



PESSIMISM IN CHARLES SIMIC'S SELECTED POEMS

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Abstract: Pessimism is an attitude of hopelessness toward existential meaning where it is having the tendency to see the bad side of things. This study explores how pessimism is presented in Charles Simic's Selected Poems and what is the significance of pessimism is in the selected poems. This study applies qualitative research using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic of poetry to analyze pessimism in three of Charles Simic's selected poems, "The Grass", "The Prompter", and "Evening Walk." Through heuristic and hermeneutic readings, the research identifies ungrammaticalities and reconstructs hypograms to uncover deeper layers of meaning. The findings reveal that Simic's poetry emphasizes pessimism by writing it using metaphor and simile in free verse. These semiotic structures convey themes of resistance, cultural pride, and historical reclamation. Ultimately, the study highlights how poetry functions as a powerful medium for resisting systemic oppression and reclaiming identity.

Keyword: Pessimism, Charles Simic, Poems, semiotic of poetry

Abstrak: Pesimisme adalah sikap putus asa terhadap makna eksistensial yang cenderung melihat sisi buruk dari berbagai hal. Studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana pesimisme disajikan dalam Puisi-puisi Pilihan Charles Simic dan apa signifikansi pesimisme dalam puisi-puisi pilihan tersebut. Studi ini menerapkan penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan semiotika puisi Michael Riffaterre untuk menganalisis pesimisme dalam tiga puisi pilihan Charles Simic, "The Grass", "The Prompter", dan "Evening Walk." Melalui pembacaan heuristik dan hermeneutik, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi ketidakgramatikalitas dan merekonstruksi hipogram untuk mengungkap lapisan makna yang lebih dalam. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa puisi Simic menekankan pesimisme dengan menuliskannya menggunakan metafora dan simile dalam syair bebas. Struktur semiotik ini menyampaikan tema perlawanan, kebanggaan budaya, dan reklamasi sejarah. Pada akhirnya, studi ini menyoroti bagaimana puisi berfungsi sebagai media yang ampuh untuk melawan penindasan sistemik dan merebut kembali identitas.

Kata Kunci: Pesimisme, teori Semiotik, Puisi, Charles Simic

Introduction

Pessimism is an attitude of hopelessness toward existential meaning where it is having the tendency to see the bad side of things. As stated in Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word pessimism originates from the Latin word 'pessimus', which means 'worst'. According to Hecht (2013), The pessimist tends to focus excessively on

negative aspects, often overlooking or disregarding the positive elements of a situation. Almost all these features are reflected in Simic's several poems and novels.

Charles Simic was a Serbian-born American poet. Simic born in Yugoslavia (now Serbia) where he had traumatic childhood during World War II. Later he

moved with his family to the United States. Charles Simic's first poems were published in 1959. Most of his early poems drew on his imagery of rural and European subjects at that time, such as the impacts of the wars in his past and how it is affecting his views of life.

The Grass, The Prompter, and Evening Walk were written by Charles Simic in simple style yet layered with complex and profound symbolic meaning. According to Riffaterre (1978: 1), poetry conveys something indirectly. The indirectness of expression contained in poetry is the attraction of poetry compared to other literary works. This semiotic complexity makes poetry a powerful tool for exploring ideological view such as pessimism. This study is based on Riffaterre's Semiotics of Poetry framework, which appears in the unique language and symbolism.

These selected poems were chosen because all of these poems discuss the mixed race of Afro-Guyanese who were being mistreated by white people. The selected poems above should be comprehended to find their meaning and significance. Sometimes, readers have difficulty understanding the meaning because the meaning is not conveyed directly (Riffaterre, 1978: 1). I use Semiotics of Poetry by Riffaterre as a primary theory in finding the meaning and purpose of John Agard's selected poems.

Related to how pessimism is applied in Simic's selected poems, I assume the selected poems above depicted pessimism. By analyzing these poems, this study shows how pessimism works is implied, thereby revealing the broader societal and ideological implications of Simic's work.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research method to explore the presentation

and significance of pessimism in Charles Simic's poetry. As defined by Denzin & Lincoln (2005), qualitative research investigates events within natural contexts using interpretive methodologies. This approach is well-suited for analyzing language, cultural meaning, and symbolic structures within literary texts. The data of this qualitative research is obtained based on the results of reading and observing every data from Charles Simic's selected poems, "The Grass," "The Prompter," and "Evening Walk" sourced from his book collections. Specific sentences, words, and phrases related to pessimism were extracted for in-depth analysis, and Secondary data include scholarly books, journal articles, theses, and online sources focusing on pessimism, semiotic theory, and Agard's literary contributions.

Result and Discussion

In this analysis, the researcher explores pessimism in the selected poems of Charles Simic by examining how the poet presents the pessimism in his works. Charles Simic's poetry is renowned for its exploration of the darker aspects of humanity and exploring into themes of despair, loss, and the absurdities of life. Simic usually uses metaphor, and free verse in writing his poems. Through a close analysis of his poems "The Grass," "The Prompter," and "Evening Walk," it is clear that Simic uses minimalist style and simple imagery to deliver a pervasive sense of pessimism.

This research focuses on the significance and presentation of pessimism in Simic's selected poems. The findings examine how Simic addresses philosophical notions of his thought based on surrealism tone.

All three poems embody philosophical pessimism, exploring the fragility of meaning, the illusion of autonomy, and the pervasive presence of loss. Simic uses

minimalist, symbolic language to express a vision of life filled with ambiguity, absence, and inevitable decline.

Heuristic & Hermeneutic in The Grass

The poem was first published in July 1971 in poetry magazine Poetry released by Poetry Foundation. This poem was composed in free verse, which mean it does not have stanzaic structure or rhyme scheme. Charles Simic wrote this poem using natural and abstract imagery to express the idea of loss, loneliness, and unattainable longing, all of which portray pessimistic worldview. This poem consists 25 lines and 4 stanzas with variety lengths, many of which are fragmented, reflective, and packed with philosophical weight, thus giving a sense of rhythm and dynamic organization.

The title of this poem, The Grass, uses a singular and simple natural object to signify something much deeper, such as memory, longing, or fate. The grass serves as the model in this poem, representing both fragility and rootedness. The tone throughout the poem suggests pessimism

It all hangs now on a blade of grass
Tucked away by a road I shall never
take,

The line 1 uses metaphor where “hangs” acts as a verb suggesting tension or dependence. This structure implies that something critical or emotionally significant depends on something fragile like a blade of grass. According to Merriam-Webster, a blade of grass is a narrow, thin leaf of grass, it often used in literature to convey fragility or humility.

The phrase “Tucked away,” In data 2 suggests that there is something hidden or far away. The phrase “a road I shall never take” is reminiscent of Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken,” symbolizing missed

opportunities or inaccessible futures and pessimistic outlook. The auxiliary modal “shall” is a formal and predictive, expressing certainty of not taking that path, reinforcing a sense of irrevocable loss.

Under a sky which by no possible
effort⁽³⁾
Will I ever get to see, on the evening⁽⁴⁾

Data 3 and 4 expand the setting with “under a sky,” which is followed by a relative clause “which by no possible effort / Will I ever get to see.” This indicates futility. The use of “by no possible effort” in a negative manner expresses pessimism where the idea that no matter what is done, the speaker will never reach or experience this sky. This reflects an existential pessimism.

Of a long summer day, which is really⁽⁵⁾
That last hidden card in the sleeve⁽⁶⁾
Of my gloomy and silent partner. ⁽⁷⁾

Data 5 uses the temporal setting “long summer day,” often associated with warmth and nostalgia, but subverts it with the phrase “which is really.” The poet implies a deceptive appearance, implying that the summer day is not just what it seems. Data 6 uses metaphorical sentence “That last hidden card in the sleeve,” an idiom suggesting a final, unseen move or truth. In literary tradition, the metaphor of cards usually to fate or strategy, implying life’s unpredictability. This is then reinforced in line 7 “my gloomy and silent partner,”. The adjectives “gloomy” and “silent” emphasize darkness and quiet, characteristics aligned with isolation and existential pessimism.

And yet, it is of that blade⁽⁸⁾
I have written, sealing in each word⁽⁹⁾
The secret code of my longing, ⁽¹⁰⁾

Data 8 reintroduces blade which refers to the blade of grass, and strengthen its symbolic weight as the model. The uses of metaphorical language in data 9 “sealing in each word,” where “sealing” implies careful preservation. Each word written is encoded with longing. Data 10 introduces “the secret code of my longing,” a phrase which turns the poem into a personal, almost cryptographic expression. “Longing” here is both emotional and poetic, in a sense it is a yearning that cannot be spoken plainly.

Letting them go like a column of ants⁽¹¹⁾
 Against impossible odds,⁽¹²⁾
 Armed only as they are with my bodily
 warmth⁽¹³⁾
 And the rare entirely unique⁽¹⁴⁾
 Musk of my own dying.⁽¹⁵⁾

The uses of simile in line 11 “like a column of ants,” highlighting its small size but with dedications and orderly to form a trail. Sense of pessimism also highlighted in data 12 “against impossible odds” underscores futility and resistance to overwhelming forces. Data 13–15 use vivid sensory imagery. “Bodily warmth” and “musk of my own dying” personalize the journey of the poem’s word. “Musk,” defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a strong-smelling secretion. These lines implied that his life and death is a unique trajectory solely for him. This supports the theme of existential questions on silence and decay.

They returned at times:⁽¹⁶⁾
 Inaudible, no longer inhabited⁽¹⁷⁾
 Messengers of ancient earth tremors
 and floods,⁽¹⁸⁾
 My breath inside them replaced⁽¹⁹⁾
 By the feel of an austere, alien space.
⁽²⁰⁾

Line 16–18 indicate that the poet's words or ideas have returned, however, it is

in a lifeless and hollow form. It indicates that they have lost their emotional strength, clarity, and significant presence. The words “Inaudible” and “no longer inhabited” imply that these returning messengers (which possibly be expressions, hopes, or memories) are devoid of life or empty. The references to “tremors and floods” refer to disasters, referring to the cause in his sense of trauma. These events also symbolize a history of destruction and loss, further deepen the pessimistic atmosphere. Data 19–20 concludes this stanza with the transformation of personal expression into something foreign and detached. “My breath” here symbolizes life and voice, which has been replaced by “austere, alien space,” indicating existential estrangement which is another sign of deep-rooted pessimism. This could also mean that even though the speakers remember some memories, he is traumatic and lacks the nostalgic feeling for it.

I think of the few that have not,⁽²¹⁾
 Of the place they are at:⁽²²⁾
 Unmade bed, sunlit wall,⁽²³⁾
 Where the shadow of a tree,⁽²⁴⁾
 Lost in thoughts, is at rest.⁽²⁵⁾

Line 21–25 form a meditative close. The speaker contemplates the few words or messages that remain unchanged or still meaningful. These are associated with a domestic, quiet setting. Here, “unmade bed, sunlit wall,” suggests a place of rest and memory. The “shadow of a tree” is personified as “lost in thoughts,” suggesting reflection, stillness, and perhaps peace. This perhaps refers to graves where the grass grows amid the silence.

In this heuristic reading, the model of the poem is the blade of grass, which acts as the central metaphor. It represents small and purposeless thing but still has a life. The variants that express and extend this model include “road I shall never take,” “sky I’ll

never see,” and “words like ants,” which show longing and distance. Through metaphors of hiddenness, natural imagery, and transformed language, Simic constructs a vision of poetic expression in the face of futility. The blade of grass becomes a symbol of fragile hope that unreachable, yet still the source of yearning.

Through passive structures, fading imagery, and metaphors of fragility, Simic presents a world where personal meaning is easily lost or transformed beyond recognition. The poem views language, memory, and longing as brave but ultimately doomed efforts against the vast, indifferent forces of time and death. This poem echoes themes from war literature and existential philosophy which reflected by hypogram such as Fragility of life, post-war trauma, biblical imagery of decay.

Heuristic & Hermeneutic in The Prompter

The poem was first published in July 1986 as a part of his poetry collection *The World Doesn't End*. There are several versions about this poem. This thesis will analyze the version published on *The Voice at 3:00 AM* (2006). This Poem is a prose poem that consists of 3 stanzas and 15 lines with irregular lengths.

The title of the poem is *The Prompter*. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a prompter is a person who provides lines to actors in a play. In this poem, the poet seems to blur the line between an external figure and the speaker's inner voices.

The one who had been whispering ⁽¹⁾
All along in this empty theater ⁽²⁾

Line 1 introduces the prompter, a figure who has been quietly working behind the scenes in the theater. The use of the word “whispering” emphasizes the subtlety and invisibility of the prompter's role. This

whispering contrasts with the louder, more dramatic aspects of the play. In line 2, The phrase “empty theater” acts as both a literal and metaphorical space. Based on Merriam-Webster, “theater” can also refer to a place where events unfold dramatically. “Empty” emphasizes the absence of audience, validation, or recognition. The setting highlights the speaker's sense of alienation and futility. The “empty theater” reinforces the pessimism present in the poem in the setting such as one of abandonment and disconnection.

And whose voice I just heard –
Or imagined I did⁽³⁾
Distracted as I was by my own
thoughts.⁽⁴⁾

The ambiguity in data 3 shows that the speaker is unsure about his perception. This introduces a psychological element that is the boundary between perception and delusion is blurred. The use of “imagined” shows a breakdown in certainty, symbolizing an internal struggle or crisis of belief. This then reinforced in data 4, where the speaker admits to distraction. This phrase implies introspection or self-absorption of his failure to notice the prompter earlier is attributed to his internal preoccupation.

God have mercy on my poor soul
Was to be my line,⁽⁵⁾
Which I couldn't bring myself to say⁽⁶⁾
With the shivers going up my spine⁽⁷⁾
Like white mice.⁽⁸⁾

The line “God have mercy on my poor soul,” in data 5 is a religious plea, which is commonly associated with moments of confession or death. According to Cambridge Dictionary, mercy is compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone. The phrase “which couldn't bring myself to say” in data 6 is an idiom that means the speaker

was hesitates to say the line which he was supposed to say. Simic implies the anxiety and fear in data 7-8 by the uses an expression with simile. According to Merriam-Webster, “shivers” is associated with fear or anxiety, and comparing the sensation to white mice, which shows that the speaker is consumed by his cowardice or lacks of bravery.

And when I finally did get around to,⁽⁹⁾
 There was no response,⁽¹⁰⁾
 A clap, someone chuckling briefly⁽¹¹⁾
 Is all I had hoped for⁽¹²⁾
 And not this great sweep of
 nothing.⁽¹³⁾

This stanza is filled with the speaker’s deep yearning for recognitions but ended with full disappointment. It can be seen from the hesitation in data 9, to the anticlimax declarative sentence in data 10. The next lines in data 11-12 showed what the speakers wished for. Lastly, data 13 concludes with contrasting phrase “this great sweep of nothing,” which metaphorically expresses total emptiness, futility, or indifference from the world. The noun sweep refers to a wide, overwhelming movement which in this case, of silence or absence. This stanza shows the speaker’s desire for a small reaction such as a laugh or a clap which symbolizes the basic human need to be acknowledged.

In heuristic reading, this poem explores the existential pessimism expresses the existential tension between expression and silence, performance and reception, fear and expectation. The speaker represents someone on the edge of self-revelation who is too afraid to speak, only to discover that when they finally do, it no longer matters. The poem reflects deep emotional isolation and suggests that the desire for recognition, even in the smallest form, is a universal human need. This makes the poem resonate with absurdist, pessimist, and existentialist themes, much like the work of Frost’s *The*

Road Not Taken (1915) or Becketts’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Simic, an immigrant who lived through war and hardship, often portrayed life as uncertain, surreal, and eerily quiet. This poem reflects that worldview.

The model of this poem is the *speaker*, who represents the individual struggling with voice, fear, and meaning. The variants are seen in the images of the *prompter*, *empty theater*, *God have mercy*, *shivers*, and *nothing*. These collectively shape a metaphor for existential uncertainty. The prompter may be memory, divinity, or even the poet’s inner self. The hypogram here is the inner conflict between seeking salvation and realizing the absence of response or meaning. It is shown as a reflection of the absurd condition where human beings search for meaning in a silent universe.

The title of this poem, *The Prompter*, refers to a person who provides forgotten lines to actors during a play. This figure typically remains hidden, whispering lines from the margins to help others perform their roles. By choosing this title, Simic suggests a speaker caught in a moment of performance or crisis, waiting for guidance that may or may not come. The prompter in this poem, however, becomes both a real and imagined figure which could be interpreted as a voice of conscience, divine presence, or inner self. This duality sets the tone for the poem’s deeper concern such as the fragile line between internal reflection and external action, and the fear that even the sincerest efforts might be met with silence.

In the first stanza, the speaker refers to “The one who had been whispering / All along in this empty theater.” The metaphor of the *empty theater* can be read as a symbol of life’s stage, but one that is devoid of audience, meaning, or affirmation. In traditional literary and philosophical thought, the “theater of life” is often associated with performance, identity, and purpose. However, Simic subverts this notion by

placing the speaker in an abandoned or silent setting, suggesting a condition of existential emptiness. The absence of others implies a loss of connection, recognition, or even God. These are themes that commonly found in postmodern poetry, where certainty and divine presence often vanish (Lyotard, 1984).

The line “Or imagined I did / Distracted as I was by my own thoughts” introduces psychological ambiguity. The speaker cannot be sure whether the prompter was real or simply a construct of the mind. This reflects modern philosophical pessimism; the inherent value of existences is questioned with the emphasizes on futility of the pursuit of happiness. The use of enjambment and hesitant syntax mirrors the mental wavering of the speaker, caught between faith and doubt, memory and delusion.

The second stanza begins with “God have mercy on my poor soul / Was to be my line,” placing the poem within a moral or spiritual crisis. The reference to God and mercy invokes religious imagery, yet the speaker confesses he cannot say it. This failure to perform a crucial plea suggests a deeper inability to access grace, redemption, or even basic emotional expression. The phrase “shivers going up my spine / Like white mice” introduces a surreal and disturbing image. The comparison to white mice that small, nervous creatures often used in experiments also suggests vulnerability, fear, and dehumanization. The metaphor highlights the speaker’s inner torment and sense of exposure under unseen judgment.

Finally, the last stanza conveys the climactic disappointment: “And when I finally did get around to, / There was no response.” This emotional and spiritual silence shown in the line, “not this great sweep of nothing” becomes the poem’s most devastating image. The speaker expects some sign or reaction which shown in “a clap, someone chuckling briefly”, but receives none. This reinforces the poem’s core

pessimism: that even our most sincere efforts to reach others, or some higher meaning, may be met with indifference. In this sense, Simic challenges not only religious comfort but also the human tendency to seek validation from others or the universe. This theme aligns with Camus’s concept of the absurd that is the conflict between our desire for meaning and nothing else matters (Camus, 1942). It also coincides with Beckett’s concept where every wait is every wait does not always bear fruit.

In summary, *The Prompter* uses metaphor, religious allusion, and surreal imagery to explore themes of isolation, doubt, and existential despair. The speaker is left alone on a stage that once promised meaning, but now offers only silence. The poem evokes the tropes of theatrical failure like Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (2016), where dialogue collapses into silence is shown by the speaker is left alone on a stage in an empty theater trying to finish his line. There is also “*God have mercy on my poor soul*” which mirrors the first line in psalm 51 “have mercy upon me, O God” which resonates with the religious allusion. The model of this poem is the speaker himself, who represents a larger human condition that is the search for meaning in a world that may no longer listen. The variants supporting this model include the empty theater (representing the void), the imagined whisper (mental uncertainty), the unspoken line (spiritual hesitation), and the final silence (emotional collapse). Thus, Simic crafts a haunting portrayal of pessimism, where even the act of reaching out for mercy becomes futile against the backdrop of existential nothingness.

Heuristic & Hermeneutic Evening Walk

The poem was first published in his book *Hotel Insomnia* (1992). There are several versions about this poem. This thesis

will analyze the version published on *New and Selected Poems, 1962-2012* by Charles Simic (2013).

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word "Evening" refers to the time of day, indicating a period of transition from light to darkness. While the word "Walk" refers to an act or instance of going on foot which suggests motion, journey, or exploration, and it can be interpreted both literally, as the speaker is walking through a physical space, and metaphorically, as the speaker embarks on a journey of thought or introspection.

You give the appearance of listening ⁽¹⁾
To my thoughts, O trees, ⁽²⁾

In the line 1, "You give the appearance of listening" introduces a key concept of personification. It then. While in line 2, "O trees" directly addresses the trees as if they were conscious beings capable of receiving the speaker's thoughts. This creates a sense of communion between the speaker and the natural world. This suggests a relationship between the speaker and nature. But, the phrase "give the appearance" also implies that the speaker does not truly mean he wanted to speak with the trees. It is more of a soliloquy by the speaker to express his thought.

Bent over the road I am walking ⁽³⁾
On a late-summer evening ⁽⁴⁾

In line 3, "Bent over the road I am walking" uses the metaphor of trees bending towards the speaker, creating a sense of being watched or accompanied. According to Merriam-Webster, a road means a path or way to an end, conclusion, or circumstance. Therefore, the road could also mean that it is not merely a path, but an emotional or existential journey. Line 4 "On a late-summer evening" sets the time of day and season, both

of which suggest transition. Both lines is a complex sentence expressing something is coming to an end, symbolizing the passage of time or the closing of a chapter.

When every one of you is a steep
staircase ⁽⁵⁾
The night is slowly descending. ⁽⁶⁾

In the Line 5, the speaker compares the trees to staircases, which are traditionally symbolic of ascension or descent. The trees could be representing stages of the journey the speaker is on, where the "steep staircase" is indicating one of difficulty or struggle in life. Followed by line 6 "The night is slowly descending" uses the metaphor of night as a symbol. Night is often symbolizes end of something. Together, these lines seem to reflect a struggle or an effort in life (the steep staircase), where, no matter how difficult the journey, time continues to move, and night (perhaps representing rest, death, or the end of something) will eventually come.

The high leaves like my mother's lips
⁽⁷⁾
Forever trembling, unable to decide, ⁽⁸⁾
For there's a bit of wind, ⁽⁹⁾

From line 7-9 Simic uses another metaphor, "The high leaves like my mother's lips" in line 7 is seen as comparing the trembling leaves to the lips of the speaker's mother. While line 8 "Forever trembling, unable to decide" emphasizes uncertainty where the speaker, is in a constant state of indecision. "For there's a bit of wind" introduces an external force such as the wind which symbolizing change or disruption in the speaker's environment. Here, the speaker is most likely speaking of his moments in life that filled with indecision and easily influenced by external forces.

And it's like hearing voices, ⁽¹⁰⁾
 Or a mouth full of muffled laughter, ⁽¹¹⁾
 A huge dark mouth we can all fit in ⁽¹²⁾
 Suddenly covered by a hand. ⁽¹³⁾

The line 10-13 suggests an auditory hallucination that begins with a simile, suggesting an eerie or surreal experience. Line 12 introduces the metaphor of the dark mouth as a vast, consuming darkness which could be symbolizes the unknown or death. While the hand that mentioned in the line 13 creates an image of being silenced or restrained. The hand might represent suppression or a desire for control, creating a tension between the freedom of the wind and the confinement of the hand. metaphorically, it feels like the speaker is confronting something vast and overwhelming that he is left voiceless in front of it.

Everything quiet. Light ⁽¹⁵⁾
 Of some other evening strolling ahead, ⁽¹⁶⁾
 Long-ago evening of silk dresses, ⁽¹⁷⁾
 Bare feet, hair unpinned and falling. ⁽¹⁸⁾
 Happy heart, what heavy steps you take ⁽¹⁹⁾
 As you follow after them in the shadows. ⁽²⁰⁾

The third stanza shifts to a nostalgic tone as written in line 16-17. While these images may seem romantic, they are juxtaposed with "heavy steps" following "in the shadows," in line 19 and line 20 which indicating that the past is overshadowed by present burdens or regrets. The "happy heart" mentioned here may be ironic, suggesting that the pursuit of past joys leads to present exhaustion or sorrow.

The sky at the road's end cloudless and blue. ⁽²¹⁾
 The night birds like children ⁽²²⁾
 Who won't come to dinner. ⁽²³⁾

Lost children in the darkening woods. ⁽²⁴⁾

The final stanza presents metaphorical contrasts where "the night birds like children / Who won't come to dinner," in line 22 and line 23 symbolizing innocence or purity with the description of the birds as "lost children in the darkening woods" bringing a sense of abandonment and confusion. The "darkening woods" serve as a metaphor for the complexities and uncertainties of life, suggesting that clarity and innocence are increasingly difficult to attain. The imagery suggests a quiet, mournful reflection on separation, growing distance, and the fear of being forgotten or left behind.

In this poem, the model is the speaker's journey through the evening. This journey is both a literal walk through the landscape and a metaphor for emotional or psychological exploration. The natural elements such as the trees, leaves, wind, night, and birds represent various aspects of the speaker's internal state that guiding them through a process of introspection and contemplation.

Variants of the model include the trees, which symbolize both the speaker's environment and the weight of time. They are described as "bent" and "listening," indicating their quiet, attentive nature. They may represent memories or the past, offering the speaker a form of silent companionship. The leaves, which described as "tremble like the mother's lips" embody uncertainty and indecision and reflect a vulnerability within the speaker's state of mind. The wind and voices represent the forces outside of the speaker's control that engage with the speaker's thoughts and creating an interplay between internal and external worlds. The dark mouth and the hand, which are metaphors for fear, repression, or external control. These elements suggest a desire for silence or restriction, possibly symbolizing

the oppressive forces that the speaker must navigate.

Through this symbolic walk, the speaker is journeying towards a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world. The model of the Evening Walk suggests both the literal transition from day to night and the emotional transitions the speaker undergoes. That is, moving from uncertainty, fear, and nostalgia to clarity and resolution.

Through the use of personification, metaphor, and imagery, Simic crafts a poem that begins with the semblance of a peaceful evening walk but gradually reveals an undercurrent of pessimism. The recurring motifs of darkness, uncertainty, and loss suggest a contemplative reflection on the inevitability of decline and the complexities of the human experience. Simic's portrayal of a seemingly serene environment, filled with subtle disturbances and shadows, invites readers to consider the often-overlooked aspects of life that contribute to a more somber understanding of existence.

Charles Simic's poem *Evening Walk* unfolds a scene of twilight that, beneath its serene surface, reveals a pervasive sense of foreboding. The speaker's solitary walk through a late-summer evening is not merely a passive observation of nature but an engagement with a world that seems to listen, reflect, and respond with unsettling familiarity.

The poem begins with the trees giving "the appearance of listening / To my thoughts," suggesting a world that mirrors the speaker's inner life. This anthropomorphism imbues the natural world with a semblance of consciousness, yet the phrase "appearance of listening" introduces a subtle doubt, indicating that this attentiveness may be illusory. The trees, "Bent over the road," become steep staircases, symbolizing an ascent into darkness rather than enlightenment, as "the night is slowly

descending." This descent into night evokes a sense of inevitable decline, setting a tone of pessimism.

The speaker reflects on "some other evening" of "silk dresses, / Bare feet, hair unpinned and falling," conjuring images of a past that is both alluring and unattainable. The "Happy heart" that follows "after them in the shadows" with "heavy steps" suggests a longing for a lost or unreachable joy. The shadows symbolize the inaccessibility of the past, and the "heavy steps" indicate the burden of this unattainable desire.

The poem concludes with "night birds like children / Who won't come to dinner," portraying the birds as "Lost children in the darkening woods." Which refers to loss of naivety of childhood after seeing the darkness of the world. This imagery evokes a sense of abandonment and disorientation, as if the natural world itself is adrift and without purpose. The "darkening woods" symbolize a world becoming increasingly obscure and inhospitable, reinforcing the poem's pessimistic tone.

Pessimism in Simic's Poems

Charles Simic's poetry is renowned for its exploration of the darker aspects of humanity and exploring into themes of despair, loss, and the absurdities of life. Simic usually uses metaphor, and free verse in writing his poems. Through a close analysis of his poems "The Grass," "The Prompter," and "Evening Walk," it is clear that Simic uses minimalist style and simple imagery to deliver a pervasive sense of pessimism.

In his poem "The Grass", the significance found is the quiet inevitability of death and the futility of resistance. The grass which commonly associated with life and renewal is presented as a passive witness to mass graves and forgotten tragedies, conveying a stoic acceptance of human cruelty. The poem does not mourn but rather

shrinks into silence, embodying the poet's pessimistic view of history as a cycle of violence.

The poem "The Prompter" is first published in his collection *The World Doesn't End* (1989), this poem emphasizes the absurdity of existence, where human behavior appears scripted by unseen forces, stripping individuals of autonomy. The speaker becomes a figure of existential irony, where even cowardice is merely part of the performance. This reveals a pessimistic vision that freedom is illusory, and existential despair where everything does not really matter in the face of nothingness.

In "Evening Walk", Simic introduces a world where beauty and horror coexist during a stroll. The poem's imagery of fading light and creeping shadows reflects the intrusion of dread into the ordinary, suggesting that darkness is never far, even in peaceful moments. The speaker's observations likely remind us that life is not always what it seems. Behind every quiet moment, there might be sadness, fear, or mystery. Through these poems, Simic communicates a persistent skepticism about the possibility of redemption or clarity, constructing a poetic landscape where pessimism is not just a theme but a way of seeing the world.

Conclusion

This research expected to explore the manifestation of pessimism in Charles Simic's selected poems which is *The Grass*, *The Prompter*, and *Evening Walk* using Riffaterre's Semiotics of Poetry as the theoretical framework. Through heuristic and hermeneutic readings, the analysis revealed how Simic employs symbolic language, metaphors, and minimalist imagery to convey a deeply pessimistic worldview that is constructed in existential despair, futility, and the inevitability of decline.

The research discovered that *The Grass* expressed the themes of loss and

unattainable longing. The blade of grass symbolizes fragile hope that is covered by existential isolation. The poem's imagery of silence, decay, and unreachable paths reflects Simic's traumatic past and his bleak perspective on human vulnerability. The next finding on the poem *The Prompter* delves into existential pessimism where he portrays life as a meaningless performance. The empty theater and the speaker's futile plea for mercy underscore the indifference of the universe, aligning with Camus and Beckett's notion of the absurd with heavy accents of pessimism all over the poem. Lastly, the poem *Evening Walk* shows the transition from day to night which reflects the speaker's internal turmoil with natural elements like trembling leaves and lost birds symbolizing uncertainty in life.

Riffaterre's semiotic approach proved instrumental in uncovering the hypograms and matrixes of these poems. The recurring symbols in all three poems such as grass, prompter, and evening, served as models that revealed Simic's central themes such as the fragility of existence, the illusion of autonomy, and the pervasive presence of decay. The hermeneutic reading further exposed the intertextual layers, linking Simic's personal history and trauma to broader philosophical pessimism.

In conclusion, Simic's poetry articulates a worldview where beauty and despair coexist, and where human efforts to find meaning are often met with silence or futility. His minimalist style amplifies this pessimism, rendering it both intimate and universal.

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