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The Sounds of Violence: Textualized sound in Frank Miller's Sin City and Batman: The Dark Knight Returns

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Abstract

Though graphic novels are slowly being accepted into the world of academic criticism, one fundamental aspect of the medium has been consistently ignored, dismissed, and ridiculed as a crude necessity: textualized sound. Visual onomatopoeias, most recognizably depicted as sound effects for gunshots, car chases, and the like, have a long history in the medium of comics. Though these textualized sounds may have originated as a device of necessity—a clumsy means of employing sound into a “mono-sensory medium” (to quote Scott McCloud)—the implementation of onomatopoeia in comics has become an integral device in defining an author’s style and heightening their work. This creative, purposeful implementation of sound is epitomized in the work of renowned graphic novelist Frank Miller. This paper argues that, in his works *Sin City* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Miller uses sound to reflect themes present in his work, heighten the sense of physical space within and beyond panel borders, contribute to plot, evoke texture, or embody character. The violent sound effects Miller implements in these works redefine the possibilities of this integral comic component. Miller aligns himself with the tradition of sound effects in comics while simultaneously demonstrating the experimental possibilities of this device.

The Sounds of Violence: Textualized sound in Frank Miller’s *Sin City* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*

In his book *Understanding Comics*, comics artist and historian Scott McCloud states: “Comics is a *mono-sensory* medium. It relies on only *one* of the senses to create a *world* of experience” (89). Although McCloud’s seminal work addresses nearly every formal element vital to the sensorial experience of comics, he avoids any direct discussion regarding the purpose of sound effects. This omission reflects a common assumption in academic analysis of graphic novels that “the lack of possibility in interpreting the onomatopoeic word as an actual word with specific meaning makes the sound of the word the only meaning the word has to convey in the comic” (Petersen 164). Especially in the analysis of American comics, onomatopoeias are often thought of as an unfortunate necessity, a goofy tradition of depicting sound on the page—a prejudice likely perpetuated since the campy inclusion of superfluous textualized sounds during fight scenes in the “Batman with Robin the Boy Wonder” television series of the 1960s. This dismissal has led to a critical phenomenon in which the “onomatopoeia is taken for granted, its implications left unexplored” (Arnett 8).

Once the comics reader critically analyzes inclusions of textualized sound on the page, the various effects of this artistic choice become obvious. This is especially true in the work of American comics artist Frank Miller. Countering critic Luke Arnett’s assertion that

Miller is guilty of “overlooking the complex relationship between letterforms, words, and sound in comics” (Arnott 1), this essay will argue that Miller’s visual integration of sound in his work heightens its complexity and depth. In both *Sin City* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Miller demonstrates that textualized onomatopoeias are not simply a means of inserting sound into the silent medium of the comic book; rather, the textualization of sound can be used to reflect the works’ themes and plot, evoke texture and physicality, heighten the sense of physical space, and reflect—or even function as—character.

Before discussing examples within Miller’s work that demonstrate the complex implications of textualized sound, we must understand the purpose of sound effects in comics more broadly. In this essay, the terms “textualized sound” and “sound effects” will be used synonymously, both referring to the linguistic depiction of noises that has long been a comics tradition. Through making use of the English language, these onomatopoeias – in the context of the graphic novel – are meant to function as sonic icons (to borrow McCloud’s [27] terminology), much like music notes on a page of sheet music. However, the sheer versatility of these sonic icons distinguishes them from mere linguistic signifiers. The shape, size, frequency, and placement of these sonic textualizations are what grant them power within a comic.

The distinction between sound effects as linguistic (in comics) or audible (in film) is particularly important, given that both *Sin City* and *The Dark Knight Returns* have been adapted to film multiple times. This adaptation may have seemed inevitable; as one review of the *Dark Knight* graphic novel explains, the work is “highly cinematic and televisual, employing the full repertoire of motion picture and video rhetoric while continually breaking frames and foregrounding the apparatus of visual representation” (Mitchell 117). While nearly every academic article published about Miller discusses the intimate relationship between his graphic novels and the film adaptations, they neglect to acknowledge the central visual element of Miller’s work that is *never* translated into film adaptations: the textualization of sound. This fact reflects a larger trend in comics scholarship. Even when the relationship between film and comics is addressed – as evidenced in Robert C. Harvey’s chapter “Only in the Comics: Why Cartooning is Not the Same as Filmmaking” (Harvey 173–191) – there is rarely even a mention of textualized sound.

Though some modern film adaptations of graphic novels have included the textual visualization of sound effects – most notably Edgar Wright’s 2010 adaptation of the *Scott*

Pilgrim series, which was produced with scripting, art direction, and endorsement from the original series creator, Bryan Lee O'Malley (O'Malley 2010) – these onomatopoeias are nearly always abandoned in the transition from cool to hot media. This frequent abandonment feeds the common perception that such textualization of sound is a necessary strain on the physical comic book medium, a flawed attempt to create what comics simply cannot: the auditory experience.

However, one must recall the power a reader has when perusing a graphic novel. Just as a reader must fill in the action omitted by the gutter, they must also provide the closure of textual sound. They must recognize the letters as sonic icons, imagine the sound in the context of the scene, and reconcile it with the temporality of the panel(s). Miller is aware of the work a comics reader invests in the interpretation of these onomatopoeias, and rewards concentrated effort by infusing each instance of textualized sound with meaning beyond the simple evocation of sound.

Sound as Story

The first way in which Miller achieves this innovative use of sound involves incorporating sound effects into the plot of a work, an effect that often heightens the work's major themes. The ways in which sound contributes to plot is most obvious in the way that onomatopoeias can be used to guide the eye around a panel or page in a particular manner. Miller exemplifies this in *The Dark Knight Returns* when one of the so-called "mutants" fires a gun repeatedly, shooting bullets through his co-conspirator, in an attempt to kill Batman (Fig. 1). The sound effects, five instances of "BRAKA," cover the left side of the panel, and their colour gradient—which progresses from bloody red on



Figure 1: Batman, 63

the left to lightning bolt yellow—forces the eye to follow the direction of the bullets as they pass through the body of the murdered "mutant". Not only do these onomatopoeias serve to guide the eye along with the literal action of the panel, but they also highlight a theme that pervades the work: criminals of the streets are merciless in their violence. This mutant

shoots his friend with a complete lack of sympathy, as the five textualizations of gunshots prove in the fact that each one is as bloody and powerful as the last.



This idea is reflected in the first major action sequence of *Sin City*, when Marv is depicted busting out of a motel room and confronting three awaiting police officers (Fig. 2). This single panel uses sound effects to guide the eye through the temporally complex scene (“SKREKKK” following Marv braking through the door, “KOK” following his upward kick to the policeman’s face) as well as in order to demonstrate Marv’s ability to command a room through sheer violence. The theme of control achievable only through brute force is implied due to the prominence of the onomatopoeias on the page: they are the largest pieces of text, highlighted through the use of block letters.

It makes perfect sense that Marv’s is a world of sounds. Privileging action over discussion, Marv allows for little dialogue throughout his escapades in Basin City. As well as

befitting of this vengeance-driven anti-hero, the absence of speech reflects one of Miller’s aesthetic ambitions. In a 2015 interview, he stated: “I realised when I started *Sin City* that I found American and English comics be too wordy, too constipated, and Japanese comics to be too empty. So I was attempting to do a hybrid” (Miller 2015). One instance of

sound effects serving the role of plot occurs when Marv shoots a hit man who has come after him (Fig. 3). The

“BLAM” that accompanies Marv’s gunshot “is treated as a physical entity inside the panel” (Arnott 3), floating above Marv’s revolver. The onomatopoeia appears like a companion for Marv, a trusty parrot on his shoulder, squawking a message of more truth and importance than his ironically grunted “thanks”.

This panel is especially meaningful when it is compared to Marv’s gunshot two pages later (Fig. 4). This “BLAM” is the only one in *The Hard Goodbye* that is entirely inked in, as well as the first that corresponds with a purposeful, unambiguous kill. Rather than torturing this man, Marv has finally finished off, and his gruesome end (depicted in a direct face shot) is intensified due to the black block letters pronouncing the corresponding “BANG”. The German expressionist quality of Miller’s intentionally ambiguous illustrations

Figure 2: *Sin City*, 20

matches the lettering of these onomatopoeias, which feature uneven letter sizes and off-kilter spacing and orientation. This textualization reflects the erratic nature of the city of Basin as a whole—especially as it is interpreted through Marv’s twisted mind.

Figure 4: Sin City, 64



Figure 3: Sin City, 62

In his essay “The Acoustics of Manga”, Robert Petersen argues that “comics... collapse the word/image dichotomy: visible language has the potential to be quite elaborate in appearance, forcing recognition of pictorial and material qualities that can be freighted with meaning (as in, for example, concrete poetry)” (133). This concept of imbuing textual sound with meaning is made obvious in several ways later on in *The Hard Goodbye* when Goldie’s twin sister confronts Marv (Fig. 5). Here, we see onomatopoeias taking the foreground, beginning with the car’s “SKREEE” sound, which creates an effect of three-dimensionality (as each “E” is placed on top of the last). In the second panel—which is



significantly the largest—Marv is soaring through the air after being hit by the car, but he is still trapped underneath a sound effect: this time, “WHUMPP”. This is the first moment in the narrative that Marv has lost control of a violent exchange, and rather than being the aggressor, he is simply attempting to survive. Instead of delivering the pain, he is taking it unexpectedly. The textual sound is therefore printed overtop of him to reflect this lack of control and the dominance Goldie’s twin sister has over the scene. Marv’s loss of control is further emphasized through Miller’s decision to place the gunshot sound effects in between panels. Rather than Miller’s precise, controlled acts of violence—the manner of communicating in which he is most comfortable—Goldie’s shots are reckless and emotionally driven, both in their placement in the gutter and their overlapping over one another.

One scene that occurs later on in the work employs textual sound in order to express plot in such a way that prose or traditional images could not. As Lucille screams in Marv’s arms upon revealing that she was forced to watch the serial killer cannibalize someone, the textualization of her scream (“HE MADE ME WAAA...”) guides the reader



Figure 6: Sin City, 100

this action in a lewd visual. The reader is forced to perform closure instead, following the onomatopoeia and imagining its consequences based on the special clues it gives.

through the next three panels in the sequence (Fig. 6). The scream, as though it were smoke, pours out of the cell’s gated window until it reaches the serial killer, at which point it begins to diminish in volume and aims itself downwards. The trajectory of this textualized sound subtly depicts the awful truth that this serial killer is only able to “get off” when he hears the agonized screams of a woman. By guiding the reader’s eye past this man’s whisper of a smile, down towards his chest, Miller suggest that this man is masturbating to

Figure 5: Sin City, 80

the sound without having to depict



Figure 7: Batman, 132

This onomatopoeia also begs the question of where to draw the line between dialogue, as one would often find in a speech bubble, and sound effects, which must exist outside of said bubble. Miller experiments with this line in both *Sin City* and *The Dark Knight Returns*. Both Lucille’s scream and Batman’s assertive “NO” used during the riots in Gotham (Fig. 7) represent, in part, speech of such a loud volume that it cannot be contained within a bubble. However, each incidence carries its own thematic weight as well. Lucille’s cry turns into a nonsensical slur of “AAA,” reflecting the lack of control existing in Basin City as a whole, while Batman’s proclamation “NO” reflects his ultimate authority over the people of Gotham and the salvation he ultimately brings during an apocalyptic time.

Sound as Space

When textualized sound is employed in a comic, its visual landscape on the page is inevitably affected. In Miller’s work, the physical presence of onomatopoeias is acknowledged as an integral part of the environment, serving not only to alert the reader of sounds that happen to be taking place, but also to highlight how much one’s sonic surroundings influences how one perceives one’s physical surroundings (and vice versa). Just as Japanese manga artist Osamu Tezuka often employs sounds in order “to slow the reader down and create greater visual depth and texture to the scene” (Petersen 166), Miller’s textualized sound forces the reader to acknowledge the profound impact that noise can have over the physical landscape in both Basin City and Gotham.

When a police helicopter descends upon Marv and Lucille, its presence is accompanied by the repeated sound effect “RAKKA”. However, this noise superimposed on top of itself, canvassing the upper portion of the series of panels in which the helicopter lands (Fig. 8). In pasting the sound effect overtop of itself, Miller creates a messy collage of noise that reflects the effect of the helicopter’s loudness in a manner that simply increasing the font size cannot. Having the textualization of “RAKKA” spill over itself reflects the literal ubiquity of the unanticipated sound as well as physically



Figure 8: *Sin City*, 114

manifesting Marv’s psychological response to the (likely familiar) sound of a police helicopter. This psychological manifestation is highlighted in the lower tier of Fig. 8. The helicopter’s sound physically hovers over Marv’s hand as he reaches for and loads his gun, visually demonstrating the fact that this iconic sound – with all its psychological for Marv – guides him in the physical action of preparing his weapon in order to fight the police.

Similarly, throughout *The Dark Knight Returns*, the “SKREE” sound effect produced



Figure 9: Batman, 18

by bats takes on spatial significance. When Clark Kent recalls his experience falling into a cave of bats as a youth, the textualization of the bats’ cries features prominently in the sequence. Just as the “RAKKA” sounds of the helicopter in the previous sequence physicalize the overwhelming nature of the sonic environment, so too do the “SKREE” sound effects for the young Clark. In the first panel of Fig. 9, the sound effects are not only layered in order to create this sense of sonic chaos, but are also depicted as becoming larger in font and more vibrantly vermillion the lower they appear in the panel. This use of colour physically depicts the danger young Clark feels in relation to the bats in a way that these black-furred animals cannot within the pitch-black cave. Additionally, Miller allows the collage of “SKREE” sounds to be cut off by the panel borders in both these panels, implying that the presence of the bats expands beyond young Clark’s location in the cave.

The effect of this “SKREE” collage takes on thematic significance as it continues to appear throughout the strip, as when these sounds hover above the mutants (Fig. 10). Batman as a hero

lives as both a voyeur, both literally (watching the city from above, symbolized in the sky-sent “bat signal”) and metaphorically (as he hides out in his mansion as an isolated billionaire mastermind), whilst also existing as a pedestrian, descending frequently into the streets to enforce justice directly. This panel uses the bat sound effects in order to mirror the omnipresence of Batman watching Gotham from above whilst also affecting the ground-level criminals directly, scaring this “mutant” so much that his exclamation, “AAAAA,” escapes from his speech bubble.



Figure 10: Batman, 63

In some of Miller's work, textualized sound can provide setting more accurately than a traditional background image could. During a car chase in *The Dark Knight Returns*, police cars frantically racing after a criminal are depicted without a traditional background.



Figure 11: Batman, 33

Although we can assume there is a cityscape behind them, all the reader sees are the erratic orange and yellow curves of the onomatopoeia for the police car alarms: “SKREEEE...” (Fig. 11). Although the same sense of chaos could be depicted through building in the background, this method emphasizes the sheer auditory chaos overwhelming the scene. The colours of this onomatopoeia, a hellishly fiery gradient, as well as the different angles and trajectories of these overlapping onomatopoeias, adds to the environment of sheer pandemonium. The scenes of the car being chased, depicted two pages later (Fig. 12), emphasize the sheer speed of this getaway vehicle by superimposing the “SKREEE” and “SSKREECH” onomatopoeias overtop of the car throughout the entire sequence. As the sheer urgency and volume of these sounds continues to take precedence of the actual physical environment, the sounds continue to be textually depicted as the physical environment.

The decision to allow textualized sound to either bleed beyond panel borders or stay within panel confines impacts the way we interpret physical space in Miller's work.

Figure 12: Batman, 35

When Batman is crossing a tightrope while attempting to avoid gunshots from a nearby helicopter, there are no physical depiction of the many bullet being fired (Fig. 13). Instead, Miller bleeds overlapping, brightly-coloured sonic textualizations—“BLAM”—across panel



Figure 13: Batman, 51

nearby helicopter, there of the many bullet. Instead, Miller bleeds coloured sonic “BLAMMM,” “KBLAMM,” borders in order to

physically represent the importance of these flying, visibly indiscernible bullets in the physical landscape. Though the size of the actual bullets is minute, their importance is represented through the textual depiction of their sonic loudness (even larger in font than the parallel “WHUP” sounds of the nearby helicopter). The bleed here also follows batman’s loss of control, as he is struck by a bullet and literally follows the impact of the shot (shown through the final curved “BLAMMM”) down into the darkness of the city.



This scene is meant to contrast the action sequence three pages later, in which Batman has miraculously harpooned himself from a seemingly inevitable death and tackled Harvey Dent through the window of a nearby skyscraper (Fig. 14). Suddenly, all onomatopoeias are limited to the confines of increasingly

condensed panel borders. As Batman gains control over his physical environment, the textually represented sounds around him are controlled within established borders. Onomatopoeias are still superimposed upon each panel, as Batman punches the gun out of Dent’s hand and hits his face, but now they are limited within the space of the panel borders: Batman is in charge of the physical space and the sounds he makes, which Miller ultimately represents through the control of the textualized sounds “THWOK” and “CHAK”

within the panel borders.

Figure 14: Batman, 54

The most notable occurrence of textualized sound taking over physical space is the “BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!” confessional sequence in *The Hard Goodbye* (Fig. 15). This sequence presents Miller’s most experimental implementation of sound effects in his work as the sounds of Marv’s gun shots become the space in which the scene occurs. Using the gunshot onomatopoeias as the panel borders has a number of effects on the reader. First of all, this technique demonstrates the sheer volume of the gunshots in a novel manner, emphasizing the loudness of these gunshots within the church: a space that likely causes the sound to reverberate and echo. This page also presents Marv as the most sure he will be of his actions at any



Figure 15: Sin City, 74



CONTINUED

point in the work. The priest has just called Goldie—the only girl who Marv claims he is fighting for—a slut. Marv’s sheer contempt for the priest allows him to feel completely confident in his decision to kill, a confidence that stands on top of the fact that Marv feels most sure of himself when he is enacting violence. The sounds of gunshots acting as panel borders reflect the world of violence in which Marv resides, and could be said to represent the violent environment of Basin City as a whole.

When the same technique is used in *The Dark Knight Returns*, it has more complicated implications. On one hand, Miller’s decision to shape a panel after the onomatopoeic “KRAKK” of thunder provides a sort of pathetic fallacy: just as lightning bolts pelt down from the sky and

thunder startles pedestrians, Batman returns to deliver justice Gotham (Fig. 16).



the sheer disorder that this view is encouraged by thunder sounds on a previous page that bleeds beyond the action of any one panel (Fig. 17). Perhaps Miller’s onomatopoeic panel borders are used here to simultaneously symbolize Batman’s return to crime fighting and the chaos that violently permeates Gotham.



Figure 17: Batman, 28

pedestrians, Batman upon the criminals of Gotham. However, this texturized sound also enhances the setting, amplifying the volume of the torrential downpour, reflecting Gotham has fallen into. by the textualization of

Sound as Feeling

The concept of onomatopoeias reflecting visceral sensations is by no means a new concept in comics. In his choice to employ “handwriting instead of typeface,” comics forefather Rodolphe Töpffler used “trembling, quirky” lines in order to establish “continuity



between image and word” (Kunzle 22), and create a sense of natural

immediacy in his work. Following in this tradition, artist Gray Panter’s “mark-making emphasizes texture as a means of immediate, visceral expression” (Hatfield 145). The expressiveness of the line is particularly pertinent to textualized sound, in which the shape of the text guides the reader’s interpretation to the character, volume, and timbre of the sound.

Figure 18: *Sin City*, 50

Though every onomatopoeia could be argued to evoke certain tangible characteristics due to the way they are drawn, Miller makes his textualizations of sound particularly visceral. In *Sin City*, as Marv pushes a bouncer’s face in which thumbs, the “KRUNCH” sound is written so that letters appear to physically crunch up against other (Fig. 18). Similarly, in *The Dark Knight* the explosion of one of Harvey Dent’s bombs the sound “POOMM,” which Miller transcribes using two huge, interlaced ‘O’s, textually emphasizing the bass frequencies that such an explosion would cause (Fig. 19).



Figure 19: *Batman*, 147

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Some of Miller’s textualizations of sound seem to directly answer McCloud’s rhetorical question, “don’t all lines carry with them expressive potential?” (124). When the serial killer in *Sin City* hits Marv in the head with a blunt hammer, the sound is effectively textualized as “KUDD” (Fig. 20). The arrangement of these block letters, clearly following the swing of the hammer, makes the impact of the hit all the more tangible. The visceral impact of the hammer is further communicated through the large, clunky, layered nature of the letters, which reflects the precise force of such a direct hit.

Miller also reflects the visceral nature of sound in a scene where Batman lands on a moving car full of criminals escaping the police (Fig. 21). The force of Batman’s landing is represented through the blank lines that emanate, like waves, through the word “WHUMPP” itself. The power of this sound is



Figure 20: *Sin City*, 94

communicated through this playful disturbance of the reader's expectation: even though the onomatopoeia is not supposed to tangibly exist in the world alongside the comic's characters, this particular action is so powerful that it resonates through the textualized sound itself.



Figure 21: Batman, 35

Sound as character



Figure 22: Understanding Comics, 87

In this sequence (Fig. 22), McCloud demonstrates just how versatile textualized sound can be. Purely through the use of onomatopoeia (in the absence of any traditional “picture”), McCloud creates a definable character. Although we don't see any visual depiction of McCloud's strange nemesis, we can infer various qualities they likely possess because of the onomatopoeias that stand in their place. This individual is indiscreet (a pronounced “WHOOSH!” accompanies their entrance), persistent (the repetition of “Ding! Ding!”), and seems to be driven by sheer cruelty (evidenced through McCloud's protestation “OW! OW! Stop that!”) [qualities that seem eerily familiar to Miller's Marv and Batman]. Though not to this invisible extreme, Miller also allows onomatopoeias to stand in for other characters, often by transforming an individual into the violent

actions they perform.

Multiple characters undergo this transformation in *The Hard Goodbye*. When the serial killer kicks Marv across the face, the reader is still quite unfamiliar with this psychopathic character (Fig. 23). It is due to manner in which “THUNKK” is drawn—in a precise, directional manner—that reveals to the audience that this serial killer is crafty and calculated in his violent acts.



Figure 23: *Sin City*, 92

More obvious a transformation occurs when Marv attempts to break out of the basement cell by



Figure 24: *Sin City*, 112

throwing his bulky body against the door. After numerous attempts, he finally overcomes the metal lock system with a powerful sound, written as “CRASH” (Fig. 24). In the final panel of this sequence, Marv’s action is so extreme that he is not actually visible in the panel; the reader must bear witness to the sound effect itself along with Lucille. So intense is the sound of Marv’s action that he as a character is physically transformed into the sound he makes for that panel.

Similarly, Miller often depicts Batman and Robin as the sounds they induce. However, Unlike Marv in the previous sequence, these characters from *The Dark Knight Returns* usually transform into sounds that take up entire panels, always re-appearing in the following panel after the action has been completed. In order to save her friend from a “mutant” intent on slicing and dicing, Robin stabs the “mutant” four times in the arm (Fig. 25). The fact that these textualized sounds occupy a large panel of their own, that bleeds into a later panel, emphasize the importance of this action, which is Robin’s first depicted moment of commendable bravery. The use of a purely text-based panel also builds suspense, as the



Figure 25: *Batman*, 30

reader wonders whether the “THUNK” sounds are due to Robin’s friend being stabbed. It is not until the next tier that the reader becomes aware of Robin’s violent act.

When Batman breaks through a window to retrieve a criminal, this technique is used again (Fig. 26). This time, the “KRESSSHH” sound effects not only reflect the sheer violence of the action and volume of the sound, but their occupation of an entire panel each suits the surprise of the criminal being brought to justice. The parallel implementation of textualized sound serves an additional purpose within *The Dark Knight Returns*: it aligns

the characters of Batman and Robin through the power and purpose of their physical actions, further demonstrating the strength of their bond as a crime-fighting team.

Miller’s use of sound as character is



Figure 26: Batman, 28

used most creatively during Marv’s confrontation with the hit men in *The Hard Goodbye*. After a panel clearly depicting Marv pushing one hit man into a brick wall while shooting the other in the hand, the reader is presented with a panel consisting only of Marv’s gritting teeth, scrawled speech bubbles, and large-print onomatopoeias (Fig. 27). In doing so, Miller creates a purely sound-driven conversation, in which Marv’s action of slamming the hit man against the wall (“CHUDD!”) lines up directly with each moan of agony uttered in response (“GUGG”). This panel not only uses texturized sound in order to reflect the sequence’s temporality (as the reader moves from left to right, following the actions), but it also reinforces the violence-based power dynamic existing between these men. The purpose for all these three men to exist in the world is to cause violence; what could communicate this more clearly than a panel dedicated entirely to the sounds of such violence?



Figure 27: Sin City, 60

As Frank Miller's *Sin City* and *The Hard Goodbye* demonstrate, the communication of physical violence through sound is not as straightforward as it may sound. Miller's textualization of sound proves that the sonic landscape in comics can accomplish much more than simply use language to stand in for what the medium can't produce. Onomatopoeias can add to the spatial dynamic of a work, just as they can heighten characterization, provide texture, enhance the major themes, and further the plot. Miller is certainly engaged in the "ongoing struggle to capture the very essence of sound" (Petersen 134): sticking out his elbows, pushing back, and giving "POW" new power.

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