

Persepolis 1 vs persepolis 2: analyzing satrapi's visuals



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Marjane Satrapi is an Iranian author and illustrator who grew up in Tehran in a middle-class family. Both of her parents were political activists and supported a Marxist ideology in contrary to the beliefs of the monarchy of the last Shah. Although Satrapi's family was a relatively progressive and secular one, she had a very strong personal connection with religion, up to the point where her only desire was to become a prophet. The majority of her childhood was ridden with war, violence and Islamic fundamentalist oppression. In both of Satrapi's memoirs, *Persepolis 1* and *2*, Islamic fundamentalism is a highlighted topic. She details how the strict regime controlled activities such as alcohol consumption to how women were permitted to act in public. In these memoirs, Satrapi uses graphic weight and empty background to show that Islamic fundamentalism takes an emotional toll.

In the first *Persepolis* memoir, Satrapi delves into her younger childhood years. Although just a child, she still feels the political weight put on her by the fundamental regime. She communicates this through the use of graphic weight and background.

Satrapi begins her first memoir with a chapter called the veil. In the second panel of page one, Satrapi uses graphic weight to demonstrate the emotional toll that the islamic fundamentalism has taken on the young girls. When glossing over the page, the second panel stands out as it takes up more space and contains expressional portraits of four girls. Each girl looks quite similar to the next and they all look discontented. This negative similarity shows that the girls, by being forced to wear the veils, feel like objects instead of unique individuals. The veils do not allow the girls to be

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expressive, as the more that is covered the “ better.” It can be deduced, by their facial expressions, that they feel very unhappy about this. Hence the islamic fundamentalist tradition of the veil weighs on them emotionally, especially in adolescence.

In the same panel on page one, Satrapi incorporates another element, background. Specifically, a blank background demonstrates the emotional effect of fundamentalism. Behind the girls sits a blank white background with no detail. Not only does this lack of detail put emphasis on the girls, it also understates the sad expressions of the girls. The background is one solid color representing how islamic fundamentalism forces young girls to fit one “ ideal” role described in the holy book. There is not meant to be any difference between the young ladies, they are all meant to act in the same modest, conservative way. This, without a doubt causes emotional stress on the girls.

The second Persepolis memoir follows Satrapi into young adulthood. In this book she encounters herself alone in Europe. Here, without the pressure of a fundamentalist regime, she pursues higher education and gets to find her real personality. However much changed she might be as a character, as an author she writes the second memoir in similar style and emphasizes similar ideas.

Again, Satrapi uses size and facial expression to give the panel on page 91 graphic weight. The graphic weight of this panel draws attention to the emotional impact of fundamentalism. In her illustration she becomes full of sorrow when she dons the veil and realizes that she must return home. She

knows she will be abandoning the liberties and freedoms that western women enjoy, to return to an area dominated by fundamentalist thought. The understanding that by returning, she is surrendering her freedom of expression, puts a large amount of emotional stress on her shoulders. Therefore the cause of such emotional stress is directly linked to islamic fundamentalism and is displayed by graphic weight.

Satrapı uses a creative background in this panel to emphasize emotional toll. Since her face is not immediately visible as the veil is the main focus of the image, Satrapı includes a mirror to show her sad expression. The use of background even outweighs the force of graphic weight in this panel as without the background the reader would not know Satrapı's emotional response to a return to Iran. Similar in comparison to Persepolis 1, Satrapı leaves the rest of the background blank, reinforcing the idea of uniformity instead of individuality. The background in this panel effectively communicates Satrapı's emotional low in response to the fundamentalist regime.

Both novels use similar elements (those being graphic weight and background) to convey that all throughout Satrapı's life, the oppression caused by Islamic fundamentalism has torn at her strong, individual spirit and she resents it. It has attacked the emotional foundation of women and progressives alike. It is in this way that both Persepolis memoirs speak to the same theme.

Satrapı recounts portions of her childhood and young adult years in the graphic novel- memoir, Persepolis. She illustrates all of her panels with

simple bi-tone colors and includes informational quotes to explain situations. In both books she highlights the practice and government of fundamentalist Islam and how that takes an effect on her life as well as many others. She is able to demonstrate the emotional toll of fundamentalism by incorporating graphic weight and background elements in both books alike. With these elements in hand, Satrapi leads us on a fundamental revolution.