

Analysis of “All There Is to Know About Adolph Eichmann” by Leonard Cohen

Biographical Data

Leonard Norman Cohen was born in 1934 and is a Jewish Canadian poet. He is also a novelist, musician, songwriter, and recording artist.

Speaker, Dramatic Situation, Symbolism

The speaker in “All There Is to Know About Adolph Eichmann” is unclear. There is no dramatic situation or symbolism.

Ironic Contrasts

The irony that Adolph Eichmann, a man responsible for the deaths of six million Jewish persons, is “medium” in so many respects and has no distinguishing characteristics shapes the central idea of the poem—it is hard to tell who is a monster—or a mad man—by examining their physical characteristics.

Paraphrase, Summary

“All There Is to Know About Adolph Eichmann” by Leonard Cohen is an open form poem; however, the last line provides an ending click which is similar to the ending click of a closed form poem. The theme of this poem is that there is no way to identify madness by a person’s physical characteristics. The fact that Cohen is Jewish is significant to the poem, because this poem was written two years after Eichmann was

convicted by a Jewish court of being responsible for the deaths of six million Jews in German concentration camps during World War II.

The first stanza of the poem is the eight lines that Cohen uses to describe Eichmann's physical characteristics. Eichmann is described as having "medium" eyes, hair, weight, height, and intelligence. Cohen also includes that Eichmann has the same normal fingers and toes and no other distinguishing features. In this stanza, Cohen establishes that Eichmann was a normal looking person.

The second stanza is the series of five questions following the description. The speaker asks the question "What did you expect?" In the following three lines the speaker suggests monstresque features that one might expect to find in a person that had been found responsible for the death of six million people. The last line of the poem establishes that one can not find madness in a person's features.