

CHARLES SIMIC

A Reunion with Boredom

Charles Simic was born in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1938, and lived there until his family immigrated from his war-torn country when he was sixteen. He is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, essayist, and translator, author of over thirty poetry collections and eight collections of prose, translator of fourteen poetry collections, and professor emeritus of American literature and creative writing at the University of New Hampshire.

"A Reunion with Boredom" was originally published on Simic's blog at the New York Review of Books in 2011. Though it might seem ironic that an essay about the downsides of our ubiquitous computers first appeared in such a forum, note as you read the ways in which Simic is not simply antitechnology.

Do people still suffer from periods of boredom even with computers, smart phones, and tablets to occupy them endlessly? There's also television, of course, which in homes of many Americans is on twenty-four hours a day, making it harder and harder to find a quiet place to sit and think. Even neighborhood bars, the old refuge of introspective loners, now have huge TV screens alternating between sports and chatter to divert them from their thoughts. As soon as college students are out of class, cell phones, and iPods materialize in their hands, requiring full concentration and making them instantly oblivious of their surroundings. I imagine Romeo and Juliet would send text messages to each other today as they strolled around Verona, though I find it hard to picture Hamlet advising Ophelia to betake herself to a nunnery.

These and other thoughts came to me as I sat in a dark house for three days in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene. Being without lights and water is a fairly common experience for those of us who live in rural areas on roads lined with old trees. Every major rainstorm or snowstorm is almost certain to bring down the lines, which, because of the relative scarcity of population, are a low