



IB English B Book Review

A review: *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee

“I’d lie down and die, if there was a place to lie down”.— Laurie Lee achieves something absolutely spectacular in his debut novel “*Cider with Rosie*”. It was first dramatised for television by the BBC in 1971, grabbing everyone’s attention, and forcing people to re-read his book. It successfully captures Lee’s childhood and his growing interest to new people and places, as he grows up in a period soon after the First World War. It shows us the traditional village life, which disappeared with the 20th century Industrial revolution.

Lee introduces the young version of himself growing up in a female family, never knowing any male authority. Lee’s father is mentioned only in few chapters, as he abandoned their family and moved to London. Lee narrates most of the story using simple child’s language, which sometimes contrasts with metaphorical descriptions of world and people. A great part of descriptive language is lavished on Lee’s brothers, sisters and mother. His mother in particular receives somewhat contrasting descriptions: sometimes, she “groaned and rolled eyes about” accusing gods for all the bad things that happen to her family, and sometimes she is being described like an angel, who is suited to domestic life, having an extraordinary ability with plants and being able to grow any of them anywhere.

Lee divided the book into thematic chapters, which follow each other in a strict chronological order, narrating the events before and after the First World I. A young boy first imagines himself as a soldier, like his uncles, playing with other boys outside. During such moments in the novel, readers have the impression in their minds of little cheerful boys playing and messing around. However, Lee also includes philosophical ideas and topics into his novel, such as the meaning of war and peace—“I could not believe in this peace at all. No messengers from heaven came with it. No explanations”. Lee shows his views on peace through a child’s eyes, mixing serious ideas with the thoughtless ones of a boy, who seeks for a scapegoat to blame, desperately wishing war to be back.

The quality of Lee’s writing strikes readers with it’s elegance, diversity of descriptive language and tone. As a grown man, he narrates through little boy’s eyes, noticing the mistakes he made in the past, though at the same time, we can feel his yearning and nostalgia for the bygone. We understand how much childhood is important to each person, as it is an integral part of our existence.

Lee created a fine first novel, worthy of all movies and TV series that have been done in the past and are going to be in the future. In one of the last sentences of his novel, there’s a phrase—“ I felt fated- and wonderful”, which I believe applies both to the main character and all the readers.

Stepan Demidkin, 2014