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COMBINED AND UNEVEN STYLES IN THE MODERN WORLD-SYSTEM:
STYLISTIC IDEOLOGY IN JOSÉ DE ALENCAR, MACHADO DE ASSIS AND THOMAS HARDY

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The stylistic discontinuities that are a widely recognised feature of literature from the world-systemic periphery can also be located in literature at the intra-core periphery: that is, those cities, regions, or macro-regions within a core state that have been peripheralised by capitalist centralisation processes. Engaging with Franco Moretti’s theory of world literature, Roberto Schwarz’s influential readings of José de Alencar and Machado de Assis, as well as Raymond Williams on Thomas Hardy, this essay tries to make visible the extent to which peripheral writers actively stylise their combined and uneven linguistic and cultural situations. Whilst aligning itself with theories of world-literature premised on the combined and uneven development of the modern capitalist world-system, the essay argues against an understanding of world-literature as a passive ‘reflection’ or ‘registration’ of this system. It suggests that an expanded definition of style – one which emphasises ‘stylistic ideologies’, the self-conscious stylistic projects writers develop – could help avoid such underestimations of the political and literary agency of writers at the periphery. It concludes with some remarks on the problem of historical temporality shared by peripheral styles and theories of style alike.

Keywords: world literature, style, politics, Franco Moretti, Raymond Williams, Roberto Schwarz, Machado de Assis, Thomas Hardy

In 2000 Franco Moretti published a provocative article entitled ‘Conjectures on World Literature’. Noting that ‘world literature is not an object, it’s a *problem*’, he sets out to develop a new critical model based on the following ‘initial hypothesis’: world literature, like the ‘modern world-system’,¹ is ‘[o]ne, and unequal: *one* literature (*Weltliteratur*, singular, as in Goethe and Marx), or perhaps, better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it’s profoundly unequal’ (Moretti, 2013: 46). He goes on to elaborate a specific example: ‘in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system ... the modern novel first arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials’ (50). This produces a compromise between ‘foreign *plot*; local *characters*; and then, local *narrative voice*: and it’s precisely in this third dimension that these novels seem to be most unstable’ (57–58).

Whilst conscious of the criticisms levelled at Moretti’s work (e.g., Prendergast, 2001; Arac 2002), I wish to sustain his ‘initial hypothesis’ and to problematise and extend his argument, especially as it relates to style. I shall do so in two ways. Firstly, I shall attempt to add a new scale to the argument, combining the scope of the world-system as a whole with core-periphery relations *within* core states themselves. This is in line with the Warwick Research Collective’s² observation that

Moretti rather overstates the ‘homogeneity’ of conditions in the core territories and regions. The processes of ‘centralisation’ (becoming ‘core’) and ‘peripheralisation’ are multi-scalar, playing themselves out at multiple levels – neighbourhood, city, nation, region, macro-region – in addition to that of the world-system itself ... [S]ome of the most significant literature from the core countries emanates from the semi-peripheries or peripheries of those countries: marginalised class, ethnic or regional positions, as in the case of Faulkner in the US context, for instance, or of Hardy, Lawrence and others in England.

(WReC, 2015: 55)

Secondly, I shall concentrate on the element of stylistic heterogeneity whilst broadening the concept of ‘style’ to include, among other things, ‘stylistic ideology’: those self-conscious

stylistic projects writers develop, theoretically justify, and (to varying degrees of fidelity) put into practice. Building on recent work inspired by Trotsky's theory of 'combined and uneven development', which was devised to describe the process whereby capitalist social relations are imposed on non-capitalist societies and cultures, creating a 'contradictory "amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms"' (WReC, 2015: 11), I shall propose certain modifications to the way in which stylistic discontinuity in world-literature is understood. Moreover, I am using the hyphenated 'world-literature' advisedly. It signals that 'world literature' is nothing more nor less than the literature of the capitalist world-system (WReC, 2015: 8).

The central hypothesis of the essay is that, if stylistic discontinuity exists within the periphery of the world-system as a whole, then it should also be traceable within *intra-core* peripheries and semiperipheries. To test this hypothesis, I begin by elaborating a definition of style that aims to be more expansive than the notions of 'narrative voice', 'posture' and 'diction' that have hitherto predominated within materialist world-literature scholarship. I shall then set out Roberto Schwarz's theory of the importation of the western novel into Brazil (the periphery), through which he explains the stylistic unevenness of José de Alencar and the artistic exploitation of this unevenness by Machado de Assis. Having problematised some of his conclusions and theoretical presuppositions, I then move to the semiperiphery of the nineteenth-century British core. Here, I draw on Raymond Williams's reading of the stylistic discontinuities of the works of Thomas Hardy, whose 'Wessex' (West Country) is located precisely at the intra-state semiperiphery. I identify certain correspondences with the Brazilian situation, but point out problems in Williams's method. As a whole, the essay tries to demonstrate the necessity of taking into consideration authors' self-conscious stylistic projects when analysing the political implications of styles. I conclude with some brief remarks on the relation of style to historical temporality.

Given the remit of the present journal – to address, in interdisciplinary terms, the study of 'English' in Europe – this 'detour' through Brazil perhaps requires some justification. Roberto Schwarz's work on the Brazilian novel is integral to Moretti's formulation of the problem of world-literature – especially its central idea that 'forms are the abstract of specific social relationships' (Schwarz, 1992: 53; Moretti, 2013: 57–59). Thus, the Brazilian connection has been an important feature of materialist theorizations of world-literature from the outset; any criticisms of the work of the 'São Paulo fraction' (Cevasco, 2014) will hence have theoretical repercussions for the ways we understand literature far

beyond the original Brazilian context. Indeed, the upshot of ‘world-literature’ has been a rejection of the notion of hermetically sealed national literatures. Unlike postcolonial theory’s project to ‘provincialize Europe’ (Chakrabarty, 2000) or the increasing turn to ‘multiple’ or ‘alternative’ modernities (Eisenstadt, 2000; Gaonkar, 2001), however, scholars such as Moretti, Jameson (2002), and the Warwick Research Collective have emphasised the combined and uneven *singularity* of capitalist modernity, and of the literatures it mediates. The methodological consequence is that ‘world-literature’ constitutes a single framework within which multiple national or sub-national literatures can be compared and contrasted. On this view, José de Alencar, Machado de Assis, and Thomas Hardy are united in their having responded – at different moments and locations – to a single capitalist world-system characterised by combined and uneven development (no two times or locations ever being homogenous, even if systemically unified).

The wager of the present essay is that the sub-national scale of Hardy’s ‘Wessex’ can enrich the theoretical insights of a ‘combined and uneven’ approach to world-literature scholarship, whilst the world-systemic scale of the Brazilian semiperiphery can cast the much-provincialised Hardy in a more expansive light. What, from the perspective of a methodological nationalism, appears a ‘detour through Brazil’ is thus nothing of the sort; it is a journey from one periphery to another in a single world-system, each point of which ideally illuminates the others. The exportation of English literary forms was part of the European colonial project, but these forms themselves were often produced in situations of extreme social and cultural unevenness. What a world-literature approach enables is thus a keener sense of ‘English in Europe’ as always already mediated by Europe’s wider entanglement in the combined and uneven modern world-system.

What is style?

What, then, is style? At its most basic, it is the artistic shaping of a pre-existent common language.³ This common language consists of multiple linguistic practices structured and striated by the divisions and contradictions of the social formation, of which it is an immanent, relatively autonomous element. I name ‘linguistic situation’ the state of language as a writer or set of writers would have experienced it, including its inner tensions and social stratifications. Each linguistic situation consists of several sub-situations, some of which are applicable to all writers, and others unique to individuals. They include the international geo-political status of a given language (e.g., English as a ‘global’ language), the national context

(e.g., National Standard versus dialect), the geo-social trajectory of the author, situations of immigration and histories of (post-)colonialism. These are the scales that structure and intensify a writer's linguistic situation: the forces with, through and against which she writes. To this must then be added the ideological or semantic content of specific words, tones and phrases: language as a web of overdetermined significations and residual intentions, marked by traces of prior use. Together with the various sub-situations, these constitute the totality of the linguistic situation.

Style is then the operation of artistically shaping this internally divided language. It begins at the level of the individual sentence, but cannot be reduced to it. This level comprises all those linguistic idiosyncrasies such as syntax, texture, diction, rhythm, and shape. Yet it also transcends them, since style in the novel is not reducible to the monologism of the sentence (cf. Bakhtin, 1981: 259–275); rather, style is inherently relational in at least three senses:⁴

1. It is a linguistic mode of social relation between writer and potential reader.
2. It consists of a hierarchised interrelation of multiple linguistic operations, idioms and intentions; 'style' can thus refer either to one of those idioms alone or – more properly – to the mode of their total configuration. To adapt the terms developed by the rhetorical narratologist Richard Walsh, style is equatable with **instance** (a representational act, in which the voice is not objectified, and carries out the task of narration (2010: 48–49)), **idiom** (an object of representation, which invites ethical evaluation of the character whose discourse it represents (ibid.)), or **interpellation**, the overall ideological subject position implied by any discourse and to which the reader – either consciously or unconsciously – imaginatively aligns herself (53)). Yet 'style' is also the name for the total mode of configuration of those sub-styles.
3. Its textual autonomy is informed and limited by its relation to other formal elements of a given literary work (most notably to plot and description).

Thus, to refer to a writer's 'style' in the singular is, technically speaking, correct and incorrect: correct, because at the level of the individual sentence certain recurring linguistic idiosyncrasies become a writer's signature; incorrect, because novelistic discourse consists of multiple stylised speech genres and subordinate linguistic operations (instance, idiom, interpellation); yet, ultimately, and on a higher plane, *correct* because the real singularity of a style – its overall meaning – consists in the *total mode of configuration* of these 'sub-styles'.

No account of stylistic production would be complete, however, without considering the rationales and ideologies that quite literally *inform* the act of writing. Literary composition is a productive and transformative *poietical* act (from the Greek *poïesis*, ‘making’) of which stylization is the dominant verbal component. The latter is guided first and foremost by ‘stylistic ideology’, which, at its most basic, is a set of ideas about how one should write. These range from dominant stylistic ideologies, such as George Orwell’s doctrine of ‘plain style’, to all those self-conscious stylistic *projects* writers develop and (to varying degrees of fidelity) put into practice, along with their accompanying theoretical justifications. Obvious examples of the latter include Wordsworth and Coleridge’s prefatory apologia to *Lyrical Ballads*, Virginia Woolf’s defence of impressionistic representation in ‘Modern Fiction’, and Robbe-Grillet’s theorization of the *nouveau roman*. The critical reconstruction of a writer’s stylistic ideology thus involves a combination of theoretical extrapolation from the literary style itself and an interpretation of the terms in which the writer justifies that style; the former is largely text-based, whereas the latter relies more on the ideological analysis of authorial paratexts, essays and manifestos. Style and stylistic ideology do not always concur. Inherited styles possess a material resistance – an ingrained tone or mode of apprehension – that can potentially obstruct a writer’s stylistic intentions; yet it is only the critic’s sensitivity to such disjunctions that makes this visible.

The second element informing the poetic shaping of language is what I call ‘directionality’. When an individual writer attempts to refer directly, centrifugally out of and away from herself towards the world, this outwardly aiming act is nonetheless always intersected by a lateral directionality often beyond her volition: context and *semiosis*. This is a problem that arises primarily with realism and the disintegration of the *Stiltrennung* (the class-bound separation of styles into high, middle and low), whereby the writer’s modern desire to ‘aim outwards’ towards real life is always overdetermined by the inheritance of literary conventions which limit or contort such naïve mimesis (a problem that becomes acute in the novels of José de Alencar, as we shall see). Finally, and most obviously, stylistic production is informed and internally limited by specific modes, types, genres and forms (Williams 1981), each of which acts as a gravitational force field impelling or repelling the production of specific types of sentences. For example, hard-boiled detective fiction has a stylistic norm which gravitates towards the macho *bon mot*.

Stylistic discontinuity at the capitalist periphery

Naturally, no stylistic analysis need draw on all of the above terms. In his account of the importation of the novel into Brazil, Roberto Schwarz (1992: 41–77) relies primarily on what I have called stylistic diction, idiom, interpellation, type and directionality. Before proceeding to investigate his analysis, however, it is worth reflecting on that which is conspicuous by its absence from Schwarz's account, an absence that is particularly marked in the context of the present journal: Portugal. As in Moretti's telling formulation – 'western formal influence (usually French or English)' – the imported novels with which Schwarz is concerned are essentially those of France and Britain. The reason for this can perhaps be explained by Portugal's status as a semiperipheral country in the modern world-system (Santos, 2002). Its semiperipheral status ensured that its colonial operation was itself semiperipheral: Portugal the coloniser was 'at times an "informal colony" of England' (11). Given the precarity of its world-systemic position, the Portuguese state was unable to establish either 'the difference of the national culture as opposed to the outside' or 'cultural homogeneity inside the national territory' – the European state's traditional twin functions (10). Ultimately, Portugal lacked the social, economic and cultural means to establish a hegemonic literary culture.

Britain and France, on the other hand, were in a much stronger position. Their national literatures produced formally sophisticated novels, consecrated with a symbolic capital germane to core colonial powers. The precondition for the world-literary pre-eminence of the French and British novel was thus a potent combination of accumulated literary capital, formal innovation, symbolic prestige and outright colonial might. Just as historically less advanced nations often 'overleap' entire stages of development by appropriating the latest technologies or weaponries, and combining them with pre-existing forces and relations, so writers like Machado and (elsewhere) Dostoevsky looked to the most advanced literary forms with the most symbolic prestige – those of France and Britain – and fused them with local materials. The upshot was an often radical stylistic discontinuity.

Schwarz begins his account of such stylistic unevenness with a consideration of the novels of José de Alencar. Here, the problem of what I have called 'directionality' becomes acute, because the social conditions which, in the European core, enabled its relative occultation did not exist on the periphery. As Fredric Jameson has noted, 'mimesis or realistic representation has as its historic function the systematic undermining and demystification, the secular "decoding," of those pre-existing inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens. In this sense, the novel plays a significant role in what may be

called a properly bourgeois cultural revolution' (1981: 152). In other words, in the European core the centrifugal direction of realist mimesis was, for a brief time,⁵ part of a common political project that was in harmony with the literary conventions which came to be known as 'realist'; during this time, the antinomies of realist directionality did not pose themselves as such.

Nineteenth-century Brazil, however, was not undergoing a bourgeois cultural revolution: far from it. As a former Portuguese colony, whose basic productive relationship was still slavery, Brazil's primary social relation – the only one it was willing to recognise – was that of 'favour':

[C]olonization based on the monopoly of the land produced three classes of population: the proprietor of the latifundium, the slave and the 'free man', who was in fact dependent ... Neither proprietor, nor proletarian, the free man's access to social life and its benefits depended, in one way or another, on the favour of a man of wealth and power.

(Schwarz, 1992: 22)

Under these peripheral social conditions – which were, nonetheless, *integral* to the combined and uneven development of capitalist modernity – the imported Western liberal ideologies of Enlightenment, Progress and Universality became what Schwarz ingeniously calls 'ideologies of the second degree': '[in Europe] they corresponded to appearances and hid the essential – the exploitation of labour. Among us [i.e., in Brazil], the same ideas would be false in a different sense' (20). This 'different sense' was that of prestige. Ideologies, which in the European core of the world-system had an immanent, intrinsic function in the process of bourgeois cultural revolution, became in the Brazilian periphery but a fashionable ornament, having no social purpose beyond that of endowing those who promoted them with the rarefied air of the Parisian *épatéur*.

Schwarz traces the stylistic effects of this historical situation in José de Alencar's 1875 novel *Senhora*. Alencar tries to reproduce both elements of realism by submitting himself 'to everyday [Brazilian] reality and literary convention at the same time' (46). In doing so, a split emerges within the novel between the style used for the mimetic registration of local colour (including minor characters) and that used for the sophisticated social circles of the main characters, who are based on realist European models. There are then two 'tones' which constantly jar against one another in the novel (cf. 53). The 'local' tone has the system

of 'favour' as its ideological premise and, unlike classical realism, assumes the historical present to be unproblematic, because fundamentally unchangeable. The 'European' tone, which has liberalism as its ideological premise, takes the present as a problem, judging it by the universal norms according to which it could be transformed. Naturally, the former tone is more relaxed, less inclined to the volatility of dramatic moral pronouncements. At root, Schwarz claims, a split ultimately occurs between plot (the structuring principle of composition) and style. Where the occasionally melodramatic tones of Balzac's narrators and protagonists went hand in hand with an extreme concentration of the central conflict, one which comes to subsume all minor characters, that same concentration was impossible in the Brazilian novel if it were to remain true to everyday reality. This was then a formal reflection of the historical fact that Balzac's France was being *fundamentally* transformed by capitalist social relations, whereas Brazilian society remained premised upon slavery.

According to Schwarz it was only with the works of Machado de Assis, in particular his 1881 novel *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, that the problem of the stylistic discontinuity produced by Brazil's combined and uneven development would be 'solved' and the 'knot untied' (1992: 50, 52). Machado's great discovery was that by constantly opposing the two styles from one sentence to the next, he could not only produce great comedy, but also unify the local and European styles within the volatility and volubility of a single narrative voice: *'in the course of affirming itself, the narrator's versatility demotes all the contents and forms that appear in the Memoirs, and subordinates them to itself, so providing the narrator with a kind of fruition or enjoyment. In this sense, volubility is ... the formal principle of the novel'* (Schwarz, 2001: 17; emphasis in original). If in Alencar the composition was uneven yet still essentially ruled by the European realist plot, Machado subordinated all plot to the whims of his sardonic autodiegetic narrator: in the words of Augusto Meyer, '[h]e made a rule of composition out of his caprice' (cited in Schwarz, 2001: 16). Literally *everything* is grist to the mill of this voice, which always hovers on the edge of a hilarious nihilistic indifference. This includes all Enlightenment thought ('I'm not saying the university hadn't taught me some philosophical truths. But I'd only memorized the formulas, the vocabulary, the skeleton ... I picked up the phraseology of all things' (Machado, 1997: 51–52)), all traditions and customs, and even – in a splendid chapter entitled 'Delirium' (Machado, 1997: 15–21) – the spectacle of the entire history of the world parading itself before him: 'As I contemplated such calamity I was unable to hold back a cry of anguish that Nature or Pandora heard without protest or laughter. And, I don't know by what law of

cerebral upset, I was the one who started to laugh – an arrhythmic and idiotic laugh’ (19). Machado takes the Brazilian ruling class’s degradation of bourgeois principles into prestigious ornaments, exaggerates and accelerates the tendency, then makes of those constant rapid shifts between eagerness for and indifference to new ideas a volatile structuring prose rhythm. In doing so, he solves the riddle of the Brazilian novel’s discontinuous styles.

Or does he? For, as magisterial as Schwarz’s account of the Brazilian novel undeniably is, it is not without its problems. In his discussion of Alencar, Schwarz seems to hover between imputing to the author the *intentional* mimetic accuracy of the novels (i.e., their internal discontinuity imitates the discontinuity of Brazilian society in general) and the *unintentional* formal effects of this discontinuity (1992: 64–66). Yet he seems to overlook the constant self-reflexive references to style that occur throughout *Senhora*. From Dona Firmina’s early remark to Aurélia that she ‘speaks in a way that sounds like a novel’ (quoth Aurélia: ‘I have a *golden style*, the most sublime of all styles’) to the narrator’s remark that Lemos’s prose style is ‘as foppish as his physique’ (Alencar, 1994: 8, 42) – not to mention the ‘brutal laconism’ (42) of the language of bills, or Aurélia’s climactic proclamation at the end of part one that ‘[w]e are playacting in a comedy’ (61) – it slowly becomes clear that Alencar is very much concerned with the implications of style and is purposely drawing his reader’s attention to them. At the very least, then, a recognition of this stylistic self-reflexivity would seem to upset Schwarz’s claim for the ‘unintentionality’ of certain aspects of the discontinuity of styles, suggesting that Alencar was being more experimental than Schwarz gives him credit for. Indeed, it is not inconceivable that he was executing a specific ‘stylistic ideology’, in this case a conscious metafictional stylistic project in which the ethical connotations of certain stock styles – *especially* those connected to the capitalist European core – are offered up for critical inspection.⁶ This is not to *deny* the presence of discontinuity, but rather to suggest that it is a far more consciously *mediated* discontinuity than Schwarz allows.⁷

This minor omission is symptomatic of a larger ambiguity in Schwarz’s methodology. In a different essay, Schwarz writes that ‘on the plane of reality, which for the person writing is made up of practical life, knowledge and the existing writing on the topic, it [i.e., the social process] may not exist in a form that is available in a literary way, though it may be intuited’ (2012: 21). The term intuition is crucial, since it delineates precisely that grey zone where conscious volition fades into involuntary registration. In terms of Alencar’s style, one might say that Schwarz attributes to him an ‘intuition’ – in both the voluntary and involuntary senses – of the combined and uneven situation of nineteenth-century Brazil. Here, however,

the methodological implications become more serious, since this intuition, which produces the discontinuous styles, is hitched to a teleological narrative that will only reach completion in the work of Machado de Assis. On this view, Alencar can only ever be a stepping-stone, a John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness of Rio de Janeiro, paving the way for the ‘master’ Machado. This narrative of ‘truly dialectical supersession’ (Schwarz, 2012: 52) has as its precondition a deeply problematic presupposition: for a literature to achieve fruition (itself a doubtful metaphor) it must possess a *unified, singular and regulated principle of form* (Schwarz, 1992: 67, 87). Discontinuity can only be tolerated by this version of literary history if it is *sublated*. As will be seen in the case of Thomas Hardy, however, this principle of regulated unification can have conservative as well as progressive connotations, which would suggest that our constructions of literary history might require a little more Althusserian scepticism towards *Aufhebung* (sublation) than Schwarz’s narrative is able to concede.

Stylistic discontinuity at the intra-core semiperiphery

One of the advantages of Raymond Williams’s approach to the unevenness of Thomas Hardy’s style is that it was designed to rescue Hardy from a metropolitan condescension whose implicit literary ideal was precisely that of a singular, carefully regulated style. In 1892, for example, William Watson wrote of Hardy’s ‘over-academic phraseology’ that it was ‘exceptional and excrescent ... and serve[s] no purpose but to impair the *homogeneity of his utterance*’ (Watson, 1892: 213–214; emphasis added). Raymond Williams’s powerful reading of Hardy’s prose contextualises these accusations of lexical misdemeanour. In the introductory essay to his edited anthology, *The Pelican Book of English Prose (vol. 2): From 1780 to the Present Day* (1969), he develops a sophisticated political theory of style whose sections on the distinction between ‘settled’ and ‘unsettled’ prose compare Hardy’s stylistic awkwardness to the orotund phrasings of Macaulay and Bagehot. Where for Alencar and Machado it was the realist forms of the (Franco-British) European core that provided the cultural dominant with and against which they had to work, for Hardy it is the Standard English of a metropolitan, imperial ruling class.

The central argument of Williams’s essay is that ‘good prose and style are not things but relationships; that questions of method, subject and quality cannot be separated from the changing relations of men which are evident elsewhere in changing institutions and in a changing language’ (Williams, 1969: 55).⁸ He initially distinguishes between an ‘abstract universal style’ and a ‘particular style’ (the terms are mine) in late eighteenth- and early

nineteenth-century non-fictional prose. The 'abstract universal' style is that of the eighteenth-century academic essay and is characterised by Williams as 'the climax of print': 'a uniformity of tone and address; an impersonality, assuming no immediate relation between writer and reader, but only possession, in a social way, of this language; a durability, as in the object itself, beyond any temporary impulse or occasion' (Williams, 1969: 31). The 'particular' style, on the other hand, was a form of 'direct address to an ever-widening public, having the strengths of contact, of the sounds of actual voices and experience ... but in danger, always, of declining to opportunism – the devices of flattery ... – and to simplification' (29).

He then identifies their equivalents in the novel: sustained analysis and speech. Sustained analysis is based on a 'small educated class' (35) whose livelihood and modes of writing and speech were premised upon the widespread exploitation and expropriation of the working class. But the increasing inclusion of direct speech in the novel was capable of counteracting this, of 'expressing the actual life of a hard-pressed, hard-driven, excluded majority' (35) – that very majority on whose emphatic want the abstract universal style relied. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that for Williams the formal struggles novelists faced when attempting to unify these two discourses within a single work were stylistic extensions of the experience of a class-divided society. Class struggle became internalised or reflected into the very writing process itself, generating stylistic discontinuities which a reified conception of style would simply brush off as either artistic or moral failures.

The most dramatic example of a writer who, on Williams's reading, lived out this struggle in the very fibres of his being was Thomas Hardy. Written off condescendingly by F. R. Leavis, and Henry James before him ('The good little Thomas Hardy has scored a great success with *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which is chock-full of faults and falsity, and yet has a singular charm' (cited in Leavis, 1962: 33)), Hardy is given pride of place in Williams's alternative history of the English novel. Hardy, he claims, has a fundamental 'problem of style':

Hardy as a writer was mainly concerned with the interaction between the two conditions – the educated and the customary: not just as the characteristics of social groups, but as ways of seeing and feeling, within a single mind. And then neither established language would serve, to express this tension and disturbance ... An educated style, as it had developed in a particular and exclusive group, was dumb in intensity and limited in humanity. A customary style, while carrying the voice of feeling, was still thwarted by ignorance and complacent in repetition and

habit. Hardy veered between them, and the idiosyncrasy of his writing is related to this.

(1969: 44)

The agony of Hardy's writing, its idiosyncratic shifts between customary and elevated diction are the scars left behind from his struggle to bind and unite them. The educated style was necessary for observational and analytical exactitude, but went hand in hand with a class with which Hardy shared no common sensibility and an education system overtly designed to set a superior class apart from other people (cf. 47). The customary style was the one, put simply, with which Hardy could *feel* but not *think* – at least, not to the standards of sophistication which his novelistic art and the reigning aesthetic ideologies of the day required. 'The writer moving through this history', writes Williams, 'had to explore, as if on his own, the resources of what seemed to be but was not in fact a common language' (47). On paper, English was the universal language of the inhabitants of Britain, but in reality it was only an abstract universal, riven by the particular interests and viewpoints of class struggle: Hardy was forced to speak with a cleft tongue.

Yet the bulk of Victorian prose was 'remarkably settled and solid: an achieved, confident and still powerful manner' (47). Williams considers such 'settled' writers as Trollope, Macaulay and Bagehot. The key difference between a Macaulay and a Hardy was that the former

shared this essential [achieved, confident] outlook ... He shared so much with his readers, in ways of seeing and dealing with the world, that he becomes a kind of model: an admirable style. While the ways of seeing and dealing last, that is English, and the schoolboys can be set to learn it: the attitudes and the style in a single operation.

(48)

The confident styles were written by those who either embodied or (unwittingly) sympathised with the structure of feeling of the reigning political – and, in this case, imperial – hegemon. The disturbed prose was written by those who could not see or feel in the same way and yet who had been taught that such self-assured English simply *was* English in its entirety. Incongruities of style, far from being reprehensible then, were symptoms that a new 'structure of feeling' was struggling to emerge.

To translate Williams's argument into the language of world-systems theory, we might say that the discontinuities in Hardy's style are a literary mediation of the combined and uneven development of the Victorian West Country (Hardy's 'Wessex'). Hardy's 'linguistic situation' is that of a writer who, like the semiperiphery itself, is located directly at the point of confluence of (at least) two partly – but not wholly – contradictory structures of feeling: one intrinsic to the enforcement of capitalist modernisation and imperial expansion, the other to a rural population which is at once implementing and suffering such modernisation. In other words, capitalist social relations diagonally traverse *both* the national core and the semiperiphery: they divide the city from itself and the country from itself.

At this point, however, a note of caution must be sounded as to the ultimate plausibility of Williams's reading. For in his project to rescue Hardy from ingrained metropolitan condescension, he was led to an interpretation of Hardy's stylistic discontinuity that partially downplays Hardy's political and literary agency. By contrast, Dennis Taylor's account of Hardy's style stresses precisely this aspect. He begins by noting an acute observation by William Archer: 'There are times when Mr. Hardy seems to lose all sense of local and historical perspective in language, seeing all words in the dictionary on one plane, so to speak, and regarding them all as equally available and appropriate for any and every literary response' ([1898] cited in Taylor, 1993: 42). Taylor sees in this passage the key to Hardy's 'linguistic project' (1993: 72), or what I prefer to call his 'stylistic ideology', whose emphasis on combined and uneven diction is of obvious relevance for the present article:

Hardy's challenge to his contemporary language seems both synchronic and diachronic. That is, his word choices are drawn from competing classes of language, standard, dialect, poetic ... over against the class-conscious nature of the current language. Also, his word choices are drawn from temporal classes of diction, archaic, obsolescent, newly coined, in a way that seems to challenge the temporal equilibrium of the current language. Nurtured by historical philology, Hardy does not choose to write in a non-standard dialect ... but to challenge the standard language from within, while also developing its expressiveness.

(4)

Where Williams sees Hardy's reminder to '[r]ead again Addison, Macaulay, Newman, Sterne, Defoe, Lamb, Gibbon, Burke, *Times* leaders, etc., in a study of style' (Hardy, 1962: 105) as evidence of an understandable but doomed attempt to incorporate himself into the hegemonic style of the metropolitan core (Williams, 1970: 106–107), Taylor reads it as part of Hardy's

systematic undermining of all aspects of the ‘post-Addison literary tradition’, which had ‘crystallized’ into an established standard dialect representing ‘a national consensus, a hegemonic norm’ (1993: 74). Thus, whilst Williams defends Hardy’s stylistic awkwardness by seeing in it an existentially agonised attempt to negotiate a situation of combined and uneven development, Taylor argues that Hardy’s style *weaponised* his uneven linguistic situation and deployed it to challenge the cultural and political presuppositions of a standard literary language connected to the urban centre of class power.

What I hope the preceding analyses have shown is, first and foremost, that the stylistic discontinuities that are a widely observed feature of peripheral world-literature can also be traced in world-literature of the intra-core (semi)periphery. Where Alencar and Machado were torn between the formal conventions of the Franco-British core and the social content of the periphery, Hardy’s style responded to a linguistic situation divided between the Standard English of a metropolitan, imperial ruling class and a customary diction which predominated in the (capitalised) countryside. The point is that both of these stylistic rifts were produced by the *same system*. The capitalist world-system develops in a combined and uneven manner at *both* the world-systemic and sub-world-systemic scales. This is significant because it troubles Moretti’s too-irenic conception of the supposedly ‘autonomous development’ of national literatures at the core, as if the British and French realist novels were not themselves a series of ‘compromise formations’.⁹ The key, however, as Moretti himself has come to observe, is to ‘recognize when a compromise occurs as it were *under duress*’ (2013: 117; emphasis in original). That is, the discovery of stylistic discontinuity within the core does not negate Moretti’s initial hypothesis that the literary world-system is one and *unequal*. On the contrary, Hardy’s style confirms it.

Yet it is precisely here that the critic must tread with caution. For there is a real danger in world-literature scholarship that stylistic discontinuity be reduced to a simple ‘reflection’ or ‘structural reduction’ of a specific geo-politically determined ‘historical impasse’ (Schwarz, 2001: 114). This is partially the case in Schwarz’s reading of Alencar, though – tellingly – *not* the case in his account of Machado. On the contrary, on almost every page of *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*, one is reminded of the enormous stylistic will-power Machado exercised in transforming such discontinuity into a coherent formal principle. The same discrepancy can be located in the readings of Hardy’s uneven style by Williams and Taylor respectively. What notions such as ‘reflection’ or ‘registration’ (the latter frequently employed by the Warwick Research Collective) risk overlooking is that writers, especially

those at the periphery, often perform Herculean acts of stylistic and literary production, guided by arduously developed stylistic ideologies. Part of their point is self-reflexively or metafictionally to foreground the impasse – and, in so doing, to question, redress or symbolically transcend it. A more expansive definition of style, one which would move beyond the ‘words on the page’ to include writers’ stylistic *projects*, would arguably help to avoid such underestimations of their literary agency. The ‘politics’ of style has just as much to do with the ‘weaponisation’ of uneven linguistic situations as it does with those more passive literary ‘registrations’ of ‘historical impasses’. Perhaps what we thus require is a critical vocabulary more attuned to the subtle gradations of intention and determination, one that avoids the too-easy conflation of history, sociality, and politics.

Conclusion: style and historical temporality

These issues come to a head there where the common stylistic features of Machado and Hardy intersect with the very methodological ambiguities I have been exploring. The major factor is time. Machado and Hardy each in their own way translated their experience of (semi)peripheral combined unevenness into a philosophy of time as *unreal*. J. Hillis-Miller long ago remarked that Hardy’s Absolute ‘is not tied to time ... He extracts from his vision of the whole the fact that all the past and future, together with the present, exist simultaneously in a single realm outside time, all with the same mode of immediate actuality. Time is therefore unreal.’ (1970: 229) Given that Hardy’s stylistic ideology is premised upon the radicalization of ‘seeing all words in the dictionary on one plane’, this philosophy of time is crucial, since its logic produces at once a positive, critical stylistic project and a tragic *Weltanschauung* (tragic, because if time is unreal, nothing can ever truly change). The gloom that pervades Hardy’s work and is embodied in such uncanny characters as Little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure* – ‘an enslaved and dwarfed Divinity, sitting passive and regarding his companions as if he saw their whole rounded lives rather than their immediate figures’ (Hardy, 1974: 295) – stems from the same philosophy of time as that which made possible his stylistic project: they conjoin in a ‘pessimistic meliorism’ (Millgate, 2004: 379).

Where Hardy assumes the tragic mode, Machado opts for the comic. Brás Cubas’ bizarre indifference to the spectacle of human history has already been remarked upon; to this can be added Schwarz’s recognition of the ‘*nonproductiveness of time*’ in Machado (2001: 46; emphasis in original). Yet having identified this commonality of time’s unreality in Hardy and Machado, the question remains as to what sense to make of it. And here we enter the dark

heart of any theory of style: for the latter always assumes *its own* philosophy of time, one that is also, at its limit, a philosophy of history as such. It must relate styles to their historical contexts, but must also be able to explain the emergence of *new* styles, thus necessitating a more general theory of the advent of historical novelty. We have seen that Schwarz's Hegelian Marxism provides a compelling account of the rise of the Brazilian novel and its stylistic discontinuities, but does so at the price of a teleological impetus that condemns certain writers to the eternal status of mere precursors and of an implicit stylistic ideal of regulated singularity.

What is perhaps required is thus a conception of historical temporality that would accept material determinations of and by literary forms, but would not reduce past presents to the idealism of the future anterior. In other words, a materialist theory of history would confirm time's irreversibility (Negri, 2013), but at the same time allow past presents their full actuality as well as the possibility of their being meaningfully connected to the historical present. Williams's notion of historical temporality offers a glimpse of such a conception and might be termed an 'immanent self-conscious traditionality': it combines a valorization of novelty typical of modernity with an emphasis on the force of biological, generational and (relatively) unconscious attachments typical of tradition. Crucially, its traditionality is *self-conscious*: new traditions are to be consciously constructed against hegemonic 'selective traditions' with a view to meeting our collective political needs in the present and enabling us to break towards an alternative future.

This was the whole point of Williams's work on Hardy: to show that he remains our *actual* contemporary. The mode of contemporaneity here is not that of Hardy's timelessness beyond history, but rather a type of historicity – formally akin to, but by no means substantially identical with, Benjaminian 'now-time' [*Jetztzeit*] – which increases the emancipatory potential of the present by re-actualizing a corresponding past. Despite the ultimate insufficiency of Williams's reading of Hardy's style, then, the conception of historical temporality that lay behind it remains suggestive. It was this that connected Hardy's combined and uneven 'Wessex' to Williams's volatile 'border country', and – arguably – that fused the contradictory presents of Alencar and Machado with Schwarz's struggles against the Brazilian dictatorship.

Notes

¹ The ‘modern world-system’, a concept developed by Immanuel Wallerstein, consists of cores, peripheries and semiperipheries – cores being characterised by the prevalence of quasi-monopolised production processes within strong states, whose condition of possibility is the manufactured weakness of the periphery (Wallerstein, 2004: 28ff.).

² The Warwick Research Collective (WReC) consists of Sharae Deckard, Nicholas Lawrence, Neil Lazarus, Graeme Macdonald, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Benita Parry and Stephen Shapiro.

³ Cf. Bakhtin 1981 (259–422).

⁴ I have adapted the following summary of style’s tripartite relationality from a previous article (Hartley, 2015: 168).

⁵ Lukács, Sartre and Barthes would all in their different ways claim that this lasted until the insurrection of June 1848.

⁶ I am not, of course, suggesting that Schwarz is insensitive to the problem of intentionality. On the contrary, he notes that a ‘careful distinction’ must be made ‘between degrees of intention’ (1992: 64). My argument is simply that he has omitted one such crucial ‘degree’.

⁷ Much more could be said of Alencar’s stylistic ideology, not least of his nationalist desire to produce an authentic ‘Brazilian’ language that would break with Portuguese (Sommer, 1991: 138–171). Due to the limited space available, however, I am unable to expand on this topic here.

⁸ Throughout this section I shall refer to the original edition of Williams’s essay. He later reprinted it in a slightly modified form in *Writing in Society* (1983).

⁹ He admitted as much himself in 2003 when responding to his critics (reprinted in Moretti, 2013: 116–117).

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