

**Nicholas Rapold, "You Say You Want a Revolution," *New York Sun*, December 21, 2007**  
<http://www.nysun.com/arts/you-say-you-want-a-revolution/68460/>

A proven crowd-pleaser and critics' favorite, "Persepolis" is Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud's adaptation of the former's best-selling graphic memoirs, published here in 2003. The autobiographical coming-of-age tale recounts and intermingles personal, political, and cultural history from Ms. Satrapi's time as a child in Iran during the Islamic Revolution and as an exile abroad. The film shared the Jury Prize at Cannes and was the closing night selection at this year's New York Film Festival.

Like its episodic source novels, "Persepolis" has garnered widespread acclaim for making Ms. Satrapi's extraordinary story touchingly immediate and somehow universal. But the nagging truth is that this popular movie is disappointingly conventional, streamlining the novels' warts-and-all intimacy with its spunky heroine and the grim background commentary so vital to their rich, enveloping experience.

Adapting the black-and-white, bold lines, and economic expression of the books, the hand-drawn "Persepolis" follows young Marjane through the phases and milestones in the lives of herself, her close-knit family, and her self-besieged country. We grow up with her, from the rise of Khomeini fundamentalism during her innocently headstrong childhood, through her awkward teenage years at school in Vienna, and on to coping as a young woman in Tehran. (To frame the material, the film adds brief reflections set in present-day Paris and rendered in color.)

"Persepolis" does not shy away from depicting life under Iran's repressive regime: Marjane's childhood with loving parents and an adored grandmother is streaked with the theocracy's spreading incursions that she comprehends first naïvely and, later, with almost rash rebellion. After hearing about her uncle's brutal torture, little Marjane play-acts at torture with friends before fully understanding; as a young woman forced to wear a headscarf, she bravely, at risk of jail or death, lashes back at the bearded young thugs who police the regime.

Marjane's homesickness and her disillusioned first love in Vienna come across well as she lives among blithely nihilist students and dates an unsupportive wimp. (In a funny sequence in which she reflects angrily on their courtship, the movie replays their scenes together with him drawn as a snaggle-toothed troll.) Likewise, you'll recognize the iconic moments harvested from the book: Marjane's snitching on a passerby to divert the police and getting pitilessly schooled in integrity from her tough grandmother; her confronting cruel gossipers overheard in a coffee shop; her friends' tragic rooftop flight from a party pursued by the ubiquitous culture-crackdown police.

But the compression and facile adaptation has led to a flattening of the source material's often conflicted reflections and humor, giving rise to more than a few half-baked bits. Marjane's set-piece vamping to "Eye of the Tiger" in heavily accented English reduces exoticizing Western pop culture to a more familiar dorkiness. The recurring visual gag of her Viennese landlord's dog sticks out with the audience-grabbing dopiness of an outside imposition despite Ms. Satrapi's central role in creating the movie.

Though the tone of "Persepolis" is well judged, the arresting black-and-white visuals begin to feel tamped down. The film has an eminently serviceable look, elegantly hovered over and

zoomed upon, but the deeper and more prevalent blacks of the book's bold inking are a palpable loss to the story's environment. It's a missed opportunity to choose to add generic shading but to discard the novels' filigreed expressions of Persian art (which look so rapturous when broken out into large panels in the novels and receive oddly infrequent rendering on the big screen here).

Of course, "Persepolis" has the estimable benefit of having been voiced by two queens of French cinema, befitting a story to a large extent defined by women's resilience. Catherine Deneuve (whose participation was a precondition for Ms. Satrapi to embark on the film) captures the hard-edged wisdom of Marjane's mother. And living legend Danielle Darrieux ("The Earrings of Madame de...", anyone?) is a sound fit for Marjane's grandmother, who gives even-toned, miraculously grounded perspective.

To some extent, one doesn't want to cut down a film that manages to convey an especially timely and eloquent personal history with disciplined simplicity and multi-tiered appeal. But it would also be nice to see a more adventuresome attempt at adaptation, one that accepts the challenge of the graphic novels' first-person perspective and shifts in mood, and embraces an established audience's openness to the full panorama and depth of Ms. Satrapi's original cross-cultural accomplishment.