

Reading Poetry in the Form of Comics – With Special Reference to Julian Peters’ Poems to See By: A Comic Artist Interprets Great Poetry

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Second Language Learners of English are reluctant to read poems as it contains various literary devices. To understand the images created through poems, one needs to understand cultural and literary implications created by the poet. So, poems were recommended for advanced learners of English. For a long time, since its inception, comics have been advocated for basic level learners of English. At present, Julian Peters, a Canadian comic book artist, tried his hand at adapting classic poems into comics. His drawings along with lines from the poem will help the reluctant readers of poem to enjoy reading it. The poems chosen for the present study are Julian Peters’ comic book adaptations of poems such as Langston Hughes’ “Juke Box Love Song”, Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “God’s Grandeur”, T.S.Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, and Siegfried Sassoon’s “Before The Battle”.

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1. Introduction

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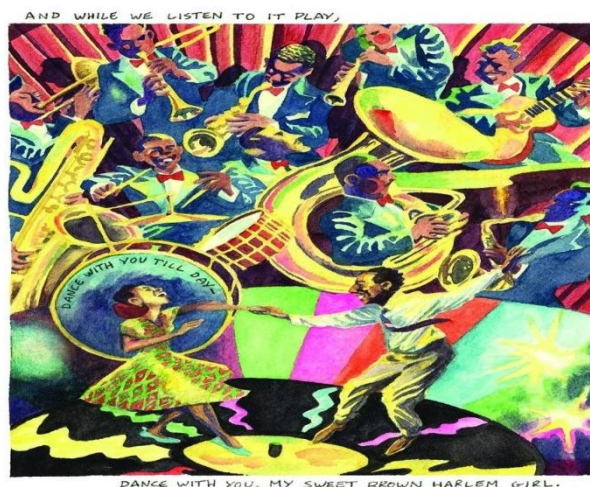
Poetry is the most difficult genre to understand for a second language learner of English. Yet, if the students enjoy reading it, it helps them to improve their four basic language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking and also helps them to develop their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. In the traditional classrooms, it is very difficult for

an English teacher to make her students enjoy poems. Usually poetry does not follow the grammar rules of the language. This results in confusion in understanding the poetry. Another major factor that hinders a student from understanding poetry is its cultural background. The most important factor that makes the students to rate poetry as the most difficult form is the literary devices that are used in it. Thus poetry is branded as the most difficult genre in English.

Teachers often use traditional method of teaching. Teachers do the task of interpretation wherein the students just listen to the teacher for the understanding of the poem. In this process, students forget to enjoy poem. This leads to poor understanding of the poem by the students. It is very challenging for an English teacher to choose a proper method to teach poetry. The teachers usually follow literature-oriented approach to teach poetry. This is of no use to students whose proficiency level in English is low. The present study probes into the current method of presenting poetry in comics form. This method of teaching poetry can help even a poor and slow learners of English to enjoy poetry in English.

The poems taken for the present study are Julian Peters' comic-book adaptation of Langston Hughes' Juke Box Love Song, Gerard Manley Hopkins' God's Grandeur, and T.S.Eliot's The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock and Siegfried Sassoon's "Before the Battle". Julian Peters is an illustrator and comic book artist living in Montreal, Canada. He focuses on adapting classical poems into comics

Langston Hughes is an African American writer who wrote poetry, plays, novels and newspaper columns. He explored Harlem in his works. His first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* was published in 1926. He portrayed black life of America in his poems. There was an influence of Jazz in his writing. East 127th Street is renamed as Langston Hughes Place. The present study focuses on comic-book adaptation of Langston Hughes' poem *Juke Box Love Song*. The following drawing by Julian Peters gives visual representation of three lines from the poem. These three lines from the poem are easy to understand. Anyone who has got the basic language skills can easily follow the meaning of this poem. Yet, a second language learner may get only superficial meaning of the following three lines.



Picture 1-Julian Peters. Plough Publishing. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved on

18/11/2024.

And while we listen to it play

Dance with you till day-

Dance with you my sweet brown Harlem girl.

Looking at the comical drawing by Julian Peters, a student is sure to understand not only the poem but also its meaning and cultural background. With the help of the drawing, the students will be grasping the literal meaning of the lines from the poem.

Gerard Manley Hopkins is a Victorian poet. His works were not published even thirty years after his death. He was the founder of a marine insurance firm. His most ambitious poem is *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. In this poem, he introduced sprung rhythm. He wrote his most famous sonnet *The Windhover* only a few months before his ordination as a Jesuit priest. In *God's Grandeur*, he expresses his despair about the way humanity has seemed to lose sight of the close connection between God and nature during the second industrial revolution. The present study focuses on comic-book adaptation of *God's Grandeur*. The following drawing by Julian Peters gives visual representation of three lines from the poem.



Picture 2- Julian Peters. Jesuit Publishing. Retrieved on 19/11/2024.

One picture teaches a lot wherein it takes many words to explain the same thing. But Hopkins has used a very limited number of words to convey what man has done to nature and thus resulting in distancing himself from God.

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: The soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

Looking at the drawing by Julian Peters, a student will find it easy to decipher what Hopkins has said in his sonnet.

T.S.Eliot is an American-English poet. His poems are landmarks in the history of Modern literature. His most notable works are *The Waste Land*(1922), *Four Quartets*(1943), and the play *Murder in the Cathedral*(1935). He won the Nobel prize in Literature in 1948. While still a college student, he wrote "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock".

The present study focuses on comic-book adaptation of T.S.Eliot's *The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock*. The following drawing by Julian Peters gives visual representation of seven lines from the poem. In this poem, the narrator is getting emotional about expressing his feelings towards a lady with whom he is in love. T.S.Eliot has successfully presented it with words. Yet for an average learner, it may be difficult to understand the situation wherein the narrator is fighting with his emotions as an introvert.

And I have known the eyes already, known them all-

The eyes that fix you

In a formulated phrase,

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,

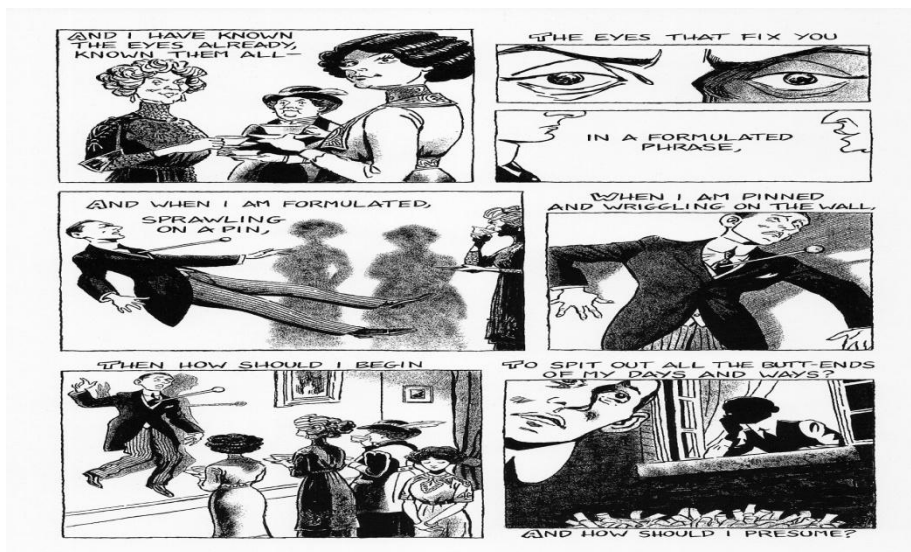
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,

Then how should I begin

To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?

And How should I presume?

Looking at the comic drawing in the seven panel page of the comic version of the poem, a student of English Literature will be able to grasp the meaning of the poem easily.



Picture 3 – Julian Peters. Plough Publishing . Retrieved on 20/11/2024

Siegfried Sassoon was a British army captain during World War I. The poem selected for the present study explores the condition of soldiers before the battle. This poem "Before The Battle" was written on June 25, 1916 – just days before the Battle of Somme. The present study focuses on comic-book adaptation of Siegfried Sassoon's "Before The Battle". The following drawing by Julian Peters gives a visual representation of the poem line.

Music of whispering trees.



Picture 4 – Julian Peters. Plough Publishing. Retrieved on 21/11/2024

By Looking at the comic drawing of Julian Peters, students are sure to understand the reality surrounding soldiers who are normal human beings and supposed to live a happy life yet sacrifice their life for the sake of nation. The poet, being the soldier himself, says that before the battle soldiers were able to listen to nature's music.

In the preface to the book, *Poems To See By: A Comic Artist Interprets Great Poetry*, Julian Peters writes, "Poetry and comics may seem like an unlikely combination, but the two art forms actually share a number of common elements. In setting out to turn beautiful poetry into comics, I wanted to pay tribute to the way these poems made me feel, to spend time with them, to pull them in as close to me as possible in the way that, as someone who draws comics felt the most natural. So poetry and comics are two different genres which tries to project images in the minds of the readers. Poetry does it with the help of words whereas a comic does it through drawings. An average learner of English may find it difficult to understand a poem with words alone. For such students, drawings along with poetic lines will be of great use.

Thus, this paper shows comic – book adaptation of classic poems are a sure guide to the students of English Literature as well as second language learners of English. Julian Peters' effort to bring classic poems into the comic world is appreciable. Teachers who use Julian Peters' comic-book adaptation of classic poems are sure to reap success and their students are sure to enjoy the poems they teach and improve their language skills.

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