



PERSEPOLIS

Autumn
Season
2008

Directors: Marjane Satrapi, Vincent Paronnaud

Cast: Catherine Deneuve, Chiara Mastroianni, Danielle Darrieux, Simon Abkarian

Most of Peter Bradshaw's excellent review in The Guardian, which describes story in full detail:

Here is an adaptation so inspired, so simple and so frictionless in its transformation of the source material that it's almost a miracle. When I tell people it's a lo-fi animation, largely in black-and-white, about Iran, they put their heads in their hands and make a low groaning sound. But I've seen those same people bounce happily out of the cinema after seeing it as if they had had some sort of caffeine injection.

Superbly elegant and simple, it is based on the comic-book series by the Franco-Iranian artist Marjane Satrapi, a coming-of-age story that I can only describe as an auto-graphic-novel-ography. Satrapi has co-written and co-directed the movie version, and what a treat: funny and moving with a bracingly authentic feel, reproducing the graphic work with broad, bold strokes and a depth-of-field effect achieved with a recessive series of two-dimensional planes, like the ocean waves at the back of a panto set. Muted colour tones are introduced for sequences happening in the present, and deploying the cartoonist's classic skill, Satrapi creates witty and sympathetic facial expressions with hardly more than a squiggle. This is one of those rare things in the cinema: a movie with an urgent new story to tell and an urgent new way of telling it.

It is the story of Marjane, a little girl growing up in pre-revolutionary Iran in the 1970s. Her hero is Bruce Lee, and she is always scampering under the grown-ups' legs at parties, baffling one and all by striking ferocious martial arts poses. She is the indulged and adored daughter of well-to-do secular leftists who campaign ceaselessly against the Shah, and find family members harassed and imprisoned. When the revolution arrives, Marjane's parents and their cigarette-smoking, alcohol-drinking, idea-discussing and life-enjoying friends at first welcome it. The fanatical theocrats make them nervous, but they are confident that all this is just a phase on the road to progressive enlightenment. But they find that the Islamic state is here to stay. And there is one group it hates most of all: women.

Marjane herself, particularly as a little girl, is a superb character, smart, vulnerable, with a cheerful, non-PC love of western trash culture. She has something of Lisa Simpson and a little more of Peanuts' Lucy van Pelt, but with a seriousness and a single-mindedness that is all her own. She is close to her mother, closer still to her wise and worldly grandmother, whose wit and shrewdness she imbibes. Hers is a funny and deeply involving story but its sharp stabs against the women-hatred of the Iranian governing classes are enough to trigger rage.

The streets are patrolled by a swaggering cadre of morality police. One barks at Marjane's hard-working and modest mother, as she is getting her daughter into the car: "Fix your scarf, sister!" - that is, pull it even more tightly and meekly around your head. When her mother mildly protests, he screams in her face: "I fuck whores like you and throw them in the trash." It is a shocking moment, and has every sign of being based on the exact truth. The movie's most agonising moment comes when Marjane confesses to her grandmother a shaming episode of collaboration with the oppressor. Fearing that she would be pulled up by these morality street cops for wearing lipstick and makeup, she pre-emptively diverts them by claiming that a man was ogling her - an entirely innocent bystander who was then dragged off for questioning. This shaming, absurd, petty episode makes the Iranian state look like a Soviet tyranny.

As she grows into her teens and 20s, Marjane is sent abroad for a chaotic education in Europe, where she experiences the finest condescension and misogyny that the west has to offer: in fact, something of the exploitation inherent in sexual-liberalism that the mullahs warned her about, while not scrupling themselves to enforce a far harsher subjection. In spite of herself, Marjane finds a gravitational pull to a homeland that rejects free-thinking women: a complicated, bittersweet sense of exile which Satrapi has cultivated in her graphic novels and in this richly seductive and entertaining movie.

Persepolis gives us the sheer pleasure of narrative, rarely found in modern cinema or indeed fiction: a gripping story of what it is like to grow from a lonely imaginative child into an adult, and to find this internal tumult matched by geo-political upheaval.

My only disappointment with the UK release is that it is being shown here in the English-dubbed version... My only other tiny worry is that the presence of an American producer - veteran Spielberg associate Kathleen Kennedy - might get the movie suspected in some quarters of anti-Iranian propaganda. But *Persepolis* is too complex for that, too entertaining, and too robustly alive.



Note: **KFC is screening the original version**, not dubbed.