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14.Sep 2011

Summer Reading Book Review

Introduction

It is a novel titled *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson. David is a novelist from Seattle and becomes interested in writing while he is in university. He gets married shortly after his graduation from the university and yet he keeps writing short stories. He also works as a high school English teacher for ten years along with his writing career. On the study trip to Japanese internment camp at the high school, he inspires the idea of writing *Snow Falling on Cedars*, which receives Pen/Faulkner Award. One of the themes of the book is prejudice toward Japanese Americans who are enemies in the World War II that lay deep in people. The other is a love affair of Japanese woman and white man, which has to be troubled by the time of war. In short, *Snow Falling on Cedars* is a great book that is colored by a number of characters and their background stories. Some old time memories are recalled on top of the other and that made stories complicated a little. However the description of the nature and its hardness add depth and since each character is introduced one by one, it does not cause a big confusion upon reading the book.

Summary

The story takes place in San Piedro Island on heavy snowstorm days in 1954. A Japanese American, Kabuo Miyamoto is accused of killing a white guy named Carl Heine but Hatsue, who is Kabuo's wife, insists his innocence patiently. Long time ago in her childhood, Hatsue fell in love with Ishmael Chambers, a son of strawberry farmer and continued their secret meet in a hollow tree. Meanwhile however, Japanese soldiers attack Pearl Harbor and the atmosphere toward Japanese islanders hardens. U.S. government then announces descendant of Japanese to move to the internment camp. Ruled by the war, Hatsue tells Ishmael that they can no longer meet each other as she is a Japanese American and she and her family is forced to move to the camp. At the

camp, Hatsue finds her love and marries to Kabuo. However, Ishmael cannot forget of Hatsue and encounters her again as a news reporter at the trial of Kabuo. On preceding the trial, islanders' hidden discrimination toward Japanese Americans is gradually revealed and the situation slightly leans against Kabuo. Ishmael then finds an important evidence of Kabuo's innocence. Because of the evidence submitted at the last minutes, Kabuo is finally freed. Ishmael recalls on the last sentence that accidents have a control over things in a universe except people's hearts. The author indicates that even under a time of accident like war, people did not lose their sense of right.

Critique

The negative point of the book is the sudden time change from past to even past and then back to present. It is that one sentence talks about past and on the next line, the situation shifts to the present on another location without any indication. Since they are in a same paragraph and apparently seems to be a continuous situation, the sudden change is surprising. The second point is that too much description of the nature is presented in the beginning although this seems to have both good and bad sides. On bad side, it is boring only to be given a simple, less important information. It does not move the story forward either so readers cannot get the story. The good side however, is that the later the information is given, the more interests are pulled such like a thrill of what happens next. On last point, David Guterson did an amazing job in organizing a lot of recollection of characters. There are at least memories of 10 people and since they are all connected to each other, it should be difficult to solve it down normally. However, David's eye-catching technique perfectly sorts the memories and the order of showing characters so it was comfortable reading through. What also helps well is that the story goes by relatively same pattern: one character is introduced, an then comes his or her background and about past days, and recent life, and finally an inquiry at the court. Each character does not mess up the others on their stories but somehow organized in a best order. Thus *Snow Falling on Cedars* surely deserves a Pen/Faulkner Award.

Conclusion

This book is a wonderful work of David Guterson, which is closely built up with a pile of memories and side stories of each character. They are somehow related to each other and though it seems to be a mess in a distance, it is easy to understand them because they are organized well. Even though the book is 460 pages long and looks hard to finish reading, it is worth reading. The deep side stories on each character are why the book is so long, but it is the result of not compromising on the quality. *Snow Falling on Cedars* is put to recommendation and it will be clear why it received an award.