

Exploring Narrative Techniques in Graphic Novels

Rajendra Prasad Chapagae, PhD

Department of English, Saraswati Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

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Abstract

In the realm of literature, graphic novels have become much more prominent as a vibrant and versatile medium in recent years. This study explores the intricate fusion of narrative and visual elements within graphic novels, with an emphasis on how all of these elements work together for conveying complex stories and themes. As the medium continues to evolve, understanding the literary techniques employed becomes paramount for scholars, artists, and readers alike. The literature review traces the historical development of graphic novels, emphasizing their evolution from comic books to a legitimate literary form. Acknowledging seminal works and scholars in the field, this paper establishes a foundation for the exploration of narrative and visual techniques within the medium. Our methodology is rooted in content analysis and case studies, examining a diverse selection of graphic novels. These novels are chosen for their exemplary use of literary and visual techniques, reflecting a broad spectrum of themes and styles within the medium. In analyzing narrative techniques, we dissect the adaptation of traditional literary elements, including plot, character development, and dialogue.

Keywords: Graphic novels, dialogue, transformation, reviews, good reads

Introduction:

Over the past few decades, graphic novel has transcended its niche status to claim a prominent position in literature. It has emerged as an appealing and transformative force within the area of literature. It has attracted readers of all ages and backgrounds. Its rich narrative and visually engaging works are a fusion of art and storytelling that offers a unique and dynamic reading experience. This introduction serves as a gateway into the intriguing realm of graphic novels and sets the stage for our research, which aims to analyze the literary techniques employed within this medium to convey complex stories and themes.

Once considered minor literary genre, graphic novels have evolved from their modest origins in comic book culture into a form of storytelling that spans into diverse genres and themes. Although comic books and graphic novel share a common visual language, graphic novel distinguishes itself through its extended narrative depth and capacity to tackle deep and multifaceted themes.

In contemporary literature, the importance of graphic novels is on the rise as interesting genre. These works are no longer relegated to the margins; instead, they have infiltrated mainstream literary circles and continue to capture the imagination of readers worldwide.

Literary awards now recognize and celebrate graphic novels, while educational institutions incorporate them into their curricula, recognizing their potential as tools for teaching literature and visual art.

The visual narrative format of graphic novels offers an exceptional storytelling experience. Unlike traditional prose, graphic novels employ a synergy of text and images, allowing for nuanced storytelling that transcends the boundaries of language. This visual narrative invites readers to engage on multiple levels, simultaneously decoding text and interpreting visual cues. As a result, graphic novels can convey complex stories and themes in ways that are both intellectually stimulating and emotionally reverberating.

Statement of Problem:

In light of the growing prominence of graphic novels within the literary landscape, this research seeks to delve deeper into their inner workings. The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the literary techniques employed within graphic novels to convey complex stories and themes. By closely examining the interplay between narrative and visual elements, the paper aims to unravel the secrets behind the unique storytelling skill of graphic novels. As graphic novels continue to tackle an increasingly diverse range of subjects from personal memoirs to socio-political commentaries, understanding the literary techniques at play becomes paramount. The paper explores how traditional narrative elements, such as plot development, characters and dialogue, are adapted and enhanced within this visual medium. Furthermore, the paper will investigate the role of visual techniques, such as panel layout, composition, color, and symbolism, in augmenting the narrative depth and thematic richness of graphic novels. Through case studies and detailed analysis; it will light up the intricate ways in which graphic novels communicate complex stories and themes. Moreover, how readers interact with graphic novels and understand their narrative and visual components will be taken into account. To put it briefly, the research article seeks to advance knowledge of graphic novels as a unique and influential genre of contemporary literature.

Development of Graphic Novels as Literary Form:

The history and evolution of graphic novels as a literary form is a fascinating journey that stretches back to ancient times but gained prominence in the 20th century. The term 'graphic novel' is relatively recent, coined in the 1960s to distinguish longer, more complex comic book narratives. Transformations in the development of graphic novels are as follows:

1. **Ancient and Early Influences:** Visual storytelling is not a recent phenomenon. Ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptians and the Mayans, used hieroglyphics and codices to convey narratives through images and text. Additionally, the Bayeux Tapestry, a medieval work, blended sequential art and narrative to depict the Norman Conquest of England.
2. **Comics and Pulp Magazines:** The early 20th century saw the rise of comic strips in newspapers and the emergence of comic books. Characters like Superman and Batman became iconic figures during this era. These early comics laid the foundation for the visual storytelling techniques that would later define graphic novels.

3. The Silver Age of Comics: In the 1950s and 1960s, comics began to tackle more complex themes and narratives. Works like *The Fantastic Four and Spider-Man* by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby introduced character development and moral dilemmas, paving the way for more sophisticated storytelling.
4. The Emergence of Graphic Novels: The word 'graphic novel' was first used in Will Eisner's book; *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, published in 1978. It defines a specific kind of comic book. Eisner's book is considered to be one of the early graphic novels that has brought to light the literary narrative qualities of the medium as a whole.
5. Maus and Watchmen: In the 1980s, the graphic novels "Maus" by Art Spiegelman and "Watchmen" by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons are two excellent examples of great graphic novels. "Watchmen," garnered critical acclaim. "Maus" tackled the Holocaust, while "Watchmen" deconstructed superhero tropes, demonstrating the medium's capacity for exploring complex and mature themes.
6. Diversification of Genres: The late 20th century saw graphic novels diversify into various genres, from memoirs (e.g., Marjane Satrapi's "Persepolis") to historical fiction (e.g., Frank Miller's "300") and non-fiction (e.g., Joe Sacco's "Palestine"). This diversification expanded the medium's reach and audience.

Graphic Literature and its Scholars:

Scholarly exploration of graphic novels has grown significantly in recent decades, paralleling the medium's rise in prominence. Researchers, critics, and writers have contributed substantial insights into the artistic, cultural, and literary aspects of graphic novels. Here are key works and scholars that have made significant contributions:

1. Scott McCloud: McCloud's "Understanding Comics" (1993) is a foundational text that offers a comprehensive analysis of the medium's unique language and visual storytelling techniques.
2. Will Eisner: Eisner is known for his pioneering work, but he is also the author of two books that dive into the theory and practice of comic art. These books are titled "Comics and Sequential Art" (1985) and "Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative" (1996).
3. Hillary Chute: The anthology titled "Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form" (2016) by Chute brings together graphic novels, witness accounts, and documentaries.
4. Charles Hatfield: Hatfield's "Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature" (2005) provides a scholarly analysis of alternative and independent comics, shedding light on their cultural significance.
5. Literary Journals and Academic Journals: Publications like "The Comics Journal," "Critical Inquiry," and "Image Text" have featured numerous scholarly articles and discussions on graphic novels.
6. University Programs and Conferences: Academic institutions and conferences, such as the International Comic Arts Forum (ICAF) and the Comics Studies Society (CSS), have contributed to the scholarly discourse on graphic novels.

The history of graphic novels is marked by a rich evolution from early visual storytelling traditions to the contemporary diverse medium as it is today. The growing body of literature and contributions by key scholars continue to deepen our understanding of graphic novels as a distinctive and impactful form of literature and art.

Form and Stories in Graphic Novels:

It is essential that teachers and other academics take comic books and graphic novels seriously if they are to obtain the maximum benefit from these mediums. There is no doubt that this is taking place; but, there are some educators and, more crucially, students who continue to assume that comics are nothing more than mindless amusement meant to pander to the most primal feelings of young males. It may be possible to clear up such misunderstandings by first defining the relevant language and then offering some background information.

Throughout the history of its existence, the medium that is now generally referred to as the graphic book has been known by a wide variety of other names. A storied identity in the world of comics what steps are involved in the creation of a comic book or other sequential work? According to Will Eisner, the term "graphic storytelling" refers to "a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea (Eisner, xi)". According to him, it is "an artistic and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea (Eisner, xi)". In other words, it is a method of storytelling. A more specific explanation of what it is that he offers is the following: "an art that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words" (xii). Will Eisner was the first artist to formally identify sequential art, which encompasses works such as comic books and graphic novels. According to him, sequential art may be defined as "an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" (4) His definition of it was that it was "an art form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea (12)." Because many of the works that are frequently referred to as graphic novels are really nonfiction. Chute argues that "the term graphic novel should be replaced with the phrase graphic narrative instead of being used (514). He further refers to "a graphic narrative as a book-length works in the medium of comics" (Chute, 453). Chute believes that the term 'graphic novel' is more appropriate than the phrase 'graphic narrative' due to the fact that many graphic novels are based on genuine stories. In the book *Understanding Comics*, written in 1994, Scott McCloud defines comics as "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (20). McCloud's definition of comics is based on the idea that comics are "a deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (21). It is probable that debates on the exact use of language will continue for some time. The idea of visual storytelling as conceived by Chute and the notion of comics as articulated by McCloud serve as the foundation for this discussion. Manga, a Japanese term referring to both comics and cartooning can be taken as analogous to graphic novels. Both are considered to be examples of sequential art and the terms 'comics' and 'manga' can be used synonymously. Graphic novels manipulate the elements of

magna to establish unique pacing and emotional resonance. These adaptations often leverage the power of visual storytelling, with illustrations that not only complement but also enhance the narrative, imbuing it with layers of depth and meaning.

The examination of visual techniques is equally crucial. Panel layout, composition, color, and symbolism are vital components in the storytelling process. Panel arrangements can alter the perception of time and space, while the deliberate use of color and symbolism can imbue scenes with thematic depth and emotional impact. Graphic novels display the synergy between narrative and visual elements. Narrative and visual techniques of graphic novels communicate intricate stories and themes and stand different from social commentary to personal narratives.

Graphic Novel and Its Narrative Techniques:

As a unique storytelling medium, graphic novels deftly use conventional narrative components like plot, character development, and dialogue. They also use the special ability of visual storytelling to modify and improve these components. Panel arrangements and page layout are frequently used in graphic novels to regulate story tempo. Panel sequences might imply time passing, heighten the action, or evoke suspense. Moreover, the visual aspects allow for non-linear storytelling through juxtaposition, where events occurring simultaneously can be presented side by side. Character development benefits from the visual dimension as well. The visual portrayal of characters' expressions, body language and visual symbolism can provide nuanced insights into their emotions and growth over the course of the narrative. Speech bubbles allow readers to interact with text and pictures at the same time. Dialogue is crucial for character interaction and plot development. Additionally, graphic novels use font selections and lettering styles to communicate shades and tone in dialogue that could be difficult to convey with text alone. Graphic novels, as a whole, invite readers to examine stories in a comprehensive approach that increases both the emotional resonance and narrative complexity of traditional narrative parts by weaving them into a visually engaging experience. The way that word and images are harmoniously combined makes graphic novels stand out as a powerful and distinct storytelling medium.

Conclusion:

Graphic novels make a unique blend of literary and visual aspects. In specifically, the purpose of this study is to investigate how readers respond to the unorthodox combination of textual and visual components that may be found in graphic novels. Languages that people speak are representative of the manner in which they interact with their surroundings and their ways of life. Despite the fact that the examined works often relied more on popular aesthetics than on high cultural discourse, they did provide readers the opportunity to engage with and experience life in their own unique ways. The evaluations performed quite well in this regard. The assessments tend to focus more on the target audience than on experts, which is different from more conventional expert evaluations and raises concerns about the reliability and authenticity of the assessments. Popular aesthetics can be used more commonly as an ideological framework in the critical assessment of culture.

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