Varieties of Literary Worlding: The Different Intercultural Visions of Witold Gombrowicz and Julio Cortázar

Antonis Sarris

Abstract

This article compares Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz and Argentine writer Julio Cortazar, focusing on interculturality. Inspecting Gombrowicz's *Pornografia* (1960) and Cortazar's *Hopscotch* (1963), it applies Shunqing Cao's Variation Theory (2012) to demonstrate how both authors, shaped by exile, challenge the Eurocentrism-cultural particularism disjunction. By offering two distinct intercultural visions, they present variations of literary cosmopolitanism: a marginal European critique of Western literary Canon and a non-European approach that seeks inclusion without mere imitation as a cultural hybridization. The article thus highlights how each author's work embodies unique expressions of intercultural dialogue and a complex, evolving literary cosmopolitanism.

Introduction

In this paper, I explore the concept of interculturality, specifically how it manifests through the literary works of Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz and Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar. More precisely, I will focus my analysis on one novel by each author, written around the same period: *Pornografia* (1960) and *Hopscotch* (1963). Exploring these authors not only illuminates the intricacies of intercultural dynamics but also challenges prevailing notions of literary hierarchy in a globalized world. I will argue that both authors, despite their distinct cultural and literary backgrounds, share common elements such as the experience of exile, the position of their national literature in the World literary canon, and their European literary and philosophical education. These factors lead them to favor interculturality over national cultural entrenchment. Despite being educated in Europe, both authors consciously distance themselves from a homogenized literary and philosophical cosmopolitanism dominated by European values (Eurocentrism), as they seek to forge their intercultural visions that reflect their unique cultural identities and experiences. Through this precise distancing, the authors achieve a reworking of cosmopolitanism in a different way and articulate two distinct intercultural visions. While Cortázar seeks literary recognition through the adoption of Western influences, Gombrowicz opts for a cultural blending of the two 'inferior' cultures in Argentina and Poland (meaning that they fall short of recognition compared to European culture) which inclines him to favor the cultural immaturity of these countries over a Western cultural maturity. The term 'cultural immaturity' refers to the absence of an established literary canon, which allows for greater freedom of movement and greater flexibility in the adoption of cultural and literary values. I will refer to the relatively recent "Variation Theory" of the Chinese comparativist Shunqing Cao to show how these authors achieve both a distance from cosmopolitanism and a reworking/undermining of it. By employing Cao's concepts of "variation" of "cultural filtering," I will show how interculturality, as is being expressed by these authors, is never unambiguous and unilateral. On the

contrary, it is always complex and multilateral due to being dependent on a different historical, literary, national, and cultural context.

To develop this argument, I will first outline Cao's theory, highlighting its relevance in understanding interculturality in a more nuanced way. Then, I will outline the similar status of Argentinian and Polish literature in the world literary system to show how their cultural proximity to European literature facilitates a critical examination of European cosmopolitanism (Eurocentrism) from the inside. Next, I will demonstrate how Cortázar and Gombrowicz shared an interest in European philosophy, literature, and culture, and how their different experiences of exile led them to two different treatments of this influence. Lastly, by examining *Hopscotch* and *Pornografia*, I will explore how all the previous points coalesce inside the novels. Ultimately, this comparative study aims to shed light on the diverse expressions of interculturality, contributing to a richer understanding of literary exchange in the context of semi-peripheral cultures.

Exploring Varieties of Literary Worlding

Shunqing Cao, a Chinese comparativist, presents "Variation Theory" in his book *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* (2013), providing a framework for understanding how interculturality manifests within literature. In this work, Cao attempts to redefine the basic principles of comparative literature, in response to the new challenges posed to literary studies by World literature and postcolonial theory.

The term "World Literature," indicating a shift of theoretical interest from the national to the global, is not new; its origins can be traced back to the nineteenth century. However, the renewed interest in World Literature during the twenty-first century, as Cao argues, still suffers from an inherent Eurocentrism. A prevailing assumption is that European literature—primarily German, French, and English—is the literary canon against which all other literatures must be measured. Critics like Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti distinguish between literary centers and literary peripheries, suggesting that authors from 'minor' literatures face the choice to either assimilate the ready-made

literary standards or reject this hegemonic model. We will see that this is not the case with Cortázar and Gombrowicz. Both authors recognize that interculturality must navigate the complexities of European cosmopolitanism and postcolonial insularity. Cao, unlike many postcolonial critics, does not dismiss Eurocentrism. Instead, he argues that prioritizing variability over sameness in literary analysis reveals Eurocentrism is already deconstructed from the inside. There are variations of European literature, rather than a single literary European identity. Both Gombrowicz and Cortázar write within these margins:

> The time of seeking sameness within a common civilizational sphere is over […] Variation theory shifts the priority to differences […] In other words, it is a time for the transformation of comparative literature from the sameness to variability […] the study of variation builds a world of harmony but not sameness by seeking common ground while preserving differences. (*The Theoretical Basis and Framework of Variation Theory* 2-3)

The emphasis Cao puts on variation allows us to recognize that interculturality is inherently ambiguous. This means it varies based on the different cultural and literary contexts that change how interculturality is articulated as we will see later with the different contexts that determine the literary writing of Gombrowicz and Cortázar, leading them to formulate other understandings of interculturality. The notion of variability reconciles difference with sameness, highlighting that cultural exchanges are never completely transparent, contrary to naïve intercultural assumptions. Variation can thrive only through "cultural filtering." Cultural filtering "refers to the mechanism of selection, transformation, appropriation, and infiltration of culture-specific norms in a different cultural context or tradition" (*The Theoretical Basis and Framework of Variation Theory* 5). As we will see in the discussion of Gombrowicz and Cortázar, cultural filtering—shaped by their experiences of exile—is essential for constructing their intercultural visions. Both Gombrowicz and Cortázar, unavoidably culturally biased,

creatively misread and perceive their common European influence in a different way. "Intercultural vision," as I employ the term, stands for each subjective ideal about how intercultural communication should be.

Before reading the novels, I appreciate that a reference to their relationship with their national literatures would be enlightening. Even if we adopt a center-periphery model like Casanova's, we find that Polish and Argentinean literature occupy a semi-peripheral position, which complicates their easy clasification. Cao himself hesitates to entirely dismiss Eurocentrism, acknowledging its ongoing influence on our understanding of literature because: "Equating world literature with canons oversimplifies this topic, even though it indeed narrows the object down to an operable range" (*Variation in Literature Communication and the Formation of World Literature* 481). Thus, while the European literary model is not the center of World literature, it remains a significant variation that shapes literary interpretation, literary circulation, and authors' perceptions of cosmopolitanism. Bearing in mind Cao's assumptions and his concept of "cultural filtering," I will demonstrate how Cortázar and Gombrowicz, though influenced by European literary traditions, forge their distinct visions of interculturality that uniquely resist Eurocentrism.

Contextualizing Cortázar and Gombrowicz

As I already argued, it is crucial, before discussing the authors, to consider the position of their national literature and culture within World literature. As I will demonstrate, Polish literature and Argentinian literature stand at a threshold of European literature, somewhere 'in between' the literary center (Western Europe) and the non-western literary peripheries. This allows a creative dialogic confrontation with the major European literary traditions, as there is a relationship of cultural proximity between them (and not distance as is the case with, e.g., Chinese literature). As I will argue below, this dialogic confrontation is found both in the structure and content of the two novels and, more broadly, in the statements and positions of the two authors.

It is challenging to interpret Latin American literature through a postcolonial lens because, as Latin-American philosopher Enrique Dussel declares: "We were the first periphery of modern Europe; that is, we suffered globally from our moment of origin on a constitutive process of modernization […] that afterward would be applied in Africa and Asia" (Dussel 67). Dussel here wants to say that the colonization of Latin America goes further back in time than that of other continents, just as Latin American countries are also liberated earlier than, e.g., the African countries. This means that their relationship with European culture is more profound, and an oppositional logic, as adopted by post-colonial theory, is not enough to approach it. The dependence on Europe is not only economic but also cultural and, as far as we are concerned, literary. The literary dependence concerns the fact that many writers, including Cortázar, in their attempt to renew the literary form of their country, were influenced by the already-formed innovations brought about by European modernism. As Gerald Martin argues, confirming Latin America's literary backwardness: "The twentieth century began late in Latin America" (Martin 238). This is evidenced by the late appearance of literary modernism in Latin America. Texts that clearly resemble the polyphony of Joycean writing appear from the late 1940s onwards. Seminal novels of this period are Miguel Asturias' *The Main of Maize* (1949) and Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955). However, Martin claims that the assimilation of European modernism does not happen globally in the same way, nor does it have the same time vector. He even notes that despite the time lag, Latin America incorporated modernist techniques faster than other English-speaking countries (141).

Martin then proceeds to a crucial, for the sake of our argument, taxonomic distinction of two separate literary influences within Latin American Literature: James Joyce and William Faulkner. These European authors form an important distinction between the authors who are influenced by European culture from those who search instead for the Latin American indigenous past. Faulkner's influence is exploited by those writers who want to depict the experience of the pastoral, indigeneity, and the mythic and ancient past of Latin America. On the other hand, the influence of Joyce's writing technique contributed

to describing the urban experience. Regarding Faulkner's influence, the search for another type of cosmopolitanism, "altermodernity," juxtaposed with European modernity, is arguably more tentative. The decolonial theory (Maldonado Torres) applies precisely to this example. However, there is also the other side of Latin American literature, the Joycean influence, which considers itself a distant part of the Western tradition and actively attempts to contribute to it by appropriating the models borrowed from it creatively. I am interested in this second, Joycean/European, direction because it is the one where Martin includes Cortázar.

Casanova discusses Latin American literature as an exemplary paradigm of the relative autonomy of literature from economy (83). Although most Latin American countries were economically dependent on Europe and the USA, Latin American literature progressively upgraded its symbolic capital. The publishing success of Latin American Boom (the well-known literary movement that, apart from Cortázar, also featured names such as Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa) in the 1960s certifies that peripheral literature can upgrade its literary/symbolic capital and function from then on as a semi-periphery that competes with the literary center. For example, Gabriel García Márquez's magical realism as expressed in *100 Years of Solitude* continued in the publication of novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1981) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), both of which have been outspoken about the significant influence that García Márquez had on their work. Moreover, both stylistically and thematically, the Joycean/Faulknerian dichotomy also survives among Boom writers. Martin notes that if one of Boom's four great writers is Joycean, it is Cortázar because his novels describe the urban experience rather than the rural one, as happens in Mario Vargas Llosa, for example (199).

Furthermore, Martin insists that not all Latin American countries are Western-oriented with the same intensity. Uruguay and Argentina are closest to Europe because they have lost contact with their indigenous past (154). A case that testifies to this argument is undoubtedly Jorge Luis Borges, an explicitly Western-oriented short story writer. As he argues in The Argentine Writer and Tradition:

> I believe that our tradition is the whole of Western Culture […] I believe that Argentines, and South Americans in general […] can take on all the European subjects, take them on without superstition and with an irreverence that can have […] fortunate consequences. (426)

When referring to Cortázar, we will better understand how he partially shares Borges' view of Argentine culture as inextricably linked to European culture. We will discuss later how European modernism profoundly influences *Hopscotch* structurally and thematically. I now turn to Polish literature to argue that, like Argentina, it is in a state of simultaneous proximity and distance in relation to Western European culture and literature.

While the term 'Latin American literature' can raise objections for its homogenizing tendencies (sidestepping the differences among national literatures of Latin America), it is nevertheless functional and valid because the national literatures of Latin America, due to common language, customs and history, resemble each other. Poland's case, contrary to Argentina's, is more complex due to the heterogeneous cultural, ethnic, racial, and political characteristics of Central and Eastern European countries. Thus, speaking of 'Central Eastern literature' becomes problematic. To give an example, while Cortazar can be considered as a Latin American (not only Argentinean) author, Gombrowicz is not considered firstly a Central European but a Polish author. If it exists, Central European literature acquires self-awareness by differentiating itself from Russian and Western European literature, as Mitsoyoshi Numano argues (132).

Among all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, if there is one that has more of the 'in-between' syndrome—meaning the liminal position between center and periphery—it is probably Poland. Throughout its history, Poland experienced multiple phases of colonial domination by Western European powers (Kingdom of Prussia, Austrian Monarchy) and Russia (and later USSR). At the same time, Poland had "a stronger relation with Western Latin religious culture

and thought" (Maylin 10) since its Christianization in the tenth century, further placing the country in a borderline position. However, after the partitions, Poland "was barred from actually participating in modern discourse" (Kolodziejscyk 16). Here, "modern discourse" means the dominant European cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical values of the Enlightenment. Hence, a gradual cultivation of a feeling of inferiority commenced, which in literature has to do with the impossibility of establishing a literary style similar to that of the European currents (think realism or modernism). Throughout his literary career, Gombrowicz also struggles with this feeling of cultural inferiority. The concept of 'immaturity' that preoccupies him constantly in his writing career, is the defense of a culture that did not have the chance, for political reasons, to establish its values and its idiosyncratic manner of utterance. This simultaneous feeling of belonging and exclusion, reminiscent of the Argentine experience, rediscovers Poland's status as a semi-peripheral country: "It is close enough to the core to aspire to be treated equally with it, and joining it appears to be within its grasp, and at the same time it is not ready to face […] its own peripherality" (Grzechnik 8).

This is also reflected in the literary migrations to Western Europe of many Polish artists and intellectuals, such as the musician Frederick Chopin, novelist Joseph Konrad and the philosopher Leszek Kołakowski. This move led to the relatively quick Polish appropriation of Western aesthetic currents. However, there are also seminal aesthetic differences between Polish and other European literatures, which made it less easy to be assimilated. On of them is that Polish modernism, contrary to Western European modernism, inclines towards a Romantic past and has an aversion towards European modernist traits like novelty and innovation: "the radical opposition between the past and the present (future)—between tradition and progress—does not exist in Polish modernism" (Trojanowska et al. 126).

Also fundamentally different from its European neighbors, is the topic of exile and emigration, which has formed a constituent part of Polish culture for 250 years (Trojanowska et al. 111). After postwar Poland's annexation to the Soviet Union, Polish modernism was divided into

modernism in exile and domestic institutional modernism. Gombrowicz belongs to the first group, which receives profound influences and converses with the aesthetic and philosophical Western European currents of the time such as the Nouveau Roman, late modernist texts such as Beckett's literature, and structuralism and existentialism in philosophy in a more pronounced way than domestic Polish literary production.

In this part, I have clarified the liminal position of Argentinian and Polish literature as somewhere between the center and periphery of World Literature and Western European culture. I now turn to the individual analysis of Cortázar and Gombrowicz to examine how their literary worldviews further complicate this cultural ambivalence.

Julio Cortázar's Intercultural Ambivalence

As mentioned, Cortázar was a Joycean writer and, among the other three great authors of the Boom, his writing resembled European modernist authors such as James Joyce (stylistically) and Thomas Mann (thematically) the most. In 1951, he moved to Paris, as did other great Latin American writers such as Ernesto Sabbato, Miguel Asturias and Mario Vargas Llosa. Most Latin American writers of the twentieth century considered Paris the world's cultural capital, which confirms Casanova's view of Paris as the center of European modernism (Martin). Seeking recognition there, they were pursuing a kind of literary (European) cosmopolitanism, but at the same time, they kept their interest in representing their national, political and cultural origin.

Evident from the mass of authors flocking to Paris is that modernism and all the consequent literary trends of the twentieth century cannot be thought of without the condition of exile. Here, we could mention the case of Ireland, where its two greatest novelists, Joyce and Beckett, who contributed the most to the formation of (high and late) modernism, wrote their masterpieces in exile in Paris. Romanian literary theorist Michail Spariosu, who has written extensively on the importance of exile in modernism, confirms the centrality of exile within modernist trends and calls it a compensation for the ontological loss that

exile generates (Spariosu 85). Cortázar would agree with the constitutive significance of exile in the formulation of his writing, but he would characterize it not as an ontological loss but as an ontological gain. Acquiring familiarity with European literature and philosophy through exile influenced and improved his writing, as he himself confirms:

> But many times [...] I tried to imagine a copy of myself in Buenos Aires and asked myself, what would I have done if I had stayed in Argentina? Furthermore, I must say that I am always led [...] to a negative feeling, to an impression that I would have been in ankylosis […] I would have accepted the parameters of the time in Argentina, while these same ten years in Europe were ten years for me tremendous plasticity [...] (*La Fascination de las palabras* 139, my translation)

The ontological gain for Cortazar can thus be found in the integration of existentialist philosophy, surrealism, and jazz in the structure of his novel, with which he became familiar in Paris.

However, this does not mean that Cortázar accepts the European cultural model only as a possible model of cosmopolitan values, but as an opportunity for dialogue between cultures so that "[...] from something conciliatory [...] from a conviction [...] there can be contacts and exchanges" (*La Fascination de las palabras* 141). In *Hopscotch*, this element is reflected in the protagonist's concern to understand the nature of the relationship between Paris and Buenos Aires, symbolizing the relationship between the West and Latin America. Intercultural communication is not the same as accepting Western culture as superior, a behavior that would constitute an internalized colonial feeling of inferiority: "Fortunately, more and more, Argentinians and Latin Americans are losing this colonial attitude [...] which consisted in expecting, when you went to Europe, the ordination, the diploma of the complete man" (*La Fascination de las palabras 141*). Shortly after in the same book, however, Cortázar differentiates his position on European culture, challenging the oppositional, culturalist logic that often pervades post-colonial discourse. In other words, contrary

to the dominant tendency of post-colonial theory, he hesitates to perceive European cosmopolitanism as inherently Eurocentric, orientalist, and homogenous. Again, I quote an extended passage. There, he disapproves of:

> [...] a nationalism that will reject Europe in a bad way under the pretext—as is heard in Latin America—that it is a culture that is tired, that has nothing to teach us anymore, that the future lies in Latin America and all these platitudes, that deep down they hide significant weaknesses[...]
>
> I still believe that the disappearance of this grand European illusion of the last thirty years is positive, provided it is adequately evaluated when it is not simply a contempt for what we once longed to know and understand. (*La Fascination de las palabras* 142)

Thus, for Cortázar, a rejection of Eurocentrism does not suffice if it is not accompanied simultaneously by an alternative proposal about what a cosmopolitan ideal should look like.

Cortázar's statements are beneficial as they outline the cultural ambivalence permeating *Hopscotch*. Just as Cortázar hesitates to choose between his European education and his Latin American origin, the same happens, as we will see along the way, with the protagonist of the novel, Horacio Oliveira (from now on referred to as Oliveira). This novel is undoubtedly one of the masterpieces of Latin American literature of the twentieth century, next to other recognized texts of the Latin American Boom such as Gabriel García Márquez's *100 Years of Solitude* and Carlos Fuentes' *The Death of Artemio Cruz*. As Martin notes, the novel launched the literary Boom, combining influences from Joyce, Borges, and Surrealism (198). Here, I will not proceed with a comprehensive examination of this very complex novel but will limit myself to highlighting the themes and characteristics related to the question of interculturalism and literary cosmopolitanism.

Cortázar's European influences are patently obvious. The novel abounds in passages of philosophical reflection. Oliveira, the protagonist, constantly reflects on a series of philosophical issues, such as those of identity and otherness, as well as the possibility of an overall exit of thought from metaphysics to another level of consciousness, which Cortázar delineates as "the passage," "the bridge" or "kibbutz." Cortázar scholars such as Dominic Moran (7) and Nataly Tcherepashenets (33) highlight Cortázar's familiarity with phenomenological thinkers such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Luis Harss and characterize it as a "philosophical manifesto" (110). The philosophical reflection that the novel presents often does not even need decoding, as in the following passage, which presents Oliveira's interior monologue and where Cortázar demonstrates his familiarity with phenomenological terminology:

> Basically, there is no such thing as otherness, maybe just that pleasant thing called togetherness. Of course, that is something […] Love, an ontologizing ceremony, a giver of being. And that is why he was thinking only now of what he should have thought about in the beginning: without the possession of self, there was no possession of otherness, and who could really possess himself? (*Hopscotch* 99)

Cortázar's European influences are not limited to philosophy but also extend to literature. Although the structure of *Hopscotch* is experimental and may recall Joyce in the adoption of a non-linear narrative and the internal monologue, as we have already seen, Cortázar refers to Mann, specifically *The Magic Mountain*—a novel that, among the modernist masterpieces, was perhaps more preoccupied with questions of interculturality—as the novel to which the *Hopscotch* responds:

> In *The Magic Mountain*, they are always looking for answers; in the case of *Hopscotch*, neither Oliveira nor Oliveira's author ever looked for answers; instead, both had a certain

> tendency to ask questions. *Hopscotch* is a book of questions […] (*Literature Class* 191)

Cortázar, in *La Fascination de las Palabras*, highlights the impact of his exile, as he cannot remember whether he started writing Hopscotch in Paris or Argentina. There, he mentions that when he first started writing the second part of the book titled "From This Side," which takes place in Buenos Aires, he stopped and began the first chapter, "From the Other Side," which takes place in Paris. The sequence of the chapters in the novel demonstrates the incorporation of Cortázar and his protagonist, Oliveira, into the Western Culture, which acquires an ontological precedence, leading him to forget the previous identity he had before being exposed to European culture. As his friend Gregorovius will say in the novel, "Paris is one big metaphor" (*Hopscotch* 132) for Oliveira, a chance for an existential journey that he could not find in Argentina:

> He guesses that in some part of Paris, some day or some death or some meeting will show him a key; he's searching for it like a madman. Note that I said like a madman. I mean that he really doesn't know that he's looking for the key, or that the key exists. He has an inkling of its shapes, its disguises. (*Hopscotch* 133)

From Paris, Oliveira returns to Argentina, where he cannot integrate and approach the unfamiliar situation he is encountering. The baroque, carnivalistic atmosphere of Buenos Aires, seen through the eyes of a rationalist from Paris, seems alien to him. For example, he cannot understand how his best friend, Traveler, does not seem to share his metaphysical preoccupations but prefers instead to live without over-thinking and analyzing constantly. While the first part is dominated by Oliveira's philosophical and metaphysical reflections, in the second they are replaced by vague, confused, affective states produced from the encounter with Latin America's carnivalesque, mythic, magical, and grotesque elements. Nevertheless, his alienation is not absolute because, simultaneously, Oliveira never really settled in the Parisian

atmosphere. His residence in Europe forces him to reconsider his cultural origin, as Traveler, his best friend, whom he meets on his return to Buenos Aires, attests:

> At first, Traveler had criticized his mania for finding everything wrong with Buenos Aires […] In the end, they [Traveler and his girlfriend, Talita] realized that he was right, that Oliveira could not make any hypocritical compromise with Buenos Aires, and that, at the moment, he [Oliveira] was much farther away from his own country than when he had been wandering about Europe. (*Hopscotch* 228)

Because Oliveria suffers such a loss of cultural bonds, this leads to "the blurring of the boundaries between place and displacement" (Tcherepashenets 31). Thus, Oliveria's constant movement from one culture to another prohibits, rather than permits, meaningful communication. On the contrary, Oliveira's best friend, Traveler, his doppelgänger, is his dialectical opposite. By naming Traveler someone who has never gone outside Argentina, Cortázar insinuates that authentic cultural openness differs from Oliveira's sterile European education. Nevertheless, the two friends are inextricably linked. This fact symbolizes the cultural connection, which, however uneven, persists between Argentina and Europe. Ultimately, however, Oliveira is alienated from both places in *Hopscotch*, and he does not feel at home anywhere:

> The worst of it was that by dint of avoiding excessively local points of view he had ended up weighing and accepting too readily the yes and no of everything, becoming a sort of inspector of scales. In Paris everything was Buenos Aires, and vice versa; in the most eager moments of love he would suffer loss and loneliness and relish it. (*Hopscotch* 18).

Therefore, Cortázar questions the universality of the literary-philosophical paradigm he aspires to join. He is convinced that

another conception of universality is possible, which will not have the strict and harsh distinguishing features of European civilization, such as attachment to ethical normativism and rationalistic calculation to the detriment of affective intuition, which are nonetheless imposed when one tries to think in terms of universality:

> I always end up talking about the center without the slightest guarantee that I know what I'm saying, and I slip into the trap of geometry, that method we Occidentals use to try to regulate our lives: axis, center, raison d'etre, Omphalos, nostalgic Indo-European names. (*Hopscotch* 15).

In this section, we firstly examined Cortázar's exile and his thoughts about it and then we proceeded to a reading of *Hopscotch* centered on the question of interculturality. We concluded that, in the end, Cortázar, alienated from his country of origin, but not fully integrated in his new place of residence, finds himself vacillating and fluctuating, between accepting European cosmopolitanism and rejecting it as Eurocentrism. Turning now to Gombrowicz we will see how a different route allows for a variant of this stance which also rejects easy dichotomous options on the matter.

Witold Gombrowicz's Reduplication of Cultural 'Inferiority

Turning now to Witold Gombrowicz, this section demonstrates how his position vis-à-vis Polish and World Literature resists easy classification because of his double exile (both from Poland and from Argentina) and his conception and then re-conception of a philosophy of Form that eventually led to the cultivation of a peculiar intercultural vision that aspires to replace European cosmopolitanism.

Gombrowicz's recognition came very late. As noted by David Brodsky: "He belonged to interwar literature and the literature of the postwar emigration [...] It is unique because Gombrowicz's position, both before the war and in emigration, was on the periphery of Polish literary life" (459). Therefore, both of Gombrowicz's writing

periods—the interwar and postwar exile—were important. However, if one had to single out one of them based on his work's popularity, then his first novel, *Ferdyturke,* is the novel for which Gombrowicz is undoubtedly best known. An intersection separates the two periods, as the exile decisively determines his literary profile and partially transforms the already-formed literary philosophy of his younger years.

Rafal Moczkodam argues that some Polish authors, such as Gombrowicz and Czesław Miłosz, escape an easy classification as writers of the émigré community that perceive exile as a state of personal or national defeat. Instead "they saw their time in the West as an opportunity to develop and enrich their work by exploring previously unseen horizons" (Trojanowska et al. 247). Gombrowicz's cosmopolitan path was different from that of other Polish writers because he did not seek to immigrate to a central city of European culture, such as Paris. As Dariusz Skórczewski argued, most crossed Poland's borders to reside "mainly in Paris, which became the great center of the Polish diaspora" (77). As we already noted, the same is true for Argentinian writers and, in our case, Julio Cortázar.

Contrary to Cortázar, Gombrowicz's experience of exile was different. Instead of moving to Paris, he found himself, quite unexpectedly, in Cortázar's country, Argentina, in 1938 while on a cruise during which Germany invaded Poland. As in Poland, Gombrowicz remained on the sidelines of literary circles in Buenos Aires. Concerning Borges, whom he knew personally, his opinion was not positive, as he claims in his diary: "The atmosphere of the country was such that in it this international, sophisticated Borges (for, if he was an Argentinean, it was in a European way) could not capture the undertone" (*Diary* 166). What fascinated Gombrowicz in Argentina was that he encountered a place that was rejecting Western cultural values:

> One should not speak of masterpieces as this word is out of place in Argentina. There are no masterpieces here, only works of art […] no hierarchy of values on a European scale has materialized in this country, which may be what attracts me most to Argentina. (*Diary* 86)

Argentina's peripheral status allows him to examine with different eyes both the concept of Polishness and the concept of Europeanness, as well as the relationship between them: "I needed desperately to get close to Europe in no other way except in a state of passionate intoxication with Argentina, with America" (*Diary* 592).

In 1963, he returned to Europe and, specifically, to Paris, Europe's cultural capital for all his compatriots. There, he will finally gain literary recognition, but at the same time, he will also experience a feeling of inferiority in contradistinction to the 'seriousness' of French culture. He will find himself yet again exiled, this time in Europe. Nevertheless, he will not attempt to integrate into European culture:

> I thought about Europe's eluding me […] I, a newcomer, an Argentinean, a returning Pole […] It seemed almost silly to me that this enormous thing in history, Europe, instead of dazzling me after […] years of not seeing it, falls into a pile of well-worn generalities. (*Diary* 668)

His goal in Paris was the confrontation with high literature and philosophy and their undermining by the cultural immaturity which he represents and which he contrasts with the maturity of European culture. However, having internalized a sense of inferiority towards European culture, it makes him want to appear equal to his peers, but only through an ironic pretense, which attests to the importance of immaturity (treating identity as a mask) for Gombrowicz:

> Furthermore, I did whatever I could. I, a writer, to be older than the Parisians, more cunning, refined, so as not to allow them to catch me being naïve […] I pushed before them this youth prepared à la Paris, that is, old, with all the maturity I could stand […]. (*Diary* 615)

Like Cortázar, Gombrowicz is exceptionally familiar with phenomenology; an existential motif that governs all his novels. Nevertheless, while he

admits his proximity to Sartre, he insists that there are reasons that separate their thinking, "reasons of a social, worldly nature" (*Diary* 111). Throughout his career, he constructs a philosophy of Form. As Beth Holmgren explains: "For Gombrowicz, Form exists as a shaping force in all arenas of human interaction; it obtains in our involuntary acceptance and acting out of the ready self-images assigned us by another (individual or collective) human consciousness" (559). Striving to form oneself is unavoidable, and Gombrowicz's characters live up to the philosophical notion of Form he coined as they strive to define themselves against the forms imposed on them by others. Thus, they succumb to a constant alternation between form and formlessness, which is a constant effort "to refuse to commit oneself to a single determining image or ideology" (559). Form is also the imposition of maturity to the formlessness of immaturity. Gombrowicz's aim through his writing is to avoid, as much as possible, the imposition of form. 'Immature' flexibility to form is preferable to 'mature' entrenchment in a specific form. Gombrowicz even accuses existentialism and phenomenology of trying to abstractify the concreteness of experience, "this is what existentialism hates, but what it thrives on" (*Diary* 224).

The experience of exile transforms his conception of the philosophy of Form. In *Ferdyturke*, the 30-year-old protagonist, an aspiring author who is inexplicably reduced back to his childish teenage self and brought back to school, constantly tries to protect his regained immaturity against the social, collective pressures to mold himself solidly according to the dictates of maturity. However, in *Pornografia*, written in Argentina, the pattern is reversed. The Argentinean cultural environment, although very different from Poland, in a similar way confirms his conviction that there is a seemingly cultural backwardness to these countries. This provides the key to the construction of another, 'immature' (that is, more versatile) cosmopolitanism. The heightening of his sense of immaturity, through the encounter with another peripheral culture, leads him to deconstruct the solid dichotomy of individuality/formlessness and collectivity/form. The novel's two protagonists, Witold Gombrowicz's alter ego and Frederyk, do not objectify each other, neither can they communicate. On the contrary, they are inextricably

interwoven in a relationship of mutual respect and seduction. This is something that does not happen in *Hopscotch*, where Oliveria, having internalized Western culture, cannot bridge the cultural gap that separates him with his friend Traveler in his return to Argentina.

At this juncture, one could think of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of reciprocity. Many passages from *Pornografia* emphatically reflect Ponty's insistence on the importance of reciprocity and relationality. According to Ponty's position, the self is not pre-existent, but it emerges in a common world that is shared with others and through his interaction with them. This is the case in the following passage, where Gombrowicz highlights the constitutive importance of his friendship with Frederyk in the formation of his personality: "What a marvelous system of mirrors: he was reflected in me, I was reflected in him—and so, as we wove dreams from each other we came to conclusions which neither of us wanted to admit were his" (*Pornografia* 59). In his diary, Gombrowicz will further explicate how the self is being constructed when he externalizes himself to another person in dialogue and vice versa:

> I do not deny that the individual is dependent on his milieu—but for me, it is far more important, artistically far more creative, psychologically far more profound, and philosophically far more disturbing that man is also created by another person. In chance encounters. Every minute of the day. By virtue of the fact that I am always "for another," […]. (*Diary* 288)

Furthermore, the story takes place in postwar Poland, which also testifies that Gombrowicz's exile does not make him straightforwardly transnational. As Jacek Gutorow argues, throughout his career, Gombrowicz was solely interested in juxtaposing a reworked Polish identity against the cultural inauthenticity of Western culture: "In his [Gombrowicz's] view, a literary/cultural framework can emerge as distinct and 'authentic' […] only in direct opposition to other ones. This refers in particular to minor, peripheral and secondary cultures dominated and shaped by the major ones" (Florczyk and Wisniewski

26). Nonetheless, simultaneously, he transcends Polishness; his intercultural vision has an anthropological universal dimension, even if he strives to disregard the dominant European world vision. Goerge Gomori will argue:

> Though his [Gombrowicz's] antinomies appeared in a Polish context, they had an anthropological and literary relevance that made his Polishness almost accidental. Immaturity and man's struggle with Form are not specifically Polish problems, even if the Polish strain that infected Gombrowicz was particularly virulent. (*Diary* 121)

As Gombrowicz himself explicitly mentions concerning the questions he raised in *Pornografia*:

> Am I sick when I claim that there is constant secret cooperation between ages and stages of development in humanity, that there is a play of mutual captivation, enchantments, and violence, thanks to which the "adult" never is merely an "adult"? We say: man. The word means nothing to me. I would ask: A man of what age? Enchanted by what age? A man devoted to what age? Bound to what age in his humanity? These are questions that, even if they are not named in *Pornografia*, determine the nature of the experiment that happens in it, and especially the category of beauty and poetry that it is about. (*Diary* 682)

Now, after analyzing each author separately, we can highlight a fundamental difference between them, which leads to the formation of two separate intercultural visions. While both authors hesitate to dismiss their European influences totally, Gombrowicz is much more positively disposed towards the benefits of cultural immaturity than Cortázar. *Pornografia* has a baroque, playful character missing from *Hopscotch*, a novel that, in the tradition of European modernism, seems to take itself sometimes too seriously and intellectually. Be that as it may,

both novels and their authors filter their cultural influences through their exile, and end up problematizing the rigid distinction between European cultural homogenization and cultural particularism in two different ways. Cortázar by being estranged from both sides (Europe and Latin America) and Gombrowicz by proposing an alternative, 'immature' cosmopolitanism, which is the product of the reduplication of a feeling of inferiority (Poland and Argentina). Thus, their respective intercultural quests seem to confirm Cao's position that universality and cosmopolitanism are not monophonic but vary according to their context and literary utterances.

Conclusion: Two Different Intercultural Visions

This article centers on interculturality, providing a comparative reading of Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* and Witold Gombrowicz's *Pornografia*. Based on Shunqing Cao's *Variation Theory*, this article showed how the two authors' intercultural visions differ from each other.

My comparison centers on three focal points, beginning with the authors' contexts. I tried to show how the Argentinian and Polish literary traditions are closely related to the European literary and cultural tradition, because of the European philosophical and literary education and the very position of their national literatures, which have a close relationship with Western European culture. Next, I examined the two authors' exilic experience and how they engaged in it based on their own statements in their non-literary books. Finally, I performed a targeted reading of the novels based on the specific issue. I aimed to demonstrate how each author's proximity to European culture, through cultural filtering, subverts Eurocentrism, albeit in distinct ways. On the one hand, Cortázar, by immigrating to Paris, seeks his literary recognition and, with it, the consequent appreciation and upgrading of Argentine literature from residual as semi-peripheral to a Western 'high' literature (not as mirroring but as cultural hybridization). Conversely, Gombrowicz immigrates from Poland to Cortázar's country, Argentina. This migration intensifies his sense of cultural inferiority. The result, as reflected in *Pornografia*, is an immaturity that functions as

a counterexample to Western maturity, claiming another kind of universality, that, due to being immature, is not consolidated and serious but more flexible and playful.

In conclusion, it is essential to recognize that Cao's theory extends beyond the authors analyzed in this article. As interculturality varies according to the context, my reading exemplifies the diverse applications of Cao's theory. This framework allows for mapping World Literature and intercultural communication, effectively addressing concerns about the hegemony of a singular cultural model—specifically European—imposed on others.

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Biography

Antonis Sarris holds a PhD in Cultural Studies from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. He recently obtained a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowship to conduct his postdoctoral research at the University of Cyprus. His proposal entitled "Recontextualizing Utopian Poetics: The Futuristic Reenactment of the Past in Juan Rulfo, Miguel Asturias and Alejo Carpentier" concerns the possible intersections between utopian and postcolonial studies, having as a case study Latin American literature. He is interested in the intersections of literature and philosophy, political and utopian dimensions of art, and comparative intercultural communication between different kinds of literature.