



Semiotics in the Poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* by Chairil Anwar

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ABSTRACT

Poem is a literary work rich in symbolic meanings and signs that represent the inner experiences of the poet. One poem that contains profound meaning is *Derai-Derai Cemara* by Chairil Anwar. This research aims to analyze the meanings of signs contained in the poem through a semiotic approach. The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive method with text analysis techniques. The data collection tools in this research include the text of the poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* and an observation guide in the form of a checklist instrument to identify and record the lines of the poem that contain signs, symbols, signifiers, and signifieds. The process of data analysis is carried out systematically through stages of identifying sign elements, classifying based on the concept of signifier and signified, and interpreting the symbolic meaning of each identified sign. Research data consists of the lines of the poem that contain signs, symbols, and meanings representing the poet's existential experience. The results of the analysis show that the poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* contains various signs that represent the poet's awareness of the journey of life, solitude, and reflections on death and human limitations. The symbol of falling cypress leaves is interpreted as a symbol of time that continuously passes and life that moves toward mortality. Through a semiotic approach, this poem demonstrates how linguistic signs are used by the poet to convey philosophical meanings about human life. Therefore, semiotic analysis helps readers understand the deeper meaning of the poem and enriches the interpretation of literary works.

Keywords: semiotics, poem, Chairil Anwar

Semiotika dalam Puisi *Derai-Derai Cemara* Karya Chairil Anwar

ABSTRAK

Puisi merupakan karya sastra yang kaya akan makna simbolik dan tanda-tanda yang merepresentasikan pengalaman batin penyair. Salah satu puisi yang sarat makna adalah *Derai-Derai Cemara* karya Chairil Anwar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna tanda yang terdapat dalam puisi tersebut melalui pendekatan semiotika. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik analisis teks. Alat pengumpulan data dalam penelitian ini meliputi teks puisi *Derai-Derai Cemara* dan pedoman observasi berupa instrumen checklist untuk mengidentifikasi dan mencatat larik-larik puisi yang mengandung tanda, simbol, penanda, dan petanda. Proses analisis data dilakukan secara sistematis melalui tahapan identifikasi unsur-unsur tanda, klasifikasi berdasarkan konsep penanda dan petanda, serta interpretasi makna simbolik dari setiap tanda yang teridentifikasi. Data penelitian berupa larik-larik puisi yang mengandung tanda, simbol, dan makna yang merepresentasikan pengalaman eksistensial penyair. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa puisi *Derai-Derai Cemara* mengandung berbagai tanda yang merepresentasikan kesadaran penyair terhadap perjalanan hidup, kesendirian, serta refleksi terhadap kematian dan keterbatasan manusia. Simbol cemara yang berguguran dimaknai sebagai lambang waktu yang terus berjalan dan kehidupan yang menuju pada kefanaan. Melalui pendekatan semiotika, puisi ini memperlihatkan bagaimana tanda-tanda linguistik digunakan penyair untuk menyampaikan makna filosofis tentang kehidupan manusia. Dengan demikian, analisis semiotika membantu pembaca memahami makna yang lebih mendalam dari puisi tersebut serta memperkaya interpretasi terhadap karya sastra.

Kata kunci: semiotika, puisi, Chairil Anwar

Submitted
03/04/2026

Accepted
05/04/2026

Published
10/04/2026

Citation	Jonatahn, G., Tariga, D., Rahmah, N., Fauziah, S., Sulastris, S., & Thamimi, M. (2026). Semiotics in the Poem <i>Derai-Derai Cemara</i> by Chairil Anwar. <i>Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra, Volume 5, Nomor 2, Maret 2026, 1679-1684</i> . DOI: https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v4i3.1327
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Publisher
Raja Zulkarnain Education Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a form of literature that uses language as the primary medium to convey human ideas, feelings, and experiences aesthetically. Language in poetry functions not only as a means of communication but also as a means of expression, containing symbols, metaphors, and signs with specific meanings. Therefore, the meaning of poetry often cannot be understood literally but requires a deeper process of interpretation. According to Pradopo (2017), poetry is a structure composed of various interrelated elements, resulting in complex meanings that are not always immediately apparent on the surface of the text.

In poetry, the use of signs and symbols is one way poets convey ideas indirectly. These signs can be words, phrases, or specific images that carry connotative meaning. Therefore, analysis of poetry can be conducted through a semiotic approach. Semiotics is the science that studies signs and the relationships between signs, objects, and their meanings. According to Hoed (2014), semiotics is the study of sign systems used by humans in various forms of communication, including literary works.

One of the great poets in Indonesian literature, widely known for his use of powerful and symbolic language, is Chairil Anwar. He was a key figure in the development of modern Indonesian literature, particularly during the Generation of '45. Chairil Anwar's poems often address themes of life, death, loneliness, and the existential struggle of humankind. According to Teeuw (2015), Chairil Anwar's works demonstrate courage in their use of language that is dense, straightforward, and rich with symbolic meaning.

One of Chairil Anwar's most widely studied poems is *Derai-Derai Cemara*. This poem depicts the poet's reflection on the journey of human life, which is inseparable from the processes of aging, loneliness, and an awareness of life's limitations. The natural symbols used in the poem, such as falling pine trees, can be interpreted as symbols of the passage of time and human mortality. These

symbols demonstrate that poetry conveys more than just literal meaning but also contains signs that require interpretation through a specific approach.

Based on this description, a semiotic approach is relevant for analyzing the poem *Derai-Derai Cemara*. Through this approach, the various signs and symbols in the poem can be interpreted more systematically, allowing for a deeper understanding of their meaning.

Based on the background above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the signs present in Chairil Anwar's poem *Derai-Derai Cemara*?
2. What is the meaning of each identified sign?
3. What is the philosophical meaning conveyed throughout the poem?

This research has the following several objectives:

1. To identify and classify the signs contained in the poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* based on the concepts of signifier and signified.
2. To analyze the symbolic meaning of each identified sign using a semiotic approach.
3. To understand the overall philosophical meaning of the poem and its implications for understanding human existential experience.

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Indonesian literary analysis through a systematic semiotic approach. Practically, this research can help readers and students understand poetry more deeply and enrich their interpretations of literary works. Furthermore, the results of this study can serve as a reference for other researchers interested in analyzing poetry using a semiotic approach.

Several previous studies relevant to this research include Saptawuryandari's (2013) analysis of Chairil Anwar's poetry from a semiotic perspective. This research demonstrated that Chairil Anwar's poetry contains profound philosophical



meanings. Furthermore, Nurweni's (2015) study on the semiotic analysis of modern Indonesian poetry also provides an important contribution to the development of literary analysis methods. These studies provide a strong theoretical basis for a more in-depth analysis of the poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* using a semiotic approach.

METHOD

This research uses qualitative research procedures with systematic steps to uncover the meaning of signs in Chairil Anwar's poem *Derai-Derai Cemara*. The research procedure was carried out in several stages, namely:

- 1) determining the research object, namely the poem *Derai-Derai Cemara*,
- 2) conducting a literature review of semiotic theory and poetry studies,
- 3) reading the poem repeatedly to understand its meaning,
- 4) identifying words, phrases, and lines containing signs or symbols,
- 5) analyzing these signs using a semiotic approach,
- 6) drawing conclusions based on the results of the analysis.

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design. This design was used to describe and interpret the meaning of the signs contained in the poem. According to Moleong (2017), Yuliani (2018), Razak (2017), Emzir (2018), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena in depth through descriptions in the form of words. In this study, the poem is viewed as a system of signs that can be analyzed to reveal its symbolic meaning.

This research is library research; therefore, data collection was not conducted in the field. Data was obtained through a literature review of books, scientific journals, and other reference sources relevant to semiotics and poetry analysis. The data collection process was conducted during the research preparation stage, in 2026.

The data collection tools in this study were the poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* by Chairil Anwar and various reference sources related to semiotic

theory and literary studies. Furthermore, the researcher used a reading and note-taking technique, namely reading the poem repeatedly and noting sections containing signs, symbols, or connotative meanings relevant to the research focus.

The data analysis technique in this study employed semiotic analysis. The analysis was conducted by identifying the signs contained in the poem and then interpreting their meaning based on semiotic concepts. The data analysis process is carried out in several stages, namely: (1) reading and understanding the poetry text as a whole, (2) identifying the elements of signs in the poetry, (3) classifying signs based on the concept of signifier and signified, (4) interpreting the symbolic meaning of these signs, and (5) concluding the overall meaning of the poem based on the results of the analysis.

RESULTS

1. Identification of Signs in the Poem *Derai-Derai Cemara*

1.1 Natural Signs as a Representation of Life

The poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* by Chairil Anwar contains signs in the form of natural elements such as "cemara," "wind," and "night." These signs represent the journey of human life that continues over time.

1.2 Typical Expressions as Philosophical Signs

The phrase "life only delays defeat" is the main sign in the poem, containing a philosophical meaning about human life, which ultimately leads to death.

2. Classification of Signifiers and Signifieds

2.1 Signifiers in the Poem

The signifiers in this poem are concrete words such as "cemara," "dahan," and "wind," which appear directly in the text.

2.2 Signifieds in the Poem

The signifieds of these signs are abstract meanings such as the journey of life, loneliness, and human mortality.

DISCUSSION

Chairil Anwar's poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* is structured in a regular manner, with each stanza consisting of four lines with an a-b-a-b rhyme scheme. This regularity creates a calm and reflective atmosphere. The use of natural imagery such as pine trees, wind, and night evokes the continuous passage of time toward the end of life.

In the first stanza, the phrase "cemara derai sampai jauh" (the pine tree's shimmering sound) depicts the long journey of human life. The transition from day to night indicates that time continues to pass and life is nearing its end. The phrase "brittle branches" symbolizes the aging and weakening of humankind. Meanwhile, "the hidden wind" depicts the pressures of life that are not always visible but nonetheless felt.

In the second stanza, the phrase "I am now a person who can endure" demonstrates the maturity of the lyricist's character. Life experiences have made him stronger in facing challenges. This is reinforced by the line "supposing he is no longer a child," which indicates that the character has left behind his youth.

In the third stanza, the phrase "life only delays defeat" becomes the central meaning of the poem. This phrase suggests that life is essentially a process toward death. This aligns with Teeuw's (2015) opinion, which states that Chairil Anwar's works often depict human struggles.

Furthermore, research by Nurweni Saptawuryandari (2013) also states that Chairil Anwar's poetry contains profound philosophical meaning. The expressions in the poem are not only aesthetic but also reflect life.

The strength of this research lies in the use of a semiotic approach, which systematically uncovers symbolic meaning in poetry. This approach helps understand the relationship between language and meaning.

However, this study has limitations because it only analyzed one poem, so the results cannot be generalized. Furthermore, the interpretation of

meaning remains subjective.

Chairil Anwar's poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* not only presents the beauty of language but also contains a complex system of signs. Through a semiotic approach, this poem can be understood as a representation of human existential experiences related to time, loneliness, and death.

Semiotically, the signs in this poem can be examined through the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Words like "cemara," "wind," and "malam" function not only as natural elements but also as symbols with philosophical meaning. This aligns with Hoed's (2014) opinion that signs in literary works have connotative and contextual meanings.

In the first stanza, the line "cemara derai sampai jauh" (cemara derai until far) indicates the long and ongoing journey of human life. The word "derai" (lights up) implies continuous movement, symbolically depicting the passage of time. Meanwhile, the change from day to night reflects the phases of human life from youth to old age. In a semiotic context, this sign falls into the category of symbol because its meaning is determined by cultural conventions and interpretations.

The phrase "branched branch" symbolizes human fragility. The initially strong branch then becoming brittle represents the human condition as it ages. This reinforces the idea that human life is temporary and limited. According to Pradopo (2017), Rokhmansyah (2018), imagery in poetry is often used to enhance emotional impact and symbolic meaning.

Furthermore, in the second stanza, there is a shift in perspective to a more personal one through the use of the word "aku." The line "aku sekarang orangnya bisa tahan" (I am now a person who can endure) indicates the lyric character's psychological development. He has undergone a process of maturation gained through life experiences. In semiotics, this can be understood as an indexical sign indicating a causal relationship between experience and changes in attitude.



In the third stanza, the line "hidup hanya ketinggalan kalah" (life only postpones defeat) becomes the core meaning of the poem. This phrase reflects the existential view that human life will ultimately lead to death. This concept aligns with existentialist thought, which views life as a process toward an inevitable end. Teeuw (2015) states that Chairil Anwar's work contains many reflections on the limitations of human life.

Furthermore, the line "tambah terasing dari cinta sekolah rendah" (increasingly alienated from elementary school love) suggests social alienation. The word "sekolah rendah" (low school) can be interpreted as a symbol of the past or simple memories of youth. As people grow older, they become increasingly distant from that time, leading to feelings of alienation. From a semiotic perspective, this indicates a shift in meaning based on the context of individual experiences.

Furthermore, this poem also exhibits elements of indirect expression, which is a characteristic of poetic language. Meaning is not conveyed directly, but through symbols and metaphors. This aligns with Riffaterre's theory (Pradopo, 2017; Nurgiyantoro, 2018), which states that poetry always contains hidden meanings that must be interpreted through in-depth reading.

From the overall analysis, it can be concluded that this poem depicts three main themes:

1. The journey of human life (symbols of the pine and time)
2. Human fragility and limitations (symbols of the brittle branches)
3. Awareness of death (life delays defeat)

A semiotic approach helps reveal that each word in the poem has a deeper meaning than its literal meaning. Thus, this poem is not only aesthetic but also philosophical.

CONCLUSION

Chairil Anwar's poem *Derai-Derai Cemara* contains signs that have symbolic meaning about human life.

These signs are natural symbols and typical expressions that represent the journey of life, awareness of time, and death. Through a semiotic approach, the meaning of the poem can be understood more deeply.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank all parties who have assisted in the preparation of this research. Thanks are extended to the supervisor for his guidance and direction.

The author would also like to thank Universitas PGRI Pontianak for providing academic support.

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