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REVIEW: *Mestre dos disfarces* by Charles Simic. Introduction and Translations by Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins and Maysa Cristina da Silva Dourado. Rio de Janeiro: Editora 7 Letras, 2021.

Mestre dos disfarces (in English, *Master of Disguises*) is a welcome celebration of North American poet Charles Simic's work in Portuguese translation. This splendid collection begins with a short preface by Maria Clara Paro that outlines the book and introduces the Serbian-born poet to a Portuguese-speaking audience. An introduction to the anthology by both translators follows the preface and explains how each of them came to know Simic's work, and subsequently met him in person and collaborated on this book project. It is clear from start to finish that the attention to, and refinement of, the translations comes from a deepened, academic-based knowledge of, and genuine admiration for, Charles Simic (b. 1938) and his oeuvre.

The book itself is divided into two parts: the first part is devoted to prose and the second to poetry. The prose selections consist of three significant essays by Simic translated by Maysa Cristina da Silva Dourado, who as a doctoral student gained access to Simic's archival materials housed at the University of New Hampshire where he was teaching and served as her adviser. The first essay is a mini-memoir—told in the first person—that presents the beginnings of Simic's life through childhood memories in former Yugoslavia during World War II. The second essay—a reflection on poetry and history—asserts the narrative capacity of poets to register barbarous and inhumane atrocities more intimately and vividly than overarching historical accounts. The final essay addresses contradictory notions of paradise and horror from the point of view of an immigrant who confronts contrasting expectations and realities in a new country. Even without the English originals to accompany the translations, these prose pieces in Portuguese seem faithful and fluid.

The poetry section consists of fifty poems presented in both English and Portuguese, with impeccable translations by Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins. This bilingual arrangement presents us with a chronological

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assortment from the poet's oeuvre, beginning with early works and ending with more recent ones. If, as I did, you alternate reading the English originals and then the Portuguese, you hear Simic's voice resonate twofold, as an unerring echo of one language flowing into the other, a testament to the power of the poems as well as to the quality of the translations.

Occasionally there are differences in word choice, but these choices never alter the tone or rarely upend the underlying meaning of the originals. For instance, in the poem "St. Thomas Aquinas" a "saintly-looking nurse" (95) becomes "enfermeira com jeito de santa," the Portuguese capturing more action than appearance. Or in the emblematic war poem "Two Dogs," "a little white dog" (104) becomes "um cãozinho assustado," the color "white" being substituted by "frightened," as if, perhaps, inferring meaning from "white with fright"? One of the difficult words to translate from English into Portuguese—the word "mice"—appears in several poems. In "The Tiger," the line "There were even some no bigger than mice," is translated by the word "ratos," which seems to conjure larger rodents (rats) and, thus, acquire stronger meaning in Portuguese. The same word appears in at least two other poems without this contrast in meaning and proportion. In "Old Man," the mice "running in the night" seem appropriate to the "ratos" in Portuguese. Likewise, in "Dance of the Macabre Mice" the larger dimension implied in "ratos" seems most appropriate to the spine-chilling tone of the poem.

Readers of this anthology learn far more than the rich and engaging (and topical) breadth and depth of Simic's literary range. They experience his varied life experiences and gift for storytelling as well. Through prose pieces and poems, we garner a sense of Simic as a multifaceted and worldly-wise human being: from his childhood in Belgrade during war times, under German and Russian occupations; from his experiences crossing borders as an immigrant; from his impressions of everyday life in cities such as Chicago and New York; from his word and imagery pairings; from his eroticism; from his light-hearted humor (in "Café Paradiso," his playful food poetics are a favorite [128]); from his deep-seated attention to social concerns; as well as from the lightness with which he captures sensory elements and seasonal variation, such as

in his beautifully-rendered ode to Spring, “O Spring” (160). This exquisite volume captures it all.

This book is certainly a fine gift to Portuguese-speakers who are now able to read Simic’s prose and poetry. Moreover, it serves as a steady compass to other translators. This volume shines due to the dedication both Brazilian scholars have for translation, which in turn, found correspondence in Simic’s own devotion to the craft. Additionally, this collection is a timely commemoration of perseverance and resilience in times of conflict and crisis. His sobering line from “Paradise Motel,” “I lived well, but life was awful” (122) reverberates, as it gives life’s vitality and its inhumanity equal weightiness. Charles Simic’s poetic voice rings ever true today, as a lifeline to our human sustainability and endurance.