

Analysis of the paul celan's poem "with a variable key"

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



Paul Celan's "With a Variable Key" shows that Celan tries to overcome his memories using hopeful languages in his poem; yet, instead of forgetting about the past, the more he writes, the closer he is leaning towards death. Celan's journey in "With a Variable Key" invites us to travel with him on a search for his variable key. We find it with him in the words of the poem itself. The key opens his house of language, a structure of language and heritage that comes with it. Language is the variable key that opens hope from both cherished and horror-filled memories. Line 2-3 is the repository of all unwritten poems, stories, words left unsaid to those important to him, and thoughts numbed through horror. The metaphor of the drifts of snow symbolizes the words, emotions and ideas that have yet to be written. An idea of concern of words left unspoken between he and his parents before they were taken away by the Nazis. Body parts mentioned in line 6 are facial features that are used to feel the memory of death by the hand of the horror of "blood" leaking from everywhere. Celan's memory of brutal and inhuman scenes of Jews hunted down and tortured are clear and reprehensible. The word "free" in line 8 reminds of Celan's eagerness to be free from his survivor guilt, as well as the memories that haunt him. In the end, this poem leaves one empty, it leaves us with a feeling of possibilities unrealized, of lives cast aside, and of love and appreciation left hanging in the breeze, never to be spoken of again.

The physical language of "The Variable Key" describes the door to an oven at Auschwitz. The virtual or spiritual significance of the poem defines language as our approach to life - we understand with language - we react

with language - everything builds through language. To Celan, language is his crutch after his tragic loss, and he can only express himself using words, but still, despite how well or how much he writes, he cannot change history.

In a physical sense, the "house" in line 2 refers to the house Celan lived with his parents. However, his spiritual world is covered with unspeakable snow, and underneath the snow are bodies of his parents and millions of Jews. The images of "snow" (line 3), "flakes" (line 8) and "snowball" (line 9), tells us that the power of these memories are strong. From drifting snow to drifting flakes that are colder and finally to the accumulated snowball, this scenery of snowing is beautiful, and it shows growth in the hope for life. These words symbolize the continuing of life as we can drink them when they melt into water. However, snow is a cold element - a cold response to the loss of so many. It makes Celan so numb that he no longer feels the coldness. The word "snowball" demonstrates that Celan has reached his limit. He writes poems to release emotions and numb the past, but instead of fading away, his memories transform into different forms and become solid and clear. Celan's memories are snow and flakes, and finally they all build up into a snowball that will drown him when it melts, which foreshadows his death later on as he could not handle the memory images anymore.

The rhythm of this poem is a bleak, simple, and non-lyrical or musical one, which gives the reader the impression of exhaustion, despair, pain, and world-weariness behind the words. The beat is unconscionable irregular—a reflection of the author's experiences. On its surface his poem makes a serious, mature statement. It is not meant to be taken lightly. Yet, the image

of snow growing into a snowball sings a crescendo melody of hope. The melody is present in the concept of hope that comes out of so much horror. However, the frost of hopes dashed and melts into the water that sustains us." With a Variably Key" With a variable key you unlock the house in which drifts the snow of that left unspoken.

Always what key you choose depends on the blood that spurts from your eye or your mouth or your ear. You vary the key, you vary the word that is free to drift with the flakes. What snowball will form round the word depends on the wind that rebuffs you.