Homeward Bound: Uncanny Deliverance in the Poetry of Charles Simic

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Homeward Bound: Uncanny Deliverance in the Poetry of Charles Simic

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Abstract

Applying contemporary criticism to close readings of Charles Simic’s poetry, it is evident that, as a sorcerer doing alchemy behind the scenes (Weigl 2), he has a bag of tricks that he continues to delve into as part of his poetic process. However, through the lens of Sigmund Freud’s *The Uncanny*, or “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known and old and long familiar,” it is possible to better engage with Simic’s darkly universal discourse (Weigl 2).

This thesis argues that, under such a lens, a close reading of Simic’s poetics as well as example samples of his signature early and mid-career poems, especially those that indicate his uncanny preoccupation with uncertainty and doubleness, and then later poems reveal that this poet, tiring of uncanny places haunted by doubleness and uncertainty, conjures up those where the familiar, congenial, and certain hold sway.

Setting his sights on home, he yearns for deliverance, if not a transcendence, which, in the parlance of Tatar’s essay Freud's “The Uncanny” can “exorcise the real ghosts of the marvelous tale” (Tatar 182).
Dedication

My thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Gertrude, who shared with me her passion for reading and writing poetry. And to my father, John; my sisters, Didi and Lisa; and to my friends, both poets and not, for their ongoing support.
Acknowledgments

Thank you to Stephanie Burt, Tom Daley, Talaya Delaney, and Sue Weaver Schopf, for inspiring and guiding my interest in reading and writing about poetry.
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Chapter I.

Introduction

A former U.S. poet laureate, Charles Simic has published 35 books of poetry since the 1960s, and is a prolific critic and essayist, as well as editor and translator. Born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, Charles Simic experienced air raids from both German and U.S. forces during World War II. Designated displaced persons, his family relocated to U.S. to escape Communism when he was 15. Consequently, critics often contend that Simic’s poetry reflects the traumatic events he encountered as a child. For instance, Bruce Weigl, in his introduction to *Charles Simic: Essays on the Poetry*, notes that Simic's poetry often centers “on the seemingly oblique images of political violence, abandonment, loss, hunger, and exile experienced, in their most basic and corrupt ways” (2).

Weigl also observes that Simic’s poetry mediates between the archetypal and the historical to find meaning in an uncertain world. He contends that, in Simic’s poetry, there is an “overwhelming presence of myth or mythic consciousness in the poetry from the beginning, personalized so that Simic forces myth to make sense in our times and in our lives” (2). Moreover, he notes in Simic’s poetry, “its habit of setting the spectacular alongside the mundane. . . the powerful sense of the brute forces of history and nature intruding on the reality of the poem” (2).

Thus, Weigl concludes that—from such juxtapositions of myth and history, the ordinary and the sinister—“an urgent linguistic primacy struggles on the page and in the heart and the mind to remain always apart from mere statement of fact; a darkly universal
discourse dominated by a imaginatively epistemological sensibility; a sorcerer doing alchemy behind the scenes” (2).

Recognizing the presence of the archetypal and historical constructs in Simic’s poems, however, does not completely get at the heart of the “darkly universal discourse” (2) at play in his poetry. Moreover, Simic’s tendency to glean meaning from ordinary things brings to mind Sigmund Freud’s “The Uncanny. In a review of Simics Night Picnic, for example, Janet McCann places this 2001 poetry collection in the realm of the uncanny:

*Night Picnic* continues to explore the area Charles Simic has set out for himself: the surface of the ordinary, and the dreams and nightmares beneath. . . .The poem often seems to be about one thing and may have a friendly, even nostalgic tone, yet the uncanny has been admitted as early as the first line. The weirdness grows with the poem and takes over by the end.

McCann notes a menacing presence lurking beyond the ordinary settings of Simic’s early poetry, and that unspoken meanings rumble below the surface. However, she simply defines this uncanny doubleness as “weirdness.” As other Simic critics note, however, there is much more going on in his poetry then a developing sense of strangeness, and to elucidate the “sorcerer doing alchemy behind the scenes” (2), and thus understand Simic’s more recent poetry, requires a clearer definition of Freud’s concept of the uncanny.

Freud, in this 1919 essay, applies his psychological theories to the aesthetic arena, defining the uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known and old and long familiar” (120). Thus, Freud questions, in an attempt to define “heimlich (familiar) versus unheimlich (unfamiliar),” how it is that the unfamiliar becomes uncanny in relation to what is familiar. Central to Freud's essay are various
definitions of “heimlich” as that which is of the household, familiar, or congenial; and that which is concealed, hidden from view, or withheld from others. Connecting these concepts with a discussion of the Oedipal Complex and the Double in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Sand-Man,” Freud asserts that the uncanny is that which taps into the unconscious, unveiling repressed feelings and memories in frightening ways.

Meanwhile, Hugh Haughton, in the introduction to David McClintock’s translation of Freud’s “The Uncanny,” asserts that ideas of uncertainty and doubleness are central to Freud’s essay. For one, Haughton says that Freud “moves beyond an idea of aesthetics ‘restricted to the theory of beauty,’ as he puts it, to explore an aesthetics of anxiety” (xli). He also assigns key roles to myth and history, contending that post World War I psychoanalysis, “increasingly conjures up a Gothic closet, an uncanny double, at the heart of modernity” (xlii).

Thus, he equates the uncanny with experiences of “the return of the primitive in an apparently modern and secular context” (xlix). And finally, Haughton establishes that home and the familiar give rise to the uncanny. He asserts that, for Freud, “nightmarish myths and primitive beliefs themselves are only estranged childhood fantasies writ large” (xlix) and “our most haunting experiences of otherness tell us that the alien begins at home” (xlix). As uncertainty and doubleness characterize the terrain of Simic’s poetic landscape, one can also apply his thoughts to appreciate the uncanny in Simic’s poetry.

Deeper insight into how Simic’s poetry evokes the Freudian idea of the uncanny, can be found with a reading of Maria M. Tatar's essay, “The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition Of the Uncanny.” Here she attributes “intellectual uncertainty” to the double meaning of “heimlich” as what is familiar and congenial and what is concealed and
sinister, that “the word *heimlich* is so charged with ambiguity that, in one of its shades of meaning, it coincides with its antonym *unheimlich*” (169).

Furthermore, she claims that such uncertainty establishes an uncanny event, which “defying reason, shatters the stability of the world to create a condition of radical homelessness. A world once safe and secure becomes hostile and treacherous” (182). As Simic’s poetry is riddled with uncertainty and doubleness, it is not a far stretch to label his poems uncanny, especially if one takes into consideration the “intellectual uncertainty” evoked from the double meaning of “heimlich.”

Moreover, considering the traumatic childhood experiences that haunt Simic’s work, one can certainly apply such a psychological analysis for a closer reading of his poems. Nicholas Royle, in the introduction to *The uncanny* explains what he sees as the meaning of the uncanny.

The uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation. More specifically, it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar arising in a familiar context. It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home. (1)

Recent criticism also recognizes in Simic’s poetry a juxtaposition of familiar and unfamiliar as well as his use of both archetypal and psychological constructs to mediate the uncertainty of the modern world.

Thus, by interrogating the “uncanny” dualities in Simic’s poetry, one gets closer to not only comprehending what creates a sense of awe in the reader, but also the underlying meanings that resonate from his poems. However, a key question arises from a close reading of Simic’s most current body in comparison with earlier poems: 1) How
do such “uncanny” dualities first manifest themselves in Simic’s earlier poetry, and how has this changed and developed overtime through Simic’s body of work?

In particular, this thesis will argue that, under such a lens, a close reading of examples of Simic’s signature early and mid-career poems, especially those that indicate his preoccupation with uncertainty and doubleness, and then later poems reveal that this poet tires of wandering through the uncertainties of the modern world, and sets his sights for home—not one defined by a sinister doubleness, but one where the familiar and congenial hold sway.

Such a finding might lead scholars to rethink Simic’s body work as more than just a preoccupation with uncanny dualities. Instead, one can find a clear link between the life Simic first experienced as a displaced person and how his poetics have developed, and, more importantly, how his poems reflect the sinister uncertainties of the modern world. And, as he gets older, examples of his later body of work reveal a new preoccupation, i.e., the search for what is familiar, congenial, and certain, even if it’s not always evident on the surface of these poems. Setting his sights on home, he yearns for deliverance, if not a transcendence, which, in the parlance of Tatar’s essay Freud’s “The Uncanny” can “exorcise the real ghosts of the marvelous tale” (Tatar 182).
Chapter II.

A Summary of Simic’s Poetic Career

For information on Simic’s life and career there are wide variety of biographical sources, many of which are cited here. According to “Charles Simic – Biography” in Poets and Poetry in America, Simic was born Charles Simic was born Duan Simi in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1938, and emigrated to the United States in 1954.

“My travel agents were [Adolf] Hitler and [Joseph] Stalin, he has said. When Simic was three years old, a house across the street from his family’s home was destroyed by a bomb. For young Simic and his friends, the war (so serious and terrible for adults) was often a source of fun. There were guns and air-raid sirens to imitate—and, toward the end, a thriving salvage business in gunpowder.

The chaos and menace of that time survive in Simic’s poems. For Simic, the city survives as well. “My mother is calling my name out of a tenement window,” he has said. “She keeps calling and calling. My entire psychic life is there.” (Poets and Poetry in America)

Meanwhile, “Charles Simic – Biography” in Great Authors of World Literature, Critical Edition, says that Simic:

recalls with black humor his childhood during World War II, marked by bombings and waves of advancing and retreating soldiers, as “a three-ring circus.” He describes how, from the summer of 1944 to mid-1945, he “ran around the streets of Belgrade with other half-abandoned kids.”

Critics have speculated that the peculiar blend of horror and whimsy in Simic’s work can be traced to those days. Simic admits to still being “haunted by images” of the war.

In 1949, according to Great Authors of World Literature, Critical Edition, “Simic and his mother moved to Chicago to join his father, an engineer who had found employment there with the telephone company for which he had worked in Yugoslavia. His father
took him to hear jazz, which Simic credits with making him “both an American and a poet.”

In 1957, according to *Great Authors of World Literature, Critical Edition*, Simic attended the University of Chicago at night, working during the day as a proofreader at the Chicago Sun Times. Simic then transferred to New York University, receiving a B.A. in 1967. From 1966 to 1969, Simic, who had first studied to be an artist, worked as an editorial assistant for photography magazine Aperture. While attending New York University, he also worked as a shirt salesman, house painter, payroll clerk, reports *Poets and Poetry in America*. In addition, *Poets and Poetry in America* offers the following insight into Simic’s development as a poet:

> Another part of his education took place in the New York Library, where he read all the folklore and anthropology he could find, as a way of introducing mythic consciousness into his poetry. He ended up making his own myths of things common and close to home: brooms, ballroom dances, and the fingers of a hand.” (*Poets and Poetry in America*)

As a result, according to *Poets and Poetry in America*, Simic published his first two books, *What the Grass Says* and *Somewhere Among Us a Stone Is Taking Notes*, with Kayak Press; *Dismantling the Silence* (containing some poems from the first two books, plus new ones) was issued by the publisher George Braziller in 1971.

Simic’s growing reputation won him his first teaching job at the California State University at Hayward, according to *Poets and Poetry in America*. And then, in 1973, Simic began a long tenure teaching English at the University of New Hampshire. Although, he retired in 2006, he has continued to teach at the university.
With over 40 poetry and prose books under his belt, Simic’s influences are deep and wide. According to “Charles Simic – Introduction” in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*:

Simic’s work blends surrealist and imagist techniques and employs elements of East European folklore and mysticism as well as American jazz and blues music to explore the horrors of war in his homeland and to imbue commonplace objects with philosophical significance.

His perception of the subjective and intuitive natures of language is revealed in works that display a variety of influences, including those of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, Yugoslavian poet Vasko Popa, American poets from Walt Whitman to Theodore Roethke, and French surrealists such as André Bréton and Stéphane Mallarmé.

In addition, Simic served as guest editor of *The Best American Poetry, 1992* and as a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 2000 to 2002. In 2007, he received the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets and was named the fifteenth U.S. poet laureate, an appointment made by the Library of Congress.
As indicated in the previous chapter, Simic’s early writing in both poetry or prose conveys his interest in metaphysics, imagism, and surrealism. In its chapter, “Charles Simic,” *Critical Survey of Poetry* offers the following: “Simic’s poetic sensibility combines a surrealistic fascination with recurring archetypes and an imagist concern for precise observation of things” (1). And, in “Negative Capability and Its Children,” Simic provides similar insight to his early poetics and creative process:

Surrealism depicts language and its representational powers. In its view, there’s no intimacy between language and the world; the old equation, word equals object, is simply a function of habit. In addition, there's the problem of simultaneity of experience versus the linear requirements of grammar. Grammar moves in time. Only figurative language can hope to grasp the simultaneity of experience. Therefore, it is the connotative not the denotative aspect of language that is of interest, the spark that sets off the figurative chain reaction and transcends the tyranny of the particular. (83)

What is evident here is that this poet has found a way to express the duality of reality and figurative language to express the uncertainty of the modern world. There is also the sense that in his poetics, he aims to disrupt the linearity of language and to get at what can be expressed thorough the juxtaposition of seeming unrelated images. In this way, that his early poems often take on characteristics of the uncanny.

“The general world of [Charles] Simic’s poems is deeply frightening, mysterious, hostile, dangerous,” says Peter Stitt, in *Uncertainty & Plenitude: Five Contemporary Poets*. “By focusing on... unimportant, everyday objects, he was able to achieve, however briefly, some degree of order, comprehension, and control within this world,”
Stitt refers here to the “series of miniaturist poems on starkly individual objects” that Simic published early in his career.

“Fork,” is one such early object poem, that not only borders on the surreal but its precise and stark imagery evokes a sense of menace:

This strange thing must have crept
Right out of hell.
It resembles a bird’s foot
Worn around the cannibal’s neck.

As you hold it in your hand,
As you stab with it into a piece of meat,
It is possible to imagine the rest of the bird:
Its head which like your fist
Is large, bald, beakless, and blind.
(Selected Early Poems 23)

From the beginning of the poem, there is terror lurking in the background as the fork, an ordinary object, becomes a “strange thing” that “must have crept/Right out of hell.” This strangeness soon transfers to a human, who like a cannibal wearing a bird’s foot as a token of his kill, uses the fork to stab and eat the bird, which then is compared to a human fist. Moreover, the use of the word “cannibal” insinuates that what is an everyday, familiar activity, i.e., eating, has now become barbaric. And finally, it is uncertain whether the human, “you,” is the speaker himself or someone he is addressing, an ambivalence that makes what is particular more universal in scope.

Asserting that uncertainty remains at the center of Simic’s poetic vision, Stitt notes the following: “Fully aware of uncertainty, unpredictability, randomness, he turns them to his advantage. The odd sense of joy we find in even his darkest poems, shows his inherent acceptance of the principle of uncertainty as the nature of being” (117).
Simic expresses this exact idea in his essay, “Negative Capability and Its Children.” “To be capable of being in uncertainties, is to be literally in the midst,” he says. “The poet is in the midst. The poem, too, is in the midst, a kind of magnet for complex historical, literary and psychological forces, as well as a way of maintaining oneself in the face of that multiplicity” (83). And so, along with his interest in ordinary objects, Simic often builds a universe with them at the center. For instance, another early poem, “Butcher Shop,” takes the reader into the midst of a dark and mysterious world, full of menace, if not uncertainty.

Sometimes walking late at night  
I stop before a closed butcher shop.  
There is a single light in the store  
Like the light in which the convict digs his tunnel.

An apron hangs on the hook:  
The blood on it smeared into a map  
Of the great continents of blood,  
The great rivers and oceans of blood.

There are knives that glitter like altars  
In a dark church  
Where they bring the cripple and the imbecile  
to be healed.

There is a wooden block where bones are broken,  
Scraped deem—a river dried to its bed  
Where I am fed.  
Where deep in the night I hear a voice.  
(Selected Early Poems 1)

The dark and mysterious world in “Butcher Shop” is that of storefront in late night, after hours, where the speaker stops and gazes inside. Despite, “a single light in the store,” the implements of butchery take on their own dark lives. The blood on the butcher’s apron becomes a map “of the great continents of blood,” while glittering knives evoke for the
speaker memories of altars in some ominously dark church where “the cripple and the imbecile” are brought “to be healed.”

In “Negative Capability and Its Children,” Simic goes on to say that “there are serious consequences to being in the midst. One longs for self-knowledge while realizing at the same time—that under the circumstances self-knowledge can never be complete” (83). Again “Butcher Shop” reflects Simic’s understanding of what it is to live in uncertainty. For one, Simic, describes, in what seems to be mythic terms, the butcher’s “wooden block where bones are broken” and “a river dried to its bed,” from where the speaker feeds.

And then, there is sense in the final line, “where deep in the night I hear a voice,” that the speaker is listening for the answer from the mythic river of blood to an archetypal-like question that has the potential to provide him some kind of transcendence or self-knowledge. However, because it is located “deep in the night” indicates that whatever the voice might communicate, is heard to hear, not completely attainable. In other words, the speaker recognizes as does the poet that there is little self-knowledge to glean from this mythic yet distant voice. One has to listen closely, and still may not hear it.

Meanwhile, Victor Contoski, in his essay “The Undramatic Theater of Charles Simic,” reflects on how the juxtaposition of images and focus on the connotative not the denotative aspect of language distinguishes Simic’s poetry. He contends that Simic speaks of poetry in terms of a theater, not as drama, but as a place where a drama may occur. He observes the following:

In his early work he concentrated on inanimate objects: spoon, fork, ax, and stone. His deep meditations endowed them with unexpected life, so
that they became “actors” in strange little dramas. A stone takes notes. A bloody apron forms a map. A knife turns into the shining eye of a madman. Yet there the action stops, frozen, as it were, by a seemingly arbitrary action of the poet. For Simic avoids narrative drama. “What I'm after,” he states in *The Uncertain Certainty*, “is something behind the story.”

In a close reading of “Spoon,” another of Simic’s object poems, one can see Simic’s theatrics at work, i.e. “the something behind the story.” The poem begins in an imagist fashion, yet quickly moves into surrealism, taking on similar to “Fork” a bizarre and menacing, i.e. uncanny, resonance.

An old spoon,  
Chewed,  
Licked clean.

Polished back  
To its evil-eyed  
Glow,

Eyeing you now  
From the table.  
Ready to scratch

Today’s date  
And your name  
On the bare wall.

From the first stanza, the poem moves between connotations of the familiar comforts of “an old spoon,” and of decrepitation and weakness due to years of overuse. As if a victim of everyday human endeavor, the spoon has been “chewed, licked clean,” and consequently polished back to what seems its mythic origins. And then, what remains, the spoon’s “evil-eyed/ Glow,” is primordial, “eyeing you now/From the table.” Not only does the reference to “evil eye,” evoke superstition and supernatural, but the verb “eyeing” rings with connotations of menace.
As a result, this once familiar “old spoon” is revealed to have evil undertones if not primordial origins, turning against the speaker in its readiness “to scratch/ Today’s date/ And your name/ On the bare wall.” And then, in the final stanza, there is a juxtaposition of modern day human concerns of identity and time, with primordial beginnings, i.e. the bare wall evokes the idea of a blank slate, i.e. human origins.

In the final analysis of what’s behind the poem, it seems as if the poem circles back to reveal an uncanny truth: The menacing spoon has become a tool of violence, erasing what the speaker possibly sees as a mythic world that innately congenial, if not familiar in nature.

There is no doubt that these early object poems all work together to illustrate Simic’s poetic emphasis on imagism and surrealism not only to reflect the uncertainty of modern world, but also his search for some form of meaning in mythic and archetypal origins.

As said before, Bruce Weigl is among the critics who assert that Simic’s poetry mediates between the archetypal and the historical to find meaning in an uncertain world. He recognizes the “overwhelming presence of myth or mythic consciousness in the poetry from the beginning, personalized so that Simic forces myth to make sense in our times and in our lives” (2).

And then Robert B. Shaw, in his essay, “The Long and the Short of It,” writes:

Simic surrounds the most homely objects with halos of strangeness. Human beings figure in his work only indirectly, in relation to these odd totems: a knife, fork, or spoon, an ax, a stone, a needle…. His mordant focusing on common objects, of course, only leads him closer to the human essence. With a pitiless reductionism he strips away the artificialities of civilization, and often prophesies a return to a harsh natural existence. (351-52)
Consequently, these early poems also bring to mind ideas on uncanniness as conveyed in Haughton’s introduction to Freud’s “The Uncanny.” For one, Freud establishes that home and the familiar give rise to the uncanny, as well as equates the uncanny with experiences of “the return of the primitive in an apparently modern and secular context” (xlix).

In addition, these object poems can be identified as expressions of the uncanniness in Simic’s early work as defined by Nicholas Royle in the introduction to *The uncanny*:

The uncanny entails another thinking of beginning: the beginning is already haunted. The uncanny is ghostly. It is concerned with the strange, weird and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural. The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly one’s sense of oneself … seems strangely questionable. (1)

Not only does Simic’s use of figurative language to manifest the duality of mythic and archetypal origins with the uncertainty in the modern world find correlation in Royle’s comments on what the uncanny entails, but also allows for an understanding of how the “uncanny” is reflected in Simic’s early poems. In the midst of the uncertain universe of each of these early poems, one is faced with a pervasive sense of doubleness between the familiar world of the ordinary object and the underlining meanings evoked by Simic’s figurative language, especially his reliance of the connotation words more that their denotation. The result is nothing less than ghostly and uncanny.
Chapter IV.
The Uncanniness of Time and Place

“Among the many sources of strangeness, one that strikes me as consistent and central over thirty years of Simic’s work is his depiction of space. His exterior and interior settings embody a sense of displacement rather than presence, and he explores them in subjective rather than pictorial terms” (35), comments William Doreski, in his essay, “Dusty Storefronts, Rooms Far Back in Time.” He explains further:

In Simic’s world, urban and rural landscapes and interiors become transparent to human perception and cognition. This is not Surrealism, since the poems usually locate these places in the exterior world, not in the unconscious; but it is a process that recognizes and embraces the irrational. (35)

One of Simic’s later poems “Mirrors At 4 A.M.” is one poem where “interiors become transparent to human perception and cognition.”

You must come to them sideways
In rooms webbed in shadow,
Sneak a view of their emptiness
Without them catching
A glimpse of you in return.

The secret is,
Even the empty bed is a burden to them,
A pretense.
They are more themselves keeping
The company of a blank wall.
The company of time and eternity

Which, begging your pardon.
Cast no image
As they admire themselves in the mirror.
While you stand to the side
Pulling a hanky out
To wipe your brow surreptitiously
*(The Voice at 3:00 am. 93)*

Moreover, this is achieved “in subjective rather than pictorial terms.” In fact, this poem interrogates a mirror’s point of view of a room, as imagined by an unknown speaker as if he or she is approaching the mirror. In this way, this interior world also becomes “transparent to human perception and cognition,” as also described by the action in this uncanny poem (Doreski 35).

“Tragic Architecture” is an example of a poem that navigates between “urban and rural landscapes and interiors” “in subjective rather than pictorial terms” (Doreski 35.) as so well exemplified by the first stanza.

School, prison, trees in the wind,
I climbed your gloomy stairs.
Stood in your farthest corners
With my face to the wall.

The murderer sat in the front row.
A mad little Ophelia
Wrote today's date on the blackboard.
The executioner was my best friend.
He already wore black.

The janitor brought us mice to play with.
In that room with its red sunsets
It was eternity’s time to speak,
So we listened
As if our hearts were made of stone.

All of that in ruins now.
Cracked peeling walls
With every window broken.
Not even a naked light bulb left
For the prisoner forgotten in solitary,
And the school boy left behind
Watching the bare winter trees
Lashed by the driving wind.
*(Hotel Insomnia, 13)*
For one, it is not exactly clear where the poem is located. It could be “school, prison, trees in the wind,” i.e., a place of learning, a place of confinement, or a place of uncertainty. Wherever the poem is located, it reveals more of a subjective landscape where the speaker says he “climbed your gloomy stairs/ stood in your farthest corners/with my face to the wall.” In fact, it seems as if the speaker is thinking back to his school days in what on the surface seems to be nostalgic in feeling, but as noted, the school soon resonates with evil, as does the classroom:

The murderer sat in the front row.
A mad little Ophelia
Wrote today’s date on the blackboard.
The executioner was my best friend.
He already wore black.

The speakers’ classmates are not congenial and familiar, but consist of a murderer, a madwoman, and executioner. And so, as a reader, one concludes that the physical location, is nothing less than menacing, more of a place of confinement and uncertainty, than a place of learning.

Chard deNiord, in his essay, “He Who Remembers His Shoes, Charles Simic,” observes the following: “‘Tragic Architecture,’ is particularly memorable for its disturbing prophecies couched in rhetorical reminiscence. One also gains from this poem an enormous appreciation for Simic's redoubtable authority as a witness to the events that destroyed his country” (83).

While Niord’s point is well taken, it must be noted that such events are not rendered in historical recollection. Instead, Simic turns to metaphor to convey what he witnessed as a child in Yugoslavia. For one, there is at sense that: “All of that in ruins now/ With every window broken./Not even a naked light bulb left” refers not only to the
school but to his homeland. Now there is only a “prisoner forgotten in solitary, /And the school boy left behind.” The school boy is not only lost his school, a familiar and congenial place, but now left in the midst of uncertainty: “Watching the bare winter trees /Lashed by the driving wind.” The prison-like school and classroom of menacing students becomes a vehicle for him to express the ruin of not only his country, but also his childhood innocence.

A deeper of understanding of Simic’s tendency to move between the personal and the political is evident in Karen Volkman’s “The World Doesn’t End: Charles Simic’s Spectral Geography.” She says:

Whatever his actual location, the setting of his poems is always a distinctive psychic landscape that defies clock and gravity, map and census. The enduring elements of his imagistic lexicon—dolls, devils, gods, alarming flies, empty streets, darkened windows, conniving trees—show the ways in which inner spaces people and transform the outer landscape, which in turn suggests new associations, mysteries, nuance. (47)

One can certainly recognize that “inner spaces people and transform the outer landscape” in “Tragic Architecture,” especially Simic’s metaphorical rendering of the destruction of his homeland in the form of prison-like school with a classroom of menacing classmates. Moreover, from a close reading of this poem, one can conclude as does Volkman, “With his faith in the deeper truths of an inner life and their transcendence over external circumstance and fortune, Simic is essentially a democratizer of sublime experience: he approaches the political through imagination and metaphysics” (47). It is in this way that Simic poems also navigate the duality of place and time

Meanwhile, Helen Vendler asserts, in “Totemic Shifting:” Charles Simic’s the Book of Gods and Devils, Hotel Insomnia, and Dime-Store Alchemy,” that Simic is a grown man on another continent. He is almost forever imprisoned in his past, a boy left
behind, forgotten by Time” (125). Considering Simic's childhood experiences in Yugoslavia during World War II, it is no surprise that poems such as “Tragic Architecture” echo with the uncertainties and uncanniness of his childhood.

And then, Diana Engelmann, in her essay “Speaking in Tongues: Exile and Internal Translation in the Poetry of Charles Simic,” contends that it is because of his experience as a displaced person, Simic’s poems convey the characteristic duality of exile, what she calls “a binary vision.” (45). She offers the following: “While it is true that the experiences of Charles Simic, the ‘American poet,’ provide a uniquely cohesive force in his verse, it is also true that the voices of the foreign and of the mother tongue memory still echo in many poems.” (45).

Furthermore, Engelmann contends that “what is inside the unsayable may reach outside though metaphor, and in that sense poetic language permits discursive thinking to come into being” (46). For example, Simic utilizes smoke imagery as metaphor to write about the Holocaust. He identifies with victims of this unspeakable historic event through his experience as a displaced person during World War II. In the opening stanza of his Pulitzer Prize winning “The World Doesn't End: Prose Poems” he writes:

My mother was a braid of black smoke.  
She bore me swaddled over the burning cities.  
The sky was a vast and windy place for a child to play.  
We met many others who were just like us.  
They were trying to put on their overcoats with arms made of smoke.  
The high heavens were full of little shrunken deaf ears instead of stars. (3)

The sense here is that, as a displaced child, his family in their travels across Europe were haunted by the death knell of Nazi concentration camps. Even though he did not experience
the camps first hand, Simic recognizes that such smoke does not necessarily issue from the warmth of the familiar hearth, but means death, whether from burning cities or crematoriums. Clearly, when Simic’s states that his “mother was a braid of black smoke” and that others “just like us... were trying to put on their overcoats with arms made of smoke” indicates that all familiar comfort and sense of safety has been lost.

More importantly, there is a feeling, as “the high heavens were full of little shrunken deaf ears instead of stars,” that the speaker feels abandoned by God. And so, it can be said that Simic, despite his distance from the Holocaust, in experience, language, and geography, finds a way through smoke imagery and metaphor to evoke memories of as well as the universal lessons to be learned from the Holocaust.

In *Master of Disguises* (2010), Charles Simic’s first poetry book after his tenure as Poet Laureate, he again writes about the “dark side” and uncertainties of the modern world with the aim of exposing its consequences. More importantly, he continues to examine themes such as identity, violence, and innocence.” Here again, Englemann’s interest in how exile and internal translation are manifested in Simic’s poetry is applicable. She asserts that:

> We could take Simic’s poetry as evidence that language may be permeable and that the structure of one language may shape whatever utterances occur in another. For someone writing in a second language, as Simic has done all along, a poem necessarily evolves out of more than one language and then memory. (45)

And because Simic writes in English as a second language, his poetry reflects a “binary vision” (45). “This is what it means to be a poet speaking ‘in tongues’ ” (45), Englemann contends.
Another of Simic’s seeming biographical poems, “Nineteen-Thirty-Eight,” reflects Simic’s binary vision. In this poem, the speaker seems to be reminiscing, focusing on historical events as well as a slew of seeming ordinary happenings, all which took place in year he was born, i.e., memory. Moreover, there is a sense from the first stanza of juxtaposition of domestic and foreign influences on the speaker, i.e., that he is viewing historical events from two different worlds. The menacing world of Europe during World War II seems to pale in the light of both ordinary and calamitous events taking place in America and South Africa.

That was the year the Nazis marched into Vienna,
Superman made his debut in Action Comics,
Stalin was killing off his fellow revolutionaries.
The first Dairy Queen opened in Kankakee, 111.,
As I lay in my crib peeing in my diapers.

“You must've been a beautiful baby,” Bing Crosby sang.
A pilot the newspapers called Wrong Way Corrigan
Took off from New York heading for California
And landed instead in Ireland, as I watched my mother
Take a breast out of her blue robe and come closer.

There was a hurricane that September causing a movie theater
At Westhampton Beach to be lifted out to sea.
People worried the world was about to end.
A fish believed to have been extinct for seventy million years

Came up in a fishing net off the coast of South Africa
I lay in my crib as the days got shorter and colder.
And the first heavy snow fell in the night
Making everything very quiet in my room.
I thought I heard myself cry for a long, long time.

Also, the poem juxtaposes domestic, i.e. personal events, as the speaker says: “A pilot the newspapers called Wrong Way Corrigan/ Took off from New York heading for California/And landed instead in Ireland, as I watched my mother / Take a breast out of her blue robe and come closer.”
It is as if the speaker is concerned that most of the time, mundane events obscure world affairs, the result of a perpetual tunnel vision due to self-involvement. And so, while all the infant seems to know is that mother has she uncovers her concealed breast, the poem continues to catalog important events as “people worried the world was about to end.” Later in the poem, “a fish believed to have been extinct for seventy million years / Came up in a fishing net off the coast of South Africa.”

Meanwhile, the speaker remains self-absorbed, and as time passes, all is silenced around him, except his own crying.

I lay in my crib as the days got shorter and colder.  
And the first heavy snow fell in the night  
Making everything very quiet in my room.  
I thought I heard myself cry for a long, long time.

In this final stanza, it seems that the speaker experiences in the silence something that Englemann describes in her essay on exile and internal translation. “One negotiates languages, the new one and the ‘other’ one that resonates with older memories (45). Thus, “mediating between dual languages, consciousness cannot rest firmly on memory or history,” she concludes, adding that “each poem that surfaces from such an unrested consciousness has in it a trace of exile, whether it appears as subject or syntax or tone” (45). Mitigating between these two diverse but tumultuous worlds, the speaker in his search for understanding seems stuck in the silent passage of time, he only sound being his cry in the dark.

Consequently, because Simic’s “unrested consciousness has in it a trace of exile” also sets his sights on search for meaning in the silence. In the same collection, the speaker of “The Elusive Something” posits the many things the “elusive something” could be masquerading as. Tapping onto all kind of sensory experience, he ponders:
Was it in the smell of freshly baked bread
That came out to meet me in the street?
The face of a girl carrying a white dress
From the cleaners with her eyes half closed?

The sight of a building blackened by fire
Where once I went to look for work?
The toothless old man passing out leaflets
For a clothing store going out of business?

Or was it the woman pushing a baby carriage
About to turn the corner? I ran after.
As if the little one lying in it was known to me.
And found myself alone on a busy street

I didn't recognize, feeling like someone
Out for the first time after a long illness.
Who sees the world with his heart.
Then hurries home to forget how it felt.

Again, however, the speaker finds himself an exile “alone on a busy street/ I didn’t recognize feeling like someone/Out for the first time after a long illness. /Who sees the world with his heart./Then hurries home to forget how it felt. In other words, the speaker again finds himself, an outsider.

And finally, if one considers how Simic expresses feelings of exile and otherness, the question then becomes how he also successfully mitigates past and present, as well as his memories of homeland and life in his adopted country. Karen Volkman, in “The World Doesn’t End: Charles Simic’s Spectral Geography,” offers one answer.: “Charles Simic’s popularity and influence among younger poets springs at least partly from his speaking to the uncanniness and latent violence of our provincial American upbringing. Strictly speaking, this is ironic, of course, since Simic grew up in Belgrade and spent his first years in America in New York and Chicago. But in the psychic realm, a provincialism of the disenfranchised and dislocated creates an off-kilter understanding and insight, an embattled sense of entitlement giving rise to what the Russian Formalists called. An essential dislocation seems at the
root of most true American originals. . . “All true lyric poets are exiles,” Simic writes. (52)

In what Volkman expresses as defamiliarization, one cannot help but find a correlation with Simic’s expression of exile and search for meaning in his uncertain world.
Chapter V.
The Uncanny in Recent Simic Poems

By applying the double meaning of “heimlich,” as that which is both congenial and concealed, to a study of Charles Simic's poetry, one can better discern not only its uncanny moments, but also how uncertainty and doubleness work to evoke meaning in his poems. Such Freudian literary analysis along with recent criticism of Simic's work further indicate that this poet has more on his mind than what his poetic language and imagery may depict. By interrogating Simic's poetic devices, one can detect unspoken concerns resonating from the midst of uncannily familiar, if not always congenial settings. In particular, a close reading of poems 80 years old, has tired of wandering through the uncertainties of the modern world, and has set his sights for home—not one defined by a sinister doubleness, but one where the familiar and congenial hold sway.

For a clear example of this poet’s current preoccupations, one can turn to “Looking for a Soul Mate.”

Recovering puff-pastry and almond-cookie addict.
Formerly associated with a French bakery in Soho
And one or two choice sewers in the neighborhood
Where he learned a few deep things about life.

Reduced of late to lurking outside cheap eateries.
Concealing his twitching whiskers behind a trash can.
Or fighting with pigeons over a few popcorn.
Now seeks a comfortable brownstone free of cats.
Snap traps, and lip-smacking snacks laced with poison.
Whose wealthy owner gives lavish dinner parties.
And where he'll be free to mingle with bankers and lawyers
And sit in their wives' laps like a much-pampered pet.
Here, Simic takes a humorous if not ironic stance to depict, in the language of singles want ad, the sentiments of a homeless cat, who is tired of living in “choice sewers in the neighborhood” and “fighting with pigeons over a few popcorn,” and yearns for a comfortable life around “bankers and lawyers” where he can “sit in their wives' laps like a much-pampered pet.”

Despite Simic’s tongue-in-cheek depiction of a stray cat searching for a new home, “Looking for a Soul Mate,” is not quite as innocuous as it seems at first glance. For one, what is evident is the world currently occupied by this speaker is full of uncertainty as he is a “recovering puff-pastry and almond-cookie addict/Formerly associated with a French bakery in Soho,” who’s been “reduced of late to lurking outside cheap eateries/ Concealing his twitching whiskers behind a trash can.” Moreover, this hungry speaker is far from an innocent: Having “learned a few deep things about life,” he “now seeks a comfortable brownstone free of cats/ snap traps, and lip-smacking snacks laced with poison,” i.e., what he desires is congenial home that is free of sinister secrets and surprises. In this poem, it is the juxtaposition of home and homelessness—accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and doubleness in meaning—that strips down its humorous surface to reveal its uncanny undertones.

To fully understand how Simic’s poetry elicits an uncanny sense of uncertainty and doubleness, however, requires further inquiry into Simic’s poetics. Critics have a number of approaches to explaining the uncertainty of meaning characteristic to his poems. For instance, William Doreski, in his essay “Scissor-Clips in the Dark,” attributes such uncertainty to a mediation between keen perception and poetic imagination. Thus,
he contends that neither a formalist nor a biographical reading can explain the
strangeness of a Simic poem. He says:

That strangeness derives from the ways in which Simic defers the full
implications of naturalistic perception or surreal imagination: rendering
the formalist reading incomplete because faced with metaphorical
uncertainties, and the biographical reading unconvincing because faced
with absurdities. These uncertainties and absurdities are the products of
negotiations between imagination and perception, and lie at the very heart
of his poems. (27)

Doreski also recognizes that Simic’s poems are made strange because they “develop a
general sense of forces working in the background of the individual life, forces
sometimes depicted as fate, sometimes as history” (28).

A clearer explanation of how Simic's language and imagery actually work to
evoke uncertainty and doubleness in his poetry comes from Richard Jackson, who, in
"Charles Simic and Mark Strand: The Presence of Absence,” asserts that Simic's poetry
reflects a dialectic between the “Symbolic order” and the “Imaginary,” that the poet
moves from the Imaginary to Symbolic thus creating a recognition of Other (137-8).
Thus, he identifies in Simic's poems a Freudian “‘wandering’ of meaning into what
seemed at first to be irrelevant details, a sense of the emergence of form, the very process
of suggesting possible meanings from 'antithetical' words and phrases” (138). Jackson
also acknowledges “that poetic language is not simply communication, that it projects, in
its relation to absence, to the Other, in its deferral of meanings for its signifiers, a truth
that resides in its faithfulness to the multiplicity of the world. The result is, in effect, the
creation of a world through language” (144).

A strange world certainly emerges in “Our Playhouse.” The poem seems
biographical, even as it gives way to absurdity, while the poem's metaphorical
uncertainties render a strictly formalist reading a challenge.
We played in the shadow
Of murderers' at work.
Kneading soldiers out of mud.
Stepping on them
When we were done playing.
Girls walking the streets
Gave us bread to eat.
An old dog with a limp
Kept us warm at night
As we huddled in doorways.
My friends, my playmates.
We never saw the dead.
Only the birds scatter
After we heard the gunshots
And ducked our heads.

What this poem succumbs to is a reading that recognizes not only what Freud would call a “wandering” of meaning, but also an uncanny sense of doubleness at work. Beginning with the title and into the first line, readers are seduced to believe they are entering a familiar and congenial place.

When the speaker begins: “We played in the shadow,” this is reminiscent of an idiomatic expression that evokes a sense of safety and security. Instead of watchful parents or a protective tree, this playhouse is located in “the shadow/ Of murderers at work.” And then, the speaker and his friends are busy “kneading soldiers out of mud/Stepping on them /When we were done playing.” They are not engaged in a homey endeavor like making bread as the word “kneading” might suggest, but are in fact building warriors, which they destroy when the game is over. Moreover, there is an ambiguity as to whether these soldiers are handmade toys or the speaker and his friends themselves. What can be surmised from this poem, however, is that there is nothing congenial or homey to be found here:

Girls walking the streets
Gave us bread to eat.
An old dog with a limp  
Kept us warm at night  
As we huddled in doorways.

Even as the poem evokes the metaphor of bread to denote the comforts of home, this representation quickly gives way to the multiple meanings of “girls walking the streets.” These girls could be streetwalkers, i.e. prostitutes, or they could be young people, who like the speaker and his friends, are unsettled and homeless. Whoever they are, the bread they offer is found lacking, just as a battered and aging dog cannot provide a sense of safety. This leaves the speaker and his friends “huddled in doorways” and unable to find more then a fleeting experience of security. Then, the poem moves quickly into treacherous territory:

My friends, my playmates.  
We never saw the dead.  
Only the birds scatter  
After we heard the gunshots  
And ducked our heads.

The poet never uses the word “war,” and the speaker and his playmates only experience it from a distance, yet we know it is there. The playmates “never saw the dead” and “only the birds scatter” after the sound of gunshot causes them to duck for cover. One can certainly identify menacing forces at work behind the scenes, but more significantly, this poem evokes the presence of war but only through a feeling of its absence. While “Our Playhouse” mediates between the “wandering” meanings of language and metaphors of home to evoke an overriding sense of uncertainty, it clearly establishes an uncanny event with its final evocation of unseen terrors. Also revealed through the double lens of presence and absence, however, is what the speaker yearns for: the security and congenial shelter of home.
However, Simic's poems do not necessarily have to depict experiences of war-torn Europe to convey feelings of exile or “otherness.” K. E. Duffin, in “The Voyeur and the Prisoner: Simic's Windows,” asserts that “the plight of the exiled watcher is a quintessential Simic situation: two worlds, separated by a boundary expressing anxieties of containment and exclusion” (64). He claims that windows often appear in Simic's poems, rendering the speaker “the voyeur and the prisoner, the hoarder of images who wanders the world with longing... and the incarcerated one who invents the world from fragments (65). In summary, Duffin offers “the speaker in a Simic poem is often looking into a realm from which he is excluded, and discovering... Or he is captive in some interior, piecing together the outside (65).

Such feelings of exclusion and otherness—along with the oppositional themes of the familiar and the sinister — are threaded through “Strange Feast.”

It makes my heart glad to hear one of these
Chirpy little birds just back from Mexico—
Or wherever it is they spend their winters—
Come and sit in a tree outside my window.

I want to stay in bed all morning
Listening to the returning ones greet the friends
They left behind, since in their rapture
At being together, I find my own joy,

As if a festive table was being set in the garden
By two languid and somber women
Clad in dresses too light for this time of year,
Mindful every glass and fork is in its proper place,

Leaving me uncertain whether to close my eyes,
Or to hurry out naked over the old snow
And make sure the dishes they brought out
Are truly there to be savored by one like me.

In this case, the poem begins with the speaker, looking out of a window, happily observes the congeniality of others:
It makes my heart glad to hear one of these
Chirpy little birds just back from Mexico—
Or wherever it is they spend their winters—
Come and sit in a tree outside my window.

Moreover, the speaker projects that the “chirpy” birds are happy to be home, seeming wistful of that he cannot experience such feelings. Next, the speaker expresses a keen desire to revel not only in the warmth of this familiar setting, but also in the celebration of the return of weary traveler, maybe even a “prodigal son.”

I want to stay in bed all morning
Listening to the returning ones greet the friends
They left behind, since in their rapture
At being together, I find my own joy,”

However, the poem then takes a dark turn, as the speaker conjures up his own homecoming:

As if a festive table was being set in the garden
By two languid and somber women
Clad in dresses too light for this time of year,
Mindful every glass and fork is in its proper place

The line: “a festive table was being set in the garden” may evoke the speaker's desire for a celebration of his return, but the reality is far from congenial, even if it is familiar. For one, the scene is populated with mother figures, but they are “two languid and somber women.” Not only is the atmosphere rendered sinister by the lack of warmth of these women, but also by their foreignness; that they are “clad in dresses too light for this time of year” indicates that they do not fit in, are foreign to the place.

Moreover, these women are “mindful every glass and fork is in its proper place,” conveying an attention to detail that is oppressive, if not authoritarian. Consequently, the speaker says that the somber and sinister atmosphere results in:

Leaving me uncertain whether to close my eyes,
Or to hurry out naked over the old snow
And make sure the dishes they brought out
Are truly there to be savored by one like me.

In fact, what he expresses is mixed feelings as to whether or not he wants to join this party. He says he is “uncertain whether to close my eyes,” i.e. reject this family scenario, or to throw off any preconceptions and “hurry out naked over the old snow.” While the speaker resists inclusion in this family get together, “the old snow” indicates that it is familiar territory. And so, he also fears being excluded, and then has to “make sure the dishes they brought out/Are truly there to be savored by one like me.”

At the heart of this poem is the return of a prodigal son to an obviously menacing homeland. In fact, the somber and languid mothers, who exhibit a sinister and oppressive otherness, resonate with a “trace of exile,” (Engelmann 45), and thus harken back to Simic’s own experiences of the authoritarian regimes of European history. Moreover, as an exile observing such a sinister and yet familiar place from a distance, he can read between the lines, is clued into what is not readily apparent, the signs of foreignness and oppression kept secret.

In the final analysis, what an exile wants more than all is to feel at home, whether that is to throw off the coat of otherness or to actually find place to settle. And so, as in “Our Playhouse,” Simic evokes the presence of something through the evocation of its absence: the safety and congeniality of home. However, this poem also interrogates differences between nature and history. Clearly, the return of the birds to their congenial nests is something that the speaker admires, indicating that nature in its innate wisdom may offer a reprieve from the uncertainties of the modern world. This sense of deliverance or transcendence not only gives the speaker pleasure, but it provides an inkling of hope as well.
Chapter VI.

Conclusion

“Charles Simic’s riddling poems, for all that they reproduce many things about his century (its wars, its cities, its eccentrics, and so on) in the end chiefly reproduce the Simic sieve—there is no escape-hatch in a Simic poem: You enter it and are a prisoner within its uncompromising and irremediable world” (119), so concludes Helen Vendler, in her essay, “Totemic Shifting: Charles Simic’s the Book of Gods and Devils, Hotel Insomnia, and Dime-Store Alchemy.”

After moving through examples of Simic’s early, mid-career, and later poems, where one finds oneself is more often than not “in the midst” of the uncertainty. Yet, as the title of his book The Uncertain Certainty indicates, this poet he is nothing less aware of that there is certitude of uncertainty in the modern world. In “The Metaphysician in the Dark: An Interview by Bruce Weigl,” Simic offers the following observation:

I continue to believe that poetry says more the psychic life of an age than any other art. Poetry is a place where all the fundamental questions are asked about the human condition. As for our age, the world has never been a more complex place. God is dead, we say, but our TV preachers talk to him all the time. Such contradictions are everywhere, our situation is impossible and therefore ideal for philosophers and poets. (7)

There is no doubt that Simic’s poetry is a place where “fundamental questions are asked about the human condition,” and “contradictions are everywhere.” Whether it is in surrealistic object poems where the historic and mythic come face to face in menacing ways or his biographical poems that convey the trauma of war and displacement, Simic has a pension for interrogating the pervasive contradictions and dualities between past
and present, thus uncovering the uncanny strangeness of modern life in all its uncertainties.

Moreover, if one applies Freudian literary analysis and contemporary criticism to close readings of his early, mid-career, and more recent poetry, it is evident that Simic, as a “sorcerer doing alchemy behind the scenes” (Weigl 2), has a bag of tricks that he continues to delve into as part of his poetic process. Whether it is his metaphorical high jinx and play with the ambiguities of language, or return to specific motifs—ordinary objects that take on uncanny meaning and menace, windows that open to exterior and interior scenes, archetypal mother figures who evoke terror and foreignness, or children and birds displaying both innocence and wiliness—such poetic devices work together to build a world that is riddled with uncertainties. Everywhere, the reader seems to encounter one doubleness after another: familiar and unfamiliar, myth and history, inclusion and exclusion, citizen and exile, presence and absence.

However, through the lens of Freud's “The Uncanny,” and the double meaning of “heimlich” as that which is both congenial and concealed, it is possible to move through the archetypal and historical constructs in Simic's poetry to better engage with its “darkly universal discourse” (Weigl 2). Not only do Simic's poetic preoccupations with uncertainty and doubleness make sense, but the uncanny meanings of home and familiar can be applied to identify the underlying fears and wishes that echo through his poetry.

What’s unveiled in recent poems is that this poet has grown weary of navigating the hidden doorways and unsafe streets of the modern world, and seeks shelter, one that is more than fleeting. Tiring of places haunted by doubleness and uncertainty, Simic works his magic to conjure up those where the familiar and congenial hold sway, even if
it's not always evident on the surface of his poems. Setting his sights on home, he yearns for deliverance, if not a transcendence, which, in the parlance of Tatar's essay on Freud's “The Uncanny” can “exorcise the real ghosts of the marvelous tale” (Tatar 182). When one achieves such knowledge, Tatar asserts, “the intellectual uncertainty created by an uncanny event yields to conviction. . . what was formerly unheimlich becomes heimlich, the once hostile world becomes inhabitable again” (182).
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