

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

WALKING AWAY

Walking Away

by Cecil Day-Lewis

It is eighteen years ago, almost to the day –
A sunny day with leaves just turning,
The touch-lines new-ruled – since I watched you play
Your first game of football, then, like a satellite
Wrenched from its orbit, go drifts away

Behind a scatter of boys. I can see
You walking away from me towards the school
With the pathos of a half-fledged thing set free
Into a wilderness, the gait of one
Who finds no path where the path should be?

That hesitant figure, eddying away
Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem,
Has something I never quite grasped to convey
About nature's give-and-take – the small, the scorching
Ordeals which fire one's irresolute clay.

I have had worse partings, but none that so
Gnaws at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly
Saying what God alone could perfectly show –
How selfhood begins with a walking away,
And love is proved in letting go.

Context of *Walking Away* by Cecil Day-Lewis

Walking Away was written by Cecil Day-Lewis (often referred to as C. Day-Lewis), a British poet and Poet Laureate from 1968 to 1972. The poem is autobiographical and reflects on a moment when the poet watched his son, Sean, walk away from him at school, marking a significant moment in the parent-child relationship. The poem was first published in 1962 in the collection *The Gate* and poignantly captures the emotional complexity of parental love and the inevitable process of letting go as children grow and gain independence.

The context of the poem is deeply personal, expressing the universal experience of seeing a child grow up and begin to detach from their parents as they forge their own path in life. The poem reflects Day-Lewis' sensitivity as a father and the emotional tension that exists between wanting to protect one's child and the knowledge that allowing them to "walk away" is necessary for their development.

Grammatical Techniques in *Walking Away*

1. First-Person Narrative

- The poem is written from a first-person perspective, creating a personal and reflective tone. This helps the reader to feel the speaker's emotions and connect with the experience of watching a loved one leave.
- **Example:** "I can see / You walking away from me."

2. Enjambment

- The use of enjambment, where a sentence flows from one line to the next without a pause, reflects the continuous, flowing nature of time and the gradual process of separation between parent and child. It also mirrors the feeling of uncertainty and reluctance associated with letting go.
- **Example:** "like a satellite / Wrenched from its orbit, go drifting away."

3. Simile

- Similes are used to vividly describe the child's movement away from the parent, evoking a sense of both physical and emotional separation.
- **Examples:**
 - "like a satellite / Wrenched from its orbit" – This suggests that the child is moving away from the parent's guidance and protection, comparing the experience to something violently pulled from its natural place.
 - "Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem" – This simile reflects the natural process of growth and separation, comparing the child to a seed that is ready to grow on its own.

4. Metaphor

- The poem uses metaphors to explore the idea of emotional separation and the challenges of growing up. These metaphors suggest that separation is a necessary but painful part of the child's journey toward independence.
- **Example:** "Irresolute clay" – This metaphor describes the child's malleability and uncertainty, suggesting that life's experiences will shape them into something more defined.

5. Repetition

- Repetition is used to emphasize key emotions and themes, especially the word "away," which reinforces the idea of separation and departure.
- **Example:** "Walking away" is repeated in the title and again in the final stanza, underscoring the central event and emotional impact of the poem.

6. Caesura

- Caesura (a pause in the middle of a line) is used to slow down the rhythm of the poem and reflect the speaker's contemplation of the moment. It also creates an emotional pause, allowing the weight of the words to be felt more deeply.
- **Example:** "I have had worse partings, but none that so / Gnaws at my mind still."

7. Rhyme Scheme

- The poem follows a controlled ABACA rhyme scheme, reflecting the speaker's attempt to impose structure on a difficult emotional experience. The repeated "A" rhyme in particular creates a sense of reflection and brings the focus back to key ideas, such as the pain and necessity of the parting.
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Themes of *Walking Away*

1. **Parent-Child Relationship**

- The poem is fundamentally about the relationship between a parent and child. It reflects on the emotional complexity of watching a child grow up and become independent. The speaker reflects on the moment of "walking away" as symbolic of a larger process of emotional separation, which every parent experiences.
- **Example:** The speaker recalls watching his son walk away for the first time and the lasting impact this had on him: "It is eighteen years ago, almost to the day."

2. **Separation and Letting Go**

- The theme of separation is central to the poem. The speaker struggles with the emotional pain of watching his son become independent, yet understands that this is a natural and necessary part of life. The poem explores how parents must let go of their children for them to grow and develop their own identities.
- **Example:** The final lines, "How selfhood begins with a walking away, / And love is proved in the letting go," encapsulate the idea that true parental love is shown through the ability to let go.

3. **Growth and Independence**

- The poem deals with the theme of personal growth and the painful process of becoming independent. The child is compared to both a satellite drifting from its orbit and a winged seed released from its parent stem, both of which suggest the natural but difficult journey of finding one's own way in the world.
- **Example:** "Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem" suggests the inevitable separation needed for the child to grow and develop.

4. **Nature as a Metaphor for Change**

- Nature imagery is used throughout the poem to represent the changes in relationships over time. The turning leaves and metaphors of a satellite and a winged seed all point to the idea that change and growth are natural processes, even if they are painful.
- **Example:** "Leaves just turning" suggests a time of change, both in the natural world and in the speaker's life, reflecting the transition from childhood to independence.

5. **Memory and Reflection**

- The poem is written from the perspective of a parent reflecting on a moment that happened eighteen years ago. The passage of time is central to the poem, as the speaker looks back on a single moment that had a lasting emotional impact, revealing how such moments shape our understanding of relationships.
- **Example:** The speaker recalls the day vividly: "It is eighteen years ago, almost to the day."

6. **Pain and Emotional Conflict**

- The speaker expresses emotional conflict throughout the poem. While he understands that walking away is necessary for his son's growth, he cannot help but feel pain and uncertainty about the separation. This tension between understanding and emotion is a key theme of the poem.

- **Example:** The phrase “scorching ordeals” highlights the difficulty of allowing a child to go through painful but necessary experiences on their path to independence.
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Conclusion

Walking Away by Cecil Day-Lewis is a powerful and moving reflection on the process of watching a child grow up and become independent. Through its use of natural metaphors, first-person perspective, and controlled structure, the poem captures the emotional complexity of the parent-child relationship. The central themes of separation, growth, and letting go are explored with a mix of nostalgia, pain, and acceptance, making the poem both deeply personal and universally relatable.

COMPARISON WITH,

1-Walking away

2-Letters from Yorkshire

A comparison of *Walking Away* by Cecil Day-Lewis, *Letters from Yorkshire* by Maura Dooley, and *Mother, Any Distance* by Simon Armitage reveals several thematic overlaps, as well as differences in the way relationships, distance, and connection, are explored. All three poems deal with human connections—specifically the bonds between parent and child or close individuals—and the theme of separation. However, the poets approach these themes through distinct perspectives and techniques. Below is a detailed comparison focusing on key aspects of the poems.

1. Theme of Separation and Distance

- **Walking Away** (Cecil Day-Lewis)
The central theme in *Walking Away* is the emotional and physical separation between a parent and child as the child grows up. The speaker reflects on a specific moment when his son, at a young age, begins to move away from the parental influence and becomes more independent. This separation is painful but necessary for the child's development. The distance is both physical (walking away) and emotional, as it marks the beginning of the child forging their own path in life.
 - **Example:** "Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem."
- **Letters from Yorkshire** (Maura Dooley)
In *Letters from Yorkshire*, the theme of separation is presented through the physical distance between two individuals, most likely friends or family, who communicate through letters. The speaker reflects on how they maintain a connection despite the physical distance, and while the speaker lives a more urban life, the person in Yorkshire is connected to nature. The distance between them emphasizes the contrast

in their lifestyles, but the letters serve as a bridge that maintains their emotional closeness.

- **Example:** "It's not romance, simply how things are."
 - **Mother, Any Distance** (Simon Armitage)
Mother, Any Distance explores the relationship between a mother and son as the son moves into a new home, symbolizing his growing independence. The poem reflects the tension between the need for independence and the attachment between parent and child. The physical act of measuring space in the new home becomes a metaphor for the emotional space growing between them as the son moves towards independence.
 - **Example:** "You at the zero-end, me with the spool of tape, recording length, reporting metres, centimetres back to base."
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2. Parent-Child Relationship

- **Walking Away**
The parent-child relationship in *Walking Away* focuses on the father's experience of watching his son grow up and become more independent. The poem explores the natural, but painful, process of letting go and accepting that children must eventually find their own way. The father understands that this separation is necessary but struggles with the emotional impact it has on him.
 - **Example:** "How selfhood begins with a walking away, / And love is proved in the letting go."
 - **Letters from Yorkshire**
While the relationship in *Letters from Yorkshire* is not explicitly between parent and child, there is a sense of closeness and care between the two individuals. The poem is more focused on maintaining an emotional bond across a physical distance. The relationship is marked by affection and communication, though it is less explicitly about family than the other two poems.
 - **Example:** "Still, it's you who sends me word of that other world."
 - **Mother, Any Distance**
The relationship in *Mother, Any Distance* is between a mother and her son as he moves out of the family home. The poem reflects on the changing dynamics of this relationship as the son becomes more independent. The metaphor of the tape measure symbolizes the connection between them, with the mother being "at the zero-end" (the origin), while the son is moving further away, stretching the bond but not breaking it. There is a tension between the need to let go and the desire to hold on.
 - **Example:** "I reach towards a hatch that opens on an endless sky / to fall or fly."
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3. The Role of Nature

- **Walking Away**
Nature plays a symbolic role in *Walking Away*, with the natural world used as a metaphor for the emotional separation between parent and child. The imagery of a satellite being "wrenched from its orbit" and a "winged seed loosened from its parent

stem” highlights the inevitability of growth and separation in the parent-child relationship. Nature reflects the natural process of development and independence.

- **Example:** "Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem."

- **Letters from Yorkshire**

In *Letters from Yorkshire*, nature is central to the contrast between the two individuals. The person in Yorkshire is closely connected to nature, digging in the garden and experiencing the physical world, while the speaker lives a more urban life, disconnected from the natural environment. The letters act as a bridge between these two contrasting lifestyles.

- **Example:** "In February, digging his garden, planting potatoes."

- **Mother, Any Distance**

Nature plays a less direct role in *Mother, Any Distance*, but the metaphor of the "endless sky" at the poem's conclusion evokes the idea of limitless potential and freedom. The sky represents the wide world that the son is about to enter, while the "zero-end" of the tape measure signifies the mother's role as the origin of his journey. Nature here symbolizes the possibilities and risks of independence.

- **Example:** "to fall or fly."

4. Tone and Mood

- **Walking Away**

The tone of *Walking Away* is reflective and melancholic, with a sense of resignation as the speaker comes to terms with the inevitable separation between parent and child. While there is sadness, there is also acceptance, as the speaker understands that "love is proved in the letting go."

- **Example:** "I have had worse partings, but none that so / Gnaws at my mind still."

- **Letters from Yorkshire**

Letters from Yorkshire has a more contemplative and reflective tone. The mood is one of quiet appreciation for the connection that is maintained despite the physical distance. There is a sense of comfort in the continuity of communication, even though their lives are different.

- **Example:** "Our souls tap out messages across the icy miles."

- **Mother, Any Distance**

The tone of *Mother, Any Distance* is a mix of tension and optimism. The speaker feels the pull between the safety of the parental bond and the desire for independence. The mood shifts from a sense of uncertainty to one of hope as the speaker contemplates the future and the possibility of success or failure in navigating independence.

- **Example:** "To fall or fly."

5. Poetic Devices

- **Walking Away**

- **Simile:** Nature is used to describe the emotional separation between the parent and child.

- **Example:** "Like a satellite / Wrenched from its orbit."

- **Enjambment:** The poem uses enjambment to create a reflective and flowing rhythm, mirroring the speaker's contemplation.
- **Repetition:** The phrase "walking away" is repeated to emphasize the central event of the poem.
- **Letters from Yorkshire**
 - **Imagery:** Vivid imagery of the natural world contrasts with the speaker's urban environment.
 - **Example:** "digging his garden, planting potatoes."
 - **Enjambment:** The flow of ideas across lines reflects the ongoing connection between the two individuals.
 - **Contrast:** The contrast between rural and urban life is central to the poem.
- **Mother, Any Distance**
 - **Metaphor:** The tape measure is used as a metaphor for the bond between mother and child.
 - **Example:** "You at the zero-end, me with the spool of tape."
 - **Symbolism:** The "endless sky" symbolizes the possibilities and risks of independence.
 - **Enjambment:** The poem's lines run on, creating a sense of the ongoing tension between connection and separation.

Conclusion

Walking Away, *Letters from Yorkshire*, and *Mother, Any Distance* all explore themes of separation, connection, and the passage of time. However, each poem approaches these themes from different angles. In *Walking Away*, the focus is on a father's emotional experience as his son grows more independent. In *Letters from Yorkshire*, the poem explores the emotional closeness maintained across physical distance, contrasting rural and urban life. *Mother, Any Distance* focuses on the tension between the desire for independence and the emotional pull of the parent-child relationship, using a tape measure as a powerful metaphor for this bond.

While *Walking Away* and *Mother, Any Distance* both explore parent-child relationships, *Letters from Yorkshire* is more ambiguous, focusing on a relationship maintained across distance but not necessarily between parent and child. All three poems, however, capture the tension between connection and separation, whether it be through physical distance or emotional independence.