Persepolis **in Various Mediums and Formats**

Persepolis is among the few adult-themed graphic novels to enjoy worldwide success in multiple mediums. It was originally written as a French graphic novel, and published in Paris, France as two volumes: *Persepolis 1* (2000) and *Persepolis 2* (2001). The English edition, which combined the first two French editions into one graphic novel, was published in 2003 as *Persepolis: The Story of Childhood*. The French sequels, *Persepolis 3* (2002) and *Persepolis 4* (2003), were also later translated and published into a single English edition in 2004 as *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return*. The graphic novel has been translated into twelve languages, and is studied in over 140 universities worldwide.

In 2007, an animated film version of the *Persepolis* story premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in France. The original version was produced in French, and similar to the book, it was re-recorded in English for the American release. The film, written and directed by Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud, condenses all 340 pages of the four graphic novels into a 96 minute movie (necessitating a lot of character and story information to be sacrificed in the interest of time). The movie is almost too true to the book, in that it lacks a cinematic story arc and replicates the structure of the graphic novel; with each scene presented as a short vignette. The movie is faithful to the art style of the book, with many scenes looking like they were ripped out of the book:

The Movie   **The Graphic Novel**

In a behind-the-scenes documentary, Marjane Satrapi explains why she chose to preserve the artistic style of the graphic novel:

> The reason we're using animation instead of real images is very simple. Drawings have an abstract quality. If we used real images, it would be a few Arabs in a country. Right away it would be an ethnic film. It becomes the problem of those people who live over there and are crazy about God. But drawings, with their abstract quality, emphasize the universal. It doesn't matter who, a dictatorship is a dictatorship. Whether in Chile, in China, in Iran or anywhere else, it's the same. The drawings have enough of an abstract quality to make you consider that it could happen anywhere.

This philosophy can be applied to the graphic novel too. The "abstract quality" that Satrapi refers to lies in the simplicity of her drawings. The simple, generic, faces of the people in her world reside in the lower right corner of the "McCloudian Triangle" (from page 52 of *Understanding Comics*), where "the more cartoony a face is . . . the more people it could be said to describe" (McCloud 31). The lack of shading to represent skin color also helps readers identify with the characters; allowing them to imagine themselves experiencing the events of the story in their own society. In a New York Times article on the film version of *Persepolis*, Satrapi said, "It is hard for me, for my ego, to say this: For me, the movie is better than the book." However, there are many aspects of the book that engage the reader in a deeper way than the film can.

Though the abstract quality of the art in *Persepolis* (movie) assists the viewer in identifying with the characters, the actors providing voices for the characters can serve to negate this relationship. When reading the graphic novel, readers must create the voices of the

characters in their heads; allowing imagination to participate directly with the storytelling. The

graphic novel also makes use of the "gutters" of the page to force the reader to use imagination

for closure. The film attempts to leave some moments up to the imagination, by depicting entire

scenes in shadow and silhouette, but the imagination is much less active than while reading the

graphic novel. As McCloud writes in *Understanding Comics*, "while film makes use of

audiences' imaginations for occasional effects, comics must use it far more often!" (McCloud

69).

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