



I have no doubt that anyone who has read Ung's "First They Killed my Father" and Satrapi's "Persepolis" will agree that both these pieces of literature are an excellent representation of the finest work of art ever documented in human history. In fact, I can bet with confidence that any person who has had the opportunity to read these two memoirs was held captive throughout the entire period of reading. I must confess beforehand that throughout my life, no explicit memoir has ever held me captive. However, after reading these two memoirs, this personal reading experience has since changed.

In particular, I was unable to reconcile how Ung, as a 5-year old girl, successfully managed to survive and remember the horrible atrocities that the Khmer Rouge committed in Cambodia nearly four decades ago. Neither could I imagine being in her shoes at such a tender age nor have a healthy mind to narrate the ordeal. On the other hand, Satrapi's "Persepolis" is equally fascinating; especially the author's steadfast resolve to continue advocating for social activism in a country that is marred with religious and political turmoil. Despite the challenges of depression and becoming homeless, Satrapi maintains her spirit to fight for the recognition of women in a society that promotes patriarchy.

Notably, a critical perspective of Ung's and Satrapi's literal works reveals that they both share the same genre in that they are both memoirs, with each of the authors giving personal testimonials of the events they witnessed and experienced during the violent disturbance and change in the revolutions of their respective countries. However, a genre is not the only aspect that juxtaposes these two charming pieces of literal art. Specifically, one other aspect that potentially connects or juxtaposes these memoirs is their ability to draw an emotional and emphatic response from their audience. The focus of this paper is to demonstrate the predominance of this similarity in Ung's "First They Killed my Father" and Satrapi's "Persepolis."

To begin with, it is imperative to point out that the main characters in both of these texts are in fact the authors who give a personal account of the various monumental events that they witnessed and experienced during their childhood years. The events of the plot in the two memoirs inform the characterization and evolution of the characters, who as earlier mentioned are the authors. These events take place in the real setting of the respective characters and that the characters do not in any way have control of these events. Thus, the characters are compelled to conform to the situations before them. In some circumstances, the characters are forced to adapt to the situation so that they can survive and later recount the events, as is the case in the present memoirs. For example, had Ung and Satrapi not survived the atrocities they experienced during childhood, we would not today be reading their memoirs from their personal viewpoint.

It is critical to highlight that despite the temporal and spatial distance from these autobiographies, we can surely feel certain closeness because of the universality of their experiences. Both memoirs are drawn from the viewpoint of a young child, one whose straightforwardness of the early experiences overcomes the typical cultural barriers that exist in various societies across the world. Indeed, such a scenario is evident in Satrapi's "Persepolis" where her young perspective is personified by a child version of herself and from whose naïve eyes we see a violent and oppressive government regime in Iran.

It is broadly agreeable that from a universal viewpoint, the majority of us have a significant possibility of being moved by Satrapi's narration, particularly when we see her as a child who has never experienced violence and oppression in her lifetime. Everything Satrapi encounters in her life apparently elicits on the part of the readers' emotions and empathy concerning her situation. For example, when Satrapi's parents move her to Vienna at such a tender age (Satrapi 201), the readers feel that the parents are rather insensitive of their daughter's parental love and attention. Although it may appear that their action is justified in so far as ensuring that their daughter is sufficiently secure from the violent Iranian regime, a reader cannot be convinced that taking Satrapi to a boarding house that is managed by nuns was the most appropriate thing they could do at the time. At the very least, the parents ought to have found ways in which they could

maintain constant physical contact with their daughter because from a moral perspective, that is what is expected of parents.

Incidentally, Ung's "First They Killed my Father" is also not deficient of scenes and narratives that evoke our humanistic emotions and empathy. As earlier mentioned in the preceding discussion, Ung's memoir accurately recounts the experiences she had in the infamous Pol Pot government regime and as a survivor of the Khmer Rouge era. Ung's narration is a traumatic chronicle of hunger, estrangement, hunger, and separation, as she is thrown into the work camps of Cambodia where she witnesses the outrageous massacre of her family members. Indeed, creating a mental picture of Ung's experience as she watched her family members being butchered by Khmer Rouge sends a chill of tremor down the spine.

It is extremely difficult for the readers, me in particular, to even consider encountering such a traumatizing experience. In fact, I think my situation would not be similar to that of Ung who lost consciousness for three days. I speculate that there is a significant chance that if I witnessed a similar atrocity even at this point when I am somewhat mature, I would have experienced immeasurable cardiac arrest that could, in turn, cause my immediate demise.

Ung recounts that all the men who had registered for work at the camps during the reign of Khmer Rouge were shot (45). She further describes in her memoir of a particular instance where in which a widow took refuge with their family, affectionately talking to the dead baby that she carried with her everywhere (Ung 86). The widow could not accept that her child was, in fact, dead. Fundamentally, this portion of Ung's recollection evokes our core human feelings to relate to the pain that the widow must have undergone when she lost her baby in the violence. The narration clearly shows that despite our demographic differences as people, we all share and relate to the painful experiences of other people.

Subsequently, I am persuaded that the way in which I relate with Ung's and Satrapi's experiences is the same way other people view their ordeal. For example, the empathy that I develop for Satrapi when I read through her memoir is to a large extent inspired by my natural humanistic feeling that such trauma should never happen to my fellow human being, even in those instances where I have no blood or personal ties with the individual. Clearly, this is a universal feeling and the one, which draws our emotional and emphatic response when we hear or read about the traumatic encounters that other people have had in their lives.

In both Ung's "First They Killed my Father" and Satrapi's "Persepolis," it is extremely difficult for one not to be moved by the events that surround the authors' childhood. The ability of these two influential pieces of literary work offers to elicit emotions and feelings of empathy on the transgressions that happened to them when young provides a basis in which they can be juxtaposed to each other in the sphere of literature. Therefore, this implies that besides the categorization of various literal works on the premise of their particular genre, it is also possible to group literal works based on the concept of the type of feelings they draw on their readership. Being entirely distinct when it comes to format and presentation, both the "First They Killed my Father," and "Persepolis" employ a child's perspective and voice when recollecting the authors' horrible past. In particular, I think this narrative approach is quite gripping and somewhat contributing to the elicitation of feelings of pity towards the authors on the part of the audience, myself included.

In conclusion, it is evident from the preceding discussion and literary analysis that both Ung's "First They Killed my Father" and Satrapi's "Persepolis" provide different aspects from which they can be juxtaposed to each other, including the element of the genre. The two literal works can accurately be categorized as memoir because they provide personal testimonials of the events they witnessed and experienced during the violent disturbance and change in the revolutions of their respective countries. However, this grouping of the two texts by genre is not the only ground for their categorization.

Both the "First They Killed my Father," and "Persepolis" can as well be connected or juxtaposed to each other by analysing the kind of emotions and empathy they stimulate on their audience. Notably, Ung's and Satrapi's texts exhibit this type of juxtaposition in which both authors provide a touching story concerning

their childhood lives. I have to admit that reading these two memoirs was not easy for me, especially Satrapi's story. When reading the works, I could clearly picture the suffering the authors underwent during their childhood. The memoirs provide narratives that can influence the different regimes across the world to adopt good governance strategies so as to prevent other people such as Ung and Satrapi from encountering traumatic experiences.

## **Works Cited**

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