



That Little Something

Charles Simic

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In his eighteenth collection, Charles Simic, the superb poet of the vaguely ominous sound and the disturbing, potentially significant image, moves closer to the dark heart of history and human behavior.

Simic understands the strange interplay between ordinary life and extremes, between reality and imagination, and he writes with absolute purity about those contradictory but simultaneous states of being or feeling:

"Everything about you / My life, is both / Make-believe and real."

A profoundly important poet for our time, and a stunning book.

SECRET HISTORY

Of the light in my room:

Its mood swings,

Dark-morning glooms,

Summer ecstasies.

Spider on the wall,

Lamp burning late,

Shoes left by the bed,

I'm your humble scribe.

Dust balls, simple souls

Conferring in the corner.

The pearl earring she lost,

Still to be found.

Silence of falling snow,

Night vanishing without trace,

Only to return.

I'm your humble scribe.

That Little Something Details

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Author : Charles Simic

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Genre : Poetry

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From Reader Review That Little Something for online ebook

Jennn says

Unfortunately I didn't enjoy this book as much as I thought I would when I was thumbing through it. The length of each poem is good and it reads easy enough, but the gems for me were few and far between. It felt like there were boundaries around each poem and even though he would sometimes stick a toe out, he would remain inside where it was safe and publishable. That is, he's a good poet and I could see how he would fit right into the writing community, but to me, that's not enough. I like to see poets leap into the fire, and jump out of their secure and dependable margins that are a sure "shoe-in" for awards and publications. I want there to be something at risk. Poetry is such an emotional experience, I want to be moved.

Many of his poems were nostalgic and reflective. "Walking" kicked off the book and was thoughtful. "The Elevator is Out of Order" continues the pace, but with a surprising dash of sexuality: "The one who let you feel her breasts/Vanished upstairs. The name is not familiar,/But the scratches of her nails are." I really liked the end of "Dramatic Evenings" (one of the best poems, I thought): "And watch the flakes come down/Languidly, one at a time,/On the broken bird feeder and the old dog's grave." "Devil and Eve" was quite clever. I really loved "Impersonator of Blank Walls": "In school you liked erasers/More than you did pencils" – the whole thing was pretty brilliant. "Listen" was dark, but captivating: "One can hear a fire engine/In the distance,/But not the cries for help". "To the Reader" made me smile and was another clever one.

Sometimes I thought his poems were a bit pretentious, which is, perhaps, why his book is a whopping \$23 instead of the usual \$15 or \$7 (it was hard cover, but still, for 73 pages, I find that pretty expensive). Some lines that struck me as such include: "Wine had bloodied your lips and tongue", "The stars were lit like candles" (Wonders of the Invisible World), "Bring a whiff of freshly cut roses//And the sight of men in black/In a hurry to lower the heavy coffin/So it can ride Satan's luxury train" (Come Winter), "That sleepwalking waiter/Carrying plates of burgers and fries,/Is he coming to our table,/Or is he going to walk out of this place?/He's going to walk out" (The Late Game), "The season of fabulous feasts is coming./Mouthwatering dishes of new evils/Are on the way to your table" (Gourmets of Tragedies).

Bottomline: Some gems, but not my style.

Sarah says

Quite a few poems were great and I loved them, yet I don't feel that this collection was memorable as a whole and I probably won't be reading it again, personally. However, Simic summed up the little things in life well, even if there were a decent amount of poems that didn't describe little things, but big things in a little way; this bugged me while I was in a good mood, irritated when I wasn't. This was the purpose, turns out, but I don't like how the two contrasted. I wanted either one or the other, depending on the circumstance of reading, not both. But overall, her gets a good score, I guess. I'll give it a 4 instead of 3 because I can perform a few of these poems along with this year's speech piece. And, it does make me curious as to his other books.

Plus, I bought a signed copy. Pow! (Haha)

Colin says

This was my first full-book experience with Charles Simic. I'm not sure I can adequately sum it up at this point. The qualities I'll mention at the moment are: an atmospheric sense of darkness, religious imagery and references, the reappearance of words and images throughout the collection, and an interesting sense of the "eternal" in every-day moments. Simic returns to the word "eternity" several times during the first three parts, and then Part Four is devoted to several short pieces under the title of "Eternities" followed by the concluding piece, "Eternity's Orphans."

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Joan Gelfand says

I read Simic in the New Yorker, and wherever he turns up in magazines, but this was the first collection that I bought. I love it. Simic is inventive, deep, possesses a moving historical context/world view, and is very, very accessible.

Now, here's the magic of poetry collections and why all serious readers should own a good sized shelf of them: Last night, when I learned that a dear friend was diagnosed w/stage 3 cancer, I needed a good, deep poem. I picked up this book and turned to "Summer Dawn." There could not have been a more perfect, elegant, graceful expression of the life/death paradox in that moment.

Mira Jundi says

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Ashraf Ali says

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Rachel Hope Miranda says

Simic, Charles. *That Little Something*. 1st. New York: Mariner Books, 2008. Print.

Charles Simic writes with a passion; he writes of dark irony, and purity in emotion, contradiction and human life. Simic's eighteenth poem collection *That Little Something* digs into the human experience with passion and nonchalance that is fresh to the poetic world. At Simic's best, he incorporates words and ideas in such accuracy and depth that to take a step back from his work creates a new and vivid understanding of life. At his worst, some of his poetry seems contrived as well as repetitive.

That Little Something fills the reader with notions of imagination mixed with the realistic themes of life, necessary for relation. The title poem "That Little Something" questions motives, asking the reader to look more closely upon their reasoning, their life and even accept the possibility that yes, maybe we have all been "making it up" (our reasoning, our motives) but even then, we still find ourselves searching for the inevitably unanswerable or lost. It is this idea that Simic comes back to continually through the stretch of his work. His work brings out the unavoidable truth in life, the overlooked passions and heroes of yesterday, reality stricken and now matters of the past that "no one recalls", the constant wars and battles both internal and external that plague our cities and selves, as well as the beauty in life, forgotten by our constant revolutions, only found in silence, and apparent when we are able to remove ourselves from the deafening cries of our own existence.

Simic's poetry within *That Little Something*, though well written and mainly consistent in awing and amazing his readers, seems to stick to the same subjects consistently throughout the book, and when veering from these subjects lacks substance and even reason. Broken up into four sections, Simic's work holds the expectation of variety, enticing his readers and regrettably letting them down. Section I deals with a more inward focused theme, invisibility of self to the world, and the comfort in the loss of self rather than embracement of it. Section II continues this theme while incorporating the ideas of fighting and war, burning and shadows into the mix – again falling invisible to the crowd but this time in the midst of the tragic. Section III again supports these ideas but holds a different tone as Simic seems to be calling to his reader for reaction, for a voice, while Section IV fades into the back ground again, structurally with untitled poems, and aesthetically as the pieces reads as mere fragments and blurs of previously stated passions. Simic's subject matter throughout the individual poems can also be finicky. The problem lies in the works that seem unnecessary; though in quantity the themes of his poems are generally awe inspiring, the reality is that all aren't. In side by side comparison some fail miserably in meaning, while other soar to the ranks of creative genius.

Taken as a whole *That Little Something* fulfills its pre-written expectations of "purity" in emotion and passion in human-kinds "contradictory but simultaneous states of being and feeling"; Simic brings to life what is lost from our busy society and war-driven world, while realistically portraying the contrasting emotions we all feel and have felt. His work embraces reality with a depth common to poetry, but uncommon within the subject matter he chooses. Even in his weaker or unnecessary poems there is a reality

that is fresh, honest and sincere. Simic's ability to acknowledge and purposefully create consistent and authentic works that continually inspire thought and passion in his readers is a task that is refreshing in modern poetry, a task that all writers should learn and equally master.

Courtney Johnston says

Where 'Frightening Toys' crept into me, 'That Little Something' slipped by me. When they hit me, Simic's poems have an x-ray-like precision (that is, a kind of powerful observation that is still mysterious around the edges) - yesterday, the focus was lacking. The fault is mine as the reader, not Simic's as a writer.

Having said that, one or two still slipped through. 'Impersonator of Blank Walls' reminds me so strongly of two boys - men, I guess - that I know. I could imagine both of them telling me these stories.

Even as a child you sought to be invisible.
When it was time for dinner,
You went and hid under the bed
And let them search for you everywhere.

In school you liked erasers
More than you did pencils.
Empty rooms at dusk meant more to you
Than going to the movies.

Your date waited for you in the park,
While you sat in your kitchen
Cutting your head and neck
Out of old family photographs,

Giving yourself again the appearance
You had on snowy evenings,
Coming home to your parents
With your hair and eyebrows all white.

'Wire Hangers' slipped through because it's so prosaic yet so evocative.

All they need
Is one little red dress
To start swaying
In that empty closet

For the rest of them
To nudge each other,
Clicking like knitting needles

Or disapproving tongues.

It's such a small step from there to the scarlet-clad girl sashaying down the street while the old biddies cluck and flap. And the girl, hearing them, is not in the least ashamed, but instead takes their chatter and rolls it into the rhythm of her hips. She's a hot spot in a grey world and she doesn't care who knows it.

And then, 'Eternity's Orphans'. This one ... this one. I have a friend who is a painter. He used to paint these longing, yearning pictures of dream women. Then he was told that this was inappropriate. So he painted longing, yearning paintings of cats and birds and dogs. And it sounds funny, but it's not. He took all that wanting, all the quiet, long-held desire, and he kept on whispering it out in his paintings, and it was all there if you could see it. If you wanted to see it.

We all read ourselves into things. Whether it's a grey cat with green eyes who stands in for the love of your life or a poem about a single, reckless, perfect act, we walk through a world that is what we make of it.

'Eternity's Orphans'

One night you and I were walking.
The moon was so bright
We could see the path under the trees.
Then the clouds came and hid it
So we had to grope our way
Till we felt the sand under our bare feet,
And heard the pounding waves.

Do you remember telling me,
'Everything outside this moment is a lie'?
We were undressing in the dark
Right at the water's edge
When I slipped the watch off my wrist
And without being seen or saying
Anything in reply, I threw it into the sea.

M- S__ says

I was tremendously disappointed in this book. Simic is a writer who I keep making notes to myself to read. All of his work that I have seen anthologized or in magazines has really struck and stuck with me, but this collection had none of that. By the end of the book, just about every poem felt like it was dwelling on the whole idea of writing being a conversation "Late Night Chat" and "To the Reader" I found particularly offputting in this regard. Every subject seemed so tame. All of the sex was impotent. There was a strange recurring image of a man crawling about on all fours looking for something that stood out to me as an apt metaphor for the whole book. *That Little Something* was a book crawling about blind looking for something

to say.

Ahmed Salim says

[illegible]

Robert Beveridge says

Charles Simic, *That Little Something* (Harcourt, 2008)

Charles Simic is stepping down from the post of Poet Laureate a year early because, he says, being Poet Laureate keeps him away from doing what he loves best-- writing poetry. And honestly, as much as I like seeing Simic, unarguably one of America's best living poets, in such a position, anything that gets him to be more prolific is perfectly fine with me.

I have to say that Simic's distraction is noticeable in some of these poems, but really, when Simic brings his A game to the table, he's still matchless:

"The two of us just barely visible,
Ghostlike looking from high up
At the wet cobblestones,
The one pigeon who appeared hurt,
Who wanted to be somewhere else
And did his best to get there,
Limping badly and stopping to rest."
("One Wing of the Museum")

It's getting kind of boring saying "another winner from Charles Simic," but I'll put up with the boredom as long as Simic keeps turning out my favorite books of any given year. Wonderful, as usual. ****

Jamison says

If this was my first reading of a book by Simic I'd have given it four stars, there are some truly well crafted poems in here. Unfortunately, I've read enough of his books to have grown sick of words like eternity and invisible that give an occult feel to poor-house culture.

My favorite poem in this entire book is also the only prose poem in it; in "Late-Night Chat" he breaks his

form in a really exciting way only to immediately return to what he's comfortable with and great at. But it's like an incredible magic trick. You can watch it the first 10 times without losing your sense of amazement, but if you keep watching your interest will eventually slip.

Simic's amazing at what he does and he's delivered one incredible collection after the other but when I see a poem like "Late-Night Chat" (which combines the best elements of his poems with the best elements of work in Dime Store Alchemy and The World Doesn't End) I get my hopes up for something new. If that something new is a fluke, then I've gotten excited over nothing.

After all my griping I'm still more than happy to pick up any of his books and let myself be thrilled over his ability to present a quick image that tells an epic story through what it implies.

And as a plus, this is one of his more violent books.

Kasandra says

Simic never fails to inspire. He's bizarre, funny, full of feeling, concise, and a perfect commentator for the crazy, messed-up, beautiful, awful world we live in, both inside and outside ourselves. Delightful.

FWK says

poetry either knocks me dead or leaves me untouched, and unfortunately this little collection falls into the latter category. there is certainly quality in those verses, but they failed to catch my attention.
