World Literature and the Ethical Turn: A Desire for Community?[1]

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Abstract Tobin Siebers has famously stated that "the heart of ethics is the desire for community." The aim of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, I will discuss how world literature is responding to the "ethical turn" (Michael Eskin) in relation to the long tradition of inclusion of the Other within comparative literature. Whereas comparative literature was born twice in western Europe in the aftermath of war conflicts — the Napoleonic Wars and WWII — it is with the world literature paradigm/discipline that the idea of community has become more visible in the form of the "human family" reflected by works of world literature and by the "human family" that works of world literature address. On the other hand, I will address the issue of the "desire for uncommunity" as expressed by hermits and anchorites. I will analyze the case of Christopher McCandless's simple living and how it may be related to "heremitic literatures," that is to say, literature by uncontacted peoples. The obvious ethical question is whether such "isolated literatures" should be part of the fieldwork of the comparatist and, hence, integrated in world literature.
Key Words anthropology; community; ethics; uncontacted people; world literature

As a comparatist, the invitation to participate in this "Third International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism" has proved to be a unique opportunity to rethink the primary tenets of the discipline. But this is particularly difficult in the case of comparative literature, for there is no general consensus on what comparative literature does, except for the distance it maintains from national literary studies. And yet, despite this lack of consensus, comparatists usually express a fierce pride in the ethical aims of the discipline, which is based upon its aspirations for international understanding in the aftermath of military confrontations. As Jan M. Ziolkowski rightly notes, comparative literature emerged after the Napoleonic wars, consolidated its position as a discipline after the Second World War, and experienced its greatest

expansion in the US during the Vietnam War.

It is claimed that by researching and teaching literatures cross-culturally, comparatists aim at increasing mutual understanding by stressing common human values beyond borders. In support of this claim, the history of comparative literature exhibits striking parallels with the history of international law, to the extent that it shares some foundational texts, for instance, Immanuel Kant's *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784; Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose) and *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (1795; Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Sketch). Ziolkowski states that "the constitution of comparative literature was linked explicitly with that of the United Nations" (26). Though he does not substantiate his assertion, it is undeniable that, according to some statements on the discipline one may read in textbooks, comparative literature is figuratively conceived of as the general assembly of the United Nations. "La letteratura comparata è diventata un sapere imprevedibile e poetico," says Armando Gnisci, "che si è rivoltato contro la sua testa europea e si è trasformato in una specie di *parlamento*: dando luogo al colloquio di tutte le voci letterarie del mondo e dei loro discorsi che *insegnano* [...] a intendere le differenze, a salvarle e non solo: ad amarle; a volerne essere parte, dote, grazia, rivendicazione e lotta (se necessario)" (xviii).

The ethical aims of comparative literature appear to be self-evident, and yet, beyond these vague and idealistic statements, there is no critical reflection on the links between comparative literature and ethics. When recent developments regarding the role of ethics in literary studies[2] are taken into consideration this lack of critical reflection seems all the more poignant: In the 2004 special issue of *Poetics Today* devoted to literature and ethics, Michael Eskin described a "turn to ethics" in literary studies and, conversely, a "turn to literature" in (moral) philosophy, which originated in 1983 or thereabouts (557). For Eskin, *apud* James Phelan, the turn to ethics in literary studies was a reaction against the formalism of deconstruction. The "double turn" took place between 1983 and 2004, a period which corresponds in the history of comparative literature with a move from both the "excesses" of *Theory* — with deconstruction once again at the centre of discussions — and the limitations of the Euro-American canon to the wider world, as symbolically encapsulated in the term *word literature*. Between 2003 and 2004 three anthologies of world literature — Bedford, Longman and Norton — were published. In these anthologies, the rationale for the change from *Western literature* and *world masterpieces* to *world literature* is posited in terms of a richer corpus of literary materials, an "extraordinary range of exciting material is now in view" (Damrosch & Pike xvii). Drawing once again on Gnisci's image, one may say that the number of member voices of the general

assembly of the "United Literatures," which represents the world literary community, is higher than ever before. Hence, one should not overlook the fact that in one of the founding books of the turn to ethics — Tobin Siebers's *The Ethics of Criticism* (1988) — it is claimed that "the heart of ethics is the desire for community" (202). This leads me to pose the following question: Does the (paradigm?) shift from comparative to world literature respond to such an ethical desire?

The aim of my paper is to provide a tentative and oblique answer to this question. Tentative, for it is not possible to deal with all the issues raised by such a question within the limits of this paper; oblique, for I choose a rather different starting point. The ethics in comparative literature has been claimed for its performativity, that is to say, what the discipline aims to achieve either directly or collaterally — a better mutual understanding between human communities, and an increasing awareness of common human values. However, I instead focus on the illocutionary dimension of the utterance, which the comparatist claims as *literary*, and whether or not both the appropriation of the utterance — the fact of being charted and included in an atlas of world literature — and its illocutionary definition as *literary* is legitimate.[3] The reader may have surely noticed that from this perspective, comparative literature faces a similar conundrum to that of anthropology. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, the institutionalization of both disciplines in nineteenth-century France was mutually dependent. To illustrate my point, I will draw on an extreme example of the negation of a "desire for community," namely, the iconic figure of the "asocial human being," variously called hermit, anchorite, or misanthrope, though important nuances should be observed between these terms. As a collective, one of the translations of this iconic figure and one which I will focus on is "uncontacted peoples," a term for which the question "Uncontacted by/for whom?" is of key importance.

After briefly sketching some reflections on comparative literature and ethics from an illocutionary perspective and its methodological consequences, I will deal with testimonials of texts by "asocial" individuals, comprising the Machiguenga community which lives in the Amazon basin. The meta-textual feature — more specifically, a Western text about non-Western texts by Mario Vargas Llosa — has the obvious shortcoming of a Western mediation, but, at the same time, the clear advantage of showing us how the Other, either individual or collective, is formed under Western eyes. In my final remarks, I will establish connections between the two parts of the paper in order to question such images as "human family" and "literary friendship," which are typical of the "ethical lexicon" of comparative literature.

The Ethics of a Comparative Discipline, Which does not Compare?

While the ideological obsequiousness and jargon-oriented bent of *Theory* has been

extensively discussed and fuelled by the "Sokal Affair" (Sokal & Brickmont), one aspect the discussion does not seem to have taken into consideration is that related to the naming of disciplines. Though put in simplistic terms,[4] I think we may broadly agree that names of disciplines encapsulate a blend of, primarily or even exclusively, object of study and, secondarily, methodology. The latter case applies, for instance, when the object of study is shared by several disciplines, but their distinctiveness depends on their different methods or scopes. Within astronomy, for example, both theoretical astronomy and observational astronomy study the physical and chemical properties of objects and matter outside the Earth, but with different tools and aims.

This is not the place to trace the disciplinary history of comparative literature. It may suffice to recall the arguments of Benedetto Croce at the beginning of the twentieth century and of René Wellek in the mid-twentieth century, against the validity of comparison *qua* method and, hence, the non-existence of something called comparative literature *qua* discipline. This has led some comparatists — for lack of a "better" name — to state that comparative literature is not about literary comparisons, and more recently to sentence it to death. I guess that Alan Sokal would claim that naming a discipline that does not compare "comparative" is typically a contradiction of humanities and social sciences, and I agree.

It is my contention that, on the one hand, comparative literature does compare and, hence, it is *comparative* and, on the other hand, that comparison *is* a method, which needs to be considered from pre-disciplinary, disciplinary and trans-disciplinary perspectives. I agree, therefore, with both Guy Jucquois — who argues that a comparison is a complex research method rooted in the "exigence de principe de multiplier les angles de vision" ("Le Comparatisme" 39) — and Marcel Detienne — who reminds us that "Il n'y a rien que l'esprit humain fasse si souvent que des comparaisons" (9).

By "pre-disciplinary perspective," I mean that comparisons form part of a critical epistemology for they are an extremely common operation in the human mind. A comparison is a kind of reasoning which consists of discovering a minimal correlation of analogy or correspondence between elements of two or several systems, and observing both similarities and differences. As Adrian Marino puts it, "l'opération proprement dite consiste dans un rapport quelconque entre deux termes, en vue d'établir les points communs et les écarts: identité et/ou différence (*A* et *B* comme *C*; *A* n'est ni *B* ni *C*)" (234).

By "disciplinary perspective," I refer to the methodological shift from comparison *qua* comparison, to disciplinary fields in which this heuristic procedure prevails. As per Croce's and Wellek's argues, the disciplinary perspective implies an acknowledgement that "il n'y a pas de différence méthodologique spécifique entre la

comparaison pratiquée par le comparatisme [the literary one] et par n'importe quelle autre discipline, vu l'universalité et l'ancienneté d'un procédé que l'on retrouve dans toutes les sciences naturelles ou humaines sans exception" (Marino 233).[5] In the case of comparative literature, comparisons need to adjust to the features of the object of study, which is plurilingual by nature.

Finally, by "trans-comparative perspective" I refer to the fact that several disciplines may recur to comparison as their main research method. Of key importance is taking into consideration the relationships among these disciplines, which work by border-crossing, be these borders linguistic, national, cultural or biologic.

To my knowledge, a meta-comparison, that is to say, a comparison of comparative disciplines has not been carried out. It is my contention, after some preliminary attempts, that if such a meta-comparison were to be conducted, many problems seen as specific of comparative literature would be solved but on the other hand, some ethical issues enshrined in the comparative method — and not in some vague *a posteriori* effects — would become visible. When one compares comparative disciplines, one realizes that they all agree that their object of study is problematic. Faced with such an object and in order to explain it, a hypothesis is formulated, from which consequences will follow. These consequences are inductively examined. Consequently, the backwards transit from facts to causes is made through the kind of reasoning which Charles S. Pierce called *guessing* or *abduction*. Abduction contributes to knowledge by providing inference to the best explanation, a process which induction completes by finding confirmatory facts.[6]

Considering the comparative method as abduction means acknowledging that scientific statements are fallible, for experimental testing may refute the consequences that follow from the hypothesis. The subject's degrees of consciousness in relation to the environment result from a never-ending learning, whereby heterogeneous phenomena are progressively integrated. And it is here where ethics is enshrined. Comparisons — as acts of formal-logic constituted by the interdependence of a differential thought (the inductive process) and a totalizing view aimed at the invariable (the deductive process) — imply a form of relationship with the Other which requires what Jucquois ("Le Comparatisme" 28) calls *décentration*, meaning questioning certainties and suspending security and coherence. In contrast to those scholars who state that either comparative literature is not about comparisons or it is not clear what comparative literature compares, I argue that comparative literature compares phenomena relevant to its object of study, namely, world literature. Therefore, world literature is neither a new discipline nor a paradigm, but the ultimate object of comparative literature. Consequently, the state of crisis of comparative literature, *pace* Wellek and René Étiemble, is not the result of a methodological

weakness, but the epistemological and ontological result of, respectively, its method — comparison — and object of study — world literature. World literature is a constantly changing historical phenomenon in spatial, temporal and reader terms. In short, the ethics in comparative literature is not the result of an idealistic stance — what comparative literature might achieve in terms of mutual understanding — but the result of constantly questioning its explanations in accordance with its epistemological principles. This is what Jucquois ("La Cohérence" 235) has called *interprétation suspensive*.

As mentioned in the introduction, Tom Siebers is the author of *The Ethics of Criticism*, a book which has been considered foundational for the turn to ethics in literary studies. In his contribution to the *Bernheimer Report* in 1995, Siebers recalls the image of comparative literature as a "United Nations" and its underlying aim of resolving "conflict among the people of the world," and he rightly wonders whether "it is a reasonable [… ambition] for the discipline." Furthermore, he expresses rather mournful concerns about both the discipline, of which he has "no doubt [it] is dying," and its practitioners, who need "to decide whether they want to live or die by it" ("Sincerely Yours" 196). I completely agree with Siebers in that "perhaps the greatest task facing comparatists in the coming years will be to grasp the underlying ethical and political symbolism of comparative literature," though I would rather not speak of "symbolism" *per se*. Such a concept indicates that Siebers exclusively considers ethics in comparative literature as the *performative*, and not as the *décentration* imposed by comparison *qua* method. And this also explains why for Siebers, comparative literature can easily either die or be replaced by something else, which for him is multiculturalism. "The only difference between the dreams" of comparative literature and multiculturalism, says Siebers, "is one of standards" ("Sincerely Yours" 196). However, as far as I know, multiculturalism is not a discipline, but a set of ideologies and policies regarding cultural diversity. And in the eighteen years since Siebers's statements, no university awards degrees in multiculturalism, whereas the necrophillic attraction of comparative literature seems to be quite alive. In the next section, I will focus on ethics in comparative literature in illocutionary terms by way of a specific example.

Humboldt's Parrot

In June 1800, while exploring the course of the Orinoco River, Alexander von Humboldt found "an old parrot that nobody understands," for it spoke the language of the Atures, an extinct race "chased by the cannibalistic Caribs" (264). I take this to be a touching example of linguicide, a parrot as the last speaker of a human language. Several words of the Atures's extinct language were transferred to Humboldt by the

parrot, but none of their stories.

"The study of literature does not, in principle, exclude any time or any culture," argues Anders Pettersson. And he follows, "Nor are there any a priori restrictions that would render impossible research and expositions with a large historical and cultural span — or even world histories of literature" (1). Furthermore, Pettersson cautions against taking the concept of *literature* "at face value" (23). Both statements are in accordance with the arguments I have presented in the preceding section: First, world literature as the object of study of comparative literature, which makes of the discipline a *locus* of crisis, both ontological (What is world literature?) and epistemological (Is it possible to know world literature?). Second is the *interprétation suspensive* typical of abduction. And yet I find a lacuna in Pettersson's line of reasoning, for he advocates that it *is* possible to study literature across times and cultures, provided that one takes into consideration that "Many cultures have operated with a division of texts into literary and non-literary — or at least into categories that students of literature have become accustomed to regarding as corresponding to such a distinction" (6). *Many* cultures, but how many? Or, better said, not *all* cultures?

It is my contention that this question pinpoints the ethical in comparative literature in illocutionary terms, in contrast to the traditional and rather naïve performative perspective on ethics. To put it bluntly, the question is: What are the ethical implications of the comparatist's claim that the utterance to be analysed — and hence charted in an atlas of world literature — is *literary,* or synonymous or nearly synonymous with literature in Pettersson's words (6)? Though it is not certainly Pettersson's case, such a claim leads to quasi-universalistic statements on "literature-proper" and "not-quite-literature," as when George Steiner argues that "All societies of which we have knowledge devise and perform music. By no means all have a literature, except in the most rudimentary and vaguely expanded sense of the term" (148). From a systemic-oriented and semiotic approach the situation is rather different: In the early 1960s Russian mathematician Andrey N. Kolmogorov proved that poetry cannot be written in artificial languages, and Roman Jakobson proved the potential iconism and hence the artistic aspect of natural languages (Lotman, *Universe* 18). Upon these findings, Yuri M. Lotman ("Dynamic Model") advanced the thesis that the creative function is a universal quality of natural languages.

But the ethics in comparative literature stops neither at the performative, nor at the illocutionary in terms of the comparatist's claim of the utterance as literary; even if the concept of "literature" is both historicized and cross-culturally tested. What about a community's refusal of the use of their utterances by a comparatist? An extreme case of such a refusal is embodied by uncontacted peoples. As stated in the introduction, I will not deal directly with utterances by uncontacted peoples, but meta-

textually through Western mediation.

In Mario Vargas Llosa's 2010 *El sueño del celta* (*The Dream of the Celt*) one finds the story of British consul Roger Casement's transformation into a fighter for Irish independence after his colonial experiences in the Congo Basin and the Peruvian Amazonia. Thematically and formally, *El sueño del celta* should be placed in relation to a previous novel by Vargas Llosa, namely, 1989 *El hablador* (*The Storyteller*), which tells the story of Saúl Zuratas, a university student who abandons civilization to live with the Machiguenga, an indigenous people of the Amazon jungle. The Machiguenga are my meta-literary example of uncontacted people for exploring the ethical implications of a refusal of use of utterances. It should be borne in mind, however, that "uncontacted peoples" is a tabooistic category. It names the unsayable on the premise that it remains unsayable. Otherwise, if said, the community as such ceases to exist, for contact has taken place. And here death is not only a cultural symbol, but mainly a fact, as proved by extinction due to the lack of immunity to "common" diseases. Moreover, the two-way direction of the "un-" in "*un*contacted" should not be overlooked, as is usually the case, for the condition that a people be named *uncontacted* is that the Other be equally uncontacted. "They" are uncontacted provided that "we" — who name them as uncontacted — are also uncontacted by them. Interestingly, a taboo here is the condition for defining both the I and the Other, which pinpoints the fact that either all communities are indigenous or none is so.

After swapping his law studies for anthropology as a result of his attraction for the "natives" of the Amazonian jungle, Saúl starts to question the tenets of the latter discipline. "A Saúl le han entrado dudas sobre la investigación y el trabajo de campo. Dudas éticas" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 43).[7] The reader follows the discussions between Saúl and his friend, the narrator, an anonymous, middle-aged Peruvian writer, about how "civilization" should deal with the Amazonian native tribes. Here "civilization" is mainly embodied in academia, both local (Universidad de San Marcos) and international (the Summer Institute of Linguistics). For his professors and colleagues, Saúl becomes the representative of an ideology — "purismo amazónico" ("purism concerning the Amazon") — whereby "academic contact" with the natives is as dangerous as imperial contact.

> Contó que, hacía pocos días, había habido una discusión en el Departamento de Etnología. Saúl Zuratas desconcertó a todos proclamando que las consecuencias del trabajo de los etnólogos eran semejantes a la acción de los caucheros, madereros, reclutadores del Ejército y demás mestizos y blancos que estaban diezmando a las tribus.
>
> — Dijo que hemos retomado el trabajo donde lo dejaron los misioneros en la

> Colonia — añadió —. Que nosotros, con el cuento de la ciencia, como ellos con el de la evangelización, somos la punta de lanza de los exterminadores de indios. (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 43-44) [8]

The narrator, while progressively losing contact with Saúl to the point of believing that he and his father have migrated to Israel, becomes more and more interested in the Amazonian natives after having been invited to participate in an expedition organized by the Summer Institute of Linguistics. His interest is especially excited by one such tribe, the Machiguenga, who have been reluctant to accept contact after decimation during the "época [… de] la sangría de árboles" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 97; "period [… of] the tree-bleeding"). In fact, the Machiguenga have divided into two communities, one with "contactos con el mundo blanco y mestizo [… que] habían entrado en un proceso de aculturación," and another — the Machiguenga-Kogapakori — disseminated "en los bosques del llano, que vivían casi en total aislamiento y conservaban más o menos intacta su forma de vida tradicional" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 92).[9]

The narrator gets to know one of the Machiguenga's songs thanks to two members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics — the Schneils — who managed to make contact with individuals of the group in near-total isolation. The narrator provides the reader with a transcription of the song with interlinear translation.

Opampogyakyena shinoshinonkarintsi
Me está mirando la tristeza
Opampogyakyena shinoshinonkarintsi
me está mirando la tristeza
ogakyena kabako shinoshinonkarintsi
me está mirando la tristeza
ogakyena kabako shinoshinonkarintsi
me está mirando bien la tristeza
okisabintsatana shinoshinonkarintsi
mucho me enoja la tristeza
okisabintsatana shinoshinonkarintsi
mucho me enoja la tristeza
amakyena tampia tampia tampia
me ha traído aire, viento,
ogaratinganaa tampia tampia
me ha levantado el aire
okisabintsatana shinoshinonkarintsi

mucho me enoja la tristeza
okisabintsatana shinoshinonkarintsi
mucho me enoja la tristeza
amaanatyomba tampia tampia
me ha traído el aire, el viento
onkisabintsatenatyo shinonka
mucho me enoja la tristeza
shinoshinonkarintsi
tristeza
amakyena popyenti pogyentima pogyenti
me ha traído gusanito gusanito
tampia tampia tampia
el aire, el viento, el aire.
(Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 98-99)[10]

However, his transcription is not first-hand, but rather third-hand, for the narrator copies the Schneils' transcription, which, in its turn, is based upon one produced by a Dominican missionary, which coincides with the version the Schneils listened to. And were the reader to pay attention to the authorial voice in the Acknowledgements, she may think it is in fact fourth-hand, for Vargas Llosa thanks Father Joaquín Barriales, "collector and translator of many Machiguenga songs and myths that appear in my book" (*The Storyteller*, n.p.).

In contrast to this multi-layered mediation by academia, the reader has more direct access to the Machiguenga's utterances not in odd numbered chapters, whose narrative voice is the Europeanized narrator's, an alter ego of Vargas Llosa, but in even numbered chapters, whose narrative voice is that of the Machiguenga *hablador* — literally, 'the speaker,' rather than *storyteller* — which both the alter ego and the reader will progressively realize is Saúl Zuratas himself. Edwin Schneil is one of a Western privileged few who has attended a couple of performances by such an individual, "ese personaje raro, que no parece curandero ni sacerdote […]. Hablador" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 104).[11] When Schneil describes the physical appearance of the *hablador* to the alter ego, he realizes it is Saúl, for both of them have "un lunar morado oscuro, vino vinagre, que le cubría todo el lado derecho de la cara" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 17).[12] It is this birthmark which gives Saúl his nickname, Mascarita (Mask Face).

One might say that Saúl, as mask of a Machiguenga *hablador* — a term, by the way, which is not provided in Machiguenga, but either in Spanish or masked as "un ruido fuerte, largo, gutural y con eses" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 104)[13] — has

deceived both scholars (the Schneils, the alter ego of Vargas Llosa) and readers, for he is not a *real* Machiguenga "x," where "x" stands for the Machiguenga's term for *hablador*. And yet, were he not a *real* Machiguenga "x," how is it that he was accepted by the Machiguenga? Once again, the unsayable, for if the *hablador* were pronounced in Machiguenga, the taboo would be violated, and the *hablador* himself would fade to leave as his only trace a Humboldtian parrot which, this time, would speak the extinct language of the Other, which happens to be the traditional Western I. "[U]n lorito hablador de nombre [Gregorio] y apellidos [Samsa] kafkianos que repetía todo el tiempo el apodo de Saúl: '¡Mascarita! ¡Mascarita!'" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 19).[14] The otherness of the Other, therefore, is not so different from the otherness of the I, as embodied in Gregor-Tasurinchi. Either in the Western parlance (Gregorio) or in the Machiguenga parlance (Tasurinchi), the term voices the monstrosity of the Other (the verminous bug, the Machiguenga), which is the monstrosity of the Self (the traveling salesman, the wandering Jew).[15]

In their aim of avoiding contact with Westerners, the Machiguenga-Kogapakori lead a nomadic life in small communities which, on the one hand, separates them and, on the other hand, takes them further and further into the remotest parts of the jungle. The role of the *hablador* is, therefore, most important, for he reminds the small Kogapakori communities that they belong to a bigger community (the Machiguenga); he provides them with news, both recent and old, and recites stories to them. For the Europeanized narrator, the *hablador* may be compared to "trovadores y juglares medievales" (Vargas Llosa, El hablador 107).[16]

I find this comparison revealing, for — consciously or unconsciously — the Europeanized narrator denies the Machiguenga world coeval with the Western world. And yet they are side by side. For Saúl Zuratas, the Machiguenga's wish to remain uncontacted should be respected. "Nuestra cultura es demasiado fuerte, demasiado agresiva. Lo que toca, lo devora" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 113).[17] Before becoming a Machiguenga *hablador*, Saúl had bitterly criticized linguists for being mainly responsible for acculturation.

> Los lingüistas eran algo muy diferente. Tenían, detrás de ellos, un poder económico y una maquinaria eficientísima que les permitiría, tal vez, implantar su progreso, su religión, sus valores, su cultura. ¡Aprender las lenguas aborígenes, vaya estafa! ¿Para qué? ¿Para hacer de los indios amazónicos buenos occidentales, buenos hombres modernos, buenos capitalistas, buenos cristianos reformados? Ni siquiera eso. Sólo para borrar del mapa sus culturas, sus dioses, sus instituciones y adulterarles hasta sus sueños. (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 111)[18]

The similarities between (comparative) linguistics and comparative literature are obvious. The recent re-emergence of the concept of world literature has been explained on the grounds of overcoming Eurocentrism — as materialized in "masterworks by European writers from Homer onward, together with a few favoured North American writers" — and reaching "Many new worlds — and newly visible *older* worlds of classical traditions around the globe" (Damrosch & Pike xxvii). But is the *hablador* not right when a comparative inclusion of Machiguenga utterances in world literature results in a statement that comparative literature "has come to signify […] to set classics too long prepotent, too long dusty aside, often in the boisterous shadow of, the Afro-American, the Chicano, the *Amazonian* traditions" (Steiner, "What Is" 209-10; emphasis added)? It is indeed a mapping that wipes *their* dreams off the map.

What are the alternatives? One might say that what Saúl has achieved is not so different from what linguists achieve. As with linguists, Saúl has learnt *their* language and *their* culture. However, in contrast to linguists, Saúl's is not a knowledge exclusively aimed at the society which seeks contact, but mainly at the society which seeks *un*contact. This is in spite of his being "extraordinario injerto en la tribu," "él era ya uno de ellos" (Vargas LLosa, *El hablador* 205).[19] And this is due to the fact that contact was not imposed, for it is the *un*contacted people who decide to host Saúl and metamorphose him into an *hablador*: "'Ahí llega el hablador. Vamos a oírlo'. Yo escuché. Me quedé muy sorprendido. '¿Hablan de mí?', les pregunté. Todos movieron la cabeza 'ehé, ehé, de ti hablamos', asintiendo. Yo era, pues, el hablador. Me quedé lleno de asombro. Así me quedé" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 232).[20] As for comparative literature, if Western comparatists want to chart world literature, the questions are: Do Others, for example the Humboldtian Atures/*Autres*, want to be charted? Do Others want to host us? What benefits do Others gain? Are we really open to be metamorphosed by the Other?

In another foundational book for the turn to ethics in literary studies, Wayne C. Booth claims that "Our subject […] is the ethical value of stories we tell each other as 'imitations of life'" (15), and details nine author's responsibilities and five reader's responsibilities to achieve *friendship*, a metaphor for people meeting as they share stories. But what can be said of the respective responsibilities of the literary scholar, and more specifically, the comparatist? In this paper, I have tried to reflect not on the ethical performance of comparative literature, about which much has been written, but on the ethics in the illocutionary, meaning the act of appropriation of utterances and its definition *qua* literature. For me, the greatest task facing comparatists in the coming years will be reading texts on the assumption that they are "authored," that they are,

as Derek Attridge argues, "the creative work, however mediated, of at least one mind. […] a full response to the otherness of the text includes an awareness of, a respect for, and in certain sense […] a taking of responsibility for, the creativity of its author" (25). This is the kind of response Saúl Zuratas embodies. His lesson is that one may only become an *hablador* after having been accepted as *escuchador* (listener), which is tantamount to an infatuated receiver. "Me quedaba maravillado de oírlos. Recordaba todo lo que decían. De este mundo y de los otros" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 231).[21] When one is willing to listen, one may realize that Others have better concepts and better definitions than we have. "Ésa es la sabiduría, parece. ¿Cierto lorito?" (Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* 145).[22]

Notes

1. This paper forms part of the research project "Europe, in Comparison: EU, Identity and the Idea of European Literature," funded by the Spanish Government (FFI2010-16165). It is also related to the activities of the Jean Monnet Chair for "The Culture of European Integration".

2. Nie Zhenzhao. "Towards an Ethical Literary Criticism." Unpublished Paper.

3. This is my contribution to Peter Hitchcock's argument that "The impasse of 'world' does not block the possibility of ethical responsibility in the practice of properly globalized literary studies" (371-72).

4. Pace Immanuel Wallerstein's argument that the "naming of disciplines [...] reflected very much the triumph of liberal ideology" (19) during the nineteenth century, when comparative literature emerged as a distinct field of inquiry in French universities.

5. A line of reasoning such as that advocated by Wellek would find the result that no comparative discipline may exist. And yet this is not the case.

6. "el análisis comparado distingue básicamente entre las unidades descriptivas y las aproximaciones correlativas. Comparar significa, en ese sentido, describir y poner en relación (compartir). Ambas operaciones son analógicas y pueden adscribirse a una pluralidad de métodos y de disciplinas, que implican un enfoque no deductivo, sino abductivo del comparatismo, que consistiría en formular hipótesis generalizadoras basadas en la analogía y en reconstruir a posteriori la imagen total o parcial (gradual en tanto que comparatista) del objeto mediante un proceso de generalizaciones" (García Gabaldón 156).

7. "Saúl's starting to have doubts about research and fieldwork. Ethical doubts" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 20).

8. "He then recounted how, a few days before, there had been a meeting in the Department of Ethnology, at which Saúl Zuratas had flabbergasted everyone, proclaiming that the consequences of the ethnologists' work were similar to those of the activities of the rubber tappers, the timber cutters, the army recruiters, and other mestizos and whites who were decimating the tribes. 'He maintained

that we've taken up where the colonial missionaries left off. That we, in the name of science, like them in the name of evangelization, are the spearhead of the effort to wipe out the Indians'" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 20)

9. "in contact with the white and mestizo world and had begun the process of acculturation" / "through the forests of the plain, living in near-total isolation and preserving their traditional way of life more or less unchanged" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 51).

10. "Opampogyakyena shinoshinonkarintsi / Sadness is looking at me / Opampogyakyena shinoshinonkarintsi / sadness is looking at me / ogakyena kabako shinoshinonkarintsi / sadness is looking hard at me / ogakyena kabako shinoshinonkarintsi / sadness is looking hard at me / okisabintsatana shinoshinonkarintsi / sadness troubles me very much / okisabintsatana shinoshinonkarintsi / sadness troubles me very much / amakyena tampia tampia tampia / air, wind has brought to me / ogaratinganaa tampia tampia / air has borne me away / okisabintsatana shinoshinonkarintsi / sadness troubles me very much / okisabintsatana shinoshinonkarintsi / sadness troubles me very much / amaanatyomba tampia tampia / air, wind has brought to me / onkisabintsatenatyo shinonka / sadness troubles me very much / shinoshinonkarintsi / sadness / amakyena popyenti pogyentima pogyenti / the little worm, the little worm has brought me / tampia tampia tampia / air, wind, air" (Vargas Llosa, The Storyteller 55).

11. "that curious personage who doesn't seem to be either a medicine man or a priest […]. Hablador: a speaker" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 58).

12. "a dark birthmark, the color of wine dregs, that covered the entire right side of his face" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 4).

13. "a long, loud guttural sound full of s's" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 58).

14. "[T]here was a talking parrot with Kafkaesque name and surname who endlessly repeated Saúl's nickname: 'Mascarita! Mascarita!" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 5).

15. Saúl Zuratas's father — Don Salomón — converted to Judaism upon moving to Lima. The connection between the Machiguenga nomadism and the Jewish diaspora is made explicit by the hablador: "El pueblo que anda es ahora el mío. Antes, yo andaba con otro pueblo y creía que era el mío. […] Ese otro pueblo se quedó allá, atrás. Tenía su historia también" (Vargas Llosa, El hablador 236). / "The people who walk are my people now. Before, I walked with another people and I believed it was mine. […] That other people stayed behind. It, too, had its story" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 141).

16. "the jongleurs and troubadours of the Middle Ages" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 60).

17. "Our culture is too strong, too aggressive. It devours everything it touches" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 64).

18. "The linguists were a different matter altogether. They were backed by economic power and an extremely efficient organization which might well enable them to implant their progress, their religion, their values, their culture. Learn the aboriginal languages! What a swindle! What for? To make the Amazonian Indians into good Westerners, good modern men, good capitalists, good

Christians of the Reformed Church? Not even that. Just to wipe their culture, their gods, their institutions off the map and corrupt even their dreams" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 62).

19. "this strange graft onto the tribe" / "in their eyes he was one of them" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 121).

20. "'Here comes the storyteller. Let's go listen to him.' It surprised me a lot. 'Are you talking about me?' I asked. They all nodded their heads. 'Ehé, ehé, it's you we're talking about.' So there I was — the storyteller. I was thunderstruck. There I was" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 138).

21. "I marveled at what they said. I remembered everything. About this world and the others" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 137).

22. "That's wisdom, it seems. Right, little parrot?" (Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* 84).

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