

Embodying Identity: Class, Nation and Corporeality in the 1847 Blue Books Report

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The publication in 1847 of the Blue Books Report into the State of Education in Wales (the term 'Blue Books' deriving from the color of the bindings of Commissions of Inquiry reports) is generally agreed to have been one of the most significant events in the history of nineteenth-century Wales.¹ Indeed, while historians have differed in their interpretations of the Report's significance, the lasting impression it made upon the history and politics of Wales, and the development of Welsh identity, have been almost universally acknowledged. In her ground-breaking study *The Language of the Blue Books* (1998), Gwyneth Tyson Roberts argues that the attitudes embodied in the Report are still of extreme relevance today:

[I]ts publication marked a watershed in officially recognized images of the Welsh people and language, and of Welsh people's images of themselves which they might wish to reject but could not ignore. It has, directly or indirectly, made a major contribution in the shaping of such images and attitudes towards what it meant and what it means to be Welsh, and as such has played a significant role in the process of construction of a modern Welsh identity.²

Certainly, the decision of the three Commissioners to exceed their original remits and pronounce moral judgment upon a whole people and culture was to have deep and lasting ramifications for Welsh politics and identity, not all of them negative. As Kenneth O. Morgan has shown, the publication of the Report incurred the wrath of Nonconformist Wales, stimulating the growth and development of a Welsh national consciousness by providing a focal point for an insurgence of national pride and regeneration which was to culminate eventually in the Liberal electoral landslide of 1868.³ By this time, as Ieuan Gwynedd Jones agrees, the Blue Books Report had become "an inspiration rather than a

¹ *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales . . . In Three Parts*. Part I, Carmarthen, Glamorgan and Pembroke. Part II, Brecknock, Cardigan, Radnor and Monmouth. Part III, North Wales (London, 1847). The three Commissioners responsible for each respective part were Ralph Robert Wheeler Lingen, Jelinger Cookson Symons, and Henry Vaughan Johnson. Subsequent references are hereafter cited in the main text by part and page number.

² Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books: The Perfect Instrument of Empire* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 3.

³ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922* [1963] (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 16, 17.

symbol of defeat, a weapon rather than an instrument of shame.”⁴ Indeed, the Report came to serve as an originating myth for the newly ascendant Welsh Nonconformist nation, a function emphasized by its sobriquet *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* (“The Treachery of the Blue Books”), with its punning allusion to another founding myth involving English/Saxon perfidy, *Brad y Cyllyll Hirion* (“The Treachery of the Long Knives”) during the fifth century.⁵

However, not all historians have agreed with Morgan and Jones’s largely positive interpretations of the Report’s long-term effects. Gwynfor Evans, for one, has argued that the Report, while awaking “the national political consciousness of the Welsh,” also helped to consolidate negative attitudes towards the Welsh language and thus contributed enormously to the continuing advance of Anglicization.⁶ That the Report can produce two such diametrically opposed interpretations is in itself of considerable interest, suggesting the ambivalence of the processes of identity formation which it set in motion. Indeed, Gwyn A. Williams has described how the “surge of national feeling” stimulated by the Report was characterized by a considerable degree of ambiguity. Williams argues that while the Blue Books undoubtedly led to a revival of Welsh-language culture, this “was essentially an English and largely middle-class-cum-populist culture translated and transmuted,” embodying ideological values “which in practice confirmed the status of the [Welsh] language as subaltern and subject.”⁷

Though the ambivalent attitudes embodied in this “translated” culture provide one focus of this article, it is not simply my intention to rehearse yet again the arguments of Williams, Jones and others. Rather, I wish to use their valuable historical research (as well as Roberts’s linguistic analysis of the Report itself) as the starting point for a more contentious argument: that the ambivalence towards Welsh culture at the heart of Wales’s late nineteenth-century national revival was a reflection, at its most fundamental and foundational level, of a shift in the perception of the body and the ways in which it was coded and represented. This shift (with its extensive implications for Welsh perceptions of themselves and their identity) was, I believe, produced in part by the Report’s condemnation of the Welsh working class for their failure to conform to bourgeois codes of bodily behavior and restraint; a failure which, to the Report’s Commissioners, demonstrated not only a lack of moral virtue but a corruption of the basic tenets underpinning British (and thus bourgeois) “civilization.” While control of the body was undoubtedly a concern of Welsh Nonconformist denominations prior to 1847, I will argue that it was the internalization of the 1847 Report’s ideological values and assumptions – its particular investment in the body as morally, nationally and socially significant – that enabled Welsh Nonconformity to construct its own bourgeois nation in the years that followed; a nation whose originating myth of *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* concealed its mimetic dependency upon the dominant values and attitudes of the middle-class England that it ostensibly opposed. Thus,

⁴ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales: The Observers and the Observed* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), 165.

⁵ See Prys Morgan, ‘From Long Knives to Blue Books’, in ed. R. R. Davies et. al., *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays Presented to Glanmor Williams* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1984), 199-215; Morgan describes how an older folkloric and mythological tradition of the Welsh past came to be superseded during the 1850s and ’60s by the more contemporary concerns of Nonconformity and its own attendant “mythology” (214).

⁶ Gwynfor Evans, *Land of my Fathers* [1974] (Swansea: Y Lolfa, 1992), 374, 366-74.

⁷ Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* [1985] (London: Penguin, 1991), 208-09, 210.

ironically, Welsh Nonconformity's "*Pura Wallia*" owed a considerable debt to the moral and social values of bourgeois England, and in the process of its construction many cultural traditions which could not be assimilated with these values were suppressed or disavowed. If the Commissioners of the 1847 Report were keen to stress the links between Welshness and immorality, in the years after 1847 the representatives of Nonconformity were equally insistent on proving that a sense of morality (as defined by the Commissioners) was in fact a dominant characteristic of the Welsh people and nation. However, before examining the Report in its historical context, I will attempt to establish the role of the body in the production and contestation of cultural identities.

I. Corporeality and Subjectivity

Since the advent of Freud's pioneering work, the most radical innovators within critical theory have continued to stress the importance of the body and its representation to the constitution of subjectivity. In a lucid summary of contemporary critical thinking on the body, Elizabeth Gross comments:

[T]he ways in which the body is coded, made meaningful, and rendered representable provide some of the necessary conditions for discursive and cultural representation. . . . [T]he subject is not an unanchored, disembodied psychological entity . . . [but] is a subject, an ego, only with reference to the mapping and signification of its corporeality.⁸

Crucially, this "mapping" of the nascent subject's corporeality is not simply a process whereby the subject becomes aware of its body in a strictly biological sense, but is a phenomenon in which the subject constructs and internalizes its own fantasized image of the body; an image which reflects social, cultural and familial beliefs about the body and its symbolic significance. The subject is thus positioned in relationship to its anatomy in terms of that anatomy's social (and generally patriarchal) meaning. As such, the image of the body which it constructs is one that is inherently fragile and always potentially contestable: while it is the intermeshing of the body with signifying systems that produces meaning and identity, it also provides the possibility of their disruption or collapse.

One way of understanding these ambiguous processes of identity formation is through Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection: the ambivalent process in which elements that cannot be assimilated by the self, but are nevertheless constitutive of that self (the abject), are expelled and disavowed. This expulsion of the abject (abjection) separates the self from what it is not, setting in place the defining subject/object dichotomy foundational of both individual and collective identity. Crucially, this process is a corporeal one, demarcating the limits of the "clean and proper" body through somatic responses of revulsion and disgust so as to exclude that (such as bodily waste) which would threaten its integrity, thereby destroying the illusion of a unified, autonomous subjectivity. However, because the abject is part of this self/body, it cannot be so readily disposed of. Indeed, the very act of abjection implicates the subject in the thing which it is attempting to reject. As Gross puts it, "[this waste] can never be definitively and permanently externalized: it is the subject; it cannot be

⁸ Elizabeth Gross, 'The Body of Signification', in ed. John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin, *Abjection, Melancholia, and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990) 81, 85.

completely expelled.”⁹ The abject can thus never be safely consigned to the category of object, but continues to transgress the boundaries separating subject from object, self from other. Moreover, the very act of expelling the abject is testimony to the frailty of the defining subject/object opposition. The expulsion of abject otherness is thus both what establishes the illusion of an autonomous unified self and what reveals the fragility, porosity and fundamental instability of that self; the subject both abjects and is made abject in the same ambivalent motion.¹⁰

Applied in a cultural dimension, Kristeva’s notion of abjection suggests that all discursive structures and symbolic representations are, as Gross puts it, “a kind of sublimated corporeality which cannot be acknowledged as such.”¹¹ As it must do in strictly corporeal terms, the subject, in order to achieve a collective identity, has to jettison its own cultural “waste,” depositing it on the far side of a border separating self from other. In this regard, it is significant that the Other of colonial discourse is often both feminized and the possessor of qualities – bestial, immoral, profligate – which the normative self must deny and displace. However, while Kristeva is keen to emphasize the role of abjection within cultural practice, she continues to privilege the individual as her site of inquiry, and does not expand her analysis to an exploration of the role which abjection might play in the construction and demarcation of social and cultural identities. In the remainder of this article, I will attempt to position Kristeva’s psychoanalytic account of identity within a broader historical account of the 1847 Report and its impact upon Welsh (and British) identity. In the process, I hope to demonstrate the corporeal foundations of both moral and nationalist discourses, and the importance of a shared sense of the human anatomy and its signification to a common cultural identity. Ultimately, I will suggest, the cultural difference which the Report articulates amounts to a clash between two different conceptions of the body as a signifying construct. For the Commissioners’ avowed aim of assimilating Welsh cultural difference to be successful, it was essential that the Welsh working class abandon their own conception of the body and embrace wholeheartedly the bodily values and regulations of the English bourgeoisie.

II. Background to the Report

As Linda Colley has shown, the early nineteenth century was a crucial period in the consolidation of a British national identity, as it overcame the definitional crisis brought about by the end of the Napoleonic wars. By the middle of the century, the Otherness which Catholic France had represented, and which had hitherto defined the British collective self in terms of a beleaguered Protestantism, had been superseded by “the triumphs, profits and Otherness of a massive overseas empire.”¹² It was around this empire and its associated trade that British identity was increasingly constructed, thereby re-defining the boundaries between a British collective self and its negating other. However, such a re-definition of Britishness also affected profoundly the relationship between the various constituent cultures of Britain. During this period of unprecedented overseas expansion, it became

⁹ Ibid. 91.

¹⁰ See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* [1980], trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

¹¹ Gross, op. cit. 101.

¹² Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 322, 6.

more than ever an ideological necessity to locate difference outside Britain and not within it; historical and cultural differences had to be put to one side so that all in Britain could reap the rewards of participation in Britain's grand imperial project. In practice, this disavowal of internal British difference entailed an extension of core "English" (that is bourgeois) values to all classes and linguistic groups in Britain; a process of cultural homogenization, I would argue, contiguous with that of abjection, entailing as it did the exclusion and rejection of all that threatened the stability and unity of an inherently unstable, heterogeneous British self. Indeed, this construction of a unified British self paralleled the formation of individual subjectivity traced by Kristeva, being predicated upon the suppression of all that threatened to reveal the permeability of the bounded body/self. Such parallels were far from coincidental, as the existence of internal cultural difference (as the 1847 Report illustrates) was often conflated with the continuance of social and sexual customs deemed to be immoral precisely for their transgression of bourgeois bodily limits. The extension of bourgeois morality (and thus a bourgeois conception of the body) to all classes was therefore an integral aspect of the construction of a British nationality, and to flout the former was (potentially) to betray the latter.

Although officially incorporated into the English kingdom since the 1536-43 Acts of Union, Wales remained, in terms of sentiment at least, largely unassimilated by this normative British self during the first half of the nineteenth century. Like the abject, Wales was at once both inside and outside constructions of British national identity; ostensibly a fully integrated part of a unified British nation state, it continued to be a region of distinctive cultural, linguistic and religious practices which were often perceived to threaten the stability, integrity and long-term progress of that state. Moreover, in recent years this threat had taken on palpable form, both in the frontier settlements of industrial south Wales – where new, highly volatile working-class communities were being formed largely outside the control and influence of the governing classes – and in rural Wales as well, where a deep-seated antipathy often existed between predominantly English-speaking Anglican landlords and their Nonconformist Welsh-speaking tenants. Violent social disturbances, for example, were characteristic of many areas of Wales into the 1840s, and major insurrections such as those in Merthyr in 1831 and the Chartist attack on Newport in 1839 were only the most visible manifestations of a breakdown in the rule of British law. More long-term disturbances, such as the widespread rural unrest of the Rebecca Riots (1839-42), and the existence of secret organizations such as the Monmouthshire Scotch Cattle, demonstrated in equal measure the ineffectual nature of British rule in large areas of Wales, and the continuing adherence of many working-class communities (both rural and industrial) to their own codes of justice and punishment.¹³

To contemporary government observers, the link between such violent unrest and the existence in Wales of a distinctive language and culture was self-evident. The latter, in fact, was often cited as a major barrier to the creation of loyal, obedient British subjects, and

¹³ For events in Merthyr, see Gwyn A. Williams, *The Merthyr Rising* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978); Two full-length studies of the Newport Rising are Ivor Wilks, *South Wales and the Rising of 1839: Class Struggle as Armed Struggle* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), and David J. V. Jones, *The Last Rising: The Newport Chartist Insurrection of 1839* [1985] (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999). The Rebecca Riots are described in David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), and Pat Molloy, *And They Blessed Rebecca* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1983). Scotch Cattle activities are analyzed in David Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protest in Wales 1793-1835* (London: Allen Lane, 1975).

following each outbreak of unrest government and newspaper reports inevitably drew attention to the “problem” of the Welsh language. A government report of 1844 into the Rebecca Riots, for instance, observed that the existence of the Welsh language and a widespread ignorance of English are “felt in a practical shape in the obstacles which it presents to the efficient working of many laws and institutions.”¹⁴ Welsh was furthermore linked to poverty and a general lack of prosperity: an ignorance of English, stated another report of 1846, was “one of the great causes of the backward state of the Welsh part of the population.”¹⁵ This is an important comment, for it suggests how the Welsh language was perceived as excluding its speakers from participation in that key element of British imperial identity, economic trade. More sinisterly, however, Welsh was also portrayed as a language of plots and conspiracies, its very existence aiding and abetting those wishing to destabilize the British state. Following the Newport Rising, for instance, the London Morning Chronicle’s assertion that “in no part of the country could an organisation be formed, with so little interruption, as in a district where the lower orders speak almost universally a language unknown to the educated classes” typified a broader official response.¹⁶ Official observers were given further cause for misgiving by the adherence of the majority of Welsh people to various Nonconformist denominations. Nonconformity was mistrusted not only for its strong identification with Welsh culture and language, but also because of its democratic structure, its strongly populist and community orientated appeal. It was considered, for example, potentially dangerous and politically destabilizing to encourage ordinary working-class people to debate contentious theological issues or participate in the election of their ministers. Fundamental to this mistrust, though, was Nonconformist hostility towards the established Anglican Church, for the strong connections between Anglicanism and the institutions of state and monarchy meant that hostility to the former could easily be seen as dissatisfaction with the latter.¹⁷

Welsh cultural difference was thus viewed by government as a barrier blocking the development of a unified British subjectivity. The task of government was to erase this difference and assimilate the Welsh into a normative Anglophone and Anglocentric British self: to make them willing participants in the project of Empire. In order to perform this task, the role of education was central, and it is significant that Matthew Arnold’s (in)famous remark that “it must always be the desire of a Government to render its dominions as far as possible homogeneous” was made in his official capacity as a school inspector for Glamorgan.¹⁸ Indeed, the links between education, cultural assimilation, and a subservient population were all made by William Williams, Welsh-born MP for Coventry, in the parliamentary speech in which he proposed the establishment of the 1847 Report. Referring to recent outbreaks of social unrest in Wales, Williams asserted that “the moral power of the schoolmaster was a more economical and effectual instrument for governing this people than the bayonet,” and quoted from numerous official reports to argue that a population of loyal Britons in Wales could only be created through education.”¹⁹ Significantly, he also

¹⁴ Quoted in G.T. Roberts, 20.

¹⁵ Quoted in Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales* 123.

¹⁶ Quoted in Wilks, *op. cit.* 26.

¹⁷ G.T. Roberts, 20.

¹⁸ Quoted in Elinor N. Williams, ‘H.M. Inspectorate in Wales’, in ed. W. Gareth Evans, *Perspectives on a Century of Secondary Education in Wales 1889-1989* (Aberystwyth: Centre for Education Studies, 1990) 130.

¹⁹ Quoted in G.T. Roberts, 24.

contrasted the Welsh with the Scottish people, whose superior education, he claimed, had led to a swift recognition of the benefits of full participation in Britain's imperial project:

If the Welsh had had the same advantages for education as the Scotch [sic], they would, instead of appearing a distinct people, in no respect differ from the English: would it not therefore be wisdom and sound policy to send the English schoolmaster among them?²⁰

From its conception, then, the purpose of the Blue Books Report was to assimilate the Welsh within a hegemonic Britishness, thus creating loyal British subjects (in both senses of the word) through the abjection of those markers of difference that made the Welsh Welsh.

Williams's attitudes concerning Wales, the Welsh language, and the role of education typified those of the ruling class in general. As Ieuan Gwynedd Jones has commented, "there was nothing new in what Williams had to say . . . his argument was a distillation of facts, opinions and pleadings long made familiar in [previous] government publications."²¹ Moreover, while the particular cultural role which education should play in Wales was unique, its general modus operandi was merely the logical extension of educational policy in England, which viewed the instruction of working-class children primarily as a means of constructing passive, disciplined working-class adults happy with their limited station in life. In short, working-class education throughout Britain was seen as a means of inculcating the poor with a sense of, and reverence for, the Holy Trinity of Church, King and Country, so that they would accept quietly and with religious resignation the political and social status quo. Education should certainly not encourage people to start thinking too much for themselves, or to begin analyzing the political and social system which kept them in subjection. As the 'educationalist' Reverend Andrew Bell commented:

It is not proposed that the children of the poor be educated in an expensive manner, or that all of them be taught to write and to cipher . . . there is a risk of elevating, by an indiscriminate education, the minds of those doomed to the drudgery of daily labour above their condition, and thereby rendering them discontented and unhappy in their lot.²²

Indeed, far from being a lever to raise the working class to the levels of educational attainment and material prosperity enjoyed by their social "betters," education was regarded as a means of maintaining social and economic power over the working class through their assimilation into the regulatory discourses of the bourgeoisie (as distinct from the bourgeoisie itself); its primary aim was thus to strengthen existing class distinctions while simultaneously eliminating the most threatening aspects of working-class alterity.²³ To the

²⁰ Quoted in Jones, *op. cit.*, 126.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

²² Quoted in G.T. Roberts, 31-2; Quoted also in Gillian Sutherland, *Elementary Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London: The Historical Association, 1971), 10.

²³ Homi Bhabha's concept of 'colonial mimicry' – 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' [original emphasis] – is clearly relevant here, a fact supporting the contention that the embourgeoisement of the working class in Britain was itself a form of internal colonialism – and, moreover, that the consolidation of the bourgeois nation was a prerequisite of

bourgeoisie, the British working class was the object of a conflicting desire: while on the one hand their assimilation was required in order to strengthen the homogeneity of the British bourgeois nation, such assimilation also threatened the social (and bodily) differentiation guaranteeing bourgeois power. Moreover, the very compromise designed to negate this threat – the withholding of “an indiscriminate education” – merely served to reinforce it, the use of education as a form of social control undermining its authoritative power and contradicting its rhetoric of personal responsibility and self-betterment. In advocating only a partial and limited “education” for the working class, government officials ran the risk (as in colonial policy)²⁴ of destabilizing the foundations of their own linguistic legitimation and of producing new, and potentially threatening knowledges, of bourgeois norms. It is hardly surprising, then, that working-class education was often regarded with mistrust by those in authority – even by those who were its strongest advocates. Dr James Kay-Shuttleworth, for example, the first secretary of the Committee of Council on Education, and a strong believer in the power of education to produce children who were “more docile, orderly and intelligent,” was nevertheless extremely sympathetic to the view that teaching the poor to read was “like putting the torch of knowledge into the hands of the rick burners.”²⁵ Thus while report after government report emphasized the need for greater education of the working class, such reports also expressed the constant fear of the ruling class that the express purpose of such education – the extension of state power (and thus Britishness) through the construction of normative working-class subjects – was always liable to inversion by and in the very act of its transmission.

However, within Wales itself, the debate over the extent to which the working class should be educated was complicated both by linguistic differences and a deep-seated fear amongst the ruling class that educational control was slipping into the hands of religious and even political subversives. Indeed, the connections drawn by many official reports and parliamentary speeches between social and political unrest and inadequate educational provision conceal the levels of unofficial and politically undesirable educational activity occurring in many industrialized regions of Wales. It is evident in a number of places throughout Seymour Tremenheere’s report of 1840, for instance, produced in the aftermath of the Newport Rising, that the term “educational provision” refers only to the kind of ideologically sound “education” outlined by Bell and Shuttleworth above, and that alternative unofficial forms of education provided by the working class themselves were regarded as merely propagating ignorance, dissent and unrest.²⁶ Sir Thomas Phillips’s oblique reference in a memorial to Tremenheere’s committee, for example, to “emissaries of disorganizing doctrines,” whose teachings ensured “that the children of this population should grow up ignorant, irreligious, corrupted and misled,”²⁷ makes it clear that some at least in industrial south Wales were receiving a very different type of education from that officially prescribed – or even that provided by the Sunday Schools. Indeed, as Ivor Wilks has shown, contrary to popular belief the Welsh language was the medium for a sizeable canon of secular political literature and discussion during the 1830s, and Welsh working-class

colonialism. For the concept of mimicry, see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 86, 85-92.

²⁴ See *ibid.* passim.

²⁵ Quoted in G.T. Roberts, 38.

²⁶ See BB 37 and Jones, *op. cit.*, 115-17.

²⁷ Quoted in Jones, *op. cit.*, 117.

leaders (most of whom were committed Chartists) maintained close contacts with the English working-class movements throughout this period.²⁸ Working Men's Associations thus provided an alternative and separate educational domain dissociated from both Nonconformity and Anglicanism, and in the 1830s the ideological effects of this new educative sphere were felt in a growing political awareness amongst the Welsh working class. In the year prior to the ill-fated march on Newport, for example, Welsh Chartist leaders such as Dr William Price toured the south Wales coalfield "to expound the ideas of Thomas Paine to the colliers in Welsh," while English radicals such as Henry Vincent were also active in the region.²⁹ The 1847 Report (and the various educational reports that led up to it) should thus be seen as stimulated, at least partly, by a desire to wrest working-class education back from the hands of working-class radicals.

If the Sunday schools provided by Nonconformist churches provoked considerably less official concern, they were nevertheless regarded with deep suspicion by many Anglicans. While the growing strength of Nonconformity had led, according to H. Herbert Jones, author of a report on the employment of children in the mines of north Wales, to many traditional 'barbarous amusements, trespasses and disgusting revels' being discontinued³⁰, the prevailing Anglican attitude towards Nonconformist education remained one of grave mistrust if not outright hostility. Given the intimate connections between Church, Crown and the political status quo, and the importance attached to education as a means of constructing a subservient working class, such attitudes are hardly surprising, and it is therefore understandable that Anglicans fought long and hard to maintain control over education in Wales. As an Anglican curate from Wrexham commented:

[E]ducation, generally speaking, has not any good tendency unless it is based on religion, and religion taught according to the formularies and catechism of the Church of England . . . I have observed that those who have had some education but were not religiously disposed were the most forward in producing a state of insubordination against employers among the employed; their knowledge seemed only to puff up the mind and to render it less subordinate to superiors.³¹

While such views typified prevailing Anglican attitudes, it remained an uncomfortable fact for the established Church that throughout much of Wales linguistic and religious differences severely circumscribed the degree of influence which it could exert over social and religious life; a problem which was exacerbated by the refusal of large numbers of Nonconformist parents to send their children to Anglican controlled schools. A child's education was thus often limited to the Nonconformist Sunday school and (potentially) the "disorganizing doctrines" of political radicals, leading to a considerable fear in official circles that any education a Welsh working-class child did receive would be potentially of an ideologically unsound or even subversive character.

²⁸ Wilks, *op. cit.* 92-120.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 97.

³⁰ Quoted in G.T. Roberts, 21.

³¹ *Ibid.*

The fundamental barrier obstructing the middle-class aim of creating a subordinate population of loyal British subjects, however, was the existence of the Welsh language itself. Many inspectors, from Tremenheere onwards, commented upon the ineffectual and even ludicrous nature of an Anglophone education system being imposed upon a predominantly Welsh-speaking population. Inspector Mitchell's report in 1848, for instance, of a school "where two-thirds of the children knew no word of English and the master had not troubled himself by any vain endeavours to learn Welsh," was not untypical of the linguistic situation in many Welsh schools.³² Thus, while education was seen as the means of cultural assimilation, it was simultaneously hindered by the same problems of cultural difference facing all attempts to impose official values upon the Welsh working class. Indeed, the linguistic barrier between Welsh and English was fundamentally a problem of control rather than communication. In England as in Wales, the teaching of an officially prescribed dialect possessed a normalizing function which aimed to construct the working class as obedient British subjects through suppressing and degrading distinctive linguistic markers of working-class difference. Thus, representations of Welsh speech in terms of animal noises – there are references in the 1847 Report, for example, to "a Welsh screech"³³ and "a beast's cry"³⁴ – are echoed in the terms deployed by officials to describe the speech of working-class children in the north of England – a "discordant utterance of articulate sound" as one Factory Inspector put it.³⁵ Such depictions of non-English and non-standard English speech mark both the perceived threat which internal linguistic difference posed to the British normative self and, via an abjection into the realm of the animal, the attempt to negate this threat.³⁶ The equation of such non-standard dialects and languages with the noises of animals invokes a series of oppositions, not just between human and animal, but between the civilized and the barbarous, the superior and inferior, which official forms of education sought to internalize within the working class themselves. Again, education was seen as essential for the construction and maintenance of a unified British subjectivity, for impenetrable dialects and separate languages created their own discursive domains of experience and values outside the control of British state institutions. This was particularly true of Wales, where, as I have illustrated, the close association of a distinct language with a religious Nonconformism created a cultural domain which undermined (ideologically if not actively) the concept of a unified British self. It is thus significant that the depiction of linguistic difference in the 1847 Report cannot be disentangled from a broader cultural commentary in which all aspects of Welsh society and custom are condemned as bestial, primitive and immoral. Within this "analysis," it is the body, and the ways in which it is perceived and made signifiable, which provides the discursive building blocks for the representation of Welsh culture and society.

III. Language and the Body in the Report

Given the perceived connections between Welsh cultural difference, social and political unrest, and a general lack of British sentiment, it is clear that any inquiry into the state of education in Wales would be primarily an inquiry into the means of culturally

³² Quoted in Jones, *op. cit.* 120.

³³ *Report of the Commission*, II, 25.

³⁴ *Report of the Commission*, I, 237; Also quoted in G.T. Roberts, 185.

³⁵ Quoted *ibid.* 119.

³⁶ Cf. Kristeva's identification of the abject "with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal" [original emphasis]; Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12.

assimilating Welsh difference. It is therefore hardly surprising that the three Commissioners given the task of producing the 1847 Report were all upper middle-class English Anglicans and thus in every respect paradigms of what it meant to be “British.” As Gwyneth Tyson Roberts has shown, the Report which these Commissioners produced naturalizes the moral and cultural values of this class, marking the Welsh as correspondingly deficient to the extent in which they deviated from these values.³⁷ Indeed, any cultural deviation from a British norm was considered by the Commissioners as evidence in itself of a barbarous primitivism, conducive of immorality, ignorance and vice. In these terms, the failure of Welsh education was its failure to eradicate these negative qualities and produce loyal British subjects: as Commissioner Ralph Lingen asserted, “a child might pass through the generality of these schools without learning either the limits, capabilities, general history, or language of that empire of which he is born a citizen,”³⁸ while Commissioner Jelinger Symons agreed that “[he had] seldom obtained [from pupils] any account of our great victories or of the inventions which mark the advance of civilization.”³⁹ The use of the pronoun “our” possesses double charge in such remarks, for it is suggestive of both an assumed association between British values and civilization, and the Welsh people’s lack of British values (and thus of civilization) by their exclusion from the discursive community which Symons addresses. This collusion on a linguistic level with the exclusion of the Welsh from the British self is suggestive – along with the mixture of shock, indignation and smug superiority with which the Commissioners treated the responses to their questionings – of the paradoxical position of these Commissioners in regard to Wales: on the one hand conducting an inquiry within what was officially an intrinsic component of the British state, while on the other faced with the ever present “otherness” of Welsh customs, religious practices and, above all, the Welsh language itself.

As is suggested by Symons’s association of “civilization” with the advance of British values, this otherness was synonymous with a barbarism which showed off the virtues of English/British civilization all the more clearly. Indeed, in Symons’s overview the contrast between the two is emphasized through the politically and religiously charged imagery of light and darkness:

Superstition prevails. Belief in charms, supernatural appearances, and even in witchcraft, sturdily survive all the civilisation and light which has long ago banished these remnants of the dark ages elsewhere. Little or none of such light has as yet penetrated the dense darkness which, harboured by their language, and undisturbed by availing efforts of enlightenment, enshrouds the minds of the people.⁴⁰

As Roberts points out, darkness here “carries both a historical and theological charge,” intertwining in its metaphorical associations not only the ignorance but the active connivance of the Welsh in wrongdoing. These metaphorical implications are developed by the phrase “harboured by their language,” which places the Welsh language itself as the active agent responsible for the moral and educational failings of its speakers as it

³⁷ G.T. Roberts, *passim*.

³⁸ *Report of the Commission*, I, 28; quoted G.T. Roberts, 106.

³⁹ *Report of the Commission*, II, 26; quoted G.T. Roberts, 106-7.

⁴⁰ *Report of the Commission*, II, 64; quoted G.T. Roberts, 187.

“enshrouds the minds of the people” (suggesting in turn, adds Roberts, the darkness of ‘intellectual death’).⁴¹

In holding such attitudes, the 1847 Commissioners were far from unique, and followed a long tradition of official discourse concerning Wales. As Ieuan Gwynedd Jones has commented of government officials in general, “Some of their reports read like voyages of discovery, journeys into unknown regions and communities among people as remote socially from the world of Oxford colleges and well-endowed rural livings as the kraals of darkest Africa.”⁴² In contrast to Africa, though, Wales could not be abjected as absolute Other, for English policy from the time of the 1536 Act of Union had dictated that Wales was (and always had been) an integral part of the English kingdom: “the Dominion, Principality and Country of Wales, justly and righteously is, and ever hath been incorporated, annexed, united and subject to and under the imperial crown of this realm as a very member and joint of the same.” This unity with England was predicated upon the simultaneous denial and admittance of Welsh cultural difference, the Act arguing tortuously that while “some rude and ignorant people have made distinction [between the Welsh and English peoples]” because the Welsh “do daily use a speech nothing like nor consonant to the natural mother tongue used to within this realm,” it was the philanthropic intention of “His Highness . . . utterly to extirp all the singular sinister uses and customs” upon which such a distinction was based.⁴³ Symons’s location of the darkness of ignorance and superstition within the Welsh language is thus analogous with the political strategy of 1536, for while marking off the Welsh as different and Other (and ‘sinister’ because they are different and Other), it continues to leave open the possibility of “enlightenment” through the abandonment of Welsh and the embracing of all things English. Indeed, in an age in which governments were demanding increasingly that their citizens should regulate their own behavior,⁴⁴ it was essential that the Welsh should not only be coerced into loyalty, but also feel themselves to be loyal Britons. However hopeless the task might at times appear – “What share in those notions which constitute our national existence can a lad have, who calls the capital of England, Tredegar . . . ?” asked Lingen despairingly⁴⁵ – it remained a political and ideological necessity that the Welsh be assimilated (at least to the partial extent discussed earlier) within the British self.

This strategy of admitting difference in a way which does not preclude the abolition of such difference is one which operates throughout the Report. In all cases, a binary opposition which identifies English middle-class values as civilized, modern, and embodying the pinnacle of human achievement (that is, with what is natural and therefore by which all others must be judged), is contrasted with the barbarous, primitive and bestial state of Welsh society and Welsh people.⁴⁶ This ‘othering’, however, is rarely racialized in a biological sense,

⁴¹ Quoted G.T. Roberts, 187-188.

⁴² Jones, op. cit. 112.

⁴³ Quoted in Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 492-3.

⁴⁴ For an analysis of this process see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977), passim.

⁴⁵ *Report of the Commission*, I, 28; quoted G.T. Roberts, 86.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Dollimore points out a fundamental contradiction within the commonplace ideological conception of nature/culture enshrined in such oppositions: ‘Culture is construed both as the (binary) opposite of nature, yet also “rooted” in nature in the sense that it operates according to, or reflects, natural law; it is at once the antithesis of nature and its natural consequence’: Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde*,

but is rather identified with particular aspects of Welsh culture and working-class life which mark the Welsh off as different but do not preclude the possibility of making them (almost) the same (this being, after all, the whole point of the Report). Of course, such a long term aim depended upon a complete cultural shift among the Welsh working class, not only as regards language, but in their whole conception of self, body and morality: in effect, the Commissioners were asking them to internalize the values and bodily regulations not just of another people but of another class. Indeed, it is the absence of such values (which are co-extensive with the strict de-limiting of the individual body) which the Commissioners find most disturbing (but also self-assuring) about Welsh working-class life. For the “grotesqueries” of this life, its moments of bodily transgression, confront the English Commissioners with the barbarity of the Welsh – their utter lack of civilization – in a way which simultaneously threatens and defines the normative English (civilized) self.

A characteristic way in which the Report emphasizes this Welsh barbarism is through the use (as already mentioned) of animal imagery and comparisons. Repeatedly, for example, the Commissioners stress the bestial nature of Welsh society, its language and its people, thereby illustrating the way in which they instinctively viewed civilization as predicated upon a regulation and repression of the body, something which the Welsh working class conspicuously failed to achieve. This is particularly true as regards the alleged sexual profligacy of the Welsh. In the eyes of the Commissioners, sex outside of marriage constituted a transgression of the body’s limits (the marriage rite, of course, constituted a symbolic incorporation of the female body by the male) and thus marked both an absence of civilization and a subversion of ‘human’ (English bourgeois) values. Given this mindset, it was therefore logical to describe the courtship practice of *caru ar y gwely* or “bundling” as “bestial indelicacy,”⁴⁷ and to ascribe a “lack of chastity” to “the revolting habit of herding” married and unmarried people into the same sleeping quarters on farms.⁴⁸ As Commissioner Henry Johnson remarked, while men and women “continue to herd like beasts, it is useless to expect they can be restrained by religion or conscience.”⁴⁹

This equation of the Welsh working class with beasts was strengthened in the Commissioners’ minds by the (to them) incomprehensible practice of many poor Welsh farmers of sharing living quarters with their livestock. An anecdotal incident recalled by Symons illustrates nicely how this feature of Welsh rural life was perceived by the Commissioners:

The pigs and poultry form a usual part of the family. In walking down a lane which forms one of the principal entrances to the town [Tregaron], I saw a large sow go up to the door (the lower half of which was shut) and put her forepaws on the top of it and begin shaking it; a woman with a child in her arms rushed across the road from the other side of the way, and immediately opened the door, and the animal walked into the house grunting as if she was

Freud to Foucault (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 115; Such a paradox suggests how Welsh society can be depicted on the one hand as the binary opposite of civilization and culture (that is, located within the world of nature as primitive, barbarous, wild) while also being construed as “unnatural” precisely for being outside the realm of civilization and culture.

⁴⁷ Report of the Commission, II, 21.

⁴⁸ Report of the Commission, II, 57.

⁴⁹ Report of the Commission, III, 68; quoted G.T. Roberts, 184-185.

offended at the delay; the woman following and closing the door behind her.⁵⁰

The overall effect of this story is to merge and even invert the characteristics and relevant importance of woman and animal, culminating in the opening and closing of the door for the sow. While the woman is attributed with bestial qualities by her indecent haste in attending to the animal's wishes (and by the fact that she presumably shares the house with the sow), the pig itself attains an almost human status, standing on two legs to shake the door and "grunting as if . . . offended." As Roberts remarks, even Symons's choice of sentence structure (which makes the sow the grammatical subject of five clauses, the woman of only two) attributes more importance to the animal than to the woman, particularly in the final sentence where the woman's actions quite literally "follow" the pig's, being outside the main clause of the sentence and described by participles ("following," "closing").⁵¹ Moreover, the final feminine pronoun "her" could refer to either sow or woman, emphasizing again the combination of human and animal characteristics in the passage. Most importantly on a cultural level, however, is the use of the word "usual" in the first sentence of the passage, which imbues the story that follows with representative significance: in Wales, Symons seems to be saying, the people live like animals and vice versa.

This depiction of the Welsh as bestial in their habits is thus both indicative of their inferiority in the eyes of the Commissioners, and a marker of their bodily transgression, of a moral laxity equated with a failure to regulate and suppress the body and its functions. Indeed, the same conjunction between this "closed" body, morality and bourgeois civilization can be ascertained from Johnson's obsessive concern with the extent and standard of sanitary arrangements in schools. As the quotation below reveals, Johnson's lavatorial concerns had very little to do with issues of hygiene; rather, as with other social phenomena commented upon in the Report, the inadequacy of sanitary provision in Welsh schools was seen as symptomatic of the moral turpitude of Welsh civilization:

It is a fact significant of the Welsh character, that 417 schools (71.5 per cent of the entire number) are destitute of sufficient outbuildings; 210 (or 36 per cent) having no sort of provision of the kind. The germs of the barbarous and immoral habits which disfigure Welsh civilisation are thus implanted in the minds of children, together with the first elements of education.⁵²

As Roberts comments, the apparent statistical objectivity of the first sentence works to obscure the absence of a causal link for the emotive conclusions expressed in the one that follows; a causality which is further reinforced by the use of the linking word "thus" and the opening phrase's assertion of the significance of the statistics cited.⁵³ Though these conclusions may sound somewhat hysterical to the modern reader (who would tend to object to the lack of what Johnson euphemistically terms "outbuildings" on hygienic rather than moral grounds), they express, I would suggest, a deeply bourgeois conception of the relationship between civilization and the body, the attainment of the former being predicated

⁵⁰ Report of the Commission, II, 58; quoted G.T. Roberts, 133.

⁵¹ Quoted G.T. Roberts, 133.

⁵² Report of the Commission, III, 8; quoted G.T. Roberts, 84.

⁵³ Quoted G.T. Roberts, 85.

upon the repression and containment of the latter. Viewed thus, it is no exaggeration for Johnson to claim that a lack of school toilets leads to “barbarous and immoral habits which disfigure Welsh civilization,” so linking the moral dangers of inadequate sanitary provision with other moral, social and cultural issues in which the Welsh are deemed guilty of failing to regulate their bodies in accordance with bourgeois notions of propriety. Though it can be argued that Johnson’s concern for the sanitary and sexual habits of the Welsh working class go beyond those of his fellow Commissioners and display a peculiarly personal pathology,⁵⁴ he seems to regard it as self-evident that his English bourgeois readers would concur that any activity, such as the elimination of bodily waste, which made boys and girls aware of their physical differences and potentially exposed the body to transgression and temptation, was not only morally detrimental to the individuals concerned but undermined the very foundation of bourgeois civilization (and by extension the British nation). It is evident from accounts of school visits, however, that such concerns were not always shared by those actually responsible for the day to day running of Welsh schools, and the nonchalant response of one schoolmaster, who when asked if he did not regard the sharing of toilet facilities by boys and girls as “improper” “replied that he ‘never studied the question’,”⁵⁵ is indicative of what was at times an unbridgeable gulf between those conceptions of bodily propriety held by the Commissioners and those generally held amongst Wales’s working-class population.

It would also not be too fanciful to suggest that the tendency of the Commissioners to equate physical dirtiness with immorality⁵⁶ was related to similar concerns about bodily transgression. Like bodily excretions, for example, dirt and grime were physical markers of the body’s contact with and openness to the world; to the Commissioners, therefore, personal cleanliness was always about far more than simply hygiene: as Roberts comments, “in the Commissioners’ view of the world, dirt functioned as an indicator of moral decline and lack of “civilisation”.”⁵⁷ This is evident in a description of the village of Newborough on Anglesey (“a very dirty and apparently poverty-stricken place”) in which immorality is seen as an almost necessary concomitant of filth and poverty, as is emphasized by the use of the same adjective (“degraded”) in connection with all three: “The state of civilisation in Newborough is very low . . . [its inhabitants’] habits, morals and social conditions are degraded.”⁵⁸

The example of Newborough follows a pattern similar to that found elsewhere in the Report in which particular moral concerns (almost inevitably relating to issues of bodily transgression) provide the nexus to which an associative network of social and cultural commentary can be attached. Thus dirtiness (and therefore immorality) is connected both with the speaking of Welsh (Lingen comments that “the disregard of cleanliness and decency is more observable in the purely Welsh than in the Anglicised districts”⁵⁹) and with membership of Nonconformist denominations. In Symons’s description of the town of Tregaron, for example, the juxtaposition of an account of Nonconformist history in the area

⁵⁴ See G.T. Roberts, 84.

⁵⁵ Report of the Commission, III, Appendix 30-31; quoted G.T. Roberts, 143.

⁵⁶ See G.T. Roberts, 144-150.

⁵⁷ G.T. Roberts, 141.

⁵⁸ Report of the Commission, III, Appendix 18; quoted G.T. Roberts, 141.

⁵⁹ Report of the Commission, I, 17; quoted G.T. Roberts, 194.

with a vivid depiction of the filth, poverty and almost animal-like existence of the town's inhabitants, creates the strong impression (without making the connection explicitly causal) that the degradation (social and moral) of the latter is a natural correlate of the pervasive influence of the former:

Welsh Methodism sprung [sic] from this immediate neighbourhood, though its spread has been so extensive of late years that neither this place nor Llangeitho can be said to present any peculiar characteristics or results of Methodist instruction. I think the extreme filthiness of the habits of the poor, though observable everywhere, are as striking in this place, if not more so, than elsewhere, inasmuch as in a town it might be expected that a little more of the outward observances of cleanliness and decency would be met with. Dung-heaps abound in the lanes and streets. There seemed seldom to be more than one room for living and sleeping in; generally in a state of indescribable disorder and dirty to an excess. The pigs and poultry form a usual part of the family.⁶⁰

By juxtaposing a sentence stating that Tregaron does not “present any peculiar characteristics or results of Methodist instruction” with one asserting that “the extreme filthiness of the habits of the poor . . . are as striking in this place” as elsewhere, an implicit connection is drawn between the existence of Nonconformity on the one hand and poverty and dirtiness on the other; connections which are subsequently elaborated and extended through implied bestial comparisons in the descriptions of the streets and living conditions, and taken into a moral dimension with the telling conjunction of (the lack of) “cleanliness and decency.”⁶¹ Again, it is evident that a social and cultural critique of the Welsh working class is inseparable from – and, indeed, is reinforced by – a moral critique in which the Welsh are condemned for their failure to conform to the bodily values regulating English bourgeois society; values investing the body and its strict de-limiting with a social, moral and cultural significance which it had yet to acquire in working-class life.

One of the most notable features of this condemnation of bodily transgression was its strong gender bias, women being judged particularly harshly by the Report's Commissioners for their perceived transgressions; in accounts of the Welsh courtship practice of *caru ar y gwely*, for instance, it is a lack of female chastity which most offends the Commissioners, the role that men might play in making such a lack of chastity possible receiving relatively little comment.⁶² In taking this harder line on women, the Commissioners were simply reflecting conventional thinking of the day, which tended to view women as less capable of rational thought than men and therefore as closer to the world of animals (as was emphasized by their ability to give birth, a capability which directly linked them to the reproductive function and the organic cycles of death and decay to which all life was subject). It followed that, as (relatively) irrational creatures, women were far more susceptible to bodily temptations than men, and, in consequence, their behavior had to be regulated the more rigorously. On top of this, women were also responsible for the upbringing of the next generation and thus had to be seen as morally beyond reproach: as

⁶⁰ Report of the Commission, II, 147; quoted G.T. Roberts, 171-2.

⁶¹ See G.T. Roberts, 172.

⁶² See G.T. Roberts, 165-6.

Symons reminded his readers, “each generation will derive its moral tone in a great degree from the influences implanted by the mothers who reared them.”⁶³

A striking example of the Commissioners’ more rigorous expectations about female bodily propriety occurred in a visit by Lingen to children under quarantine in a Union Workhouse School in Llanelli. While apparently able to withstand the filth and squalor of the boys’ ward long enough to ask (and receive answers to) an extensive array of questions on various subjects, Lingen records that he found the room in which the girls were housed to be “so close and offensive that I could not enter.”⁶⁴ In respect of Lingen’s very different responses to male and female bodily odor, it might be worth noting Kristeva’s point that it is “not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order.”⁶⁵ Clearly, Lingen possessed a series of socially-conditioned expectations about how female bodies should smell which differed from those relating to (working-class) males, and the disruption of these expectations naturally provoked in him expressions of revulsion and disgust; somatic symptoms which asserted (and sought to safeguard) his English upper middle-class identity from the impinging presence of feminine body odor.

Indeed, such feelings are not merely evidence of bourgeois squeamishness; as other passages in the Report indicate, bourgeois notions about female bodily propriety could easily acquire social and cultural significance, the Commissioners often positing a direct correlation between the flouting of bodily taboos and other socially transgressive phenomena:

Mr Richards [a local vicar] tells me that although he spent some years as curate of Merthyr Tydfil, in the county of Glamorgan, which is usually considered the most depraved and uncivilised locality in Wales, yet he never met with so much poverty, so much social and moral degradation, as at Rhosllanerchrugog. He complained that throughout the district the women have no kind of knowledge of the duties of their sex, or of common household occupations and requirements; that till lately needlework was unknown among them.⁶⁶

The structure of the two sentences in this passage seems not only to imply that depravity, barbarism, and “social and moral degradation” are a direct result of women failing to fulfill their domestic obligations (the natural “duties of their sex”), but that this failure is an integral part of the “social and moral degradation” so lamented by the local informant, who cites an ignorance of needlework as ultimate proof of the area’s barbarity. That a failure by women to remain safely tucked away within the domestic sphere could lead to other, more pernicious forms of transgression was made even more explicit by Richards elsewhere in his evidence to the Commission, the Anglican vicar complaining hysterically that the work of clearing coal from pit entrances in which many local women were employed was “immoral,” “degrading and unnatural for women,” and a cause of women becoming “bold and impudent and unnaturally vicious.” These connections were cemented (at least in the mind of Richards) by the recent birth of an illegitimate child whose mother, a sixteen-year-old girl,

⁶³ *Report of the Commission*, II, 57; Quoted G.T. Roberts, 165.

⁶⁴ *Report of the Commission*, I, 212-213; quoted G.T. Roberts, 162.

⁶⁵ Kristeva, *op. cit.* 4.

⁶⁶ *Report of the Commission*, III, Appendix 76; quoted G.T. Roberts, 159.

was employed at the local pits.⁶⁷ A failure by women to find appropriate employment (or, better still, to remain at home and perfect their domestic duties) was thus directly equated with an inability to conform to bourgeois notions of sexual (and thus bodily) propriety. Again, then, evidence of the Welsh working-class's failure to control and regulate its bodily functions was inseparable from a broader indictment of Welsh society and culture; an indictment which, as we shall see, was to have long and lasting ramifications for the subsequent development of Welsh identity.

IV. The Aftermath

The peculiarly bourgeois conception of the body as closed and self-contained, sealed off from contact with other bodies and the external world, was, as I have argued above, central to the Commissioners' condemnation of the Welsh in the 1847 Report. In transgressing this body, the Welsh were not only morally lax, but lacking in self-control, civilization, and even humanity. Ironically, the Welsh Nonconformist nation which emerged during the second half of the century, while furiously denouncing the Blue Books Report, internalized many of its Commissioners' conclusions. As Prys Morgan puts it, "Victorian radical Wales, which might be said to have been born out of this furore, regarded the whole business as a foul libel and an act of treachery. But it quietly accepted many of the strictures, aims and intentions of the reports."⁶⁸ In consequence, it was the rigid patriarchal values of nineteenth-century bourgeois England, with, in Jane Aaron's words, all their "[f]ear and loathing of uncontained female sexuality," which were to be henceforth posited as essentially and representatively Welsh: "the essence of nineteenth-century Welsh Nonconformity."⁶⁹ Indeed, the growing consolidation of Welsh identity around Nonconformity (an identification which the Report partly enabled), gave Nonconformist attempts to regulate the body a nationalist dimension that mirrored in many respects the Commissioners' attempts to construct a homogeneous British nation. The Commissioners' perception of bodily transgression, for instance, as indicative of a potential threat to British bourgeois identity, was increasingly paralleled after 1847 by a Nonconformist tendency to regard transgressive behavior no longer as simply irreligious or immoral, but as a direct subversion of the moral foundations of Welsh nationhood; haunted by accusations of immorality and sexual profligacy, it was Nonconformity itself which began to perform the Commissioners' task of regulating the Welsh body and strengthening normative bourgeois codes of behavior amongst Wales's working class.

Of course, it can be argued that Nonconformist regulation of the body was nothing new; as H. Herbert Jones, author of an 1842 government report, acknowledged, it was the growing strength of Nonconformity which had led to the discontinuance of many traditional "barbarous amusements, trespasses and disgusting revels" in north Wales.⁷⁰ Indeed, Welsh Nonconformity, particularly its Calvinistic strain, had for decades placed considerable emphasis on many values – temperance, female chastity, and the desirability of cleanliness

⁶⁷ *Report of the Commission*, III, Appendix 76; quoted G.T. Roberts, 162.

⁶⁸ Morgan, *Welsh Society and Nationhood*, 210.

⁶⁹ Jane Aaron, 'Finding a voice in two tongues: gender and colonization', in ed. Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts & Moira Vincintelli, *Our Sisters' Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), 183.

⁷⁰ Quoted G.T. Roberts, 21.

and order – which English bourgeois culture held in common. At the same time, however, Nonconformity had been forced to accommodate the existence of a vigorous working-class culture whose distinctive customs and practices it could not always officially sanction, and, in consequence, a blind eye was often turned towards transgressive behavior: as the testimony to the Report of the vicar of Begeli in Pembrokeshire indicates, the practice of fertility-testing, in which a woman had to first demonstrate her fertility before her lover would marry her, was widespread among his predominantly Nonconformist population, the bride being already pregnant in sixty-four out of seventy recent marriages at which he had presided (only weddings performed by Anglican clergy were legally valid).⁷¹ After 1847, however, such tolerance on the part of Nonconformist chapels became increasingly rare, the evidence suggesting both an intensification of Nonconformity's policing of the body and a new emphasis (reflecting the Commissioners' concerns) on the control of female sexuality and behavior. With regard to this latter point, it is noticeable that while Nonconformist disapproval of *caru ar y gwely* dated from long before 1847,⁷² the systematic imposition of social and religious sanctions against the parties involved (particularly the female parties) did not begin to occur until later in the century, following the publication of the Report.⁷³

Indeed, during the latter half of the century Nonconformist control over the body (and particularly the female body) was strengthened by both overt threat – public excommunication from the chapel and social ostracization – and through more indirect and insidious means of cultural pressure. The first Welsh-language periodicals designed specifically for a female readership, for example, appeared within a few years of the Commissioners' Report, and these attempted to instill the same values of bodily propriety amongst Welsh women as those accepted and followed by English "ladies." It was perhaps no coincidence that the first of these periodicals, *Y Gymraes* (The Welshwoman) was edited from 1850 to 1851 by one of the fiercest and most eloquent critics of the 1847 Report, Evan Jones ('Ieuan Gwynedd'). As Aaron argues with regard to this and later periodicals, "[t]he need to confound the 'lying tales' of the Report continued to function as a moral imperative throughout the century."⁷⁴ This was true not only of courtship practices and general feminine decorum, but of other social phenomena which had caught the disapproving eyes of the Commissioners. The temperance movement, for instance, which had first begun to spread through Wales during the 1830s, increased considerably during the latter half of the century, culminating in the Sunday Closing Act of 1881, the first ever Act of Parliament to apply exclusively to Wales. In relation to the issues of bodily propriety discussed above, it is worth noting that, in the eyes of both the 1847 Commissioners and later Nonconformists, drink was regarded as an evil not so much because of its injurious effects to health, but because of the acts of social and sexual impropriety with which its consumption was intimately associated.⁷⁵

This adoption and subsequent internalization by Welsh Nonconformity of an English and bourgeois conception of the body had ambivalent and contradictory effects

⁷¹ *Report of the Commission*, I, 421; Quoted G.T. Roberts, 164.

⁷² See, for instance, Catrin Stevens, *Welsh Courting Customs* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993), who cites condemnatory articles in denominational periodicals (*Seren Gomer* and *Yr Eurgrawn Wesleyaidd*) from 1818 and 1819 respectively (103-4).

⁷³ See Aaron, *op. cit.* 187.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 187-8.

⁷⁵ G.T. Roberts, 146-7.

upon its own relationship to both the Welsh working class and the English bourgeoisie; effects which had profound cultural and political implications. While on the one hand, for instance, asserting vigorously the political and cultural achievements of Welsh Nonconformity and the Welsh people (two terms which became increasingly synonymous), many among Wales's Nonconformist elite simultaneously regarded English culture as the epitome of civilized values and thus as the benchmark by which Welsh civilization and achievements should be judged and evaluated. This equivocal attitude is exemplified politically by the rapid development of British imperial sentiments (the Welsh, says Gwyn A. Williams, "were not merely reconciled to Empire, they were enthusiastic junior partners in it"),⁷⁶ and culturally by the deep-seated attraction felt by many Nonconformist ministers towards the English language and its culture. As Ieuan Gwynedd Jones notes, English culture was increasingly admired by ministers during the nineteenth century, and young men training for the ministry put "enormous efforts" into acquiring the language. To these men, Jones argues, "English became an additional code, an indicator of social class, which is why they enjoyed using English when writing privately to each other and why they multiplied the social and public occasions on which its use might seem to be prescribed." Indeed, the linguistic hierarchy propagated by many English observers, which separated a materialist, progressive English from a spiritual, mystical Welsh fit only for poetry and religion, was confirmed and propagated by many of the self-proclaimed defenders of Welsh nationality. It is worth noting, for example, that English was the dominant or exclusive language of virtually all schools, colleges and academies in Wales (including the University) many of which were under Nonconformist control or influence.⁷⁷

However, while themselves embracing English culture, the Nonconformist elite continued to assert their social and political role as the rightful representatives of the Welsh nation and people. To this end, English, the language of social advancement and material progress, was condemned as the language of atheism, secularism and (in a reversal of the Commissioners' verdict) drunkenness and immorality:

[The English] . . . reveal more infidelity and beastliness in a week than many a part of Wales ever experienced; drunkenness, lewdness and all other curses of the English will flood our dear country unless we are prepared to withstand the attack and turn back the flood by raising the banner in the name of our God.⁷⁸

Thus the Welsh language was regarded by Nonconformists (and even by the same Nonconformist individuals) in opposing and paradoxical terms: as a defense against the corrupting moral influences of English materialism, but also as a barrier to social advancement within the secular world. The ideology of Progress, so intrinsic to nineteenth-century English culture, was a defining aspect of English alterity to Welsh Nonconformity: officially repudiated while secretly desired. Like the abject, expelled yet always present, these conflicting elements of Welsh identity inevitably returned to shape and influence the Nonconformist institutions from which they were officially absent, undermining Nonconformity's moral authority in the process. This was reflected not only in terms of

⁷⁶ Williams, *When Was Wales?* 202.

⁷⁷ Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales* 67.

⁷⁸ *Y Diwygiwr* (1851) 64; quoted in Jones, *op. cit.* 72.

linguistic orientation, but in the growing grandeur of later nineteenth-century chapels, and even in the dress, mannerisms and social mores of ministers. It was said, comments Jones, that these latter “tended to *ape* the manners of English ministers in style of dress and mode of living.”⁷⁹

It is clear from the above, then, that the adoption by Nonconformity of an English bourgeois conception of the body possessed deep and lasting ramifications for the ways in which Welsh identity was subsequently perceived and constructed; ramifications which were to shape the development of Welsh identity well into the twentieth century and had very real effects upon the lives (and eventually minds) of ordinary working-class people. Indeed, ultimately the 1847 Report was successful in its avowed aim of extending bourgeois bodily values and regulations to the Welsh working class. The “national revival” which it stimulated, for instance, far from being opposed to these processes of assimilation, actively sought to construct Welsh culture in conformance with bourgeois notions of morality and bodily propriety. It is no surprise, then, given the corporeal foundations of subjectivity, that the concept of Welsh nationhood which emerged after 1847 found itself predicated upon, and contained within, the same bourgeois ideals which it purported to reject. The nascent Welsh nationalist movement, it could be argued, was doomed to operate within a bourgeois identity politics that regarded Welsh culture – that is, Welsh working-class culture – as irredeemably subaltern and subject.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 68.