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## How do comics talk about love?

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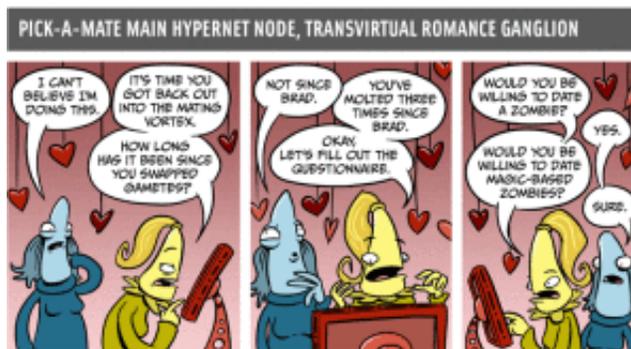
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# How do comics talk about love?

In recognition of Valentine's Day, I decided to write a post about love in comics. But not any kind of love, of course, will do for this post—it should be about love across boundaries and the language that instantiates it.

*Scenes from a Multiverse* is a web comic by Jon Rosenberg that began appearing on the web in 2010. It explores social situations from an extraordinarily wide-ranging perspective of a multiplicity of worlds. As a satirist, Rosenberg often borrows from current events or internet memes and adapts them for his own purposes, making commentary about what he sees as social problems. Frequent objects of his critique are religion and race relations, among others.

One strategy that Rosenberg uses in his satire is to comment on a situation by creating a highly unlikely scenario (what would be unlikely in our dimension of the Multiverse at least). In the following excerpt from the strip 'Replacing Brad,' we see two characters interacting in a scene reminiscent of a number of romantic comedies or television sit-coms. One friend hasn't had a date in a while, and the other friend endeavors to help remedy the situation. In this case, the tool to solve the love problem is on-line dating.



(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/2011-09-08-replacing-brad-crop.png>)

Transvirtual Romance Ganglion

One of the main points in this comic is the exploration of love. Who would be an acceptable date for our protagonist who is getting over Brad? Would any zombie do? It's hard to know if Brad was a zombie, but clearly dating a zombie is an issue because the on-line questionnaire spends a lot of time on it. The two central questions for our protagonist is whether it is too soon to start dating and whether she would date someone as different from herself as a zombie (and which kinds of zombies she would consider). [Go here to see the full comic](http://amultiverse.com/2011/09/08/replacing-brad/) (<http://amultiverse.com/2011/09/08/replacing-brad/>).

In another excerpt, this one from *Date Night*, two characters are meeting at a restaurant for their first date. In this case, Rosenberg doesn't use *zombie* as the linguistic focus but instead uses *dragon*.



(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/2011-05-11-blind-date-crop.png>)  
Speciation Vertex

In comparison to 'Replacing Brad,' this strip makes clearer the possibility that readers should think of the lexeme *dragon* as an analog for the lexeme *race* (or *ethnicity* or *nationality*). Drawing on background knowledge of problematic race relations (in many countries, including the United States, South Africa, England, France), readers are supposed to recognize the disjunction between expectation and reality. Whoever was expected to show up at the dinner table, it wasn't a *dragon*, even if he identifies as *half-dragon*. [Go here to see the full comic](http://amultiverse.com/2011/05/11/blind-date/) (<http://amultiverse.com/2011/05/11/blind-date/>).

Other linguistic cues that point us toward an interpretation of love crossing boundaries can be found in the headings of each of the comics. In 'Blind Date,' the heading includes the phrase 'speciation vertex.' Of course, Rosenberg is not equating racial and ethnic identity in humans to the taxonomy of different species. He uses the disjunction, the contrast, to satirize lingering notions of racism. In fact, the use of *dragon* is probably supposed to help reframe our comprehension of racial difference. The comic minimizes the importance of racial difference in juxtaposition to species difference.

My post started out about love, and it ends on love. But as Rosenberg demonstrates, love might best be understood as part of a wider, more complex human condition.

For more on race and ethnicity in comics, see [this post](https://pencilpanelpage.wordpress.com/2011/12/08/second-person/) (<https://pencilpanelpage.wordpress.com/2011/12/08/second-person/>) by Qiana Whitted.

What comics do you read that address love? How is love constructed, both through images and through language?

Posted by [Frank Bramlett](#) on [February 16, 2013](#) in [Comic Strip](#), [Identity](#), [Love](#), [Race](#), [Uncategorized](#), [Web comics](#).

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## About Frank Bramlett

Until June 2014, I am a visiting lecturer in the English Department at Stockholm University, where I offer seminars in Sociolinguistics; Language and Gender; and Language and Comics; among others. For Fall 2014, I will return to the English Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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