

How does the text conform to, or deviate from, the conventions of a particular genre, and for what purpose.

Jimmy Corrigan

*“Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth,”* is a graphic novel written by Chris Ware. Being a graphic novel, Ware tells a story through the use of images and text in an almost impossible to read manner. Because of this, the storyline may be altered from person to person. A graphic novel obviously differs from conventional print novels with only words. Ware uses a lot of repeated visual symbolism throughout the novel which may be somewhat confusing to the reader. Unlike other graphic novels, however, this work does not move along a time line but jumps back and forth in time from past to present in a technique called network reading . With all this in mind, Ware describes the book as “obscure,” “different and impenetrable” and in the post script of his novel, which he calls “Corrigenda,” Ware apologizes for his book and gives an explanation for writing the novel and clarifies the things that he thought were confusing, left out or needed corrected definitions. The Corrigenda, which is defined as, “A list of errors in and their corrections in a book,” is a way for the author to try to explain a few things about the book in order to give the readers a better understanding of the novel as a whole and the events that took place, along with the importance of the list of words defined in the Corrigenda. The Corrigenda clearly shows that this work pushes the boundaries of the graphic novel genre.

To evaluate whether the Corrigenda is actually helpful at the end of the book, it is necessary to analyze the Corrigenda itself and compare it to rest of the book. Firstly, Ware starts off with an “Apology.” In this, he gives an explanation for the reason that he wrote the book in the first place and why the events in the novel unfolded as they did. Ware describes the work as “semi-autobiographical,” that is, partly relating to his own personal life in which he “works-out some of the more embarrassing problems of confidence and emotional truthfulness that I (Chris Ware) was experiencing as a very immature, and not terribly facile, cartoonist.” This quote allows the reader to be mindful of Ware’s situation before an opinion can be made. It is quite similar to Wintold Gombrowicz’s *“Ferdynand,”* as in both books, an apology is made for a specific piece of writing and an excuse is formulated for the author’s immaturity. This can also be seen as a cry for pity because the author is not mature enough to face bad reviews. However, this can be debated since Ware seems to be making fun of his book in the

beginning where he intentionally adds the bad reviews to the first few pages. Also, as part of the apology, Ware includes a personal story about meeting his father for the first time in his life, like Jimmy Corrigan did with his father. This allows the reader to understand the connection between the author and the character and it makes the fiction a little more realistic as it shows the link to the real world. This is important to take in to consideration because this novel is written as if it was "real." By this I mean that the way the story is presented reflects the ways that humans think, that is, not linear.

This gives us a better understanding because we become more sensitive to the way the book should have been read rather than seeing it as a confusing jumble of pictures and text.

Next, in the "Corrigenda", there are a series of words; most of them are simple words while others can be thought of as more complex within the context of book. This makes the reader wonder why the author chose those words and what is it about those words that are so important that they had to be explained at the end of the book. The first word that appears is crutch. For this word, the author gives a definition and a few drawing panels in which he explains how Jimmy broke his leg. It is possible that the author forgot to include this while he was creating the novel or, it could have been done purposely to give the reader the impression of how lame Jimmy really is. The first time the reader sees the crutch is when Jimmy is pretending to be a robot and he sees that he has gotten a crutch for his birthday from his mom, however, before this, Jimmy is not seen with any injuries. This becomes interesting since the obvious meaning is not there so there must be some sort of symbolic meaning, which could be that Jimmy is a total wreck and the aid that he gets from the crutch is not only to support his leg, physically, but to support him emotionally. In a written novel, this would leave the reader puzzled, but for this graphic novel, it is understood that the story skipped over that point in time as it was probably not that important and there is not enough space to include everything that happened over a time period of a few days, it should simply be evident that there was an accident. Having this definition and depiction fills in the blanks for the reader. This use of the Corrigenda is the same for a majority of words such as "Exposition" and "Glasses." It is how the author tries to further inform the readers of the events that unfolded throughout the novel.

The third way that Ware uses the corrigenda is to make note of some words that are supposed to make the reader think. Words such as "Metaphor," "Lonely" and "Symbol" are listed because the author wants the reader to know that these words are important to the book and their meanings are representative of what the novel contains. By this, I mean that the definitions are made according to the content of the book. A good example is "Lonely:...The permanent state of being for all humans..." We know that this meaning is not literal but in Jimmy Corrigan's case, it is. The author wants us to know that when you think of Jimmy as lonely, don't think of it as if it were a feeling that Jimmy has, think of Jimmy as literally alone. People read normal comic books such as "Superman" because it acts like an escape from a boring life. This graphic novel is similar to the comic book, however, it does not have a happy ending. By defining the word lonely, we know that there is no happy ending for Jimmy and no escape from the life he lives. Jimmy lost his real father, Peggy does not return the same feelings, his sister pushed him away and his hero killed himself. This leaves us to understand that in Jimmy's case, there is no escape and he is forever trapped alone.

The Corrigenda is merely a way for Ware to verify that the readers understand what he wants them to know about the book. It is true that most of the words can easily be defined off the top of the head however giving them a new definition shows that there is a deeper meaning when put in context with the book. Ware uses the Corrigenda to apologize for his “immature” work and explains that his novel is somewhat influenced by the fact that he met his father after a longer period of silence. This gives the novel a realistic edge rather than fiction because we can relate it even more to real life. The Corrigenda is also a way for the author to fill in what he may have left out, clarifying situations that may have been difficult to understand and making sure that the readers are fully informed. Lastly, Ware uses the Corrigenda to emphasize some of the themes brought up throughout the novel and shares more information about them with the reader by defining them in the context of the book. The Corrigenda really does allow a better understand of the novel as a whole by giving additional information despite the fact that the book has already been read and the reader’s interpretations have already been made. Most importantly, however, the Corrigenda reminds the reader that this book can be approached more as a complex interconnected network than a typ