

‘SATRAPI’S USE OF A CHILD’S PERSPECTIVE HIGHLIGHTS THE REGIME’S BRUTALITY AND INJUSTICE.’ DISCUSS.

Marjane Satrapi’s graphic novel Persepolis explores the social and political aspects of life in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. As the novel is written and illustrated through the eyes of ten-year-old Marji, Satrapi highlights the regime’s brutality and injustice through a child’s perspective as well as through her illustrations. She achieves this through Marji’s relationship with her Uncle Anoosh and her peers, as well as through her having to move away at the age of fourteen.

The death of Anoosh is one of the key ways in which the brutality of the regime is explored. Throughout the novel, Marji’s admiration and desire for a hero is evident, and when she finally meets Anoosh, their bond is unbreakable. However, due to Anoosh’s risky job and lifestyle, the two are separated and Anoosh is arrested and executed. This act of inhumane violence conducted by the Shah and the regime is explored through Marji and her despair. Firstly, Marji’s shock when she finds out Anoosh has left is illustrated through Satrapi’s use of a black background. The black in this panel is symbolic of Marji’s fear, sadness and surprise that Anoosh would leave her. Marji then comes to terms with the fact that it is due to the regime and his lack of safety that Anoosh had to leave. Marji’s emotional progression from shock to realisation to anger and sadness is depicted through Satrapi’s illustrations of close up facial expressions. Following this, Marji addresses Anoosh’s death which is accompanied by a frameless illustration of the newspaper announcing his execution. This panel’s lack of frame and gutters are used to symbolise the shock and emptiness Marji feels as well as highlighting the importance of the panel as it contrasts with the rest of the page. Bread swans also accompany the newspaper as a symbol of Marji’s relationship and connection with Anoosh, further demonstrating her despair and loss. Following this is a full-page panel of Marji floating in space ‘lost with no bearings’. The panel, in conjunction with the caption, further highlight Marji’s pain as well as the harsh reality and injustice of the regime at the time.

Similarly, events related to Marjane’s peers demonstrate the brutality of the political climate from Marjane’s perspective. Marji’s classmate Pardisse has a father in the airforce who is eventually bombed and killed. As Marji watches Pardisse’s sadness, she tries to comprehend the situation. In doing so, she makes a naïve statement about Pardisse’s father being a hero, to which she responds ‘I would rather my father be alive and a failure than dead and a hero’. This sparks a moment of realisation for Marji as she begins to understand the impact the regime is having on the war and Iran’s people, and as a consequence, further demonstrates to the reader the violence of the time. Towards the end of the novel, as Marji’s character continues to develop, her friends and neighbours, the Baba-levy’s house is bombed and the family is killed. This violence and war as a result of the extremism of the regime is explored through Marji’s despair as she explains she ‘didn’t know what justice was’. This is further explored through a significant panel which is all black with no illustration. The blackness symbolises the darkness and emptiness felt by Marji at the time, further highlighting to the reader the brutality and injustice in Iran at the time.

Lastly, Marji being sent away is a final sign of the oppression and danger as a consequence of the regime. As Marji begins to develop into a young woman, her parents, Ebi and Taji decide it is the best option to send her away. This is due to the regime’s extreme provisions and laws to fight against ‘symbols of decadence [and]... of the West’, forcing the education system to be limited. Parallel to this, Iran is becoming more and more unsafe throughout Marji’s childhood, which results in many friends and families leaving the country. Although towards the middle of the text Ebi claims that they are ‘leaving because they are afraid of change’ and that ‘they’ll be back soon’, this is later contradicted as he sends Marji away.

This move to Vienna further highlights the danger and injustice of the regime as Marji cannot get a solid education in her own country and finally begins to comprehend her lack of safety as she claims she 'was finally beginning to understand just how unsafe [they] were', further solidifying the notion that her childhood perspective emphasizes the injustice and oppression of the regime.

It is evident that Satrapi's use of illustrations and the young protagonist Marji assist in highlighting the brutality and injustice of the regime and the war. This is achieved through Marji's relationships with Anoosh, Pardise and the Baba-Levys and the tragedy that hits them as well as Marji having to move away and cut her childhood short.