UC Santa Barbara
UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

Title

The Book of Ashes: Authorial Instructions, Incorporations, and House Rules in Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/56t2b9bf

Journal

Narrative, 31(2)

ISSN

1063-3685

Author

Samolsky, Russell

Publication Date

2023-05-01

DOI

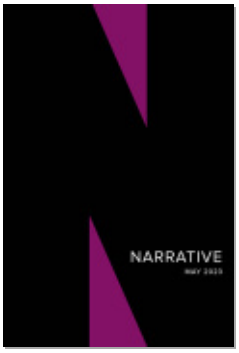
10.1353/nar.2023.0012

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

PROJECT MUSE®

The Book of Ashes: Authorial Instructions, Incorporations, and House Rules in *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*



Russell Samolsky

Narrative, Volume 31, Number 2, May 2023, pp. 179-197 (Article)

Published by The Ohio State University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2023.0012*

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/896369

[169.231.39.38] Project MUSE (2024-06-10 20:35 GMT) University of California , Santa Barbara

Russell Samolsky

The Book of Ashes: Authorial Instructions, Incorporations, and House Rules in *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*

ABSTRACT: This article examines the apparatus of authorial instructions in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth.* It does so by first investigating the role coincidence plays in the literalization of Ware's comic, and then by examining what might be hidden or more deeply at stake in Ware's incorporation of the urn of his father's ashes into the "corrigenda" (or afterword) of his book. My reading takes issue with Ware's assertion of the gap that yawns between his artistic deployment of coincidence in his comic and the blind unfolding of coincidence in life itself; or, as Ware himself puts it, between the "artless, dumbfoundedly meaningless coincidence of 'real' life and my weak fiction." My analysis does not wholly contest Ware's claim, but it does complicate Ware's lamenting the failure of his "weak fiction" by arguing that if his house rules or instructions fail, they paradoxically also prevail. In order to justify this claim, I try to take account of what strangely happens to Ware's "weak fiction" when read in the context of Walter Benjamin's weak messianism.

KEYWORDS: *comics, coincidence, incorporation, authorial instructions, weak fiction, weak messianism*

Russell Samolsky is Associate Professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of *Apocalyptic Futures: Marked Bodies and the Violence of the Text in Kafka, Conrad, and Coetzee.*

NARRATIVE, Vol. 31, No. 2 (May 2023)
Copyright © 2023 by The Ohio State University

[169.231.39.38] Project MUSE (2024-06-10 20:35 GMT) University of California , Santa Barbara

1. House Rules, Incorporated

This article examines the apparatus of authorial instructions in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000). These extraordinary "house rules" consist not only of the "General Instructions" for reading on its opening pages, but also instructions for pages that can seemingly be cut out and folded to form three-dimensional models. By means of these insets, together with the "Corrigenda," or afterword, Ware's graphic novel probes the limits of authorially directed play and its confrontation with reality. In fact, Ware's directed play and confrontation with reality is announced, if only mock-ironically, from the outset in his blurb for the intricately designed dust jacket of the hardback volume: "A BOLD experiment in reader tolerance, *disguised* as a gaily-colored illustrated romance in which TINY PICTURES seem to COME ALIVE, DANCE, SING and WEEP. Full particulars and instructions enclosed." Despite Ware's irony this blurb also discloses a concerted drive in *Jimmy Corrigan* towards literalization or embodiment, with the bold large typeface attempting to enact this drive of coming alive by jutting out and hiding the conditional "seem to," and this runs parallel to the deflating romantic arc of "DANCE, SING and WEEP."

If instructions are enclosed in the book, they are also disclosed on the dust jacket, which unfolds on both sides to diagram detailed histories, backstories, and scenes from the story we are about to engage and contains a cut out model for assembling a Jimmy Corrigan figure that fleshes out the comic's drive to come alive.[1] Indeed, I use the term "flesh out" not only metaphorically but also literally as this is what the instructions for assembling Jimmy attempt to impart to the figure. We are instructed, for example, to "Use a good hide glue, of the type available at any stationer's. Mucilage will not do for this project." It is not simply that mucilage, which is obtained from plant matter, is too weak a glue to hold the figure together; but that the stronger hide glue is obtained by rendering animal hides or connective tissues. By implicitly playing on the different meanings of "render," Ware's authorial instructions seek to literally embody or flesh out this cut-out Jimmy Corrigan action figure. In what follows, I shall examine the role that authorial instructions play in constructing this comic and its drive to manifest itself. These will include both the "instructions enclosed" within the comic as well as the book itself as an instructional project on which Ware embarks. While readers are instructed to use a strong hide glue, I shall also examine the role that the weaker glue of fiction might play in holding or not holding Ware's project together.[2]

The story of *Jimmy Corrigan* is the story of a meeting between Jimmy, a shatteringly insecure 36-year-old man, and the father who abandoned him, which also unfolds the sordid, dysfunctional, and repetitively traumatic history of four generations of Corrigan men and, along with it, in synecdoche, a certain history of America since the time of the Civil War. Ware began drawing *Jimmy Corrigan* as a brief instructional exercise to prepare himself to meet the father he had never met.[3] He had resolutely avoided contacting his father and he now envisioned his comic as a cathartic working through of the emotional wounds of abandonment that would allow him to meet his father and move on with his life. Ware did not, as might be supposed, begin with an autobiographical persona but with Jimmy as an alter-ego or characterological

scapegoat who exemplified in rather extreme form an overarching anticipatory anxiety, and provided a figure of distilled shame, abasement, and self-wounding fantasy. However, after five years of compulsive composition—during which his graphic text had grown to near-epic proportions—Ware was flabbergasted to be contacted by his estranged father after an absence of thirty years.[4] Art, it seemed, had now strangely instructed reality. Upon completing *Jimmy Corrigan,* Ware decided to present the published book to his father, who had no idea that his son was an accomplished artist. But in another moment of life copying art, Ware's father died of a heart attack, just as Jimmy's father had done in the comic. Reality, then, beat him to the punch in that his own graphic text that strongly invoked coincidence was itself overtaken by uncanny coincidence. Remarking on this in a "Corrigenda" at the end of the text, Ware speaks of the "chasm which gapes between the ridiculous, artless, dumbfoundedly meaningless coincidence of 'real' life and my weak fiction."[5] He also remarks that the published book *Jimmy Corrigan* appeared "nearly equal in volume to the little black box, or urn" of his father's ashes.

What might be hidden or more deeply at stake in this scene? Is the relation between real life and Ware's "weak fiction" purely that of an artless or meaningless gap, or could the way Ware constructs his text play a more instructional role in programing its reception (or, in the case of his father, lack thereof) and relation to coincidence? As we shall discover, one element of the comic's house rules promoting its drive to embodiment consists of Ware's literalizing of coincidences. My reading will complicate the story of Ware's lamenting the failure of his "weak fiction" to argue that if his house rules fail, they paradoxically also prevail. I shall trace how and why Ware attempts to circumscribe and condition his comic's reception, and this will also lead me to examine how Ware was himself instructed by Art Spiegelman's great comic, *Maus.* Spiegelman was an early and powerful influence. As a teenager, Ware avidly followed the serialization of *Maus* in *RAW* magazine. When the first volume of *Maus* (1987) was published while he was a student at the University of Texas, Ware wrote a review that was sent to Spiegelman by the editor of the student newspaper. What captivated Spiegelman more than the review was a fragment of Ware's comic strip that happened to be printed on the back of the cut-out sheet. Spiegelman cold-called Ware (who, discomposed, thought he was being pranked) and invited him to contribute to *RAW.* Thus began, Ware remarks, "one of the most important and lasting friendships of my life . . . Art himself also became both a mentor and something of a father figure to me" (*Monograph* 43). (We might regard Spiegelman's jolting call as a precursor call from a different father of sorts that did and did not condition the shock of Ware's father's call, which was still to come.) Addressing Ware's influences, Spiegelman maintains, "While his work clearly outs him as anxious by nature, he doesn't have the anxiety of influence that can lead an artist to pretend he was born under some cabbage leaf . . . he has managed to synthesize his own and our culture's past to become 'one who is most like himself'" (*Monograph* 3). Indeed, in his massive *Monograph* (2017), Ware provides us with a comprehensive autobiographical commentary and retrospective display of the development of his art and his influences. While I shall not be especially concerned with the anxiety of influence of the poetic father in Harold Bloom's sense, I will turn to Walter Benjamin's thought on reading and time to analyze Ware's anxiety

of the father's influence and its (a)synthesized and (a)synchronized relation to art and the past.

Although Ware began his comic as an exercise in psychic self-instruction, as his book progressed he also deployed authorial instructions as a compositional element or motif. Here, however, a curious split develops. Contrary to what we might expect, these authorial instructions do not quite possess the executive function typically associated with instructions. Rather they become themselves suffused with Ware's irony or with Jimmy's self-abnegating pathos. (It is as if Ware's initial instructional project can't find its cathartic moment and is emblematically caught in a repetition compulsion.) And yet these instructions also contribute to the intricate and monumental structure of this book. "Instruction" derives etymologically from the Latin *instruere,* to build or construct, and consumed as it is with building, Ware's comic works toward literalizing what Henry James referred to as the "house of fiction." These instructions and literalized coincidences lie at the heart of the comic's relentless incorporative drive, as well as its display of Ware's desired extension into the third dimension of reality. As we shall see, this works in effect to metaleptically transgress or mark as undecidable the exact narrative boundary between reality and fiction. My investigation of this boundary will draw together two discourses that do not customarily converge: the first, a narrative analysis of instruction and coincidence in the comic and beyond, and the second, Benjamin's hermeneutic on ethics, reading, and history.

2. Irony and Instructions

Writing for *The New Yorker* in 2005, the art critic Peter Schjeldahl proclaimed *Jimmy Corrigan* to be the "first formal masterpiece of a medium that he [Ware] has proved to be unexpectedly complex and fertile." He went on to add that, "there may never be another graphic novel as good as 'Jimmy Corrigan,' even by Ware himself" (Schjeldahl). This was paradoxically the case, Schjeldahl conjectured, because *Jimmy Corrigan* signaled both the graphic novel's acme and because the moment of the form's narrative breakthrough was past, its creative energies largely spent, even as its critical afterlife was only just beginning. It is as if these energies were at once consummately expressed and consumed by Ware's encyclopedic incorporation of media-history and graphic techniques. My own view is that Schjeldahl was premature in his periodization, and that the form has remained remarkably fecund. However, I can readily see how we might place *Jimmy Corrigan* in similar relation to the graphic novel as we now place *Ulysses* in relation to the modernist novel.[6]

Indeed, just this particular linkage was mock-ironically asserted by a reviewer of the first edition: "Ware's work is the comic equivalent of Joyce's *Ulysses*—no one's ever read it, and those who have, know that it sucks, but it sure looks good on your bookshelf" ("Drawing").[7] True to form, Ware subsequently incorporated this comment, and others drawn from reviews, into the second edition as a ludic set of interior blurbs that both critique and promote his book. Ware was true to form in a double sense, for in folding in this review he was simply adding an element to, and complying with, the relentlessly incorporative structure or program of *Jimmy Corrigan,* but

[169.231.39.38] Project MUSE (2024-06-10 20:35 GMT) University of California , Santa Barbara

he was true as well to the current of self-deprecating, self-reflexive irony that runs through his graphic novel.

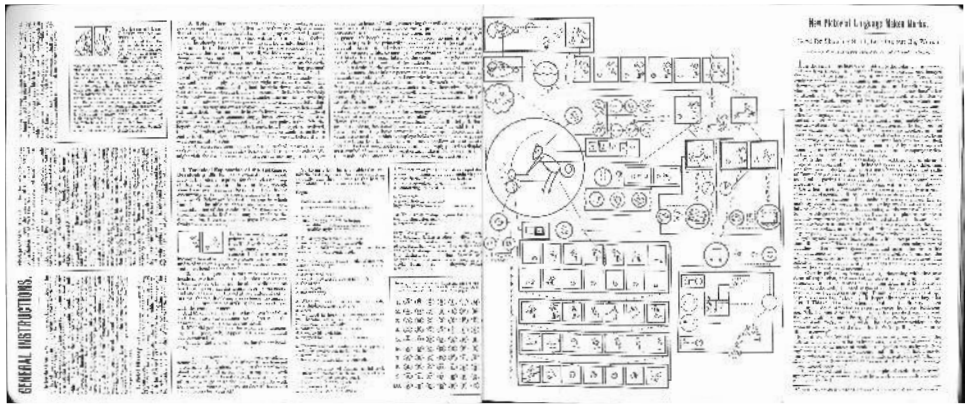


Figure 1. General Instructions

In order to allay fears that the book might prove discouragingly labyrinthine, Ware opens *Jimmy Corrigan* with an introductory set of mock-ironic authorial instructions on the endpaper, the aforementioned "General Instructions."[8] Adopting a defensive stance regarding the presence of this instruction manual, Ware explains this "rudimentary guidance" as a concession to the publisher.[9] Reading this comic text, Ware advises, is basically an intuitive affair. In rubric "4. Technical Explanation of the Language Developing Skills," Ware states "most of the talents required for the understanding of this volume are essentially intuitive." He goes on to provide a simple cartoon of two boxes where we observe the stick figure of a mouse with a raised hammer about to strike a cat's head which action is completed in box two.[10] He follows this with a mock exam by which readers may check their technical proficiency. Instructed, he coyly implies, to provide a body of readerly instructions, Ware responds by literally turning such instructions into a comic.

Indeed, Ware seems to be saying comics are not a preachy or instructional medium and are in fact quite the opposite. All that is required to read his admittedly dense comic is persistence and the usual readerly powers of close attention and intuition. Readers need not avail themselves of formal or technical instructions, such as those in Scott McCloud's instructional comic, *Understanding Comics.* And, as a consequence, in the place of technical authorial instructions, he supplies a set of mock authorial instructions. The process of apprehending the narrative logic of comics panels that McCloud refers to as "closure" occurs intuitively in the very act of reading itself (63). However, it is also hard to think of a comic more obsessed than *Jimmy Corrigan* with incorporating all manner of instructions and their analogues (diagrams, charts and genealogies), including model "cut outs" that provide part of the very matter of comics themselves.[11]

In one sense, this tension or discrepancy is readily explained; there is simply a difference between reading a comic where the process of apprehending it occurs, at least partially, without our being consciously aware of how this process of apprehension takes place, and understanding, in formal or poetic terms, how the art of comics works. But, at the same time, there is more to Ware's ironizing of instructions, even as he deploys them, than is contained in this distinction. For we are led to ask: why, if he simply wants to disavow authorial instructions, does Ware also deeply embed them as part of the intricate art of his comic? What role do instructions play in building the very house of his graphic fiction? As I work towards answering these questions, I will further examine how Ware deploys authorial instructions, and the uncanny consequences of his instructional incorporation.

It is not only technical or readerly instructions that Ware ironizes, however: his irony also extends to the sympathetic role that he claims for his comic. Under rubric 3, "Role," on the endpaper, Ware instructs his readers on the function or purpose of his book. He begins by laying bare the bleak hurts and existential ennui that may come upon the sensitive as they proceed through life, describing this sensitive reader in the middle of the night "quite unsuspectingly seized by the horrible, gnawing sense of all that has led up to this point in their life, the hopefulness of their childhood, the friends lost, the trysts unrealized, the hearts broken, and has cried out to whomever might listen for an end to it all, a solution, a termination of the program before it goes one minute further." Such readers desperately seek out escape, or better, some form of identificatory solace in art—an identificatory solace, or, "sympathetic resonance" with either the peculiar condition of their lives or philosophical commonality.

Such readers might hold out hope that Ware's comic would provide this tonic, but Ware, it appears, is quick to disabuse them of false hopes. He identifies two problems that beset the solace-giving potential of a book: either the profit-driven author desires to simply distract or amuse, or the empathetic author is caught in making the reader feel just as badly as they do. Given this, Ware concludes, "seeking emotional empathy in art is essentially a foolhardy pursuit better left to the intellectually weak or to the ugly, for they have nothing else with which to occupy themselves." However, this need not dissuade those who wish to buy the book, for as Ware asserts, "Most purchasers of this book . . . are likely sexually confident, attractive go-getters for whom grief is merely an abstraction." Indeed, purchasing this book would precisely confirm this. Moreover, it would have additional benefit for those wishing to "fashionably enhance their 'look' or add to their 'nowness,' and they have certainly made the right choice, for the comic strip medium which it employs holds no hope of ever expressing anything but the meanest of sentiments." For these buyers, *Jimmy Corrigan* is nothing more than an ornament or icon that attests to their fashionableness; it requires no reading, only to be put on display. Indeed, Ware uses the word "nowness" to denote this presentation of being in vogue, but let us also hold this word "nowness" in reserve for meanings that may accrue to it later in this article.

However, even as Ware ironizes the notion of bestowing either formal reading instructions or instructions pertaining to the psychological use or role of his "pictographic theater," there is what we might term an "instructional program" that seems inescapably to operate throughout his graphic text. One aspect of this program that I

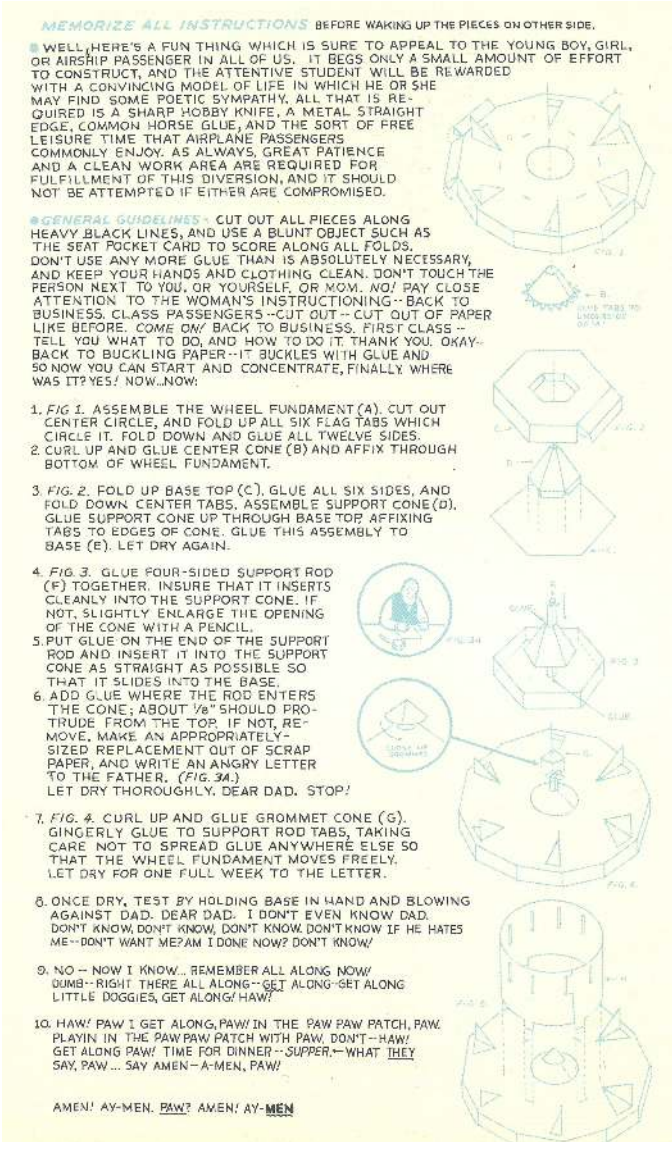
have briefly alluded to can be thought of as an architectural process of incorporation that works not only towards a narrative accrual, but also gestures towards a narrative expansion or incarnation of the graphic text into the third dimension of life itself. What especially interests me is the complicated way in which Ware releases this program; the way he solicits or courts it, even as he ironizes it. (We have already briefly seen an example in Ware's incorporation of the review likening *Jimmy Corrigan*'s unreadability to *Ulysses.*)

Ware's insistent irony toward his comic is itself double edged. In a manner, Ware deploys irony against itself. His mock claim, for example, that those who purchase *Jimmy Corrigan* are "sexually confident" and unaffected by grief is ironic, not only in the tongue-in-cheek sense, but also because the sexually confident and those impervious to life-shattering anxieties are wholly unequipped to experience the dread recognition or sympathetic resonance of Ware's comic; it is not a house in which they can dwell. In this sense, *Jimmy Corrigan* can only ever really function as an ornament of display for them. Moreover, for all his insistent irony, we readers of *Jimmy Corrigan* also discern that Ware's grim irony, and indeed Jimmy's self-lacerating abjection, is undercut by a pathos and poignancy with which the comic is also suffused, and Ware makes this interestingly evident in the quite unexpected space of the "cut outs" that are included as part of the comic's building instructions. I shall analyze these in a moment, but I want first to lay the analytical ground by claiming that this tension between irony and poignancy can be visualized in the discrepancy between the cartoonish foregrounded figures or characters of *Jimmy Corrigan* and its intricate formalized background.

McCloud rather famously asserts that the simplified form of the cartoon facilitates, or indeed orchestrates, a projection into, or reader identification with, the abstract cartoon figure. "The cartoon," he claims, "is a Vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled . . . an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm" (36). Somewhat paradoxically it is the cartoon's iconicity, its distance from realism or photorealism, that compels this absorption, and in contrast the concrete detail of a picture's background establishes its discrete or more objective presentation. In some respects, this distinction is very much at play, and very much on display, in *Jimmy Corrigan.* There are different degrees to which readers identify with Jimmy, or to which readers might be projected into his character, but Ware does display precisely this dichotomy between the cartoonish figures of Jimmy, or his father, and the extraordinarily intricate and architecturally detailed representation of certain backgrounds: for example, of buildings in Chicago. The cartoonish characters and the architectural background seem to belong to, or emerge from, different orders of representation. The contrast, however, is not only between the simple, baggy cartoon characters and the detailed, stylized backgrounds, but also between the crippling insecurity or inward abjection of Jimmy and the Corrigan men, and the studied, architectural, and perfectly assured art of Ware's building backgrounds.

This dichotomy pertains, however, not only between characters and buildings but between Ware's graphic craft presenting cut outs replete with building instructions, and an accompanying commentary betraying a measure of irony towards the act of instruction itself. We usually consider model instructions as objective, indeed

[169.231.39.38] Project MUSE (2024-06-10 20:35 GMT) University of California , Santa Barbara



MEMORIZE ALL INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE WAKING UP THE PIECES ON OTHER SIDE.

WELL, HERE'S A FUN THING WHICH IS SURE TO APPEAL TO THE YOUNG BOY, GIRL, OR AIRSHIP PASSENGER IN ALL OF US. IT BEGS ONLY A SMALL AMOUNT OF EFFORT TO CONSTRUCT, AND THE ATTENTIVE STUDENT WILL BE REWARDED WITH A CONVINCING MODEL OF LIFE IN WHICH HE OR SHE MAY FIND SOME POETIC SYMPATHY. ALL THAT IS REQUIRED IS A SHARP HOBBY KNIFE, A METAL STRAIGHT EDGE, COMMON HORSE GLUE, AND THE SORT OF FREE LEISURE TIME THAT AIRPLANE PASSENGERS COMMONLY ENJOY. AS ALWAYS, GREAT PATIENCE AND A CLEAN WORK AREA ARE REQUIRED FOR FULFILLMENT OF THIS DIVERSION, AND IT SHOULD NOT BE ATTEMPTED IF EITHER ARE COMPROMISED.

GENERAL GUIDELINES: CUT OUT ALL PIECES ALONG HEAVY BLACK LINES, AND USE A BLUNT OBJECT SUCH AS THE SEAT POCKET CARD TO SCORE ALONG ALL FOLDS. DON'T USE ANY MORE GLUE THAN IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, AND KEEP YOUR HANDS AND CLOTHING CLEAN. DON'T TOUCH THE PERSON NEXT TO YOU, OR YOURSELF, OR MOM. *NO!* PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE WOMAN'S INSTRUCTIONING -- BACK TO BUSINESS. CLASS PASSENGERS -- CUT OUT -- CUT OUT OF PAPER LIKE BEFORE. *COME ON!* BACK TO BUSINESS. FIRST CLASS -- TELL YOU WHAT TO DO, AND HOW TO DO IT. THANK YOU. OKAY -- BACK TO BUCKLING PAPER -- IT BUCKLES WITH GLUE AND SO NOW YOU CAN START AND CONCENTRATE, FINALLY. WHERE WAS IT? YES! NOW...NOW:

1. *FIG 1.* ASSEMBLE THE WHEEL FUNDAMENT (A). CUT OUT CENTER CIRCLE, AND FOLD UP ALL SIX FLAG TABS WHICH CIRCLE IT. FOLD DOWN AND GLUE ALL TWELVE SIDES.
2. CURL UP AND GLUE CENTER CONE (B) AND AFFIX THROUGH BOTTOM OF WHEEL FUNDAMENT.
3. *FIG. 2.* FOLD UP BASE TOP (C). GLUE ALL SIX SIDES, AND FOLD DOWN CENTER TABS. ASSEMBLE SUPPORT CONE (D). GLUE SUPPORT CONE UP THROUGH BASE TOP, AFFIXING TABS TO EDGES OF CONE. GLUE THIS ASSEMBLY TO BASE (E). LET DRY AGAIN.
4. *FIG. 3.* GLUE FOUR-SIDED SUPPORT ROD (F) TOGETHER. INSURE THAT IT INSERTS CLEANLY INTO THE SUPPORT CONE. IF NOT, SLIGHTLY ENLARGE THE OPENING OF THE CONE WITH A PENCIL.
5. PUT GLUE ON THE END OF THE SUPPORT ROD AND INSERT IT INTO THE SUPPORT CONE AS STRAIGHT AS POSSIBLE SO THAT IT SLIDES INTO THE BASE.
6. ADD GLUE WHERE THE ROD ENTERS THE CONE; ABOUT 1/8" SHOULD PROTRUDE FROM THE TOP. IF NOT, REMOVE, MAKE AN APPROPRIATELY-SIZED REPLACEMENT OUT OF SCRAP PAPER, AND WRITE AN ANGRY LETTER TO THE FATHER. (*FIG. 3A.*) LET DRY THOROUGHLY. DEAR DAD. STOP!
7. *FIG. 4.* CURL UP AND GLUE GROMMET CONE (G). GINGERLY GLUE TO SUPPORT ROD TABS, TAKING CARE NOT TO SPREAD GLUE ANYWHERE ELSE SO THAT THE WHEEL FUNDAMENT MOVES FREELY. LET DRY FOR ONE FULL WEEK TO THE LETTER.
8. ONCE DRY, TEST BY HOLDING BASE IN HAND AND BLOWING AGAINST DAD. DEAR DAD. I DON'T EVEN KNOW DAD. DON'T KNOW, DON'T KNOW, DON'T KNOW. DON'T KNOW IF HE HATES ME -- DON'T WANT ME? AM I DONE NOW? DON'T KNOW!
9. NO -- NOW I KNOW... REMEMBER ALL ALONG NOW! DUMB -- RIGHT THERE ALL ALONG -- GET ALONG -- GET ALONG LITTLE DOGGIES, GET ALONG! HAW!
10. HAW! PAW I GET ALONG, PAW! IN THE PAW PAW PATCH, PAW. PLAYIN IN THE PAW PAW PATCH WITH PAW. DON'T -- HAW! GET ALONG PAW! TIME FOR DINNER -- *SUPPER.* ← WHAT THEY SAY, PAW ... SAY AMEN – A-MEN, PAW!

AMEN! AY-MEN. PAW? AMEN! AY-**MEN**

Figure 2. Zoetrope cut-out

instrumental, entities which, when properly executed, allow us to construct the cut out in three dimensions. However, the first cut out that we encounter comes to us, oddly enough, through one of Jimmy's dreams. While we are understandably disconcerted when we first read these pages, it is later, retrospectively, explained to us that, profoundly anxious at the prospect of taking a flight to meet a father he never knew, Jimmy begins dreaming of himself as encased in a suit of robot-armor mounted with a strange scope. Part of the dream contains a graphic cut out complete with instruc-

tions for a zoetrope, which offers the constructor a "convincing model of life in which he or she may find some poetic sympathy" (24). Although the diagrammed elements of the cut out are presented as unaltered figures, the accompanying set of assembly instructions is intruded upon by Jimmy's anxiety-ridden fears concerning his father. Invaded by Jimmy's stream of (un)consciousness, the objective instructions become interfused with and overtaken, or literally "cut out," by utterances of subjective pain. Reading this scene, we come to grasp that the instrumental cut out whose material construction would provide the maker with an element of poetic sympathy, fails, like *Jimmy Corrigan* itself; or, put another way, Jimmy's elaborate psychological defense mechanism of imagining this model replete with construction instructions cannot be sustained and breaks down.

Part of the reason Ware has recourse to instructional cut outs begins to emerge. He rather incisively deploys the cut out, the very site of the instructional or instrumental efficacy, as an emotional defense mechanism that cannot hold together. And yet this is not quite the whole story, for behind the overcoding of these instructions by Jimmy's anxiety, the cut out retains its form and potential construction. Indeed, if the first model we encounter remains unconstructed, a fair portion of *Jimmy Corrigan* is given over to the story of the construction of another model of sorts, albeit on a massive scale. We get the story of Jimmy's great-grandfather's tiny part in building the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. This too is accompanied by an instructional inset in which an executive ironically visits his authority on his workers who are erecting plaster statues of workers and slaves. However, what we are truly struck by is Ware's superb rendering of different stages in the construction of the Exposition. In his virtuosic drafting, buildings of the "White City" are painstakingly and marvelously reconstructed.[12] As with the buildings of historical and contemporary Chicago, the assured architectonic background of the buildings of the White City contrast sharply with the baggy cartoon figures. But there is a contrast here too with Ware's unconstructed models. In his reconstruction of these model buildings, Ware seems captivated with displaying the power of his graphic art to resurrect a model city of the past—indeed, not only a model city, but the old city of Chicago as well. Joyce once said of *Ulysses* that if Dublin were destroyed it could be reconstructed by means of his book; Ware takes this one step further recording the burning of Chicago in the great fire of 1871, and the city's reconstruction displaying old and new Chicago side by side. With its reconstructions and depictions, Ware's comic expands to become a graphic house of fiction.

There is, however, one more cut out and set of authorial instructions that Ware adds to his house of fiction. In between his extraordinary reconstruction of the White City, Ware also pictures the growing working-class Chicago neighborhood that was once home to Native Americans and now abuts the Exposition built to commemorate the arrival of Columbus in the New World. Here, Ware literally interleaves a model cut out depicting a homestead addition to this neighborhood. This model cut out comes complete with instructions for assembly of a main house, barn, outhouse, horse-drawn coach, and trees (207). Echoing the "General Instructions" with which he opened the book, Ware again invokes the reader's or assembler's intuition. Under the rubric marked "Instructions," he writes, "Given the generally intuitive level of

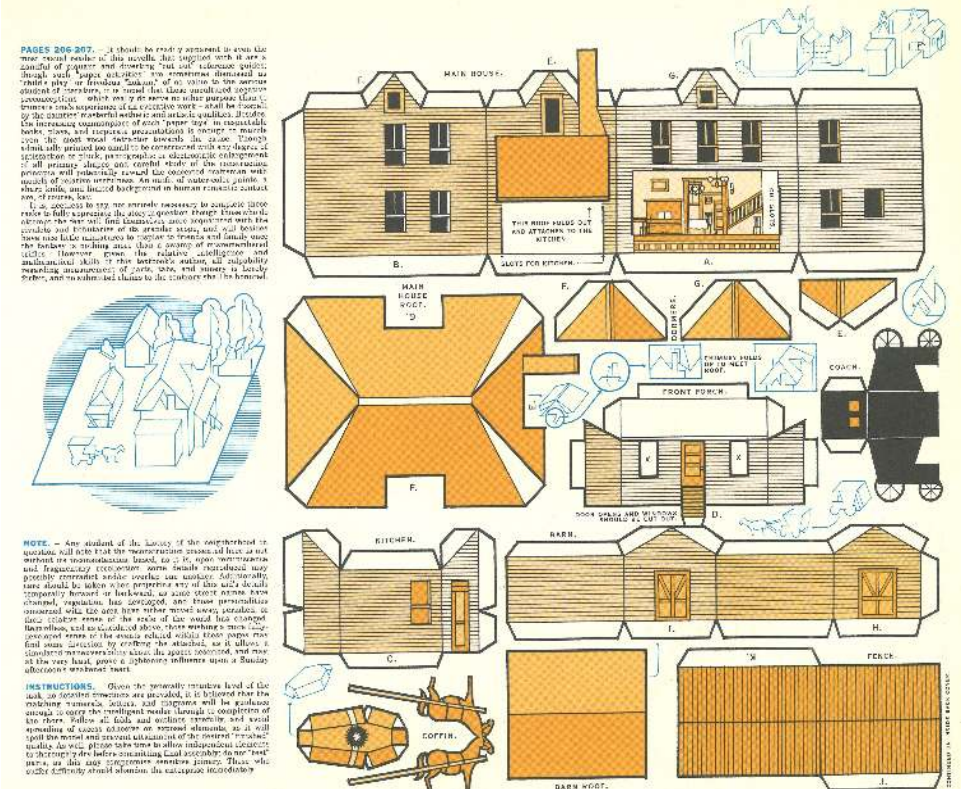


Figure 3. Homestead cut-out

the task . . . it is believed that the matching numerals, letters, and diagrams will be guidance enough to carry the intelligent reader through to completion of the chore" (206). Ware's cut out model is not simply a comic fabrication—real world catalog and kit houses were sold by mail order through Sears Roebuck—but this cut out proves too small to be assembled as a model.[13] It is rather a graphic rendition of a true cut out model.

What, then, is the curious purpose of this graphic representation of a cut out model? Ware answers as follows: "though such 'paper activities' are sometimes dismissed as 'child's play' or frivolous 'hokum,' of no value to the serious student of literature, it is hoped that these uncultured negative preconceptions—which really do serve no other purpose than to truncate one's experience of an evocative work—shall be disspelt by the dainties' masterful esthetic and artistic qualities" (206). Notwithstanding a touch of artistic self-deprecation, Ware's defense is essentially that the graphic depiction of the cut out has its own aesthetic value. However, things are a bit more complicated for he adds: "Though admittedly printed too small to be constructed with any degree of satisfaction or pluck, pantographic or electrostatic enlargement of all primary shapes and careful study of the construction principia will potentially reward the concerted craftsman with models of relative usefulness" (206).

[169.231.39.38] Project MUSE (2024-06-10 20:35 GMT) University of California , Santa Barbara

Although drawn too small to be anything more than a representation, sufficiently enlarged, the cut outs could be assembled; while the scale is too small, the design is true. But here things take a further turn, for Ware also casts some doubt on how faithfully representative the cut outs are as he notes, "the reconstruction presented here is not without its inconsistencies; based, as it is, upon reminiscence and fragmentary recollection, some details reproduced may possibly contradict and/or overlap one another. Additionally, care should be taken when projecting any of this aid's details temporally forward or backward, as some street names have changed . . . the scale of the world has changed" (206).

As with the word "nowness," we shall soon see how projection temporally forward accrues a greater meaning. For now let me note that in analyzing the representational shifts of this graphic cut out, we need to attend to the way in which it comports with the instructional drive of Ware's comic to expand not only backwards and forwards but also outwards into the three-dimensional world: "regardless of inconsistencies," Ware remarks that "crafting the attached . . . allows a simulated maneuverability about the spaces described" (206). The reader is positioned not only as a constructor but as a guest in Ware's graphic house of fiction. However, I am equally cognizant of the way in which the instructional or instrumental element of the cut out is, if not de-animated, then de-instrumentalized. In a sense, this graphic cut out is subtended by a dialectic of instructional or instrumental potential for outward expansion and a counter de-instrumentalizing move towards deflation. In a manner, this cut out contains in miniature the programmatic instrumental and de-instrumental drives that contend in *Jimmy Corrigan* itself.

3. Corrections

If Ware opens his graphic epic by ironizing the apparatus of readerly instructions, he punningly closes his book with a paratextual "Corrigenda" that unfolds a number of curiously ironic twists. "Corrigenda," or a list of errata and corrections, Ware tells us, derives from the Latin c*orrigere,* to correct. Importantly, "correction" here refers not only to textual errata, mistakes, or accidents, but to extratextual or worldly correction or repair as well. For all his circumspection toward instruction, at the end of *Jimmy Corrigan,* indeed, after the end, as I noted at the outset, Ware informs us that he began his comic as a way of preparing himself to meet his absent father.

He never had in mind anything so vast as *Jimmy Corrigan* became. In fact, he planned his comic as an "improvisational exercise" to be completed over the course of a summer. But if "improvisational," it was also one that had a preparatory or instructional purpose to it. Ware hoped to "provide a semi-autobiographical setting in which I could 'work out' some of the more embarrassing problems of confidence and emotional truthfulness I was experiencing as a very immature, and not terribly facile, cartoonist." Ware, then, was not only drawing and writing in order to produce his comic but, also, by this cathartic art, to work through and refashion himself. In this sense, his comic would have a performative, self-correctional, or reparative function; his comic art would instruct his life.

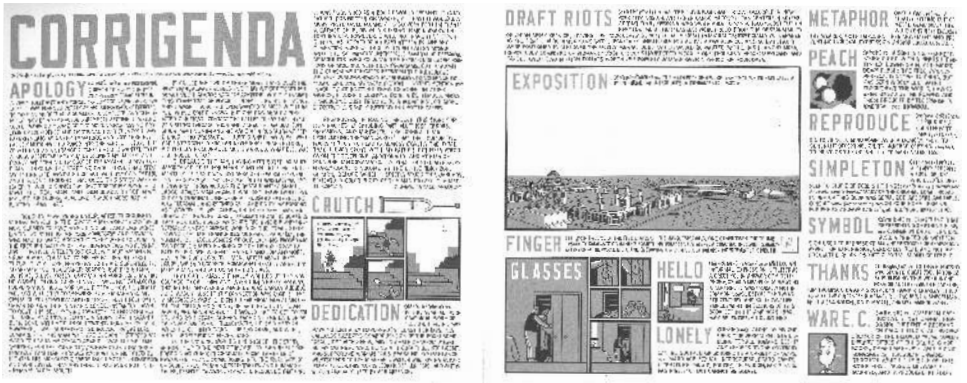


Figure 4. Corrigenda

But Ware was after something more: a further attendant catharsis. For what occasioned this lacuna in Ware and what he worked to recover was, paradoxically, something that had never been, that which was always missing. It was the father he never had: "I had spent my entire life avoiding contact with my own father, and I guess I thought that once this story was finished, I would somehow have 'prepared' myself to meet the real man, and then be able to get on with my life." From its inception, Ware's project was therefore constituted as an instructional program or a preparatory apparatus by which he could play out various scenarios that would facilitate his meeting his father. "I wanted," he tells us, "to try a more respectable 'stab,' by shoving my hapless and poorly-written 'alter ego' of the moment, 'Jimmy Corrigan,' through the starting gates first." This working through, in the double sense, would prove, he hoped, sufficiently cathartic to allow him to progress forward with his life. Knowing this, we might consider the literalizing instructional elements that I have delineated in *Jimmy Corrigan* as part of Ware's larger instructional life-realizing program or apparatus.

What we readers would have been unprepared for, had we encountered this instructional confession in the introduction rather than as an afterword, would be the sheer purgative violence, self-wounding and masochistic, of Jimmy's manifold fantasies, of his trying out different scenarios. As part of his psychic preparation, Jimmy imagines himself addressed by a series of shape-shifting facial images of his father that gather momentum in his mind. Once started, the anticipatory fantasy seems to take on a life of its own; it becomes automatic or self-propelling. And this automaticity will also become an operating component of the intratextual and extratextual instructional program that Ware both releases and cannot fully contain. After meeting his actual father Jimmy is engulfed by a fantasy of stabbing him with the broken edges of a mug. Ware wasn't kidding then when he spoke of taking a "stab" at shoving Jimmy through the starting gates.

Although he intended to complete his preparatory exercise over mere months, years later Ware found himself still caught in his interminable project. It was then that the uncanny in Freud's sense of recurrence intruded: wholly unexpectedly and with-

out warning, Ware received the telephone call from his father that by outrageously interrupting his psychic being also interrupted his project, "instantly laying to rest the self-pitying identity I'd unconsciously cultured and invested into a story that I wasn't even done with yet."[14] Before his instructional program had time to become properly operational, before it had time to truly do its work, it was usurped and superseded. But if this intrusion was untimely, it was also uncanny in the sense of an incredible correspondence, in that Ware's biological father, the "man who had suddenly stepped forward to claim my co-authorship," unbelievably exceeded in floundering awkwardness the father Ware had given Jimmy. Reality had again outdone Ware's comic art.

A year later Ware and his father met, and a lifetime of anticipatory fear dissolved during an ordinary evening and was replaced by lingering regret. Ware was thankful that his father had never come across his comic strip that was being published weekly in the Chicago newspaper, *Newcity.* In the following months Ware completed the story, marveling that it might "graduate from the exile of newsweeklies and comic books into the 'real world' of bookstores." Once published, Ware decided that he would give a copy to his father, "for better or worse; at least it would be a more preferable means of discovery for him than at a garage sale, or in a nursing home library." Although he does not explicitly mention this, Ware was no doubt thinking of the episode in *Maus* where Art's father Vladek discovers his early underground comic "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," which Art had never intended him to see. "Prisoner" expressionistically relates the story of Art's mother's death by suicide, which is made more tragic in that she and Vladek had survived Auschwitz, as well as Vladek's and Art's guilt and grief. Visiting Vladek, Art finds him morose and sorting items in his garage; he finds out that it was the shock of Vladek's discovering "Prisoner" without any forewarning that has cast him into depression. This episode is preceded by Art recalling that his mother had written diaries about her survival of the Holocaust—diaries that had been lost and then rewritten—and these would prove crucial to his writing *Maus.* He searches the shelves of Vladek's den where he vaguely remembers seeing the notebooks but cannot find them. *Maus I* concludes with Art suggesting he and Vladek search the garage for the missing notebooks only to find out that Vladek now remembers having burnt them, a scorching away of excruciating memories, in a desperately cathartic act of trying to bring some order back to his life. Enraged by the burning of the notebooks, Art twice accuses his father of murder. If the Nazis had not succeeded in burning his mother's body to ashes, his father had succeeded in burning her books, and afterlife of her memory, to ashes.

Given this context, we grasp that Ware's thought of not wanting his father to discover his book at a "garage sale" is not without its precursory motivations. This resonance grows when we consider the words Vladek uses when he tells Art that along with the notebooks he also destroyed letters between himself and another survivor: "All such things of the war, I tried to put out from my mind once for all . . . until you rebuild me all this from your questions" (*Maus II* 98). By "rebuild" Vladek simply means "reminded" or, better, "resurrected," but "rebuild" resonates with all the rebuilding in Ware's comic. Although the shocks are of course not fully comparable, what Ware wished to cushion by giving his father a copy of his comic was the naked outrage and woundedness that he felt towards the father who had abandoned him.

[169.231.39.38] Project MUSE (2024-06-10 20:35 GMT) University of California , Santa Barbara

He does not now wish to repeat Vladek's ill-fated uncovering of the comic, and consequent deepening of the wound between father and son.

We might also regard Vladek's reading of "Prisoner" in terms of a particular Benjaminian hermeneutic, which he refers to in terms of a "now of legibility." In a note in his Arcades project, Benjamin claims, "The image that is read—which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability—bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded" (463). What Benjamin posits here is a particular "now time" upon which the possibility of any true reading rests. He argues for a particular moment, a perilous "now," in which an image comes to its actual moment of full legibility. This moment is perilous precisely because it might always be missed, might always remain unredeemed and forever lost to history.

But there is in this particular instance a different sense too in which Vladek's reading Art's "image in its now of recognizability" presents a "perilous critical moment" in that Vladek reads that which was expressly never intended for him. Art's "underground" comic surfaces like the return of the repressed lying in wait to attain its "moment of recognizability," which would have been better missed, that would, paradoxically, have been redemptive in remaining unredeemed. We are here presented with a very different relation to "nowness" in which the comic book is not a fashionable ornament, as it was for some buyers of *Jimmy Corrigan,* but a perilous performative text.

However, the "Corrigenda" also confronts us with a moment in which Benjamin's "now of recognizability" does not signify the dangerous potential of lying in wait and capturing its reader, but rather returns us to Benjamin's original sense of missing its moment of reading, of recognizability.[15] Before he could present him with a copy of *Jimmy Corrigan,* we recall, Ware's father died of a heart attack. Ironically, the book that had the missing father at its inception, that was instructively written to prepare to meet the father he had not met, the father who had gone missing, now misses its appointment, or very moment of recognizability. At the end of the "Corrigenda," this leads Ware to "admit the chasm which gapes between the ridiculous, artless, dumbfoundedly meaningless coincidence of 'real' life and my weak fiction—not to mention my inability at knitting them together."

In light of Ware's program of authorial self-instruction and expansion into the dimension of life itself, what do we make of his summation? We might begin by noting the sharp contrast between Ware's assertion of the utterly "meaningless coincidence of 'real' life and his "weak fiction" and Joyce's claim for profound relation between "coincidence" and *Ulysses* as his strong, indeed, all-consuming fiction. Addressing the composition of *Ulysses,* and the "Sirens" episode, in particular, Joyce speaks of the word "scorching" as having a "peculiar significance for my superstitious mind" (461). By way of explanation Joyce adds, "the progress of the book is in fact like the progress of some sandblast. As soon as I mention or include any person in it I hear of his death . . . and each successive episode dealing with some province of artistic culture (rhetoric or music or dialectic), leaves behind it a burnt up field" (461). The deadly progress of *Ulysses* confirms Joyce's superstitious belief in the performative aspect of his book that is both in and out of his control. Indeed, in confirmation

that one of his characters harkened to the Siren's call, Joyce cut out an article from a Dublin newspaper he just received, "announcing the death of one of the figures in the episode" (462). If, as a work in progress, each episode of *Ulysses* left in its wake the burnt-up field of its art, how might we consider *Jimmy Corrigan* and the field of the art of the graphic novel?

Although Ware disavows the connection between coincidence and his weak fiction, his deployment of coincidence in *Jimmy Corrigan* corresponds to, and indeed enacts, Joyce's view of *Ulysses*. By way of demonstration I will confine myself to a few significant examples that ramify through *Jimmy Corrigan* and beyond. Having sprained his ankle Jimmy visits his father with his leg bandaged and carrying a crutch, which is truly more a crutch of emotional support.[16] The next morning he goes for a walk and comes across a road sign bearing the icon of a deer in front of a US Mail delivery truck. The combination of the sign signifying a deer crossing and the mail truck sets off a "Dear Dad" letter association in Jimmy's mind. In fact, Jimmy imagines writing a surprise letter to his father that would introduce himself as the son of the absent father. This letter would have preempted the letter that Jimmy received from his father; it would have given Jimmy priority, and control of the act of initiation. While struggling to compose the letter in his mind, Jimmy encounters real deer, and wonders if they will be friends or foes. He imagines one of the deer spearing him with its antlers. But standing in front of the deer sign with the deer themselves in view across the road, he decides they are friendly rather than threatening and he starts crossing towards them. At that instant Jimmy is struck by the deer sign that has itself been hit by the mail truck. A set of coincidences is ironically literalized in this scene. The coincidence of the alignment of the sign and mail truck sets off an association in Jimmy's mind and prompts him to try to reverse the temporality of sending and receiving a letter that lies at the heart of a psychic wound. It is because he is absorbed by the deer (associated with his father) and whether or not they will wound him that he begins crossing the road, leading to his being injured not by the deer, but rather the deer (dad) sign.

The ramifying of coincidence continues while Jimmy is examined by a doctor who determines that his ankle is only slightly sprained and replaces the bandage with a new one just for show. The doctor remarks that he has a daughter in Chicago from whom he has not heard in years and tells Jimmy and his father how great it is that they still have such a strong relationship. The irony of this leads Jimmy to indulge in a flight of fancy in which he climbs out of the clinic window taking to the sky in the superman pose. He imagines himself accompanied in free flight by a red bird but the red bird shifts course and appears in danger of flying into the clinic windowpane. It is at this moment that Jimmy's fantasy is punctured and literalized by an actual bird crashing into the windowpane.

If Jimmy was not seriously injured, it turns out that his father will be, and Ware's comic is by no means done with ramifying coincidence and literalization. Towards the end of the book, we find out that Jimmy's father has a bad accident driving through the snow. His daughter Amy, who is Black, is stopped by a police officer as she is driving too fast through the snow to the hospital. The officer tells her that there is no reason to get into an accident just because her father did, that he checked with the hospital

and her father is going to be fine. This turns out not to be the case. Coincidentally, another Mr. Corrigan, who is Black and thus assumed to be Amy's father, is indeed released but not James Corrigan, her father. Although it initially appears that Amy and Jimmy's father is going to survive, he suffers a heart attack induced by his injuries and dies. To this the "Corrigenda" adds the extratextual coincidental coup de grâce: *Ware's* father's death by heart attack.

In the wake of his father's death, Ware worked through the final edits of his project and remarks that it occurred to him that the five hours it takes him to read the book equals the total amount of time he had spent with his father. He goes on to add that "its final printed size seems nearly equal in volume to the little black box, or urn, before which I briefly stood . . . beneath a color photo of the man its label claimed to contain." After completing his manuscript, Ware opens it up again by writing into his "Corrigenda" this act of reparative incorporation. If *Ulysses* left in its wake the burnt-up fields of the arts it engaged, *Jimmy Corrigan* gestures to incorporating into the visual field of the graphic novel the color photograph of Ware's father and the urn of his ashes. If *Jimmy Corrigan* displayed Chicago burning to ashes, by incorporating the urn Ware's comic now becomes all the more a book of ashes.

By this act of incorporation, however, Ware does more than add a comic strip or panel; he turns his book into something like a completed cut out or model box. After all, the comparison he draws is between the three-dimensional volume of the black box and the box-like volume of his comic book. We are reminded of the instruction to be cautious when moving "temporally forward or backward . . . as the scale of the world has changed" (206). Indeed, in moving temporally forwards, in absorbing the ashes of his father, the "scale" of the comic's world does change. Paradoxically, by incorporating death, Ware's book is, if not incarnated, then literalized into the voluminal dimensions of life.

If *Jimmy Corrigan,* born out of the work of instruction, misses its appointment with the living father, in his literalizing act of incorporation Ware now confers on his book a different "now of recognizability"; the book as fashionable ornament attains a very different "nowness" or destiny in which the dead father reanimates Ware's instructional project by means of an odd metaleptic transgression of the boundaries of life (or death) and storyspace. To put this another way, Ware engages *Jimmy Corrigan* in a poetics of incorporation by means of a fusion of coincident signs and coincidence itself gesturing towards the book becoming its own performative sign. Moreover, a further consequence of Ware's incorporation is that his de-instrumentalizing of his cut outs, his situating them in the realm of the aesthetic, is overborn by the literalizing instructional or instrumental program that relentlessly drives his pictorial drama.

Does this, then, wholly give the lie to Ware's claim for the failure of his "weak fiction," and his inability to instructively knit together art and reality? Perhaps the whole story is more subtle, for looking again at Ware's consideration of his book as an urn of ashes we notice some wariness on his part. For one, Ware refers to the "black box . . . beneath a color photo of the man its label claimed to contain" with circumspection. His wariness does not simply concern the true correspondence between the ashes and the color photo of his father, but the fact that despite his vast comic, his father mostly remains a black box that signifies some limit to incorporation.

[169.231.39.38] Project MUSE (2024-06-10 20:35 GMT) University of California , Santa Barbara

And what do we make of Ware's reference to his "weak fiction" itself, which calls to mind Benjamin's famous "weak messianism"? Is this use of "weak" just coincidence? But what does "coincidence" mean in the context of *Jimmy Corrigan,* given Ware's performative deployment of it? "Coincidence," here, surely takes on more than one register. Indeed, it is not only this correspondence, for Ware seems to gather together a host of Benjaminian signifiers and echoes of his lexicon and the redemptive discourse out of which it emerges: not only "nowness" but "gates" and the echo in the Corrigenda of correction or repair of the world. In addressing his "weak fiction," Ware most strongly invokes Benjamin's second thesis on the concept of history, in which he claims, "like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim. Such a claim cannot be settled cheaply" (390). It is in the very possibility of the future actualization of missed possibilities that the past endows future generations with the weak messianic power of that which was previously failed and now lays claim to its particular fulfillment. This tenuous or weak power lays claim to restoration of the unrealized past, of what might have been, precisely because it could never guarantee its future actualization. It depends on the recognition of a future generation to seize that moment in which it flashes up as an image. By "weak fiction," Ware may well be signaling the failure of his graphic text to redeem the failed generational past. After all, his comic portrays the possibility of a generational arc bending towards some measure of redemption. Reality however steps in, ironically instructing the authorial instructor and siding with the coincidental incorporative program. Ware's weak messianism fails and gives way to a further cycle of abandonment.

But is there also not another way of approaching this? For we are also led to ask: what would it have cost Ware's father to read the book? Ware wishes to preempt his unexpectedly coming across his comic for the shock it would cause. But while this might have conditioned the shock somewhat, *Jimmy Corrigan* engages in such violent revenge fantasies against fathers that, even for as obtuse a man as Ware's father was, the comic would surely have wounded him to the core. It would have flashed up as a moment of self-recognition in the bad sense. "This claim cannot be settled cheaply." In this regard, Ware's book missing its appointment with the father uncannily anticipates and preempts the wound it would have inflicted. Indeed, we recall that Ware was thankful that his father had not already encountered his comic.

Apart from this, the "Corrigenda" provides us with a reversed sense in which that which is missed also constitutes a "weak messianism" of sorts. We remember that well into the making of his comic Ware's father contacted him. Outraged by this intrusion into his authorship that came without warning, Ware remarks, "I was the better writer, for the painfully awkward and inappropriately familiar phrases with which he tried to lighten his monologue were much more ill-considered and nonplussed than anything I had ever put into Jimmy's dad's mouth." Considering Jimmy's father, this is really saying something. And later, finally meeting his father for what would turn out to be the last time, Ware recounts: "Gradually, the sublime outrageousness of our evening eroded into two people simply running out of things to say to each other. We weren't father and son anymore, just a pair of regretful men. After about three hours, we said goodbye, somewhat affably agreed to meet again, and got on with our lives." In a way,

the catharsis Ware sought occurs towards the end of the composition of his book, when he meets his father. By the end of the evening more than 30 years of resentment had simply dissipated and had been worked through.[17] What Ware does not say but what is revealed in this scene of the anticipatory sublime succumbing to the ordinary is that the missing father, and sense of abandonment, was one of the profound origins and psychic engines of his art. The presence of the dull father would have simply proved an insuperable block foreclosing the very possibility of his comic and blocking his drive, as well as one aim of his art: "to make something that isn't just a picture of life but has a life of its own" (*Monograph* 27). If Ware invokes a "weak messianism" by allusive comparison with his "weak fiction" and the irreducible space between them, he also, I think, invokes Benjamin's sixth thesis: "articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it 'the way it really was.' It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger" (391). This corrective too surely lies behind his invocation of his book as an urn of ashes.

Endnotes

1. For a sophisticated analysis of Ware's use of diagrams in *Jimmy Corrigan,* see Cates.
2. Ironically, since we are dealing with literalization, Ware complains about the weak binding glue that led to earlier editions falling apart (*Monograph* 146).
3. Ware records his parents' early divorce and his first meeting with his father as an adult in *Monograph,* 5.
4. Ware offers the autobiographical story as a companion to the semi-autobiographical comic in the "Corrigenda" section at the end of the text.
5. All citations from the "Corrigenda" refer to the endpaper that closes the book.
6. Schjeldahl actually uses the example of Braque and T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" but the analogy between the modernist avant-garde and *Jimmy Corrigan* holds.
7. In his acquisition meeting with Pantheon, editor Chip Kidd is reported to have professed that "Chris is the James Joyce of comics, and *Jimmy* is the *Ulysses*" (Emelino).
8. Citations of the "General Instructions" are all from the initial endpaper.
9. For a different and perceptive treatment of Ware's instructions, see Gilmore.
10. Analyzing the intricate explanatory diagram to this simple cartoon appearing on the opposite page, Cates points to Ware's ironic use of complexity: "The irony of this dense, compact and complicated way to understand a comic is, of course, that the reader must already know comics shorthand in order to be able to read it in the first place: it excludes the unpracticed reader it pretends to instruct" ("Comics" 93).
11. Ware's *Building Stories* (2012) also plays with assemblages, notably asking the reader to perform the work of its title.
12. Ware records the laborious and extensive historical research he did at the Chicago Public Library: "I wanted to create a sense of the Fair as accurately as I could" (*Monograph* 104).
13. In *Monograph,* Ware recounts the impact of the Sears Roebuck catalogs on his art (95–96).
14. Also see *Monograph,* where Ware records that it was during his intricate work drawing the construction of the Exposition that his father called: "This was the moment of my life I'd most dread-

ed and anticipated, the one which, for better or for worse, had defined, limited and created me—it even was the whole point of the story I was working on!" (104).

15. For a different and perceptive analysis of *Jimmy Corrigan* through the lens of Benjamin, see Bearden-White.

16. Stuck in his apartment after breaking both legs after an ill-fated jump from the second floor of the Art Institute in Chicago, Ware records spending his time working on *Jimmy Corrigan* and "reading about Chicago with a new, near-obsessive interest, the story turning into something much denser and more complicated than I'd ever imagined or planned" (*Monograph* 103).

17. Ware relays this information in the "Corrigenda."

Works Cited

Bearden-White, Roy. "Inheriting Trauma in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth.*" *International Journal of Comic Art* 12.2–3 (Fall 2010): 354–66.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project.* Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999.

———. "On the Concept of History." In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 4: 1938–1940,* edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 389–400. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003.

Cates, Isaac. "Comics and the Grammar of Diagrams." In *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing is a Way of Thinking,* edited David M. Ball and Martha B. Kuhlman, 90–104. Jackson: Univ. of Mississippi Press, 2010.

"Drawing Conclusions." *Slate,* 30 Aug. 2000. https://slate.com/culture/2000/08/drawing-conclusions.html.

Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce.* Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982.

Emelino, Louisa. "A Day in the Life of Chris Ware's 'Rusty Brown.'" *Publishers Weekly,* 2 Aug. 2019. https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/columns-and-blogs/openbook/article/80836-a-day-in-the-life-of-chris-ware-s-rusty-brown.html.

Gilmore, Shawn. "Public and Private Histories in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan.*" In *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing is a Way of Thinking,* edited David M. Ball and Martha B. Kuhlman, 146–58. Jackson: Univ. of Mississippi Press, 2010.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art.* New York: William Morrow, 1993.

Schjeldahl, Peter. "Words and Pictures: Graphic Novels Come of Age." *The New Yorker,* 10 Oct. 2005. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/10/17/words-and-pictures.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus 1: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History.* New York: Pantheon, 1986.

———. *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began.* New York: Pantheon, 1986.

Ware, Chris. *Building Stories.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2012.

———. *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2000.

———. *Monograph.* New York: Rizzoli, 2017.