

Marjane Satrapi

Marjane Satrapi (b. 1969) was born in Rasht, Iran, and raised in Tehran. She is the only child of a father who was a successful architect and a mother who was a dress designer, and she is the granddaughter of the last Qajar emperor of Persia. In 1984, five years after the Iranian Revolution, at the beginning of the war between Iran and Iraq that left a million dead, her parents sent her to live in Vienna, fearing that she would be arrested as an outspoken rebellious teenager in fundamentalist Tehran. Feeling exiled as an art student in Austria, Satrapi had to fit in. Four years later she spent two winter months on the street, becoming suicidal, and was hospitalized. In 1989, when she returned home to the domestic repression of the totalitarian regime in Iran, she found that "everything had settled down. The revolution was far behind, ten years before. . . . We were fed up with the eight years of war [with Iraq]; it was so good that the war was finished. People just wanted to live. . . . We didn't talk about politics because we were so scared. This new generation is different. They haven't lived what we have gone through. They don't have the same fears."

After a brief marriage Satrapi left Tehran for Paris in 1994, where she attended a comic book workshop called "The Association," which included Pierre-François Beauchard, whose black-and-white graphic novels, published under the name David B., dramatize family trauma. As a child Satrapi never dreamed that she would become a graphic artist, since she did not like to read comic books. When she was growing up, her cousins tried to interest her in the popular Tintin adventure series created by the Belgian artist Hergé, who incorporated actual newspaper stories from 1929 to 1983 into his graphic narratives. Satrapi claims that Tintin is a peripatetic young journalist who traveled the world with his dog Snowy—did not stop anywhere long enough to interact with young women characters, so she couldn't identify with him. It was encountering Art Spiegelman's Holocaust story *Maus* that captivated her. "When I read him I thought . . . it's possible to tell a story and make a point this way. It was amazing." She realized that she could express her ideas and feelings through pictures in a way that words alone could not communicate.

Image is an international language. The first writing of the human being was drawing, not writing. That appeared much before the alphabet. And when you draw a situation—someone is scared or angry or happy—it means the same thing in all cultures. You cannot draw someone crying, and in one culture they think that he is happy. He would have the same expression. There's something direct about the image. Also, it is more accessible. People don't take it so seriously. And when you want to use a little bit of humor, it's much easier to use pictures.

"The Veil," a story told from the perspective of a ten-year-old girl, is from *Persepolis 1* (2003), subtitled "The Story of a Childhood," which describes Satrapi's life in Iran during the Revolution and the first years of the war with Iraq. *Persepolis 2* (2004), called "The Story of a Return," begins with her arrival in Austria and ends with her return to her ravaged homeland. She wrote them after she moved to Paris, which has become her home. *Persepolis* is dedicated to her

parents, but she didn't show them her first book based on their life together until just before it was published. She feels that

maturity is knowing to say what to whom and when. Sometimes saying stuff is not a very good idea. You want to make yourself feel a little bit lighter, so you take your shit and you put it on somebody else's back. Well, that's extremely egoistic. One should know also how to hold things back and assume his or her own responsibility.

Describing her method, Satrapi, who writes in French, says she first decides how many frames she wants to put on each page and what she wants to say in each frame. Then she sketches a stick figure or the outline of a scene in each frame. "After that, I take a pencil and draw them. Once that is finished, I put my paper over the light box and ink it. It's a long process." Satrapi's other books include *Embroideries* (2005) and *Chicken with Plums* (2006). *Persepolis* is available as a film distributed by Sony Classics.

RELATED CASEBOOK

See Casebook on Graphic Storytelling, pages 1700–17, including Charles Hatfield, "From *Alternative Comics*: Toward the Habit of Questioning," page 1702; Michael Kupperman, "Are Comics Serious Literature?," page 1705; Scott McCloud, "From *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*," page 1706; Sydney Plum, "Reading 'The Veil,' by Marjane Satrapi," page 1707.



From *Persepolis: The Veil*

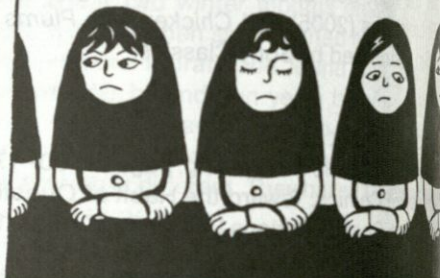
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THE VEIL

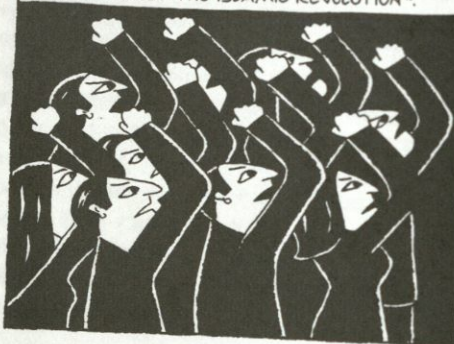
THIS IS ME WHEN I WAS 10 YEARS OLD. THIS WAS IN 1980.



AND THIS IS A CLASS PHOTO. I'M SITTING ON THE FAR LEFT. YOU DON'T SEE ME. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: GOUNAZ, MARINE, MINNA.



IN 1979 A REVOLUTION TOOK PLACE. IT WAS LATER CALLED "THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION".



THEN CAME 1980: THE YEAR IT BECAME OBLIGATORY TO WEAR THE VEIL AT SCHOOL.



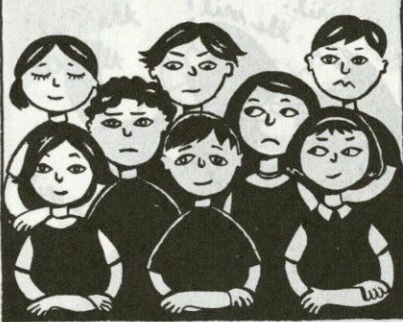
WE DIDN'T REALLY LIKE TO WEAR THE VEIL, ESPECIALLY SINCE WE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY WE HAD TO.



AND ALSO BECAUSE THE YEAR BEFORE, IN 1979, WE WERE IN A FRENCH NON-RELIGIOUS SCHOOL.



WHERE BOYS AND GIRLS WERE TOGETHER.

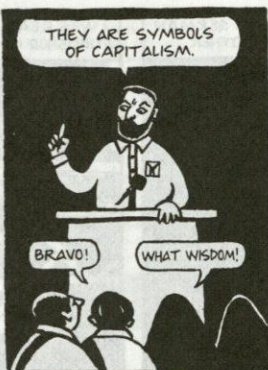


AND THEN SUDDENLY IN 1980...

ALL BILINGUAL SCHOOLS MUST BE CLOSED DOWN.



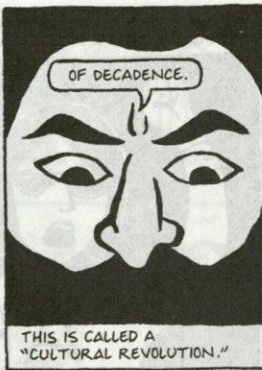
THEY ARE SYMBOLS OF CAPITALISM.



BRAVO!

WHAT WISDOM!

OF DECADENCE.



THIS IS CALLED A "CULTURAL REVOLUTION."

WE FOUND OURSELVES VEILED AND SEPARATED FROM OUR FRIENDS.



AND THAT WAS THAT...





AT ONE OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS, A GERMAN JOURNALIST TOOK A PHOTO OF MY MOTHER.



I WAS REALLY PROUD OF HER. HER PHOTO PUBLISHED IN ALL THE EUROPEAN NEWSPAPERS.



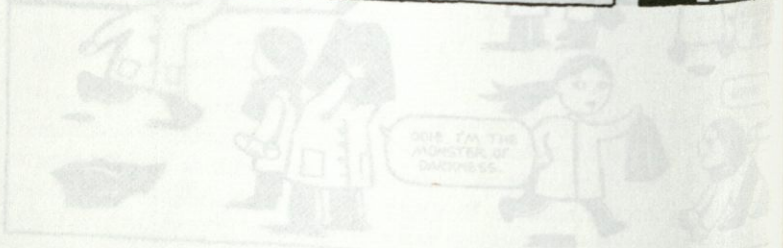
AND EVEN IN ONE MAGAZINE IN IRAN. MY MOTHER WAS REALLY SCARED.



SHE DYED HER HAIR,



AND WORE DARK GLASSES FOR HIDE



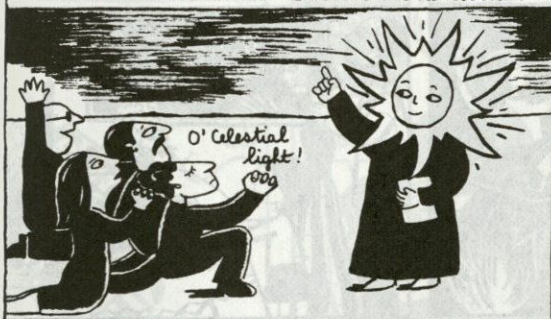
I REALLY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK ABOUT THE VEIL. DEEP DOWN I WAS VERY RELIGIOUS BUT AS A FAMILY WE WERE VERY MODERN AND AVANT-GARDE.



I WAS BORN WITH RELIGION.



AT THE AGE OF SIX I WAS ALREADY SURE I WAS THE LAST PROPHET. THIS WAS A FEW YEARS BEFORE THE REVOLUTION.



BEFORE ME THERE HAD BEEN A FEW OTHERS.



A WOMAN?



I WANTED TO BE A PROPHET...

BECAUSE OUR MAID DID NOT EAT WITH US.



BECAUSE MY FATHER HAD A CADILLAC.



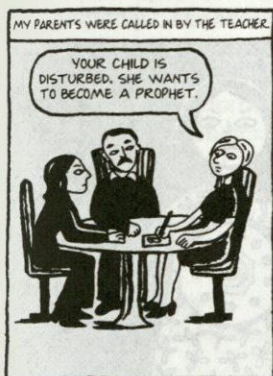
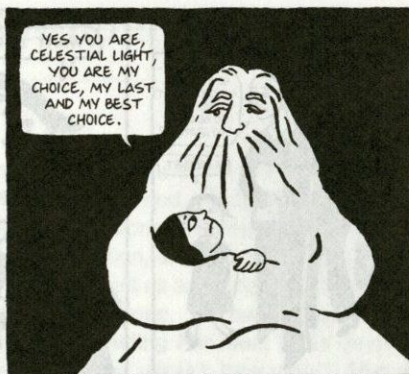
AND, ABOVE ALL, BECAUSE MY GRANDMOTHER'S KNEES ALWAYS ACHED.

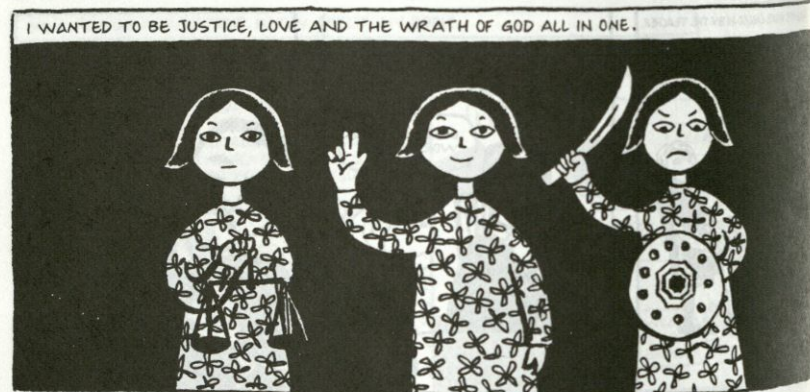




ONLY MY GRANDMOTHER KNEW ABOUT MY BOOK.







George Saunders

George Saunders (b. 1958) was born and raised on the south side of Chicago. He attended the Colorado School of Mines and earned a B.S. in geophysical engineering in 1981. Then, as he described in a "Personal History" (2003) column for *The New Yorker*, followed some years of confusion, as apparently he tried to emulate the inimitable lives of the authors he admired as a young aspiring writer: Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and Jack Kerouac. "At twenty-six, at the embarrassing end of a series of attempts at channeling Kerouac, I was beyond broke, back in my home town, living in my aunt and uncle's basement." After a short, brutal winter job on a roofing crew in Chicago, Saunders read in *People* magazine about the Creative Writing graduate program at Syracuse University. He was accepted into the program and received his M.A. in 1988.

From 1989 to 1996, Saunders worked as a technical writer and geophysical engineer while writing the stories collected in his first book, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella* (1996). Since 1997, he has taught creative writing at Syracuse University and conducted writing workshops throughout the United States. *Pastoralia*, his second collection, appeared in 2000. His short fiction has won the National Magazine Award for Fiction and the O. Henry Prize. *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* was published in 2005.

As Joyce Carol Oates recognized, Saunders's "hyperkinetic dark-fantast-satiric prose" is an acquired taste, but it's also "a taste quickly acquired." His vision of America as a land peopled with "entrepreneurial zealots whom he satirizes" sometimes "spills over into sheer comic-book silliness," but often "engages us unexpectedly." Abandoning his earlier literary models, Saunders has forged his own style in the "stream-of-consciousness black humor" tradition of contemporary American novelists Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover, and Don DeLillo. Saunders's bizarrely humorous response to the problems of contemporary life as it is portrayed on commercial-ridden television animates the deliberately truncated sections of the story "Brad Carrigan, American." It was published in *Harper's* in March 2005. Some other books are *In Persuasion Nation* (2006), a story collection, and *The Braindead Megaphone* (2007), his collected essays.

RELATED STORY

Kurt Vonnegut Jr., "Harrison Bergeron," page 1328.