

## Synthesis: an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies

No 9 (2016)

Living through the Interregnum



### Of PIGS and Archipelagoes

*David Lloyd*

doi: [10.12681/syn.16230](https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.16230)

Copyright © 2016, David Lloyd



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## Of PIGS and Archipelagoes

David Lloyd

I want to speak today of PIGS and of archipelagoes. In 2008, when the tremors of the global recession first began to make themselves felt, the blame was not placed where it might have been, on the international financial centers of New York, Frankfurt, London, but on the peripheries, on those hapless nations that, like swine at the trough, had lived off the benevolent indulgences of the wealthy and industrious core and now would have to pay with regimes of austerity for their feckless prodigality. By happy coincidence, the names of those guiltily indebted parties (the famous German pun on Schuld is entirely apposite) furnished an apt acronym: Portugal, Ireland, Greece, Spain (or, at times, Italy—the I is always double). PIGS. It is a metonymy all too familiar to the Irish who have enjoyed this aspersion since at least the eighteenth century. I want to focus today on two of those porcine parties: on Greece, which gave its name not only to our panel but also as a kind of synecdoche for the crisis as it manifests in Europe today (and, more hopefully, for the popular resistance to austerity regimes); and on Ireland, whose history and economic plight I know better but which, due to the shameful acquiescence of successive governments in the imposed regime of austerity, and in the face of still growing if less spectacular popular resistance, continues to play the role of the good student in neoliberal Economics 1a. In speaking of them, I want to explore the question of solidarity that Radhakrishnan initially raised for us here in dialogue with the figures that Derrida drew out of Paul Valéry at another moment of the recurrent crisis that is Europe—folding one such moment on another—in his 1991 essay, *The Other Heading (L'autre cap)*.<sup>1</sup>

As I read the other day in the *New York Times*, the always imminent and impending Greek collapse embodies the threat of an ‘implosion’: the crisis that promises to

fragment the Union is a violent centripetal movement of the economy away from the commanding centre of the supra-European state and its institutions of experts and technocrats and into a self-enfolded economic black hole. This is perhaps a figure for the way in which the periphery, so colourfully inhabited by the PIGS, pulls away — *centrifugally*— from the centripetal movement of the state that has in many respects defined the emergence of Europe itself, self-fashioned not only as a central core of gradually centralised states, but also as imagining, in Derrida's words, "a center, at least a symbolic center, at the heart of this Europe that has considered itself for so long to be the capital of humanity or of the planet" (36). The history of Europe has been that of a centralisation that continues today and whose counterpart has been the production of peripheries from whose ragged edges the centripetal movement of state and nation formation has always pulled away, drawing with it their resources and their potentialities insofar as the latter do not conform to the will or the imagination of the state and its capital logics.

Imagine for a moment the space of Europe revolving around this centre, whether we locate it in Brussels or Strasbourg, Paris or Berlin. To its south-east is Greece, a peninsula penetrated by bays and gulfs and spinning off into a whirl of islands, the vortex of the Cyclades. To its north-west is Ireland, the outer edge of an archipelago once misnamed the British Isles and itself an archipelago of islands opening out into what Edward Dorn once dubbed "the North Atlantic Turbine," its image on the map like an open embrace. According to Paul Valéry, Europe's spatial imagination of itself is as a promontory, "a kind of cape of the old continent, a western appendix to Asia." Derrida elaborates:

In its physical geography, and in what has often been called, by Husserl, for example, its spiritual geography, Europe has always recognized itself as a cape or headland, either as the advanced extreme of a continent, to the west and south (the land's end, the advanced point of a Finistère, Europe of the Atlantic or of the Greco-Latino-Iberian shores of the Mediterranean), the point of departure for discovery, invention, and colonisation, or as the very center of this tongue in the form of a cape, the Europe of the middle, coiled up, indeed compressed along a Greco-Germanic axis, at the very center of the center of the cape. (19-20)

The spatial image in fact presents both centre and promontory as images of advance, the promontory signalling the westward expansion of European colonial capital, its first movement, so to speak, the centre signalling the teleological 'heading' of rationality and rationalisation, the organizing centre or capital of capital. It is thus always a figure for Europe's own arrogation to itself of the position of economic,

political and cultural avant-garde of humanity: "what is proper to Europe would be, analogically, to advance itself as a heading for the universal essence of humanity ... Europe takes itself to be a promontory, an advance--the avant-garde of geography and history." (49)

In relation to the forward thrust of this promontory, the archipelagoes of Greece and Ireland must be seen as domains cut or spun off from the cosmopolitan centre, like the diffuse debris around a nebula, fragmentary and incoherent spatially and historically not yet fully arrived in modernity (and how the avatars of Ireland's Celtic Tiger proudly trumpeted their arrival in modernity!) (Kirby 6). But bear with me a moment in imagining the archipelago not as an index of peripherality and insularity, but as an imaginary counter-model to the promontory: that is, does the archipelago not offer a figure of discontinuity, disconnection, yet also of communication that passes not through the centre but horizontally, circuitously, in non-centralisable circuits of communication with other peripheries? These connections may not be continuous, consistent, programmatic, but in their sporadic, non-totalising, episodic rhythms constitute above all a figure for opening, for the ragged porosity of borders in an archipelago cut and connected by the interruptive passages of the sea. The archipelago, with its cast of scattered islands, is at once the edge and the inverse of the imagined space of the nation, for which islands and their recalcitrant cultural particularities represent a hindrance to the formation of a continuous and homogeneous 'frictionless' space of communication and rule. Yet the archipelago's discontinuity, determined by the intimate relations of land and sea, may look like a map of interruptions but passes in fact over the connective tissue of communication that is the sea. Islands constitute not spaces of isolation, 'insular' and apart, not the rebarbative sites and figures for the "*marches*" and "*marges*" that Derrida so fears will "cultivate for their own sake minority differences, untranslatable idiolects, national antagonisms" (44), but nodes of connectivity.

Debt is here, in turn, in its centripetality, a kind of counter-counter-figure for the horizontal circulations and openings of the archipelago. It operates like a gravitational bond that draws the peripheral towards the centre in the track of the resources, material and human, that have already been sucked from it historically in the process of capital formation. Debt is a tie, a ligature—an obligation, in the language of the financiers—that binds the undercapitalised archipelagoes of underdevelopment to the imaginary centre that is capital's advance point. Debt is the insidious leverage of power that draws everything to the centre. Thus the crisis is represented as the threat

of a swinish and irresponsible unmaking of the ties that bind Europe into a Union that imagines itself as that advance point, the avant-garde, of humanity in its movement towards a post-national, cosmopolitan and democratic federation, but manifests as the solidarity of the economic elites with one another against the hopeful solidarities of the dispersed populaces of the periphery.

This crisis of Europe is, of course, twofold: the economic and therefore political crisis folds in with the refugee crisis that has brought from West Asia and Africa a numerous, but by no means so very overwhelming, influx of humans fleeing what are ultimately the economic and military adventures of the global north. These are distinct crises, but ones differentially articulated within the parameters of a global and as yet uncertainly headed transformation, economic and political, of the so-called 'new world order' whose initiating violence continues to reverberate. The debt crisis is a crisis of accumulation, austerity driven not by actual scarcity (it is, after all, a crisis of abundance of uninvested capital) but by the logic of a capital driven to monetise the stored resources of hard-won public goods in order to feed the engine of profit and expansion. Structurally, it is the latest movement of enclosure, aimed at privatising the store of public goods that were won in the long struggles of social movements over centuries, with the concomitant effect of displacing the dispossessed and under-employed. This is the root of the refugee crisis, which nonetheless manifests as a crisis of European culture, caricatured as a 'clash of civilisations'. Set aside the virulence of ethno-nationalist fascists: even at the liberal core of Europe, the anxiety, articulated so clearly above by Derrida, is that these arrivals from 'the other shore' will not, cannot, conform to the 'idea of Europe' even and precisely where that idea is "of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading, or the heading of the other" (29). The subsequent emergence of 'Fortress Europe' definitively put paid to the hope inscribed in such formulations.

Greece is one epicentre of this twin-bladed turbine of crisis: of the refugees fleeing the violence of neoliberalism's efforts to make the world over in the generalised image of what is, as Derrida knew, originally, archetypically, the idea of Europe as the exemplary destiny of human kind, and entering a Greece drained of the means to host them by a debt crisis imposed from without. And yet Greece m—not the state but the people, or part of the people— time and again does play host, inventing ingeniously the autonomous means whereby, in the absence or impotence of the state, people and communities forge the possibilities of mutual support. And had being doing so well

before the crisis erupted, in places like Molyvos on Lesbos where local reception committees were easing the arrival of Afghani and Iraqi refugees long before they got the media's attention along with ISIS and the Syrian civil war. Solidarity emerges literally and figuratively archipelagically, without a centre, in those discontinuous, disarticulated reachings out of the unanticipated, necessary hand. The archipelago is — to riff on Derrida's words— "neither mono-poly nor dispersion" (41) even if dispersion is how the discontinuous articulations of the archipelagic appear. The sea that appears as the lacuna, the perilous hindrance to crossing that separates and divides, is no less the means to an ancient and historical circulation that gives another bearing, that, indeed, bears even as it parts.

But still, though Derrida signals that Valéry, in his Europeanness, is Mediterranean, and draws his Europeanness from this Mediterranean that is at once Asian and African on its 'other shores,' his 'appendix of Asia' is nonetheless a promontory that pushes away from its *arche*: the mythic thrust of capital is westwards and centripetally pulls its Greece away from Asia and, indeed, away from itself. Greece may be taken to be Europe's cultural or civilisational capital, but only in the sense of an initial (and initiating) letter, only as a point of departure for the thrust of capital that leaves it depleted, even of the material representations of that cultural priority, its exemplary works that are stored in the metropolitan museums. If, according to Valéry, "the Mediterranean has been a veritable *machine for making civilization*," is the locus where "*spirit, culture, and trade* are found together" (64), even if "this Europe of ours ... began as a Mediterranean market" (126), Europe with its capital has departed, moved on in its westward thrust, leaving Greece partitioned between its archaic idea, its idea as archaic, and its currently depleted and indebted actuality.

Ireland in some degree represented a similar point of departure —and partition— for the thrust of capital as it moved in what historian Nicholas Canny and others dubbed 'the westward enterprise' into the colonial phase of the Atlantic world.<sup>2</sup> Both a laboratory and a semi-permanent other both within the capital logic of Europe and within the violent circuits Europe's shadowy double, Empire, Ireland remains an anomaly, with archipelagian relays that connect it over and again to the Caribbean, to India, to West Africa, not to mention to the settler colonies of North America, Africa and Australasia. These relays are at once analogical, based in the shared experience of a self-replicating colonial machine, and embedded in the material and differential history of colonialism itself. The Irish crisis, now as in its earlier history, is that of an historically undercapitalised location, literally drained of its capital by generations of

resource and rent extraction and obliged to mortgage itself to attract investment whose real form was indebtedness. Its experience is typical for the periphery, from Latin America to Greece, not least in the unevenness of its peculiar vantage point on modernity (Kirby 13-16).

This is a different self-division from that in which Derrida, with an unmistakable if ambivalent nostalgia, finds the still exemplary ethos of Europe. From the start, he recapitulates an idea of Europe's special capacity for reflexive "self-difference" that has a long genealogy, from Hegel to Heidegger, or from Weber to Husserl: "what is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself. ... There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference with itself." He goes on to elaborate:

This can be said, inversely or reciprocally, of all identity or all identification: there is no self-relation, no relation to oneself, no identification with oneself, without culture, but a culture of oneself as a culture of the other, a culture of the double genitive and of the difference to oneself. ...

Will the Europe of yesterday, of tomorrow, and of today have been merely an example of this law? One example among others? Or will it have been the exemplary possibility of this law? (9-11)

For all the rhetorical posing of those questions, it seems certain that Derrida continued to find the 'singular advent of Europe' not so much in the actuality of this self-difference (which is, after all, an axiom of all culture and identity) as in the Selbstbesinnung by which it singularly recognizes and finds its destiny therein, "the idea of an advanced point of exemplarity [that] is the idea of the European idea, its eidos, at once as arche ... and as telos" (24):

It is always in the figure of the Western heading and of the final headland or point that Europe determines and cultivates itself; it is in this figure that Europe identifies itself, identifies with itself, and thus identifies its own cultural identity, in the being-for-itself of what is most proper to it, in its own difference as difference with itself, close to itself. (25)

Is it then for us, with Derrida, to assume the responsibility for, "to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe", even if it is "of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity" but, rather and still, "advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading or the heading of the other"[29]? Even such an idea promotes the figure of an advance, of an exemplary movement before the other it meets. In it, self-difference is restored to its function of generating and accumulating spiritual or cultural capital for this Europe

that continues to centre on the "advance point" of its own self-regard. It resumes the monopoly on the theoretical that has, since Weber and Husserl, been Europe's tautological self-definition.<sup>3</sup>

Conceived otherwise, debt is another, an other mode of difference with oneself, a responsibility or "obligation" to the other that consists in the other's belonging as part of oneself. Debt gives rise in the Irish literary tradition to an alternative mode of *Selbstbesinnung*, from the *poète maudit* James Clarence Mangan's assumption of debt and addiction into the heart of his writing, to Stephen Dedalus's cryptic formula, AEIOU, to Beckett's *Unnamable*, "made of words, others words."<sup>4</sup> Debt fragments the subject into an archipelago of the proper and the appropriated; it is nonetheless an a-primordial relation to the other, to the other that is always already interior and exterior, not an obligation assumed as a responsibility, but the very anarchic condition of being and of being otherwards. It is the ever-insistent and recalcitrant remainder of subsumption into identity.

These archipelagoes of debt, these indebted archipelagoes, offer the possibility, not of a centripetal identity finding its other drawn within it, as its figure, but of an unbounded and dispersed space of discontinuous relation. This is not an empirical description of solidarities that exist, although they do and may, but a call to forms of solidarity that do not solidify, or create coercive modalities of Union, but remain rather in the ragged, ravelling space of the edge, of the periphery, on that other shore that exceeds —*déborde*— the centripetal logic of austerity and of the management of crisis that takes the form of a coerced honouring of obligations coercively assumed.

Rather than conform to and emulate the thrust of capital in the form of the advance, of the promontory, the archipelago offers the space and the figure for solidarities that are divergent, connective, provisional and differential.<sup>5</sup> In this, it may even be the critical counterpart to the contemporary model of "flexible accumulation" that extracts its surplus through an archipelago of sites of production whose 'competitive advantages' are the legacy of colonial capitalisms that had already made of the colonies and its peripheries exemplary laboratories for a mode of accumulation it has since generalised, from the fragmentation of Palestine by Zionist colonisation to the 'free trade zones' that dot the former colonial world.<sup>6</sup> That is the mode we call neoliberal. The point then is to bring to crisis that self-conception of Europe as the theoretical and capital "advanced point" in relation to which we PIGS are always found to be lacking, lagging. It is to explode the European idea and what Fanon once called "its unilateral declaration of universality."<sup>7</sup> It would remain for us to link, to articulate the



archipelagoes of the ragged edges with those other disarticulated and indebted segments of the global political economy, along the lines of a material analogy that neo-liberalism is increasingly making our common share.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. Page numbers cited in the text hereafter.

<sup>2</sup> See K.R. Andrews, N.P. Canny, P.E.H. Hair.

<sup>3</sup> See Weber, 13 and Husserl, 155-78.

<sup>4</sup> See Lloyd 167-88; Joyce 155-56; Beckett 390.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. The Invisible Committee, To Our Friends: "To secede is to break not with the national territory but with the existing geography itself. It's to trace out a different, discontinuous geography, an intensive one, in the form of an archipelago—and thus to go encounter places that are close to us, even if there are 10,000 kilometers to cover" (185).

<sup>6</sup> David Harvey introduced the model of "flexible accumulation" in his *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. For some reflections on the implications of both colonial capitalism and flexible accumulation for contemporary politics, see Lowe and Lloyd, 1-4 and 12-16.

<sup>7</sup> Fanon, "The unilaterally decreed normative value of certain cultures deserves our careful attention" (31).

### Works Cited

Andrews K.R., Nicholas Canny & P.E.H. Hair, eds. *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic and America, 1480-1650*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1978.

Beckett, Samuel. *The Unnamable* (with *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*). London: Calder and Boyars, 1959.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1992.

Day, Kirk. "These are refugees, not migrants, arriving in their thousands on Greek shores." *The Guardian*, 27 July 2015:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jul/27/refugees-not-migrants-arriving-thousands-greece-shores>

Dorn, Ed. *The North Atlantic Turbine*. London: Fulcrum Press, 1967.

Fanon, Frantz. "Racism and Culture." *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove Press, 1988.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Husserl, Edmund. "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man." *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*. Trans. Quentin Lauer. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler. New York: Random House, 1986.

Kirby, Peadar. *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Lloyd, David. *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987.

Lowe, Lisa & David Lloyd. "Introduction." *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. New York: Scribner, 1958.