Take Heart: A Conversation in Poetry

Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair, Maine Poet Laureate

Carl Little of Somesville is both a poet and widely published interpreter of Maine painting. He bases today’s entry on a remark once made by the New Hampshire resident and former US Poet Laureate, Charles Simic, a relentless reviser of his poems.

Last Writes
by Carl Little

“I tinker with most of my poems even after publication. I expect to be revising in my coffin as it is being lowered into the ground.”
— Charles Simic

At the wake for the ex-U.S. poet laureate
at the Hotel Fin du Monde someone swore
he heard a scratching sound in the casket

and later, as we wedged the box into
a rocky corner of a New Hampshire bone orchard,
one of the pall bearers, a pallid poet with
acute hearing, caught the sibilant sound
of the words being crossed out ——“kissing”
substituted for “praying”, perhaps, or

“lover” for “beloved”——the gentle rub
of eraser, the whisper of a breath
to remove residue from the paper

and the click of the miner’s lamp
Simic insisted wearing on his head
in lieu of the standard issue laurel wreath.

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