



THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE PRESENTS
Treasures *Screentests*

PERSEPOLIS

(Satrapi and Parronaud,
2007, 35mm, 96 min.)

Thursday, April 21, 7pm
HQ L01, the Alice Cinema

“I loved fries with ketchup, Bruce Lee was my hero, I wore Adidas sneakers, and had two obsessions: shaving my legs one day, and being the last prophet of the galaxy.” This is Marjane, age eight, at the beginning of a story that takes her from Tehran to Vienna and back, and then on to Paris at age 24. While she and her friends debate ABBA versus the Bee Gees, her country undergoes the Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and a time of resigned detente when “the age of great ideals was over” and, according to Marjane, “We were so eager for happiness, we forgot we weren’t free.”

PERSEPOLIS—a 2007 French animated feature co-written and co-directed by Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud—was adapted from Satrapi’s acclaimed autobiographical graphic novels (though she prefers to call them comic books) of the same name. It was the first film for Satrapi, and the first feature for fellow comics artist Paronnaud, who had previously directed only one six-minute animated short. The two teamed up again for 2011’s live-action CHICKEN WITH PLUMS, based on another Satrapi graphic novel about middle-class life in Iran, this one set in the 1950s.

PERSEPOLIS maintains what Mehraneh Ebrahimi calls Satrapi’s “simplified yet amplified black-and-white drawing style” which creates “a playful space for questioning of the offered narratives and imagining differently.” Satrapi’s preference for an animated adaptation was not purely an aesthetic choice, but a means of emphasizing the universality of her story and the vulnerability of other countries to the threat of tyranny. “With live action,” she remarked, “it would have turned into a story of people living in a distant land who don’t look like us. At best, it would have been an exotic story, and at worst, a ‘third-world’ story.” The film was hand-drawn by a team of 20 animators, with over 80,000 drawings created. Satrapi insisted on acting out all of the scenes herself as a model for the animators. Bob Mondello described the results as “lovely black-and-white animation work that blends Islamic motifs into a sort of YELLOW SUBMARINE-ish world, where Marjane fantasizes conversations with God and Karl Marx, and where imagination runs free.” Dana Stevens observed, “The pleasingly simple, hand-drawn characters, and flat, often abstractly patterned backgrounds show the influence of everything from Charles Schulz to German Expressionism to Persian miniature painting to shadow puppetry. But the resulting mood is never cerebral or self-consciously postmodern.”

In the French version, which we are screening this evening, Marjane and her mother were voiced by Chiara Mastroianni and Mastroianni’s real-life mother Catherine Deneuve. Marjane’s grandmother was voiced by Danielle Darrieux, who was 90 when the film was made and who had previously played Deneuve’s mother in THE YOUNG GIRLS OF ROCHEFORT, SCENE OF THE CRIME, and 8 WOMEN. Mastroianni and Deneuve reprised their roles for the English-language version, which featured Gena Rowlands as the grandmother, Sean Penn as Marjane’s father, and Iggy Pop as her beloved uncle Anoush.

PERSEPOLIS premiered at Cannes, where it shared the Jury Prize with Carlos Reygadas’s SILENT LIGHT. It received an Academy Award nomination for Best Animated Feature (losing to RATATOUILLE), as well as a Golden Globe nomination in the Best Foreign Language Film category. Back in France, it won César Awards for Best First Film and Best Adapted Screenplay, and received nominations for Best Film, editing, music, and sound. It wasn’t nearly as lauded in Iran, where Ahmedinejad’s government described it as Islamophobic and anti-Iranian. A rare 2008 screening at a cultural center in Tehran was only permitted after the removal of half a dozen scenes (though uncensored DVDs were already readily available in Iran from bootleggers like those seen selling “Michael Jackson” and Iron Maiden tapes in the film). The center’s director, Mahmoud Babareza, said the screening was held “to end the delusions surrounding the film” in Iran. “When a film is not shown, people make all sorts of misconceptions. Cinema is cinema, after all, and I should not be put into a limited political context.”

UP NEXT: **Class Pictures Student Archivist Screening Night**
(Various, 1946 - 1983, 16mm, 100 min.) Wednesday, May 4, 7pm

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