

ely film society

July 2016

the notes

SHOWING AT KINGS LYNN
COMMUNITY CINEMA CLUB
Saturday 23rd July : *MACBETH*
Saturday 30th July :
ELVIRA MADIGAN

SPECIAL EVENT Sunday
7th August: *In the Ripper's
Footsteps – Day Trip to London*

Thursday 11th August : *TRUMBO*
Thursday 25th August :
IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE
Thursday 8th September :
ON THE WATERFRONT

EFS members - bring your
membership card for entry!!
<http://www.klccc.uk/> for details

Persepolis

Marjane Satrapi & Vincent
Paronnaud, Iran 2007

with the voices of

**Sean Penn, Gena Rowlands,
Catherine Deneuve, Chiara
Mastroianni (her daughter),
Iggy Pop**

Marjane Satrapi was born in Iran. She now lives in France and produces graphic novels (though she prefers the term 'comic books'). *Persepolis* is an autobiographical account of her upbringing in Iran under the Ayatollahs during the Iran-Iraq war, and her move to Europe, first to Vienna and later to Strasbourg. During her childhood she witnessed the persecution, arrest and even execution of friends and family. Her rebellious nature made her parents fear for her safety under the repressive theocratic regime and they sent her to school in Europe. Here she studied visual arts and met French artists and directors, notably Vincent Paronnaud, with whom she co-wrote and directed *Persepolis*. The film debuted at Cannes and received the Special Jury Prize. It was nominated for an Academy Award



for Best Animated Feature, the first woman to receive this honour. In 2008 the film was awarded the Cinema for Peace Award as the Most Valuable Movie of the year.

Iranian cinema has always been 'different'; under the Shah or the Ayatollahs or the relatively few and short periods of more liberal regimes, its films have been notable for their creative, imaginative and other-worldly qualities, rejecting the values

of Hollywood and other Western mainstream cinema. Often, during the last 25 years, films by Iranian directors which have been recipients of awards at the main International Film Festivals have been banned by the regime in their own country and their directors imprisoned or forced into exile. Even within this idiosyncratic art form *Persepolis* is a one-off. There has been an increasing number of distinguished female filmmakers who have

represented their repressed sector of society in this patriarchal culture (most famously Samira Makhmalbaf in *The Apple* and *Blackboards*), but none have described so viscerally the fear of growing up in this society. While most Iranian directors, male and female, have developed a poetic or allegorical approach to their subjects, Marjane Satrapi's narrative and visuals have a forceful directness.

Iranian cinema is usually recognisable in terms of its location and history, and *Persepolis's* intertitles (TEHERAN 1982) is no exception, but its use of animation gives it a more abstract and universal frame of reference; we do not have a particular scenario in which to place the action. While it is a deeply personal,

autobiographical film, Marjane Satrapi is able to tell the story without getting in the way of the story; it is not only a coming-of-age story, but also one dealing with repression and rebellion. And the use of animation does not mean that this film is aimed at a young audience; this is a political film. However, she rejects the label of political, maintaining instead that she is an artist. But it is shot through with humour, more so than the books. What could have been a depressing story of a miserable childhood is made entertaining by its use of visual jokes and irony (one of the characters comments on the horror of Japanese films while apparently ignoring the brutality of the regime's police; characters look forward to the end

of the Shah's regime – 'just a matter of time' – ignorant of what is to follow). Rather than wallowing in self-pity, Marji, as she calls herself, is a feisty, uncompromising, funny heroine.

Marjane Satrapi saw at first hand the iniquities of both pre- and post-revolutionary Iran: her uncle and grandfather were imprisoned; the brainwashing of the education system; the oppression of the moral police; the spying on neighbours; the double-speak of the war-mongers; executions and exile. There is also personal loss and grief; she is betrayed by her lover. *Persepolis* puts a personal – and alternative – face on George Bush's vision of Iran.

“ Marjane Satrapi gusts into the room like a hurricane. She is a tiny woman propped up on huge white platform heels. She is dressed in black and is beautiful in a cubist way - Picasso could have sculpted her. Her hair is black, her mouth is a gash of red lipstick, she is talking 20 to the dozen, and smoke seems to be pouring out of every visible orifice. Everything about her is cartoon-like. Which is appropriate because she is best known as a cartoon character in her own comic books.

Satrapi, 38, is the author of *Persepolis*, a graphic memoir recounting her childhood in Iran, the overthrow of the corrupt Shah, the terror of the Khomeini years, the war with Iraq, the refuge she sought in Europe, and her painful path to adulthood. *Persepolis*, the Greek name for Persia, is desperately moving and extremely funny - a little girl's sarcastic love letter to her family. Young Marjane is a stropky, piss-taking, veil-wearing Marxist-anarchist who embraces her many contradictions with self-absorbed relish. When she's not preaching communism, she's predicting her future as a religious prophet; when she's not pogoing down the streets as a young punk, she's listening to the turgid prog rock of Camel or the bubblegum pop of Kim Wilde.

[...] As a child, Satrapi was supremely gobby. Her parents always

encouraged her to have her own opinion. She says there is something Hitleresque in her character that she has inherited from her father - she means in the power of her convictions rather than her politics. Satrapi was a sceptic from the off. "If the majority of people were right, we'd be living in paradise. But we are not living in paradise, we are living in hell. What does it mean? That means the majority of people are wrong. So I never believed what people told me."

[...] It's not surprising that the teenage Satrapi lost her way in Europe. She expected to find herself in a secular paradise looked after by Zozo, her mother's best friend. In *Persepolis*, she imagines how it will be: "It's going to be cool to go to school with a veil, to not have to beat oneself every day for the war martyrs." In fact, Zozo leaves her in a boarding house run by nuns and Marjane is thrown out for calling the mother superior a prostitute when she says Iranians are "uneducated". "In every religion you find the same extremists," young Marjane concludes.

[...] She is amazed how life has worked out. In France, she married a man about whom she will say nothing other than that he is Swedish. They have no children. "I don't understand when people say it is so natural to make children... I want to devote my life to my art. And I know if I'm a man and I say that I would be this great artist who sacrifices life for his talent,



but since I am a woman I become this ambitious bitch who doesn't want to have kids. Some people think like that, but I don't care."

Now she has sufficient distance from the past, she can see that things are probably as good as they get. "I'm this woman coming from Iran, I've succeeded in what I wanted, I live in the city I want, I live with the man I want, I make the work I want, and they pay me for it, which is incredible. How many people in the world have this luck?"

From an interview with Simon Hattenstone, *The Guardian* March 2008

NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS
REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE
(Nicholas Ray, US 1955)
Monday 15 August

www.elyfilmsociety.com

www.meetup.com/ely-film/

