

Baby Pictures
of Famous Dictators · *Charles Simic*

The epoch of a streetcar drawn by horses;
The organ-grinder and his monkey.
Women with parasols. Little kids in rowboats
Photographed against a cardboard backdrop depicting
an idyllic sunset
At the fairgrounds where they all went to see
The two-headed calf, the bearded
Fat lady who dances the dance of the seven veils.

And the great famine raging through India . . .
Fortune-telling white rats pulling a card out of a shoebox,
While Edison worries over the lightbulb,
And the first model of the sewing machine
Is delivered in a pushcart
To a modest white-fenced home in the suburbs.

Where there are always a couple of infants
Posing for the camera in their sailor's suits
Out there in the backyard overgrown with shrubs.
Loveable little mugs smiling faintly toward
The new century. Innocent, why not?
All of them like ragdolls of the period
With those chubby porcelain heads
That shut their long eyelashes as you lay them down.

In a kind of perpetual summer twilight
One can even make out the shadow of the tripod and
the black hood
That must have been quivering in the breeze.
One assumes that they all stayed up late sitting
under the stars
And were carried to bed by their mothers and big sisters
While the dogs remained behind:
Pedigreed bitches pregnant with bloodhounds.