Teaching Graphic Novels in the English Classroom: Pedagogical Possibilities of Multimodal Literacy Engagement, Alissa Burger, Culver Stockton College Canton, Missouri (2018) vii + 183 pp., ISBN: 978-3-319-63459-3 (pbk).

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The book is an edited volume made of three sections, each divided into several chapters. The first section focuses on different possibilities for the adoption of sequential art in the classroom, from introductory to advanced composition writing. In the second section, the graphic novel is foregrounded as a unique literary genre where the editor makes reference to authors who advocate graphic novels to be regarded as literature in their own right. The third section is concerned with graphic novels' potential for triggering discussions that create opportunities for students to gain insights into the notions of social justice, identity, and empathy. In the introductory chapter of the book, which is a collection of essays on the use of graphic novels in the English classrooms, Burger enumerates the outstanding benefits of teaching graphic novels such as engaging reluctant readers, encouraging students to view familiar knowledge from a new perspective, activating, and developing students' multiple literacy skills due to the inextricable combination of text and image in graphic novels.

In this collection, the editor has attempted to feature essays that provide specific examples and in- depth assignment overviews which could be incorporated into educational settings. Given the enumerable instances of implementing graphical novels into English classrooms, the editor hopes that the present collection of essays would convince the readers to move towards various other pedagogical possibilities for further multimodal engagement. However, it would be highly desirable to have addressed the biggest barriers in integrating graphic novels in secondary content classrooms, the distinct literacies needed to read graphic novels, and to draw up clear

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methods/guidelines about appropriate inclusion of graphic novels in classrooms (as explicitly outlined in Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer, 2013).

The first chapter (Not Just Novels: The Pedagogical Possibilities of the Graphic Narrative) of Part I (Reading, Writing and Graphic Narratives) comprises Andrew Bouelle's arguments regarding the incorporation of sequential art to teaching multimodal literacy. He underlines the pedagogical value of focusing on shorter graphical narratives which is worth studying and teaching. Drawing upon the experiences of students from an advanced composition course which focused on multimodal literacy, he highlights a surprisingly higher illustration and storytelling performance when they were provided with shorter graphic narratives compared to performance on full-length graphic novels. Interestingly enough, the effect of the shorter graphics turned out to be similar to that of longer works. However, the author's arguments could have been supported with a richer body of both quantitative and qualitative pieces of evidence.

The second chapter (Understanding Rhetoric, Understanding Genre: A Rhetorical Genre Studies Approached Writing Course) includes Sara Austin's discussions concerning the use of a rhetorical genre studies approach in a writing course. She suggests the adoption of an approach beyond the traditional focus on argumentation and persuasion that represents only a small portion of genres students encounter during their education. In this essay, Austin has presented a good number of instances in which more value could be placed on students' perspectives, types of writing in various academic and non-academic contexts; however, it could have been more informative, had it contained more in-depth descriptions of implementing materials during the course.

The focus of chapter (Writing Through Comics) is on Riki Thompson's *Writing through Comics* that highlights the undeniable role of graphic textbooks in providing non-traditional texts to help students make sense of almost complex ideas. Further, she raises the issue of integrating comics into the classroom setting so as to meet a variety of educational objectives in several disciplines such as ethnic and cultural studies as well as composition and rhetoric studies. Also, she warns against the simultaneous instruction of reading and production of comics due to the potentially problematic integration of reading and writing as well as the teachers' discomfort with writing through comics. However, more theoretical and empirical justifications are required for further elaboration of this argument.

Chapter four (Teaching the History and Theory of American Comics: 20th-Century Graphic Novels as a Complex Literary Genre) in Part II (Graphic Novels in the Literature Classroom) outlines Lauren E. Perry's essay on the historical construction of graphic novels and narratives in an expository writing course in the form of a literature survey allowing the students to critically discuss important graphic novels from the 20th century. Perry found the course a favorable experience due to the overwhelmingly positive reactions she received from the students. Compared to the beginning stages of the teaching program, the learners felt competent enough to approach comics and other various subgenres without apprehension.

In the next chapter ("What Is the Use of a Book … Without Pictures or Conversations?": Incorporating the Graphic Novel into the University Curriculum), Allison Halsall underlines the importance of further analysis in terms of the serviceability of graphic novels in university and

college classrooms. She elaborates on her experience of adopting graphic novels in university as a practical tool to help students overcome the feeling of intimidation that is associated with sitting in a compulsory university English or general education classroom.

In chapter six ("Does Doctor Manhattan Think?": Alan Moore's The Watchmen and a 'Great Books' Curriculum in the Early College Setting), Guy Andre Risko argues for the ease with which students read comics as a lighter load of practice compared with traditional textbooks. He contends that such narratives as *Watchmen* by Alan Moore are one of the most famous graphic novels whose foundation comes from generic expectations of the detective genre and 1950s superhero comic that occurs along philosophical underpinnings and political bounds.

Chapter seven ("If He Be Mr. Hyde, We Shall Be Mr. See": Using Graphic Novels, Comic Books, and the Visual Narrative in the Gothic Literature Classroom) addresses one of the biggest challenges each English instructor encounters, that is, striking a balance between education and entertainment in the classroom. As long as the teachers increasingly opt for more data-driven educational methods, the need for increasing the students' comprehension is still a crucial requirement. One approach to meet this requirement is to incorporate more visual narratives into the text-centric content. Introduction of visual narrative genre in the Gothic literature classroom potentially motivates the reluctant readers, supports the passionate readers, and obviously contributes to a greater likelihood of comprehending the complex images and ideas in Gothic literature.

In Part III (Graphic Novels, Empathy, and Social Engagement), the chapter Teaching March in the Borderlands between Social Justice and Pop Culture switches the focus from the incorporation of graphic novels into the English classes to the notions of empathy and social engagement which could be introduced to the students through the graphic medium. Having centered upon John Lewis's three-volume graphic memoir, *March*, Susanna Hoeness-Krupsaw underscores the way text and picture interplay to lead the students to a wider understanding of various events by simultaneously developing their empathy for these issues.

In chapter Revising the Rhetoric of "Boat People" through the Interactive Graphic Adaptation of Nam Le's "The Boat", Jennifer Phillips examines a number of the issues that teachers of literature encounter as they present students with texts that engage with current global concerns in a world of increasing access to information and technology. The main focus of the essay is on how graphic adaptations of literature including graphic novels and interactive graphic adventures take on a more effective role in nurturing the empathy necessary to break through the inertia of the internet age by highlighting the visual sense and drawing the reader further into the experience of others.

The last chapter (Performative Texts and the Pedagogical Theatre: Alison Bechdel's Fun Home as Compositional Model) outlines the review of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* as a memoir, as a Gothic novel, and as a graphic novel. William Cordeiro and Season Ellison in their essay present varied approaches to teaching this text in the classroom.

Overall, the book is a good resource for MA students of TEFL to get some ideas for doing research. Implementation of graphic novels in language classes and how this can impact learning is relatively unexplored especially when it comes to Iranian EFL contexts. However, as this innovative approach of using graphic novels in classrooms is probably interwoven with challenges and issues, it is highly recommended that language teachers refer to Monnin (2010) who has brilliantly tackled the issues and presented valuable ideas for aligning the graphic novels to English learning curriculum. These novels can also benefit language teachers in that they can incorporate these novels in their curriculum to inject variety into their class routines. We believe that using graphic novels can bring a welcome change to traditional classes.

References:

Brozo, W. G., Moorman, G., & Meyer, C. (2013). *Wham! Teaching with graphic novels across the curriculum*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Monnin, K. (2010). *Teaching graphic novels: Practical strategies for the secondary ELA classroom*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House.