

## Review of *A Quarter Life* by Tyler Pufpaff

When one shares fragments of their soul in any given way, it is a genuine gift. It is a form of trust, akin to a feline lying on her or his back. Breathing life into artistic creation, on the other hand, takes eight steps further than the aforementioned trust. Confessional poets like Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and Robert Lowell have taken private morsels of brutal truth and set them loose upon the literary wilderness. Like many of his contemporaries, Tyler Pufpaff has done so with his debut chapbook of poems, *A Quarter Life*. While certain collections contain somewhat of a buildup from start to finish, this sampling of finely woven words is a suspenseful non-linear opera, keeping the reader on their toes and never allowing them to breathe for a single millisecond.

There is, however, a remora attached to this paper shark: the subject of mental health. In a century where mental health awareness is not only prevalent, but also widely encouraged, this book stands as a reminder to that fact. It takes an inexplicable amount of valor to reveal vulnerability such as this, especially when surrounded by mortal fingers of inevitable judgment. Some may even go as far as to say that mental health through certain forms of media may be revered or glamourized. This is *not* a celebration. This is *not* glamourization. This is *not* glorification. This is a public service announcement, an intentional electric shock.

The words contained within *A Quarter Life* are not for the faint of heart, but they are for those who wish to find the living embodiment of personal evolution. The catharsis that Pufpaff explores through his words are not only shattered and repaired reflections of himself; there are outward observations that have been documented as well. For example, in the aptly titled 'Insta Poetry', Pufpaff writes the following:

*There is  
no  
cure  
for the  
wickedness  
of man.*

While the stanza itself may be debatable in this day and age, the evidence exposes otherwise. Even though this may not personally represent the author himself, it is a necessary statement in the general sense. Is he testing the reader to see if there is a possible antidote to this wickedness? Is this the prophetic statement that will eliminate our entire species, or is he referring to the *gender* of man? Subjectivity is a beautiful device and it allows us to explore a vast number of unspoken possibilities, even if the work itself is more direct and not cloaked in symbolism.

Another sting in the spinal area occurs when delving into the first of seven haiku that belongs to a more cinematic approach. 'In the movies once: An extended Haiku' is what he calls this string of pearls that contain nuggets of personal wisdom.

*In the movies once  
Someone hung from their ceiling.  
Life flashed before their eyes*

*In the movies once  
Even the villain was changed  
There's hope for me too*

The individual desperately clings to any thread of hope they might find. Unfortunately, salvation does not always arrive in the most positive forms. The most viable solution to exiting the doldrums is not always that obvious.

People who are outsiders and watch their loved ones succumb to a darkness cannot possibly imagine what the organized (or unorganized) chaos within the cranium displays. If there is any human, whether acquaintance or confidante, who has approached someone who struggles with mental health and has stated, "It is all in your head," they are in for a violent awakening. This book proves that fact on multiple occasions. In between trauma (and why one should not trauma bond), untold philosophies of the psyche, and more, *A Quarter Life* is a *must* for 2020. Hold these words as tight as your better half and absorb the aforesaid electricity. I shall leave you with two stanzas of what one may call 'frozen ambiguity' from Pufpaff's confession 'Lines':

*I found myself; drawing lines on tombstones  
Insensate, when I related myself to a line  
incorrectly drawn.*

*Now in another reality  
Looking down at myself,  
With the lines drawn on my arms  
I saw something real.*