



## Full Length Review Article

### COMICS AS “LITTLE NARRATIVES...”

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#### ABSTRACT

The present paper discusses the pedagogical shifts in English Language Teaching which demands the participation of the subgenres in Literature. The paper also justifies the role of comics in English Language Teaching through Gerard Genette's paradigm and strongly recommends that Comics can be a viable genre of Sub-literature. Any element in language teaching requires a context and Literature serves as the best source for any classroom interaction, irrespective of the level of the students. Again, the present scenario in teaching and learning had redefined what 'literature' is. In the present era, where one's time is their valuable asset, research shows that reading in any form has been dwindling. The communication not only has to take place but also have to happen at a quick pace. On the other hand, the role of the students in learning is acquiring importance with the concept of flipped classrooms. Also, Learners have to read, understand and interpret language. On this occasion, sub-literatures serve a better choice to improve reading habit among learners. Sub-Literature includes anecdotes, jokes, repartees, quotations, riddles, comics, 'middles' in newspapers, etc., (Ram R V,2008). Of the above mentioned forms, Comics serve as a best way to promote reading, applicative and critical skills. In a worksheet, the students imagine the contents, given in words. But comics contain pictures which motivates the students to read. They enhance the understanding of the language as they are a series of pictures with a beginning, middle and an end, with meaning implicit. The immediacy of the content is an attractive factor in comics which helps the students to stay tuned. A comic, when put to effective use helps a teacher in numerous ways. The paper throws light on the pedagogies of using comics as an effective tool in language classrooms and justifies comics as a sub genre with the help of the narrative paradigm of Gerard Genette, a French Structure list.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The present paper discusses the recent pedagogical shifts in English Language Teaching and recommends the participation of the sub-literatures (see (Ram R V, 2008) in English classroom. In the modern era where learners are blessed with little time, the teachers find it challenging to compel their students to read literature –novels, dramas, epics, long poems, essays, etc., in order to develop their language skills. But any teaching requires a meaningful context to enhance the language ability of a student. To fill in the gap, the author of this paper suggests comics as a best alternative. The paper recommends comics as a Sub-literature as it has richer narrative elements which makes the communication easier and also generates interest in pedagogy. The paper is divided into three parts where in the first part analyses the need for a

change in the context of pedagogy and in the second, the paper discusses the narrative elements present in a comic to be used as a learning tool in a classroom. The Third part brings to light, the advantages of using comics as a sub-literature in a language classroom. 'Change' is the permanent phenomenon. In the recent days, the concept of mother tongue, regional language, foreign language, language for academic purposes, language for economic and social mobility, language for day-today communication and language for cultural identity are being redefined. In the post modern era, concepts change as every walk of life is redesigned by the socio-political influences in the society. Language teaching is not excluded from the change. The question in every teachers mind is not what to teach? But, "With what to teach?" The learners of present time find reading as a difficult task. They don't prioritize their time for reading a novel or an epic by sacrificing their extra-curricular activities (which interests them most than academics). At the same time, they cannot quit reading for specific purposes like equipping their vocabulary, to stay up in current affairs, learning the use of a given word in

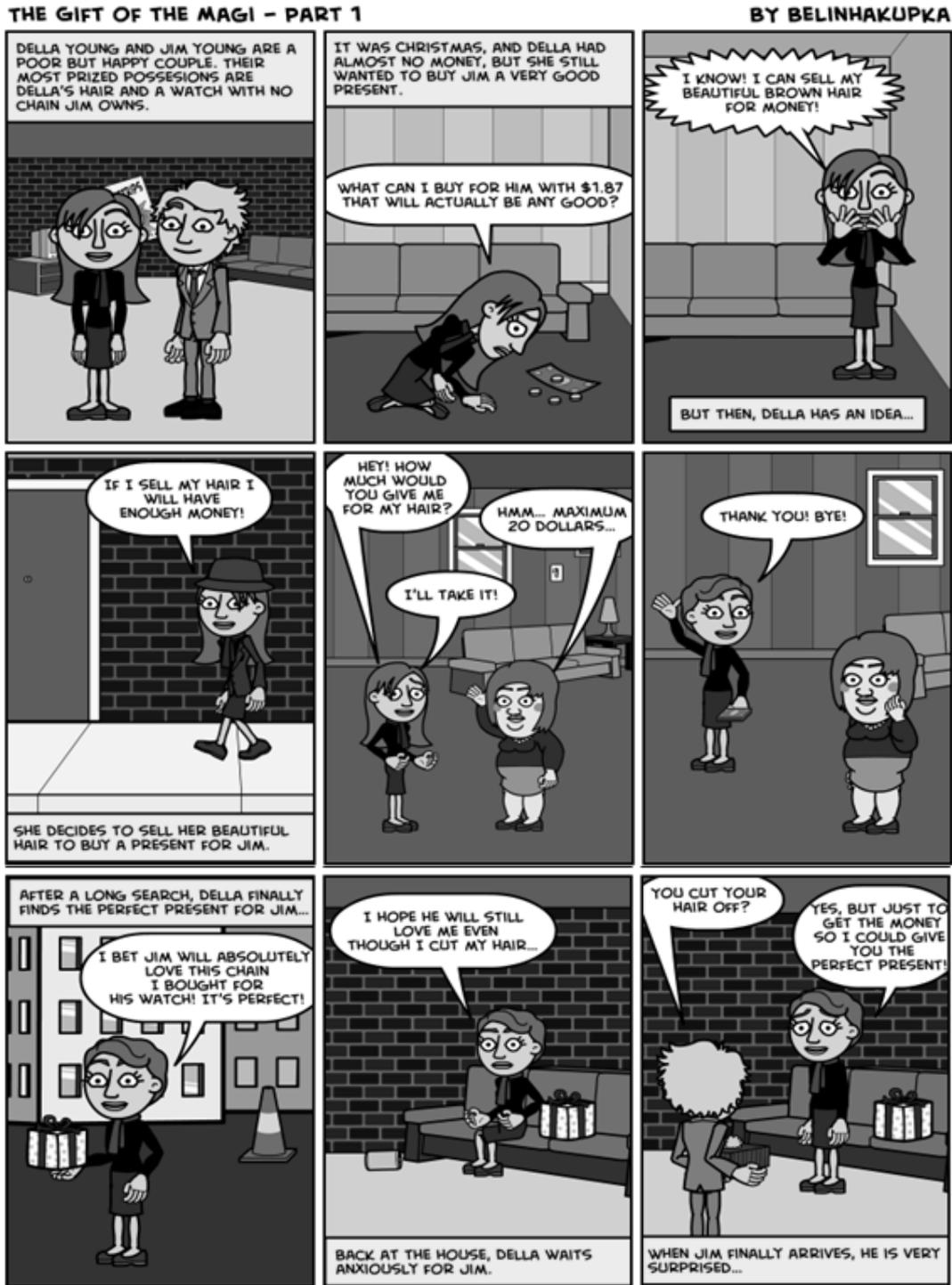
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a context, etcetera. Language cannot be separated from literature and vice-versa. In this context, any language teacher is confused with what materials should they use to teach English language.

Little narratives are nothing but narratives which are simple and talk about down to earth things. To cite an example, epics are example of grand narratives whereas short stories, one act plays are examples of little narratives.

Comic Strip - ‘The Gift of The Magi’



There are two kinds of narratives- Grand Narratives and Little Narratives. Grand Narrative or “master narrative” is a term introduced by Jean-François Lyotard in his classic 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, which is a magnificent way of saying things, in which events are interconnected. When the grand narratives failed in their purpose, they paved way for the birth of little narratives.

Comics as Little Narratives

To establish Comics as an authorized genre in literature, it is important to establish it as an independent narrative with all the qualities of a literature. So it is important to grasp the distinction between three fundamental entities: story, narrative and narration.



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The story generally corresponds to a series of events and actions that are told by someone (the narrator), and represented in some final form, producing a narrative. As a field of study, narratology looks at the internal mechanisms of narrative, the form taken by a narrated story. In the field of narrative discourse, we Endeavour to identify the common, near-universal principles of text composition. Thus, we attempt to discern what relations are possible between the elements of the narrative/story/narration.

#### Elements of narrative in a Comic

Comics is a medium used to express ideas through images which are combined with text or other visual information.

Mr. James Dillingham ("Young Jim") and his wife, Della, are a couple living in a modest apartment. They have only two possessions between them in which they take pride: Della's beautiful long, flowing hair, almost to her knees, and Jim's shiny gold watch, which had belonged to his father and grandfather. On Christmas Eve, with only \$1.87 in hand, and desperate to find a gift for Jim, Della sells her hair for \$20 to a nearby hairdresser named Madame Sofronie, and eventually finds a platinum pocket watch fob chain for Jim's watch for \$21. Satisfied with the perfect gift for Jim, Della runs home and begins to prepare pork chops for dinner. At 7 o'clock, Della sits at a table near the door, waiting for Jim to come home. Unusually late, Jim walks in and immediately stops

short at the sight of Della, who had previously prayed that she was still pretty to Jim. Della then admits to Jim that she sold her hair to buy him his present. Jim gives Della her present – an assortment of expensive hair accessories (referred to as “The Combs”), useless now that her hair is short. Della then shows Jim the chain she bought for him, to which Jim says he sold his watch to get the money to buy her combs. Although Jim and Della are now left with gifts that neither one can use, they realize how far they are willing to go to show their love for each other, and how priceless their love really is. The above comic illustrates the story in an effective way rather than it is conveyed through words. Genette discerns four analytical categories to explain the possible relations within a narrative. They are: narrative mood, the narrative instance, narrative level and narrative time. The elements of narrative in this comic- The story implies a narrator who is distanced from the narrated as the narrative is conveyed through reported speech. The narrative performs the communicative function and have a heterodiegetic narrator. The narrative time is simultaneous as it is in the form of dialogues. The comic strip has external focalization as the character knows more than the narrator and the narrative time corresponds to the story time, which is reported only once in the comic. Thus the above comic justifies to the typology of Genette and so can be treated as an exclusive genre of literature.

### Conclusion

Comics are a great mode to teach and conduct activities in a language classroom. The content paves a meaningful context and the information conveyed is immediate.

Pictures motivate people to read even before they know the content. The choice of words helps in the development of vocabulary and various elements of grammar can be taught. The time spent in reading a comic is also an added advantage. We live in the era where we have to buy time whenever, wherever possible and comics is the best possible resource. Comics are affordable and appear in mass communications like newspapers, magazines which are available in common, unlike novels which one have to buy on their own. Moreover, Comics enhances the creativity of the readers as it is a visual treat. There is no doubt that it can emerge as a genre of literature.

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