

Past-Lives Therapy

By Charles Simic

They explained to me the bloody bandages
On the floor in the maternity ward in Rochester, N.Y.,
Cured the backache I acquired bowing to my old master,
Made me stop putting thumbtacks round my bed.

They showed me an officer on horseback,
Waving a saber next to a burning farmhouse
And a barefoot woman in a nightgown,
Throwing stones after him and calling him Lucifer.

I was a straw-headed boy in patched overalls.
Come dark a chicken would roost in my hair.
Some even laid eggs as I played my ukulele
And my mother and father crossed themselves.

Next, I saw myself inside an abandoned gas station
Constructing a spaceship out of a coffin,
Red traffic cone, cement mixer and ear warmers,
When a church lady fainted seeing me in my underwear.

Some days, however, they opened door after door,
Always to a different room, and could not find me.
There'd be only a small squeak now and then,
As if a miner's canary got caught in a mousetrap.

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