

## **The streets of Bethesda: The slate quarrier and the Welsh language in the Welsh Liberal imagination**

H. PAUL MANNING

*Anthropology, Trent University  
Peterborough, ONT K9J 7B8, Canada  
paulmanning@trentu.ca*

### ABSTRACT

Sociolinguistic debates about the fate of the Welsh language have since at least the mid-20th century posited the relationship between language and political economy as a central factor in the death or rebirth of the Welsh language since the Industrial Revolution. Such studies have been concerned primarily with empirical head counts of actual speakers and the movements of populations and distributions of languages as determined by political economic independent variables. This article argues that the relationship between language and political economy was also crucially and consequentially construed in the 19th century in terms of “imagined” exemplary speakers of Welsh. In the imagined voice of the Welsh slate quarrier, Welsh elites of the 19th century found a “modern” Welsh-speaking figure who participated in industry while remaining Welsh, both linguistically and culturally, thereby associating the Welsh language itself with the desirable properties of modernity, particularly industrial productivity, and this allowed it to be imagined as a language at home in modernity. (Welsh, political economy, language, ideology, modernity.)\*

### INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGE AND POLITICAL ECONOMY IN WALES

The irony, and it is a particularly teasing one, of Welsh industrialisation is that the Welsh had no longer to seek modernity elsewhere.

—Smith 1993:46

In 1959, the Welsh economist Brinley Thomas suggested that industrialization, far from being the gravedigger of the Welsh language that Welsh nationalists had been calling it since the 1930s, had in effect strengthened the Welsh language by allowing a population released from a declining agricultural sector in Wales to transfer to the growing industrial sector without leaving Wales: “The Welsh language was saved by the redistribution of a growing population brought about by industrialism” (Thomas 1959:189). His article proposed a heretical inversion of expectations, claiming that industrialization had been a “cauldron of rebirth” for

the language, spurred by a kind of “internal colonialism” different from that later proposed by Hechter 1975 – one in which the rural Welsh, like the Irish leaving the land and fleeing from agriculture, “colonized” hitherto uninhabited regions of their own country along the lines of the coalfaces. Thomas concluded:

Instead of bemoaning the rural exodus, the Welsh patriot should sing the praises of industrial development. . . . The unrighteous Mammon in opening up the coalfields at such a pace unwittingly gave the Welsh language a new lease of life and Welsh Nonconformity a glorious high noon. (Thomas 1959:192)

Thomas’s thesis received a short and testy response, suggestively entitled “Industrialization did not save the Welsh language” (Millward 1960), which concluded, on the contrary, that the net effect of industrialization on the Welsh language had been “a catastrophe.”

This debate has simmered unresolved ever since (see the summaries in Jenkins 1998 and Jones 1998). The focus of the debate has always been on the effects of the massive industrialization in the coalfields of South Wales, and to a lesser extent in North East Wales (see Pryce 1975, 1998), the effects of which were admittedly mixed (see the relevant chapters in Jenkins 1998). This more recent literature has nuanced Thomas’s thesis considerably, showing both considerable variation across different coal-mining districts, spatially as well as temporally. While in the anthracite coalfields of South Wales Thomas’s thesis is largely borne out (Matthews 1998), in the coalfields of North East Wales, for example, the demographic gains induced by industrialization were brief rather than long-term (Pryce 1998). In the valleys of Glamorgan, one of the districts most profoundly transformed by industrialization,

At least until the 1870s the bulk of the rural migrants who ventured into the industrial communities of Glamorgan hailed from Welsh-speaking counties. . . . For the period up to the 1870s, therefore, few historians would deny the validity of the argument that large-scale migration from rural Wales into Glamorgan proved a blessing to the Welsh-language. Thereafter the situation changed dramatically. . . . [I]n the long term, i.e. progressively over the period 1861 to 1911, the industrialization of the county ‘did not perform miracles’ for the preservation of the Welsh language and culture but . . . it did create a vibrant bilingual society characterized by stable and unstable linguistic groups which were increasingly receptive to English-language acculturation. (Jenkins 1998:8–9)

It can be argued, however, that the same processes described by Thomas happened on a smaller scale in North Wales between slate-quarrying districts and their agricultural hinterlands (Jenkins 1998:6, P. E. Jones 1989). The slate-quarrying districts of North Wales have in general displayed, on a smaller scale, the same sorts of population dynamics that characterized the early periods of the development of the South Wales coalfields; that is, the exodus of Welsh-speaking populations from the agrarian economy was in part absorbed by Welsh-speaking

industrial communities in the nearby slate-quarrying districts. Certainly census reports indicate that the slate-quarrying towns of North Wales were (and remain today) exemplary Welsh-speaking centers. Significantly for my present article, the slate-quarrying town of Bethesda had the highest proportion of Welsh speakers of any community, agricultural or urban, in Wales in both 1891 and 1911 (according to the data collected in Jones 1998), and the slate quarriers of North Wales were certainly aware of their status as paradigmatic Welsh-speaking communities.

The coalfields of South Wales, by contrast, were emerging as very different kinds of speech communities, varying both spatially and temporally from monoglot Welsh to bilingual to monoglot English. As a result, unlike the slate-quarrying communities of North West Wales, these communities never fit comfortably into a dualistic model of Welsh favored by some Welsh nationalisms – a Wales riven between the Welsh Wales of the *bro* (a term denoting a Welsh-speaking heartland), and an English-speaking Wales beyond, or alternately, a Welsh Wales consisting of a classless common people (*gwerin*) opposed to an upper-class English Wales consisting of anglicized aristocratic landlords and Anglican clergy (Morgan 1986). In response to these demographic changes wrought by industry, some commentators chose to see Wales as divided into three; among them was Alfred Zimmern, who in 1921 characterized this industrialized region of South Wales as “American Wales”:

The Wales of today is not a unity. There is not one Wales; there are three . . . There is Welsh Wales; there is industrial, or, as I sometimes think of it, American Wales; and there is upper class or English Wales. These three represent different types and different traditions. They are moving in different directions and, if they all survive, they are not likely to re-unite. (cited in Smith 1993: ix)

By the late 19th century, as we have seen above, it was already becoming apparent that, linguistically, the industrial communities of South Wales (“American Wales”) were emerging as a novel kind of bilingual speech community, bearing as little in common with “English Wales” as they did to the rural hinterlands of “Welsh Wales,” including the slate-quarrying communities. At the same time, industrialization was producing not only new kinds of speech communities and speakers, but also new voices: the voice of “American Wales,” typified by the collier, increasingly spoke in a political idiom of Laborism and socialism, and he did so in English. The political economic transformations that gave rise to “American Wales” produced novel kinds of communities both linguistically and politically, communities that could not be readily assimilated to the dualistic model of a classless Welsh Wales of the common people and an upper-class English Wales. But some Welsh communities, such as the slate-quarrying districts, industrialized and yet remained within the pale of Welsh Wales. It was in such communities that one could find an idealized Welsh

speaker, the slate quarrier, who could respond to both these alternate visions of Welsh modernity. The question is, then, why did this figure specifically come to assume the role of the exemplary Welsh speaker?

Part of the answer lies in the very different effects that industrialization had on speech communities along the coalface and the slate belt. But equally important, I would suggest, is the way that the VERY TERMS of this debate, which introduces political economy – industry and market – as an independent variable and community life and language as dependent variables, replicate the way that the predicament of the Welsh language has been GRASPED since the 19th century. This gives us a clue as to why the slate quarrier emerged as an exemplary Welsh speaker. I. G. Jones has perceptively commented on this literature (whose intellectual forebears begin in the 19th century), which argues that the survival of Welsh “was a function of migration, that it lasted only as long as the pump is primed with newcomers,” that it “confuses life with commodities” (Jones 1987:155). Sociolinguistic processes like language shift and the enregisterment of languages in bilingual societies are not merely matters of empirical head counts of actually existing speakers, countable like so many commodities, nor are they directly “superstructural” reflexes of changes in the economic “base” (Gal 1989b:348). They are also fundamentally ideological matters of the formulation and propagation of images of exemplary speakers – figures who connect topologies of linguistic variation to topologies of social variation in an exemplary fashion, imbuing languages as registers with the social properties of their imagined exemplary speakers. As the case of the quarriers shows, depictions of such imagined ideal speakers, disseminated in print or other media, can take on sociolinguistic importance as exemplars or figures far beyond their empirical numbers. Moreover, as Inoue 2003 shows for another kind of imagined speaker, such images of stereotypic speakers can emerge not only as precipitates of actual embodied speech, but also in disembodied, print-mediated “forms of metalinguistic practice . . . citing, quoting and reporting in the circulation of the modern mass media” (Inoue 2003:318). Welsh print culture in the late 19th century was more and more densely populated with (real or imagined) Welsh-speaking voices of quarriers, and sparsely populated with those of colliers, in proportion to their actual relative numbers.<sup>1</sup>

But some such confusion of “life” and “commodities,” subjects and objects, persons and things, was characteristic of 19th-century materialism in general and political economy in particular.<sup>2</sup> What interests me in this essay is this semiotic ideology of “materialism” that made the slate quarrier (as opposed to a Welsh farmer, for example) so central to the existence and future of the Welsh language, and the set of premises about languages and their speakers that made the existence of a Welsh industry of slate-quarrying identical with the possibility of a Welsh(-speaking) modernity. It was precisely by IMAGINING the Welsh language in productive engagement with the material world of industry that these imaginings became persuasively “real.”

When I speak of an IDEOLOGY of materialism, I want to draw attention to the historicity and positionality of this ideology. It is associated with the 19th-century liberal phase of capitalism, in which material productivity was increasingly seen as a universal criterion of social worth (Rabinbach 1990, Postone 1996, Manning 2002, 2004a). Since I am concerned here with ideologies about languages and their speakers as well as with other forms of sign use (semiosis), I use the term “semiotic ideologies” rather than “linguistic” or “language ideologies” (see, e.g., Gal & Irvine 1995). Keane 2003 defines semiotic ideologies as follows:

basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world. It determines, for instance, what people will consider the role that intentions play in signification to be, what kinds of possible agent (humans only? Animals? Spirits?) exist to which acts of signification might be imputed, whether signs are arbitrary or necessarily linked to their objects, and so forth. . . . [S]emiotic ideologies are not just about signs, but about what kinds of agentive subjects and acted-upon objects might be found in the world. (Keane 2003:419)

That is, semiotic ideologies are informed by indigenous ONTOLOGIES, assumptions about what sorts of entities, things, forces, and agents populate the cosmos, such as those embodied in the dominant 19th-century ideology of materialism (Rabinbach 1990).

In keeping with this semiotically grounded research program, I will speak of different qualitative types of sign relations posited by the philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce: (i) ICONS (iconic, iconicity; also LIKENESSES), sign relations founded on potential, qualitative, subjectively apprehended resemblances between a sign and its object (as a picture resembles, and hence stands for, the person or thing portrayed); (ii) INDEXES (indexical, indexicality), founded on actual, purely objective, existentially real relations of causality or contiguity between sign and object (e.g., a clue and a crime, a bullet and a bullet hole); and (iii) SYMBOLS, purely stipulative relations founded on intersubjective law, custom, or habit, in the absence of any other semiotic relation (e.g., all linguistic signs and their objects). See Keane 2003 for discussion. I will also speak, following Gal & Irvine 1995, of certain typical ways that semiotic ideologies construe or recast existing sign relations: NATURALIZATION (whereby arbitrary signs such as symbols are treated as being relatively NATURAL icons or indexes), and its converse, CONVENTIONALIZATION; ERASURE, in which the semiotic field is simplified by the elision or removal of some of its relations; and RECURSION, in which a semiotic opposition significant at one level is redeployed at another.

The semiotic ideology of materialism involves its own characteristic set of oppositions, notably the opposition between a material and a moral universe, spheres of “commodities” and “life,” and, almost equivalent, an opposition between technical and social (or cultural) spheres of activity, and an asymmetric relation between those spheres such that the former conditioned, informed, or determined the latter, which served as a reflection of the former. The material

universe, in local understandings, included what we might call the economy, composed of industry and the market – a sphere dominated by objective interests; the moral universe was prototypically located in the home or the chapel, the sphere dominated by subjective sentimental attachment and affect. The result was a kind of utilitarian version of Herzfeld's "disemia" (e.g., Herzfeld 1996), which alternates as an antinomy, or unresolvable contradiction, between philistinism and sentimentalism, so to speak.

At times, the opposition between English and Welsh echoed this antinomic opposition between unresolved contradictory positions, as one observer pithily summed up the opposition between English and Welsh in one district in 1847: "If interest pleads for English, affection leans to Welsh" (*Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry* 1848, cited in Manning 2003). Here English is a language of material and technical utility, and therefore of progress, and Welsh is a language of moral sentiment, and therefore of tradition. Yet again, English could stand for the corrosive aspects of modernity, and Welsh as the moral security of tradition (for a similar "disemic" polarization of culture in another colonial context, see Chatterjee 1992). In brief, the linguistic opposition between the functional domains of English and Welsh was precisely the emerging antinomies of modernity itself. But only if Welsh could be made to step from its walled garden in the moral sphere of the chapel and the home into the material sphere of industrial production could Welsh move from traditional stasis into progress and modernity. For this semiotic mediating role, the traditional peasant figure, redolent of a vanishing order, that was favored in other European nationalisms would not suffice (Hofer 1980, Rogers 1987; however, see Urla 1993 for a parallel case of "ethnic modernity"), particularly since peasants were actually fleeing the agrarian economy in droves. The quarrier, however, was modern, and he spoke Welsh in both the material and the moral worlds, mediating the opposition.

As I will show, the quarrier stands initially as an exemplary resident of Welsh Wales, a member of the mythical common people (*gwerin*), as opposed to upper-class English Wales, in a dualistic model of Welsh modernity. This figure was initially articulated to contest the hegemonic claims of English as the positively valorized language par excellence of modernity, and he was imbued with all those essentialized traits that Welsh Liberalism liked to believe were characteristic of the Welsh people in general.<sup>3</sup> However, as we will see below, the figure of the quarrier also serves to oppose Welsh Wales to the threat presented by a very different form of Welsh modernity: the "American Wales" whose stereotypical resident was the collier, who came to represent a very different vision of Wales's future – one associated with the political narrative of Labor rather than Liberalism, a narrative expressed increasingly in English rather than Welsh.<sup>4</sup> I will show that English had two very different values with respect to Welsh, first as the language of progress and utility (English Wales), and second as the language of the corrosion of tradition and the rise of a new, unruly industrial communities inhabited by a restless proletariat – American Wales, a kind of stain,

linguistic, moral, and material, on the map of Wales. The quarrier could stand as a figure of exemplary Welshness contrasted with both these alternative visions of a modern Wales. The quarriers, originally a vanguard of Welsh Nonconformist Liberalism bringing the Welsh common people into modernity despite the aristocratic landlords and Anglican clergy of English Wales, also served as a rear guard against the increasingly “mixed” figure of the collier, a Welsh people holding the line against a nationless “American” proletariat.

To meet those challenges, the Welsh Wales of the Liberal imagination would have to provide itself with an exemplary Welsh speaker who was also modern, and modernity in this context meant industrial modernity. If industry stands to agriculture as modernity stands to tradition, then a Welsh language that was not involved in industry was not part of modernity, and it was doomed to the death that awaited all tradition. “For all modern purposes . . . let the Welshman speak English,” Matthew Arnold (1906 [1866]:10) pithily summed up the net wisdom of Welsh and English philistinism. As modernity annihilates tradition, industry supplants agriculture, so English must supplant Welsh – unless Welsh traditionalism could secrete itself in some walled garden of sentimental pursuits away from the modern and utilitarian. Or, better yet, unless modernity itself could be made to speak Welsh. Enter the slate quarrier.

*The streets of Bethesda*

This brings us to a rather late contribution to this debate on industry and the fate of the Welsh language: a song by the band Celt, who are slate quarriers themselves and who hail from Bethesda, a traditional center of the slate-quarrying industry. I reproduce the text in full:

*The streets of Bethesda*  
(Celt [copyright Recordiau Sain])

One day as I walked through the streets of Bethesda,  
As I walked down past the slates and the graves,  
I saw an old quarryman watching the sunset,  
Recalling his life at the close of his day.  
He’s just a statistic in history’s pages,  
Struggling for breath as he shuffles along,  
There’s dust in his lungs from the rocks of the ages,  
Death in that mountain he’d known for so long.  
My grandfather told me: ‘Don’t slave in that quarry,  
Or you will be joining them six feet below.’  
I said: ‘*Nhaid i bach paid a phoeni, fydda’i’n iawn,*  
(*mi*) *fydda’i yn gwisgo fy masg rhag y llwch.*’  
[‘I Said: Dear grandfather don’t worry I’ll be fine,  
I’ll wear a mask against the dust.’]

Celt began their performance with this song when I saw them in 1991. It produces a paradoxical inversion of linguistic expectations. First, this opening song is English, while the remainder of Celt's repertoire is entirely Welsh. While the song itself switches (or returns) to Welsh in its coda, it must itself be treated as a salient usage of English within Celt's overall repertoire. This linguistic code-switch is paralleled by a switch of genre. While this song takes the form of a traditional ballad (sung to the tune of "Bang the drum slowly"), the remainder of their songs can readily be classified as some variation of modern rock. The song's position within Celt's "set" enacts a reversal of expectations, associating English with traditionalism of genre, and Welsh with modernity of genre. This reversal is recapitulated within the song: The old quarryman addresses his grandson in English, and the young quarryman, suddenly and surprisingly, replies to him in Welsh.

The generational conversation between the dying old man and the young one, then, unexpectedly places English and Welsh in counterpoint as traditionalism and modernity, and, moreover, aligns the end of slate-quarrying with English, and its continuation with Welsh. The slate quarries bring the Welsh language into the world of industrial production, of modernity, but ironically the salvation of the Welsh language in Welsh industry requires the death of the Welsh-speaking worker from silicosis, itself a product of the slate dust that everywhere accompanies production. The slate dust, a vector of industrial death for the individual quarrier, becomes the metonymic index of the projected death of the Welsh language. The silicosis that makes the old quarryman unable to breathe and speak is aligned with his inability to speak WELSH. The young quarrier, who wears a mask to protect him from slate dust, can continue to speak Welsh and to engage in that most Welsh of all industries, slate-quarrying, whose fate is linked to the fate of Welsh.

#### THE SLATE QUARRIER IN THE 19TH CENTURY

How charming to his ears is the sweet sound of his mother tongue!  
 Sweeter to his tongue than honey its seemly sounds;  
 Dearest old Welsh, if ever it dies,  
 From the lips of a quarrier, I think, will come the final word.

—*Y Chwarelwr*, John Owen (Glan Elsi), *Cymru* 1893:112<sup>5</sup>

One hundred years before Celt sang, a Welsh poet with the bardic name Glan Elsi had drawn a similar connection between the fates of Welsh language and the slate industry. Here again, the Welsh-speaking quarrier has the last word, in the specific sense of *final word*, or last token utterance of the language. Both of these images depend on a prior linkage of the Welsh language with the activity of slate quarrying. In the 19th century, Liberal apologists for the Welsh language found in the quarrier their ideal Welsh speaker. For liberals and quarriers alike, the figure of the slate quarrier came to condense the variousness of the relation of Welsh to English, so that the quarrier became a major ideological exemplar of



Welshness, a suitable replacement for the vanishing peasant and a respectable antidote to the strike-prone coal miner. Not only was the slate quarrier linguistically Welsh; he was also CULTURALLY Welsh–Liberal, Nonconformist, cultured, temperate, and respectable, all traits that were linked together by the hegemonic Welsh Liberal Nonconformist construct of Welshness in the 19th century (Merryn Jones 1982, 1986, 1992, Manning 2001a, 2002). The following assessment from a period newspaper correspondent is typical:

On the whole the quarrymen are an intelligent class of workmen. . . . Speaking in general terms, they are a very orderly set of men, not given to heavy drinking and debauchery. They almost all subscribe to a newspaper each week, and can converse intelligently on the topics of the day. In politics they are almost without exception Liberals, and in religion Nonconformists. (*Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 15 February 1873, p. 6)

By appearing as a stable term in a series of dichotomous oppositions indexically linked to language, the slate quarrier was a crucial mediating link, an exemplary mapping, between topologies of linguistic and social variation, so that the fate of the slate industry and the Welsh language became one in his person. The imagined figure of the quarrier as exemplary Welsh speaker, then, allowed Welsh to be seen as partaking of all the other social properties associated with this idealized figure; this established the Welsh language as a suitable vehicle for the moral and material life of a specifically Liberal conception of Welsh modernity, rather than a barrier to it.

This canonization of the quarrier as a linguistic exemplar of Welshness (summed up in Glan Elsi's poem, to which I will return throughout) was partially a broader cultural precipitate of the quarriers' own "linguistic" critique of production, a "private" debate within production that they projected, via the Welsh press, onto the public canvas of Wales. The quarriers wrote themselves into the Liberal narrative of modernity by their own contributions to the Welsh Liberal press. To understand the image of the quarrier in the broader society, then, we must explore the quarriers' own contributions and their rhetorical ends.

## THE ROCK DOES NOT UNDERSTAND ENGLISH

If officials are needed  
 They are at once sent for from afar,  
 Either Irishman, English or Scots  
 Are in jobs almost everywhere  
 In works here in Wales  
 Englishmen can be seen interfering  
 You must get Welshmen to break the stone,  
 For the rock does not understand English

—Welsh folk song, cited in Jones 1982:78

This broader naturalized imagining of the relation of slate rock and the Welsh language derives from the slate quarriers' own ideologies about the relation of language and geology, which they expressed in an aphorism: The reason the Welsh had to work the rock was that "the rock did not understand English." From the mid-1860s on, many letters to the Welsh press by self-designated quarriers begin to appear; the writers used *noms de plume* that uniformly drew attention to their position in the labor process for authorization. They articulated a fairly systematic "productivist" critique of what the quarriers sometimes called "the English method" of working quarries, part of which involved naturalizing the relationship between speaking Welsh and the activity of slate production. This productivist critique, as I have shown elsewhere (Manning 2001a, 2002, 2003), linked the Welsh language and ethnicity with activities associated with "industry" – that is, the use-value dimension of commodity production – and English with "the market," the exchange-value dimension of commodity production.<sup>6</sup> These two aspects internal to commodity production, in the quarriers' ideology, were externalized and materialized as being spatio-temporally separated processes in discrete locations, standing as industry to market, and as Welsh quarrying village to the markets of the world. The net result of such a semiotic polarization was that the Welsh language appeared to be the language of human interaction with nature – industry par excellence – while English came to be associated with relatively nonproductive forms of commercial artifice overlaid on this "natural" activity (Manning 2002). Productivism, then, led to naturalization of the relation of knowledge of slate rock to knowledge of Welsh in the quarriers' imagination: The rock really did not speak English. These workers, then, succeeded INDIRECTLY in canonizing themselves as national exemplars.

But what was it that Welsh liberalism found "good to think" in the slate quarrier? The quarriers' ethnicizing rhetoric cast their disputes about matters internal to production into more general terms that made them recognizable as part of the broader struggles of Welsh Liberalism. At the same time, their ethnic rhetoric, which emphasized linguistic difference as constitutive of the division of labor in the quarries, along with their casting their complaints as instances of relatively undifferentiated ethnic oppression (*gormes*), allowed them to be seen as artisanal members of a classless common people (*gwerin*), in whose name Welsh Liberalism fought (Morgan 1986 [1967], Merfyn Jones 1992), rather than as an anomalous and dangerous proletariat, represented archetypically by the coal-miner, for whom Laborism would later speak.

#### THE LIBERAL QUARRIER

Hateful in his sight is oppression, tyranny, and treachery,  
 For Freedom he would sacrifice everything without refusal,  
 'Let the world's wealth go the abyss' is the language of his guileless  
 mind,

'I prefer Freedom to the best pearls of the world.'  
 He is the comely embodiment of sublime Independence,  
 To the landlord he will not bow against the rights of man.

—*Y Chwarelwr*, John Owen (Glan Elsi), *Cymru* 1893: 112

In the Liberal imagination, the quarriers were essentially another group of the *gwerin* suffering from undifferentiated oppression (*gormes*, *gorthrwm*) at the hands of Englishmen, as English landlords and capital encompassed Welsh tenants and labor, and as the Anglican church encompassed Nonconformist Wales (Merfyn Jones 1992). The category of *gwerin* represents an undifferentiated group of the ethnically oppressed Welsh common people opposed in the aggregate to the English, and their myriad struggles are grasped in similarly undifferentiated terms. This allowed the struggles of the Welsh quarriers to become metonyms for the struggle of Welsh Liberalism writ large. It was this apparent alignment that allowed Welsh quarriers to find such a ready ally in the Welsh Nonconformist Liberal press, which could see the quarriers' struggles in familiar and reassuringly universalizing terms as being the struggle of a common people for justice (*cyfiawnder*) and freedom (*rhyddid*) against oppression (*gormes*), rather than as the narrow struggle of an industrial proletariat against exploitation. The former interpretation seemed, moreover, to take the struggle itself and its object out of the material world of production and economy into the moral political world of freedom and justice. A newspaper commentator wrote in 1874:

Bringing justice (*cyfiawnder*) to its place is always worthy of struggle and sacrifice, and the quarriers of Llanberis can feel that they have been well strengthened to contribute their part in common struggle and sacrifice of humanity for the glorious hegemony of justice. . . . Their struggle can be looked upon as a moral contest between oppression (*gormes*) and freedom (*rhyddid*). (*Y Goleaud*, 1 August 1874, p. 2)

The figure of the slate quarrier served as a particular exemplar of the general predicament of the Welsh people. The opposition between labor and capital in most slate quarries was correlated with a virtually categorical linguistic opposition between Welsh quarriers and English owners (Merfyn Jones 1988:47). Moreover, to this linguistic divide there corresponded a broader cultural and political one: The quarrier was Nonconformist Protestant, the owner Anglican; the quarrier a Liberal, the owner a Tory; and so on. The slate quarriers, then, are perhaps the best Welsh exemplars of Hechter's "cultural division of labor," and indeed, his model of "Internal Colonialism" (Hechter 1975) seems in large part to recapitulate the basic 19th-century liberal thesis of the classless Welsh *gwerin* suffering from oppression at the hands of the English (Lovering 1978:65–6).

The quarrier was associated with all those attributes that the Welsh Liberal imagination liked to associate with Welsh. The Welsh language was seen as intrinsically respectable, cultured, temperate, and above all religious, and the quarriers, at least in principle, were all these things. Even his battles against his employers could be seen as enacting the various theses that animated the multiple crusades of Welsh Liberalism in the period – yet another battle by the classless Welsh *gwerin* (variously tenant-farmers, Nonconformist Protestant worshippers, or slate quarriers) against a culturally alien, English or anglicizing or Anglican upper estate. The prior question, then, is how did the Welsh language ITSELF come to have all of these associations?

## OF WHITE AND BROWN BREAD: A UTILITARIAN DISEMIA

If English can talk best  
 About money and counting,  
 Welsh is our language,  
 We commend it for worship.

—Gwalchmai, *Yr Iaith Gymraeg* (*Y Geninen* 11, 1893:103)

By the second half of the 19th century, in the wake of the infamous “Blue Books” inquiry into the state of education in Wales (1847), Welsh and English fell into an uneasy and ill-defined complementary opposition in Welsh Liberal ideology (Edwards 1980; Jones 1987, 1992; Williams 1988, 1992). In brief, the general question addressed by the Blue Books was the causes of the purported general ignorance, backwardness, and immorality of the Welsh people. The answer was “Welsh.” The conclusions of the report, whose commissioners were Welsh Anglicans, shocked and outraged Welsh Nonconformist Liberals, who soon labeled it the “betrayal of the Blue Books” (*brad y Llyfrau Gleision*) (Morgan 1991); however, it is equally true that the publication of the report produced unexpected benefits for this audience. As Sian Rhiannon Williams has written, “The ‘betrayal of the Blue Books’ gave a basis to the Nonconformists to claim that they were the guardians of the language and the nation, and after the publication of the Report of 1847 Welshness and Nonconformism became inseparable” (Williams 1988:50).

The conclusions of the Blue Books implied that Welsh might not be of any particular value at all, and, indeed, many (Welsh Liberals included) stopped just short of advocating linguistic euthanasia (Millward 1991b). English, there was no question, was the language of utility and useful knowledge, the best language for talking “about money and counting,” as Gwalchmai would have it. Welsh was condemned by the Blue Books as its antithesis. If we are to understand what properties the quarrier had in relation to the Welsh language that made him good to think, we must first understand the way in which the unchallenged thesis of the “Utility of English” produced and conditioned the various properties of Welsh *qua* antithesis.

First, Welsh became opposed to the utility of English as a complementary residuum of all that was not utility – thus, the sphere of the moral, the sentimental, the religious, and the impractical (see, e.g., Edwards 1980; Jones 1987, 1992; Millward 1991a; Williams 1988, 1992). Second, English became opposed to Welsh via the derived thesis that set up Welsh as the language of the moral and respectable and English as that of the immoral and dangerous, the language of all that Welsh “scorned or feared to express” (Jones 1987:75). Third, the opposition between English and Welsh was reproduced recursively within the domain of utility, so that Welsh stood to English as practical knowledge much as a craftsman’s skill stood to theoretical knowledge (e.g., as quarrying to the science of geology), or as industry stood to the market within the domain of production and exchange. I will take up each of these themes again with respect to the quarrier and his exemplary status.

### *Complementarity*

The thesis of English as the language of utility and progress implied a complementary position for Welsh as the language of sentimental attachment and stasis. The quintessential 19th-century Welsh self-made man, David Davies Llandinam (of the Ocean Coal Company), summed up the compromise position perfectly:

He said that this was the first Eisteddfod [Bardic festival] he had ever attended, but he hoped it would not be the last. He was himself a great admirer of the old Welsh language, and he had no sympathy with those who reviled their country and language (applause). Still he had seen enough of the world to know the best medium to make money by was English; and he would advise every one of his countrymen to master it perfectly (applause). If they were content with brown bread, let them of course remain where they were; but if they wished to enjoy the luxuries of life, with white bread to boot, the way they would do so would be by the acquisition of English. He knew what it was to eat both (cheers). (*Aberystwyth Observer*, 30 September 1865)

Davies presents Welsh here as the language of sentimental attachment, opposed to the forthright utility of English. The parallel association of English with white bread and Welsh with brown reiterates this point, linking the moral order of languages to the material order of objects, specifically commodities. Not only does white bread oppose brown as the bread of luxury to the bread of poverty, but white bread was sold according to market prices, while brown bread (“household bread”) was sold at regulated or subsidized prices (Thompson 1971:80–1). While nowadays we associate brown bread with healthy, wholesome goodness, this subsidized brown bread was often substandard, made with inferior ingredients or fillers. Indeed, Davies himself was said to have cried when forced to eat it as a child. White bread could therefore stand to brown bread “totemically” as the unfettered logic of the triumphant Liberal political economy stood to the traditional moral economy, an economy of provisioning subsidized and regu-

lated by the state. The totemic series that Welsh is “brown bread” to English “white bread” produces Welsh as a historical residuum, a social stasis to be replaced by self-evidently superior social progress.

Following this logic, Welsh Liberal ideologies always accepted the thesis of the utility of English, simply aligning Welsh with various sectioned-off domains of non-utility, such as home, chapel, or poetry. They hoped that in these “walled gardens” the principle of complementarity would be the salvation of Welsh. Thus, by complementary contrast with English, Welsh came to represent a language of culture suitable for literary pursuits, a language of sentiment suitable for private pursuits, and especially a language of religion. It came to be seen as the “language of the heavens” in opposition to English, and the fate of the chapel and the language were linked (Williams 1988). In one of many possible examples, the publisher Thomas Gee reacted to the prophecies of, and apologies for, the imminent death of Welsh thus in 1866:

Let English be the language of the market, and Welsh the language of religion. Let English have the world, and Welsh the sacred (sanctuary). . . . Let us keep our language, our pulpit, and national religiousness. If we are poor in money, we will be rich in the wealth of an infinitely higher nature. Let the foreigner work the wealth which lies in our mountains, we have a wealth a thousand times richer in our language and our ministry. (Gee, *Y Cymraeg a'r Dyfodol* [The Welsh language and the future], cited in Edwards 1980:340–1)

Thus, Welsh became a language of moral sentiment as opposed to material interests (Manning 2004a), a language of parlor culture and *eisteddfodau* as opposed to public life and the market.

### *Respectability*

Yet again, if Welsh were to play the moral and cultured antithesis to the material and utilitarian thesis of English, by a second antithesis English became the language of the immoral as opposed to the moral, the rough as opposed to the respectable, the politically revolutionary as opposed to the reformist, the language of labor as opposed to liberalism. To follow a popular formulation, English became the language of all that Welsh feared to express (I. G. Jones 1987). In the Welsh imagination, for the working class at least, respectability was aligned with Welshness and roughness with English. The status opposition between “respectables” and “roughs,” “people of the chapel” and “people of the tavern,”<sup>7</sup> within every British working-class community was recursively projected onto the map of Wales, such that the slate quarriers of Welsh Wales would stand opposed to the colliers of American Wales as a respectable working class to a rough one.<sup>8</sup> Although earlier Liberal ideologues of Welsh had taken comfort in the idea that the very word “strike” was English and the activity it described was a pernicious external influence, as South Welsh turned toward Laborism and socialism, English

came to be seen as its emblematic language (I. G. Jones 1987), thus reproducing the same ideological opposition with a different valuation of the terms.

### *Practicality*

Last, the Blue Books alleged not only that English was the language of utility, but also that Welsh lacked any utility whatsoever. Whatever benefit the Welsh language had in imparting essentially useless knowledge such as poetry or religion, it was the cause of the Welsh “remain[ing] inferior in every branch of practical knowledge and skill” (*Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry* 1848:522). But in the image of the quarriers, a Welsh-speaking working class, the asymmetric complementarity between English and Welsh could be RECURSIVELY REPRODUCED within the domain of utility. Within the domain ruled by utility, the market clearly belonged to English, but what of industry, in the sense of productive interaction with the material world, “practical knowledge and skill”? Here was a domain where the Welsh participated practically: after all, who would break the rock in Wales but the Welsh? Perhaps the finished slates spoke English, but the rough rock from which they were hewn spoke only Welsh. Thus, if English was incontestably the language of commerce, then Welsh was in not a few cases the language of industry. The Welsh quarriers could see their practical skill as mediators between rock in its natural state (*craig*) and rock in its cultural state (*cer-rig*), so that the skill of the quarrier, condensed and displayed in the Welsh language – which had a referential monopoly both on rock in the natural state (raw material) and on the industrial process that converted it into its cultural state as commodity – stood totemically opposed to the cultural sphere of the market, whose domain was English, which had a referential monopoly on rock in its cultural form as commodity (Manning 2001a, 2002). The quarrier’s skill turned “the materials formed by nature in the mountain into slates suitable to send to all the markets of the world” (Peris 1896 [1875]:70).

### *A trip to Ffestiniog: The cultured quarrier*

By the late 19th century, the quarrier had become as cultured, religious, literate, and respectable as it was possible for a member of the Welsh *gwerin* to become. His culturedness in nonproductive spheres was contingent on his skill within production, and his culturedness outside of production was brought into the domain of production by his distinctive lunchtime canteen practices. When quarriers spoke in the pages of the Welsh Liberal press, they often spoke anonymously, but they did so in their own collective name: Most letters were signed simply *chwarelwr* ‘quarrier’, or some more specific craft occupation (always a relatively skilled one, however). The self-negation of the speaker’s private identity, necessary to allow his stance to seem representative and general in the public forum of print, required a decentering anonymity (Warner 1990:42), but at the same time it dictated a choice of pseudonym that gave some general positive inflection to his stance (hence the popularity in the Welsh press of names like

*carwr* *x*, ‘lover of *x*’, where *x* is something indisputably good, like freedom, order, or justice), replacing his individual, private appellation (proper name) with a public, generic pseudonym. For the quarriers, it was their position in production as skilled workers that lent this generalizable, typifying authority. Since the term *chwarelwr* draws attention to the skill of the craftsman – here, cultural authority – the authorization to speak in public outside of production derives from skill, the category within material production that is cognate with moral culture. At the same time, the insistent use of a broadly generic term such as *chwarelwr* allowed individual workers to present their individual contributions in the press as if these emanated from a collective voice, a collective authority. The quarriers’ own definitions of the name in which they spoke, *chwarelwr*, indicated that it was in use as an occupational “shifter,” a term whose reference shifts depending on indexical features of context, denoting now quarriers in general, irrespective of skill, and now only the most skilled quarriers (see Silverstein 1976 on shifters; Gal 1991; Herzfeld 1996; Manning 2001b on ethnic or group shifters; and Quam-Wickham 1999 on the “slipperiness of skill”). Their attempts to restrict the “proper” use of this term to skilled quarriers was the key to their self-construction that equated skill (the culture of the material world of production) with respectability (the culture of the moral world outside production). As Knox (1999:103) notes for another British working-class culture of the same period, respectability in the moral sphere echoes skill in the material sphere, “reproducing the status hierarchies of the workplace in the wider society.”

In general, these quarriers were responding to a widespread 19th-century social ontology of a uniform and unidimensional civilizing process in which material progress and moral progress went hand in hand, an ontology in which the indigenes of the British colonies stood to the metropole as the British lower orders stood to the bourgeoisie, as women to men, children to adults, savages to civilized, past to present, and so on (Kuklick 1991, chap. 3). These oppositions constitutive of the social ontology of empire were recursively reproduced within the working orders, producing an opposition between unskilled, rough plebeians (often of Irish or agricultural background) and a skilled, respectable, British “labor aristocracy,” and, in consequence, a whole series of recursive invidious distinctions of moral and material status between these (Kuklick 1991: 94ff.).

But the slate quarrier had not always been the image of cultured respectability for Welsh Liberalism. In fact, not too long before, travelers to slate-quarrying towns like Blaenau Ffestiniog and Bethesda had been horrified by the degraded moral condition of the working populace. Their lack of thrift, drunkenness, and general boisterousness presented an image very distant from the respectable Welsh speakers they would later become. Such images of the quarrying communities were relatively common in the Welsh press during the period before the formation of the Union (1874) (see *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, 17 July 1858, p. 7). These communities were growing by leaps and bounds, with their populations doubling in a few years. Some observers noted that the “rough” and “respectable”



segments of the working class, the “people of the tavern” and the “people of the chapel,” were beginning to coalesce around a craft hierarchy, and it is this, perhaps, that provided the immediate empirical basis for the ideological emergence of the cultured quarrier:

I asked someone who was sober and close to me, whether those that were drunk were the quarriers? He said that the majority of them were miners and labourers, but the youngest of them were quarriers. . . . There were very many of these people (who my friend called *riders*), enough to make a stranger think that the quarriers were the lowest men under the sun. But I was gladdened to understand that these were a small class in comparison, and that there was another class of sober, honest, respectable and religious men, and that this was the largest class amongst them. (*Yr Herald Cymraeg*, 17 July 1858, p. 7)

Ironically, then, the cultured respectability of the quarriers begins to emerge via opposition to a large segment of the working class in these very towns, who were neither cultured nor respectable. For the quarriers, and their apologists in the Welsh press, the question of respectability became one of the referential precision of the term “quarrier” itself. Miners and other laborers in the quarry were admittedly drunken and uncouth, but then, they were not “real quarriers.” The more that travelers criticized the morals of the slate communities, the more the quarriers themselves began to answer in print that the real quarriers were not to blame, based on an explicit ideology of craft control of the proper reference of the term “quarrier.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, one quarrier (signing himself *chwarelwr* ‘quarrier’) took a moralizing traveler (a certain Arthur) to task for mistakenly confusing the quarrier “in the strict sense” with the quarrier “speaking loosely”; the former, he wrote, were, among other things, respectable, while the latter were not, consisting largely of “strangers and newcomers,” in this case unskilled workers fresh from agricultural occupations in other Welsh-speaking areas.<sup>10</sup> This *chwarelwr* was reflexively constituting the very authority of the name (*chwarelwr*) in which he spoke:

One thing is certain, that the picture that [Arthur] gives of us as quarriers and as believers is incorrect and unfair. If Arthur is from Ffestiniog, and as *quick* in his understanding that he can perfect his knowledge about the craft of making slates in a month’s time, then he must know the *definition* given here, as in other places, to the word *quarrier* [*chwarelwr*], and that not everyone who works in a quarry is a quarrier. It must be admitted that there is here dreadful drinking and drunkenness, and that the language which is heard along the streets is frightful – the curses, oaths and shrieks of the drunks are extremely painful. But it is not the quarriers as a class who are those that are guilty of these things (though there are some exceptions); but the majority are ‘strangers and newcomers,’ as they were called by the Rev. William Edwards, Aberdâr, when he was here. (*Y Faner ac Amserau Cymru*, 7 December 1864)

Following the dominant semiotic ideology of 19th-century materialism, here again the moral life of the community (culture, respectability, religiousness) depends on its material position in production (craft skill). This craft skill is the crucial element in identifying the “real quarriers,” and therefore the respectable elements of the community. Skill is the material equivalent of moral culture, and at the same time stands as a qualitative moral counterpart to purely material, physical labor, measurable quantitatively in terms of strength (Quam-Wickham 1999).

Skill makes the quarrier, but what is skill? The stereotypical intension of the term *chwarelwr* is closely connected with notions of skill as a holistic property, including within it the entirety of the labor process of production. Its shifting referential applicability to individual workers makes it a “shifter” based on a gradient participation in this property. For example, all accounts agree that “at times all of the men who work in a quarry are quarriers, including the *arloeswyr* [‘pioneers’, a kind of unskilled worker] and the *labr-greigwyr* [lit. ‘labor-rockmen’, whose job involved removing waste rock covering slate deposits] of all kinds” (Peris 1896:274). Thus, the loose sense of the term simply means all workers in a quarry, skilled or unskilled. The term is also used “at other times, . . . restricted to the slate-workers alone [i.e. those that are involved in producing slates (saleable commodities)]” (Peris 1896:274). Here a distinction is introduced between unskilled “laborers” and skilled “craftsmen,” ultimately depending on productivity. What unites certain laborers is not their payment system but the nature of their product: True quarriers are truly “productive,” that is, involved directly or indirectly in the production of useful products – commodities – , while laborers are involved only in the production and removal of waste rock, however necessary this activity may be to production.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the nature of the payment system makes *labr-greigwyr* ‘bad rockmen’, who have a bargain contract system like true quarriers, more skilled than *arloeswyr* ‘pioneers’, who are paid on a day wage system.<sup>12</sup> Thus, they are a hybrid category, as their hyphenated name implies: “It can be said that he [*labr-greigiwr*] is between the ‘laborer’ [*labrwr*] and the ‘rockman’ [*creigiwr*]; he has some degree of experience to be able to blast and free the rock in the most effective manner” (Emrys Jones 1964:242). The pinnacle of skill in all these definitions are slate-makers, but even specialists within slate-making are not the “true” quarriers. Dewi Peris opined that

a complete (‘thorough’) quarrier, in the narrowest sense of the word, is one who can make slates everywhere, – this, in truth, is the true quarrier – who can get them from the rock (*creigio*), thick-split them (*brasholli*), split them (*hollti*) and dress them (*naddu*)<sup>13</sup>; so that, were he released by himself into the mountains, he would come back with a load of slates, ready for the market, completely from his own labor. A quarrier IN PART, more or less, are all the rest; but this one is A COMPLETE quarrier. (Peris 1896 [1871]:274)

A quarrier in the strict sense is one who refuses the detailed division of labor entirely, a worker who commands all the skills of quarrying, and who can take the slate from the rock wall to the shed and thence to market by himself. All the other types of skilled laborers in the quarry are merely sundered parts of this complete quarrier (note the exclusion of the laborers from this holistic unity of skill). The term “quarrier,” then, is a “group shifter,” calibrated here to gradient participation in the skill of quarrying, which is itself calibrated to shifting notions of productivity (on productivity as a shifter in 19th-century political economic discourse, see Manning 2004a). It is thus proximity to the finished commodity and the market that makes a worker productive, skilled, able to bargain with slate-owners as an equal, a seller of commodities, and not as an inferior, a seller of mere undifferentiated, unskilled labor.<sup>14</sup>

It is by insisting on precision of reference in the use of this shifting term that the quarriers could claim that all quarriers were cultured and respectable, because by insisting that only the most skilled quarriers were quarriers AT ALL, the proper extension of the craft term, defined by skill, could be shown to be identical with the respectable portion of the local working population. Skill (nominal or real) in the material world of production leads *pari passu* to authority and respectability in the moral universe. Hence, we find that when quarriers chose to speak in the Welsh press in some name other than *chwarelwr*, which, as we have seen, is a shifter implying relative skill, they chose more specific SKILLED positions in the labor process. Craftsmen could speak publicly with the authority of skill; laborers could not.

THE CULTURE OF THE *CABAN*: INDUSTRIAL  
DEMOCRACY AT WORK

His understanding is lively in the great topics of the day, –  
Politics, trade, religion, and its deep, hidden secrets;  
As we approach his *caban*, the sound of debate is audible  
At lunch time, one could think that it was a small parliament.

—*Y Chwarelwr*, John Owen (Glan Elsi), *Cymru* 1893:112

“If you want to understand the quarrier, go to his *caban*” (*Y Chwarelwr* 7, 1876, p. 107). As the quarriers came to speak in their own name in the Welsh press, as *chwarelwyr*, indexing their collective skill in the material sphere that authorized their entry into the moral world of cultured respectability, the quarrier’s voice entered the Welsh press as an exemplar of the industrial democracy that seemed to characterize all of the quarriers’ interactions, and most of all the lunchtime canteen, the *caban*. In its material definition, the *caban* was merely “the building where the quarriers ate their food during lunchtime,” but in its moral aspect, it was “the cradle of the quarrier’s culture” (E. Jones 1964:38).

It was in these little “parliaments” that the quarriers brought the moral universe of respectable culture, including debates and *eisteddfodau*, into the midst of the material world of production, and brought the genres of freedom (*rhyddid*) into the very lair of *gormes* and *gorthrwm*. The folkloric transformation of the quarrier revolved around the constitution of the culture of the *caban* as an emblem of quarriers’ thriving culture. The *caban* in literary representations as well as in surviving record books of *caban* meetings is the exemplary locus of the culturedness of the quarrier, a lunchtime canteen “which was also the union office, debating chamber and the scene of permanent tests of literary skill” (Merfyn Jones 1982:57). The emblemization and folklorization of the *caban* culture is a metonym of the way that the slate quarrier participated in 19th-century Welsh print culture as both an exemplary object and an active participant.

In the *caban*, the principal and defining speech genre, at least as appropriated in the Welsh press, was the *caban* dialog (*ymddyddanion y caban*). From the time we find quarriers adopting the standard literary genre of letter-writing to register their voice in the Welsh press, we find writers in the Welsh press in turn adopting the voice of the quarrier, and in particular the (now secondary) genre of the *caban* dialog, to discuss topics of the day, related to quarrying or not. For example, on 14 May 1864, *Yr Herald Cymraeg* ran on its front page a fictive *Ymddyddanion y caban* ‘Conversations in the [lunchtime] *caban*’ signed by *cabanwr* ‘one of the *caban*’. The contribution (presumably submitted by a quarrier) was part of a general groundswell during this period of writing related to quarriers and their attempts at union formation. This contribution spurred a series of anonymous imitations (possibly editorial) entitled *Ymddiddanion yn marics y chwarelwyr* ‘Conversations in the barracks of the quarriers’ (8, 15, and 22 July 1865); the *caban* dialog as primary speech genre had now become part of a repertoire of genres (Bakhtin 1986:61–2) within the complex jumble of genres characteristic of the Welsh press. The editors adopted this remarkably “democratic” genre, and the voice of the literate and cultured quarrier, to cover topics of general cultural interest, from religion to the relative utility of Welsh and English to literary meetings and pursuits. The genre reappeared in a column entitled *Caban Rolant Dafydd* in *Y Chwarelwr* in 1876 (after the union is successfully formed). In 1881–1882, *Y Genedl Gymraeg* used a long series of *Ymddyddanion y caban* to provide a running commentary on an ongoing acrimonious debate in the same paper between Melville Richards (Morgrugyn Machno), the author of a well-known work on slate-quarrying (Richards 1876) and a small quarry-owner, and a self-styled Gweithiwr (“worker”) on the “sorry state of the slate market.” This series included, ironically, a summary and review of Richards’s own book cast in the form of a *caban* literary conversation, in which the voice of the quarrier is allowed to retort to Richards’s characterizations of quarriers. The voice of the quarrier had by now become itself a privileged source of “liberal” speech genres, liberal in form and content alike, and

his *caban* conversations became emblems of the authentically Welsh and authentically liberal culture of the quarries.

RETURN TO FFESTINIOG: THE MODEL STRIKE  
IN THE MODEL VILLAGE

If a carnal weapon is chosen by others in their quest,  
While fighting the battles of labor against cruel tyranny,  
The quarrier prefers to take his complaints to Him,  
Who presides over the troubles of world and heaven.

—*Y Chwarelwr*, John Owen (Glan Elsi), *Cymru* 1893:112

Welsh nationalism, in the 19th century or the early 20th, did not generally find the proletariat as such good to think. Moreover, the very idea, as well as the accomplished fact, of an industrial proletariat has always seemed to Welsh nationalism to be a form of pollution of specifically English derivation. The South Welsh coal miner has inherited the position of “archetypal proletarian” (Harrison 1978), as symbolically central to the Wales of the Labor movement as he is marginal to Welsh liberalism and nationalism (Metcalf 1989). But somehow the slate quarrier was redeemed in Welsh nationalism where the coal miner was not (for a discussion of literary attempts at his redemption, see Edwards 1994, 1996). O. M. Edwards, cultural reformer and Welsh nationalist of the 1890s, did not in general see the future of Wales in its industrial localities; his was a Volkisch agrarian paradise, Canaan to the Samaria of South Wales (Smith 1993:66; Sherrington 1992). The only exception he ever made was the slate quarries of Ffestiniog (and it is striking how much the image of Ffestiniog has changed since 1858):

Not every industrial district can attract worthless idlers like myself and my ilk. As a rule, the home of the sons of labor is not our favored destination. We prefer some bathing spot on the seaside, or some magical fountain far away in the mountains, . . . without anyone remembering the biblical passage which says that it is through the sweat of his brow that fallen man is to eat his bread. (Edwards 1893:107)

What an exception to this rule the slate quarries prove to be! Ffestiniog, it is clear, is not like other centers of labor and industry. Most of all, it differs from them in being clean:

But Ffestiniog is so beautiful, although it is a stronghold (place, *mangre*) of labor, that we can be seen idling amongst the quarriers there, like butterflies amongst bees. There is no dirty and unclean smoke there to blacken everything, the air is as clear as crystal, full of clouds newly born from the sea. There is no garbage and poison disfiguring the rivers, the water is bright and healthy flowing through Ffestiniog. The place is remote and rainy, but clean

and beautiful and healthy. If I must work, give me the work of the rockman (*creigiwr*) or the quarrier. (Edwards 1893:107)

While Edwards paints a picture of the slate quarries of Ffestiniog, he is always casting a glance over his shoulder at the coal mines of South Wales. Ffestiniog is a “place of labor,” true, but without the filth, the pollution of air and water, that is normally associated with such places (and especially with the coal mines of South Wales). The slate quarriers of Meirion present no danger to their supervisors, unlike the coalminers of Glamorgan (Edwards 1893:110). Even strikes in Ffestiniog are respectable (and cultured) affairs:

There were only a few people along the street, but I could hear the sound of piano and singing from many houses. Everything was perfectly peaceful and quiet, and it was hard to believe that 450 people were on strike that day. We didn’t see so much as a broken window. (Edwards 1893:108)

The local guide admits to Edwards and his companions that the quarrier has a very independent spirit, but is not like the colliers of Flintshire and Glamorgan, who allegedly “frightened a supervisor to death”: “‘But,’ he said, ‘quarriers are not like colliers. They are more civilized, more evangelical; and they prefer to suffer than do anything wrong’” (Edwards 1893:109). The quarrier carries his disputes forward in the MORAL universe, while the coal miner does so MATERIALLY (as Glan Elsi puts it, seeking a “carnal weapon” [*cnawdol arf*], where the quarrier prefers to seek spiritual aid). Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that material cleanliness echoes moral cultured respectability.

DUST AND DIRT: THE QUARRIER AND THE COLLIER

Dear reader, if you wish to see a happy snug home  
 Try to see the whitewashed cottage of the diligent-minded quarrier;  
 How orderly and spotless the look of its appearance!  
 Cleanliness placed its image on it and everything he owns  
 —*Y Chwarelwr*, John Owen (Glan Elsi), *Cymru* 1893:112

This dichotomization of the Welsh proletariat into opposed images that stand in implicit or explicit contrast, the slate quarrier and the coal miner, was already well established by the time Edwards belatedly decided to visit Ffestiniog. In this opposition, nationalism and internationalism are juxtaposed; the Welsh quarrier becomes a proletarian image of the national essence, just as the Welsh collier becomes a national image of the proletarian essence.

But more concrete and material oppositions divide these two images. Specifically implied by Edwards is the matter of cleanliness and its opposite. In this set of discourses, the desirable properties of the quarrier, like the undesirable properties of the coal miner, are a moral product of the material conditions of work. Here, the image of “dust,” as a moral precipitate of the material world of produc-

tion, plays a crucial mediating role. For example, in a controversial Welsh novel of the 1960s, a group of children from a slate-quarrying village, debating the relative merits of coal miners and slate quarriers as choral singers, conclude that “It must be that coal dust is better than quarry dust at making people into good singers” (Caradog Pritchard 1988 [1961]:138).

This macabre image linking dust inhalation causally to something other than silicosis condenses and parodies a lasting tradition linking the moral and cultural properties of these two groups to their material position in production. Here the linkage is indexical and naturalizing, because it is mediated by a real causal linkage (dust). The linkage can also be iconic, as in the following example, where the linkage effects a resemblance between the material and the moral:

There is something in the nature of quarrying itself that is more favourable to morality than any other sort of work. . . . Think of the coal-miner, there is some sort of blackness and filth in connection to his work in every connection so that nothing can be more natural than his mind’s familiarity with the like. . . . But as far as the quarrier is concerned, there is a sort of cleanness and lightness belonging to all of the branches of his work as are certain to be a help in putting a superior impression on his mind. There is a sort of cleanliness in the *dust* of the quarrier. An observation like this can seem extreme to the reader, yet there is such a close connection between the material and the mental, the natural and the moral, in our world, that they are certain to have influence on one another. (*Y Goleaud*, 15 August 1874, p. 2)

Here, the dust, a METONYM of the material world of production, provides an efficacious indexical linkage between the material and the moral worlds. At the same time, the dust itself is an ICON of the indexical effects it has; that is, the moral universe comes to resemble the material universe. The heaviness of the coal dust drags down the mind of the collier, just as its material filth disposes his mind to like things in the moral sphere. In contrast, the lightness of quarry dust elevates the mind of the quarrier. The intrinsically clean quarry dust produces a respectable and moral quarrier.

What is “dust” for the quarrier is transformed into “dirt” for the coal miner. Metcalfe 1989 argues powerfully that the image of pollution associated with the coal miner and his work was an important differentiating diacritic allowing the coal miner to serve as the symbolic antithesis of the respectable bourgeois moral order, with emphasis on the pollution and filthiness of the miner and his community standing in contrast to the tidiness of the normative bourgeois and his. Their moral lack of hygiene followed that induced by their work. It is worth hearing the reply of a New South Wales (Australia) coal miner to the common motif of the “dirt of the miner” cited by Metcalfe, which accepts the principle of alignment of moral and material pollution even as it seeks to reject its particular necessity. The desire to enact bourgeois separations of work and home, avoiding the miasmatic contact between the filth of the former and the tidiness of the latter,

seeks to undermine the necessity of the correlations by which the material world of production affects the moral sphere:

[The miner] follows a dirty occupation; but given the chance he is just as clean and respectable and decent a member of the community as anybody else. . . . [He] should have the opportunity of bathing and leaving the dirt where it belongs to, and should not be compelled to take it to his home and foul the railway carriages or other conveyances he may come into contact with on the way. The fact that he has to travel home black with coal-dust, exposes him to some ridicule and contempt, and . . . the impression exists that he is a freak or animal. . . . They are entitled to be provided with the facilities for bathing, and to go home from their work as decently as other people. (quoted in Metcalfe 1989: 49)

The distinction between the respectable quarrier and the rough coal miner, if not produced by a natural, material agent like coal dust, was more likely produced by the polluting influences brought like a cloud of dust from England, from which the Welsh were protected by the very respectability of their language, just as the dust inhalation that causes silicosis can be prevented by wearing a safety mask. In a curious replay and inversion of the original thesis of the Blue Books, English came to be seen as a medium of polluting ideas. The quarriers are pure, then, in a more abstract sense, lacking any harmful miasmatic influence from English foreigners and their notions:

‘Unmixed Welshmen,’ said one perceptive man, ‘are the quarriers, without any English or Irish or anyone else mixing with them, bringing their harmful books, their polluted customs, and their ideas with them.’ Among the quarriers, one does not find even one professed *infidel*, not one *anarchist*, and there is hardly anyone in the whole district who doesn’t go to Church or Chapel. . . . It is certain that the Welsh character has not been kept so unmixed in any one of the great works in Wales as it has in the quarries of Arfon and Meirion. It is true that there are exceptions, but they are exceptions. (*Y Faner ac Amserau Cymraeg*, 19 February 1890, p. 13)

In contrast, the oft-noted “propensity to strike” of the coal miners (Kerr & Siegel 1954) was directly connected in the Liberal imagination to the alien anglicizing influence that brought with it strange concepts with no Welsh equivalent, such as “strike”:

It is obvious in the first place that had Workers’ Unions never been formed, we would not have been plagued by *strikes*. Mercifully there is no concise Welsh word for this evil thing. And that is for the good and comforting reason that it is not a Welsh thing to begin with, although it has become something too customary among the Welsh, but one of the wretched things that have come to us from the land of the English. And it is the English also who are



now primarily fanning this foreign flame in our dear Principate. (*Y Goleaud*, 27 March 1875, p. 8)

For Welsh commentators, the moral and cultural differences between these two brands of workers in equivalent extractive industries seemed to have much to do with their relative exposure to alien influences, so that both the desirable properties of the quarrier and the undesirable qualities of the collier are indexically linked to their relative exposure to English.

The slate quarrier in the Welsh Liberal imagination simultaneously stood as a modern successor, or indeed a proletarian metonym, of the classless common people, the *gwerin*, who composed Welsh, as opposed to “American,” Wales. As we have seen, the liberals constructed the *gwerin* as Liberal, religious, cultured, and respectable. The quarrier condensed within himself in particular all the features that seemed to characterize the ideal Welsh *gwerin* in general. As a perfect depictive representative of the Welsh nation, the slate quarrier was a specific kind of *gwerin*, a proletarian metonym of a classless whole, whose struggle was a specific aspect of the general political problems Liberalism addressed. More a craftworker than a proletarian, the slate quarrier shared and exemplified the oppression (*gormes*) suffered by the homogenous Welsh nation at the hands of the English, as opposed to standing for a class (the proletariat) within a class-differentiated capitalist modernity.

In sharp contrast, in Wales as in England, the coal miner was constructed as being an “archetypal proletarian” (Harrison 1978), a figure ESSENTIALLY proletarian, but ACCIDENTALLY Welsh or English (or neither). The coal miner, as Metcalfe argues, early on became the symbolic antipode potentiating the self-definition of the bourgeoisie, but *a fortiori* “standing for the class, and culturally defining working-classness even to workers themselves” (Metcalfe 1989:54). Coal miners have in this sense become

at once morally marginal and symbolically central, both despised and held in awe. With the rise of industrial capitalism and in the course of political struggle to establish bourgeois moral hegemony, coalminers came to represent the proletarian essence, to embody the profane against which the bourgeoisie could define and seek the supremacy of its own moral order. (Metcalfe 1989:53)

The inheritors of the folklorized slate quarrier in the twentieth century were romanticizing Welsh nationalists, many of them writers. Their vision of an unspoiled Welsh Wales as the privileged referential object of the specifically Welsh novel directed them to produce novelistic accounts almost exclusively of these districts. The quarrying community and the Welsh novel in the interwar years were virtually synonymous. Indeed, as industrial coal-mining South Wales came to be associated not merely with industry and Labourism, but also with bilingualism, the retreat of the Welsh novel into these communities became a necessity entailed by the conflicting requirements of linguistic purism and representa-

tional realism implied in the collocation “Welsh novel.” Thus, the nationalist novelist Kate Roberts, whose first published novel, *Traed Mewn Cyffion*, deals with a traditional slate-quarrying community, eventually concluded that the life of South Wales could not be portrayed in a novel for precisely these reasons:

You must have a community before one can write a story. . . . If that community is changing its way of life, and changing its language, can one do fair play to it in Welsh? No, nor in English either, because that community is neither Welsh nor English. The life of such a people is not honest, they live in two worlds, their life is superficial, and it is not a field worthy for a novelist to take to. Another thing, a prose writer can scarcely be expected from a community of the sort. (Roberts 1928:214–15)

The dismissal of narrative potential, as both subject and object, is sweeping. One cannot narrate such a community at all, nor could such a community produce a narrator, and apparently it wouldn’t be worthwhile anyway. The quarrier, by contrast, offered great possibilities for portraying the life of the “common man” (not, one notes, a proletarian) who was also “Welsh.” Like some latter-day bard, Roberts foresees the topic *par excellence* of the twentieth century novel:

If the life of Wales is Welsh then a Welsh novel is possible. As things are now, if there is hope for a novel at all, it must come from those places, where Welsh culture is alive. . . . There is plenty of room for one who wishes to dig. We do not have a novel at all about the quarriers of Arfon and Meirion. . . . Think about the amazing possibilities that there are in the life of a quarrier, and every other common man. (Roberts 1928:215)

This same generation of Welsh nationalists famously saw the only solution to the industrial problems of South Wales in “de-industrialization” (the tenth point of the “Ten Points of Policy” articulated in *Y Ddraig Goch* in 1933), with a concomitant return to agriculture as “the main industry of Wales and the basis of its civilization” (the seventh point). This was their own modest solution, seeking somehow to turn back the clock and repatriate the inhabitants of American Wales to the rural arcadia of Welsh Wales. Thus, the antidote to the intrusive, dangerous, and linguistically mixed coal miner, for Welsh nationalists of the interwar period, was essentially the wholesale ERASURE of American Wales from the map of Wales, both figuratively and literally (Smith 1993).

#### PRACTICALITY: OF DREAMS AND REALITY

You who are comfortable beneath your sheltering roof,  
On tiresome bad weather days, prithe, at some time  
Let your debt to the quarrier come to your mind  
And pay him a tribute of fitting respect and praise.

—*Y Chwarelwr*, John Owen (Glan Elsi), *Cymru* 1893:112

Respectability, however, was not in itself sufficient in a utilitarian age. For Welsh liberalism, the quarrier, more than anything else, was good to think because he straddled the moral sphere of culture and religion and the material sphere of production, and his language in both spheres was Welsh. It was on the lips of the quarrier that the Welsh language moved from the cultured world of the Eisteddfod to the practical world of industry. In turn, the moral progress of the quarrier as Welshman was seen by liberals and quarriers alike as emanating from his material position in production. Welsh disemia of the 19th century, as in our own culture (Harvey 1997:8; Ingold 1997:129–30), strongly polarized human activity into “technical” and “social” aspects, increasingly assimilating the former to the asocial, material world of technology, and it increasingly saw technical progress (both in artifice or skill, ‘techne’, and in artifacts or technology) in production as the mainspring of social progress. “Progress” was the watchword of the day, and that which was not progressive was backward and consigned to erasure by progress; such a fate awaited Welsh the moment it fell from the lips of the quarrier. The figure of the quarrier had a foot firmly planted in either domain, material and moral, making him a figure of the ideal Welsh speaker congenial to sentimentalists and utilitarians alike.

I close with an image that I think best illustrates the kind of consciousness that corresponds to this “lived utilitarianism,” or, as Matthew Arnold termed it, “Philistinism,” which privileged utility over sentiment, the material over the moral: “On the side of beauty and taste, vulgarity; on the side of morals and feelings, coarseness; on the side of mind and spirit, unintelligence, – this is Philistinism” (Arnold 1906:xi). In 1873, an anonymous “special correspondent” to the *Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald*, doing a multipart survey of the quarrying districts, paused briefly to survey the romantic beauty of the landscape of Snowdonia’s quarrying districts, celebrated in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, among other works:

I almost envied the inhabitants of a little farmhouse built upon the banks of the river, who daily might feel their hearts thrill with the grandeur of this ravine, and be hushed to sleep by the dull roar of the cataract. From the height on which I stood, the little farmhouse, nestling in the depths of the canyon, looked as though a tiny dollhouse, and brought with it a host of memories of boyhood. But the bitter east wind came to remind me that ‘life was real,’ so I banished dreaming and went on my way to visit other quarries. (*Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald*, 15 February 1873, p. 6)

In this aside, the Wordsworthian image of the landscape of Snowdonia is subordinated to the Gradgrindian fact of the quarry, as an iconic order of “dreaming” to an indexical order of “reality.” Such was the Philistinism that consigned Welsh, but for the quarrier, to dreaming, because reality was English.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “figure” in a sense indebted broadly to Goffman, as Agha (2003:243, n.8) defines it: “image of personhood that is associable with a semiotic display itself – such as the use of an accent,” or, here, with a language. My argument in part is that IMAGININGS of exemplary speakers of languages (figures in this sense, such as the quarrier and the collier) associated with broader social and political positions and projects have important roles in the valorization of these semiotic phenomena as registers (Agha 2003, Inoue 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Such as Marx’s famous discussion, in vol. 1 of *Capital*, of the commodity fetish, in which relations between subjects come to be seen as relations between objects (commodities), and vice versa (e.g., Pietz 1993; Postone 1996:61–63, 166–71).

<sup>3</sup> Liberalism, in this context, refers both to 19th-century liberalism in general and to Welsh Nonconformist (Protestant denominational) Liberalism in particular. For some of the inconsistencies of this “liberalism” see Merfyn Jones 1992, Sherrington 1992, and Manning 2004b.

<sup>4</sup> Initially the collier was imagined by Welsh Liberalism as a member of the *gwerin*, very like the quarrier (Edwards 1996:22), but by the turn of the 20th century, the colliers with their strikes and combinations and languages of labor and class conflict were increasingly resistant to assimilation to the Liberal (or compromise “Lib-Lab”) narrative of the *gwerin*: “Welsh literature fashioned a stereotypical goodly collier, appealingly pathetic, to stand in that defensive line of worthy working people who were to help to restore the good name of Wales which the Blue Books had traduced. . . . But . . . with the formation of the FED [colliers’ union] in 1898, and [as] the chapel culture began to retreat in the face of Socialism, Welsh literature’s prototypical collier was a doomed illusion” (Edwards 1996:27). The deciding moment, perhaps, was the failure of the Liberal nationalist Cymru Fydd movement of the 1880s and 1890s to accommodate its vision of Welsh Wales to include what David Lloyd George derisively called “Newport Englishmen.”

<sup>5</sup> Translations of this and all other passages from Welsh are my own.

<sup>6</sup> By “industry” I mean in general industrial production, or manufacture, as opposed to agricultural production, and as opposed to the spheres of distribution and consumption, the market.

<sup>7</sup> In Welsh sociology and sociolinguistics, these are called *buchedd* ‘way of life, lifestyle’ groupings, where Buchedd A is the respectable “people of the chapel” and Buchedd B is the rough “people of the tavern” (Owen 1986:111–14; Morgan 1986:148–49). Morgan (1986:149) notes that nationalist writers like O. M. Edwards portrayed the common people (*gwerin*) of Wales as if they were all Buchedd A.

<sup>8</sup> In reality, of course, the slate quarriers, skilled or not, were no more uniformly respectable, cultured chapel-goers than the colliers were uniformly rough, English-speaking denizens of the public house, nor were collier strikes noted for violence (on the first point, see e.g. Roberts 1988; on the latter, see the work of H. T. Edwards and I. G. Jones).

<sup>9</sup> Such metapragmatic control of the proper reference of craft terms is one way that skilled craftsmen created a skill-based hierarchy and constituted themselves as a “labor aristocracy.” British colliers similarly insisted that the term “collier” did not refer merely to “those who worked around a mine or a pit,” but only to those “who possessed or claimed to possess specialized skills” (Harrison 1978:15, n.1).

<sup>10</sup> Skilled quarriers (slate makers) saw themselves as the antithesis of agricultural laborers. The former were recruited from quarrying communities via informal apprenticeship directly into productive slate-making, and the latter were recruited initially into unskilled laboring positions; the former entered the status hierarchy “from the top,” the latter “from the bottom” (Manning 2002). Quarriers tended to deemphasize any incidental agricultural activities in which they might engage, emphasizing their own distance from agriculture and displaying considerable contempt for unskilled workers recruited from farms, referring to them as “foreigners” or comparing them to farm animals (Merfyn Jones 1982:21–22). Alongside these occupational distinctions there were also distinctions of con-

sumption patterns in diet and dress (Merfyn Jones 1982:31 ff.). The following is a typical assessment, emphasizing the parallel opposition between physical strength (a property shared with farm animals) and skill (cf. Quam-Wickham 1999): “Herds – well, say gangs if you like it better, of ignorant labourers used to some to the quarries from Anglesea [sic]. Their ignorance was only equalled by their awkwardness. Compared with the agile quarryman, they looked exceedingly clumsy and very slow” (Richards 1876:73).

<sup>11</sup> For example, the definition of “productive labor” given by Adam Smith requires that such labor result in a useful MATERIAL object – a commodity; see Jean-Baptiste Say’s discussion of “immaterial products” for a criticism of this definition (Moore 2003:332–34). The subjective skill of the quarrier was objectified in his product, the quality of the product becoming an indexical icon of the skill of its maker (“No one goes to the marker without seeing the quarrier in the slates; . . . nor was the slate suitable for the market at all if the image of the quarrier as a worker was not [visible] on its form” (*Y Faner ac Amserau Cymru*, 24 November 1874, p. 14).

<sup>12</sup> In some definitions, *chwarelwr* is identical to *barganwr* ‘bargain-taker’ (William Ryle Davies, “Dewi Peris” (obituary), *Y Geninen* 10, 1892, p. 26). That is, it is the wage contract type characteristics of skilled workers that constitute them as skilled workers (here including *labr-greigwyr*, who are also ‘bargain-takers’). However, Huw Menander Jones (1884:307–8) essentially treats *labr-greigwyr* as laborers with pretensions: “They are not quarriers, but common laborers, who have proselytized themselves in amongst the quarriers”; but the moment they receive a *bargen* (of any kind), “that is the moment they are baptized as a ‘quarrier’, and he is known, from then on, as a *labr-greigwyr*” (1884:308).

<sup>13</sup> For a general picture of the process of slate production, see Manning 2001a.

<sup>14</sup> The latter is typified by the “navvy,” a rootless, mobile, unskilled laborer par excellence, distinguished only by his strength and menial occupation, associated with the railroad industry, often from an agrarian background, or Irish ethnicity, occupying the bottom of the labor hierarchy of 19th-century Britain (Brooke 1983). Quarriers, like all labor aristocracies, disliked being portrayed as navvies. In a review of Melville Richards’s (1876) book on slate quarrying, cast as a *caban* dialog, quarriers are portrayed as criticizing the book’s picture of quarriers at work; one complains that the workers in the picture “look more like *navvies* than quarriers”; another calls the portrayed workers an impossible hybrid, a contradiction in terms, a “navvy-quarrier” (*nafi-chwarelwr*) (*Y Genedl Gymreig*, 8 November 1882, p. 2). See Dot Jones 1995 for the navy as a figure of linguistic and moral pollution accompanying the advent of the railroads.

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