

# Marjane Satrapi

Bio cribbed from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marjane-Satrapi> Interviews from 2012 Iceland film festival, 2016 interview about *Persepolis* with Emma Watson, 2017 PEN conference panelist with winner Pulitzer prize.

As the book we have just read is autobiographical, we already know a great deal about our author already. Marjane Satrapi was born in 1969, Rasht, Iran. She also works in cinema, and has written and illustrated children's books as well. She writes in French, but her work has been translated into 24 languages. Satrapi is also a children's illustrator created the illustrated children's books *Les Monstres n'aiment pas la lune* (2001; *Monsters Are Afraid of the Moon*) and *Le Soupir* (2004; *The Sigh*).

Satrapi was the only child of Westernized parents; her father was an engineer and her mother a clothing designer. She grew up in Tehrān, where she attended the Lycée Français. After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, her family's Western way of life drew the attention of Iranian authorities, and by 1984 her parents had decided to send her to Austria to attend school. At one point, the family friend with whom Satrapi was intended to live instead shuffles her to a boarding house, and her life gradually dissolves. A failed relationship exacerbated her sense of alienation and contributed to a downward spiral that involved more than her share of drugs, alcohol, smoking, and a brief (few months) period of homelessness. She returned to Tehrān, studied art, and, after a short-lived marriage, moved back to Europe in 1993. All of this is in *Persepolis* volumes 2, 3, and 4 documented in the same style as the first volume. In France she earned a degree in art, and by the mid-1990s she was living permanently in Paris. She lives there now with her husband, a Swedish national.

Her work is being taught at schools and colleges across the country, and her film adaptation of *Persepolis* was extremely well received, and featured at the Cannes film festival. She is frequently invited to speak across the US, and has been on countless panels discussing her work. Thus a lot of my information comes from watching interviews at various events. She is very candid with her views, and her answers to questions sound off the cuff, and she swears like a sailor. She can be all over the place but she has, however, distinctly evolved. I noticed from watching her speak at different points in

her career, it seems that she wrote down her stories without expecting to have to analyze them or explain why she told them via graphic novel. She's happy to share her opinions though, and over the years, she has developed more cohesive answers to these questions. Something else to remark upon; her drawings of herself, though they appear stylized, are spot on.

She says she has been surprised that so many people have read her book and asked her to speak. One unexpected speaking invitation was Westpoint, where she was told they teach not only Persepolis, but another graphic novel of hers, Embroideries, which centers on women's experiences with sex and marriage. She said this was one encounter that changed her image of Americans as a people fixated on guns, violence, ignorant of the rest of the world. I found it ironic that she admitted to this view, as she often talks about how important is to remember that humans are all the same even if from different parts of the world.

Satrapı published the books Persepolis 1 (2000) and Persepolis 2 (2001) in France; they were combined as Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood when translated into English in 2003. Her style has been described as a stripped-down visual style that shows the influence of German Expressionism. Satrapı adapted her book as a film, also called Persepolis (2007), which was nominated for an Academy Award for best animated feature.

In between the Persepolis 2 and 3, Satrapı published Broderies (2003; Embroideries), which consists of stories told by Satrapı's mother, grandmother, and other female relatives and friends about their experiences as women living in Iran. She was inspired to write it when, after dinners at her family's house, the men and women separated and the women talked very frankly about their lives in arranged marriages, and their sexual experiences. Another work published in 2004, Poulet aux prunes (Chicken with Plums); was adapted to film in 2011. It recounts the story she has been told of her great-uncle, a renowned tar (lute) player who resolves to die when he cannot adequately replace his broken instrument. In 1955, Nasser Ali Khan, one of Iran's most celebrated tar players, is in search of a new instrument. His beloved tar has been broken and no matter what tar he tries, none of them sound right. Brokenhearted, Nasser Ali Khan decides that life is no longer worth living. He takes to his bed,

renouncing the world and all of its pleasures, the final being food, hence the title. This is the story of the eight days he spends preparing to surrender his soul. He commits suicide at the end, and Satrapi insists that this is a happy ending, as he has fulfilled his goal. She enjoys making irreverent, provocative, so this is not a surprise.

She is also interested in film. In an interview at the Iceland film festival of 2012, she said she hates doing adaptations and would never do another because they're boring and tedious. On the other hand, she finds cinema very inspiring because it is so difficult and her brain functions best when she is very stressed. The more her brain is stressed, the more she likes it. She likes to be alone, but not for too long—so working with others extremely exciting.

She also feels that in your life, you have to do what you really want to do in that moment. Having a career plan and so on is no good because sometimes you have a career plan and 10 years later you don't feel like doing what you planned, because you've changed.

Unfortunately, in 2014, she directed the English-language dark twisted comedy *The Voices*, which concerned a man who, having failed to take his medication, becomes a murderer. Having seen only the trailer, I can say it is something I would never watch, involving perky dialogue and a man chopping women's heads off and keeping them in the fridge, where he talks to them.

Hopefully that was a brief foray into conventional film. As she proved true to her word that something you may not have enjoyed doing years ago may change, and she is currently working on a film adaptation of a graphic novel about Marie Curie through Amazon Studios. It should be out in 2020.

To the most frequently asked question Why did you write this and why did you choose this medium she has this to say:

She found herself saying the same thing over and over and facing so many prejudices. She felt compelled to put it in a book, because while she likes to talk, constantly repeating herself was tiring. She really didn't believe anybody would ever read it, but if people asked her

questions after she had written it, she could say, “There is a book; you can read it.”

As to why the graphics, she’d been drawing all her life and realized her drawings told a story. She is not drawing what is written, rather the pictures are part of the narration. She considers herself not good at prose. When she tried just writing, her story became too heavy, and lost her humor. When she began to draw it, she gave herself permission to have distance with her story. She finds that she can be herself as a cartoonist, that writers are expected to talk and behave in certain serious ways, but cartoonists are allotted more freedom; something she clearly cherishes.

She commented that she always thought comics were really work for monks, because it is obsessional work—frame after frame. She didn’t think of herself as an obsessive person, but discovered in this process that she actually is and it suited her for a long time.

She also doesn’t think of *Persepolis* as an autobiography, because normally an autobiography is a book that you write because you hate your family and your friends and you don’t know how to say it to them, so you write a book and let them read it themselves. This was not the case with her.

## Awards

- 2001: [Angoulême Coup de Coeur Award](#) for *Persepolis*<sup>[24]</sup>
- 2002: [Angoulême Prize for Scenario](#) for *Persepolis: Tome 2*<sup>[25]</sup>
- 2005: [Angoulême Best Comic Book Award](#) for *Poulet aux prunes*<sup>[10]</sup>
- 2007: Jury Prize for *Persepolis* (tied with *Silent Light*), Cannes Film Festival<sup>[15]</sup>
- 2007: Best Animation: [Los Angeles Film Critics Association](#)<sup>[16]</sup>
- 2008: [Cinema for Peace](#) Award for "Most Valuable Movie of the Year"<sup>[26]</sup>
- 2008: [Gat Perich](#) Award
- 2009: [Doctor honoris causa](#) both at the [Katholieke Universiteit Leuven](#) and the [Université catholique de Louvain](#) from [Belgium](#)<sup>[27]</sup>
- 2013: [Noor Iranian Film Festival](#) award for Best Animation Director, for *Chicken with Plums*