



Clarion Review

General

Salted with Salt and the Altar of Silence: Two Novellas

Jason Akley

Outskirts Press

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Four Stars (out of Five)

The road trip has been the quintessential rite of passage for many young Americans.

Jason Akley, author of four other books and holder of a BS degree in physics and mathematical economics from Tulane University, based the first of this two-novella collection on the road trip of Solomon Cross, a college graduate living with his parents, (“you can’t beat the rent”), who finds himself without direction, motivation or meaningful ties in his life. Unlike the “vision quests” or “walkabouts” of other cultures, Cross’s trek is without apparent danger, and little true solitude is involved. Instead, he meets and interacts with strangers who apparently have a similar lack of meaning in their own lives.

“Salted with Salt” shows common folks in everyday situations as they mingle with the stranger in their midst and react to his presence, sometimes with kindness, other times with irritation or indifference. Akley brings the reader into the minds of young men at what could be a turning point in their lives—those last free hours before responsibility to a larger world dominates their minds and hearts—and demonstrates how self-absorption and lack of direction can create a feeling of being lost in the realities of the commonplace. Tethered at both ends by family and friends, Sol Cross’s trip is rich in mundane details, but the real action is in the inner journey that is too private to expose to those he meets. Heading home after a startling event leads to his internment in the Wilford Hall Psychiatric Ward, Cross states: “I left the city just as I’d come, an anonymous traveler...”

In the second novella, “The Altar of Silence,” Akley takes readers into the minds and hearts of three very different young men and deftly shows how their relationships become a volatile mix that offers each character a chance to confront himself, and the reader a chance to look through the eyes of detached, self-absorbed young men trying to make sense of their lives in a world which offers them little in the way of direction, guidance or hope that such a goal is

even possible. Burdened by feelings as diverse as boredom, (John, the narrator), the perception that one must somehow be “special” (Jim), or a terrible secret from the past, (Ray), the three friends are sympathetically portrayed and will lead readers to experience anew the alienation and poignant suffering inherent in each young man’s struggle to find a sense of personal worth and meaning in a world that seems structured to deny both.

Kristine Morris