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The Graphic Novel—Paper #2: Chris Ware / *Jimmy Corrigan*  
23 June, 2005

The comics of Chris Ware have captivated me for some time now. Not only do the stories in his work affect me (both as humor and drama), but I am especially drawn to the methods he uses—his narrative techniques—to tell the stories with words and imagery. A prime example of these techniques is in Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid On Earth*.

One of the first things that stands out about the book is Ware's use of color. It is obvious that he chooses his colors carefully and is a master of the subtle language therein. Not only are his color combinations beautiful on their own, but they also play an integral part in the telling of the story. Color can become a device by which dreams are separated from reality, silent emotions are portrayed, the climate is changed from scene to scene, and even changes in time or geography are made obvious.

Another expressive element that Ware seems to have a firm hold upon is typography. Again, his lettering (which is all done by hand) is beautiful on its own but, even more than color, he uses it for much more than decoration. Changes in narration or voice are made obvious in a silent, effortless way that is beautiful but doesn't distract from the rest of the story (though he isn't afraid to let the letters shine when appropriate). In his typography, Ware smartly letters in styles that were popular around the 1800s—a time that related closely to the storyline.

Another visual aspect of *Jimmy Corrigan* worth note is the composition. While most of the panels are laid out in a fairly conventional, rectilinear fashion. The composition within the panels is where Ware's sense of composition shows. Clever divisions and spacial arrangements are often achieved through variations in the point of view—scenes viewed from directly overhead, or extreme close-ups of relevant details—which all make for an interesting perspective on the world(s) in which the story take place.

Another device that Ware uses successfully to help tell his story is that of diagram. A complete summary of a person's (or persons') background can be portrayed in a beautifully intricate, well-planned diagram. This is no small task either; to create a successful diagram of such complexity requires a strong skill of being able to use simple visual elements, like lines and icons, to portray complex (sometimes invisible) concepts, such as time, love, perception, etc.

In a similar fashion to his diagrams, Ware offers ephemeral cutout-type activities throughout the story, including mini landscapes, robots, and even intricate zoetropes (spinning mechanisms for viewing animation). All of these paper "toys" relate to and often blend with the storyline.

One way the story—particularly the main character's thoughts—are portrayed is with a juxtaposition of word and image. Normal conversation in the story can continue uninterrupted while the reader actually gets the visuals of what the main character is daydreaming at the time. This makes for interesting transitions between scenes and is becomes an excellent element of surprise in

the story.

Similarly, the story will slip in and out between reality and dreams, flashbacks, daydreams, skewed points of view, and other alternate states of reality. These transitions are often coupled with contextual metaphors as to a characters mental state or point of view of someone else: masks and costumes become a language that represent how someone feels both emotionally or physically.

These things all add up to create a very unique atmosphere in which the story is told; one that is intentional and made readily available for the reader to occupy. A fair amount of aspect-to-aspect panel transitions and overview shots help to adjust the reader to this setting.

In conclusion, it is safe to safe that this storyline, with its unique setting and transitions between dream and reality, etc, is one that could only be communicated with the language of comics. Even though some of the specific situations are extremely mundane, it is the way they are tied together are shown from different viewpoints using different narrative techniques which makes the story so engaging and unique.