Research Profile

Charles Simic – Inspired by New Hampshire

“Good friends, beautiful winters, and great parking spaces”

This is what initially drew poet, essayist, and professor emeritus of English Charles Simic to the University of New Hampshire in the early 1970’s. “The whole place was very pleasant,” he shares, his love for the country life in New Hampshire eventually coming through in his poetry. “Living in Strafford near Bow Lake has influenced me. The woods, the weather, the local animals… dogs, cats, cows, chickens… they all got into the poems.”


Traveling Poet

2014 has been a busy year for Charles Simic. Aside from his various writing projects, he has traveled to both Mexico and Poland.

In late March, Simic was invited to attend a celebration in Mexico City to honor poet Octavio Paz. Having been an acquaintance of Paz’s, Simic was familiar with Mexico City. He participated in the 3-day event, writing a 2-page reminiscence of Octavio Paz and reading poetry during his stay.

Simic traveled to Warsaw, Poland in May to receive the Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award, presented to “recognize outstanding artistic and intellectual literary achievements on the world stage which have a bearing on the world of values towards which Zbigniew Herbert’s work gravitated.” Simic was surprised one Saturday morning to receive the call informing him of the award, although he had met Herbert two or three times, reviewed his work, and written a preface to one of his books, Zbigniew Herbert: The Collected Prose, 1948-1998. At the award ceremony, Simic’s first time visiting Poland, he also delivered a lecture on poetry.

On Teaching

As part of the MFA faculty, Simic comes across 4 to 6 new poets yearly, all eager to learn from the world-renowned Pulitzer Prize winner and former U.S. Poet Laureate. It is clear how he influences his students; his advice to poets is to “read a lot. There are so many stages of influence. A lot of what one writes is a reaction to what one has read.” And while this is an important lesson he gives writers, it is also interesting to see how teaching has influenced his own writing. “I read so many fine poems from students and [they] recall for me what good poetry is. [They] spur me to do something myself. Someone once said, ‘One good poem deserves another good poem,’ and I believe that.”
Little Icons: A local artist creates paintings inspired by the poetry of Charles Simic

Portsmouth artist and salon owner John Angelopoulos created a series of paintings inspired by the early poetry of Charles Simic. Describing the paintings as “little icons” reminiscent of Byzantine-era mosaics, Angelopoulos’ work depicts the darkness and humor present in Simic’s internationally acclaimed poetry.

The paintings were displayed in the Special Collections of the UNH Dimond Library in October of 2013. The exhibit, “Relaxing in a Madhouse, Paintings by John Angelopoulos, Poems by Charles Simic,” featured Simic’s original poems alongside Angelopoulos’ interpretations.

To explore more:

The Great Poets’ Brawl of ’68

Charles Simic – Laureate of the Zbigniew Herbert Literary Award 2014

Charles Simic, Poet
http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/charles-simic

MFA Program in Writing at the University of New Hampshire
http://cola.unh.edu/english/program/writing-mfa

An excerpt from

New and Selected Poems: 1962-2012
by Charles Simic

SOLITUDE
There now, where the first crumb
Falls from the table
You think no one hears it
As it hits the floor.

But somewhere already
The ants are putting on
Their Quaker hats
And setting out to visit you.

© The Farmer,
John Angelopoulos

© A Landscape of Crutches,
John Angelopoulos

Story by Cynthia Plascencia with contributions by Michael Thompson and Lynnette Hentges 8/7/14