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Package from Marjane Satrapi

by Kevin Dwyer

(English 1130)

Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis* is a retelling of events that took place during the author's life in Iran with her family during the revolution and the war. Marjane has many tough choices to make in the novel as she gets older, and learns important lessons about life, family, society, and other significant aspects of the world. Marjane goes through a lot of hardship in the story, and has to deal with problems like discrimination, sexism and, again, war. *Persepolis* contains a lot of symbolism as well, and really explores a lot of themes and questions about morality and cultural issues. If a box that belonged to Satrapi was discovered, I think the items inside would each represent something important that plays a big role in her life.

The first item in the box is a Veil. This is undeniably an object that Marji despises due to how much it covers up a woman's body and how it prevents them from expressing themselves the way they want to. She knows that she has to wear it though, as it is the law. The only reason it is in the box is because Marji needed to make sure she always had one on hand. If a woman was seen without wearing a veil, she would be treated horribly and possibly could be punished. Marji's mom had to find this out the hard way when she encounters a group of men who taunted her when they saw she was not wearing one: "They insulted me. They said that women like me should be pushed up against a wall and fucked. And then thrown in the garbage. ...And that if I didn't want that to happen, I should wear the veil" (Satrapi 74). After this event Marji starts to further understand how the veil and the whole idea of it strips woman of their individual freedom and personality. In the box, the veil would be a symbol of gender differences, as the behavior of the men who antagonized Marji's mom showed. The veil plays a big role in Marji's life throughout the course of the novel, notably when she is in art class when she is an adult. The women are not allowed to draw men so they are forced to draw women with the veil on, which again is a sign of how it takes away from the freedom of expression for women. The veil completely takes away from any personality one might have and essentially puts all of the women wearing one into the same perspective.

The second object in the box is an Iron Maiden CD. Iron Maiden and metal music was Marji's way of rebelling against the regime, as she had to buy the albums under the table. It was also a way for her to open her mind a little bit and escape from the everyday life of a girl living in the middle of a revolution. The Iron Maiden CD is a symbol for rebellion. After the regime took control, Marji did not want to abide by it because she knew what life was like before it, including the presence of secular schools, which were taken away by the regime. She realizes that was the cause of her rebellion when she's older as she reflects on it: "I think that the reason we were so rebellious was that our generation had known secular schools" (Satrapi 98). Marji knew of secular schools before they were taken away, and it made her angrier about the new regime, especially after her parents stressed to her how important education is. The Iron Maiden CD is a way for her to not have to think about it and for her to stay true to herself by not following every new system that was implemented.

The third item is a bullet. Most likely a used bullet, as they were probably everywhere in Marji's town. The bullet is a symbol of war, and the absence of peace. Obviously with the revolution and civil unrest, there was not really anything peaceful about Iran during that time, as a bullet was most likely very easy to find. It also puts into perspective how dangerous and scary it would have been to live there, as people probably don't think about little things like that. Marji's dad makes a good point about peace in the world when he brings up the quest for oil: "As long as there is oil in

the Middle East we will never have peace” (Satrapi 43). Interest in oil and natural resources are some of the main causes for war in the first place. It appears Marji’s father was right, too, as there are still conflicts surrounding oil in the Middle East to this day. Peace was hard to come by during Marji’s time in Iran, and that is why the bullet is there and represents war, which was obviously much more prominent.

The fourth item is a bottle of wine. While peace was a rarity in Iranian society, Marji’s family was able to acquire it by sitting down and having a glass of wine with the family. The bottle of wine represents family, and was another thing that was banned by the regime. Though Marji obviously did not sit and drink the wine with her family, she was present when they would gather and have numerous conversations about the revolution and what they had to do to stay together or survive. During one of those times, Marji expresses her interest in protesting with her parents and seeking justice, to which her mother tells her that is not her role to play, and that if anything, forgiveness should be the important thing to strive for: “It is not for you and me to do justice. I’d even say we have to learn to forgive” (Satrapi 46). Marji has learned a lot from not only her mother, but her family, and it is clear how those ideals and values are what have kept her going during any rough times she experienced. Family is important to Marji, and the bottle of wine represents her family well, as that was one of their ways of escapism.

The fifth item is the swan that Marji’s uncle made for her. The swan is a symbol of hope/love for Marji, as well as remembrance of what her and her family stood for. It is a way for her to remember the good man her uncle was and represented the bright side of life during what were very dark times. After her uncle was executed, the swan was one of the only things she had to remember him. Her uncle wanted Marji to know that love is the most important thing and that nothing could ever take that away from someone. He stresses how important love is when he tells Marji about his time in Russia: “Russians aren’t like us. It is hearts they don’t have. They don’t know how to love” (Satrapi 59). At first, Marji’s uncle wanted to go to Russia because he thought their society from an economic and political standpoint was better than Iran’s, but while he was there he learned how cold and corrupt it really was. Her uncle would later die standing up for what he believed in, but he made sure to get the message out to Marji to always look on the bright side of things and that no matter what happened things would get better in the future.

The last item is one of the keys that the young men would get to be persuaded to fight in the war. They were told that if they accepted the key and joined the army, it would get them into heaven where they would be truly free. Marji’s family was appalled by this and saw how the regime was directly affecting the citizens of Iran. The key represents power, and it is clear in the novel that the Iranian government is clearly the main power that is the base of most of the problems for Marji and her family. This is when they realize that their government is causing more of the problem rather than trying to solve it: “The real Islamic invasion has come from our own government” (Satrapi 81). Marji’s dad feels that the government and the regime is what caused the revolution in the first place, and now more of their rules are clearly taking a toll on the values of the society that Marji and her family live in. When Marji’s mom saw the key she knew that the government truly had all the power, and was putting the fate of innocent young men up for grabs.

All six items in the box represent some kind of understanding or lesson for Marjane based on events in the story. There could probably be hundreds of other items in there as well, but themes like gender differences, rebellion, war, peace, love, and power are all arguably the ones that stand out the most. Marjane Satrapi went through a very tough time growing up in Iran during the revolution, but came out of it a good woman who has shined a whole new light on what exactly went down and how some of the families who lived in Iran had to make difficult decisions for the good of their loved ones, but also had to stay true to themselves and what they stood for.

Works Cited

Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*. New York, NY: Pantheon, 2003. Print.