



Red Sky at Sunrise: Cider with Rosie; As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning; A Moment of War

Laurie Lee , John Ward (Illustrator) , Leonard Rosoman (Illustrator) , Keith Bowen (Illustrator)

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Beginning with *Cider with Rosie*, Laurie Lee writes evocatively of his idyllic childhood in the Cotswolds of the twenties, a world of rich sensuousness and native innocence. *As I Walked Out One Summer Morning* picks up the story as he leaves his valley for London and then for Spain. There, equipped only with a violin and his wits, he crossed the dramatic landscape of a vibrant and still almost medieval Spain for which he developed an abiding affection. In the winter of 1937 he returned to a country now in the grip of Civil War and joined the International Brigade, describing in *A Moment of War* his journey into the dark side of Spain with unsparing honesty and poignancy.

Cider With Rosie: "A prose poem that flashes and winks like a prism." - H.E. Bates

As I Walked Out One Summer Morning: "The vivid, sensitive, irresistibly readable story of what happened after he left home." - *Daily Mail*

A Moment of War: "A great heart-stopping narrative of one young Englishman's part in the war in Spain... crafted by a poet, stamping an indelible image of the boredom, random cruelty and stupidity of war." - John Sweeney in the *Literary Review*

The cover shows a portrait of Laurie Lee by Anthony Devas in the National Portrait Gallery, London

Red Sky at Sunrise: Cider with Rosie; As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning; A Moment of War Details

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From Reader Review Red Sky at Sunrise: Cider with Rosie; As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning; A Moment of War for online ebook

Sean says

Three books broken up as follows:

Cider with Rosie - early childhood in a small valley village.

As I Walked Out... - leaving the valley and travelling to and through Spain.

A Moment of War - returning to Spain and being a part of the war.

The first book is very poetic and paints vivid images of country life from the dreamy hazy view point of a child. The second finds a balance between poetry and story, leading you through the country in good pace. The final part (book) reads more like a biography than the others. Distancing himself enough from the poetic language so as not to disturb the earthiness of its reality.

Together the books show a fascinating progression in style. I am reminded of Orwell's statement about the difficulty he had writing about the war in Spain. On the one hand he wanted to be true to the reporter in him, on the other he wanted to write the story; he ended up with a book that starts as a story and jumps into historical journalism, only to return to a story at the end. Admittedly Lee's progressive approach feels much more fluid and natural (although the comparison is still a little unfair as the focus is so very different, not to mention Lee's lack of opinion on what he is experiencing... something Orwell was passionately determined to share throughout his work).

I only mention Orwell as I read a comment on *Down and Out in Paris and London* that spurred me to read Lee. Mentioning that *As I walked Out...* was a better book about homelessness. Different, yes. But better, no. Orwell tries hard to make you feel for the lack in his life. To Lee not having is more of a guide to his next situation, the hardship and struggle is barely mentioned, certainly not the focal point as it is in *Down and Out*.

Manray9 says

With *Red Sky at Sunrise*, Laurie Lee's autobiographical trilogy comes together into one volume. The first book, *Cider with Rosie*, is an ode to an idyllic childhood in a Gloucestershire village in the twenties and thirties. When wanderlust prodded Lee into undertaking life on the road in the second book, *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*, he tramped as a casual laborer in London and then across Spain as a busking fiddler. His Spanish travels led to the third book, *A Moment of War*, recounting his bumbling stint in the army of the Spanish Republic during the civil war of the late thirties. Lee did not join the fight out of anti-fascist zeal. His enlistment followed a confused love affair compounded by a bewildered naiveté which almost got him shot on more than one occasion.

Lee's trilogy, especially the first volume, is heartwarming. He evokes a wistful nostalgia for a way of life forever gone and captures the poignancy of time's passage and its impact upon those people and places close to our hearts. Lee wrote: "The last days of my childhood were also the last days of the village. I belonged to that generation which saw, by chance, the end of a thousand years' life." He regretted the loss – and succeeded in making the reader regret it too.

As a chronicle of one young man's transition from an isolated and self-sufficient existence into the midst of the world's murky struggle against the dark forces of modernity, Lee's story is humorous and moving. He recounts the conversion from the old ways to the new – and does so with lyrical prose and consummate pacing. I recommend *Red Sky at Sunrise* to readers of all ages. Laurie Lee's autobiographical trilogy earned a Four Star position on my bookshelf.

Steve Blackburn says

Wonderfully written. So lyrical. IMHO should be compulsory reading in secondary schools.

Sam Josh says

Lyrical beauty, if I had 10% of his writing talent I would be a very happy man.

Michael says

I first read *Cider with Rosie* at school and enjoyed it, identifying with the author's portrayal of childhood, I suppose. When I re-read it as an adult, and a father, I was overwhelmed by the yearning nostalgia of Lee's prose. But there is no mawkish sentimentality here, no idyll. In places there is a lurking, murderous undercurrent, a burgeoning and threatening sexuality that had gone over my head when I read the book at school. What comes across so strongly is Lee's sense of affection for and of belonging to a place and time that has forever vanished.

Cider with Rosie is not just one of the best books ever written about childhood, it is (for me) one of the best books ever written.

As I Walked Out Midsummer Morning sees Lee's leave-taking of his village home in the Cotswold countryside and his entry into the bigger world. It's a transition from a rural lifestyle that had not significantly changed for hundreds of years to the modern twentieth-century urban environment. Having seen the big city, Lee wants to see more of the world, and we are therefore gifted with his wondrously brilliant sketch of Spain. The heat and light of the Spanish plains seems to pour off the page and you feel transported.

A Moment of War continues from the point the previous volume ended, but the tone is very different. In an unusually cold Spanish winter, Lee joins the International Brigade in the Republican struggle against General Franco's fascists. Lee shows the horrible futility, wastefulness and arbitrariness of war unflinchingly. This easily stands beside *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves as a great literary war memoir. A downbeat ending to the trilogy, but nonetheless affecting.

Kowanda Richardson says

Laurie Lee's upbringing in the Cotswolds of England and his venturing off into the world.

Betti Moser says

All-time favourite!

Sarah England says

Shouldn't really have taken me so long - I read 'As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning' in a matter of days, then had a bit of a gap and read 'A Moment of War' in dribs and drabs. Utterly beguiling - you can tell he's a poet because his prose just oozes from the page. Lyrical, beautiful and the most tangible, gorgeous images. Absolute master of words, he makes you fall in love with the language. Also a great read! I read 'Cider with Rosie' years back but do not remember it being so fluid and luscious as this. Maybe I'm just getting old?

My copy is now full of underlinings and folded corners because I want to copy out literally scores of phrases and passages.

Tracey says

This has got to be one of the most beautifully written books that I've ever read. The author was first and foremost a poet and the prose he has written here reads like a gentle, lyrical love poem to a time, a place, a life forever lost.

I knew I was going to love it from the opening paragraph when 3 year old Laurie is set down from a cart in some long grass, he is bewildered and terrified;

' The June grass, amongst which I stood, was taller than I was, and I wept. I had never been so close to grass before. It towered above me and all around me, each blade tattooed with tiger skins of sunlight. It was knife edged, dark and a wicked green, thick as a forest and alive with grasshoppers that chirped and chattered and leapt through the air like monkeys'.

His first day at school leaves him upset and angry as his teacher sits him down at a desk and tells him to 'just sit there for the present'. When he gets home crying his Mum asks what has happened and little Laurie tells her that he was told he would get a present if he sat in his seat and he hasn't got one!! :))

The part about the 2 old ladies Granny Trill and Granny Wallon had me laughing with delight. I won't spoil anything but suffice to say, one lived above the other and there was 'animosity' between them. They referred to each other only as "Er-Down-Under and" Er-Up-Atop the varmint'.

Another part that had me crying with laughter was when the whole village went for a day trip in a Charabanc. They left their little village near Stoud in the Cotswolds for a seaside trip to Western- super-Mare. On arriving they halted on the promenade.

"The seaside" they said: " We gazed around us, but we saw no sign of the sea
We saw a vast blue sky and an infinity of mud stretching away to the shadows of Wales.

As I've been to Western many times, I can absolutely verify that the sea never comes in there. Well at least not when children want it to. ;))

This book is phenomenal. It has brought up so many memories for me from my childhood and a longing for those lost times. Every word resounds with beauty and his descriptions of nature as he sees it blew my mind;

'Bees blew like cake crumbs through the golden air, white butterflies like sugared wafers, and when it wasn't raining a diamond dust took over which veiled and yet magnified all things'

I'm going to stop here and will finish with the thought that; memories aren't always reliable and indeed can a person relate verbatim what happened in their childhood? These are the memories of Lauri Lee as he remembers them and whether embellished with fantasy or all factual the story he has told is perfect. 5 whopping * from me, and a place on my books I'm passionate about shelf.

I will read the second part of this in March and the third in May and review the separately. :)

Emily says

This book. Was. Amazing.

It was exactly what I needed right now, having become a bit sick of short books.

The tone of this book is something I don't think you could analyse; it seems to exist in the white space. But it is incredibly immersive and evocative and gave me that sense of being really excited to read, which only a few special books seem to do. Individually I think I'd give these three books 4/5 stars, but altogether it definitely increases to five stars.

Here are my reviews for the first two books individually that I wrote as I finished them:

"Finished Cider With Rosie - I'd give this a strong 4/5 stars. Very beautifully written and I really enjoyed the tone and documentation of Gloucestershire village life in the early 1900s."

"I'm coming to the end of AIWOOMM. Lee travelled naively and gloriously, in such a way only young men at that time could. Surviving on luck, the money he earned busking and what little he could carry, he was not afraid to sleep rough. Lee is a master of travel writing, finding the quintessence of a place in his beautiful, delicate yet simple writing. Wonderful."

"I've now finished AIWOOMM. An incredibly and strangely satisfying read. Lee is an amazing travel writer - he manages to make long, long walks across the Sierra in midday heat and hours of climbing the Pyrenees in a blizzard romantic and beautiful. I could only ask for some of his poetry interspersed, and an update from time to time on his learning of Spanish."

As for A Moment Of War, I found his utter calmness throughout everything that happened was amazing. He did mention at points his fear (I don't want to include spoilers so I won't say what he was scared of) but, in the multiple times he came face to face with death, in his writing at least he remained serene. The tone of this is different to the other two books, which, despite living in relative poverty during both, feel very rich and luxurious, possibly because Lee seems to get as much sustenance from his surroundings as he does from food (and even the most meagre meal sounds amazing in his description). AMOW is desolate by comparison, but this is definitely intentional and still very evocative.

And of course there's the EXQUISITE writing throughout. I could quote the whole book to you as an example, but I can't, so you'll just have to read it yourselves.

One of the best books I've read this year. I'm definitely going to read some more travel writing after this as these books are positively SUMPTUOUS.

Mario Hinksman says

If you wanted an example of a gifted poet who can write prose but retain his poetry in that prose, this is the book for you. It is really three separate books: the famous 'Cider with Rosie' covering the writer's idyllic yet poverty-stricken upbringing in the Slad Valley in Gloucestershire; an account of his leaving home travelling to London and then Spain in the early nineteen-thirties and finally an account of his largely futile idealistic efforts in the Spanish civil war that nearly cost him his life on several occasions mainly due to the incompetence of the Republican side he was fighting on, as well as his inherent limitations as a soldier.

These books capture variously an England, a London and a Spain that are lost and gone. He combines factual observations with poetic descriptions. It is both a history and a poem.

Highly recommended. Having read this and a biography, I am still at a loss to understand how someone who had so rudimentary an education (by his own account largely timetables, dates of Kings and Queens and a few verses from the Bible) came to write so well and have such an understanding of the world. For he had undoubtedly had both of those attributes in generous quantity. He undoubtedly inherited some artistic talent from his mother while keeping very interesting company for most of his life.

Nicola Pierce says

It is bewildering that I have waited this long to read Laurie Lee. I bought this compact edition last Sunday and finished it yesterday morning. The writing is glorious and so evocative that I have a strong feeling it will haunt me over the coming months.

I will admit that I do now want to read a biography of Lee as, especially during "A Moment of War" I was wondering what was being left out. Obviously I thoroughly enjoyed Lee's writing but we never heard him in actual conversation throughout the last two books in the memoirs. I can't decide if he's like a blank canvass reacting to his surroundings or else some omnipresent god who never says a wrong word and remains perfectly detached at all times.

Admittedly I am utterly squeamish when it comes to children and the last two books, for me, proved challenging at times. In the third book it was impossible to recognise the Spain of today but I suppose civil war temporarily rids a country of its identity. Spain became a living hell with only the most distasteful people to be encountered. I longed for him to meet a loving parent and well-cared for children but of course he must have, he just preferred to describe the sordidness and dirt.

In any case I absolutely recommend the three books and this edition contains all three along with the bonus of fine illustrations. He really is the most wonderful writer! I think I will be rereading this again and again.

Bryn says

Laurie Lee came from the Stroud valleys, not so very far from where I grew up. His Cotswold childhood happened back when cars were still a rarity, when the world was a far less industrial place. There's a

nostalgia for the past here, for lost innocence. The writing is beautiful. There are sorrows and hard times as well though, its not just a rose tinted view of a rural youth.

'As I walked out' takes Lee across Spain, walking and busking. This section of his life really caught my imagination, although I've never had the nerve to do anything like it, it's fuelled my daydreaming for many years. More evocative prose, and a great adventure.

A Moment of War - as Spain plunged into civil war, Lee felt obliged to go back and participate. what follows is dark, insane and deeply disturbing, a haunting recollection of a terrible conflict.

Having all three books in one volume is a great asset. They're wildly different in character, and all very good reads. Cider with Rosie might be the most famous, but I feel the other two are far stronger books, much more adult and provocative.

Laurie Lee was also a poet, so if you enjoy these you might want to look out his other work.

Andrew says

This is an auto-biographical trilogy.

It begins with '**Cider with Rosie**' which charts the childhood and school years of Laurie Lee in the village of Slad in Gloucestershire. It is an excellent piece of social history.

I was prompted to re-read this by a recent TV drama. The writing is beautifully prosaic, capturing both the sense of time and space in this part of rural England.

The second book '**As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning**' tells the tale of a young Laurie journeying through Spain just before the Spanish Civil war.

The sense of innocence of youth is a recurring element of this part of Laurie's life. The first couple of chapters chart his walk to London. Then he arrives in Spain

'and the new life beginning. I had a few shillings in my pocket and no return ticket; I had a knapsack, blanket, spare shirt, and a fiddle' and enough words to ask for a glass of water.'

I really like the self-effacing way he writes about his adventures.

'But I was innocent then of my ignorance, and so untroubled by it.'

The writing, a bit like in Cider with Rosie, paints a literary picture of the life the people in the time before the conflict to come. This book ends as Spain is moving in to civil war, in the Epilogue when he is back in Gloucestershire he writes:

'Unlike so many of my age, for whom Spain in the Thirties represented one of the last theatres of political romanticism, I hadn't consciously chosen it as a cause but had stumbled on it by accident, simply by happening to be there.'

The final book of the trilogy is called '**A Moment of War**'. In this Laurie makes the decision to return to join the anti-Fascists opposing Franco. In his naivety he finds himself treated as a spy and facing death, before finally being accepted for what he is.

He successfully manages to explain a little of the tragedy of this war:

'It was then that I began to sense for the first time something of the gaseous squalor of a country at war, an infection so deep it seemed to rot the earth, drain it of colour, life and sound.'

'Worse than a country at war, this one was at war with itself- an ultimate, more permanent wastage.'

Sue says

Where do i start about this book. Cider with Rosie, is one of those books that's been on my must read pile for a long time and i promised myself i would read this summer, and now i have i wish i'd read it sooner, or do I. Maybe if i'd read this when i was a few years younger i wouldn't have appreciated the lyrical prose that Lee plays with in this text. "Bees float like cake crumbs" the descriptions are so wonderful and conjure up time gone by that no longer exist in the british countryside. The other two stories of his life are just as beautiful and descriptive and i felt that the journeys he made in Spain i was along for the journey with him. This book of all three autobiographical stories of Lee are worth the time, but to be savoured not rushed. For any of you that want a serene read of different times i recommend this book!
