

***A Mouthful of Air*, by Amy Koppelman**

***Two Dollar Radio***

rev. by Tracy DeStefano

*A Mouthful Of Air* is a novel written by Amy Koppelman. This book faced a lot of rejection and criticism in its publication process, due to how dark it is with its depiction of depression. This book follows Julie Davis, a privileged mother and wife who is at war between wanting to love her family, and the depression inside her head telling her that the family would be better off without her. The novel is told in a multiple third person point of view, because we get insight into the characters thoughts and feelings. There are a lot of complex characters and complex relationships within this novel. I think that this was effective because it provided many layers to this story. Julie is the protagonist; mother to Teddy and Rachel and wife to Ethan, battling postpartum depression. She is very observant of others and insecure about her appearance. Julie is obnoxiously privileged: on page 32, she thinks to herself while getting ready

“It’s a basketball game, it’s a beer, drinks after the game, it’s a little fake laugh here and there. It’s not like Ethan’s asking her to work the checkout line at Waldbaum’s”. Ethan is very charismatic for his family, however ignorant with Julie and her mental health. He nicknamed her “Tiny” and told her that she looked better than the cheerleaders at the Knicks game, knowing Julie has a bad relationship with her body and food. Harriet, Julie’s mother, is one of the main roots of her insecurities, due to the comments about her weight and her lack of morals. Georgie is the couples housekeeper, who is constantly envied by Julie because of her motherly nature and relationship with Teddy who she basically raised.

The book begins in New York, 1997, with the reader meeting Julie when she comes back from the mental hospital after a failed suicide attempt right before her sons, Teddy’s, first birthday. The novel follows her struggle to recover and her desperate longing to be the perfect mother and wife. The plot takes us through Julie’s everyday struggles that to anyone else would be an ordinary task, for example: going to a basketball game, getting dinner for her family, or going to a tupperware party. However, now Julie lives a rather privileged life, with a fancy apartment in Manhattan, a nanny to take care of her baby, and has a very supportive husband. This was done to show that depression can happen to anyone, and it is a disease where not even

wealth and a happy family will cure it. Although she had the time, support and resources, this book displays the power that depression has on someone. With the birth of her second child, Rachel, “Some door inside [Julie] swings open. Seized and unhinged” (164).

The language of this novel is very vivid and poetic sounding which evokes a lot of emotion within the reader. For example, “Bumpy pink scars brand her forearms, marking her surrender. She is learning to wear them this way. With every handshake she reveals that she wanted to die,” then expresses the guilt Julie holds, “A mother’s body is no place for a sinner to hide” (page 6).

The tensions in this novel are strong, however lacking depth in a way. Julie has memories of her father leaving her mother and is scared that Ethan will do the same. Although he reassures her that is not going to happen, she can’t help but think “what will happen when her beauty is gone”. Julie has a fixation or obsession with her father throughout the novel. It was revealed later that Ron sexually abused Julie when she was young. The novel details Julie’s inappropriate attraction to her newborn baby Teddy. On page 38, it describes how she is a pervert.

To conclude, I enjoyed this novel, however I would hesitate to recommend it to others. The character array and language is very strong, however the impact on the reader is not effective. It feels uneventful, up until the end, where everything happens at once and leaves you wanting more.