

Seidel, Frederick  
THE COSMOS POEMS  
Pictures by Anselm Kiefer  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (112 pp.)  
\$100.00  
January 2000  
ISBN 0-374-13020-5

This limited-edition collection of verse and pictures was commissioned by the American Museum of Natural History in New York to inaugurate and celebrate their new planetarium at the Rose Center for Earth and Space. Seidel, the author of several previous books of poetry, contributes thirty-three new poems to this effort. They are accompanied by Kiefer's full-color lithographs. The poet has clearly done his homework and knows the lingo peculiar to astrophysics and quantum mechanics. He speaks of the original eleven-dimensional space-time and the massless spin-2 particle, but insertion of these clunky terms into poetic stanzas is often awkward. At other times, he is given to rhapsodic verse such as, "I like the speed of light." (Good thing, too. It's the law in these parts.) In between are a handful of enjoyable poems, such as "Supersymmetry" and "Morning of the Universe" that express childish delight and awe at the marvelous workings of the universe, poems which present concrete images of Planet Earth rather than intergalactic abstractions. In how many ways can a poet be expected to metaphorically describe the Big Bang in a *faux enfant* voice without repeating himself? And after seeing a half-dozen pictures of plants superimposed upon pictures of galaxies, how interesting a departure are the next ten going to be? A better method for commissioning such a work might have been to elicit poems and pictures from a number of poets and artists.

Unless a gravitational anomaly is likely to cause your coffee table to float away into space, you aren't likely to need such an expensive book.