

Fractures in a Glass Mind: A Collection of Poetry and Songs

Nicholas C. A. Sparkman

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Nicholas C. A. Sparkman's poetry collection *Fractures in a Glass Mind* holds a jagged shard of a broken mirror to its speaker's mental state and tumultuous emotional life.

These poems, prose poems, song lyrics, brief reflections, and diary entries tackle weighty subjects in dark and thorny territory, including pain, misery, loneliness, and suicidal ideation. They do so with frankness and bravery. "Vigilia," Spanish for wakefulness, recounts being unable to sleep while being plagued by self-doubt. "Gaslighting" tells a tale of deception and betrayal. The charged and electrifying "Let Us Pray..." which is acidic with dripping sarcasm, thanks an indifferent deity for divorce, drug abuse, hatred, and sundry other social ills.

Angst informs much of the work. Emotional candor is clear in entries like "Marks," which opens with the line "wounds become scars." The narrator sometimes seems to fear that their protests will go unheard. This is punctuated by poems like "A Good Cause," in which a disillusioned service member becomes more and more conscious about being a cog in the war machine that leaves so many hurt or worse.

While the book's expressions of inner turmoil are engaging, its tone is at times aggressive to the point of being off-putting. This is true in "Spit," about spitting in someone's face over a litany of offenses. Some lines are overly theatrical. The book is better at traversing mundane territory, as with "Stop," wherein the narrator runs afoul of writer's block while trying to express a mood, wastes time on Facebook, rants about it, smokes a cigarette, and goes to bed. The narrator's suffering and ostracism is best captured when contextualized in such everyday scenes.

Much of the poetry is free verse, but rhyme schemes also play in, most often in rhyming couplets that lend the book a sense of lilting musicality. Rhyming becomes more common near the end of the collection, in which ABAB stanzas with traditional meters impart a more formal feel. These entries dilute the book's otherwise unbridled ferocity.

The formatting of the poems is varied, creative, and mindful, verging at times on concrete poetry and making the text come off of the page. Lean, apt word choices are packed with meaning, though some of the metaphors are hackneyed. Startling imagery is rare, but appears in lines like "Blue suns glow / Off my moon-kissed lips" and "screams of war in a quiet mind." Stock photos and art complement the poems, as when a poem about a soured relationship is followed with the haunting image of a burning chair.

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JOSEPH S. PETE (July 29, 2019)

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