



★ **Man of the World**

Layne Maheu

Chatwin Books (Oct 30, 2021)

Softcover \$17.00 (278pp)

978-1-63398-087-7

The skies are seductive to a young man from the French countryside in Layne Maheu's spellbinding historical novel *Man of the World*.

Auguste is the son of an apple farmer, for whom days replicate in calm form, in whom thrives a thirst for romance—not just with Simone, his bright childhood friend, but among the lights and glamour of Paris. Such grand excursions seem a distant dream before a hot air balloon drops into his orchard, carrying two daredevils headed for a display of the Wright brothers' aerial machine.

Auguste is swept up in the wonder of that witnessed flight. He's soon ensconced as airman Hubert Latham's apprentice. In Latham's glitzy circles, fearless men are encouraged to break records with the dangerous flying machines—many of which remain in the early stages of development. Auguste is awed as the chattering metal and fabric contraptions take to the sky; behind the scenes, the madness of those endeavors is more apparent. And Latham's unhealthy drive to achieve historical distinction is also witnessed by Antoinette, the waifish beauty after whom his machine is named, and for whom his desire is insatiable.

Rich, gorgeous images capture the excitement and promise of the era. These include the views from the balloon that Auguste first rises above the tilled earth in, of "an endless cloudscape [and] fleeting castles of the sky," and of the balloon's "shadow, rippling in and out over the chasms." Grand parades and performances are preserved: aerialist displays in balloons meant only for show; great crowds gathering beneath World's Fair tents and at inventor exhibitions. Latham, who's charmed by "suicidal daydreams," pulls Auguste through this alluring world—perhaps toward ultimate freedom; perhaps toward infamy.

The untamable sky awaits the defiant adventurers who wish to ride it in the stunning historical novel *Man of the World*.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2021)

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