for the discussion of educational issues. Despite his rather comprehensive ability to hit the books and recognize a horse as:

‘Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth’ (*Hard* 50).

Bitzer has the same function in Hard Times as Steerforth in David Copperfield and Smike in Nicholas Nickelby. Raised on a diet of facts, he evolves into a morally destitute character, with no convictions to support him in adulthood beyond a calculating avarice.

In the same way that we see a new and more subtle type of inspiration for educational leaders in Mr. Gradgrind, so do we see a new teacher in the form of the charmingly named Mr. M'Choakumchild, who comes from a very different background than the eclectic masters in earlier novels, as Dickens explains:

He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. Orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmography, the sciences of compound proportion, algebra, land-surveying and levelling, vocal music, and drawing from models, were all at the ends of his ten chilled fingers. He had worked his stony way into Her Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council's Schedule B, and had taken the bloom off the higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin, and Greek. He knew all about all the Water Sheds of all of the world (whatever they are), and all the histories of all the peoples, and all the names of rivers and mountains, and all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries, and all their boundaries and bearings on the two and thirty points of the compass. Ah, rather overdone, M'Choakumchild. If only he had learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more! (*Hard* 53).

One might be excused for beginning to form the impression that Dickens is tricky to please; on the one hand he abhors the lack of structure and inhumanity that made victims out of students and masters alike in his early novels, while in his later ones he rails against the imposition of structure and excessive rigidity of training. Naturally Gradgrind sees the error of his utilitarian ways as he grapples, later in the book, with the impact of the philosophy on his own family, but the enthusiastic observer is left at a loss for what type of reform solution Dickens might actually propose.

Obviously, Dickens was not the lone voice urging educational reform in the Victorian era. Among the others was Charlotte Brontë, who provides us with unique insight in that

she portrays the Lowood Institution in Jane Eyre, modelled on her own experiences at a religious school, both before and after significant reform. Brontë's descriptions of the school, after Dickens', seem altogether more businesslike and less melodramatic.

I passed from compartment to compartment, from passage to passage, of a large and irregular building; till emerging from the total and somewhat dreary silence pervading that portion of the house we had traversed, we came upon the hum of many voices, and presently entered a wide, long room with great deal tables, two at each end, on which burnt a pair of candles, and seated all round on benches, a congregation of girls of every age, from nine or ten to twenty. Seen by the dim light of the dips, their numbers to me appeared countless, though not in reality exceeding eighty; they were uniformly dressed in brown frocks of quaint fashion, and long Holland pinafores. It was the hour of study; they were engaged in conning over their to-morrow's tasks, and the hum I heard was the combined result of their whispered repetitions (76).

The classes in the Lowood Institution are conducted on the monitorial principle discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, and again, a strict hierarchy is observed among the teaching staff, which is divided into junior and senior mistresses, a superintendent – the voice of compassion in the novel - with Mr. Brocklehurst, treasurer and manager, at their head. Brocklehurst is a complex character, and when the protagonist asks, “Is he a good man?” the response is, “He is a clergyman, and is said to do a great deal of good” (83). Naturally, Brocklehurst is anything but a good man, or at least as the reader might be expected to conceive of one.

Characterized by extreme parsimony, religious fervour, officiousness and a bombastic nature, Brocklehurst epitomizes the type of district official and school trustee apparently still zealously pursued for hiring by school districts in British Columbia. More than anything else, Brocklehurst is vastly hypocritical, in that he insists on any number of petty economies for the school and its students, strictly reprimanding the teachers for

over-expenditure, while at the same time indulging his own spoiled daughters with every extravagance.

In common with all of the educational leaders observed in this project, Brocklehurst is, inherently, superficial, self-absorbed, and unable to gain any real insight into the affairs of his school. Again, a state of affairs highly comparable with that present in school districts in the Lower Mainland of BC¹⁰.

As Brontë's Brocklehurst lectures the superintendent:

'Madam, allow me an instant. You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying. Should any little accidental disappointment of appetite occur, such as the spoiling of a meal, the under or over-dressing of a dish, the incident ought not to be neutralized by replacing with something more delicate the comfort lost, thus pampering the body and obviating the aim of this institution; it ought to be improved to the spiritual edification of the pupils, by encouraging them to evince fortitude under the temporary privation. A brief address on those occasions would not be mis-timed, wherein a judicious instructor would take the opportunity of referring to the sufferings of the primitive Christians; to the torments of martyrs; to the exhortations of Our Blessed Lord Himself, calling upon His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him; to His warnings that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God; to his divine consolations, "If ye suffer hunger or thirst for My sake, happy are ye." Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!' (95).

One of the most distinctive differences between Dickens' treatment of leadership figures and Brontë's is that while his characters instil fear and loathing in their subordinates, hers do not. Brocklehurst is clearly the subject of wry humour to both the staff at the Lowood Institution and the girls in their care. In addition to the relative lack of brutal corporal

¹⁰ Hepburn, Claudia R. "The Case for School Choice." *Critical Issues Bulletin*. Vancouver: Fraser Institute, 1999.

punishment, those lower on the hierarchy do not evince any great terror of their benefactor, keeping their contemptuous glances well hidden from him; as the author notes, "...it was a pity that Mr Brocklehurst could not see them too; he would perhaps have felt that, whatever he might do with the outside of the cup and platter, the inside was beyond his reach" (Brontë 96). Despite this, Brocklehurst still employs the time-honoured weapons of isolation and public ridicule to deal with the girls; the difference is that at the Lowood Institution, being singled out for such treatment is a badge of honour which marks the victim for special respect and caring treatment from the other students. As the Jane Eyre is told when she asks about the tacit support she received while being forced to stand alone on a stool in the schoolroom,

‘Mr Brocklehurst is not a god: nor is he even a great and admired man: he is little liked here; he never took steps to make himself liked. Had he treated you as an especial favourite, you would have found enemies, declared or covert, all around you; as it is, the greater number would offer you sympathy if they dared...’ (101).

The students of the school are shown to have a much clearer understanding of the leadership qualities of their benefactor than he has of himself.

In Jane Eyre, reform of the school is only achieved after a catastrophic outbreak of typhus caused numerous fatalities, "...till its virulence and the number of its victims had drawn public attention on the school. Inquiry was made into the origin of the scourge, and by degrees various facts came out that excited public indignation in a high degree" (115).

In response to public pressure, the Lowood Institution is rebuilt in a better location, and new leadership figures are installed:

Mr Brocklehurst, who, from his wealth and family connexions, could not be overlooked, still retained the post of treasurer; but he was aided in the

discharge of his duties by gentlemen of rather more enlarged and sympathizing minds: his office of inspector, too, was shared with those who knew how to combine reason with strictness, comfort with economy, compassion with uprightness. The school, thus improved, became in time a truly useful and noble institution. I remained an inmate of its walls, after its regeneration, for eight years – six as pupil, and two as teacher; and in both capacities I bear my testimony to its value and importance (115).

And so, at least in one novel there is a happy ending as a result of enlightened intervention into otherwise damning circumstances. As will be discussed in the next chapter, from these figures we can construct ‘types’ of educational leadership figures that inform our understanding today. As Samier notes:

In general terms, then, literature both provides a descriptive account of how administrative life is led, as well as an interpretive and critical account of how administration should be carried out, including ethos, ethics, interpersonal relations, the qualities of judgement, and policies as expressions of value (Samier 3).

While the exaggerated nature of administrative caricature in Victorian novels seems hyperbolic, it provides a cautionary reminder that all narrative is based on observation of the real world.

CHAPTER FIVE:

All things come to a satisfactory resolution, after the consideration of implications for theory, practice, and the training of administrators. Mr. Dickens has the final word.

The commentary of Victorian literature on educational leadership, its roles, and characters draws this discipline firmly into the scope of humanities research, supplying a cultural tool to accompany an otherwise unpredictable world. This is not meant as a didactic treatise in the style of much scholarship in this area, but rather as a companion reader to the educator's life in which we all participate as enthusiastic amateurs.

Unlike dispassionate analysis, the novel is a dramatic source relying principally on the collective actions of characters and the laying bare of their motivations to bridge the comprehension gaps of the audience. It is not geared to the specialized knowledge of the well-read academic nor couched in their jargon; it depends instead on the perpetuation of recognized themes through narrative and the assumption of shared experience or understanding. As such, the novelist cannot partake (even if the discipline had been developed enough at the time to do so) in the delicate articulation of abstract issues in educational leadership or administration theory. The brush of the novelist must be broad enough to paint stark images in primary colours that will deliver the main thrust of his intent to the public. The fine distinctions that may be drawn in academic analysis are lost to the author who wishes to retain the interest of a wide readership of diverse tastes.

While limited by these restrictions, the novelist is also freed from the shackles that bind the social scientist. A work of fiction is immune to academic criticism; as a work of imagination it requires no justification or sanction from the public or the author's peers. It may be obviously biased and actively hostile to its enemies without being branded as

unfair. It may draw on exaggeration as one of many tools of its trade, and no accusation of dissemblance can be levelled against it. Characters may be aggregates of traits and behaviour patterns streamlined to create a desired effect, while the passage of time may be compressed, resequenced, or heavily edited to serve the purpose of the narrative. Through characterization, the author is at liberty to display political beliefs and forward calls for reform from beneath a cloak of plausible deniability. In essence, the author may say exactly what he or she wishes and damn everybody else except the book-buying public. Ironically, when one presents the world with fiction, it becomes possible to tell the truth. As Dickens said of his readers and characters in a speech of 25th June, 1841:

I feel as if I have stood among old friends, whom I have intimately known and highly valued. I feel as if the deaths of the fictitious creatures, in which you have been kind enough to take an interest, had endeared us to each other as real afflictions deepen friendships in actual life; I feel as if they had been real persons, whose fortunes we had pursued together in inseparable connexion, and that I had never known them apart from you (qtd. in Fielding 9).

Unlike an academic treatise, a large number of people read popular fiction, and, regardless of their acceptance of your cause, come to understand the importance of it and the logic it implies. The novel is a medium of transmission sufficiently detached from both author and audience to allow the public examination of the events it portrays, which may be considered selectively and in a relatively harmless narrative context.

This essay has focused almost exclusively on the presentation of negative ‘types’ in Victorian literature, delineating the constellations of qualities common to all of these works that the poor headmaster or educational leader may have, and the actions that they undertake. In many cases it might be suggested that such arbitrary characterizations are

unfair, and might lead the reader to make generalized assumptions about leadership figures. As Edith Wharton noted in her explication of Ethan Frome, however:

It appears to me, indeed, that, while an air of artificiality is lent to a tale of complex and sophisticated people which the novelist causes to be guessed at and interpreted by any mere looker-on, there need be no such drawback if the looker-on is sophisticated, and the people he interprets are simple. If he is capable of seeing all around them, no violence is done to probability in allowing him to exercise this faculty; it is natural enough that he should act as the sympathizing intermediary between his rudimentary characters and the more complicated minds to whom he is trying to present them (Wharton 7).

Consistently in the novels examined in this essay, there is the question of the competence of the educational leader. If they are not completely disinterested in the actual provision of education to the children in their care, such as Squeers in Nicholas Nickleby and Creakle in David Copperfield, who pursue their profession for naked gain, they are well-intentioned yet misguided, such as Gradgrind in Hard Times and Brocklehurst in Jane Eyre.

Closely associated with the notion of competence is that of judgement, which is universally poor in the Victorian novel's portrayal of unreformed schools. A second feature that is universally present is irrationally cruel treatment of the students, found as corporal punishment or chastisement based on humiliation and ridicule that borders on a sadistic malice in many of the vignettes under consideration. Thirdly, there is a carefully established organisational hierarchy which perpetuates and magnifies the errors of the leadership figure. Fourthly, the persistent perception of unfairness within the system is ubiquitous, and recognized as perhaps the most damaging feature of the organisations discussed in these novels. Fifthly, educational theory, such as the

utilitarian instructional methodology in Hard Times and the doctrine of stoicism in Jane Eyre, is consistently misconceived and misapplied. This goes hand in glove with the final common characteristic of leadership figures in these novels, that of self-deception as a function of school management. Dickens himself was rarely concerned with the content of curriculum to be implemented, although in a letter of 24th September, 1843, he expressed dissatisfaction with the interference of others in schools that he supported in a letter to the headmaster:

In the event of my being able to procure you the funds for making these great improvements, would you see any objection to expressly limiting visitors (I mean visiting teachers – volunteers, whoever they may be), to confining their questions and instructions, as a point of honour, to the broad truths taught in the school by yourself and the gentlemen associated with you? I set great store by this question, because it seems to me of vital importance that no persons, however well intentioned, should perplex the minds of these unfortunate creatures with religious mysteries that young people, no matter with the best advantages, can but imperfectly understand. I heard a lady visitor the night I was among you propounding questions in reference to the “Lamb of God,” which I most unquestionably would not suffer anyone to put to my children, recollecting the immense absurdities that were suggested to my childhood by the like injudicious catechising. (Paroissien ed. 287).

Not all about education in the Victorian novel is bleak. It should be noted that these negative characterizations are almost always paralleled with positive ones, although the good educational leaders and administrative figures often find their actions rendered nugatory by the bad. In many cases, including Jane Eyre and David Copperfield, both the institutions in question and their leaders are provided with alternate foils which better represent the authors’ visions of fair and reformed educational practices. These systems demonstrate humanistic philosophies, the celebration of the individual, fairness, discipline meted out with justice, compassion, and the love of learning for its own sake.

Naturally, characters who find themselves transported to these environments learn that they were only held back by the systems that were inflicted on them and eventually excel. It is worth noting that the 'learners' in these novels are essentially neutral figures who find themselves acted upon by the organisation and its agents rather than assuming an activist role in the creation of change themselves. The theme of the passive victim in education is one that Dickens also pursued in his periodical publications. In *The Examiner* of 3rd June 1843, he discussed the condition of instructors at Oxford and their readiness to impart wisdom to their charges:

...they all become short-sighted in a most remarkable degree; that, for the most part, they lose the use of their reason at a very early age, and are seldom known to recover it. That the most hopeless and painful extremes of deafness and blindness are frequent among them. That they are reduced to such a melancholy state of apathy and indifference as to be willing to sign anything, without asking what it is, or knowing what it means... That, from the monotonous nature of their employment, and the dull routine of unvarying drudgery (which requires no exercise of original intellectual power, but is merely a parrot-like performance), they become painfully uniform in character and perception, and are reduced to one dead level (a very dead one, as your Commissioners believe) of mental imbecility (Slater ed. 61).

Despite the frequent negative characterizations of educational leaders in British Victorian literature, positive counterparts can be found to match them point for point in many cases, and would provide an excellent prospective field for further research. There are also manifest implications for educational administration and leadership theory that will be discussed in the following section.

Leaving behind it "a legacy of heroic optimism and an ideal of heroic leadership" (Tyack 258) the Victorian era provided a model of educational leadership that has endured beyond all expectation. It has become clear that there is much to be drawn from

literature, Victorian or otherwise, that is beneficial to the study of educational administration and theory beyond the marginalised 'sound-biting' of appropriate quotations to illustrate the otherwise nebulous points of imprecise theorists. Literature cannot be glossed over as a means of tertiary support and should be viewed as a primary source for the understanding of school and organisational culture; it is bred of the issues contemporary to it and free from the compulsion toward self-justification that is endemic to scholarly writing. It mirrors reality while drawing together specific 'lots' of issues, events, and characterizations for the amusement and edification of an eclectic public. It addresses matters that are perceived to be of vital public interest, rather than foraging far afield for undiscovered and underexploited research territory, and must, to maintain its popularity, reflect subjects that can be identified with by the person on the street, or at least, the person on the street reading a book. It is inherently humanistic and cultural; as Smircich notes:

...whether one treats culture as a background factor, an organizational variable, or as a metaphor for conceptualizing organization, the idea of culture focuses attention on the expressive, nonrational qualities of the experience of organization. It legitimates attention to the subjective, interpretive aspects of organizational life (Smircich 355).

In a similar vein, Greenfield and Ribbins comment:

There are ways of understanding and expressing knowledge that are powerful, satisfying and important, but non-rational – ways that are essentially cast within an artistic, literary, historical, philosophical even journalistic mode. A mode that is descriptive, with-holding judgement, though moving towards it, moving to insight (Greenfield 254).

It should be noted that Greenfield, addressing the humanist agenda in educational leadership, is perhaps one of the best examples of the powerful use of literature sampling to propel theory. "His talk and writing, at its best, had a compelling poetic

quality and...he made much use of literary examples, being as likely to quote Shakespeare as Max Weber" (Ribbins 375).

Since its emergence, the novel has been a means of advocacy for the oppressed, and a way to plant the seeds for the possibilities of change. In the Victorian works discussed the urgent pressure for educational reform is clear, transmitted to millions in a form that was actually relevant to them. The power of narrative is stunning. Its impact on education, be it through the Victorian novel or such charming meta-narrative as Ozick's The Cannibal Galaxy, represents a battle campaign brought to the masses, rather than a duel between a matched pair of the elite. The readers of a novel care, through sympathy with the characters – and by extension themselves - about the issues at stake. Rarely does this happen in connection with an academic treatise, although increasingly narrative is harnessed to perform a corollary function by authors such as Sergioivanni and Starratt¹, and as seen earlier, by the likes of Rushworth Kidder. In these books, narrative is used as illustrative supporting material. In the former it is to assist the reader in identifying with case studies similar to their own, and in the latter to lend some credibility to whatever point the author is trying to make. If the interpretation of an issue does not seem to carry sufficient weight, the application of narrative is employed to provide it with additional substance. Such approaches are generally superficial, offering no critical analysis of the piece even if it has literary merit, often diffusing the strength of the narrative by offering weak explanation of theme.

¹ Sergioivanni, Thomas J., and Robert J. Starratt. Supervision: A Redefinition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

The novel is of culture but transcends it; our understanding may be enhanced by the recognition of the socio-cultural features that it examines or reflects, as a familiarity with western culture and the Victorian era assists our comprehension of the novels examined in this project – but it is not necessary to our understanding. The elemental thrust of these novels falls outside specific boundaries of nationality or ideology, speaking to a shared conception of the human experience and the growth and maturation processes that define it. In the Victorian novel we see elements common to all poor education, ‘types’ that know no country.

One does not have to be a part of the culture of Machiavelli or Sun Tzu to recognize the value of the implications for leadership in The Prince or the The Art of War, nor should one shun the Kama Sutra based on a lack of cultural similitude. The misconceived or poorly applied learning model, the incompetent leader, the hazy vision of the shoddy theorist, the cruelty of undeserved punishment, the lack of empathy for the learner – these are concepts that are integral to our notion of what education should be, and more importantly, based on even a cursory examination of education in the novels discussed by this essay, has failed to become.

Robert Evans, in his article “The Culture of Resistance” points out that all educational systems are prone to atrophy over time, growing increasingly resistant to change:

In addition to the stability that is bred by success, there is a further fact that, like a person, a culture tends to grow more conservative with age. During an organization’s birth and early growth, culture begins as a distinctive competence, a source of identity, the “glue” that holds things together. When an organisation reaches maturity – the stage that characterizes most schools – culture generally becomes a constraint on innovation and a defence

against new influences (Schein, 1992, p.314). Traditional patterns of doing things have become so ingrained that they seem to have a momentum of their own. If the institution has enjoyed a history of success with its assumptions about itself and its environment, people will not want to question them or re-examine them... (Evans 510).

The implications of this are unavoidable for an institution like public education, which, if we are to accept Evans' position, has been steadily hardening for more than a century.

In the schools of the Victorian novel there are also clear tinctures of bureaupathology, hardly surprising to those working in the public system of Canada, which becomes increasingly paralysed by red tape while administrators download responsibility to teachers, becoming less and less connected to their schools and the clientele they serve. As Brocklehurst was disconnected from Brontë's Lowood School, so do administrators become detached in modern schools when hierarchy becomes pathological. As Hodgkinson notes, "When this happens, pseudo-authority is used to compensate for technical ignorance" (Hodgkinson 57). Continuing to parallel Hodgkinson's discussion, the educational leaders depicted through the novels in this project also demonstrate superficiality as the headmaster, already disenfranchised to a great extent from this school, deals at best with an abstract understanding of what is really occurring in the school as interpreted by those who act as information gatekeepers to the leader. "This generalization and simplification of data is (sic) both inevitable and necessary in the Weberian theory, but at worst it can result in distortions and manipulations of the "reality" that the administrator is attempting to deal with" (Hodgkinson 58). It is also apparent that all of the figures in Victorian literature rely heavily on dramaturgy to amplify their credibility. In fact, there is little genuine administrative work being

undertaken at all, as the hierarchy is used to dispel issues that require the demonstration of competence. Given all of this, what the analysis of Victorian literature leads us towards is an alternative model of leadership in schools, one that resists the blight of leaders of poor character and schools mired in bureaucracy and left without direction.

The answer to this century-old cycle of self-congratulatory decay may be found in the work of theorists who fail to subscribe to the structuralist vision of the administrator's role, the established hierarchy, the resistance to change, and the lack of agency among the clientele of schools. Foster suggests that leadership must be "critical, transformative, educative, and ethical" (Foster 50), characteristics that are the reverse of the characteristics of the bad schools reflected in Dickens and Brontë. As Angus contends:

Moreover, an undue emphasis upon the role of administrative leaders in schools suggests that it is possible to reduce complex educational problems to administrative issues that are represented as being soluble at the school level. Many educational problems, however, can only be understood in relation to the broad social, political and cultural context of which education is a part (63).

This was clearly understood by Dickens, who recognized that a reinterpretation of what is meant by school, education, and leadership was immediately required, and that the need for this type of reform was driven by wider social issues of which he was also a critic. All these years later, we are still waiting for the remainder of the reform to take place.

In Hard Times the school of 'Girl Number Twenty' reflected the utilitarian spirit of the time, one vivified by Gradgrind but still present today in the assembly-line features of many classrooms.

However, because schools are not factories, and because the administration of education is not reducible to management strategies, it [is] argued that professional administrators should be distinguished by their overall commitment to a set of educational values and principles for practice, rather than their competence in particular management skills (Codd 157).

Codd argues for what is perhaps the only eventual solution to the riddle set for educators by the *Elementary Education Act* of 1870, which is the reinvention of education in a form that supports democratic principles reflecting the complex relationships on which education is borne. Rizvi argues that while apathy abounds in politics and education, "[it] is not an intrinsic feature of human life; it is something conditioned by an over-organized and paternalistic society" (220). While there can be little doubt that apathy is a plague on administrators and students, as demonstrated by the frightening lack of activism on the part of Canadian educators (and much more ominously) their students, Rizvi points out that "Human beings can be politically engaged only in an organization in which they are encouraged to participate" (220). Again, it was to promote similar values that the incisive social commentary of Dickens and his associates was brought to bear.

The implications for literature as a source for current practice are equally significant. As the B.C. government continues to ignore the recent experiences of its provincial and

international counterparts to doggedly pursue a New Right agenda², administrators are facing unusual stress and can frequently be seen clutching at straws, or, just as likely, at thin pulpy treatises on administration offering the promise of self-discovery in a few easy steps³, much in the way that guitar students used to believe that Chet Atkins Play in a Day paperback would turn them into rock stars overnight. It's difficult to blame them for such strategies, although apparent that this is, at best, a superficial and probably futile exercise.

The problem with many of these 'solution manuals' is that they rely on case-study and matrix formulas which fail to recognize the fluid and dynamic nature of the school environment. Try as one might, there is not going to be enough time to flip to an appropriate page and attempt a reconciliation of reality and guidebook, much in the way that one runs the risk of being run over in Paris while consulting a Michelin guide. What is required is a broader, more holistic approach, one which has its roots in the training of administrators and flowers into a rounded understanding of the random unreality that we are much more likely to be faced with on a daily basis. It is here that literature becomes a key weapon in the arsenal of the administrator.

We do not teach children to read strictly so that they can avoid stepping into the wrong washroom and embarrassing themselves, nor so that they may successfully navigate a menu. Ignore the fact that doors and menus are often symbolically labelled in any case,

² BC Ministry of Education. "Statement of Education Policy Order (Mandate for the School System)." Vancouver: BC Ministry of Education Governance and Legislation Unit, October 10th, 2003.

³ Fullan, Michael. What's Worth Fighting For in the Principalship? Strategies for Taking Charge in the Principalship. Mississauga: Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation, 1997.

and recall that we use literature in school as a means of socialisation, a method to link oneself to the socio-cultural milieu in a manner that imaginatively resonates with the world they recognise and are a part of. Intended Learning Outcomes are rife with suggestions as to why The Chrysalids by John Wyndham is a powerful novel to help junior high school students to understand the dangers of fanaticism and religious fundamentalism, and how Miller's Death of a Salesman brings them to grips with self-deception and the illusory nature of the 'American Dream'. We read Robert Lopshire's Put Me in the Zoo tot's barely out of the crib knowing that it idealises a belief in the universal cultural tolerance and the challenges of finding your niche in a critical and unfriendly world, and E.B. White's Charlotte's Web to their older siblings to reinforce the same notion. In many ways, it might be better for an administrator to review Put Me in the Zoo carefully rather than reach for Change Forces: the Sequel. It has stronger thematic unity, economy of language, and doesn't take as much time out of your day.

The Victorian novel is a superlative source for the discussion of educational leadership because it grapples with the issues in the field that we had hoped to overcome, and presents us with characters that surround us in our practice. It's sad to note, but the education system is still full of Gradgrinds, Mells, Squeerses, Creakles, M'Choakumchilds, Brocklehursts, and all of the variants in between, as represented by authors such as Foster⁴, Smyth⁵, and Bates⁶, and Gronn⁷. The novel offers an

⁴ Foster, William. Paradigms and Promises: New Approaches to Educational Administration. Buffalo: Prometheus, 1986.

⁵ Smyth, John. "A 'Pedagogical' and 'Educative' View of Leadership." Critical Perspective on Educational Leadership. ed. John Smyth. London: The Falmer Press, 1989. 179-204.

⁶ Bates, Richard. "Educational Administration, the Sociology of Science, and the Management of Knowledge." Educational Administration Quarterly 16.2 (1980): 1-20.

opportunity to gain some detachment from these caricatures and recognise their types when we encounter them in the first place, even offering strategies for dealing with them or avoiding their mistakes. The novel brings the humanity back into an administrative discipline that must, if it worth anything at all, be founded in the humanities.

The importance of narrative and storytelling to the development of culture is well documented and understood by all but the most jaded philistine, who is beyond saving and probably on the way to a superintendency or career in the Ministry of Education in any case. If we consider the notion that "...culture develops as an ethos...created and sustained by social processes, images, symbols and ritual" (Morgan 132) the value of a resource which illuminates an organisations roots, identifies common types within it, and offers a key to decode the behaviour of its members is inestimable. Smircich offers the following conception of organisational culture:

Organizations are representations of our humanity, like music or art; they can be known through acts of appreciation...organizations are symbolically constituted worlds; they can be known through acts of critical reading and interpretation...organizations are symbolic forms, like religion and folklore; they are displays of the meaning of life. (Smircich, *Concepts* 66).

Coincidentally, so are novels. They are the products of imagination which offer a framework through which to examine critical commentary of our organisational cultures. More can be learned from the story than some personal experiences. Meaning is a construction in part dependent on the processing of narrative in some form. The novel is the most sustained and complex development of narrative that is available to us.

⁷ Gronn, Peter. "Leading for Learning: Organizational Transformation and the Foundation of Leaders." Journal of Management Development. 16.4 (1997): 274-83.

As Czarniawska notes:

The narrative structure of human life requires unpredictability, and this is, paradoxically, why the alleged failure of the social sciences is in fact their greatest achievement, namely, their failure to formulate laws, and, consequently, to predict (15).

If the importance of storytelling to organisational culture is accepted, then the case for literary sources for administration studies is axiomatic, as it offers a critical account of where reforms are needed as well as rich description of the circumstances in which administrative actions are carried out. It fulfils the requirements that Greenfield and Hodgkinson have made for a more critical, humane, and informed discipline; to satisfy Greenfield, character, and for Hodgkinson, values.

If it is impractical to suggest that would-be administrators spend several years travelling the world, participating in the delivery of education and the building of communities in diverse environments, and accumulating a comprehensive network of eclectic acquaintanceships in their prospective field, the next best thing for them is to read about these things. Not in the dry how-to manuals of the educational marketplace, but in a powerful historiographical narrative form. In fact, the literature might be preferable, if another lesson is drawn from Jane Eyre:

‘Then, in the first place, do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated, namely, that I am old enough to be your father, and that I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house?’

‘Do as you please, sir.’

‘That is no answer; or rather, it is very irritating because a very evasive one. Reply clearly.’

'I don't think, sir, you have the right to command me, merely because you are older than I or have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience' (165).

The inclusion of appropriate literature in the training of educational administrators offers signal advantages over the many banal options presently being hawked to the unwitting throngs of potential candidates. The trend towards increasingly pragmatic scholarship such as that of Fullan and Sergiovanni already noted and others such as Leithwood⁸ in preparation for entry to the field is disturbing. This is not to discount the importance of having a grasp of how schools and students function, as has been seen in Beattie's analysis of the drive toward 'Recent, Relevant Experience' in the UK, where educational leaders play "...an uncomfortable role in the mythology of the New Right, featuring regularly as manifest incompetents or ideologues" (221). This is not as troubling as the trend toward the pseudo-narrative use of tenuous analogies in administrative training, including Young and Peterson's⁹ use of the sports league as a metaphor, and Coleman and Creighton's¹⁰ effort that uses mastering golf to reflect educational leadership and preparation and practice. I am all in favour of analogies if they are suitably abstract and run along unique themes, but if it is necessary to devolve the theory of the field to such a numbing level of simplicity, it may be necessary to rethink the calibre of the candidates in training.

⁸ Leithwood, Kenneth and Deborah Montgomery. *Improving Principal Effectiveness: The Principal Profile*. Toronto: OISE Press, 1986.

⁹ Young, Michelle D. and Petersen, George J. "Enabling Substantive Reform in the Preparation of School Leaders." *Educational Leadership Review* 3.1 (2002): 1-15.

¹⁰ Coleman, Donald G. and Creighton, Theodore B. "Bringing University Education Administration Programs Up to Par: Oh? You're Talking About a Leadership Practice Field." *Education Leadership Review* 3.1 (2002): 16-20.

Equally tiring are the countless strategies which list a half-dozen or so strategies for surefire success as an educational administrator, such as one that suggests it provides "...six strategies that state and district leaders can employ to secure an ample supply of highly qualified school principals" (Bottoms 10). I have an idea. *Teach them to read*. Other suggestions that abound include those that suggest the manifold values of mentorship programs¹¹, while the concept of what 'mentorship' means is vaguely defined at best, often deteriorating into little more than coaching.

The study of literature does not appear to be high on the list of priorities for administrative training curricula, despite the recognition that it provides "...a sensitivity to the particular circumstances of individual cases and to the tone and symbolic meanings of administrative actions" (Shoenberg 10). Perhaps part of the solution to the problem of initiating new administrators lies, as in Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy*, in the prospect of living vicariously through literature. If the provision of sufficiently broad experience for new administrators is impossible, which seems to be self-evident, then at least let us encourage them to explore the field through the eyes of gifted authors. Perhaps, eventually, the pen and the sword will be reconciled. And so to conclude with Dickens:

As master of the school now breaking up, I am very happy to dismiss you for a holiday. I beg to assure my young friends that their patient and unremitting attention to their studies has afforded me the liveliest satisfaction (*Speeches*, 337).

¹¹ Moir, Ellen and Gary Bloom. "Fostering Leadership Through Mentoring." *Educational Leadership* 60.8 (2003): 58-61.

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