

rites of passage

By Mark Magro

A rite of passage is an event that marks progress from one stage of life to another – birthdays, marriage, baptism, confirmations, first sex and first time alone behind the wheel of a car are among the most common milestones in Western civilization.

Those events are important, but mostly because they are also very clear landmarks between “then” and “now.” By elevating those special events, we often miss the little moments in between, the subtle thoughts that make up most of our waking lives and bring richness to our experience.

To honor those missing moments, poet Mark Magro has chosen to title his work “Rites of Passage,” encapsulating a collection of reflections on war and religion, love and sanity, imagination and soul, and power and nature. The sections thematically explore the nuances of these powerful and symbolic concepts, as Magro attempts to find a true passage to enlightenment. Or, as he puts it, “an individual on a journey, I expose myself to the elements.”

Accompanied by black and white photos (often featuring the poet himself, and captioned with quotations, mostly from great philosophers and writers), the collection is mostly allegorical and vaguely (though not precisely) from the imagist school. It purports to be the struggle of a young man trying to make sense of a world that can be as abstract in its ultimate meaning as the verses.

Such opaque poetry can be weighty and hard to truly follow at times, and readers expecting an easy, breezy read should beware.

But when breakouts of burning insight and ironic truth spring forth -- as in “Relationships,” where he notes, “When you need them the most, they are not there,” or in “Sex,” where “a climax of stars reaches its burning desire” -- all is forgiven. These lines are brilliant and fun, and probably elicit an amen and applause when performed in public.

Ultimately, Magro has done a fine job of bringing forth his inner world, “a collection of random and chaotic thoughts organized carefully through visual representation.” It is a world worth visiting for the serious student of poetry, and his marriage of visuals with the poetry is a potentially rich path that will be interesting to watch develop in future collections.

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