

Howard nemerov's poem "d-day and all the years"

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

For the following essay I have taken a close look at the assigned poem by Howard Nemerov and focused mainly on the identity of the speaker, his/hers relation to the author, and the poetic techniques that Nemerov has used to achieve his aims. The first thing I want to describe is my view of the situation in this poem. What is going on? To my opinion the speaker has just been asked something about his/her father by the addressee, who noticed a picture of this man in the speaker's house.

The speaker seems very eager on this prompting to tell the story, since the answer to this question starts before the first line has ended, directly after the repeated question. The last line could also refer to this scene, when the speaker points at the picture and says: 'And more or less the way you see him now'. The photograph might be one of the heroic father dressed in his military outfit. Dealing with the speaker's gender, I would like to make a case for the speaker being a woman for several reasons. Firstly, the fact that the speaker keeps referring to the father as 'Daddy'.

But moreover because of the way in which the speaker describes everything and particularly elaborates on what her father was wearing during the operation. This fairly detailed description of his clothes goes on for the whole last stanza. Also the whole poem seems to have a chattering ring to it, which is enhanced by the fact that it is written in free verse. One might object that a iambic pentametre can be discerned, for instance in the first four lines and in the eighth to eleventh line, alternated with some anapests.

It is my opinion, however, that there are too many instances where the verse departs from this fixed form and where not only the sort of feet differ, but

more importantly you can not find five feet to a line. What I did notice was that the first and the last line are in fact written in a perfect iambic pentameter, so in a way this " closes" the open poem, as does the fact that both of these lines have to do with (pointing at) the photograph.

Finally, I would like to stress the fact that the iambic pentameter is the verse that tends to be the closest related to the spoken language, which is exactly what Nemerov is aiming at here, the chattering of a vain woman. Assuming the speaker to be a woman rules out the possibility of this poem being autobiographical. The woman is Nemerov's persona. However, before I can go on describing this persona a bit more, I must discuss a very important feature of this poem, namely the use of irony. Nemerov applies this verbal irony without involving his own persona, he is applying an ironic point of view.

The woman is clearly being absolutely serious about her father's heroic part, but Nemerov is not. He is mocking her and her kind of prattling women by making the irony clear to us as readers. On further examination of the text I found two instances that might indicate the woman's age. The words 'Opening Day' in line 1. prove that this takes place at least after the sixth of June 1944. The fact that she uses these particular words, that were commonly applied during the Second World War, shows that the date will probably be not very many years later.

Though from the words 'used to wear then' (line 19.) you can infer that it is not directly after the war. From all this my guess would be that the scene is taking place in the late fifties or early sixties. Her age would then be guessed

at approximately 30 to 40 years. Now I would like to give a few examples of where we can see the irony at work. The woman is boasting about the part played by her father during Operation Overlord. She confesses that he was the first to fly towards Normandy and that he flew over all kinds of interesting and important places.

When she says 'as far as Cap Gris Nez' (line 3.), presumably thinking that this French name has a very smart sound to it, she is unconsciously being ironic. As it happens Cap Gris Nez and Manston are on either sides of the Channel en not more than a hundred kilometres apart. The way she describes her father flew afterwards is also an indication of him being not all that heroic. Seemingly, after dropping the first parachutists he 'wheeled homeward' (line 9.) back in time 'for an early lunch' (line 10.). Her father does not seem to have been involved in any war action at all.

He just flew to the coast of Normandy and then the long way back. Other words from which we can infer the father's inactiveness are 'pleasant and warm', when referring to the airplane which she calls his 'office', and 'A peaceable morning. And the sky was blue.' (line 14.) This all sounds more as a pleasure trip than as someone going to war. The fact that Nemerov makes her use the word 'peaceable' in stead of 'peaceful' only strengthens my opinion, since 'peaceable' also denotes 'inclined to avoid war'.

The irony I mentioned above was on the part of the ri?? e of the father during WW II. There is, however, also irony working on the part of the daughter, who is obviously trying to attract attention by mentioning different and (in her perspective) far off places. She wants to look distinguished and knowing. For

example by mentioning Hamlet, but she does not seem to know what the names of the other characters from the play are. When she mentions the Bight of Heligoland, she does not mention its importance in the First World War, which would have been more to the point here, since she did refer to the part Terschelling played.

About Terschelling she says 'where we had lost a few' (line 6.), which makes her sound a bit foolish, as she is talking about human lives here. I want to end this essay with a short comment on rhyming. This certainly seems to be an open-formed poem, because there is neither a metric nor a rhyming pattern involved. You could say that the single fixed thing in it is the use of stanzas, which are, however, of various irregular length. The only alliteration of any kind can be found in the first line 'Daddy did ... Day', which refers to D-Day.

Of course the words D-Day and Daddy are not accidentally so similar, but they are evidently chosen to put these two together. Mark that this link is made by the daughter, who is the one that chooses to call the man 'daddy' and not 'father' or 'dad' or 'papa'. Another instance where one could say alliteration is at work occurs in lines 17. and 19. , where the /e/ sound is repeated, presumably to give the sentence a heroic and dramatically poetic sound, which fits the meaning and once again pokes fun at the daughter.