Introduction: Imperial structures of feeling

HERE COMES EVERYBODY

Perhaps the least studied story in *Dubliners*, "After the Race" reads as an allegory of the relationship between a provincial Ireland and the Europe Joyce hoped it might someday join. Its protagonist, Jimmy Doyle, has invested in a race car owned by the Frenchman Charles Séguoin. The money comes from Jimmy's father, a "merchant prince" who "had begun life as an advanced Nationalist" but "modified his views" in time to earn a substantial living.[1] As the story begins, a car containing Jimmy, Ségouin, a young Canadian and a "huge Hungarian" races through Dublin to great applause.[2] Despite being pleased to be seen "in the company of these Continentals," Jimmy is "too excited to be genuinely happy" (*D* 44, 43). Nevertheless, after going home to dress, he meets his friends for dinner. "That night," Joyce tells us, Dublin "wore the mask of a capital" (*D* 46). After several glasses of wine, Jimmy feels the "buried zeal of his father wake to life within him" and he starts to quarrel with an Englishman who has joined their party (*D* 46). Fortunately, "the alert host … lifted his glass to Humanity" and the men continue their revelry, eventually making their way to a yacht owned by a wealthy American (*D* 46). "This," Jimmy thinks to himself, "was seeing life" (*D* 47). Drinks continue to flow, cards are dealt and soon enough Jimmy has lost an indeterminately large amount of money: "Jimmy did not know exactly who was winning but he knew that he was losing. But it was his own fault for he frequently mistook his cards and the other men had to calculate his I.O.U.'s for him" (*D* 48). "He knew," Joyce continues, "that he would regret in the morning but at present he was glad of the rest, glad of the dark stupor that would cover up his folly" (*D* 48). This relief, however, is short lived; two lines later, the story ends with the Hungarian, "standing in a shaft of grey light: – Daybreak, gentlemen" (*D* 48).

If we are unsure of the lesson, the opening paragraph, as is so often the case in *Dubliners*, provides all the clues we need:

> At the crest of the hill at Inchicore sightseers had gathered in clumps to watch the cars careering homeward and through this channel of poverty and inaction the Continent sped its wealth and industry. Now and again the clumps of people raised the cheer of the gratefully oppressed. Their sympathy, however, was for the blue cars – the cars of their friends, the French. (*D* 42)

The enemy of my enemy is my friend: so think the gratefully oppressed Irish, but Jimmy's experience demonstrates how historical opposition to England is not enough to secure friendship. Having given up nationalism for the prospect of financial gain, the Doyles find their financial lives still determined by the relations of center and periphery, as Jimmy becomes an allegorical figure for a provincial Ireland taken for a ride by the international community it would like to join. The daybreak at story's end reveals, then, the falseness of toasts to humanity in the face of capitalist modernity's uneven development. However, the story does not so much replace a false internationalism – let's call it cosmopolitanism – with nationalism, but rather suggests that this nationalism is itself only legible through the larger international structures that condition it. Abstract cosmopolitanism is replaced, here, by the pressures of existing international relations.

So it has gone in modernist criticism, as a movement once characterized by its ahistorical internationalism – whether in a celebratory or denunciatory fashion – has been replaced by a transnational set of texts deeply intertwined with the various discourses of their multiple locations. Modernism, in the familiar usage, has become modernisms. This work has proceeded in two relatively clear directions. On the one hand, there has been the effort by scholars such as Melba Cuddy-Keane, Paul Peppis, Lawrence Rainey, and Vincent Sherry (and many others) to return canonical modernism to its national scene.[3] Here we find a modernism no longer in opposition to mass culture, market society, or the publishing industry, but rather, defining itself through an appropriation of and, at times, direct participation in those discourses from which it most sought to distance itself. On the other hand, there has been what Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz identify in their 2008 state of the field essay "The New Modernist Studies" as "expansion," perhaps best exemplified by the collection *Geomodernisms*, which, in the words of its editors Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, "unveils both unsuspected 'modernist' experiments in 'marginal' texts and unsuspected correlations between those texts and

others that appear either more conventional or more postmodern."[4] The old modernists have been put in their place, while the term *modernism* has been extended across time and space, becoming, in Susan Stanford Friedman's account, "the expressive dimension of" a modernity defined as "the velocity, acceleration, and dynamism of shattering change across a wide spectrum of social institutions" wherever it might find itself.[5]

Each of these critical trends is, of course, deeply influenced by postcolonial studies, which has not only revealed the imperial structures through which Europe managed to universalize its own particular set of cultural ideals and attitudes, but has also happily shifted scholarly attention to work from peripheral spaces. Modernism has emerged from its encounter with postcolonial studies productively chastened. Although this transformation of modernist studies can easily be attributed to a larger shift in literary criticism, and indeed society as a whole – even as the formalism of an earlier generation had less to do with the modernists themselves, who had always articulated a range of social and political concerns, than with the larger cultural climate – it is nevertheless instructive to observe the way in which this shift has been narrated. For when we do, we find that what Doyle and Winkiel call the "globalization of criticism" most often emerges in response to a larger shift in the *value* attributed to canonical modernism: its difficulty de-fanged by institutionalization, its aestheticism revealed to be complicit with even those oppressive social structures it sought to escape.[6]

This transformation emerges as the central conceit in Mao and Walkowitz's collection *Bad Modernisms,* in which the authors describe how the "permanent … opposition" of Irving Howe's modernism became the domestication found in Andreas Huyssen's influential *After the Great Divide*, where "conformism has all but obliterated the iconoclastic and subversive thrust of the historical avantgarde."[7] Modernism was no longer seen to be "at war against but rather continuous with tradition."[8] Friedman, as Mao and Walkowitz note, has her own version of this story. As a "young graduate student in 1965," Friedman writes, "Modernism was rebellion … resistance, rupture … the antidote to the poison of tradition."[9] For her graduate students thirty years later, "modernism was elitism. Modernism was the Establishment."[10] In each case, the key term is tradition. Bad modernism critiques it, conformist modernism is complicit with it, and so the retention of modernism's transgressive potential seems to require the search for a modernism that occurs elsewhere, away from those who are complicit with the establishment and to those who emerge from peripheral situations, other spaces, alternative traditions.

The irony of this story, however, is that this expansionary impulse – motivated by the critique of modernism's complicity with empire – threatens to replicate the very primitivist gesture it would disavow. In other words, we risk effacing the specificity of modernist cultural production if we use the term modernism as a placeholder either for period or form, each considered in isolation from one another. If we believe modernism to be related to empire, then expanding the definition of modernism to include peripheral formations, rather than achieving the seemingly anti-imperial goal of inclusion, might, in fact, efface the relationship between imperial center and aesthetic practice. The only way to confront the critique of modernism is not to redefine the term, to retreat, as it were, from history, but rather to examine more closely the relationship between aesthetic form and historical ground.

To this end, I argue that the characteristic devices of aesthetic modernism *depend* on the accumulation that only occurs in the centers of capitalist production. Indeed, when we look at modernist literature for figures of accumulation, we find them almost everywhere. Often these are formal in nature; modernist style forced into innovation by its awareness of the achievements of the past, by the fact that we know more than the writers who precede us and "they are that which we know."[11] No text captures this particular sense of modernism's place in literary history better than "Oxen of the Sun," in which Joyce recapitulates all the styles of English prose that have led to his own moment. Modernist form, that is to say, betrays a particular kind of self-consciousness about what Virginia Woolf called the "accumulated … deposit of tradition and inheritance" that makes even the "most ordinary young man or woman" at a tea-party "so thoroughly steeped in associations of all kinds" as to become "something venerable and subtle."[12] Woolf is summarizing Henry James's view of the English – a view with which she expresses a slightly bemused sense of agreement – but she repeats it nearly ten years later, complaining of her difficulty expressing unique perceptions in a language so well trodden. "There are the old cadences humming in one's head," Woolf writes, "the old phrases covering nothing so decently that it seems to be something after all" (*E* 2:249). Modernism's restless search for the new is here intimately tied to its awareness of the accumulated weight of the past.

Accumulation shades into overaccumulation, however, when it fails to find any viable way to realize its value and modernist literature is filled with characters who represent this particular problem. Stephen Dedalus's bored meditation on Aristotle, Blake, and historical potentiality conjured up while his students mechanically repeat lines from *Lycidas*; J. Alfred

Prufrock's declaration that he has known everything and yet finds it impossible to describe the butt-ends of his days and ways; Hugh Selwyn Mauberley's attachment to works of the past mocked as the "few thousand battered books" for which so many died, in a densely allusive poem that name-drops cultural works with abandon; Mr. Ramsay's plodding march through an alphabet of knowledge that remains entirely separate from the daily life that sustains him. Each of these characters contains a wealth of accumulated knowledge that cannot be realized in the historical moment in which he/she exists.

To make this claim is not, however, to assert that modernist art is somehow *coterminous* with capitalist accumulation. The analogy between the accumulation of culture and the accumulation of capital remains only an analogy and I will spend some time throughout this book distinguishing between the work of art and the commodity and, therefore, between these two forms of accumulation. Rather, my assertion is that we can only properly understand modernist aesthetics if we note their determination by the culture through which they are formed. For it is one of the most consistent lessons of modernist literature that there is no secure place outside of the structures that condition us. Indeed, it is this desire itself that is most often behind the modernist alienation that runs the gambit from Prufrock (for whom sociability feels like "sprawling on a pin") to Stephen Dedalus (who, Joyce demonstrates, is inexorably a product of the very nets of nationality and religion he would seek to escape) to Woolf's Rachel Vinrace (whose death is, in part, a metaphor for her inability to secure a place within the bourgeois social relations she so despises) to Mauberley (to whom Pound must bid good-bye before embarking on his *Cantos)*. Each of these figures has a false idea of a heroic opposition that must evade any taint of complicity with the world in order to critique it. And it is precisely this understanding of historical determination as the evacuation of agency that leads to the view that heroes stand outside of their social order, while villains are those in whom we can detect the presence of its various ideologies.

Instead, we must understand how historical circumstances are riddled with contradictions, and so the aesthetic forms that arise from them are themselves contradictory, laced with critical potential even as they embody the self-same ideologies they would seek to resist. Recent work by scholars such as Simon Gikandi and Jahan Ramazani has begun to take on this challenge, suggesting the ways various postcolonial writers have refashioned modernist aesthetic devices for political ends. *Modernism, Imperialism and the Historical Sense* contributes to the emerging field of

what we might call "postcolonial modernism," by demonstrating that it is precisely through their aesthetic forms, typically viewed as the mark of modernism's ahistoricism, that Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Woolf engaged the structures of empire.[13] Only by understanding modernism's relationship to imperialism can we untangle what is a defining paradox of modernist writing: namely, its tendency to articulate a desire for novelty through references to work from the cultural past. Thus, Pound turns to Provençal poetry and eighteenth-century China, Joyce bases his modern epic on *The Odyssey* and both Eliot and Woolf, in distinct ways, develop their aesthetics out of readings of the English Renaissance. What historical pressures produced modernism's characteristic blend of stylistic innovation and canonical obeisance? This question is, perhaps, more familiar when framed as one about modernist politics as scholars have grappled with a literary movement that seems equal parts progressive and reactionary. To phrase the question as a purely political one, however, is to move our attention away from aesthetics while simultaneously reifying the distinction between aesthetics and politics. Instead, my aim is to trace the political implications of aesthetic form itself, attending to the ways art is both conditioned by its historical moment and yet, through its imaginative investments, capable of negating the world as it is, producing new phrases in excess of the historical content of its moment of production.

To achieve this goal, I situate modernism's aesthetic innovations alongside the structural transformations of what Eric Hobsbawm has called the Age of Empire, where imperial expansion was conditioned by a crisis of overaccumulation. No longer able to be absorbed profitably in its metropolitan centers, Western capital attempted to maintain its profits by acquiring new territories that could absorb the excess capital and commodities in which its value was locked. The result was an early moment of what we have come to call globalization: the increased unification of financial markets, the homogenization of culture, and the prevalence of informal means of control that supplement or, at times, replace military domination. Imperialist expansion occurs, then, alongside the emergence of that mass commodity culture that is one of the chief features of today's neo-imperialism and was also one of modernism's most consistent objects of attack. This attack on commodity culture needs, then, to be thought in relation to empire.

I begin this argument by identifying three main conceptual results of imperialist expansion. (1) Imperialism tended to increase cultural contact, but it did so under the relations of structural dependence characterized by the terms center and periphery. This relationship is represented

by a conceptual structure I call Imperial Time – the contrast between an unending telic modernity and a world of reified unchanging traditions, which finds its clearest articulation in the atavistic primitivism characteristic of the period. Typically this primitivism sought to renew Western culture by an introjection of the exotic, ostensibly more "natural" forms of traditional culture. (2) Imperial culture is thus dominated by an interest in immediacy, either in the progressive forms of the modern world that erase traditional structures of feeling, or in the atavistic primitivism imagined to be that modern world's opposite number. These two forms of consciousness, however, are simply mirror images of each other, each lacking any sense of historical grounding. (3) This absence of historical grounding is further exacerbated by the structures of commodity culture, which in their perpetual need to manufacture desire construct an expressivist subject that tends toward the effacement of all forms of community. What results is a radically ahistorical individualism, constituted by a series of desires that are in service to a repressive social order but experienced subjectively as a form of liberation from that order.

Modernism's response to this situation is to emphasize the social ground of both subject and art object through what Eliot, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," famously called "the historical sense" (*SW* 49). Eliot's essay describes a world in which tradition is no longer given, but must be acquired with "great labour" (*SW* 49). Its result is the "historical sense … [which] involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence … [and] is what makes a writer traditional. And it is as the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity" (*SW* 49). For "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (*SW* 49). The historical sense, then, is an understanding of the dialectical intertwining of the present and the past, the past only gaining meaning through its persistence into the present, the present only becoming meaningful in its relation to the past. In the realm of literature, tradition becomes the space within which history is registered.

This emphasis on the historical structures that condition the production of the work of art is seen most clearly in modernism's radical transformation of literary allusion. No longer simply the borrowing of a phrase or rhythm meant to jog the alert reader's memory, allusion becomes, within modernism, what Eliot called "stealing." And this stealing is one of the most striking formal features of modernist literature, as Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and, to a lesser but still significant extent, Woolf, construct their signature works out of materials from the cultural past. This formal device

must be situated within the larger context of primitivism that dominates the early twentieth century from the atavistic vitalism of D. H. Lawrence to the commercial fads for African or Egyptian culture that have recently captured scholarly attention.[14] However, the turn to the past of Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Woolf is never atavistic. Instead, the high cultural forms of modernist literary production are imagined to contain those values that consumer culture has tried to forget, but which persist nevertheless within its margins. In this way modernism resists what Dispesh Chakrabarty has called "History 1" – the "past posited by capital itself as its precondition" – in favor of "History 2," those aspects of the past that do not belong to capital's "life-process" but nevertheless "inhere in capital" even as they "interrupt and punctuate the run of capital's own logic."[15] The cultural materials that form the very fabric of modernist works of literature are thus inseparable from the capitalist history they are nevertheless mobilized to resist.

In reading modernist literary production in light of imperial culture, I bring two discrete discourses into conversation with one another. On the one hand, there is the relationship between Marxism and modernism, most famously embodied in the works of the Frankfurt School. Within this tradition, the mark of modernism's historical engagement is its autonomy, its absolute rejection of the structures of capitalist modernity. On the other hand, there is the oft-described rift between Marxism and postcolonial studies, Marxism seeing postcolonial studies as irredeemably culturalist, postcolonialism viewing Marxism as a Eurocentric discourse that fails to take into account peripheral experience.[16] Where these two discourses meet, I argue, is in the commodity form itself. For the commodity is, in Georg Lukács's famous account, "the central, structural problem of capitalism in all its aspects," its reification leading directly to the ahistorical consciousness of the self-legislating bourgeois subject, unmoored from his/her social ground.[17] At the same time, the commodity is, in the periphery, the very embodiment of the colony's dependence upon the neoimperialist structures of the world market, its cheap price being "the heavy artillery with which [the bourgeoisie] batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate."[18] The commodity, that is to say, structures the particular consciousness of center *and* periphery, embodying both the omnipresence and the erasure of colonial dependence.

This understanding of the commodity's dual function allows us to reread modernism's relationship to both Marxism and postcolonial studies. Grounding the modernist resistance to emergent cultural forms within a

determinant political and economic structure suggests that its relationship to commodity culture is always, in part, a relationship to imperialism. Reading the commodity as the determining structure of peripheral consciousness allows for the introduction of power relations into postcolonial notions of hybridity that are all too-often overwhelmingly culturalist in their orientation. Neither modernism nor postcolonial studies, however, need be seen through the lens of romantic anticapitalism, for each can be understood to engage directly with one of capitalist modernity's determining forms.

IMPERIAL STRUCTURES OF FEELING

The great virtue of Lukács's discussion of reification lies in its ability to see how forms of thought arise from particular moments. The same is true for aesthetic forms, which arise from particular places in response to particular social formations. Yet by virtue of being formal, they also have the ability to persist outside of the social orders from which they emerge, a fact that tends toward their reification. Fredric Jameson, for instance, argues that cultural forms should be seen as "attempts to resolve more fundamental contradictions – attempts which then outlive the situations for which they were devised, and survive, in reified forms, as 'cultural patterns.' Those patterns themselves then become part of the objective situation confronted by later generations."[19] Attaching modernism to its social ground is a way to understand both the contradictions that produced modernist aesthetics as well as how these formal resolutions might have continued relevance for a contemporary moment that remains in sway to some of the same structures of domination that conditioned modernist literary production. This, it seems to me, is the fundamental task of any Marxist aesthetics: how can we adequately do justice to both the shaping power of history and the efficacy of aesthetic form? How, that is to say, can we understand, without reifying either side, the relationship between aesthetics and history?

To answer this question, I would like to turn to Raymond Williams's important – and underutilized – concept of "structures of feeling," for with this concept Williams produces a nuanced sense of how the notion of determination never exhausts the ability of historical agents to articulate new possibilities latent within the contradictions of their historical moments. "Structures of feeling" are, for Williams, "social experiences in solution," emerging from "the endless comparison that must occur in the process of consciousness between the articulated and the lived."[20]

Structures of feeling, then, describe an area of experience that is all we might feel of "immediacy," that exists prior to conscious articulation – prior, that is, to the various ideological and social determinations that necessarily shape any communal discourse – and yet is always already social in character.

In this way, Williams preserves the possibility of emergent social formations, against the reifications of classical base/superstructure theory. In contrast, Williams offers a base that is itself consistently changing, a view that, in turn, allows for a less rigid conception of culture's relation to that base. To understand this argument more clearly, it is worth quoting Williams in full:

> *no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy and human intention* … [thus] modes of domination … select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice. What they exclude may often be seen as the personal or the private, or as the natural or even the metaphysical. Indeed it is usually in one or other of these terms that the excluded area is expressed, since what the dominant has effectively seized is indeed the ruling definition of the social.[21]

However, for Williams, "all consciousness is social."[22] Paradoxically, then, the notion of "structures of feeling" emerges as a strong defense of the political efficacy of seemingly private experiences. For if these experiences are always already social they necessarily have a specific location in that social field of contestation we call culture. "Structures of feeling" name those kinds of "experiences to which the fixed forms do not speak at all, which indeed they do not recognize" but which might very well be tied to emergent social formations.[23] The articulation of these experiences in solution thus becomes one of the ways in which culture transforms itself, building something new out of inherited traditions.

The modernist literature of the European metropole is, as I will argue, virtually defined by this notion of an emergent structure of feeling, one entirely dependent upon inherited traditions and yet consistently striving toward the realization of something else, whether in the attempts of Eliot's fragmented subjects to connect with one another, Pound's utopian desire to craft a world culture out of disparate cultural discourses, Joyce's recognition that a transformation of Ireland cannot simply reject the British culture within which it is submerged, or Woolf's realization that a reimagining of British nationalism cannot continue to voyage out, but must, instead, turn inward on itself. Similarly, the way out of the conceptual bind that I have outlined within modernist studies – the desire to