



Ballooning in Stars

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Matthew Edward Schatmeyer's poetry collection *Ballooning in Stars* uses pert lines and playful techniques to celebrate everyday wonders.

Jubilant and inspirational, the entries gathered in this chapbook alight on familiar but happy subjects, rejoicing in the everyday miracles of life. They are exclamatory and free-verse in their treatments of topics like butterflies' comings-of-age (made to represent "most beautiful rebirth!"). And they jump between being grandiose and focused on singular subjects; indeed, some poems are both.

The poems include passionate encouragements, such as to "touch a star... / if you can!" and to "shake a hand, / rub a shoulder, / pat a back, / hug a chest to your own, / to be human..." that exemplify the book's general tone of ongoing exaltation. Truisms arise as well, sometimes consuming whole poems:

*There are times when it is best to...
say nothing.
Times when you must...
say something.
Times when you have to...
say everything.
Anytime?
Say 'I love you!'*

In those entries that contain end rhymes, such effervescence veers into treacherous territory. Further, the book's inclusion of a vague microstory with allegorical tones, "Clearings"—about two forest-dwelling creatures who meet by chance and so bring the world "into balance"—muddies its cohesion and confuses its intentions.

The poems delight in linguistic experimentation: titles flow into opening lines; some words are split for provocative emphasis; and homophonic wordplay is frequent. The use of an echo in "Stone's Throw (Reflection)" makes otherwise familiar lines stand out. The use of internal capitalization is less effective, though, drawing unnecessary extra attention to terms that are heady on their own.

Further, the poems sometimes lose their centers amid their dances through stretched metaphors and similes: “Ballooning” bookends its musings on flying machines with spiritual references, but in such a way that neither topic is well fleshed out, and the six lines of “Impulse” evoke multiple galactic bodies to make their amorphous point about existence. Elsewhere, the book’s use (and sometimes lack) of punctuation is haphazard: ellipses appear often, and in places that force awkward pauses; abrupt line breaks interrupt the flow of poems; and entries trail off without clear conclusions.

Images that are neon-bright in their enthusiasm, as with the opening reference to a laughing porpoise jumping from the ocean’s “turquoise truth,” appear throughout. Pebbles, stars, and flowers are referenced on repeat too. Indeed, “See Change (About Time)” delights in the fact that

*Yet, I'm changing.
More than a star,
less than a cloud,
a little like the flower.*

Elsewhere,

*A comet's icy trail
hangs as God's etching
in the heavens.*

Surprises are few among these glittering images, though, and many are too imprecise to be memorable—as in “Dew,” where either a cloud or the title subject is made plural without explanation or interrogation, and with a reference to “three billion heartbeats” that calls its poem’s time period and setting into question. Further, some of the book’s references are so personal that they jar audiences out of their entries’ reveries—as with a sudden reference to a pet, Onyx, who is not revealed to be a pet at first, and whose name appears right after lines on changing colors in the trees.

Quiet spirituality marks the poems collected in *Ballooning in the Stars*, a familiar and comforting chapbook.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (November 28, 2023)

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