

THE LUNATIC

Poems

By Charles Simic

96 pp. Ecco. 2015.

Charles Simic (b. 1938) spent the war years in Belgrade, emigrated to the US in 1954, and settled in Oak Park, Illinois. He left the University of Chicago to serve in the military, completing his studies at New York University. Simic has earned many literary awards (including the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry), and in 2007, was named US Poet Laureate. *The Lunatic* (2015), a collection of seventy poems, is among dozens of his books. In his spare, stark imagery, Simic evokes an émigré's past, an unsettledness, with a droll sensibility. "What ever became of my youth?" he asks in "The Stray" (43). In "Meet Eddie," he describes a man whose life is "as merry as a beer can" (15). Simic's language is precise: swat, huddle, scrub, toddle, fret, flick, noose, insomniac, and needs no embellishment—"pinched smile" (66) being an exception. Poem titles reveal nothing but the reader's assumptions. "Autumn Evening" is about a goldfish thrown into a rain puddle; it ends "Yeah, poor fish." Who could have known? The "lunatic" of the book title is not Hitler as one may suspect, whom Simic referred to elsewhere as his "travel agent," but a snowflake "falling out of the gray sky / All afternoon, / Falling and falling / And picking itself up / Off the ground, / To fall again, . . ." (5). —Lisa Thaler, author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*, 27 December 2020