

## Defining Atlas

### Stone Michaels

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*This inspiring collection is filled with prayerful self-examination.*

Stone Michaels's *Defining Atlas* contains poems that illuminate both the poet himself and the God he gives all glory to. In plainspoken language, Michaels praises God while exploring the everyday heartache we all endure. The result is a collection that many will find inspiring through its prayerful self-examination.

Most often, Michaels's poems posit that this life is merely a passageway to the eternal. In "Just Passing Through," the poet writes, "The things that I see / The things that I am / Will not be always / Because I know that through it all / It is not my way." Similarly, in "Invincible," the speaker states, "I am a dreamer, seeing the way beyond what's here." It is in such lines, ringing with the poet's own faith, that Michaels shows his belief in the goodness of God's plan for all individuals.

There is, however, a good deal of repetition throughout the book and within individual poems. The previously mentioned "Invincible," as well as pieces like "Dying to Live" and "Limited," unnecessarily repeat lines and phrases. Further editing would make the poetry more succinct and powerful. Similarly, eliminating the majority of the text's ellipses—and perhaps replacing them with line breaks or periods—would also serve to emphasize language and imagery rather than vague pauses.

Such editing suggestions seem especially valid since Michaels's short poems are the highlight of the collection. "The Soul of the Dream Chaser" is a spare four lines, but each word feels purposeful and necessary. "Black Paper" and "The Deaf Messenger" are similar in their brevity and starkness. In the latter poem, Michaels writes: "A sound is not as important as what caused it / And my sound will be the last message for the Body." These short poems also feel the darkest in content, and contrast interestingly with the pieces that serve mainly to worship God.

Rhyme is utilized throughout the poems. Though certain instances do demonstrate an ear for rhythm, the lines that feel most successful are those that do not force end rhymes. That said, many of Michaels's pieces feel as though they would have their greatest impact by being read aloud.

*Defining Atlas* brings together poems that look both upward toward heaven and at the earth beneath our feet. Within the collection, Michaels seems to shoulder the weight of his own burdens while seeking to show others a path that will lead to paradise.

MARGARET FEDDER (August 24, 2015)

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