



Love in Revolution

Books Reviewed:

[Love in Revolution](#) [1]

Issue:

[203](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

B.R. Collins sets her novel almost out-of-time and almost out-of-place. There is a brief memory of a character's friend in the trenches of the Great War, and several implicit references to the Spanish Basque country. The national game is pello, not unlike one version of pelota; an escape route over the mountains leads to St-Jean-Pied-le-Mont, which you'd guess was not a thousand kilometres away from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port at the foot of Roncevalles. Then there's the absence of mobiles, computers, television, military air strikes. You might infer, maybe, Spanish Civil War, Communists versus Fascists; yet an ambiguity remains which allows a sense that the arguments and actions driving this story come round again and again, wherever and whenever you are ? and that this is our own very real world.

This is not merely a cleverly crafted novel, however. It is also a brave one; Collins's blog implies some struggles over the editorial desk about printing the love story at the core of this adventure. For, caught up in the political maelstrom in which fifteen year-old Esteya finds herself, she falls helplessly in love with another girl. Esteya comes from a respectable small-town family; Father is the local doctor, Mother brings up her daughter and her twin, Martin, within the firm precepts of the Catholic church. Older brother Leon, the son of the doctor and his late wife, sits uneasily in this domestic context; he is a university student, a sincere idealist but parroting mantras from the Communist handbook, untempered by experience. One day, as the twins watch a stunning pello defeat of the local hero by Angel Corazon, a graceful, unknown peasant boy, Esteya meets Skizi. She's a Zikindi ? an untouchable, a kind of Roma pariah. Skizi's moral code is founded on one principle; survival at all costs at anyone's expense.

The plot unwinds through external conflict as Revolution stains the streets and the victorious Communists impose systems which soon decline into corruption and naivety; and through internal tensions as Esteya explores her values, her body and her feelings for Skizi ? uncharted territory indeed. She struggles to read Skizi's responses to her when their different codes collide. Sustained and tender understanding seems impossible. There are no easy family reunions or political reconciliations here. The old comforts and certainties are lost. Ultimately, there's a glimmer of hope for a desperately difficult future ? some kind of new start in a less damaged, but foreign, land.

Collins is an unflinching writer. People die and are tortured brutally in this novel. Others are snatched from their beds in the night and disappear. As I write, she has been shortlisted for the **Stonewall Writer of the Year Award**. She will take some beating.

This is a novel to excite and open young minds and emotions. You'd love to read it with a class of talkative adolescents, though you might have to brace yourself for some parental letters.

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[1] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/love-in-revolution>

[2] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/203>

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