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## Unspeakable Images: On the Interplay between Verbal and Iconic Narration in Benedetti's "Cinco años de vida"

**ABSTRACT:** This article deals with the relationship between verbal narrative and images (iconic narrative) in the illustrated edition of a short story by Mario Benedetti, "Cinco años de vida," taken from *Historias de París*. It forms a companion piece to an article I published in 2013 on the relationship between (verbal) narration and fiction in this short story, particularly its ending. The theoretical framework of the present article is that of transmedial narratology. From transmedial narratology, I retain five major propositions which are presented in the first section. There is one proposition, however, which I cannot accept. It concerns the necessary presence of a fictional narrator in every fictional verbal narrative. In my 2013 article, I tried to show that the analysis of a fictional third person narrative like "Cinco años de vida" could completely dispense with the concept of a fictional narrator. What I would like to show here is that this approach does not contradict the other propositions of transmedial narratology, nor an analysis based on these propositions. My position is that there are fictional narratives with and without a fictional narrator, but this opposition does not correspond to an opposition between media, namely between (verbal) language and other media. The two forms of fictional narrative coexist in some media, but not in all. The demonstration also rests on the interview I had with the painter Antonio Seguí in his workshop in Arcueil, near Paris, on June 29, 2015.

**KEYWORDS:** *verbal narration, iconic narration, transmedial narratology, fictional narrator, Mario Benedetti, Antonio Seguí*

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### Preliminary Remarks

This article deals with the relationship between verbal and iconic narrative in the illustrated edition of a short story by Mario Benedetti, “Cinco años de vida” (“Five Years of Life”).<sup>1</sup> It forms a companion piece to an article I published in 2013 on the relationship between (verbal) narration and fiction in this short story, particularly its ending (“Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in Benedetti’s ‘Five Years of Life’”). The theoretical framework in which the present article is set is transmedial narratology.<sup>2</sup> This theory is based on the existence of narratives in various media, with the aim of studying the influence of the medium in which the narrative is transmitted on the narrative practice itself. It is concerned in particular with the possibilities and constraints of (verbal) language in relation to still or moving images, music or digital media.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I will be looking at the interaction between verbal print narrative and still images depicting characters at particular moments in that narrative.

I am using the following five propositions from transmedial narratology:

- (1) The language-based, or rather, speech-act based approach to narrative, which defines narrative as an act of narration addressed by a narrator to a narratee, cannot account for visual or musical forms of narrative, and also mistakenly excludes verbal texts that are considered to have no narrator from the “narrative” category, namely dramatic texts.<sup>4</sup>
- (2) Theoretical concepts can be either medium-specific or applicable to several media.<sup>5</sup> Among the narratological concepts that can be applied to several media are: the distinction between story and discourse (in any case, according to one meaning of discourse, referring to the presentation of events, especially from the perspective of time), the concepts of character, event, fictional world or *storyworld*.<sup>6</sup>
- (3) Unlike classical narratology, which rests on a language-based, or rather, speech-act based definition of narrative, transmedial narratology rests on a definition of narrative in terms of a cognitive construction: “If the transmedial identity of narrative lies on the side of the signified [i.e. story], this means that narrative is a certain type of mental image, or cognitive template which can be isolated from the stimuli that trigger its construction” (Ryan, “On the Theoretical Foundations” 4). According to Marie-Laure Ryan, the cognitive template constitutive of narrative is defined by the following features:

- narrative must be about a world populated with individuated agents and objects (spatial dimension);
- this world must be located in time and undergo significant transformations; these transformations must be caused by non-habitual events (temporal dimension);
- some of the participants in the events must be intelligent agents, having a mental life and reacting emotionally to the states of the world; some of the



- events must be actions performed by these agents, whose goals and plans must be clearly identifiable (mental dimension);
- the events must be part of a unified causal chain, leading to a closure; the occurrence of some of the events must be asserted as fact in the story-world; the story must communicate something meaningful to the recipient (formal and pragmatic dimensions).<sup>7</sup>

Note the absence of the narrator. This is not an oversight but a deliberate exclusion, found in other narratologists or theorists of intermediality.<sup>8</sup>

- (4) Out of all the media, (verbal) language is the best suited to narrative. Proof of this is that every narrative can be summarized in language, but not every narrative can be retold through pictures, for example.
- (5) The challenge faced by transmedial narratology is that of reconciling the superiority of language with the recognition of the original contributions supplied by other media.<sup>9</sup> Ryan presents an overview of what language, (still) images, and music can do and cannot do (or can do only with difficulty, or can do to make up for certain limitations), in the field of narrative transmission, in a sort of table.<sup>10</sup>

There is one proposition of transmedial narratology, however, which I cannot accept. It can be expressed as a sub-proposition of (1):

- (6) The language-based, or rather, speech act-based approach, which defines narrative as an act of narration addressed by a narrator to a narratee, is able to account for all verbal narratives apart from dramatic texts.<sup>11</sup>

This proposition varies according to the type of narrative in question: when the narrative is a fictional narrative, the act of the real narrator (the author) is duplicated by that of a fictional narrator, situated in the same fictional world as the characters. It is he or she who is supposed to satisfy the felicity conditions for the speech acts corresponding to the sentences of the text.<sup>12</sup>

This proposition is false and contrary to the theory it is based on: John Searle's theory of fictional discourse.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, it can be considered as unnecessary from the perspective of the cognitive definition of narrative given above.

In my 2013 article, I tried to show that the analysis of a third-person fictional narrative such as "Cinco años de vida" could completely dispense with the concept of the fictional narrator. Modern, third-person fictional narrative that the dominant language-based, or speech-act based approach, would attribute to a fictional narrator can be better explained as a structured collection of information, some of which has no origin assignable in the fictional world (these might be termed *narrative*, or *narrative-zero*, or again *objective* sentences or contexts, as opposed to *subjective* ones), while others stem from one or more subjects of consciousness who belong to the fictional world (and might be termed *subjective* sentences or contexts). I will come back to the characteristics of these types of sentences at the end of the present arti-

cle. What I would like to show is that my approach does not contradict the five other propositions of transmedial narratology, nor an analysis based on those propositions. Moreover, I will go further and argue that the reasons why we can dispense with the fictional narrator for the verbal narrative are similar to the reasons why we can dispense with such a narrator for the iconic narrative. More generally, my position is that there are fictional narratives with and without a fictional narrator, but this opposition does not correspond to an opposition between media, namely between (verbal) language and other media. The two forms of fictional narrative coexist in some media, but not in all.<sup>14</sup>

The subject of this article is a type of narrative that could be called “plurimedial” or more precisely “bimedial,” since two media participate in the structure and signification of the narrative. (Note however that “Cinco años de vida” does not fit the standard description of graphic narrative where the visual and verbal are interacting on every page. Instead there are only six images, appearing intermittently.) The dependent status of the images in relation to verbal narrative should be highlighted. It is typical of what we normally call illustrations; and it is acknowledged and even stressed by the visual artist, Antonio Seguí.<sup>15</sup> We can also refer to what Ryan has written about the *illustrative* or *ancillary* narrative mode (as opposed to the *autonomous mode*): “In the illustrative mode, the text retells and completes a story, relying on the receiver’s previous knowledge of the plot. The illustrative mode is typical of pictorial narratives, for instance of medieval paintings of Biblical scenes” (“Introduction” 14 and “On the Theoretical Foundations” 12).<sup>16</sup>

The story told in “Cinco años de vida” takes place in Paris in the late 1960s. The protagonists are Raúl Morales and Mirta Cisneros. He is Uruguayan and she is Argentinian. He is a writer (of short stories) and she paints, or rather did paint before she arrived in Paris. They meet one night in the Bonne Nouvelle metro station after the exit doors have been shut. They talk, telling each other their life stories and unfulfilled dreams. At a quarter to five, Raúl says to Mirta:

“¿Sabés una cosa? Daría cinco años de vida porque todo empezara aquí. Quiero decir: que yo estuviera divorciado y mi mujer hubiera aceptado el hecho y no se hubiera matado, y que yo tuviera un buen trabajo en París, y que al abrirse las puertas saliéramos de aquí como lo que ya somos: una pareja.” (“Cinco años de vida” 30)

“You know something? I’d give five years of my life if I could start all over, right here and now. I mean, if I were divorced from my wife, and she hadn’t killed herself; and I had a good job in Paris; and when they opened the station again, we could walk out of here as what we really are: a couple.” (“Five Years of Life” 103)

Mirta replies, “Yo también daría cinco años” (“I’d give five years, too”) and adds “No importa, ya nos arreglaremos” (“Don’t worry, we’ll manage somehow,” *ibid.*). At five



o'clock, the doors open, Raúl and Mirta leave the metro, and the events that follow show that the desires expressed by Raúl in the form of a promise to make a great sacrifice have become reality. The ending of the story nevertheless contains a surprise, which I shall discuss later.

It is, therefore, a non-realistic or "unnatural" narrative.<sup>17</sup> It presents two violations of the natural order, which is to say of the established order in the real referential world: firstly, the immediate fulfillment of all of Raúl's wishes (or the wish to be transported into a future corresponding to his desires) and secondly, the fact that Raúl gives up, or sacrifices, five years of his life. When he leaves the metro station, Raúl is divorced, his wife has not killed herself, he has found a sufficiently steady and well-paying job that enables him to live in a smart apartment building, and he has been married to Mirta for several years: all of this is presented as real and objective in the fictional world. At the same time, Raúl has sacrificed five years of his life, which means that five years of his life are missing, leaving a gap. The reader must accept this, too, as real and objective within the fictional world.

The illustrations retell and complete the story, relying on the reader's knowledge of the plot as it unfolds. As I noted above, there are six of them, one of which is a spread.<sup>18</sup> Their distribution and placement on the page were decided by the publisher. The first image (Figure 1), which illustrates—according to Seguí—a passage from the scene in the metro station, is not in chronological order. If it were, it would have been placed after the fifth image, which illustrates the moment of encounter in the metro station. The other images, however, follow the chronology of the story.

The illustrations place a strong emphasis on Raúl and Mirta as a couple: three out of the six images show both protagonists; the fourth can be interpreted as a representation of Mirta seen through the eyes of Raúl. In this respect as well, Seguí's illustrations fit with Benedetti's text, in which the majority of events are represented through the thoughts and perceptions of Raúl, who can be considered as the only "subjective character" of the narrative.<sup>19</sup> The leap of five years forward in time that the characters experience at the end of the short story is clearly indicated in the last image.

## Another Unspeakable Narrative

### A PLAYFUL RELATIONSHIP TO THE IDEA OF NARRATIVE

What is unstated but implicit in Ryan's definition of narrative is that the agents who populate the storyworld, perform actions, have identifiable goals and plans, and so on, must stay the same from one end of the narrative to the other. The permanence of the characters contrasts with the variability of the events, which by definition are changeable, succeeding and replacing each other. In verbal narrative, the permanence of the characters is indicated by the recurrence of proper names and other expressions of reference and co-reference (pronouns, definite expressions, demonstratives and possessives, which constitute the anaphoric system). This can be seen for example in: "Hacia bastante más frío que cuatro horas antes, así que [Raúl] levantó el cuello del



Figure 1. Antonio Seguí, "Cinco años de vida." Image 1. Barcelona: Libros del Zorro Rojo, 2007. 16.

impermeable" ("Cinco años de vida" 20) ("It was a lot colder than four hours ago, so he [Raúl] pulled up the collar of his raincoat" "Five Years of Life" 96).<sup>20</sup>

A feature of Seguí's illustrations is, on the contrary, the rupture of the anaphoric chains or their visual correlate (which could be called the "visual anaphoric system"). Thus the raincoat that the male character is wearing in the third image (Figure 2) does not appear on him, or Mirta, or in the background in the fifth image (Figure 3). There is more, however: in the case of the male character, he does not wear either the same jacket, or the same trousers, or the same shoes in the first, third and fifth images. He wears or does not wear a hat, and the hat is not the same in the first and fifth images. His hair is not the same color, either. The same applies to the female character in the first, fourth and fifth images.<sup>21</sup>

The variations in hair color and items of clothing in particular could lead us to think that there are as many different referents as wearers of different clothes and hair colors, which is obviously contradicted by the text of the verbal narrative. When questioned on this point, Seguí stressed his "painter's freedom" (Interview). I also see this





Figure 2. Antonio Seguí, "Cinco años de vida." Image 3. Barcelona: Libros del Zorro Rojo, 2007. 21.





Figure 3. Antonio Seguí, “Cinco años de vida.” Image 5. Barcelona: Libros del Zorro Rojo, 2007. 29.

as a form of play (Seguí playing with the expectations of the receiver of the narrative) and a mark of his humor. Here is another example of this humor: if we interpret the fourth image as Mirta seen through the eyes of Raúl, we are led to place the subject of this perspective in an impossible location in the storyworld, namely on the railway tracks of the metro (Figure 5).<sup>22</sup>

Considering now not narrativity but *tellability*, which is implied in one of the prototypical traits of narrative according to Ryan (“this world must undergo not fully predictable changes of state that are caused by non-habitual physical events . . .” “On the Theoretical Foundations” 4),<sup>23</sup> we can note that Seguí represents pauses and moments of stasis rather than non-habitual events—except in the case of the fourth image (Figure 5).<sup>24</sup> When questioned on the criteria that governed the choice of representing such an event, Seguí replied: “It’s intuitive” (Interview). This might seem a disappointing response. I think however that this idea of intuition can be understood in terms of a deep understanding of the possibilities and constraints of the medium.





Figure 4. Antonio Seguí, "Cinco años de vida." Image 2. Barcelona: Libros del Zorro Rojo, 2007. 18–19.

#### THE NARRATIVE POSSIBILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS OF THE MEDIUM

(Verbal) language is a temporal medium; image, a spatial medium (even if a sequence of images is not treated in the same way as an isolated image: it precisely allows the spatial relationships of the images to be transformed into implicit temporal relationships). It is on the basis of a similar observation that Ryan draws up a list of narrative possibilities and impossibilities for language and images that I will now turn to.

Language can easily "represent temporality, change, causality, thought, and dialogue; make determinate propositions by referring to specific objects and properties; represent the difference between actuality and virtuality or counterfactualty; evaluate what it narrates and pass judgments on characters." It can only with difficulty "represent spatial relations and induce the reader to create a precise cognitive map of the storyworld." It cannot "[s]how what characters or setting look like; display beauty" (*Avatars of Story* 19; typography and punctuation modified), which are all things that images can easily do.

Seguí's illustrations exploit the possibility of images to "immerse spectators in space" (*ibid.*): the interior space of the apartment of Raúl's Bolivian friends in the second image (Figure 4), the exterior space of the street in the third image (Figure 2); but also the elevated space of the second image (see the perspectival drawing of the glass roof at the top of the image, which is an addition in relation to the text of the verbal





Figure 5. Antonio Seguí, "Cinco años de vida." Image 4. Barcelona: Libros del Zorro Rojo, 2007. 24.

narrative), the underground space of the metro station in the fourth and fifth image (Figures 5 and 3). We can also note the role of colors: mostly warm in the second image, cold in the third and fourth. The final image (Figure 6) is distinct from the previous ones in so far as it does not contain any representation of space. The characters are set against a flat grey background. The image is smaller than the previous ones, it does not occupy the full width of the page.<sup>25</sup> The effect seems to be rather a reversing movement of “emersion” out of the fictional world. It coincides with the effect created by the placement of the image on the right-hand page, opposite the last page of the verbal narrative.

Despite all of this, I would not say that Seguí’s illustrations allow us to “map a storyworld” (Ryan, *Avatars of Story* 19), unless we understand “map” in a very broad sense. The text of the verbal narrative is much more detailed and specific in this respect and the illustrations are too few and too concerned with things other than mapping the world. Raúl’s journey in the metro, from station Corentin Celton to Bonne Nouvelle, via Saint-Lazare, as well as the path out of the metro station Bonne Nouvelle to 28 Rue de l’Échiquier, can be plotted on a relatively detailed cognitive map, whose graphic transposition would be interesting to compare to a map of the metro and a map of the 10<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement in Paris.

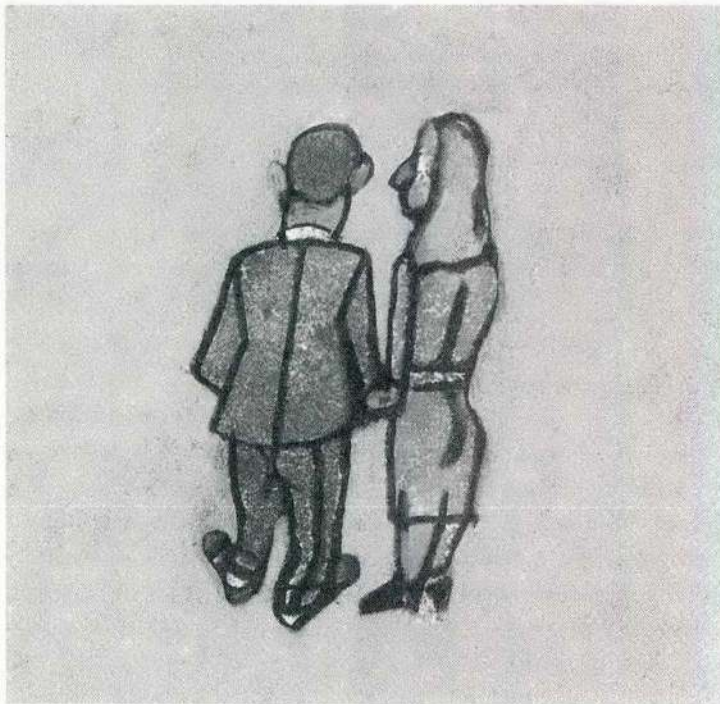


Figure 6. Antonio Seguí, “Cinco años de vida.” Image 6. Barcelona: Libros del Zorro Rojo, 2007. 33.



It also does not seem to me that Ryan's propositions about the possibilities that images have to "[r]epresent [the] visual appearance of characters and setting" or "[r]epresent beauty" (*ibid.*) fit particularly well with Seguí's illustrations. The reader is not led to replace his or her mental representation of Raúl and Mirta with the visual representation of the characters in Seguí's illustrations (especially since these characters have different features in each image). He or she is rather encouraged to appreciate, in a singular, distanced way, several possibilities for the visual representation of the characters, which are very marked by Seguí's style. This style tends towards a distortion or even a caricature of the human figure, rather than the representation of beauty. Under the same heading, we can point out the disturbances of relationships of scale between the character(s) and setting in the third and fourth image, or the fact that elements in the setting (poster, seat) are represented from two different angles in the first image.

From the point of view of the visual appearance of characters, we should also mention that Seguí makes the character of Raúl in particular his own, giving him the typical features of the characters in his paintings: suit, hat, two-tone shoes. Raúl can thus be seen as a representative of Seguí's usual characters, who are mostly male,<sup>26</sup> always the same and always different. Seguí describes his approach as "a kind of anti-machismo" (Interview). Asked whether women are valorized in the short story and illustrations, he responded with a definite "Yes, I think so" (*ibid.*).

I will pass over the possibility that images can "[s]uggest [the] immediate past and future through [the] 'pregnant moment' technique" (Ryan, *Avatars of Story* 19; the term is borrowed from Lessing), because Seguí does not know or use this technique, at least not consciously. Some of his illustrations, on the other hand, exemplify the ability of images to "[r]epresent [the] emotions of characters": whether, as Ryan writes, "through facial expression" (*ibid.*) or by other means, body language in particular.<sup>27</sup> The fourth image, for example (see Figure 5), represents Mirta's panic through the movement of her feet, the raised right hand, the folds of her skirt, and the contrast between the cool colors of the setting and the yellow of the upper part of the character's clothing. Body language is also used in the last image (see Figure 6), with particular attention paid to the heads, which seem to look in different directions, and the arrangement of the feet.

Seguí's illustrations allow us to consider the limitations of images in relation to (verbal) language from a particular angle. Images cannot "make explicit propositions (as Sol Worth observed, 'Pictures can't say ain't')" (Ryan, *Avatars of Story* 19). In other words, there are no iconic means for expressing the fact that a character or an object, or a situation, is not something, or is not something other than what it is. Images can only show what is. (Worth deduces from this that they cannot make propositions, which is to say statements capable of being true or false). Seguí, for example, could have wanted to represent the moment Raúl and Mirta, coming out of the metro, came across "otra muchacha, de pantalones negros y buzo verde, [quién] les hacía señas para que la esperaran" ("Cinco años de vida" 31), (a girl in black pants and a green sweater [who] was waving at them from across the street,) ("Five Years of Life" 103). But he could not have represented the fact that this girl is neither a friend of Mirta's nor an acquaintance of Raúl (indicated in the verbal narrative by the two parallel



sentences: "Raúl pensó que sería una amiga de Mirta. Mirta pensó que sería una conocida de Raúl," [Raúl thought it might be a friend of Mirta's. Mirta thought it might be an acquaintance of Raúl's,] *ibid.*). At best, he could have represented different expressions on the faces of Raúl and Mirta on the one hand, and on the girl's face on the other hand, but not in a way that would be completely unambiguous.

Ryan also refers to: the impossibility of images to represent flow of time, thought, interiority, dialogue (meaning: they can represent characters talking to each other, but not the content of the dialogue in question); the fact that they may suggest, but not state explicitly, the existence of causal relations between events; the fact that they cannot express possibility, conditionality, or counterfactuality; the fact that they cannot represent absent objects; the fact that they cannot make evaluations and judgments.<sup>28</sup> We can see that in the fifth image (Figure 3), Mirta is represented in the act of speaking (her very red mouth is wide open). In the first image, it seems more to be Raúl who is expressing himself (because of his open mouth and the orientation of his upperbody toward Mirta), whereas Mirta's face and thus her eyes look outside of the frame. In contrast with the preceding images, the sixth and last image (see Figure 6), which represents the characters from behind and in three-quarter view, respectively, may signify the absence of dialogue or communication between the couple. This analysis does not contradict Ryan's assertions but rather reinforces them—except perhaps the idea of it being totally impossible for images to represent absent objects or situations. Concerning the possibility of images to suggest but not state explicitly the existence of causal relations between events, we can go back to the example of the fourth image, illuminated by Seguí's verbal commentary.<sup>29</sup>

A comparison between the text of the verbal narrative and Seguí's illustrations allows us to add certain specifications proper to the narrative in question: for example, the fact that the images cannot represent the difference between a natural and an unnatural passing of time (this is what happens in the world of the verbal narrative: Raúl gives, which is to say sacrifices, five years of his life, which purely and simply disappear from his life).

I'd like to dwell for a moment on the ending of the verbal narrative. It is based on the characters' discovery, Raúl in particular, the only subjective character in the narrative, that they have been transported to another world, which matches the world of Raúl's wishes (at least to a certain description of that world, the one contained in the passage: "Daría cinco años de vida," etc., [I'd give five years of my life], etc.). The images cannot represent this fact, nor the fact that the new world and the world the characters have just left are both identical and different. As a result in the sixth and last image, Seguí seems to have chosen to place the characters in a no-world, where it is as if space and time are suspended—this is one of the possible meanings of the flat background of this image (see Figure 6). The surprise contained in the final sentences cannot be represented either:

No se trataba de que ya no quisiera a esa delgada, friolenta, casi indefensa mujer que lo miraba desde el sillón de esterilla, pero para él estaba claro que en sus actuales sentimientos hacia Mirta quedaba muy poco del ingenuo, repentino, prodigioso, invasor enamoramiento de cinco años atrás, cuando la



había conocido en cierta noche increíble, cada vez más lejana, cada vez más borrosa, en que, por una trampa del azar, quedaron encerrados en la estación Bonne Nouvelle. (“Cinco años de vida” 32)

It wasn't that he didn't love the slender, thin-blooded, almost helpless woman looking up at him from the wicker chair. But it was clear now that little remained of the naive, prodigious, explosion of feelings from that incredible night five years ago—now just a fading memory—when he first met Mirta, after fate played a trick on them and locked them up together in the Bonne Nouvelle station. (“Five Years of Life” 104–5)

Surprise is created by the brutal revelation of a situational irony: the five years that Raúl sacrificed when he said, “Daría cinco años de vida porque todo empezara aquí,” [I'd give five years of my life if I could start all over, right here and now], are the five years that separate him, at the moment of the act of consciousness represented in the last sentences, from the moment he met Mirta; in other words, they were the first five years of his life with Mirta. The disappearance of those five years implies as a corollary a marriage that Raúl has missed, retaining no other happy memory beyond the distant meeting in the metro station. The last sentence also reveals a new side to Raúl's personality: his inability to love or stay in love with a woman for more than five years. Seguí's illustration here has to settle for illustrating the text on a background that I would call tonal—this is one of the possible meanings of the choice of the color grey.

According to Ryan, images can make up for their narrative limitations through certain strategies. She offers a no doubt non-exhaustive list of these strategies: the use of intertextual or intermedial references in titles; the representation of objects with verbal inscriptions in the images themselves; the use of conventional attributes to refer to certain characters and their properties; the use of multiple frames or the division of pictures into distinct scenes; the use of several images to suggest temporality, change, or causal relations between events; the use of graphic conventions to suggest thoughts or other modes of virtuality or counterfactuality.<sup>30</sup> Seguí does not use any of these strategies in the illustrations of “Cinco años de vida” (which is not to say he does not know them or use them elsewhere; some of them can in fact be found in his paintings and series of paintings).<sup>31</sup>

I had thought that the sixth and final image could be interpreted as representing a thought or dream—in this case, a thought or dream of Raúl's. If this were so, the narrative would be “naturalized,” its unnatural elements being explained in an entirely natural fashion (like the effect of the statement “It was all a dream”), which is obviously a long way from the text of the verbal narrative. Seguí strenuously rejects this interpretation. It is true that, if he had wanted to represent a dream, he could have used the same method as in his painting *Los Sueños de Aniseto*. In this painting, which is divided into two parts, upper and lower, the figure's hat is topped with a bubble representing a town where male figures, all more or less sinister-looking, move around in all directions. The figure of Aniseto himself stands out against a flat ochre-yellow background which occupies the lower part of the painting. According to Seguí, “Yes, it would have been clearer like that” (Interview).

#### TOWARDS A CRITICAL USE OF INTERMEDIAL COMPARISON

In Ryan's presentation of the respective possibilities and impossibilities of (verbal) language and images, it seems clear that the agent using language and the agent using images occupy the same plane—he or she could be called “the author” or “the creator” in both cases. When Ryan writes that “[l]anguage . . . [c]an easily . . . represent temporality, change, causality,” and so on, the sentence can be considered synonymous with: “An author, using language, can easily represent temporality, change, causality,” etc. The same applies to the statement: “Images . . . [c]an easily . . . immerse spectators in space” (“A creator, using images, can easily immerse spectators in space,” [*Avatars of Story* 19]; typography modified). Ryan uses the term “narrator” once in this passage, inside brackets: “language can only tell the reader that a character is beautiful; the reader cannot judge for herself and must believe the narrator” (ibid.). The naïve reader could in fact assume that the term “narrator” here refers to the author of the verbal fictional narrative. But since Ryan's whole theory of verbal fictional narrative relies on the existence of a fictional narrator in all verbal fictional narratives (apart from dramatic texts), whether personal or impersonal, this interpretation would be incorrect.

In my own analyses of Seguí's illustrations based on Ryan's propositions, I used the concepts of character, setting, and represented world, but also the concept of style and thus that of the author or creator, considered as the agent responsible for the representation style. On the other hand, it did not seem necessary to make use of the concept of the (fictional) narrator or to find equivalents for it (“iconic narrator,” or “show-er,” as in certain theories of the narrator in drama or cinema) to account for an act of represented narration or representation. This figure does not feature in Seguí's illustrations and we can wonder whether there is a possibility of it existing elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> Ryan does not use the term “narrator” in relation to the iconic narrative either.

My analysis of Seguí's illustrations is consistent with the one I proposed in 2013 of the ending of Benedetti's short story. That analysis does not make use of the concept of the narrator (the fictional narrator, who is supposed to narrate real events) either. In its place, I use a distinction, from the narrative theory of S.-Y. Kuroda and Ann Banfield, between two types of sentences: *narrative* or *narrative-zero* sentences, or else *objective* sentences, and *subjective* sentences or contexts. Narrative or objective sentences cannot be seen as the representation of a separate point of view from that of the characters. They do not represent any point of view and cannot be false. They establish what belongs to the realm of facts in the fictional world. The second type of sentences express subjectivity, but one which is not linked to a traditional *I-here-now* syncretism (“third-person subjectivity,” if you like). They present fictional facts from the point of view of one or more characters who are not in the position of speakers. Recourse to the idea of context becomes necessary to the extent that certain sentences contain no subjective elements or constructions (defined as such on the basis of a precise linguistic analysis), but appear in the middle of other sentences which do contain such characteristic elements or constructions and are thus interpreted as subjective. As an example, let us take the following passage (we will see below why I give it in the original Spanish and in French and English translation):



Raúl, sin pronunciar palabra, con el ceño fruncido y los ojos entornados, comenzó a revisar el apartamento. En el estante encontró sus libros, señalados y anotados con su inconfundible trazo rojo; pero había otros nuevos, con las hojas a medio abrir. En la pared del fondo estaba su querida reproducción de Miró; pero además había una de Klee que siempre había codiciado. Sobre la mesa había tres fotos: una, de sus padres; otra, de un señor sospechosamente parecido a Mirta; en la tercera estaban Mirta y él, abrazados sobre la nieve, al parecer muy divertidos. ("Cinco años de vida" 32)

Raúl, sans prononcer un mot, les sourcils froncés et les yeux mi-clos, se mit à examiner l'appartement. Sur l'étagère il retrouva ses livres, marqués et annotés de son trait rouge caractéristique, mais il y en avait d'autres, nouveaux, aux pages à moitié coupées. Sur le mur du fond se trouvait sa chère reproduction de Miró; mais il y en avait une aussi de Klee qu'il avait toujours convoitée. Sur la table il y avait trois photos: une de ses parents, une autre d'un monsieur ressemblant étonnamment à Mirta; sur la troisième, Mirta et lui dans la neige, enlacés et apparemment très joyeux. ("Cinq ans de vie" 32)

Raúl inspected the apartment with a worried frown, in silence. In the bookcase he found his own books, dog-eared and marked up in his handwriting; but also some new ones with still-uncut pages. He saw his favorite Miró poster hanging on the wall, but also the Klee he'd always wanted. There were three photos on the table; one of his parents; one of a man who looked suspiciously like Mirta; and one of him and Mirta, rolling around in the snow in each other's arms and, apparently, having a great time. ("Five Years of Life" 104)

The first two sentences in each passage are objective sentences. They use the *pretérito indefinido* as a basic tense in Spanish, the *passé simple* in French, and the simple past in English, with the simple past playing the same role as the *passé simple* and *pretérito indefinido* when it is combined exclusively with third-person forms and non-deictic adverbs. The sentences establish the elements constituting facts in the fictional world. It cannot be doubted that Raúl inspected the apartment with a worried frown, in silence, or that in the bookcase he found his own books, but also some new ones, nor that these events all took place in the fictional world in the order in which they are presented in the narrative. In the third sentence, the switch from the *pretérito indefinido* to the *pretérito imperfecto* in Spanish and from the *passé simple* to the *imparfait* in French, which is not rendered in the English translation, indicates the switch from a narrative or objective context to a context where the perceptions and reflections of a subject of consciousness, Raúl, are represented. In the Spanish text and the French translation, the presence of embeddable subjective elements in Banfield's sense can also be noted: the evaluative adjective "querida" ("chère" in French), and the adverb derived from an adjective which can also be characterized as evaluative, "sospechosamente" ("étonnamment" in French).<sup>33</sup> The American translator, by contrast, has not looked for strict equivalents of "querida" and "sospechosamente." As for the circum-

locution “a man who looked suspiciously like Mirta” (referring to Mirta’s father), it illustrates the capacity of the subjective sentences to represent a mistake in the interpretation of the facts on the part of the subject of consciousness. This analysis of the passage allows the conclusion that the language of Benedetti’s narrative presents no element to justify recourse to a consciousness other than that of the subject of consciousness, Raúl. The objective sentences do not in any way manifest the presence of a narrator. This absence of a narrator also makes it possible to understand the linguistic facts of the last sentences, where there is no room for narratorial intervention. One can verify it, using what can be called “Banfield’s test”: if one adds an “I” to the following sentences, one sees clearly that it is no longer possible to attribute the expressive element “sospechosamente”/“étonnamment”/“amazingly” to a subject other than the referent of the “I.”

Sobre la mesa había tres fotos: una, de sus padres; otra, de un señor sospechosamente parecido a Mirta . . . (“Cinco años de vida” 32) > Sobre la mesa había tres fotos, me parece: una, de sus padres; otra, de un señor sospechosamente parecido a Mirta.

Sur la table il y avait trois photos: une de ses parents, une autre d’un monsieur ressemblant étonnamment à Mirta . . . (“Cinq ans de vie” 32) > Sur la table il y avait trois photos, je crois: une de ses parents, une autre d’un monsieur ressemblant étonnamment à Mirta.

There were three photos on the table: one of his parents; one of a man who looked amazingly like Mirta. (“Five Years of Life” 104; modified translation) > There were three photos on the table, I think: one of his parents; one of a man who looked amazingly like Mirta.

In other words, it is no longer possible to consider this sentence as a sentence representing Raúl’s consciousness. Of course, Benedetti could have chosen to write the narrative as a first-person fiction narrated by Raúl. But that would have made it difficult to unambiguously represent the consciousness of the character Raúl at the time when he undertook the examination of the apartment, as opposed to that of the hypothetical narrator Raúl, who would be telling the story retrospectively. Generally speaking, it would have been very difficult to eliminate the entire set of problems linked to retrospection and therefore to the dissimulation of crucial information.

We can draw a parallel between the narrative or objective sentences of the verbal narrative and the objective images of the iconic narrative: the latter retell, in their own way and within the limitations mentioned, what belongs to the realm of facts in the fictional world (for example, the fact that Raúl is in the street in the third image [see Figure 2] and that he is heading towards a precise point corresponding to the vanishing point of the image). In the same way, we can make a parallel between the subjective sentences or contexts and the subjective images, which present the fictional facts from the point of view of a character (Raúl’s, for example, in the fourth image [see Figure 5]), with the reservation that the subjective images are probably rarer and



more ambiguous as to their interpretation than the subjective sentences and contexts of the verbal narrative.<sup>34</sup>

By contrast, Ryan's theory is a clear example of the application of a double standard. On the one hand, she admits that, except in particular cases, there is no narrator in film narratives, and this remark can be extrapolated to iconic narratives. On the other hand, she offers a description of the impersonal narrator in verbal fictional narratives, which is vulnerable to all the objections made against the theory of the filmic narrator. Here are a few of these criticisms, as echoed by Ryan herself: the cinematic narrator was "postulated for purely formal reasons" by film theorists who were adherents of structuralism; it has no "imaginative reality for the spectator" ("Moving Pictures" 196); "when we watch a fiction film . . . , the medium disappears from our mind; it is not part of our game of make-believe that somebody filmed the events" ("Fiction, Cognition, and Non-Verbal Media" 18). Here now is Ryan's most recent description of the impersonal narrator in verbal fictional narratives: "I would locate such narrators at the edge of the outer storyworld: they belong to this world logically because they situate themselves in this world by presenting it as 'the real world,' but they do not belong to it corporally because they are not individuated members of its population, and their discourse does not exist in either the narrow or the wide frame" ("Story/Worlds/Media" 38).<sup>35</sup> A footnote adds: "Scholars who have denied the presence of a narrator in this case include Ann Banfield, Richard Walsh, and Henrik Skov Nielsen. I personally favor a compromise that makes the impersonal extradiegetic narrator a purely logical placeholder whose purpose is to relieve the author of the responsibility for the textual speech acts" (ibid., 46, n. 10). Here we find the same weaknesses and dysfunctions that were pointed out in the theory of the filmic narrator: the impersonal narrator is postulated for purely theoretical reasons by Ryan who adheres to a revised version of Searle's theory of fictional discourse; it has no imaginative reality for the reader (I mean the ordinary reader; I do not deny the fact that certain readers can perceive or project a narrator due to previous theoretical preferences and convictions). Moreover, there are other theories of fictional discourse, which make it unnecessary to relieve the author of the responsibility for the textual speech acts.<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, I suggest adding the following propositions to the list of the respective possibilities of language and images:

Language (or an author using language) may or may not represent a fictional narrator taking charge fictionally of the narration of the narrative we read. When language (or an author using language) does represent a fictional narrator, the traces of this representation should be found in the text. (I add the clarification that these traces cannot be reducible to the fact of presenting the fictional world as "the real world," which is not the prerogative of the fictional narrator but that of the fictional narrative as such.) We can also say that a text contains a fictional narrator if and only if it gives the reader sufficiently clear indicators ("I"; expressive elements to be referred to this "I"; reference to the act of narration; etc.) to imaginatively construct a fictional narrator. On the other hand, this act of representation must give rise to an interpretation

connected to the goals and plans of the author, in the same way as the acts of representing temporality, change, causality, etc.

Images cannot represent a fictional narrator taking charge fictionally of the narration of the narrative that we see. They can compensate for this limitation by including verbal text (for example, in the text boxes used in comic strips and graphic novels) and, in this case, it seems possible to transfer the concept of the fictional narrator from one medium to another, as long as we understand that it does not apply in exactly the same way in the source medium and in the target medium. In the case of images that include verbal text, the fictional narrator only takes charge fictionally of part, larger or smaller, of the narrative we see.<sup>37</sup>

In all cases, the representation of a fictional narrator must be considered as an option available to the author and not as a logical or pragmatic necessity of all fictional narratives.<sup>38</sup>

Translated by Melissa McMahon

## Endnotes

A first version of this article was presented at the 2016 International Conference on Narrative (Amsterdam, June, 16–18). I take this opportunity to express thanks to my co-panelists, especially Liviu Lutas, who was kind enough to re-read my article. I also thank Jim Phelan for his invaluable comments and suggestions.

1. Mario Benedetti, Antonio Seguí, “Cinco años de vida,” in *Historias de París*, 16–33. The short story was translated by Maya Gross as “Five Years of Life,” in *Blood Pact and Other Stories*, 95–105.
2. The term is used here in David Herman’s sense, and is also used by Marie-Laure Ryan (see Herman, “Toward a Transmedial Narratology,” and Ryan, “Introduction,” “Defining Media from the Perspective of Narratology,” and “On the Theoretical Foundations of Transmedial Narratology”). For the origin of this use of “transmedial,” see Wolf, “Intermediality Revisited: Reflections on Word and Music Relations in the Context of a General Typology of Intermediality” 18–19.
3. I will not discuss the problems associated with the use of the term *medium*. I am using it in the sense of transmedial narratology and refer to the definitions found in Ryan (see all references), Ryan and Thon, and Thon, *Transmedial Narratology*.
4. See Ryan, “On the Theoretical Foundations” 2 and *Avatars of Story* 4–5. Ryan presents this approach in the section titled “Positions Hostile to Transmedial Narratology.” She also dismisses the weaker form of this approach, which takes the speech-act-based definition in a metaphorical sense to incorporate certain non-verbal narratives (see the theories of the dramatic narrator, or “shower,” the filmic narrator, etc.).
5. See Ryan, “On the Theoretical Foundations” 2–3 and *Avatars of Story* 6. Ryan presents this idea as an alternative to what she calls “media relativism,” according to which two different media cannot convey the same meanings (stronger form) or, if they can convey the same meanings, cannot have the same expressive resources (weaker form). Media relativism is the second position incompatible with transmedial narratology.
6. The term “storyworld” is borrowed from Herman (see “Toward a Transmedial Narratology” 50 and passim). It refers to “the global mental representations that interpreters are prompted to cre-



- ate when they read or listen to a narrative" (ibid. 50). It concerns both non-fictional and fictional narratives. See also Ryan and Thon, and Thon, *Transmedial Narratology*, part 1, chapters 2–3.
7. See Ryan, "Introduction" 8; "On the Theoretical Foundations" 4; *Avatars of Story* 8; and "Toward a Definition of Narrative" 29. Regarding the mental dimension, see also Herman, "Narrative Ways of Worldmaking" 73–74, 76, and *Basic Elements of Narrative* 9, 14, 21–22, 137–60, 2010: 156–57.
  8. See for example Wolf, "Narratology and Media(lity): The Transmedial Expansion of a Literary Discipline and Possible Consequences" 145–46 and "(Inter)mediality and the Study of Literature" 4.
  9. See Ryan, "On the Theoretical Foundations" 9–10.
  10. See Ryan, *Avatars of Story* 19–20. See also, for some case-studies, Ryan, ed., *Narrative across Media: The Language of Storytelling*, Herman, "Toward a Transmedial Narratology," "Narrative Ways of Worldmaking," "Directions in Cognitive Narratology: Triangulating Stories, Media, and the Mind," "Multimodal Storytelling and Identity Construction in Graphic Narratives," "Building Storyworlds across Media and Genres," Grishakova and Ryan, eds., *Intermediality and Storytelling*, Wolf, "Narratology and Media(lity)," Ryan and Thon, eds., *Storyworlds across Media*, Thon, *Transmedial Narratology*.
  11. This proposition is found in almost all the articles by Ryan that have been cited to this point. See also Ryan, "Fiction, Cognition, and Non-Verbal Media" 17 and Wolf, "Narratology and Media(lity)" 168.
  12. See in particular Ryan, "Narration in Various Media" 471.
  13. More precisely, it errs in extending to all fictional narratives the description Searle reserves for first-person fictional narrative, which is a misinterpretation from Searle's perspective. See Patron, *Le Narrateur: Un problème de théorie narrative* 111–17, and *La Mort du narrateur et autres essais* 14, 17 et passim.
  14. Here I converge with the positions of Thon, "Toward a Transmedial Narratology: On Narrators in Contemporary Graphic Novels, Feature Films, and Computer Games," and *Transmedial Narratology*, part 2, chapters 4–5.
  15. See the interview of Antonio Seguí by Sylvie Patron, Arcueil, France, 29 June 2015 (unpublished): "My illustrations always go with texts"; "The image goes with the text. It's the text that gives it meaning."
  16. See also Ryan, "Defining Media from the Perspective of Narratology" 6 and *Avatars of Story* 14. The word "text" here refers to any narrative artifact, regardless of the medium.
  17. See Alber 887.
  18. The images are all reproduced here with the kind permission of the artist. The first number refers to the order in which the images are reproduced in this article, the second to the order in which they appear in the short story.
  19. The expression "subjective character" is taken from Gail A. Bruder and Janyce M. Wiebe, 342 et passim. It can be used within the framework of transmedial narratology. My position here is close to Thon's in "Subjectivity across Media: On Transmedial Strategies of Subjective Representation in Contemporary Feature Films, Graphic Novels, and Computer Games," and *Transmedial Narratology*, part 3, chapters 6–7.
  20. There are more references to the raincoat: "Five Years of Life" 99, 100, 102: "his raincoat" (three occurrences) and the pronoun "it" (two occurrences).
  21. This is based on Seguí's interpretation of the first image. We could also make the hypothesis that Seguí is mistaken, and this image does not illustrate a passage from the scene in the metro station, but a passage from the first scene, in the apartment of the Bolivians ("tomó uno por uno los dedos finos de Claudia Freire, . . . y los fue besando, en actitud compensadora, antes de dejarlos sobre la pana verde del respaldo," "Cinco años de vida" 20, "he took those delicate fingers of Claudia

- Freire's . . . kissed each one by way of compensation, and deposited them on the green corduroy of the sofa," "Five Years of Life" 17–20), or a passage in the last scene, in the couple's new apartment (the orange-yellow square in the background would then refer to [su querida reproducción de Miro], "Cinco años de vida" 32, [his favorite Miró poster] or the new Klee reproduction, "Five Years of Life" 104). This would then explain the hair color of the female character. This hypothesis leaves many other problems unresolved however and for this reason, as much as for the fact that it contradicts Seguí's interpretation, it seems best rejected.
22. From unpublished interview: "Sylvie Patron: Is this Raúl's view of this woman? Antonio Seguí: Yes, perhaps . . . S. P.: At the same time, he would have to be on the tracks . . . A. S.: Yes (*laughs*)."
  23. Ryan then says that this feature is more controversial than the others. Is it necessary for a story to involve non-habitual events, or can it concern routine actions, called "scripts"? She concludes that the issue of narrativity is difficult to separate from the issue of tellability, of what makes a story worth telling.
  24. From unpublished interview: "Sylvie Patron: You chose to represent the train leaving, rather than the doors closing. Antonio Seguí: That's the significant event. That's why the doors are closed afterwards."
  25. In fact it is a rectangular section cropped from Seguí's original illustration, as the illustration presented on page 33 of the French translation shows (*Histoires de Paris*, Noville-sur-Mahaigne Esperluète Éditions, 2009). In the original illustration, the characters are enclosed in a sort of bubble or frame inside the frame of the image, which delimits an interior grey surface (the external part plays on the contrast between the pastel colors and the white of the paper).
  26. From unpublished interview: "Antonio Seguí: My painting is the reconstruction of my childhood. During my childhood, women stayed at home, they didn't go out into the street. Or they didn't go out very much: that's why I sometimes only show half of them, from the belt to the feet (*laughs*)." For these half-represented women, see Seguí's exhibition at Galerie Laurent Strouk, Paris, from 24 September to 31 October 2015, and Galerie Laurent Strouk, ed., 2015.
  27. It is mentioned in another article of Ryan's; see "Narration in Various Media" 478.
  28. See Ryan *Avatars of Story* 19, "Media and Narrative" 291–92, and "Narration in Various Media" 476, 478.
  29. See *supra* note 24.
  30. See Ryan, *Avatars of Story* 19 and "Narration in Various Media" 478, 479.
  31. See for example *De Cómo Ícaro Aprendió a Volar* [How Icarus learnt to fly], 1977 (Abadie 169), the series *À vous de faire l'histoire* [It is up to you to make the story], 1965–69 (ibid. 90–93), with a playful or parodying dimension, *Remember Buenos Aires*, 1984 (ibid. 172), or the famous *Pensando Mucho* [Thinking a lot], 1984 (Sibony 150; Artaud 9; Abadie 180), or again *Los Sueños de Aniseto* [The dreams of Aniseto], 1985 (ibid. 182 and front cover).
  32. From unpublished interview: "Sylvie Patron: Would you have illustrated the short story in the same way if it had been written in the first person? Antonio Seguí: Yes, in the same way. S. P.: Can a painter paint "in the first person"? A. S.: I don't think so.
  33. On evaluative adjectives, see Banfield, 54–56 (the definitive characteristic of evaluative adjectives is that they can appear in an exclamative of the adjective + noun type, e.g.: "Poor boy!")
  34. In connection with the whole of this paragraph, see Thon, "Subjectivity across Media," and *Trans-medial Narratology*, part 3, chapters 6–7.
  35. On the previous page, Ryan defines the narrow framework of the storyworld as the one in which the characters are located and the broader one as the one where the chorus is located in ancient Greek theater.
  36. See Walsh and Patron, forthcoming.



37. See Thon, "Toward a Transmedial Narratology," for a further development of this position, based on the analysis of examples. See also *Transmedial Narratology*, part 2, chapters 4–5.
38. This proposition is considered as a possibility by Ryan and Thon, "Storyworld across Media: Introduction" 5–6. We should no doubt see in this an isolated case of the influence of Jan-Noël Thon on this co-signed introduction.

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