

3. Think of other films besides gangster movies that have a tragic ending for the main character or characters (such as *Titanic*, *American Beauty*, *Vanilla Sky*, or *American History X*). Pick one whose tragic end represents something interesting and important about the limits of American culture. Write an essay that explains the tragedy in the film. What were the main character or characters striving to do? Why was their tragic end inevitable? What does this tragic end tell about American culture?

VISUAL CULTURE

The Graphic Novel: Reader Participation



To learn more about
storytelling, visit
www.oxfordman.com/george/127

Although storytelling is usually considered an oral or written form, people have been telling stories with pictures—making visual narratives—since ancient times. Prehistoric cave paintings tell hunting stories or detail rituals. Medieval church murals and windows narrate the lives of saints. Even today, many modes of storytelling are visual ones. Obviously, television and film carry much of the story through pictures, but still pictures—cartoons, comic books, children's books, and much print advertisement—depend on visual sequencing and arrangement to move the narrative (the story) along. With very little dialogue, the reader must follow the logic of the panel sequence.

Graphic novels work because readers fill in the information that is not expressly drawn or written in the panels. For example, in the second panel of the story reprinted here, Marjane Satrapi tells us that she is in the picture, although we cannot see her because she has been cut off. We see only a bit of her veil. Satrapi is depending here on the reader's ability to put her into the picture, especially since she gives us a complete drawing of herself in the panel before. In this way, the reader relies on both the sequencing of the two panels (panel 1 with a complete drawing of Satrapi as a child, followed by panel 2 with Satrapi cut off but identified as being "in" the picture) and the reader's ability to imagine outside the panel to fill in the image. That is how *reader participation* works in comics and in graphic novels.

The following excerpts are from Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. This graphic novel works very much like a visual memoir, drawing on the conventions of comics and visual narrative to tell a young girl's story of growing up in Iran during the Islamic revolution there. In what follows, we have reprinted Satrapi's introductory essay that sets the scene and historic context for this memoir and "The Veil," the opening chapter of *Persepolis*.

THE VEIL

— Marjane Satrapi

Marjane Satrapi was born in 1969 in Rasht, Iran. She grew up in Tehran, where she studied at the Lycée Française before leaving for Vienna and going to Strasbourg to study illustration. She has written several children's books, and her illustrations appear in newspapers and

magazines throughout the world, including the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*. *Persepolis*, a memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic revolution, was first published in 2000. Satrapi has called it an autobiographical novel in graphic novel form. This excerpt, "The Veil," is the opening chapter in *Persepolis*.

SUGGESTION FOR READING In an exploratory writing, write what you already know about or think about Iran, the Islamic revolution there, and/or the Islamic practice of requiring women to wear the veil.

1 In the second millennium B.C., while the Elam nation was developing a civilization alongside Babylon, Indo-European invaders gave their name to the immense Iranian plateau where they settled. The word "Iran" was derived from "Aryana Vaejo," which means "the origin of the Aryans." These people were semi-nomads whose descendants were the Medes and the Persians. The Medes founded the first Iranian nation in the seventh century B.C.; it was later destroyed by Cyrus the Great. He established what became one of the largest empires of the ancient world, the Persian Empire, in the sixth century B.C. Iran was referred to as Persia—its Greek name—until 1935 when Reza Shah, the father of the last Shah of Iran, asked everyone to call the country Iran.

Iran was rich. Because of its wealth and its geographic location, it invited attacks: from Alexander the Great, from its Arab neighbors to the west, from Turkish and Mongolian conquerors, Iran was often subject to foreign domination. Yet the Persian language and culture withstood these invasions. The invaders assimilated into this strong culture, and in some ways they became Iranians themselves.

In the twentieth century, Iran entered a new phase. Reza Shah decided to modernize and westernize the country, but meanwhile a fresh source of wealth was discovered: oil. And with the oil came another invasion. The West, particularly Great Britain, wielded a strong influence on the Iranian economy. During the Second World War, the British, Soviets, and Americans asked Reza Shah to ally himself with them against Germany. But Reza Shah,

unstable government because of UK & US interest
who sympathized with the Germans, declared Iran a neutral zone. So the Allies invaded and occupied Iran. Reza Shah was sent into exile and was succeeded by his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was known simply as the Shah.

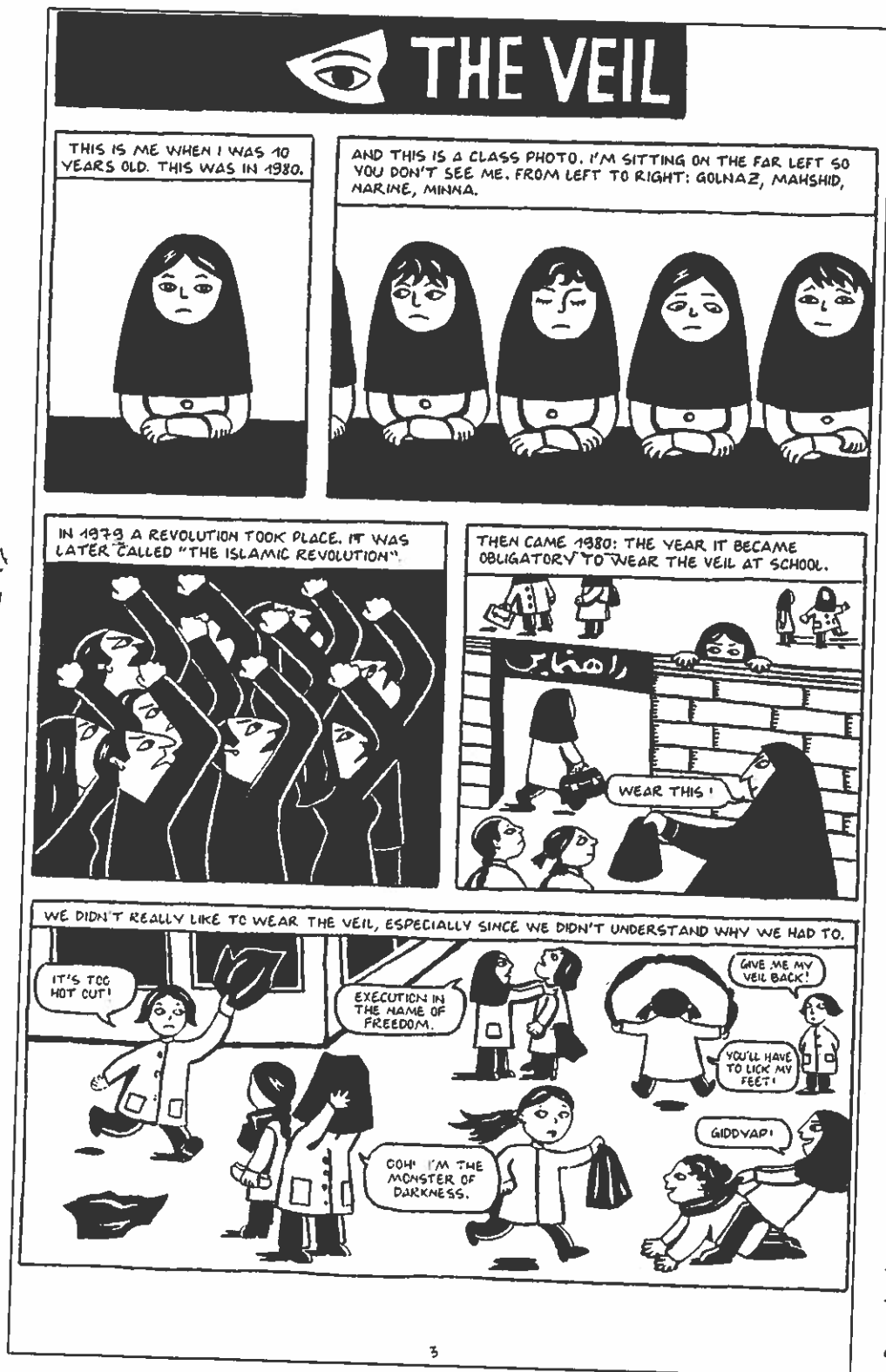
relationship with the West
In 1951, Mohammed Mossadeq, then prime minister of Iran, nationalized the oil industry. In retaliation, Great Britain organized an embargo on all exports of oil from Iran. In 1953, the CIA, with the help of British intelligence, organized a coup against him. Mossadeq was overthrown and the Shah, who had earlier escaped from the country, returned to power. The Shah stayed on the throne until 1979, when he fled Iran to escape the Islamic revolution.

5 Since then, this old and great civilization has been discussed mostly in connection with fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism. As an Iranian who has lived more than half of my life in Iran, I know that this image is far from the truth. This is why writing *Persepolis* was so important to me. I believe that an entire nation should not be judged by the wrongdoings of a few extremists. I also don't want those Iranians who lost their lives in prisons defending freedom, who died in the war against Iraq, who suffered under various repressive regimes, or who were forced to leave their families and flee their homeland to be forgotten.

One can forgive but one should never forget.

Marjane Satrapi
Paris, September 2002

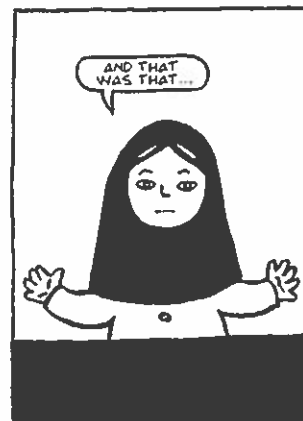
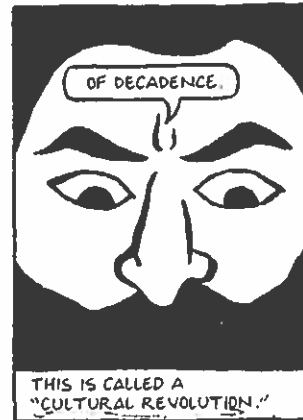
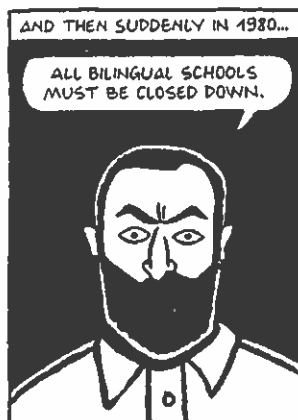
more
of government
instability
change



Flash back
to
past

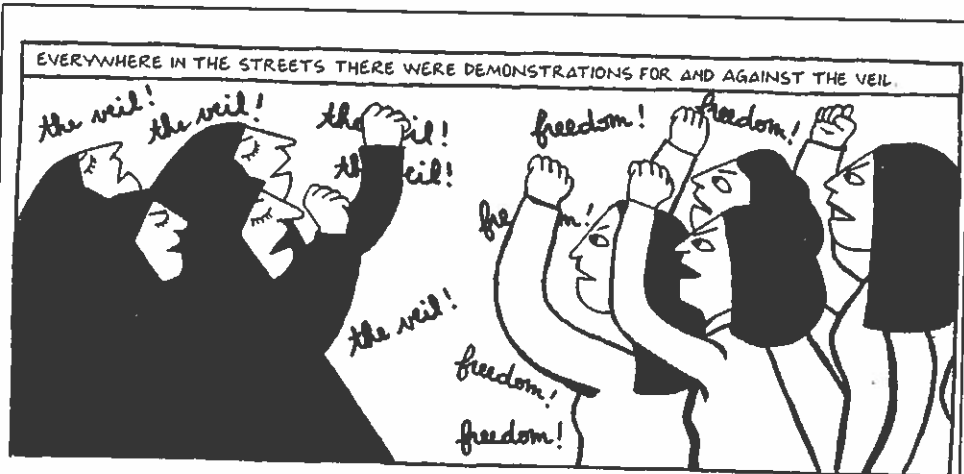


Move back
to present



powerlessness

Compares
mothers +
adult's
experience,
understanding
of the veil



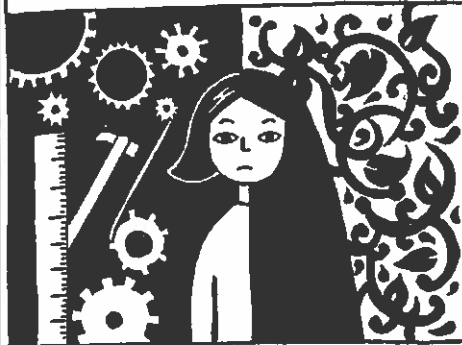
critique
between kids
Dr. G, mother's
fear



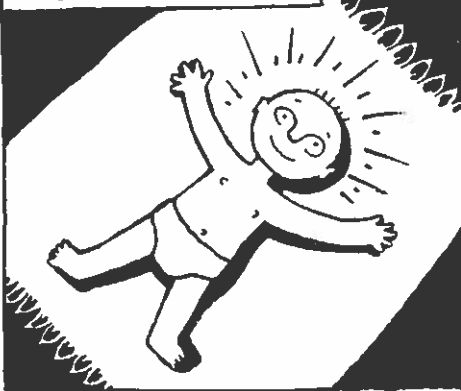
conflict
between
spirituality &
humanism / modernism

gap
shift back
in time &
somewhat
in time

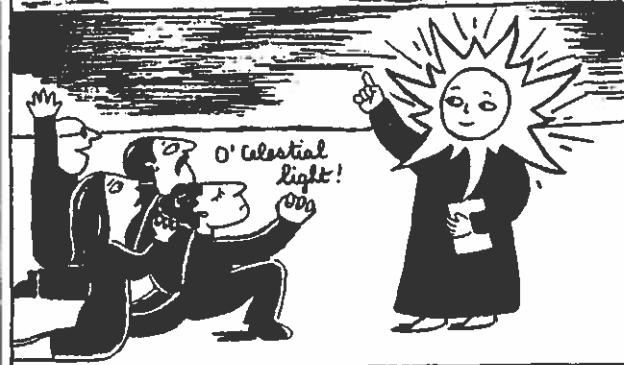
I REALLY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK ABOUT THE VEIL. DEEP DOWN I WAS VERY RELIGIOUS BUT AS A FAMILY WE WERE VERY MODERN AND AVANT-GARDE.



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?



movement
in time
female
prophet?

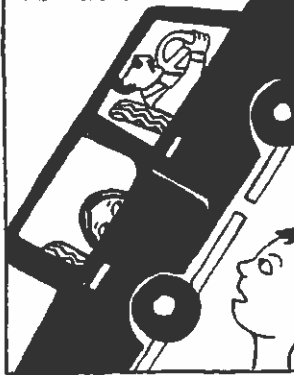
What would it
be like to be
inspired, called
by denied
because of sex

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.

COME HERE MARJI! HELP ME TO STAND UP.



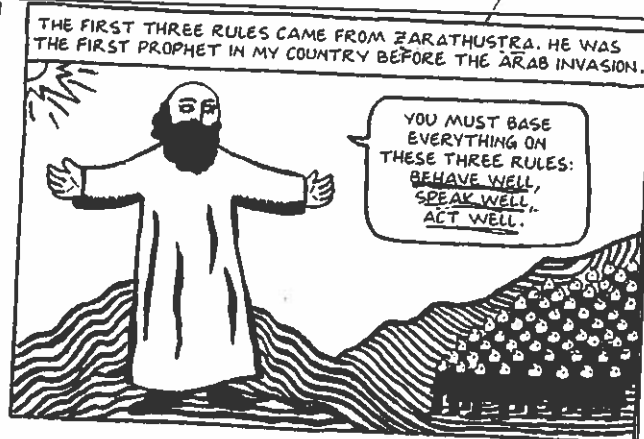
how spiritually
condemned -
how she sees
these things
through a
spiritual lens

classism

materialism,
class

healing

she writes her philosophy, theology



she creates her own "religion", theology

basic to all religions



she has freedom to explore spiritual authority, beliefs & encouraged by family



innocent & idealistic

she
creates
her own
religious
theology

basic to
religious

more
conflict -
how to reveal
this kind of
knowledge,
information,
especially as
a female +
child (lack
spiritual
authority)

skeptical



She
covers up
to satisfy
parents



moral of the story? Can anyone really be justice, love & wrath of God? Can anyone really know it? Is it a childish fantasy to think humans can know God's will.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How much do you already know about the Islamic revolution in Iran? How does that previous knowledge help you read this visual narrative?
2. The basis of all visual sequencing is the reader's ability to connect the actions or characters of one image to the actions or characters of the image that follows it. That is how comics tell stories. If a character is shown in one panel with his hand on a doorknob and in the next greeting someone at an open door, we assume the character opened the door to find this visitor on the other side. We don't see the door open, but the logic of the sequence tells us what the action is. Look carefully at the selection from *Persepolis* reprinted here. Notice, for example, that Satrapi takes advantage of the reader's ability to fill in information that is not actually in the picture when she tells us that she is in her school picture with her friends but we cannot see her because she is cut off. Discuss with a group of your classmates other places in this excerpt where the reader must fill in the action from the few details, our assumptions about what must be outside the frame, or the sequence of the panels.
3. In her introduction to *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi writes that the old and great civilization that was Iran is, from the outside, seen "mostly in connection with fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism. As an Iranian who has lived more than half of my life in Iran, I know that this image is far from the truth. This is why writing *Persepolis* was so important to me." With a group of your classmates, discuss the images you each have or preconceptions you each have about Iran and the Middle East in general. How does this graphic memoir figure into the way you think of Iran? Does it shift perception at all? What difference might it make if this story were told from the point of view of an adult in the family?

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENT

Drawing from a well-known short story, play, short novel, or film, create your own graphic novel. Or make your own graphic memoir by telling a story in your life using the techniques of a graphic novel. You do not have to be an artist to make a visual narrative. Use computer programs such as PowerPoint to arrange clip art, use photographs arranged in a sequence, cut images from magazines, or make your own drawings or paintings that you arrange in a sequence to tell a story.

- Choose a story that you have read and liked and that seems to lend itself well to being told in pictures. You might even choose one of the Urban Legends you read about earlier in this chapter. ("The Killer in the Backseat" would make a good visual narrative, for example.)
- If you are writing your own story, reread Patricia Hampl's essay on memoir reprinted earlier in this chapter. A memoir must be about something more than just the story. It should, as Hampl suggest, tell your mind, not just the story. Satrapi, for example, is telling a story about a people. Her part in the story is interesting and sometimes funny and sometimes sad, but it is not a story about her. It is a story about everything around her.
- Write the story down. Write down the basics of the story. Make sure you write out the parts of the story that you believe are crucial to telling this story well. If you are working with a novel, you very likely can only work with one chapter rather than the entire novel. Decide which chapter is key for understanding the story.
- Make a list of the key scenes in your story. Your visual narrative cannot convey every detail in the story, so you have to decide which parts of the story make for good visual

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narration. What can you show? Decide on the number of scenes. Choose scenes that are crucial for telling the story and that have good potential for visual impact.

- Arrange your scenes. On paper (or in a computer program with storyboard capabilities), make a storyboard such as the storyboard reproduced on pages 245–246. Fill in your storyboard with general sketches or notes on what scenes must go in each space. Sequencing is important in the way you tell your story, so pay attention to the order of your scenes.
- Present the completed story to your classmates. Be sure that you can project the story in a computer program or on transparencies so that the entire class can see clearly. In your presentation, talk about what choices you had to make to turn a written story into a graphic novel. Use the following questions to guide your preparations for the presentation:

What does the story gain when you change it from the written version to the visual?
What does it lose?

What in the original story seemed to lend itself to being told as a graphic novel?

What roles do color, line, and sequence play in telling the story?

When did you have to use dialogue, caption, and sounds?

When could you rely on image and sequence alone to tell the story?

FILM CLIP

Book to Film: The Adaptation



To learn more about
film adaptations, visit
www.ablongman.com/george/128

One of the comments most of us have heard about film adaptations of books is: "The movie is never as good as the book." What that statement usually means is that the reader misses both the experience of reading the book and the events (and sometimes whole plotlines and characters) as they are portrayed in the book.

A good film adaptation, however, is not a faithful rendering of the pages of a novel, short story, or play. Storytelling in film is different because the medium is different. For one thing, film depends on the visual to make many of the connections that are spelled out in a book. Popular film also has difficulty if a story contains too many plotlines that threaten to distract or confuse viewers. When the very popular *Lord of the Rings* trilogy was adapted into three films by Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh, and Philippa Boyens, each film was over three hours long, and their extended DVD editions run over four hours. But these films did not come close to reproducing everything in the three novels. Most films are limited to just about two hours, so time constraints will affect the way a book is adapted into film. Moreover, production companies want to make movies that appeal to the widest audiences possible, so popular films are often driven to maintain a faster pace than many novels.

If you think of film adaptations of books as interpretations of those stories rather than faithful renderings of what is on the page, then you have a notion of what it means to translate a story from a book onto screen. The filmmaker and scriptwriters are forced to make choices about what they can leave in and what

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