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European Comic Art

DOI:
[10.3167/eca.2023.160203](https://doi.org/10.3167/eca.2023.160203)

Published: 01/09/2023

Peer reviewed version

[Cyswllt i'r cyhoeddiad / Link to publication](#)

Dyfyniad o'r fersiwn a gyhoeddwyd / Citation for published version (APA):
Miranda-Barreiro, D. (2023). Intermediality and Transmedial Tanatography in Jacobo Fernández Serrano's Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro. *European Comic Art*, 16(2), 54-73.
<https://doi.org/10.3167/eca.2023.160203>

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Intermediality and Transmedial Tanatography in Jacobo Fernández Serrano's *Lois*

Pereiro. Breve encontro

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Total word count: 7585 words

Abstract: In 2011, the poet Lois Pereiro (1958-1996) was honoured at the annual *Día das Letras Galegas* [Galician Literature Day] that celebrates a Galician literary author. As it has become customary, the Galician publishing industry released a plethora of texts about Pereiro, particularly biographies. Said corpus includes Jacobo Fernández Serrano's comics biography *Lois Pereiro. Breve Encontro: un achegamento comiqueiro á biografía e obra do poeta* [Lois Pereiro. Brief Encounter, a Comics Approach to the Poet's Life and Work]. This article examines the comic as an intermedial text that captures the influence of literature, films, music, and comics in Pereiro's own writing. Furthermore, it is analysed as part of a transmedial network, together with other biographies published around the *Día das Letras*.

These texts address the role played by death in the poet's life and work (as he died at an early age of rapeseed oil poisoning and AIDS), and they can therefore be understood as 'thanatographies' as much as life writing.

Keywords: comics biography, *banda deseñada*, Lois Pereiro, intermediality, transmediality, thanatography

Introduction

Despite the challenges posed by its condition as a minoritised culture, and thanks to the continued effort of both artists and enthusiasts, Galicia has become a hub of comics creation since the end of the twentieth century. Still greatly neglected within Galician Studies, the academic interest in Galician comics (or *banda deseñada galega*) has also seen some recent developments, especially in the work of Xulio Carballo and Octavio Beares.¹ In his *A historia do cómic en Galicia* [The History of Comics in Galicia], Beares has argued that today 'se vive o mellor momento do cómic galego en toda a súa historia' [it is the best moment in the history of Galician comics].² The national and international success of artists such as Miguelanxo Prado, Emma Ríos, David Rubín, and Alberto Vázquez, the celebration since 1998 of the comics festival 'Viñetas desde o Atlántico' [Comic Strips from the Atlantic] in A Coruña,³ the creation of comic book awards by public institutions, the emergence of the publishing house Demo Editorial, directed by artist Manel Cráneo and exclusively devoted to comics in the Galician language,⁴ and the founding of the first school of comics in 2012, O

¹ Xulio Carballo, *Os pioneiros da banda deseñada galega. 1971-1979* (Vigo: Xerais, 2019); Octavio Beares, *A historia do cómic en Galicia* (Vigo: Galaxia, 2021).

² *Ibid.*, 104.

³ See <https://www.vinetasdesdeoatlantico.com/>.

⁴ See <http://demoeditorial.com/es/>.

Garaxe Hermético [The Hermetic Garage],⁵ by artist Kiko da Silva, are some of the examples of a thriving comics scene in Galicia.

It is then no surprise that comics have also gained a place in Galician mainstream culture. A case in point is the *Día das Letras Galegas* [Galician Literature Day], which honours a Galician writer every year since 1963. This event is organised by the *Real Academia Galega* [Royal Galician Academy], an institution founded in 1906 for the study and promotion of Galician language and culture. Although the day of the celebration is 17th May (and a local bank holiday since 1991),⁶ the activities paying tribute to the chosen author are spread across the entire year. As journalist Xosé Manuel Pereiro has sarcastically pointed out,⁷ in Galicia ‘el autor designado por la Academia tiene más presencia social que cualquier ganador del Nobel’ [the author chosen by the Royal Galician Academy enjoys more media presence than any Nobel prize winner].⁸ The publication of anthologies, critical studies, biographies, and other sorts of texts about the author’s life and work, have become an important part of this event. Since 2010, with the release of *Uxío Novoneyra: a voz herdada*

⁵ The name of the school is of course a reference to Moebius’ *Le Garage Hermétique* (1976–1979). About the school see: <https://www.ogaraxehermetico.com/a-escola>.

⁶ The date refers to the publication of Rosalía de Castro’s poetry collection *Cantares Gallegos* [Galician Songs], one of the founding works of modern Galician literature, on 17th May 1863.

⁷ Xosé Manuel Pereiro is also Lois Pereiro’s brother.

⁸ Xosé Manuel Pereiro, ‘Introducción. El mundo que llamamos Lois Pereiro’ [Introduction. A World Called Lois Pereiro], in Lois Pereiro, *Obra completa. Edición bilingüe* [The Complete Works. Bilingual Edition], trans. Daniel Salgado (Barcelona: Xunta de Galicia and Libros del silencio, 2011), 11–21 (12).

[Uxío Novoneyra: the Inherited Voice], by Kike Benlloch and David Rubín,⁹ comics have also been incorporated into this corpus, sometimes totally or partially funded by the *Xunta de Galicia* [Galicia's Autonomous Government] or by independent associations for the promotion of the Galician language.¹⁰ That is the case of the comics biography studied in this article: *Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro, un achegamento comiqueiro á biografía e obra do poeta* [Lois Pereiro. Brief Encounter, a Comics Approach to the Poet's Life and Work], by Jacobo Fernández Serrano, which was originally published in Galician by Xerais with support from the Xunta de Galicia in 2011.¹¹ A year later, an extended version in Spanish was also published by Ediciones Sinsentido.¹²

⁹ Kike Benlloch and David Rubín, *Uxío Novoneyra: a voz herdada* (Betanzos: Xunta de Galicia, 2010). The book was published as a non-commercial edition.

¹⁰ Examples of comics totally or partially published by independent associations include the illustrated anthology of the poet Manuel María, *A voz do vento* [The Voice of the Wind] (Santiago de Compostela: A Mesa pola Normalización Lingüística, 2016) and the comic *Coraçom de terra* [Heart of Soil] (A Coruña and Santiago de Compostela: Demo Editorial & Através Editora, 2020) about writer and academic Ricardo Carvalho Calero, published with funding from different public bodies such as the *Xunta de Galicia* and independent ones such as *A Mesa pola Normalización Lingüística* (an association for the promotion and use of the Galician language; see: <https://www.amesa.gal/>).

¹¹ Jacobo Fernández Serrano, *Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro, un achegamento comiqueiro á biografía e obra do poeta* (Vigo: Xunta de Galicia and Xerais, 2011). This is the primary source for my analysis, although I will also refer to the Spanish version on occasion.

¹² Jacobo Fernández Serrano, *Breve encontro. Un acercamiento a la vida y obra del poeta Lois Pereiro* (Madrid: Ediciones Sinsentido, 2012).

The choice of Lois Pereiro for the 2011 *Día das Letras* meant a change from the usual profile of writers selected by the Royal Galician Academy. To be eligible, candidates must have passed away at least ten years earlier, which has meant that most of the authors given this honour have been canonical figures (also some lesser-known ones), sometimes going as far back as the Middle Ages. By contrast, Pereiro (1958-1996) was not only a contemporary poet, but a countercultural icon, a *poète maudit* whose life was cut short by illness and drug use, and with a brief literary œuvre, including the two published collections *Poemas 1981-1991* [Poems 1981-1991]¹³ and *Poesía última de amor e enfermidade* [Last Poetry of Love and Illness],¹⁴ as well as several poems in anthologies and a few other texts released posthumously. In a retrospective entry published on his personal blog in 2015, writer and academic Mario Regueira stated that the election of Pereiro ‘conseguiu revolucionar unha data en risco permanente de anquilosamento (...). Por primeira vez en décadas as Letras Galegas implicaron na súa festa a toda a sociedade. Das casas okupas ás salas da Academia, e dos actos oficiais aos bares e pubs’ [managed to revolutionise an event always at risk of stagnation (...). For the first time in decades, the celebration of the Literature Day involved the whole of society, from the squatter houses of the countercultural scene to the Royal Academy, from official events to bars and pubs].¹⁵ Although the Royal Galician Academy returned to celebrating less contemporary writers after 2011 (even with the controversial choice of the pro-Francoist Xosé Filgueira Valverde in 2015), the recognition of Pereiro’s

¹³ Lois Pereiro, *Poemas 1981/1991* (Santiago de Compostela: Edicións Positivas, 1992).

¹⁴ Lois Pereiro, *Poesía última de amor e enfermidade* (Santiago de Compostela: Edicións Positivas, 1995).

¹⁵ Mario Regueira, ‘Ano Lois Pereiro’ [Year Lois Pereiro] (12 April 2015),

<https://marioregueira.gal/2015/04/ano-lois-pereiro/>.

work also opened the door to more recent authors such as María Victoria Moreno (1939-2005) and Xela Arias (1962-2003).

Pereiro's writing is permeated by influences from popular culture, inspired by a variety of media. Alberte Valverde defines him as:

[un] autor que procura un lector/a ávido e con formación, non só de carácter formal ou da Gran Cultura con maiúsculas senón tamén unha persoa que domina as novas formas de arte de finais de século, tal como a neovangarda, o posmodernismo ou tendencias musicais caracterizadas polo underground, nomeadamente o punk.¹⁶

[an author who seeks an avid and cultured reader, not only formally educated and with a knowledge of Culture with a capital C, but also someone versed in the new art forms of the late twentieth century, such as the new avant-garde, postmodernism and underground musical styles, especially punk music].

The recurrent allusions to cinema, punk and rock music, and comics in his poetry are testament to the spirit of a generation of young people growing up at the end of Franco's dictatorship with a thirst to go beyond the cultural limitations of the regime, 'ansiosos buscadores de la cultura existente más allá de las fronteras del franquismo' [eager seekers of the culture that existed beyond of the borders of the Franco regime].¹⁷ Several of the texts published about Pereiro in advance of the *Día das Letras* reflect the author's interest in

¹⁶ Alberte Valverde, 'As relacións interartes en Lois Pereiro', *Grial* 49, no. 190 (2011): 120–127 (127).

¹⁷ Xosé Manuel Pereiro, 'Introducción. El mundo que llamamos Lois Xosé Manuel Pereiro', 15.

different artistic forms and his avant-garde style of poetry, for example:¹⁸ a *Fotobiografía sonora* [Sound Photobiography] edited by Xosé Manuel Pereiro, Lino Braxe, and Xurxo Souto;¹⁹ a ‘filmic’ biography that follows the structure of a film script, by Marcos Calveiro, *Naúfrago do paraíso* [Castaway of Paradise];²⁰ and a more classical biography by Iago Martínez, *Lois Pereiro. Vida e obra* [Lois Pereiro. Life and Work].²¹ The aforementioned comics biography by Fernández Serrano is also part of this transmedial corpus, and, like Pereiro’s own writing, draws on a variety of intermedial references from literature, film, photography, music, and TV, as well as incorporating intramedial references to other comics such as *Tintin* and *Conan the Barbarian*.

The present article examines the role played by intermediality and intramediality in this comic, and the strategies deployed by Fernández Serrano to bring comics in contact with other media. Following Irinia O. Rajewsky’s distinction, my use of the term intermediality is conceived here as ‘as a critical category for the concrete analysis of specific individual media products or configurations’, rather than ‘a fundamental condition or category’.²² About the former, Rajewsky underlines that it ‘is useful only in so far as those configurations manifest

¹⁸ I am including the titles of the biographical texts about Pereiro that will be part of my analysis, but there are more cases.

¹⁹ Xosé Manuel Pereiro, Lino Braxe, and Xurxo Souto, eds., *Lois Pereiro. Fotobiografía sonora* (Sarria: Ouvirmos, 2010).

²⁰ Marcos Calveiro, *Naúfrago do paraíso* (Vigo: Xerais, 2011).

²¹ Iago Martínez, *Lois Pereiro. Vida e obra* (Vigo: Xerais, 2011).

²² Irina O. Rajewski, ‘Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: a Literary Perspective on Intermediality’, *Intermédialités* no. 6 (2005), 43–64, (47),

https://doi.org/10.7202/1005505aradresse_copiéeune_er.

some form of intermedial strategy, constitutional element or condition',²³ and advises that 'if the use of intermediality as a category for the description and analysis of particular phenomena is to be productive, we should (...) distinguish groups of phenomena, each of which exhibits a distinct intermedial quality'.²⁴ Owing to the inherently intermedial nature of biographical texts, comics biographies constitute a specific and rich 'phenomenon' for the study of intermediality. Referring to the biopic, Tom Brown suggests that it 'is innately a form of adaptation; its heterogeneity is guaranteed by its attempts to translate imagery (of a famous person, of famous events in which that person was involved) from other media (classical portraiture or statuary, photographs or newsreels, for example) into film'.²⁵ Similarly, in comics, the recreation of someone's life is realised in the palimpsestous act of layering a variety of written and visual sources, with the aim of achieving, in Bart Beaty's words, 'not simply verisimilitude, but resemblance to the truth. Not "the effect of the real", but the image of the real'.²⁶ This idea can be further developed when considering not only the available archive of texts and images that captures the biographical subject's existence, or rather their 'ghostly' post-mortem presence, but also those that belong to the multimodal corpus that inspired their creative practice. In this regard, the dialogue between different art forms that characterises Pereiro's poetic output is reflected in Fernández Serrano's biographical comic in a way that is reminiscent of Lars Elleström's understanding of

²³ Ibid., 47.

²⁴ Ibid., 50.

²⁵ Tom Brown, 'Consensual Pleasures. Amazing Grace, Oratory, and the Middlebrow Biopic', in *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, ed. Tom Brown and Belén Vidal (Routledge: New York & London, 2014), 118–139 (121).

²⁶ Bart Beaty, 'Autobiography as Authenticity', in *A Comics Studies Reader*, ed. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 226–235 (228).

intermediality ‘as a bridge between medial differences that is founded on medial similarities’.²⁷ My analysis of said similarities as well as the way different media are recreated and combined in the comic draws on Rajewsky’s three subcategories of intermediality: *medial transposition*, or ‘the transformation of a given media product (a text, a film, etc.) or of its substratum into another medium’; *media combination*, that is, ‘the combination of at least two medial forms of articulation’; and *intermedial references*, ‘for example references in a literary text to a film through, for instance, the evocation or imitation of certain filmic techniques such as zoom shots, fades, dissolves, and montage editing’.²⁸ *Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro* makes use of all three, both in the narration of his life and in the evocation of the author’s cultural referents. Intramedial references, as those involving only one medium in Werner Wolf’s categorization,²⁹ also feature in the comic to incorporate the influence of comics in Pereiro’s poetry and his fondness for them.

Furthermore, this article pays attention to the existence of a transmedial dialogue between the comic and the other biographical texts mentioned above, as they not only echo other media similarly to Fernández Serrano’s book, but also seem to relate to each other, thematically, structurally, and even aesthetically. For the purposes of my analysis,

²⁷ Lars Elleström, ‘The Modalities of Media: a Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations’, in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström (Basingstoke Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 11–48 (11).

²⁸ Rajewski, ‘Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: a Literary Perspective on Intermediality’, 51–53.

²⁹ Gabriele Rippl and Lukas Etter, ‘Intermediality, Transmediality, and Graphic Narrative’, in *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, ed. Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 191–217 (196).

transmediality is therefore understood also as defined by Wolf: ‘transmedial phenomena that are non-specific to individual media (motifs, thematic variation, narrativity) and which appear across a variety of different media’.³⁰ A key motif in this transmedial network is the role played by death in the representation of Pereiro’s life, marked by illness since 1981. He was one of the victims of an infamous massive poisoning by rapeseed oil, which had been sold as cheap olive oil (the well-known *caso del aceite colza* in Spain).³¹ The poet had also started to use heroine and was diagnosed with AIDS in 1994. The effects of illness left a visible imprint on his body, which quickly deteriorated. Owing to the almost overwhelming presence of death in these forms of ‘life writing’, the term ‘thanatography’ (borrowing Sean Hand’s expression)³² seems quite apposite, as they are not only concerned with representing his life, but also writing his death, both as a visible process, inscribed in Pereiro’s noticeable physical deterioration, and as a theme and character in his own poetry.

Intermediality, Transmediality and Thanatography in *Breve encuentro*

Intermedial references play a key thematic and structural role in Fernández Serrano’s biographical comic from its very title. *Breve encuentro* is also the name of one of the last poems published by Pereiro, which is in turn taken from David Lean’s 1945 film classic *Brief Encounter*, the story of an impossible romance between two married people. Pereiro was a

³⁰ Gabriele Rippl, ‘Introduction’, in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature - Image - Sound - Music*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 1–31 (12).

³¹ Daniel Muela, ‘Colza, historia de un envenenamiento’, *El País* (19 May 2016), <https://aniversario.elpais.com/colza/>.

³² This term is cited by Jesse Schlotterbeck, ‘*I’m not there*. Transcendent Thanatography’, in *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, ed. Tom Brown and Belén Vidal (Routledge: New York & London, 2014), 227-242 (230).

cinophile from an early age and, while studying English, French, and German in Madrid, he was a regular at the film showings of the *Filmoteca Nacional* [National Film Library].³³

Written during the last stages of the writer's illness, the poem is preceded by a few lines within square brackets that not only acknowledge the reference to the film, but also connect it intimately to his own life circumstances:

David Lean filmou nos anos corenta un breve encontro, *Brief Encounter*: amor de fume ferroviario e a humidade correcta. Eu estou a vivir agora deles e sentiría perder eses breves encontros espaciados e intensos, que positivaban o meu pasado, revelando un presente máis amable, e un posible futuro revivido, firme e moi posiblemente fracasado.³⁴

[In the 1940s, David Lean shot a *Brief Encounter*: a love story enveloped in train smoke and with the correct amount of humidity. I am now living off those brief, intense and sparse encounters, and it would pain me to lose them, as they develop a kinder present from the images of my past, and a future potentially relived, one that is stiff and quite likely unsuccessful].

While the comic makes no reference to this introduction (but quotes the poem in several places, including the opening epigraphs), it begins with a prelude that reproduces, shot by shot and almost verbatim, the scene in which Laura Jesson and Alec Harvey first meet in Lean's film. In this prologue, entitled '0. Como en *Breve encontro* de David Lean' [0. Like in David Lean's *Brief Encounter*] the panels are drawn over a black background, and with a layout of three per page, to be read vertically (Fig. 1). This arrangement creates an

³³ Xosé Manuel Pereiro, 'Introducción. El mundo que llamamos Lois Xosé Manuel Pereiro', 15.

³⁴ Lois Pereiro, *Obra completa*, 212.

intermedial reference not only to film as a medium, as it follows the editing of its referent quite literally, but also to the act of watching a film in a cinema. Moreover, the darkness of the page alludes to the intramedial appearance of film in *Brief Encounter*, in which the protagonists attend several screenings together. Like the cinema screen within the movie, the edges of the panels in this chapter are rounded, an indication that the comic is echoing the film-going experience of Lean's characters.

The comic also transforms the film (Rajewsky's *medial transposition*), to announce that the biography will deal with Pereiro's relationship with death as much as with his life. In his analysis of Todd Haynes's experimental Bob Dylan biopic *I'm Not There* (2007), Jesse Schlotterbeck argues that the film 'is not only interested in biography (writing life) but also in thanatography (writing death). Yet, the film is not somber or sentimental about death. Instead, it celebrates a heroic encounter with death and a popular artist's insistence on play and creativity because of it.'³⁵ Therefore, *I'm Not There* 'consciously elaborates on the film biography as thanatography: the presentation of how stars die in addition to how they live'.³⁶ These statements apply perfectly to Fernández Serrano's comics biography. In the prelude, the protagonists of Lean's film are replaced by Lois Pereiro (as Alec Harvey) and a female incarnation of Death (as Laura Jesson), characterised with the same clothes and hairstyle as Laura, but with a white mask and big black pupilless eyes instead of a face. An extra shot is also added to the scene: an extreme close-up of Death's eyes, with the profile of Pereiro's face looking into them, as if symbolizing mutual fascination. Similarly to the quote from Pereiro cited earlier, the comic therefore intertwines his life with the film, here to imagine his personal and poetic relationship with death as a sort of love story or fatal attraction.

³⁵ Schlotterbeck, 'I'm not there. Transcendent Thanatography', 229.

³⁶ Ibid., 230.

Figure 1: Jacobo Fernández Serrano, *Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro, un achegamento comiqueiro á biografía e obra do poeta*. Two non-consecutive pages from the prologue. Reproduced with the artist's kind permission.

The presence of death in Pereiro's life and work is in fact a recurrent theme in the biographies and documentaries about the writer released around the 2011 *Día das Letras*. On the page preceding the reimagining of Lean's film, Fernández Serrano's comic cites a statement from writer Manuel Rivas alluding to the same idea: 'se escribes poesía como escribía el, tes que medirte con grandes inimigos. El non veu loitar con outros poetas, senón con inimigos serios. O máis serio precisamente é a pulsación da morte, da destrución' [If you write poetry the way he did, you must face great enemies. He didn't choose to write in order to fight other poets, but serious enemies. The most serious one is precisely the death drive, the drive towards destruction].³⁷ This quotation is taken from an interview with Rivas included in the documentary *Contra a morte: unha aproximación a Lois Pereiro* [Against Death: an Approximation to Lois Pereiro], by Alexandre Cancelo and Iago Martínez.³⁸ Death also frames Marcos Calveiro's biography *Lois Pereiro. Náufrago do paraíso* [Castaway of Paradise],³⁹ written in the form of a film script in which the poet is a character. In the introduction, Calveiro explains that his text attempts to recreate Pereiro's 'acelerado flash-

³⁷ Fernández Serrano, *Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro*, 11.

³⁸ *Contra a morte: unha aproximación a Lois Pereiro*, written and directed by Alexandre Cancelo and Iago Martínez (Xas Films, 2011).

³⁹ The biography alludes to the title of Pereiro's unfinished novel *Náufragos do paradiso* (Vigo: Galaxia, 2011).

back existencial’ [accelerated existential flash-back]: the film of his life as he would see it seconds before passing away, following the ‘life review’ trope according to which a person sees their life history in near-death experiences.⁴⁰ The biographer underscores the poet’s passion for cinema, and also suggests a close relationship between Pereiro and death:

cando a Morte se lle presentara para levalo (...) tantas veces fuxiu dela, da súa afiada gadaña, que chegaron a facerse amigos co tempo e Lois, arroutado, aproveitou para desafiala nalgunha que outra partida de xadrez e falarlle a corazón aberto ollándolle ás cuncas baleiras dos ollos.⁴¹

[when Death came to take him away (...) he escaped so many times from her sharp scythe that in time they became friends, and Lois, reckless, took from time to time the opportunity of challenging her to a chess game and speak to her with an open heart while looking into the empty sockets of her eyes].

As well as including another film reference, to Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal* (1957),⁴² Calveiro’s image of Pereiro looking into the eyes of death is reminiscent of both Rivas’ assertion and of the panel added by Fernández Serrano to his recreation of *Brief Encounter*. Some chapters later, another filmic reference to death brings Fernández Serrano’s biographical comic and Calveiro’s ‘film script biography’ together again. Drawing on Pereiro’s own autobiographical writings in the epistolary diary *Conversa ultramarina* [A Conversation beyond the Sea],⁴³ both Fernández and Calveiro envisage the poet as a vampire,

⁴⁰ Calveiro, *Náufrago do paraíso*, 8.

⁴¹ Calveiro, *Náufrago do paraíso*, 7.

⁴² *The Seventh Seal*, directed by Ingmar Bergman (Svensk Filmindustri, 1957). Famously, a personification of Death plays a chess game with the protagonist played by Max von Sydow.

⁴³ Lois Pereiro, *Conversa ultramarina* (Santiago de Compostela: Edicións Positivas, 2010).

a creature defined by its liminal position between life and death. Pereiro wrote: ‘Si, é certo, deixei atrás os “vicios” anteriores, pero por algo os debo substituír. Creo que empezo a sentir un inquietante desexo de consumir espíritos, de meterme nas veas as súas almas’ [Yes, that’s true, I left my old ‘vices’ behind me, but I have to fill them in with something. I think I begin to experience a disturbing desire for consuming spirits, for making my way into the veins of their souls].⁴⁴ In the comic, this passage is adapted in two panels where Pereiro appears as a vampire seducing a young woman, echoing the characterization of Gary Oldman in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992). Similarly, Calveiro’s biography recreates the moment when Pereiro is writing the diary entry at the hospital, which is here expanded beyond the original to show the poet imagining himself also as a vampire: ‘Saíndo pola fiestra ao solpor cando o mortífero sol xa se perdeu no horizonte. É a hora dos malditos, das criaturas da noite. Co meu camisón azul sobrevooo a cidade na procura das miñas vítimas’ [Leaving at dusk through the window when the deadly sun has already sunk behind the horizon. It’s the hour of the damned, of the creatures of the night. Dressed in my blue nightshirt I fly over the city looking for victims].⁴⁵ The dark trinity formed by Death, the vampire and the poet is fitting with Pereiro’s interest in gothic aesthetics. Moreover, the recurring motif of death, conflated with repeated intermedial references to cinema, places Fernández Serrano’s comic within a transmedial network, in which literature, cinema, and comics become intertwined in the attempt to patch together the pieces of Pereiro’s life.

Indeed, biographies rely on pre-existing materials to recreate a life with words and/or images, a task that highlights ‘the constructed nature of a life story’, which is ‘openly acknowledged in the separation between the writer and the life of the person who is

⁴⁴ Lois Pereiro, *Obra Completa*, 522.

⁴⁵ Calveiro, *Náufrago do paraíso*, 95.

depicted’, as Marta Kuhlman has pointed out in relation to graphic biographies.⁴⁶ Pereiro’s biographers make this limitation and *modus operandi* explicit, even in their titles: *achegamento* [approach] and *aproximación* [approximation] appear on Fernández Serrano’s comic and Cancelo and Martínez’s documentary, respectively. Martínez describes his task as a biographer as the weaving of different anecdotes, and opens his book *Lois Pereiro. Vida e obra* by clarifying: ‘Nunca coñecín a Lois Pereiro (...) nada é meu neste libro. Nin sequera as palabras. Tomeillas emprastadas a unhas trinta persoas ao longo de case cinco anos de traballo’ [I never met Lois Pereiro (...) nothing in this book is mine. Not even the words. I borrowed them from about thirty people throughout almost five years of work].⁴⁷ Fernández Serrano’s biographical comic makes a similar claim in the acknowledgements (where he thanks Martínez and Calveiro, among others): ‘Eu non o tratei en vida. (...) Lin e escoitei falar del (...) imaxineino e debuxei as miñas visións’ [I didn’t meet him when he was alive. I read and heard other people talk about him (...) I imagined him and drew my visions].⁴⁸ Fernández’s reference to visions is quite evocative, as if acting as a medium (a bridge) with the afterlife. Martínez also refers to the process of writing a biography as time spent ‘convivindo cun fantasma, escoitando as súas cancións e vendo as súas películas favoritas’ [living with a ghost, listening to his songs and watching his favourite films],⁴⁹ a statement that stresses the importance of engaging with a variety of media to understand Pereiro both as a person and as an artist. The result is, however, only a ‘simulacro’ [simulacrum], an

⁴⁶ Martha Kuhlman, ‘The Autobiographical and Biographical Graphic Novel’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Graphic Novel*, ed. by Stephen E. Tabachnick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 113–129 (124).

⁴⁷ Martínez, *Lois Pereiro. Vida e obra*, 11–12.

⁴⁸ Fernández Serrano, *Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro*, 6.

⁴⁹ Martínez, *Lois Pereiro. Vida e obra*, 14.

‘espellismo’ [mirage], a ‘derrota’ [defeat], since ‘por máis anécdotas que se cosan no relato (...) Lois Pereiro seguirá sen comparecer’ [no matter how many anecdotes are woven into the narrative (...) Lois Pereiro won’t still appear].⁵⁰ Calveiro also expresses a similar feeling of defeat, and even questions the possibility of reconstructing a life in a biography.⁵¹

However, by contrast with the bodily absence of textual biographies, biographical comics have the capacity to summon the body of the biographical subject, albeit in a ghostly manner. The graphic representation of a person’s body can be compared to that of film, although the comics medium has its own specificities. Whereas Jean-Louis Comolli suggests that there are two competing bodies in a biopic (that of the real person and of the actor representing them), ‘one body too much’,⁵² Bill Nichols argues that in the biographical documentary there is ‘a body too few’.⁵³ The role played by bodies in the comics medium has also been emphasised by Hilary Chute, who argues that comics are ‘about bodies - about locating them in space and time’ and therefore have ‘a multivalent and complex relation to embodiment’.⁵⁴

As it would be expected in a biographical comic, Pereiro’s body is almost ubiquitous in *Breve encontro*. The narrative of the comic revolves around the poet’s physical deterioration – if

⁵⁰ Martínez, *Lois Pereiro. Vida e obra*, 14.

⁵¹ Calveiro, *Náufrago do paraíso* 8.

⁵² Jean Louis Comolli, ‘Historical fiction: A body too much’, *Screen* 19, no. 2 (1978), 41–53 (44).

⁵³ Bill Nichols, “‘Getting to Know You...’: Knowledge, Power, and the Body”, in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 174–91 (77).

⁵⁴ Hilary Chute, ‘Comics Form and Narrating Lives’, *Profession* (2011): 107-117 (109), <https://doi.org/10.1632/PROF.2011.2011.1.107>.

that is also true for any ageing body and its path towards eventual disappearance, it takes a more prominent role in Pereiro's case due to the mark left by illness. This process is present from the very start of the comic, as the first chapter features a double page spread with twelve portraits of the poet, capturing changes in appearance from his birth in 1958 to his death in 1996. These and other images that can be found throughout the book are a media transposition of the photographic archive on Pereiro. A key biographical publication in this regard is the *Fotobiografía sonora* [Sound Photobiography] edited by Xosé Manuel Pereiro, Lino Braxe and Xurxo Souto, a photographic collection with images of the writer from his childhood to the year before his passing, accompanied by two CDs that include an interview with Pereiro and compile several songs adapting some of his poems. This is therefore a multimodal artifact in itself, and also one with which the biographical comic establishes a dialogue by reproducing several photographs that appear in the former. Page 29, for example, features a collage of six photos of Pereiro as a child that can also be found separately in the *Fotobiografía sonora*. These are drawn, delimited by their original rectangular shape and in a more realistic style than the panels telling Pereiro's life story. This strategy draws the reader's attention to the fact that they exist outside of the artist's imagination. However, having been drawn instead of inserted as photographs into the page, these pictures occupy a liminal state between media, as reimaginings of the source object. If Marianne Hirsch refers to photographs as 'ghostly revenants',⁵⁵ the reproduction of the poet's body in these photos is the image of an image, endowed with an intermedial in-betweenness. Even when Pereiro's body is drawn without reproducing the photos directly, these work as a template for the imagining of the poet as a character in his own story. The re-enactment of his body in

⁵⁵ Marianne Hirsch, 'Mourning and Postmemory', in *Graphic Subjects: Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels*, ed. Michael A. Chaney (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 17–44 (22).

Fernández Serrano's biographical comic can therefore be placed somewhere between Comolli's and Nichols' considerations: the imagined body is not physically present in someone else's flesh, but drawn on the page, becoming simultaneously present and absent as a ghostly presence or a 'bodiless body'.⁵⁶ Thinking of Todd Haynes' film mentioned earlier, Pereiro is in the comic and yet he *is not there*.

The biographical comic exhibits another transmedial link with the *Fotobiografía sonora* in the reference to one of the songs included in its CDs: 'Narcisismo' [Narcissism], based on Pereiro's poem of the same title and recorded by the band Radio Océano [Radio Ocean] fronted by his brother Xosé Manuel Pereiro.⁵⁷ The poem appears in a panel where we see the band performing the song, and here the sobriety of the printed letter contrasts with the expressiveness of the drawn word 'Narcisismo', within spiky speech balloons, to convey the singer's performance. This form of medial transposition is also used earlier, to illustrate the lyrics of some of Pereiro and his brother's favourite songs during their teenage years (Fig. 2). This page opens with two panels showing the needle of the record player being placed on a vinyl that starts turning, an image that anticipates the poet's later heroin use, precisely the theme of 'Narcisismo':

Sigo os pasos do sangue no meu corpo

⁵⁶ I made a similar suggestion in David Miranda-Barreiro, 'Invoking the Past in Graphic Biographies: the Life, Death and Ghostly Return of Alexandre Bóveda', *Studies in Comics* 10, no. 1, 27–48.

⁵⁷ Punk band from A Coruña, active between 1981-1987. Although 'Narcisismo' was included in one of their demos and played on the radio, it was not part of their only studio album, *Nin falta que fai* [And It's not Even Necessary] (RNE, 1986). The song was officially released in 2016, in special vinyl edition.

e coa unlla do meu dedo máis firme
abro un sulco vermello en media lúa
na vea que me acolle tan azul.⁵⁸

[I follow the steps of the blood in my body
and with the nail of my steadier finger
I open a red line in the shape of a half moon
in the vein that welcomes me with such a blue colour].

The images of the record player are followed by several small panels featuring the brothers as singers or protagonists of songs by The Doors, The Rolling Stones, David Bowie, Neil Young, The Velvet Underground, and Leonard Cohen. As in the case of ‘Narcisismo’, the speech balloons adopt different shapes depending on the tone of the song; for example: spiky ones for the Rolling Stones’ ‘Brown Sugar’, wavy shapes for Bowie’s ‘Space Oddity’ and Cohen’s ‘Suzanne’, and a speech balloon filled with black ink to convey the darkness of The Velvet Underground’s ‘Venus in Furs’. Around the panels, musical notes are drawn to signify that the music is playing. The combination of these different visual strategies works as a bridge between comics and music to represent sound with images, while at the same time expressing Pereiro’s identification with the countercultural movement that will influence his style of writing.

⁵⁸ Lois Pereiro, *Obra completa*, 106.

Figure 2: Jacobo Fernández Serrano, *Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro, un achegamento comiqueiro á biografía e obra do poeta*. Xosé Manuel and Lois listening to rock music. Reproduced with the artist's kind permission.

Fernández Serrano also brings the existing footage on Pereiro to the comics page. A noticeable example is the recreation of a 1989 TV interview in the programme *Corazonada* [Hunch] from the *Televisión de Galicia* (Galicia's public TV channel). In another case of medial transposition, the comic offers a summary of the interview in two pages. Visually, it is quite clear that we are 'reading a TV programme' from the start, as this section opens with the logo of the show on a black background. Moreover, both pages are laid out with eight rectangular panels of the same size which include shots that are very similar to the footage, and therefore reminiscent of a TV screen. As in the original source, the damage inflicted on Pereiro's body by the illness is now striking, and is emphasised in the close-ups in which the poet's face looks like a pale mask. Furthermore, Fernández Serrano decides to focus on the interviewee's opinions on the use of drugs for literary creation. This choice enhances the visual representation of the poet's physical decay, who now resembles the characterization of Death from the comic's prologue. Indeed, like photography, audio-visual texts reproduce the image of bodies that do not exist anymore, because they have either changed or disappeared. The ghostly air of these images adds to the central theme of death and deterioration in the transmedial network of Pereiro's biographies and is also a reminder that the drawing of his body occupies a liminal position between media, akin to the in-betweenness of the ghost and the vampire. The fact that this interview is no longer accessible on the TVG's website but only as a YouTube video made with a screen-capturing software and uploaded by a private citizen, makes the original show also a phantom presence on the internet. As the only available referent for the reader who wants to go back to the original footage, the existence of

this YouTube video adds yet another layer to the weave of intermedial sources that the comic, as a medium, uses to summon Pereiro's body onto the page. Furthermore, and as in previous cases, the incorporation of this medium in the comic reflects the role played by TV in Pereiro's life and writing, as he not only worked as a translator of series for the TVG, but also wrote the script of a short programme entitled 'Que é Galicia?' [What's Galicia?], aired on the same channel in 1988. The script, a collection of definitions of Galicia inspired by each letter of the alphabet, is also included in the comic, with the text appearing in tailless balloons on a drawn map of Galicia. For the reader, it is not possible to discern whether this is a medial transposition, since the programme is not available to be watched anywhere – another ghostly presence. It might well be that the comic is not transposing the TV programme, but creating a new version by combining the artistic languages of the TV script and of comics.

Medial combination is in fact present throughout the comic, by integrating some of Pereiro's poems and extracts from his prose writing into the biography (Fig. 3). On three occasions, the poems appear on a black background, accompanied by illustrations matching the themes, and following different aesthetics associated with Pereiro's poetry, such as gothic and industrial. The poet's drawn body also appears here, reimagined in different contexts and attires, such as an 18th-century philosopher or dressed in the punk-rock style he wore in the 1980s. His body appears drawn again in the adaptation of extracts from his aforementioned diary *Conversa ultramarina* and his short essay *Modesta proposición para renunciar a facer xirar a roda hidráulica dunha cíclica historia universal da infamia* [A Modest Proposition for Renouncing to Turn the Hydraulic Wheel of a Cyclical History of Infamy].⁵⁹ In the former, he is not only drawn as a vampire (as we have seen), but also as a fake Marvel superhero, *Fígado-man* (Liver-man), sarcastically imagined by Pereiro in his diary as a hint to his body's reluctance to succumb fully to the illness. This is not the only time the poet

⁵⁹ Lois Pereiro, *Modesta proposición e outros ensaios* (Vigo: Xerais, 2011).

takes on the appearance of a comics character—he appears as Conan the Barbarian in an earlier chapter to illustrate the role of comics in his formative years as a teenager. Later on (Fig. 4), he is drawn into a refashioned cover of Hergé’s *Le Lotus bleu* (1935), with Pereiro inside the vase where Tintin and Snowy are in the original, in this case as part of a reimagining of the poet’s visit to the *Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée* in Brussels (Pereiro was an avid traveller). These are instances of intramedial references, comic to comic, which in the case of Marvel and Tintin are also intertwined into the media combination with literature. The biography does in fact incorporate Pereiro’s poem ‘Cobalto y el profesor Tornasol’ (Cobalt and Professor Calculus), with a reference in its title to Hergé’s character, which appears within a speech balloon as if Pereiro was reciting it.

Towards the end of the comic, the writer appears again reading his work, in the recreation of the launch of Pereiro’s last collection on the same year of his passing. Several of his poems are also included here, in this case occupying separate panels, which are placed next to others where Pereiro explains the meaning of his verses. The poem ‘(Breve encontro)’ is cited next to a reproduction of the original poster of Lean’s film, and preceded by a panel where Pereiro introduces his text in front of Death as Laura Jesson. All these examples of medial combination and intramedial references (sometimes appearing together) weave a multi-layered intermedial network and blend different semiotic systems, not only echoing the influence of a variety of media on Pereiro’s writing, but also making full use of the potentiality of comics to act as bridge between different forms of creative expression.

Figure 3: Jacobo Fernández Serrano, *Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro, un achegamento comiqueiro á biografía e obra do poeta*. Illustrated poems. Reproduced with the artist’s kind permission.

Figure 4: Jacobo Fernández Serrano, *Lois Pereiro. Breve encontro, un achegamento comiqueiro á biografía e obra do poeta*. Pereiro at the *Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée*. Reproduced with the artist's kind permission.

The poetry reading spans two chapters and is interspersed with images of the writer's funeral, but his death is not the end of the comic. Pereiro reappears in a last section called 'Visiones' [Visions], a sort of resurrection in the afterlife, in which his body is restored to health. His presence lingers in Fernández Serrano's art, as if the author were reluctant to let him go just yet. In these 'Visions', the intermedial and intramedial references continue, as Pereiro meets with Death once more, who appears dressed like Red Sonja and again like Laura Jesson. This section is expanded in the Spanish edition with adaptations of Pereiro's poems and of texts by other writers, such as a version of the comics adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) issued by the Spanish publishing house Bruguera.⁶⁰ This is, therefore, an adaptation of an adaptation, an intramedial reference that originates from a medial transposition, which also adds a final twist: the deceased Captain Billy Bones resembles Pereiro, and the 'dark spot' that announces his demise in a threatening letter turns into Death's eye, characterised like Laura Jesson one last time, as the dialogue

⁶⁰ From 1970–1983, in their collection *Joyas Literarias Juveniles* [Literary Jewels for Young Readers], Bruguera published 272 comics adaptations by Spanish artists of famous works of European and American literature. *Treasure Island* was the second issue of the collection in 1970. See Miguel Fernández Soto, 'Joyas Literarias Juveniles: los clásicos ilustrados de Bruguera' [Literary Jewels for Young Readers: Bruguera's Illustrated Classics], <http://seronoser.free.fr/bruguera/joyasliterariasjuveniles.htm#adaptaciones>.

from the scene of the film *Brief Encounter* in which Alec Harvey removes a piece of grit from Laura's eye appears in a series of speech balloons. The black spot then reverses from Death's face into a shining dot, a full stop that closes the biography in the afterlife, and brings the multilayered network of intermedial references on which the comic is built also to an end.

Conclusion

Lois Pereiro is a poet that stands out in Galician literature owing to his status as a countercultural icon whose work includes references to punk music and drug use, and combines different forms of pop culture with erudite references to European and American literature. This aspect of his literary creation has been reflected in several of the biographies published about him. Film, photography, literature, and comics are used in these texts to re-enact his life through an intermedial dialogue.

Jacobo Fernández Serrano's *Lois Pereiro. Breve encuentro* is at the centre of this transmedial network, as it incorporates a variety of intermedial references to other texts about the poet. Moreover, by making of intermediality a key feature of his biography, Fernández Serrano shows how comics are particularly well equipped to act as a bridge between media. The hybrid nature of comics as a text/image art form, and the malleability of the comics page, allows a range of strategies to carry out medial transpositions, media combinations, and intermedial references (following Rajewski's terminology), as well as intramedial references (in Wolf's definition). The combination of literary texts (adapted, illustrated or in separate panels) with drawings, the use of different shapes of speech balloons and other visual markers to bring sound to the page, and the adoption of filmic techniques from both cinema and television, are some of the strategies used by Fernández Serrano to reflect the intermedial nature of Pereiro's writing itself as well as his passion for popular culture, and art in general.

Furthermore, biographical comics act as a medium in another sense of the word, by summoning the body of the biographical subject. If intermediality can be defined as a bridge and therefore as a practice that takes place between borders, comics biographies can also be regarded as occupying a liminal position between life and death, since the biographee appears as a ghostly presence, both absent and present, a 'bodyless body' that comes back on the page. To represent how the poet lived on the edge between life and death due to his illnesses, Fernández Serrano's comics biography also incorporates Death as a character, and in doing so, turns life writing into a form of 'writing death', a thanatography based on a theme that appears across the transmedial network of textual and visual texts about Pereiro.