

# Walking Away

Cecil Day-Lewis

## OVERALL SUMMARY

"Walking Away" is narrated by a father who **retrospectively reflects** (thinks back) on his son childhood after he has left home. He **reminisces** on sending him off to school with **a tinge of regret** in his tone that him and his son didn't spend more time together.

## STANZA SUMMARY

- The Father **reminisces** on watching his son play a game of football
- The father **reminisces** on another moment, sending his son off to school, watching him as he walks away. He uses **language of nature** to create an image of him letting his son go.
- He speaks of his son as though he was hesitant to leave his father, comparing him to a seed wrenched from a stem.
- Parting from his son has been **prevalent** in his mind, but he considers that it was likely a necessary part of forging one's own independence and **gaining selfhood**. He believes that in letting his son go he has somehow proved his love for him.

## CONTEXT

- Cecil Day-Lewis is believed to have written this poem about his own son, whom he sent to boarding school.
- Day-Lewis was raised by a **single father** after his mother passed and thus has a particular interest in father son relationships, as seen in his poetry.
- The poem originally had the sub title **"for Sean"**.
- Day-Lewis' poetry is known to be Romantic at times, hence the **semantic field of nature** we can see in this poem. **Romanticism** was a movement that greatly valued the natural world and we can see this appreciation in his poetry.

# Key Themes & Analysis

## NATURE

- Day Lewis uses frequent **nature imagery** which has the effect of making his poem sound **Romantic** and **sentimental**.
- The poem begins on a ***"sunny day with the leaves just turning"***. The **pathetic fallacy** that Day-Lewis employs in the first few lines of his poem, where the **sunny weather mirrors his happy disposition**, set up the theme of nature and establish a **nostalgic, sentimental tone** in the poem, which is continued throughout.
- Furthermore, the ***"leaves [...] turning"*** evokes the colours orange and red which **connote warmth and serenity**, furthering the poems **sentimental tone**.
- The speaker characterises his son as ***"a half- fledged thing set free into the wilderness"***. The **noun *"wilderness"*** portrays the school he is sending his son off to be **treacherous** and **wild**. It is an ironic way to describe a school given how **strict** and **controlled** they are. This **irony** shows him to be overly **sentimental** about his son, worrying when there is no reason to worry.
- Additionally, that he calls his son a ***"thing"*** **dehumanising** him, almost **zoomorphising** him making him seem **animalistic**. By extension he **de-personalises** him, making it seem as though he is not a mature young man but a ***"thing"*** that he is **reluctant** to let go of.
- Day-Lewis is **possessive** over his son and by portraying him as **animalistic** and de-humanising him he justifies that **possessiveness**.
- He compares his son to a ***"winged seed loosened from its parent stem"***. In his simile he portrays his son as **small** and **vulnerable** in comparison to the wide world he is entering.
- The father speaks of ***"natures give and take"*** reinforcing the **semantic field of nature** in the poem and comparing him raising his son to let him go to the give and take of nature.
- At the beginning of the poem Day-Lewis uses a semantic field of nature and the effect is it sounds **warm** and **nostalgic**, but towards the end the semantic field begins to sound harsher and evokes themes of **relinquishment**.

## ABANDONMENT & GUILT

- Day-Lewis addresses the theme of **abandonment** in his poem. He reflects on watching his son go to school, **"like a satellite wrenched from its orbit"**. The theme of **space** is evoked, which reflects the **vast abyss** or the wide world, to speak less **metaphorically**, he feels he is throwing his son into by letting him go off to school.
- The verb **"wrenched"** connotes to **"pull"** or **"tug"**, an aggressive movement, this emulating how he feels his son has been **brutally snatched from him**. The **gravitational semantic** exacerbating how he feels some kind of alien force has separated them.
- The speaker demonstrates the **immense guilt** he feels for abandoning his son. He says **"I can see you walking away from me"**. The **syntactical distance** between the **pronouns** **"you"** and **"me"** in this line reflects the physical distance between him and his son.
- He describes his son as a **"hesitant figure"** as he walks away from him to school. The **adjective** **hesitant** emphasises the speaker's guilt in that he believes his son is reluctant to leave him.
- Furthermore, the way in which he describes his son as a **"figure"** **de-personalises** him, showing that the speaker is assuming how his son feels and this assumption is **influenced by his guilt**. He does not actually know that his son is hesitant. Because the poem **uses the first person**, we must assume his son is **"hesitant"** too. We view the son through the eyes of his father which is **a lens that is smudged by guilt**.
- He describes how the partings **"gnaw at [his] mind still"**. The **adjective** **gnaw** sounds **animalistic**, it **personifies his guilt turning it into a bloodthirsty creature**.
- The speaker ends the poem by saying **"God alone could perfectly show [...] love is proved in letting go"**. The reference to God adds a sense of omniscience (all knowing) to the speaker's conclusion.
- Furthermore, the rhyming couplets make the final few lines sound like a **proverb** or a pre-established saying. The speaker sounds certain in his conclusion and seems to have **dissolved** his guilt.
- Day-Lewis shows abandonment and guilt to be the **crux** of his poem and by the end, the speaker seems secure in the notion that letting his son go was the right decision.
- Day-Lewis portrays **the guilt that parents feel in parting with their children** for whatever reason, but through his poem he re-assures those parents that **abandonment is sometimes unavoidable**.

# Form

## STANZAS

- The poems have **four stanzas** that each contain **five lines**. The stanzas are **regular**, and this reflects the speakers age.
- Furthermore, the **regularity** of the stanza lengths **foreshadows** the poems tone of **contentment** at its end. It gives the notion that everything will settle.
- The regularity of the stanzas could make this experience seem **universal** and almost a regular experience for many parents. The **hardships** of seeing a child grow up being a painful experience for most parents, as if they are **mourning** the loss of their younger innocent child.

## RHYME

- The poem has an **ABACA rhyme scheme** which is **regular in it repeats** throughout the poem but **irregular in its actual form**.
- The **irregularity in the order of the rhyme scheme** represents the **conflict** the father feels in letting his son go but also his worry that his son is too young and vulnerable to be released into the world.
- The familiar, yet unfamiliar repeated irregular rhyme could mimic how parents have this comfort in knowing their child and keeping them close, but this pain and fear that they're growing up into somebody they now don't recognise.
- Every **rhyming couplet** is a **monosyllabic** perfect rhyme, however, which **drives the metre** and gives the sense of stability and normality - Day-Lewis is reassuring the reader that although these feelings are daunting, this is something that will become an easily acceptable part of life.

# Structure

## TONE

- The **tone** of the poem gradually changes as it progresses.
- The tone of the speaker at the beginning of the poem is **uncertain and guilty** while at the end it becomes **content and secure**.
- This shows the **gradual realisation** of the speaker that what he is doing is, so he believes, the right thing.

## SENTENCE STRUCTURE

- The speaker uses **varying sentence structures**, from complex to simple.
- The speaker's maturity is reflected through his language and **syntax**. They are confident in expressing themselves and secure in their emotions.

## DASHES

- Day-Lewis' frequent use of **dashes** makes the speaker always sound willing to give more detail.
- It has the effect of making him sound **sentimental** and **reminiscent**. He is living in the days that he can never get back. He is re-living the time he believes he wasted.

# Comparisons

Mother Any Distance	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	<p><b>Leaving</b></p> <p>Both poems address the theme of growing up and leaving home through a <b>retrospective lens</b> with an element of <b>fondness</b> in their tones.</p> <p><b>Conflict</b></p> <p>Both speakers feel <b>conflicted</b> with the idea of letting go. Armitage's speaker with letting go of his mother And Day-Lewis' with letting go of his son.</p> <p><b>Emotional intimacy</b></p> <p>Both speakers have a sense of <b>insecurity</b> in their relationships with their respective mothers and sons. They are worried that their relationship has been or will be affected by physical distance.</p>	<p>The poems are quite dissimilar in terms of form</p>	<p><b>Perspective</b></p> <p>Both poets make use of the <b>first person</b> in their poems, which allows us a certain amount of intimacy with the speakers. It makes the poems seem more <b>personal</b>.</p>	<p><b>Relationships between parents and children</b></p> <p>Both poets have close relationships with their father's with Day-Lewis being raised by a single father after his mother passed and Armitage being close to his mother.</p>
Different	<p><b>Emotional intimacy</b></p> <p>While Armitage's speaker concludes that his relationship with his mother is strong and can <b>withstand</b> the physical distance between them, Day-Lewis' speaker seem <b>insecure</b> in his relationship with his son and regrets not spending enough time with him.</p>	<p><b>Rhyme</b></p> <p>Armitage's poem lacks a discernible rhyme scheme while Day-Lewis' employs an <b>ABACA rhyme scheme</b>. This could highlight the age of Day-Lewis' speaker, showing them to be <b>more mature</b> and thus more organised with their thoughts in comparison to Armitage's speaker who is younger and therefore more unstable and disorganised.</p> <p>Furthermore Day-Lewis poem's rhyming couplets are <b>monosyllabic</b> which places <b>emphasis</b> on certain words making them more noticeable the Armitage's half rhymes. Again, making Day-Lewis' speaker seem more cohesive (organised) in his thoughts.</p>	<p><b>Enjambement</b></p> <p>Armitage's poem makes use of enjambement far more compared to Day's Lewis' who uses a range of complex sentences but who includes shorter, simpler ones as well. As a result, Day Lewis' speaker seems less rambling than Armitage's, which could, as aforementioned, be attributed to their respective ages.</p> <p><b>Stanzas</b></p> <p>Day Lewis' poem is broken into four stanzas of five lines each whereas Armitage's stanzas are uneven and disjointed. This has the effect that Armitage's uneven rhyme scheme mirrors his uncertain attitude towards his mother and their parting. Whereas Day Lewis' speaker seems more accepting of the relationship he has with his son and isn't making any changes to that relationship.</p>	<p><b>Tone</b></p> <p>Day-Lewis' poem seem more <b>retrospectively melancholic</b>. The poem is thought to be about his son who went to boarding school and the speaker and the poet by extension regrets not spending more time with his son. Armitage's poem is, on the contrary about his mother with whom he is very close and thus is poem has a happier tone with more fondness.</p>

Winter Swans	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	<p><b>Conflict</b></p> <p>Both speakers feel a sense of <b>conflict</b>, Day-Lewis' in his reluctance to let his son go and Sheers his relationship.</p> <p>Contentedness Both poems end with the theme of <b>contentedness</b>. Both speakers seem</p>	<p><b>Stanzas</b></p> <p>Both poems are broken into regular stanzas which gives them an <b>organised</b> feel. The speakers both seem cohesive and organised with their thoughts. The poems have a calm feel to them as a result. However, Sheers' poem as a two-line <b>standalone</b> final stanzas but this does not interrupt the poems calm feel.</p>	<p><b>Perspective</b></p> <p>The first person is used in both poems and as such they feel <b>intimate</b>, and we get to know the speakers inner feelings very well.</p>	<p><b>Relevance</b></p> <p>Both poets have picked issues which are relevant to them and which they have experience with. Day-Lewis' grew up with a single father so focuses on father son relationships whilst Sheers is interested in society and people so focuses on romantic ones.</p>
Different	<p><b>Tone</b></p> <p>Sheers' poem is permeated by a sense of melancholy whereas although Day-Lewis' poem has melancholic themes, his is rather <b>permeated by nostalgia and fondness</b>.</p>	<p><b>Rhyme</b></p> <p>Day-Lewis' employs an <b>ABACA rhyme scheme</b> with <b>monosyllabic rhymed couplets</b>. Sheers on the other hand uses <b>no discernible rhyme scheme</b> (except for a final rhyming couplet). Day-Lewis' poem, as a result seems far more controlled, as though we know everything will work out for the best by the poems end, whereas Sheers' poem has a sense of <b>uncertainty and ambiguity</b>.</p>	<p><b>Caesura</b></p> <p>Sheers' poem makes use of <b>caesura's</b> whilst Day-Lewis' does not. As a result, Sheers relationship seem more tumultuous than the one Day-Lewis' speaker has with his son.</p>	<p><b>Relationships</b></p> <p>Both poems tackle relationships but where Day-Lewis chooses to focus on a father son dynamic, Sheers focuses on a romantic relationship.</p>