

Sara, Author & Artist of *Revolution*, On The Book & Her Art

On *Revolution*

The word 'revolution' curiously opposes the word 'evolution' in the French language – only the 'r' separates the two. It matters little though... for the "r" of revolution always brings us back to the point of departure, say, of the planets which fulfil their revolution (as in revolving), that is to say they turn on their axis, proceed in their own trajectory, only to return to their point of departure (which is never exactly the same since time has since elapsed).

The term "revolution" is linked, for me, to the little book written in 1548 by Steven de La Boétie, when he was 16-17 years old - *La Servitude Volontaire* ('Volunteer (Voluntary ?) Servitude'), in which he expresses his surprise that human beings accept so easily the oppression of a single person: together, he says, it would be so easy to trip a tyrant who is alone! It is also linked to colours, my impressions of colours - the black, white and red colours of this book recall Russian revolutionary battles and the work of graphic designers and film-makers of the 1920s in the USSR.

What I address in this picture book is therefore the relationship between the oppressor and those who struggle against him. In most revolutions, those who struggle against the oppressor take his place, and in turn become oppressors. But once again people rise against tyranny, grab the flag of freedom and leave for battle again.

Then, there is the question of the tanks - they represent the blind brutality of war. They are brought in to assault cities, populations ... They flatten humans, animals, plants. They destroy everything in their path. They also trap and imprison those that drive them: one bomb and the tank-driver is done for, they get entombed in the machine. The cadavers of tanks lying in the hollow of ruined cities or burning fields, useless and rusty monsters ... like things I saw on the Atlantic Coast, where I grew up... They are part of all modern revolutions.

But perhaps this battle is not all political... Perhaps it is also the battle that many human beings wage inside themselves between the desire to live and the wish to die.

My protagonist: is it a man or a woman? Many ask me this. I believe it is for each reader to choose. In my books, there is a lot of silence, and the reader has to become the author, of his or her story. In *Revolution*, there is very little text; my pictures are silhouettes, torn to accentuate uneven and edgy aspects of character - it is up to the reader to complete the shapes and tell the story the way she wants to.

On Drawing *Revolution*

My decision to work on an album – picture book - does not emerge from intellectual reflection alone. My work builds upon pictures that appear in my imagination, based on political events that reach me - though I don't need to watch horrible events on television to start thinking - and I perfect in the spindle tree or torn paper the impressions, which come together at that instant.

My illustrations do not merely endorse an idea, or what is in the text. They are not there to soften the task of reading. My pictures constitute a language - their shapes, colours, and the way they are laid out on the page, together they tell a story. They do not speak to our intellect, to our thinking brain, but they appeal to our emotions, impressions. I work my pictures to their own grammar, to a syntax that is their own... And this is why the lion in this book, the symbol of freedom, running in the savannah freely, filled with the force and plenitude of youth, gets down from the flag and frees the little prisoner: the lion's actions are in keeping with the logic of visual expression, of a language that uses shapes to express itself...

The reader has to only listen to the pictures speaking to her and she will know what they mean, and will no longer be influenced by the opinions of others.

On Art and Artists

When I discovered the picture book, I learnt how an image could be sufficient in itself; how pictures are a language unto themselves. Have you noticed how we seldom see only pictures? That we do not see images, without the text that tells you what is in the picture? Newspaper photographs come with their own captions, billboards carry their own explanations, television features pictures with commentary...My first picture book was in black, grey and white and told the story of a man and a cat meeting.

The artists who have influenced me the most are the painters of the Italian Renaissance: Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Giorgione; film-makers of the silent period, like Eisenstein, as also those from the talkies era, the American film-maker John Huston, the Frenchman, Robert Bresson; and finally, comic book artists such as the very popular Hugo Pratt.

I live in Paris, I grew up in Rouen – but I travel in my imagination. I sometimes imagine that I walk down the streets of Bénarès, down to the river Ganga, and see, with my internal eyes, the fog fetching up from the river and spreading on the steps. I travel in this manner to the African savannah to watch the lions, to the Japanese temples, the high plateaus of Patagonia...

My physical body stays mostly in Paris. Sometimes I take it to the Atlantic coast because the light's long white trails intersperse with the dazzling whiteness of the sun. There, the wind blows so strongly and throws the ocean about so much so that with the tide's help, the howling waves take by storm the headlights and dams.