Introduction

Celticism, Capitalism, and Transnational Modernism

Sometime around the middle of the nineteenth century, at a fortuitous inter-section between the emergence of Victorian anthropology and the escala-tion of colonial conflict between England and Ireland, begins the career of a unique and remarkably prolific literary figure. At different points of his his-tory, this figure can be found engaging bravely yet haplessly in tribal warfare; sitting rapt in poetic communion with nature; held captive in a London zoo; surveying a prehistoric landscape from a South American tree; suppressing insurrection in colonial India; mediating racial tensions aboard a British mer-chant ship; serving as a religious idol in an anticolonial Mexican revolution; protesting the influence of popular culture in turn-of-the-century Ireland; modeling the ideal citizen of the twentieth century's first postcolonial state; or deceased, with his decapitated head being worshipped in ritual dance. This is, by any measure, a distinguished record—of service domestic and foreign; military and civilian; rural and urban; real and mythological; political, cul-tural, and aesthetic; dramatic, poetic, and fictional—and displays a versatility, indeed a virtuosity, difficult to match in the record of modern literature. Yet this figure's achievements have yet to receive full recognition, and where they are noted, they are often denigrated.

More persistently than any of the above labors, this figure may be found performing one special task prior to his retirement sometime around World War II. Beyond his prominent role in buoying aesthetic values in a utilitarian age or in shaping the rising, incipiently global forces of anticolonial struggle, this figure was deployed to combat the harmful effects of modern capitalism. At a time when capital's evolution had begun to issue in the technological forms of the second industrial revolution and the pop-cultural manifestations of the culture industry, this figure became central to a widespread effort to comprehend and combat the perils of these processes. If the variety of this figure's employment during the period from the mid-nineteenth through the

mid-twentieth centuries is without peer among his literary contemporaries, the steadfastness of his nearly century-long devotion to gauging and altering the course on which capital had set the world is even more so.

The figure to whom this sketch refers is the Irish Celt. Like many of the ancient deities in which he is thought to have believed, he displays a remarkable shape-changing capacity throughout the extensive archive of British and Irish texts he populates during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Across the various guises he assumes in his globetrotting heyday, however, his antagonism to the forces of capital is a constant. This book traces the history of the Irish Celt, reconstructing from his diverse manifestations in British and Irish literature his service to the cause of criticizing capitalism's depredations during the colonial, postcolonial, modern, and postmodern periods. The record of this service is a fascinating study of the Irish Celt's entanglement with some of the most significant civilizational arcs of the modern and contemporary eras, and of his utility for comprehending and criticizing them. In the hands of both British and Irish writers, the Irish Celt served as an unparalleled resource for thinking through the ramifications of imperial/colonial history and the economic forces driving and shaping that history. A study of the astonishing variety of ways in which these writers cultivated this resource thus enables a novel account of some of the most influential works of modern literature in English while also providing a window into some of the most pressing historical problems of the last two centuries.

As indexed in this capsule biography, this book takes the literary history of the Irish Celt as a point of access not only to Irish but also to British literature. Though there is an extensive critical record addressing this figure's role in the former corpus, *Against the Despotism of Fact* is unique by virtue of its simultaneous engagement with his British incarnations. This archipelagic vantage affords both a richer account of the literary history of this unique entity and a novel awareness of the extent to which the two nations were engaged in addressing a common set of problems across the colonial divide. If the Celt has served as a bugbear of postcolonial criticism over the last several decades—as a sort of Trojan horse the embrace of which doomed Ireland to the reproduction of debilitating stereotypes—the transnationality of his career as adduced in the following pages demands a reassessment of this reputation. In particular, the Irish Celt's common appeal to both British and Irish writers as an aesthetic vehicle for the interrogation of capitalism argues for his bearing a critical potential beyond his colonialist limitations.[1]

While respecting the significance of the colonial divide separating the two nations during the period in question, this book attempts to push beyond the postcolonial paradigm that has predominated in studies of their literatures in

recent years. Building on work that has begun to delineate new, comparative lines of inquiry into the literary histories of Britain and Ireland, as well as on work in Irish Studies specifically that has emphasized the nation's possession of both colonial and metropolitan characteristics at the turn of the twentieth century, I argue for reframing these literatures as engaged in addressing a common set of concerns in addition to those that divided them.[2] The specific emphasis on capitalist concerns facilitates an awareness of the two nations' transnational connectivity, as, from the late nineteenth century onward, Ireland was increasingly integrated into the domestic British economy, not merely in terms of colonial relations of production and distribution but also in terms of marketing and commodity consumption. In this context, the Celt, who, from his inception in the founding text of British Celticism, Matthew Arnold's *The Study of Celtic Literature*, possessed a marked anticapitalist trait, appears not simply as an instrument of imperial racism by the British or nationalist self-sabotage by the Irish, but as a critical resource for writers of both nations.

This book takes its title from the ethnological definitions of Arnold's *Study*, and it traces the nearly century-long heritage of British and Irish Celticisms to that text's anatomy of the two nations' racial essences. In Arnold's famous description of "the Celtic nature," the Celt's anticapitalist proclivities derive from his "sentimental" biology: "Sentimental—*always ready to react against the despotism of fact* . . . [this term] lets us into the secret of its dangers and of its habitual want of success" (*Study* 84). In contrast to the "essentially Germanic" makeup of "the creeping Saxon," whose knack for "direct practical utility" Arnold credits with "augment[ing] the comforts and conveniences of life . . . Doors that open, windows that shut, locks that turn, razors that shave, coats that wear, watches that go, and a thousand more such good things," the Celt displays a "habitual," allergic resistance to such economic and technological bounty (92–93). This compound binary opposition, equating, oil-and-water-like, Saxonness with capitalist development and Celticness with resistance to it, resides at the root of a largely unacknowledged genealogy of nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics, culture, and aesthetics. By elucidating this genealogy, *Against the Despotism of Fact* offers a fresh perspective on some of the most significant experiments and innovations in modern British and Irish literature.

CELTICIST THEORY

Most studies of the Celt have tended to marginalize Arnold's taxonomy in keeping with the more general condemnation of his thought, particularly in Irish Studies, as doggedly racist and imperialist. Gregory Castle's *Modernism*

and the Celtic Revival places Arnold prominently among a group of anthropological and political thinkers responsible for a series of misrepresentations of the Irish "that invoke a binomial distinction between primitive and civilized" to consolidate British rule, and he stages his recuperation of the cultural politics of the title movement through its "ambivalent" distancing from such images (3). By this account, the Celt of fin-de-siècle Irish nationalism, insofar as he escapes "the charge of complicity" with colonialist categories of thought, does so only by breaking free of such definitions as Arnold's binary propounds (6). Sinéad Garrigan Mattar's *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* similarly argues for a Revivalist Celt founded not on *The Study* but on the doctrines of continental race science—on "Celtology" rather than Celticism.[3] Such work in Irish Studies has extended the theoretical models for understanding the challenges of identity formation during and after decolonization contained in such texts as Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, which argue, in the words of the latter, that "There is . . . an inherent contradictoriness in nationalist thinking . . . whose representational structure corresponds to the very structure of power [it] seeks to repudiate" (38). Such postcolonial conventional wisdom informs efforts to reposition the Celt of Irish nationalism away from the "representational structure" of Arnold's colonialism.[4]

This book seeks to restore Arnoldian concepts to a place of centrality in studies of the Celt without losing the crucial gains made by such accounts. What follows should not by any means be taken as an endorsement of Arnold's theories, which in many ways deserve the condemnation they have received in recent years for their racism, essentialism, and retrograde political legacy. Nor does this book claim that the Celticisms that followed in his wake for the ensuing century—British or Irish—rigidly or slavishly adhere to the terms of *The Study*. Rather, I contend that Arnold's Saxon-Celt binary demarcates an intellectual territory in which an extensive and diverse group of thinkers, political activists, and writers on both sides of the Anglo-Irish divide found it attractive and productive to work over the next century. I further contend that, in spite of his racial and political baggage, the Celt who inhabited this territory, with his unique proclivity for resisting capitalism, played a leading role in some of the most sophisticated and savvy efforts to interrogate and challenge its forms at an early moment of their global ascendancy. Though I will have frequent occasion to differentiate the Celticisms that compose the discourse's subsequent history from the more insidious aspects of Arnold's founding typology, the figures and texts I address remain committed throughout to the notion that the Celt bears a unique utility for efforts to gauge and

navigate the challenges of a globalizing capitalist modernity. As I will show in the book's latter half, even the Irish nationalist movement of the fin de siècle, while necessarily resistant to some of the Celt's features, itself expressed such a commitment and would owe many of its signal achievements to the image of the Celt as an antagonist of capital.

To a certain extent, then, my reading of the Celt, which is committed to recovering a critical potential beyond its "complicitious" dimension, constitutes what Gayatri Spivak would call an "ab-use" of Arnold's ethnological definitions: a deployment of his concepts that "moves away" from his colonialist intentions and reconfigures them "from below"—that is, from the point of view of Irish subaltern resistance.[5] However, the particular Celticist inheritance traced here also argues for a materialist complication of postcolonial accounts. The theoretical bite of the classic three-stage, Fanonian model of decolonization depends upon the initially negative or instrumental definition of the subordinate term in the colonial binary opposition. That is to say, the progression from a first, imitative or assimilative stage of subaltern identity formation to a second, repudiative stage falls prey to what Fanon calls "the pitfalls of national consciousness" because the original formulations of colonial discourse are inherently disadvantageous and disabling to the colonized. To embrace views of the colonized as politically incompetent or unruly or as economically ineffectual seems irresistibly to "surrender to the stereotype" and thus to hamstring colonial nationalism, rendering it irreparably disadvantaged in the games of modern state formation and economic development. Thus, what is needed is indeed a Fanonian, dialectical alternative to imitative assimilation or its reactionary inverse, a "revolutionary," self-determined modality capable of fully independent identity formation.[6] If, however, the original definition of the colonized is itself already part of an effort to challenge the civilizational norms of the colonizer—if, that is, the erstwhile colonialist theorizer of race identifies in the subaltern figure a resource for criticizing hegemonic norms—then it would seem the decolonizing and postcolonial embrace of such a definition need not entirely disable efforts to throw off those same norms. In such a circumstance, the attractiveness of a stereotype may inhere not in an infantile, knee-jerk embrace of whatever traits or behaviors be opposed to "civilized" standards, but in the specificity of a trait configured in a dynamic, critical relationship to those standards.

In what follows, I argue that the anticapitalism of the Celt bears such a critical potential, and that an array of British and Irish authors seized on this potential to devise aesthetic critiques of a modernity defined by British capitalism. Both the Irish nationalist moment usually emphasized in accounts of the

Celt and the contemporaneous British moment evince a widespread embrace of the stereotype of Celtic anticapitalism, and even where this embrace is not complicated by postcolonial suspicion, it issues in aesthetic, cultural, and political projects that interrogate and offer sophisticated alternatives to both British imperialism and capitalism. Such projects affirm the critical potential residing in the anticapitalism of the Arnoldian Celt, effectuating a sort of bypass between the second and third stages of Fanon's dialectic. Devised by Arnold as an imaginative lever against an overly capitalist British civilization, the Celt would not only inspire and serve as the model for metropolitan self-revision in the decades subsequent to his coinage; he would also be exported to the colonial nation whose subjection was one of his inbuilt purposes, and in that context his anticapitalist talents would instead facilitate anticolonial resistance.

This argument accords with a materialist rejoinder to Fanonian accounts of decolonization mounted in recent years by theorists like Neil Lazarus and Laura Chrisman, who have argued, in the words of the latter, that to view the adoption of colonialist definitions as always and everywhere disabling "is to deny the capacity of formerly colonized peoples to transform structures of thought and governance" (185).[7] As we shall see, the Irish nationalist movement of the fin de siècle would coopt the basic terms of Arnold's Celticism, and it would succeed in articulating a liberatory decolonizing vision not despite but, in many ways, through that cooptation. Beyond the mere demonstrable fact of this "transformed" or ab-usive deployment of Arnoldian ideas, however, what enables such a deployment to effectuate a sort of bypass of Fanon's second and third stages is the common capitalist civilization shared by British metropole and Irish colony during the historical moment on which this book is centered. Earlier than any other colony in the British Empire, Ireland, by virtue of its domestic proximity to the metropole, became encircled within the expanding domains of modern European capital. Its situation at the turn of the twentieth century may thus be read as presaging the fully global dimensions of such expansion that would later extend to other British colonies in Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean.[8] In some ways, Ireland's early entry into economic modernity reflects a sort of historical short-circuit between what were for other territories the temporally distant obstacles of colonialism and advanced capitalism—the latter designating not merely market dependency or an international system of resource extraction and distribution, but phenomena of mass marketing and commodity consumption. As a result of its nationalism at the turn of the century thus being addressed not only toward imperial domination but also toward a highly advanced,

metropolitan capitalist hegemony, the Celt's appeal resided not simply in his potential to serve as a vehicle of identity contrast with the Saxon invader, but in his original coinage as a tool of capitalist critique. This inbuilt resistance to capital, in the unique set of Irish circumstances Joseph Valente has dubbed "metrocolonial," could be more beneficially, though not unproblematically, adopted than other stereotypes devised as an imperial wedge, because the nationalist agenda confronted there the same socioeconomic problems as Arnold himself.[9]

Much of this book offers an attempt to reckon with the implications of Ireland's colonially proleptic incorporation into the more advanced dimensions of capitalist modernity. In Ireland at the turn of the century, the decolonization process was thus complicated by the penetration of the forms of modern capitalism in ways that presage challenges only faced toward midcentury by other colonial nations. In an under-remarked passage in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon, from such a mid-century vantage, addresses the additional challenge posed to postcolonial self-authorization by the dissemination of European commodities:

> Normally, there is a certain homogeneity between the mental and material level of the members of any given society and the pleasures which that society creates for itself. But in underdeveloped countries, young people have at their disposition leisure occupations designed for the youth of capitalist countries: detective novels, penny-in-the-slot machines, sexy photographs, pornographic literature, films banned to those under sixteen, and above all alcohol. In the West, the family circle, the effects of education, and the relatively high standard of living of the working classes provide a more or less efficient protection against the harmful action of these pastimes. But in an African country, where mental development is uneven, where the violent collision of two worlds has considerably shaken old traditions and thrown the universe of the perceptions out of focus, the impressionability and sensibility of the young African are at the mercy of various assaults made upon them by the very nature of Western culture. (195–96)

Though Fanon leaves this line of inquiry relatively undeveloped alongside the colonial identity dynamics that are his main concern, it bears profound implications for the Irish context of half a century earlier, as well as for the theorization of the intersection of empire and capital more generally. Experiencing through the collocation of the two influences a sort of "mental uneven

development," an epistemological mismatch between the cultural products of the metropole and the economic and educational infrastructures of the colony, colonial youth at the moment of decolonization are held mentally in thrall by the pop-cultural forms of European capital. Their perceptions and their *self-perceptions* must thus overcome not only the limitations imposed by colonialist structures of thought, but those imposed by capitalist reification.

To students of the fin-de-siècle Irish Revival, Fanon's diagnosis of the dissemination of metropolitan popular culture as an exacerbative barrier to anticolonial resistance should ring immediate bells, for it also arises in many canonical tracts of Revivalist nationalism. Witness, for example, the account offered by Douglas Hyde's seminal screed against British cultural hegemony or "West Britonism," "The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland":

> We must set our face sternly against penny dreadfuls, shilling shockers, and . . . the garbage of vulgar English weeklies like *Bow Bells* and *The Police Intelligence*. . . . We must strive to cultivate everything that is most racial, most smacking of the soil, most Gaelic, most Irish, because . . . this island *is* and will *ever* remain Celtic to the core. . . . On racial lines, then, we shall best develop, following the bent of our own nature; and, in order to do this, we must create a strong feeling against West-Britonism, for it . . . will overwhelm us like a flood, and we shall find ourselves toiling painfully behind the English . . . following the same fashions, only six months behind . . . reading the same books, only months behind . . . taking up the same fads, after they have become stale there, following them in our dress, literature, music, games, and ideas. . . . We will become, what, I fear, we are largely at present, a nation of imitators. (159–60)

As in the Algeria of the 1950s, so in the Ireland of the 1890s, where, by imperial proximity, the shadow of capital applies additional pressure to the politics of culture beyond the obstacle of state oppression. Where Fanon worries over slot machines, detective fiction, pornography, film, and alcohol, Hyde calls his listeners' attention to sensational fiction, tabloid reporting, fashion, popular music, and games. Just as Fanon does in his description of the disturbance of Africa's "mental development" by such commodities, which have "thrown the universe of the perceptions out of focus," so Hyde's litanies continue to light upon concern over the nation's "ideas" not being developed along independent lines. In such circumstances, the challenges of colonial identity formation do not stop at political resistance or racial self-definition,

but are compounded by the suffusion of the mind of the colonized by the pop-cultural forms of capital. Different states of infrastructural development aside, this homogenization of the *consumer dimensions* of the imperial economy threatens to smother colonial resistance in its infancy by molding the perceptions of the colonized according to metropolitan norms.[10]

It is just this compound problematic that the Irish case addressed in this study presents, and it is toward this problematic that, in the aesthetic projects of a diverse group of British and Irish writers, the Celt's anticapitalist propensities bare their critical teeth. Already, in Hyde's dual commitment to a model of decolonization that extricates Ireland from British consumer products and to a postcolonial identity "Celtic to the core," we gain a glimpse into the manner in which Arnoldian concepts, in the colonially divided but economically merged Anglo-Irish situation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, could mobilize a liberatory vision despite their colonialist coinage. In response to the particular problematic outlined here via Hyde and Fanon, that of the mental domination of the colonized by the reifying tendencies of capital, Celticism evinces a counterhegemonic utility slighted in prior accounts, one that generates a host of insights regarding the challenges posed by the insidious imbrication of empire and popular culture. This study will argue that Celticism became a powerful discourse for diagnosing and resisting the manner in which, at the moment of decolonization, the reification of mental perceptions and cultural values produced by such products as Hyde and Fanon list threatens to contribute to the reproduction of imperial hegemony and, where decolonization succeeds, to continue to mold postcolonial minds according to imperial and capitalist priorities.

Through its critical responsiveness to such economic phenomena, Celticism in fact encompasses a series of cultural concerns typically considered alien to both metropolitan and colonial history circa 1900. Namely, in the trajectory between Hyde's 1890s Ireland and Fanon's 1950s Africa, we witness a major segment of the route traveled by European capital's pop-cultural products during the process of economic globalization. This circuit places turn-of-the-century Ireland at an early stage of the connective processes in which our contemporary world is so extensively entangled, and it locates Ireland during the period of this study in an oddly anachronistic mode of cultural experience more often associated with theories of *post*modernity. Both passages above may be read as linking postcolonial and Marxist or neo-Marxist theoretical models like those contained in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and in other texts such as Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* and Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. This

book will argue that the more sophisticated of the Celticisms that emerged in Arnold's wake mount a prescient critique of the entanglement of colonialism, decolonization, and postcoloniality with an incipient form of postmodern cultural reification. It will suggest that the especially refined form of Celticism advanced by Irish writers such as W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, and James Stephens in the early twentieth century positions the Celt as a sort of reification detector—an instrument for identifying and resisting the culture industry's insidious colonial effects. Celticism, in this context, constitutes an early and especially revealing chapter in the larger story of the global spread of postmodern cultural forms and their complication of the legacies of empire.[11]

What enables the Celt to serve as such an instrument is the particular aesthetic traits Arnold and his successors attribute to him alongside his talent for economic resistance. *The Study* in fact links these two characteristics directly in a binary opposition that is foundational to Celticism's subsequent history. As he advocates for a greater appreciation of the contributions of the junior, Celtic component of the predominantly Saxon modality he calls "the composite English genius," Arnold assigns an inverse proportionality to the Celt's material and aesthetic capacities: "Style is the most striking quality of [his] poetry. Celtic poetry seems to make up to itself for being unable to master the world . . . by throwing all its force into style, by bending language . . . to its will, and expressing the ideas it has with an unsurpassable intensity, elevation, and effect" (63). The Celt's sentimentality, if an economic and political disadvantage, bestows an equal aesthetic advantage, generating a "Titanism in poetry" that informs not just Irish or Welsh but the best English literature (67). Arnold traces this aesthetic potency to "the Celt's quick feeling," "his indomitable personality," and "his sensibility and nervous exaltation," which together form a sort of biological wellspring of responsiveness to what he calls "the magic of nature"—"her weird power and fairy charm" (70–71). This potent capacity, Arnold hopes, will "free" the English "from hardness and Philistinism," an intellectual stagnation that he elsewhere defines as the baleful flipside to the Saxon knack for "direct practical utility" (78).

This compound opposition between Saxon and Celt, capital and the aesthetic constitutes the major through-line of nearly a century of British and Irish experiments in politics, culture, and literature to follow. Throughout this heritage, it is the conception of the Celt's compound biological repulsion of capital and aesthetic attunement to nature's "Titanism" that enables him to serve as a sort of reification detector. The opposition of a passional, "magical" aesthetic to the forms of capital outfits the Celt with a preternatural sensitivity to the impingements of the latter on the human organism. The Celt, in this

sense, is not simply a critical resource for interrogating capital's transformation of human consciousness, but a fully *negative-dialectical* one. His knack for both apprehending and embodying nature's primordiality outfits him with a heightened awareness of capital's ontological encroachments, and his "quick feeling" in turn furnishes an aesthetic "style" that throws such encroachments into relief. A passage from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* on the critical utility of the sublime helps elucidate this potential. Adorno's description of this utility emerges from a dense critique of the limitations of the Kantian sublime:

> By its transplantation into art the Kantian definition of the sublime is driven beyond its boundaries. According to this definition, spirit, in its empirical powerlessness vis-à-vis nature, experiences its intelligible essence as one that is superior to nature. However, given that the sublime is supposed to be felt in the face of nature, the theory of subjective constitution implies that nature itself is sublime; self-reflection in the face of its sublimity anticipates something of a reconciliation with nature. Nature, no longer oppressed by spirit, frees itself from . . . subjective sovereignty. Such emancipation would be a return of nature, and it—the counterimage of mere existence—is the sublime. Through the traits of domination evident in its dimensions of power and magnitude, the sublime speaks against domination. . . . The feeling of the sublime does not correspond immediately with what appears; towering mountains are eloquent not as what crushes overwhelmingly but as images of a space liberated from fetters and strictures, a liberation in which it is possible to participate. The legacy of the sublime is unassuaged negativity, as stark and illusionless as once promised by the semblance of the sublime. (196–99)

Adorno here reverses Kant's confinement of the sublime within the phenomenal sovereignty of the subject by emphasizing nature's excess of this rationalizing maneuver, and he goes on to locate a critical potential in specifically aesthetic representations of this excess.[12] "Self-reflection in the face of nature," representation of the self in the midst of nature's sublimity, gives the slip to the Kantian sublation of the latter, releasing its potential to serve as the "counterimage of existence," the latter being defined as suffused with the "domination" of capitalist modernity.[13] Adorno's dialectical rumination avoids the commonsense equation of sublime effects with those of such domination, insisting that "the feeling of the sublime does not correspond immediately with what appears." Rather, domination inheres in the Kantian effort to

"subject" the sublime to rational representation or apprehension, and thus, preserving its disturbing power from such subjection inspires "images of a space limited from fetters and strictures." A properly sublime aesthetic is in this sense a "negative" resource bodying forth a view of "a liberation in which it is possible to participate."[14]

Adorno's terms are remarkably close to Arnold's: just as Arnold positions Celtic style as a Titanic representation of nature's "weird power," and just as he opposes this aesthetic capacity as a resource for "freeing" the English from modernity's "hardness and Philistinism," so Adorno defines sublime aesthetics as a spur toward resisting modernity's rationalizing and dominatory effects. It is in this manner that a Celticist aesthetics conceived on Arnoldian lines can serve as a negative, sublime "counterimage" of capitalist modernity.[15] This positioning of the Celt as the biological bearer of a Titanic, magical "style" capable of both registering capital's ontological depredations and helping envision alternative social modalities bears the seeds for a host of experiments by British and Irish writers over the next century. Indeed, I will claim that the radical aesthetic visions to which Arnold's seminal formulations gave rise locate Celticism at the root of a significant body of modernist formal innovations.

CELTICIST MODERNISMS

In addition to the Celt's affinities with the Adornoan sublime, the binary of Celt and capital bears affinities with another binary opposition critics have perennially found central to modernist aesthetics, Friedrich Nietzsche's opposition between the Dionysian and the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy*.[16] Invoking this binary and defining the aesthetic capacity of the Celt as racially ingrained brings *Against the Despotism of Fact* into the orbit of critical discussions of modernism and race that have emerged in recent decades. Many of these discussions have proceeded under the "primitivism" paradigm, which has traced the debt of Euro-American modernism to the nineteenth-century pseudosciences of anthropology and ethnology and has chronicled the widespread modernist effort to embrace "primitive" over "civilized" values, social institutions, and aesthetic forms. While recent studies such as Urmila Seshagiri's *Race and the Modernist Imagination* and the edited volume *Modernism and Race* (Len Platt) have made some progress in pushing beyond the binary terms of this schema, the relative scarcity of such efforts may be taken as affirmation of modernism's deep indebtedness to the Victorian racial episteme.[17] Given

its Arnoldian origins, Celticism necessarily shares this debt, and, through its central distinction between Saxon and Celt, it often functions as a primitivist aesthetic discourse.[18] The Celticist modernisms traced in what follows suggest, however, that the study of modernism and race cannot stop at simple condemnations of racism or essentialism but must continue to probe the agendas that modernists used the languages of race to pursue. I am in sympathy with Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses when they remark, in the introduction to the edited volume *Modernism and Colonialism*, that recent criticism "has sometimes pushed modernism too far . . . treating it as indistinguishable from colonialism," and I would extend this assessment to the modernist reliance on Victorian race theory (6). Particularly in the case of the Celt's opposition to the global march of capital—deriving partly from the anticapitalist bent of Arnold's original definitions and partly from the sheer creativity of the aesthetic visions to which Celticism gave rise—I argue for scaling back the tendency to view primitivism as inevitably baleful.[19]

This is not to say, however, that the modernist Celticisms traced here rigidly adhere to the script laid down by Arnold, or even that they all evince a primitivist aesthetic more generally. A number of the authors addressed in subsequent chapters do rely fairly directly on Arnold's taxonomy, and many of them do, indeed, pursue its exfoliation toward primitivist visions. Often, however, in the hands of modernist writers whose aesthetic projects conduct searching examinations of the prevailing norms and tendencies of British modernity, Celticist aesthetics leads to outcomes that deviate from the Victorian anthropological script and contribute to what Seshagiri calls "the erosion of Victorian-era racial codes" (9). Beyond such expansions of the aesthetic and ideological ambit of original Celticism, it is the particular negative, critical capacity of the discourse relative to the civilizational forms of capital that drives modernist innovation. Even in texts that deviate from Arnold's definitions to imagine more capacious and dynamic notions of Irishness, the Celt's positioning as a uniquely sensitive instrument for registering and resisting capitalism's pressures proves pivotal. Especially in the case of what I will argue—along with Castle but in contrast to a number of other critics—is the modernism of the Irish Literary Revival, in the hands of writers such as William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge, the Celt's aptitude for capitalist critique underwrites aesthetic visions whose innovations derive from the effort to gauge, comprehend, and resist the effects of British capital in its productive, distributive, and, especially, pop-cultural dimensions.[20]

This last area of Celticist modernisms' critical stance toward capital—popular culture—draws the readings to follow into another prominent context in recent

modernist studies in addition to that of race. In the wake of Michael North's pathbreaking *Reading 1922*, there has been a marked shift toward recognition of the pop-cultural affiliations of modernist aesthetics. North's bold relocation of Anglo-American modernism "across the great divide" previously viewed as separating modernist works and mass- or pop-cultural artifacts and media forged a new paradigm that has since driven much important work in the so-called New Modernist Studies. The edited volume *Bad Modernisms* (Walkowitz and Mao), North's own subsequent *Camera Works* and *Machine-Age Comedy*, and Enda Duffy's *The Speed Handbook*, among numerous other studies, have fleshed out and expanded this paradigm in recent years, resulting in a reconfigured image of modernism's relationship to "pulp" literature, photography, advertising, film, the automobile, and innumerable other forms of early-twentieth-century popular expression.[21] *Against the Despotism of Fact* builds on such work by reading Celticist aesthetics as a medium through which a number of prominent modernists interrogated pop-cultural forms such as advertising, fashion, the music hall, tabloid reporting, and film. Especially in its Irish half, it shows that Celticism's anticapitalist utility served as an imaginative resource for early modernist writers such as Yeats, Synge, and James Stephens seeking to stem the tide of cultural reification emanating from the British metropole, as well as for later modernists such as Joyce, the late Yeats, Flann O'Brien, and Samuel Beckett, who instead willingly (sometimes exuberantly) submitted their work to capital's suffusion of popular perceptions. Throughout such aesthetic negotiations with capital's pop-cultural dimensions, the Celt's special sensitivity to reification appears again and again.

Earlier, I claimed that the Celt's entanglement with capital in the metro-colonial context of fin-de-siècle Ireland places him in contact with an incipient form of the postmodernity that has since engulfed much of the remainder of the globe. The location of the Celticist modernisms traced here at an early stage of this globalization process also places him in at least one further context within the new modernist studies, one that the title of this study invokes directly and that the foregoing emphasis on theoretical considerations of Irishness should not be read to belie: transnationalism. Both Irish modernist writers situated at the cutting edge of such economic processes and British ones attuned to their portents would call upon the Celt's unique talents as a means of confronting them. Their parallel and, in some cases, explicitly allied efforts render Celticism a fully transnational discourse—one capable of serving the cultural and aesthetic purposes of thinkers and writers across the divide (equally great) separating metropole and colony. The various Celticisms they

devised express a larger, archipelagic sensibility that anticipates later global commonalities like those indexed in the passage from Fanon above.[22]

The distinctive combination of race theory, capitalist critique, and aesthetic experimentation that is the signature of Celticist modernisms also bears a distinctive gender dimension. Most notably, Celticism seems to have held particular appeal for *male* writers. This fact is most readily explicable as an outgrowth of Arnold's own gendering of the Celt: "the sensibility of the Celtic nature, its nervous exaltation, have something feminine in them, and the Celt is thus peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of the feminine idiosyncrasy" (46). Building upon the French ethnologist Ernest Renan's definition of the Celts as an "essentially feminine race," Arnold's formulations locate the Celt's "sentimental" capacity beyond the normative qualities of capitalist modernity. In this sense, later Celticists exfoliating this capacity may be viewed as exemplars of what Rita Felski, in *The Gender of Modernity*, calls "the feminized male": writers who, in order to elude an overly rigid modern regime often coded as male by the Victorian logic of the "separate spheres," embraced qualities conceived as female as an oppositional strategy. The modernist embrace of the Arnoldian Celt—himself, as the quotations above illustrate, a sort of feminized male—is thus a gendered as well as racialized strategy for antagonizing the reifying tendencies of capitalist rationalization.[23] It is important to note, however, that where Felski's gender-switching male modernists are often ironic or parodic in their dalliances with femininity, especially in the hands of Irish writers pursuing an essentialist rationale for decolonization, Celticist modernisms' gender commitments are correspondingly earnest. Across the imperial divide, conversely, with writers such as Doyle, Kipling, and Conrad whose Irish investments were rather different, we shall indeed encounter versions of Celticism that handle its primitive and feminine components through a layer of ironic distance.

This is not to suggest that women did not participate in Celticism. Particularly in Revivalist Ireland, a number of prominent women such as Lady Augusta Gregory, Alice Milligan, and Maud Gonne full-throatedly embraced Celticist anticapitalism as a key component of their nationalist agendas. Such efforts will come to the fore of this study in chapters 4 and 5, where attention will turn, respectively, to the Revival's particular iteration of Celticism and the efforts of its modernist participants to reform the popular-cultural predilections of the young, female Irish consumer. As chapter 4 will address, however, Revivalist literature shows a marked split between literary work that aspired to practical, popular contributions to decolonization—works that Yeats would dismissively dub "propagandist"—and works that envisioned

successful decolonization as inseparable from formal challenges to prevailing, colonial norms. Whereas in the case of British modernism the paucity of female Celticists is explicable mainly through the lack of a deep investment in matters Irish by prominent figures such as Virginia Woolf, Mina Loy, Mary Butts, and Dorothy Richardson, in the case of Ireland, it is the commitment of writers like Gregory, Milligan, and others such as Katherine Tynan to more popular and accessible literary forms that best explains the scarcity of female Celticist modernisms. As chapter 5 will suggest, if this commitment tended not to issue in the more avant-garde challenges to capitalist reification of which Celticism would prove capable, the judgment that more traditional styles and genres were better suited to galvanizing the Irish public would prove a sound one.[24]

CELTICIST MODERNITIES

Much of the best work being done in transnational modernist studies heeds warnings laid down by postcolonial theorists that the "transnational turn," if not nuanced in relation to the uneven history and legacies of Western colonialism/imperialism, threatens to proffer a shallow and insufficiently differentiated understanding of contemporary experience.[25] Books such as Rebecca Walkowicz's *Cosmopolitan Style*, Matthew Hart's *Nations of Nothing but Poetry*, Peter Kalliney's *Commonwealth of Letters*, Jed Esty's *Unseasonable Youth*, and Susan Stanford Friedman's *Planetary Modernisms* have thus, in the words of the editors of the influential volume *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Loomba et al.), usefully deployed "postcolonial studies as a critical strain posed within and against, as well as antecedent to, dominant notions of globalization" (8).[26] What is needed to register the complexities of the transition of territories like Ireland to a larger global economic order is a method that remains sensitive to the legacies of colonial subalternity and underdevelopment while also attending to the ways in which postcolonial nations now share an economic modernity and cultural postmodernity with both other former colonies and the erstwhile metropolitan core. This study tries to achieve such an account by addressing the distinct experiences bred by the two nations' colonial differentiation while at the same time suggesting that their economic entanglement circa 1900 bears the seeds of larger, global commonalities.

The dual or split attention of transnational modernist studies of course stems from a much larger intellectual project underway in recent years devoted to leavening universal narratives like that of "globalization theory"

with particularizing approaches devoted to conceptualizing states of indigeneity and subalternity: that of alternative modernities. This theoretical paradigm has guided much work both in postcolonial studies "and beyond" in recent years, and has expanded the notion of modernity to reflect adaptive, indigenizing inflections of its otherwise-Eurocentric narrative trajectory by formerly colonized peoples throughout the globe. As outlined in Dilip Gaonkar's seminal brief for the concept, such "alternatives" have been defined as emerging through complicated "cultural" modifications to the "societal" pressures placed on colonial and postcolonial territories through imperial and capitalist development. Against the "convergence" produced by such material impositions are situated "divergences" facilitative of "creative adaptations" of modernity's master narratives (18). It is noteworthy, relative to this study's reassessment of Matthew Arnold, that the notion of "culture" as a critical, interrogative resource pitted against "societal" modernization centrally informs such alternatives for Gaonkar. More importantly than this Enlightenment-based definition, however, Gaonkar also deploys the later conception of culture not as an agency for criticizing modernity's trajectories, but as a term for the "whole way of life" of a particular people—in the formulation of another text devoted to envisioning "cultural" alternatives to "societal" limitations, Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society*. Gaonkar in fact protests against the notion that the Arnoldian concept is solely responsible for driving such alternatives when he describes that "cultural modernity" does not "inevitably take the form of an adversary culture that privileges the individual's need for self-expression and self-realization over the claims of the community" (16). Alternatives to modernity's trajectory may thus emerge both through an Arnoldian conception of culture as—again in Williams's terms—"an abstraction" denoting "the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society," activities that come to serve "as a court of human appeal, to be set over the processes of practical social judgment and yet to offer itself as a mitigating and rallying alternative," and through the notion of culture "as an absolute," as "a mode of interpreting all our common experience" (*Culture and Society* xviii). This second imperative of Gaonkar's program, which locates in "the claims of the community" and its "whole way of life" a divergent shunting of modernization's narrative of convergence, has proved especially central to work in alternative modernities.[27]

Against the Despotism of Fact necessarily bears a complicated relationship with the alternative modernities paradigm through its claim that both British and Irish Celticisms, while distinct through their metropolitan and colonial

vantages, together propound a critical perspective on the global telos of capital. In what follows, I indeed note the ways in which Irish writers deviate from their British counterparts through their greater intimacy with "the claims of the community" of the Irish, but I suggest that beyond such differences British and Irish Celticisms, especially the modernist Celticisms emanating from these two metrocolonial counterparts, in many ways express a common alternative vision. I read Celticism in both its economic and aesthetic dimensions as the critical resource for an alternative modernity in both "cultural" senses: as an "adversary," "moral and intellectual" discourse pitted against the excesses of British imperial and capitalist development, and as an "absolute" whose contents—especially for Irish Celticists but also for British ones—derive from the conception of Irishness as a "whole way of life." The readings to follow thus trace how the discourse's transnationality embodies what Gaonkar describes as "the elusive and fragmentary band of similarities that surface unexpectedly on the axis of divergence," with the exception that in this case, such similarities connect not two colonized communities (on the model of "minor transnationalisms") but the colonized community and the metropolitan one (23).[28]

Many proponents of alternative modernities theory would find dubious, if not outright objectionable, my suggestion that such similarities span the colonial divide between England and Ireland and my further suggestion that these similarities derive from the very economic development processes the theory arose as a mode of questioning. The question of whether colonial and postcolonial histories either conform to the teleological explanatory model of modernization theory and the dialectical-materialist model of Marxist historiography or confound such models of course undergirds the claims of alternative modernities proponents, as well as those of transnational and global modernisms. The so-called "difference versus development" debate has raged for decades between postcolonial and Marxist proponents, and has recently been reenergized by the acrimonious reception of Vivek Chibber's broadside on Subaltern Studies, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*.[29] Subaltern Studies theorists themselves, however, against the more reductive tendencies of Chibber's account, often avow the need to recognize capital's structuring influence and even embrace the potential benefits of economic and infrastructural development as a handmaiden to postcolonial agency. Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential conception of the "two histories of capital" in *Provincializing Europe* highlights these aspects by stressing the imperative of allowing "both the universal history of capital and the politics of human belonging . . . to interrupt each other's narrative" (70), while Spivak's advocacy for "aesthetic

education in the era of globalization" depends directly on the development of postcolonial "societal" infrastructures for its practical effectuation (Spivak, *Aesthetic* 4).[30] Jed Esty's formulation "one world system, many modernities," offered as a "working compromise" between the notion of incommensurable, global cultural difference and the Marxist view of a world structured by the universality of capital, aptly renders the kind of mixed methodology required for respecting both claims—and indeed for comprehending the contemporary world in both its unity and diversity (200–201).[31]

The critical narrative of modernity offered in the following pages takes its methodological cue from such studies by situating Celticism as an alternative modality resistant to capital's teleology but at the same time responsive to that teleology's material force. I will argue that the history of the Celt reaches its logical and practical conclusion in decolonizing Irish visions and postcolonial Irish projects devoted to imagining and enacting an alternative economic development in tune with the Irish Celt's anticapitalist vitality. Ultimately, however, I will argue that this history provides evidence for the view that capitalism tends to subsume not only precapitalist cultural formations but also efforts to forge civilizational alternatives amid capital's global shadow. I show that for a number of complex reasons, a viable Irish alternative capable of evading capital's depredations and fulfilling Celticism's potential never successfully took shape. The project begun by Arnold terminates in the early years of the postcolonial Irish state, whose stultifying cultural and economic vision rings the death knell of the discourse's alternative potential. In the wake of the full-throated Irish embrace of capital undertaken in the 1950s and, more recently, in the 1990s during the financial boom of the Celtic Tiger, the nation has now long since capitulated to the capitalist world system and abandoned that portion of its self-conception that viewed capital as a threat to the national identity just as grave as British domination.[32] This study is thus just as much an archeology (in the non-Foucaultian sense) of the alternative modernity it depicts as it is a genealogy. In the retrospective vantage afforded by this genealogy, the Irish Celt appears, in ironic fulfillment of his sublime, Nietzschean potential, as the tragic hero of a major chapter in the history of capital's global ascendancy.

This book consists of two parts, each devoted to one half of the transnational narrative of Celticism outlined here. Given the discourse's British origins, the first half traces its efflorescence within the metro- portion of the metrocolonial archipelago. Chapter 1 extends and augments the analysis of Arnold's *Study* offered above and consolidates my reading of his Celticism as a radical anticapitalist and aesthetic discourse. I set Arnold's Celt alongside

both his own critique of the "machinery" of capitalism in *Culture and Anarchy* and contemporaneous critiques by thinkers like Karl Marx, arguing, first, that Arnold positions the Celt as a "mitigating and rallying alternative" to modernity's depredations similar to but more radical than that of culture, and, second, that his ethnological account identifies in the Celt the same propensities Marx identified in communism. Arnold's definition of capitalism as an inherently Saxon modality racially repulsive to the Celt sets the terms for the colonial, economic, and aesthetic binaries that mark Celticism—and the literary, cultural, and political programs it inspired—for the duration of its history. The chapter concludes by comparing the aesthetic capacities with which Arnold imbues the Celt to those described as "Dionysian" by Nietzsche, arguing that these pave the way for the figure's later deployment in British and Irish primitivist modernisms.

Chapter 2 focuses on premodernist Celticist aesthetics by British writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling. It lays the foundation for discussion of their work by conducting the first of two major historical supplementations of Arnold's theories, both of which are designed to ground the Celticisms that succeed his in a larger set of considerations derived from the material realities of Irishness at the turn of the century. This first supplementation argues that because the Irish in the late nineteenth century were in several respects both metropolitan and colonial subjects, and because British popular-cultural characterizations defined them as both racially white and non-white, they came to be viewed as a hybrid racial group possessed of both civilized and primitive tendencies. This mix of attributes led imperialist writers like Doyle and Kipling to view the Irish as a uniquely advantageous imaginative resource. I argue that imperial-romantic fictions such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *Kim* seize on this putative hybridity to devise Irish protagonists who utilize primitive commonalities to infiltrate resistant native populations in such locales as Ireland and India and subjugate them to the imperial authorities. The "civilized" features of these hybrid protagonists thus serve as the medium for the global consolidation of empire and capital in these pre-modernist texts, whose aesthetic forms likewise disclose a rational epistemology reflective of hegemonic priorities.

Chapter 3 argues the reverse of the second: that, in the hands of modernist British writers such as Conrad and D.H. Lawrence, the hybridity of the Irish Celt becomes the means for destabilizing imperial and capitalist values. The same racial flexibility that outfitted imperialists like Doyle and Kipling with the tools to undermine native resistance provides such writers with the tools to undermine British hegemony through the cultivation of racial