

Interview with Charles Simic

FRONT PORCH: Prose poetry is often chastised as being a bastard child of prose and poetics. That changed somewhat, at least critically, when you won the Pulitzer Prize in 1990. How do you think the American prose poem has changed since the success of *The World Doesn't End*?

CHARLES SIMIC: People still write prose poems but I don't think that they resemble mine which were exceedingly short and had their own zany humor.

FP: "Surreal" has been the most common adjective describing your work throughout your career, and it is commonly used to describe prose poetry as well. What keeps you returning to surrealism?

CS: It's a label that means nothing to me. I was interested in surrealism forty years ago but no longer read it. The label has stuck, because the critics are lazy to think of another one.

FP: Since you are quite active with translation, how do you perceive the current climate of translation among American poets? Do any particular younger poets catch your attention in this field?

CS: There's not enough translation being done. We are once again an insular culture that has little interest in other literatures. Plus, people know foreign languages less and less. Of course, there are many poets out there worth knowing.

FP: Your critical writings have covered a variety of topics, including poetry. Do you feel that the poet has any responsibility to comment on the genre in which he or she writes?

CS: None. It's up to the poet.

FP: You were recently appointed Poet Laureate, which is a rare instance of celebrity for a poet living in America. Is this uncomfortable in any way? Which perks delight you most?

CS: So far I haven't discovered the perks. There must be some. What I get is dozens of requests every day from people who want me to drop everything, read their manuscripts and arrange to have it published.

—interview conducted by Trey Moody via email on September 27, 2007