ENGL 4900 Honours Capstone
Professor Anthony Enns
Nicholas Rodrigues B00838949
March 31 2024

Reveries of a Family History Muting Present Identity
An Analysis of Silence in *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Boy on Earth*

How does an erasure of the past influence present behaviour, and how can silence in the graphic medium accentuate the disruption in awareness of identity or how it forms? This paper demonstrates how the connotations of silence link the theme of silenced family history to the shaping of identity in *Jimmy Corrigan the Smartest Boy on Earth* as it relates to a more profound theme of systemic racism and the spectre of slavery. Silence is a device that Chris Ware employs to mirror tacit aspects of systemic oppression and how historical narratives tend to overwrite and forget specific individuals who are left out of them, as is the case with Black characters in the narrative, Amy and May. Utilizing "sequential absence of sound," this paper will look at how sound can accentuate profound moments of silence, in a literal sense and the way the past itself can be "silenced" concerning the identities of the protagonist, Jimmy Corrigan and his sister, Amy.

Dey and Bokil argue that when sound-symbolic words in the graphic novel medium appear, they act as: "temporal markers, spatial markers, action markers, emotion markers," and "identity markers" (1099). Dey and Bokil discuss how sound-symbolic words can embody certain characteristics of identity or even act as a synecdoche for a character (1097). Dey and Bokil provide a valuable premise for understanding how external diegetic sounds seen throughout the narrative express and mirror the characters' feelings. Ryan Twomey introduces a nuanced approach called 'the sequential absence of sound' to analyse the way sound is represented in graphic novels, focusing on the works of Chris Ware. The "sequential absence of sound" occurs by removing diegetic sound markers from the final panel in a series of panels that

make up a scene. Twomey's paper is concerned with how "the lack of written information, whether through dialogue with another character or in the form of a ubiquitous thought bubble, focuses the reader's attention on both the inward and external isolation felt by Jimmy" (103). Although Twomey's analysis of *Jimmy Corrigan* solely focuses on the protagonist, his ideas provide a catalyst for expanding the discussion around the narrative function of sound and silence as it relates to other characters and, for the sake of this paper, Amy Corrigan. Following Twomey's example, the "sequential absence of sound" accentuates the alienation experienced by characters. However, the effects of sound/silence extend beyond loneliness and alienation, as they also encompass the "silenced" family history and the intersectional aspects of the story, such as the legacy of slavery. This concept will connect to a paper where Teresa Ferloli discusses "the narrative's revelations about the afterlife of slavery and its impact on the Black and white Corrigans" (64). Expanding on Twomey's concept, this paper will show how the effects of sound/silence extend beyond loneliness and alienation. Diegetic noise is a device that accentuates the meaning behind moments of profound silence, and it is helpful to note that Twomey does not link it to "silenced" family history, to the intersectional aspects of the story, or the legacy of slavery. The silenced episodes from the Corrigan family past resonate in their present lives in both Jimmy and Amy's inability to reconcile their relationship to one another and understand where they came from. Refocusing Twomey's argument and the role of sound throughout the narrative by bringing together Twomey's and Teresa's arguments will exemplify how silence encompasses intersectional themes that express the tension of familial and systemic alienation that Amy, Jimmy Corrigan and her forgotten grandmother, May, experience.

Jimmy Corrigan, a 36-year-old man, embodies the struggle to access his familial history, grappling with the inability to find the right words and the breakdown of language and identity.

Jimmy experiences an emotionally fraught journey as he reconnects with his estranged father, Jim. Intermittent episodic accounts chronicling the lives of Jimmy's grandfather, James, and great-grandfather, William, interrupt Jimmy's present-day narrative. Only Jim has access to the family history, which is never articulated to Jimmy because Jim is taciturn and frequently avoids discussing the past to avoid tension or conflict with Jimmy. As a result, the conflict in the narrative of how the two men attempt to reconnect becomes muddled and unresolved. Although Jimmy himself is not actively engaged in recovering his family's story, or possesses the know-how to ask about it, the plot functions in such a way as to introduce past moments in his family's lineage that fill in the space between Jimmy and Jim's awkward moments together. Running parallel to Jimmy's narrative is a subplot about his adopted sister, Amy, who, unbeknownst to Jimmy, is biologically related to him. Amy, like Jimmy, is unable to access knowledge that is barred by an inaccessible past, as their racist great-grandfather suppresses the truth about the Black housemaid, May, whom he impregnates and subsequently casts aside to the streets of Chicago in the 19th century. These familial stories are inaccessible to Jimmy and Amy because of an inherited penchant for muted speech and an inability to articulate identity, which is emphasised through the representation of sound and silence.

This paper will thus review and complicate how "the sequential absence of sound" not only conveys a sense of alienation for the protagonist but also signifies a more nuanced relationship to how the plot is continually interrupted by 'silenced episodes' from the past. Acting as a key component to the plot sequence, these 'silenced episodes', reopen moments from the past in a way that knits the present moment to the family's history of suppression and its inability to pass down certain information. The sequential absence of sound is a device that expands the meaning behind moments of profound silence by linking them to a fractured plot structure that

reflects this 'silenced' family history and prevents the story's characters from ever realising their own identities. The plot mirrors the lack of resolution in the inability to access the past for both Jimmy and Amy–the present moment for both characters is interrupted by episodes from their grandfather and great-grandfather's past. This paper is split between the narrative accounts of Jimmy Corrigan, in the first section, and his sister Amy Corrigan in the second. Each section analyzes the way sequential absence of sound correlates to silenced episodes of the past and how silence acts as a buffer that synthesizes the past and present into a single moment.

I. Sequential Absence of Sound and Jimmy's "Unspoken" Identity

The narrative opens with Jimmy flying out to see his father, Jim, for the first time; they spend an excruciatingly tense time together in Jim's apartment. Following a page of panels where Jimmy is left alone in the apartment looking for Jim, a scene transition occurs that documents his great-grandfather, William, and his grandfather, James' experience living in Chicago post-Civil War. In this silenced episode (that Jimmy will never be aware of) we see James cope with the death of his grandmother and a belligerent father, William, who resents James for killing his mother during childbirth. This section is notable because it conveys a deep-rooted and systemized racism passed down between each generation of the Corrigan men. For example, the saga of the Corrigan men thus opens with a set of circular zoetrope frames used in a short film of a caricature of a Black man stealing a pie from a white woman's window sill, entitled "Jim Crow." In the succeeding pages, we witness William purchasing a newspaper from a young boy who is Black; following the transaction, William utters "racist epithet." This chapter is significant because it seeds the family history in a particular moment and with a man whose sensibilities on race and the world are inherited by the succeeding men in the family tree. How William's sensibilities are inherited by Jim and Jimmy will be further expanded on later in the

paper, but it is essential to note its placement in the plot line, in a moment when Jimmy is becoming newly acquainted with his father. In other words, this episode from his family's past rather abruptly interrupts Jimmy's present life, signifying that Jimmy's story is not his own. Moments of sequential absence of sound happen at regular intervals before and after episodes from the past occur. This particular account is significant because it expands the connotations of Jimmy's isolation, and his anxieties become amplified in silence. Each of these episodes from the past thus help to explain the alienation that the Corrigan family experiences with one another in the present moment and Twomey's notion of the sequential absence of sound becomes a useful conceptual tool for analyzing how the silence in the present correlates to these episodes of a silenced past.

Twomey takes examples from *Jimmy Corrigan, Rusty Brown,* and *The Last Saturday* to show how Ware employs diegetic markers of sound and onomatopoeia, in panels preceding ones where silence is produced (90). Twomey states, "...during moments of alienation, Ware's characters' isolation is enhanced by moments of silence and the manipulation of diegetic sound" (91). Twomey has termed the production of this type of silence as "sequential absence of sound" and how it "occurs when previously observable diegetic markers of sound are removed from proceeding panels (94). An illustrative example of the sequential absence of sound that Twomey points to is a set of panels involving a Superman figure who jumps to his death in *Jimmy Corrigan*. Twomey notes how the initial panels portray a bustling street corner where the Superman figure prepares to jump and how the monochromatic background, buildings and busy people act as diegetic markers producing sound (95). When Superman jumps and lies dead at street level, he attracts a crowd, and in the final panel, the crowd disperses, and his corpse remains, evoking a powerful sense of isolation.

Twomey eloquently demonstrates the formal use of the sequential absence of sound. However, Twomey does not elaborate on the symbolic significance of this scene and how it pertains to Jimmy Corrigan's identity or the other instances where it coincides with the silencing of family history. The Superman figure features as a diachronic braid (visual motif) throughout the narrative, acting as a symbol of idealised masculinity, and a marker of inescapable adolescence, particularly where moments of SAS (sequential absence of sound) occur. In the panels concerning Jimmy's visit to a clinic, late into the narrative, we see him imagine himself to be the Superman figure flying above. Superman also correlates to an early incident where Jimmy is a child, and his mother has a one-night stand with a sleazy super-hero-actor who sneaks away the following morning but leaves Jimmy with a unique face mask. Serafin writes:

> Ware's "The Super-Man" character– as both an index of superheroic masculinity and as a figure for comic-book history–has long haunted Jimmy and has caused him to be anxious and frantic. Jimmy finds himself feeling immobilised in the face of filial connection, which is dramatised early in the narrative, when Jimmy receives a note from his estranged father. (240)

It is crucial to indicate where references to Superman occur, as they link the moments of profound isolation that Jimmy experiences to a deeply suppressed and warped notion of masculinity tied to his absent father. In every instance where a Superman motif recurs, it is also followed by an enlarged panel featuring Jimmy, evoking a potent sense of silence. This occurs when a Superman motif appears. More significantly, however, the sequential absence of sound occurs predominantly in moments before or after each historical episode for William and his son James.

Preceding another chapter about James' past, the reader sees him and his father, Jim, visit a clinic because of Jimmy's sprained ankle. This section includes various instances of sequential absence of sound that will be elaborated upon later. It is thematically significant to note that Jimmy envisages himself as a Superman who flies above the clinic with a bird, speaking to his inability to grow up and the perpetual adolescence he experiences. The relationship between Jimmy and his father is also conveyed through the patronising tone of Jim, as he tries to embody the father role, and Jimmy's reticence in how to behave–the result of which produces a feeling of crippled emotional development, for both Jimmy and his father. As they both leave the clinic, a new chapter on James commences. The placement of this chapter within the plot reflects the thematic aspects of Jimmy and Jim–they are irretrievably disconnected from one another by the spectre of intergenerational trauma. This fragmented style of conveying the story speaks to Jimmy's personality and how his inability to understand his family's past impedes his ability to fully comprehend himself in his present setting or the fractured dynamic between himself and his father. A through line exists thematically between each of the Corrigan men and their respective fathers in each period the reader experiences. In Jim and James' context, for example, we see a profoundly abusive dynamic play out that smothers Jim's ability to voice his own opinions, and later, the tendency to avoid any conflict whatsoever manifests in Jim and Jimmy's relationship. These flashbacks to the past as a form of psychological "silencing," as Jimmy will never learn about them, and Ware places them at moments in the plot when the sequential absence of sound happens for Jimmy in his present.

The significance of where the sequential absence of sound is placed at different intervals in the plot expands the alienation that Jimmy experiences by linking it to the historical episodes of his ancestors. Plotting scenarios where SAS occurs relays the relationship it has to a forgotten

past. For example, in the first instance, where the reader experiences an ancestral echo of Jimmy's great-grandfather/grandfather, we see how it is demarcated by two instances of SAS for Jimmy just before it begins, and how it instills profound moments of silence after it ends. Preceding the first "silenced" historical episode where Jimmy is in his father's apartment while Jim is taking a shower, several instances of SAS occur. Here, we witness Jimmy sitting on a couch while Jim, his father, takes a shower. The sound of the shower, represented by the words "tshhhhhhhhh" and then "shhhhh," gradually becomes smaller in the succeeding panels, until a series of silenced panels precede a larger one featuring Jimmy, evoking a sense of Jimmy's timid nature and his inability to feel a sense of security when he is alone. The literal sound of the shower evokes the connotation that Jimmy is being told to "shush" or be quiet, as though the noise is invading his thoughts. Notably, we see Jimmy sit on a couch, sweating, becoming increasingly anxious with the "shhhhhshshshhhh" sound of the shower bleeding into successive panels, and in the final panel Jimmy imagines his father stabbing him in the throat. The following silent panel in the next row shifts into a wide-angle perspective, accentuating Jimmy's fear and isolation as he grasps a blanket before the shower noise creeps into the following panels again. As the shower continues to run, a sizeable diegetic text stating "RING" appears above Jimmy's head, causing him great anguish and discomfort; fear engulfs his expression again as he imagines who is calling or what the call could pertain to, in a series of thoughts bubbles surrounding his head. Jimmy's face appears overwhelmed, but because of the frequent interruptions, both literal (coming from the shower) and metaphorical (in the plot sequence of past accounts), he is utterly silenced because he cannot communicate his feelings.

Although the following sequence of panels are not examples of SAS they do exemplify a correlation to a past episode with Jim and William, which mirrors, the awkward dynamic

between Jim and Jimmy in the present. The answering machine makes a noise as indicated by "KLK," and as Jimmy imagines who could be on the other line, through a series of thought bubbles with a face that has a question mark on it, the answering machine repeats, "Hi dad… I was just calling to see how you were doing…" We see how discombobulated, uncomfortable, and paranoid Jimmy is. In the final panel, before the first story of his grandfather, James, commences, Jim cluelessly peers through the crack of a door, uttering "Hey," which accentuates the rising tension of this awkward familial scene. The transition into James' early childhood in the 19th century evokes the feeling that it is an extension of the present moment for Jimmy and his father. Another great example of how a past episode interrupts the present moment and amplifies the fragile relationship between Jim and Jimmy can be seen where William chastises James for mistakenly letting a horse into their house.

In a scene where James mistakenly lets a horse into the house, sound is represented through literal descriptors, as opposed to onomatopoeia; "The sound of Hoofs" appears in one panel, and "hoofs" appears in the following one as the horse traverses the staircase and into his grandmother's room. Like Jimmy, in the scene mentioned earlier, his grandfather, James, experiences great unease as this scene unfolds. Representing the sound the horse makes as a disruptive force frightens and causes anxiety to the young boy, James. The final four panels in the scene collectively say, "All it takes," "To Ruin it all," "is the sound," "of the first day's words," and a cut to William saying, "Get up you goddamn little son of a bitch." On the following page, we see a large silent-panel, where no diegetic markers for noise appear, of James sitting, staring off into the distance at the construction of the Chicago Exhibition–a pointed evocation of alienation and silence. Diachronic braiding occurs in how silence is expressed in this scene, as well as in the one involving Jimmy in the apartment with Jim. Sarafin states:

> William Corrigan's masculinity is represented as in a state of ontological incompleteness: he often stares at the finger he had lost in the civil war, and his patriarchal and domineering position over poor Jim is a cover for this literalized defect in his masculinity. So we are made to think that William Corrigan is another avatar of The Super-Man, as they are both of the hegemonic masculinity damaging the psyche of both Jim Reed Corrigan and Jimmy… (248)

Sarafin points to how the relationships between Jimmy and James, respective to their fathers, establish a "sort of phantasmic agon" (248). In the examples regarding the use of SAS in both accounts of the Corrigan men, sound and silence are used to convey their anxieties and emotional turmoil, and the way the past interrupts the present shows how these anxieties are shared across generations.

When the prior account of Jimmy's grandpa ends, a new scene with Jimmy commences. An instance of SAS occurs where successive panels of silence amplify Jimmy's loneliness and are interrupted by the squelching sound of his bandaged ankle and the "screech[ing]" noise of a truck that ends up hitting him. This scene is a unique narrative shift where Jimmy's thoughts are conveyed in cursive font on each panel, without any word bubbles. The first four panels feature a blackened silhouette of Jimmy standing in front of a street sign, and in the final panel, the word "DEER" appears in bright blue lettering above Jimmy's head. The symbol of a deer, acting as a signifier of Jimmy's naive and aloof temperament, becomes emphasised through the interspersed thoughts that he has. The word "DEER" transitions into the words "DEAR" and "DEAR DAD," signifying Jimmy's thought process when he sees the sign. Following this is a series of fragmentary and half-formed thoughts that seemingly interrupt a cohesive chain of thinking in which "Deers" becomes conflated with his encounter with his father. Samolsky discusses how

this scene "ironizes coincidence" in how Jimmy sees the deer–Jimmy's initial response to the deer sign (imagining a deer impaling his torso) is negative. However, when he sees an actual deer, he deems it non-threatening and decides to get a closer look; a truck then strikes him to the ground (193). Samolsky states:

> 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. (193)

The placement of this scene provides insight into Jimmy's fragmentary thought process and illustrates a cruel irony that is only accessible to the audience peering into his life. By positioning it relative to the sequence of James–as a small child and his relationship with William as both their lives unravel–the reader sees how the main plot of Jimmy's life is interrupted by silenced episodes from a past that he cannot see and how his present moment is impaired by psychic wounds related to his family dynamic. Even moments of silence and solitude are perpetually disturbed for Jimmy by the anxieties of the larger socio-historical narrative structure–involving his father and grandfather in post-civil-war Chicago–that he does not have access to but, ironically, has indirectly moulded the formation of his identity.

Identity and its formation become a focal point when Ware deploys SAS, as these moments not only interrupt the plot but also provide details that indirectly reveal a family history of which he is not aware. Understanding the themes and subject matter from the Corrigan family tree thus contextualises a psycho-history of how Jimmy relates to his family in his internalised sensibilities and behaviour. However, it appears in instances not only with Jimmy and his Grandfather but also with Amy, Jimmy's estranged sister. The point in addressing how SAS is used by Ware is to recognize the connotations that it expresses, to explain how it relates to and

mirrors the plot structure, and to further complicate and expand Twomey's argument beyond instances solely involving Jimmy. In the following section, we will analyse specific accounts of Twomey's concept of "the sequential absence of sound" and the ones he missed, in how it relates to Amy's identity and the significance of its use in relation to the plot.

II. Amy Corrigan, SAS, and Fractured Identity

Amy Corrigan is adopted by Jim Corrigan, but, unbeknownst to Jim, Jimmy and Amy are, in fact, biologically related. Elucidating this detail via a diagram at the end of the graphic novel, Ware shows us Amy's ancestry dating back to her great-grandmother May, a housemaid to her great-grandfather, William, who impregnates her and subsequently shuns her. Feroli indicates how the narrative structure undermines and suppresses the Black characters of *Jimmy Corrigan* to mirror an "awareness of how the lives and bodies of Black people continue to be violated in ways that replicate the conditions of slavery" (64). As Jim Ziegler similarly observes:

> Whether or not Williams' relationship with the woman at the head of Amy's family history was consensual, the history of white slave owners raping [B]lack women, his standing as her employer, his propensity for violence, and his racist remarks toward other African Americans all make legible the possibility of sexual coercion. (76)

Ziegler shows how William's relationship with May is rooted in and replicates the legacy of systematised violence and oppression of Black bodies. The fraught, racist, and abusive relationship that occurs between William and May resonates in a disturbing moment where Jimmy imagines an incestuous encounter between himself and Amy. This scenario shows that while Jimmy has no recollection of who his great grandfather was, he still exhibits behaviour that seems to stem from systemic racism that has become ingrained in the American psyche.

Jimmy's internalised racism becomes apparent in the placement of these silenced episodes from the family's past and the way they parallel Jimmy and Amy's current moments. The narrative opens with Jimmy flying out to see his father, Jim, for the first time; they spend an excruciatingly awkward time together in Jim's apartment. Following a page of panels where Jimmy is left alone in the apartment looking for Jim, a scene transition occurs that documents his great-grandfather, William, and his grandfather, James' experience living in Chicago post-Civil War. The placement of this chapter within the plot reflects the thematic aspects of Jimmy and Jim–the unknowable past that complicates both of their identities because they do not have access to it. In this episode, James is a small boy (Jimmy's grandfather) coping with the death of his grandmother and his belligerent father, William, who resents James for killing his mother during childbirth. Notably, the chapter opens with a set of magic lantern frames that William keeps in his private collection, which feature four hand-painted images on glass, referring to the Draft Riots across the U.S. in 1863. The Draft Riots occurred in New York when working-class men protested conscription in the U.S. Civil War, and it encompassed racialized violence towards Black Americans due to a racist fear that emancipation would threaten job availability to lower-class white Americans (Encyclopedia Britannica). The four frames portray a man wearing a top hat pillaging a store during a fire, proceeding to kidnap a woman and presumably rape her. The historical setting of the draft riots acts as a symbolic marker, expressing the way racist moments in history become tokenized by William and signify his deeply racist identity. Chronicling the events before William and his son have to move from a lavish country house to a forlorn bachelor Chicago apartment, we see both characters enjoy a stable life before the severe economic circumstances of the late 19th century mire their lives. A pointed moment occurs during a dinner between the two, and the Black maid, May, is featured in a single panel serving

them. This scene is one of a few instances where May is represented throughout the narrative before she is written out of the story. The importance of May's appearance in the story signifies how her being written out of the story replicates aspects of systemic racism in the erasure of Black identities from history. The themes of overt racism become accentuated when William shares an anecdote about a "dark sentinel" named "[racist epithet] Barney," whose skeleton he receives after a physician gives it to his father. Barney's skeleton becomes a symbol of objectification of a Black body for the Corrigan family, used as an object for pranking until William's father has to dispose of it in a river to avoid legal repercussions. This scene is significant because it shows William's racist mindset and parallels the forgotten and fetishized Black skeleton with the erasure of May from the family story and the graphic narrative as a whole. Moreover, suppose one is to view this episodic account and its relationship to silence. In that case, we can think of how it links to Jimmy's conception of Black bodies and his sexual objectification of Amy in a later sequence in the story. Beyond Jimmy's comprehension, he reenacts Williams's behaviour in how he perceives his sister Amy, a point that is elucidated upon later.

The theme of the objectification of Black bodies thus becomes relevant once again where an unsettling scene unfolds in Jimmy's mind, involving an instance of SAS when he is in Amy's home, and he imagines an incestuous encounter with her. In a large red text box stating "ANYWAYS," Jimmy imagines an apocalyptic scenario unfolding where, by nuclear war, civilization is destroyed. In the wake, he builds a log cabin for himself and Amy. This scene operates on several levels. Firstly, it is ironic due to the suggestion of Jimmy's masculinity, as he is seen wearing a dilapidated sweater with the Superman symbol, contrasting with a scene of him building the log cabin where he is represented as a much taller, more muscular version of

himself. Secondly, it expresses an internalised racism manifesting in sexual desire–the desire for which is premised on a catastrophic scenario “making the incest incommensurate with the preservation of the human race” (Feroli, 81). And thirdly, it occurs during the sequential absence of sound as indicated by the diegetic markers of sound occurring afterwards. The significance of placing this hypothetical scenario between a moment of SAS is that it not only becomes an extension of the abrasive diegetic sounds being made but also links to the plotting of episodic accounts with Jimmy’s racist grandfather. Jimmy’s sickening notions towards his sister and William’s silenced episodes become a potent thematic link, showing how problematic behaviours are destined to repeat if one is never made aware of them.

In several instances, we see Jimmy fetishize Amy's body in ways that dehumanise her and replicate the objectification of Black bodies. In one instance, he becomes preoccupied with a moment in which she touches his hand; Feroli points out that Amy has an angry reaction towards him: "attest[ing] to the possibility that she recognizes the gesture as sexually charged" (80). In another instance, Jimmy imagines having an intimate dinner with Amy while she is wearing a tight-fitting red dress. Jimmy also conflates his desire for an office worker named Peggy with his desire for Amy when he imagines a keychain he had given to Peggy with her name on it (which she rejects and gives back to him) and has the name "AMY" etched into it. A vocal moment occurs in the story's final moments after Jimmy has returned home and goes to his office, where he proceeds to have a mental breakdown. Here, Jimmy recognizes his incestuous desires for Amy in a singular moment of cohesive self-reflection when he stares down at the keychain with "AMY" on it and sees a pen going through its metal link. Through this phallic symbolism, Jimmy experiences extraordinary disgust. A moment of diachronic braiding occurs where he imagines himself committing suicide in the same fashion as that the Superman figure at the start

of the narrative jumps off the building. This moment crystallises the use of the sequential absence of sound by linking it to the failure of fatherhood, the fetishization of Black bodies, and Jimmy's alienation. Perhaps the most subtle expression of the warped relationship that Amy and Jimmy have occurs during the sequential absence of sound shared between them after their father, Jim, dies.

A lengthy exposition by the doctor on how Jim Corrigan has passed away, followed by the words "I'm terribly, terribly sorry," shows the tension between Jimmy and Amy reaching a climax. In the moment preceding a scene where Jimmy is standing alone outside the doctor's office where this information has been relayed, the diegetic marker "SH-SHUT" signifies the last time Jimmy will ever see Amy, evoking a potent sense of familial alienation. The "SHUT" is the only instance where sound is not represented as onomatopoeia in this scene, acting as a diegetic marker that blurs narration with reality with a verb rather than the sound it produces. Perhaps the blurring effect that this word produces is intended to amplify the severity of the closure in Amy and Jimmy’s relationship. Right before the door shuts, we see Jimmy and Amy's anxieties mirrored between panels, and through this parallel, their facial features become recognizable. The placement of the panels shows how Amy's reaction to Jimmy becomes mirrored by his inability to come up with a response when she yells, "GET AWAY FROM ME." The silence produced after this scene fits into a pattern where quiet moments accentuate the patterns of behaviour related to interruptions that prevent the members of the Corrigan family from properly articulating themselves.

The connotation that silence holds expands in scenes with Amy and May because of the way that it relates to the legacy of slavery and how the Corrigan men replicate its memory in their behaviour. May appears in the narrative in sparse moments; perhaps only four to five small

panels feature her, either turned away or hiding her face. This lack of visual representation throughout the story acts as an example of Ferloli's aforementioned notion that the narrative replicates aspects of systemic racism in the way that May herself has been "drawn" out of the story and how the narrative focus is on a past that is primarily concerned with the white men of the Corrigan family. What can the reader discern about May's past besides saying that we have very little information about her besides what we know of her as a maid in a position of servitude to James? Ware makes use of the anagrams "Amy" and "May" to bring awareness to the fact that both characters are living in moments of systemic racism or to perhaps assert that Amy's racially oppressive circumstances have not meaningfully altered since the time of her grandmother. The reader also finds that both Amy and May work in professions with similar connotations of servitude towards white members of society, as Amy works as a caretaker in a predominantly white old age home while her grandmother was a maid to William. A poignant moment of SAS occurs for Amy where she finds out Jim has died that links the erasure of her grandmother with her present moment of grief for her father.

In bold white letters "MEANWHILE" appear where the clinic administrator has an argument with a patient about getting her a taxi. The door to the reception room, where Amy has just found out that her father has passed, is featured in a large square panel in the top right of the page. The symbolic significance of this placement correlates to the various instances of how both Amy and May are literally being forced out of predominantly white people's narratives throughout the story and placed into separate, unobservable spaces. When Amy does exit the reception room into the lobby, we see her caught in the doorway sobbing, saying "I'm sorry" in a series of four small panels. The final panel on this page shows Amy as a lone figure, seemingly trapped between the two rooms she finds herself in, and the image scales her body down to such

a small size she barely appears in the image at all. This final sequence of SAS featuring Amy evokes a sense of profound alienation. It is a poignant scene because of its placement in the plot: on the following page, the reader is given the lineage account of Amy, when Jim adopted her, who her biological parents were, a brief account of how William impregnated May, and how May gave birth to Amy's mother. The placement of this silenced episode is unique because it parallels Amy's present moment, trapped between literal spaces in the clinic and unable to discern the history of her family's past. Like Jimmy, Amy's identity has been made mercurial because of the silenced past they cannot access.

The reader is presented with a past that Amy cannot perceive, a single embryo that is her mother is seen in a circular panel pointing to William and May, respectively. As previously discussed, in the final moments of the narrative, the reader witnesses Jimmy, a man wearing an expression of perpetual anxiety, an anxiety that he cannot fully comprehend or gain the necessary knowledge to deal with appropriately. Similarly, Amy's most profound moment of anxiety is then immediately followed by a silenced episodic account from the family tree that she cannot access. If both characters were able to recognize their biological relation and the fraught and abusive nature of their grandfather William, they might have the tools to cope with their respective anxieties. Ware's portrayal of silence binds the two characters thematically, particularly in the way these silenced episodic accounts are plotted in the narrative. Ware adds two additional pages of story in the soft-cover version of the graphic novel, following the story's end and Corrigenda. In the final two pages of the soft-cover, a point of SAS occurs when Amy is on a bus, bearing a face akin to Jimmy's–in the novel's final moments–an expression of restless anxiety. The reader sees Amy stare at the gentleman in front of her, who is reading a paper and a diegetic marker stating "KRNKL," emulating the sound of his newspaper. At the same time, the

panels shift back to Amy and her inability to socialize and her crystalizing fear of being perpetually alone. The larger panel features Amy as a lone figure walking away from the bus, looking somewhat dejected at the ground. It is equally important to point out that we see Amy as a nurse in a nursing home, bearing the same expression as before, caring for various old white men. The parallels this has to her grandmother May's role in William's house is eerily similar, and it becomes clear to the reader that Ware collapsed these past and present moments to portray the way both women find themselves in positions of servitude to white men. Amy, in a series of panels, is shown taking a coffee break outside of the nursing home–as she walks outside and watches the leaves falling off of a tree–she looks to the ground where she has almost stepped on a single red leaf amongst a vast array of yellow leaves. This single red leaf signifies a sense of othering and alienation she finds herself experiencing in the nursing home amongst a white clientele. We see in the final moments for both Jimmy and Amy how a silenced past has led to a present moment where neither character can reconcile who they are, a crippling anxiety they cannot decipher and an utter lack of resolution.

Twomey writes, "To have one of our senses repressed for a prolonged period disrupts the equilibrium and draws our attention to character interiority. For this reason, insignificant sounds become significant…" (100). The way the reader experiences the narrative disruption, induced through sound and followed by silence, mimics the contrived relationship between Jimmy and Amy. Jimmy enters into her life at a moment that will always be marked by unsettling interactions between the two, and principally, the death of their father, Jim. In a two-page family tree chronicling Amy's lineage to her grandmother and May's ties to William Corrigan, we see portraits of Amy as she ages. The sequence of portraits denotes how Amy's hairstyle changes after she rejects Jimmy and leads a life ultimately severed by the Corrigan men. Two successive

panels illustrate how Amy's hair has gone from straightened and pulled back to dreadlocks and, in the final panel, cornrows. Feroli notes that the change in outward appearance is not coincidental in her severance with the Corrigan men but signifies a

> …cultural struggle inscribed in critical engagement with the dominant white culture and effectively induces [Ware's] readers to see the extent to which slavery's violence and trauma are part of the cultural and psychic inheritance of all Americans. (84)

Feroli goes on to express how these changes in appearance are an act of resistance in the face of racial oppression. Perhaps Amy's change in appearance coincides with her tacit acknowledgement of how growing up in a white family with a profoundly racist family history has suppressed access to parts of her Black identity and her wish to express herself outside of the norms she grew up with. However, as the reader later finds out in the narrative, Amy seems to lose all sense of self just as Jimmy has, and her hairstyle returns to how it had been. Feroli does not mention the significance that this sequence of panels featuring Amy's changing hairstyles has to silence, or why it is placed next to a scene where May's pregnancy is revealed. Placing this sequence of portraits and changing hairstyles next to a page that reveals May's biological relationship to William places two fundamental aspects of Amy's identity at odds. There is her respective Black identity, her choice to embody it through hairstyle, and on the opposite side, the suppressed reality of her racist grandfather and the sexual coercion of her grandmother. The examples mentioned above of the sequential absence of sound illustrate the fraught and fractured family relationship between Amy and Jimmy and the influence of their racist grandfather, William. In the final two pages of the softcover, we see that Amy will not uncover her silenced family history and will, therefore, never fully understand where her origins lie and why her

family is as psychically wounded as it is. Amy, like Jimmy, will have to live with irretrievable aspects of their identity.

III. Concluding Remarks

Twomey introduces an indispensable concept for decoding the representation of silence in *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Boy on Earth*, and how it accentuates Jimmy's alienation from himself and society in a more general sense. This paper builds on how SAS features in Ware's work to expand and complicate Twomey's observations–to point out how it relates to how the plot is structured, how it expands on themes of a past that is inexpressible and inaccessible, and how it emphasises not only Jimmy's fractured identity but Amy's as well. Feroli expresses a nuanced analysis of Ware's work by elucidating how the text relates to the legacy of slavery, but she does not connect these thematic elements to the way silence is represented. By drawing in the observations of both Feroli and Twomey one can see how meaning expands through Ware's use of silence and particular episodic accounts seen throughout the story. The positioning of incidents of SAS occurs mainly before and after chapters on James occur. In some respects, it feels that when silence occurs, for a brief time, giving the reader a rest, it is then interrupted by reveries of an ugly family history. As the narrative continues, we find that when SAS does occur, it also coincides with terribly awkward character interactions, whether they include James and William, Jimmy and Jim, or Jimmy and Amy. The silence after these sequences reflects each family member's inability to communicate cohesively. The connotation of silence grows as the story develops because, just as the plot is interrupted by the past, so too are the lives of the present characters interrupted by noises that prevent them from expressing themselves adequately. The narrative frames Jimmy and Amy as members of society that, through its erasure of the past, has suffocated the voices of presently living people.

Works Cited

Beaty, Bart, and Stephen Weiner, editors. *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels : History, Theme, and Technique*. Salem Press, 2013.

Dey, Subir, and Prasad Bokil. "The Narrative Functions of Sound-Symbolic Words in Comics and Graphic Novels." *Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2021, pp. 1080–101, https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2020.1853190. Accessed October 9, 2024.

Feroli, Teresa. "Reading Post-Slavery Subjectivities in Chris Ware's Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2022, pp. 63–88, https://doi.org/10.7560/TSLL64104. Accessed October 11, 2024.

Sarafin, Wyatt E. "Masculinity, Incorporated: Diagrammatic Epistemology in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*." *ASAP/Journal*, vol. 4 no. 1, 2019, p. 239-270. *Project MUSE*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/asa.2019.0014. Accessed October 9, 2024.

Samolsky, Russell. "The Book of Ashes: Authorial Instructions, Incorporations, and House Rules in Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth." *Narrative (Columbus, Ohio)*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2023, pp. 179–97, https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2023.0012. Accessed October 8, 2024.

Twomey, Ryan. "Graphic Sound and Silence: Chris Ware's Aural Depiction of Alienation and Isolation." *Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2024, pp. 90–107, https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2023.2238806. Accessed October 4, 2024.

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

*It should be noted that there are no page references made in this paper because there are no page numbers in *Jimmy Corrigan*

Ziegler, James J. "A Secret History of Miscegenation: *Jimmy Corrigan* and the Columbian Exposition of 1893." *The Blacker the Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art*, edited by Frances Gateward and John Jennings, Rutgers UP, 2015, pp. 292–313. Accessed October 9, 2024.