

Transformation Of Female Protagonist

Role Of Society In Transforming Marjane Into An Individualist

Growing up is hard. Finding yourself and your identity during teenage while experiencing puberty and handling school is burdensome enough. Now add an unanticipated war, the fear of being imprisoned, raped, and even executed! How would advancing in time in such a society transform your personality?

“Persepolis: the story of a childhood”¹ is a French novel set during the 1978-79 Iranian revolution caused due to discontent with the Shah’s rule, religious motives, and social injustice. This gave rise to strikes, demonstrations, and civil resistance (“Down with the king!”²) that had a detrimental effect on the entire Iranian population, especially children who were forced to grow up fast, losing their purity. Persepolis, by Marjane Satrapi, is a graphic novel as she believes “Images are a way of writing.”³ It is a bildungsroman that recounts her story of the coarse experiences she went through as a child from the age of ten to fifteen - an exponential growth in personality from being an innocent and confused child to becoming a rebellious, independent, and self-reliant lady.

Personality usually begins to develop when one is about the age of the protagonist, Marjane. Generally, children like Marjane at the tender age of ten go through role

¹ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

² Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

³ “Why I Wrote Persepolis. - Great Graphic Novels for all Grades.”
<https://greatgraphicnovels.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/whyiwroteperspolis1.pdf>. Accessed 27 Feb. 2021.

confusion⁴ which means being addled trying to find themselves. The Islamic revolution made society take a U-turn from progressively westernizing to being fettered around archaic and patriarchal ideologies. The fundamentalist regime made veil culture not only mandatory for women but also for young girls like Marjane. While Marjane was going through her initial stage of metamorphosis, the sudden change in society further added to her role confusion.

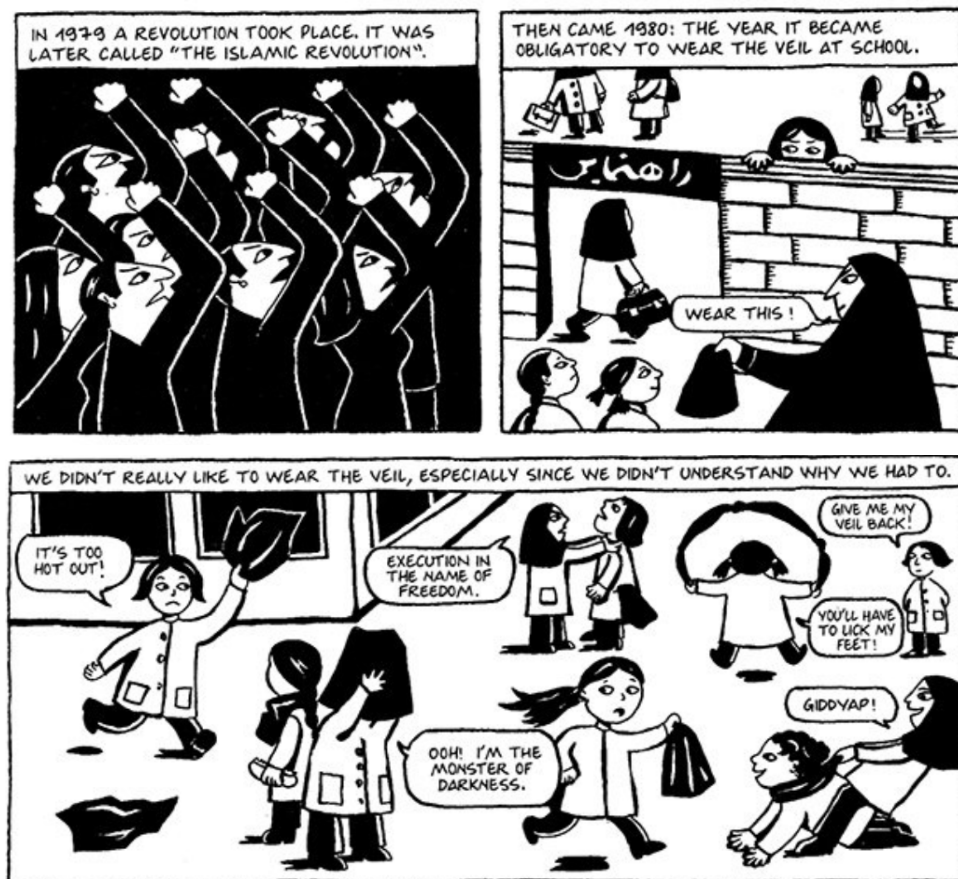


Figure 1 ⁵

The degree of freedom a reader has for imagination depends on the width of gutters. The wider the distance between the panels, the more freedom there is for the reader to imagine what might have happened. In figure 1, the distance between panels is

⁴ "Identity Versus Role Confusion | SpringerLink."

https://link.springer.com/10.1007%2F978-0-387-79061-9_1447. Accessed 18 Feb. 2021.

⁵ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

significantly narrow, depicting the narrow-minded Islamic Iranian society that did not give Iranians any freedom. While one is transitioning from childhood to adulthood, an unbarred society is needed for children to express themselves to figure out who they are. Marjane felt terribly confused and caged. Her society was the opposite of what is ideal. Why were authorities fencing her identity? The graphical technique of gutters helped stimulate Marjane's feelings to the readers.

The sudden transposition in society made her want to dovetail, but being a young girl, her innocence came in the way. An instance to explain this was when Marjane's dad came home after a long day of capturing a demonstration. He shared an incident of a woman who had recently lost her husband. The misinformed protesters thought the man had been killed by the king. When the widow tried explaining that her husband had died of cancer, the protestors replied by saying "No problem, He's a hero"⁶ so the widow went along with them, "The king is a killer!"⁷. Everyone around Marjane rolled in mirth while Marjane was perplexed; she could not understand the hypocrisy behind the mockery. Children generally do not have the mental ability to comprehend hypocritical movements and dark humor.

⁶ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

⁷ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.



Figure 2 ⁸

In figure 2, the author portrayed Marjane's feelings by using the color black for her clothes and the background. Marjane felt as though she was slipping into the darkness of her innocence. She felt lowbrow for she could not apprehend what her family was talking about or what was going on in her society. Asyndeton has been used to emphasize the gravity of Marjane's feelings. Her ignorant society started to make her feel like she did not belong there. Society then secondarily started to transform her into an individualist. She no longer wanted to be an innocent flummoxed child who was oblivious and adrift. She decided to take it upon herself to get educated about what was going on. (Figure 3)

⁸ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.



Figure 3 ⁹

Even though Marjane cracked all the books she could, it did not help. She still could not fathom what was going on in her society. She did not want to be kept in the dark. She wanted to know it all: the protests, the violence, and the death! Marjane vehemently set her mind to go to a demonstration and asked her parents for permission but they bluntly refused as "It is too dangerous"¹⁰. It was evident that small parts of society, like her parents, did try to restrain her from turning into an individualist.

Some new moons later, adamant, strong and unbridled Marjane decided to participate in a protest along with her maid while her parents were totally oblivious of her doings. Parents are always protective, aren't they? No matter how much they support their child, they forever want to shield them from the coarseness of social tags. Her parents however were just a tiny fragment of the society she lived in and therefore did not have enough horsepower to stop Marjane's independent and rebellious personality. War,

⁹ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

¹⁰ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

politics, and protests are more of a mature topic that Marjane was trying to assimilate – is this something a preadolescent should agonize about?



Figure 4 ¹¹

Figure 4 was the climax of Marjane's transformation into an individualist but participating in the Iranian Revolution came with a price: her innocence. To portray this crucial scene, Satrapi uses the technique of graphic weight. The color black preponderates the panel representing her rebellion. A splash-panel is particularly used to draw the attention of the reader. Furthermore, an eye-level angle helps the readers connect emotionally with Marjane by literally putting them at the photo subject's level to create an instinctual response.

After the conclusion of these events, society only made Marjane's individualist personality grow. She started to defy rules and made her own independent decisions. For example, she started smoking to “kiss childhood goodbye”¹² (Figure 5), talking back to teachers by standing up for what is right (Figure 6), wearing clothes that were

¹¹ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

¹² Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

considered unethical yet expressed who she was (Figure 7), deciding when to and when not to go to class (Figure 8) and much more to add on. All this just to be as independent as a hog on ice - there was no stopping her from doing what she wanted to. Her parents though liberal, had their reasons for not encouraging her on all occasions.



Figure 5 ¹³



Figure 6 ¹⁴



Figure 7 ¹⁵



Figure 8 ¹⁶

¹³ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

¹⁴ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

¹⁵ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

¹⁶ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

Towards the fag end of the novel, we learn that Marjane did not have a choice to stay dependent even if she wanted to. The only people who opposed her individualist personality: her parents, now encouraged it. Her parents decided that they would send her to Austria all by herself as they thought the society they lived in was not safe. Marjane, just fourteen was shocked at first and doubted herself.



Figure 9 ¹⁷

Even though the dialogues in figure 9 are between Marjane and her mom, Satrapi makes both characters look strikingly similar, portraying the two sides of Marjane's mind using the technique of debatable competitive dialogues. This portrays the dilemma that Marjane has in her process of transition. But the unyielding headstrong girl that she was, Marjane ultimately looked forward to being independent and self-reliant.

¹⁷ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.



Figure 10 ¹⁸

Figure 10 represents her confidence through her body language and expressions...growing confidence came with age. Marjane's parents started believing their daughter had finally transformed into the independent young adult she had always aspired to be treated like.

In "The Seven Ages of Man"¹⁹, the most puzzling stage is of a "teenager"²⁰. Parents influence their child's personality, but only to some extent. What sticks with a person in the long haul are things learned from society as it plays an immense role in shaping one's behavior, character, and mindset, especially of teenagers like Marjane. Marjane underwent transmutation in a society that had a psychologically harmful effect. She wanted a bright and radiating world around her but her staunch and resistive society

¹⁸ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

¹⁹ Shakespeare, William. *All The World's A Stage*. 1623.

²⁰ "The 'Seven Ages Of Man', According To Shakespeare✓."

<https://www.nosweatshakespeare.com/quotes/famous/seven-ages-of-man/>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2021.

made it dark and gloomy. This is evident in the color of her graphics. The Iranian society, at first, left her feeling confused, vulnerable, dependent, and disoriented but ultimately transformed her into an autonomous person. Satrapi, years after that experience wrote *Persepolis*²¹ brutally exposing the Iranian society and its effect from a child's perspective, a sign of rebellion. Her book is currently banned in Iranian schools.²² Furthermore, a 2016 interview with Emma Watson revealed forty-seven year old Marjane having the same individualist personality she used to have as a child. Society indeed has long-term effects on a person's character. Marjane revealed how she was and is rebellious towards societal norms. She used to rebel against the Iranian society but now rebels against general societal stereotypes. She answered the question "Why don't you have a child?"²³ by making bold statements like "Well, because I don't want to be anybody's mother"²⁴ and "I want to dedicate my life to my work"²⁵. What a way to contradict Darwin's law, "Survival Of The Fittest"²⁶. Marjane survived though being a misfit in society! It can now be concluded that the life-changing events Marjane experienced living in the Islamic Revolutionary society as an adolescent is what transformed her into an individualist for life.

Word count: 1497

²¹ Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*.

²² "Sex, Violence, and Radical Islam: Why 'Persepolis' Belongs in" 19 Mar. 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/03/sex-violence-and-radical-islam-why-persepolis-belongs-in-public-schools/274152/>. Accessed 19 Feb. 2021.

²³ "Emma Watson Interviews Persepolis Author Marjane Satrapi | Vogue." 1 Aug. 2016, <https://www.vogue.com/article/emma-watson-interviews-marjane-satrapi>. Accessed 19 Feb. 2021.

²⁴ "Emma Watson Interviews Persepolis Author Marjane Satrapi | Vogue." 1 Aug. 2016, <https://www.vogue.com/article/emma-watson-interviews-marjane-satrapi>. Accessed 19 Feb. 2021.

²⁵ "Emma Watson Interviews Persepolis Author Marjane Satrapi | Vogue." 1 Aug. 2016, <https://www.vogue.com/article/emma-watson-interviews-marjane-satrapi>. Accessed 19 Feb. 2021.

²⁶ Darwin, Charls. *Survival of the fittest*.

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