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Text piece

Poetry Study Reference: Walking Away, Cecil Day-Lewis

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Imaad Isaacs - www.bookrags.com

Resources consulted

How to approach a poem, JSK Publishers

ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE

PRESCRIBED POETRY FOR NSC EVALUATION 2009

Achebe	<i>Refugee mother and child</i>
Banoobhai	<i>You cannot know the fears I have</i>
Cummings	<i>i thank You God for most this amazing</i>
Day-Lewis	<i>Walking away</i>
Dikeni	<i>Love poem for my country</i>
Eliot	<i>Preludes</i>
Ghose	<i>Decomposition</i>
Keats	<i>To Autumn</i>
Livingstone	<i>Sunstrike</i>
Mungoshi	<i>If you don't stay bitter for too long</i>
Plath	<i>Mushrooms</i>
Serote	<i>City Johannesburg</i>
Shakespeare	<i>To me, fair friend</i>
Shelley	<i>Ozymandias</i>
Yeats	<i>An Irish airman forsees his death</i>

Walking Away Cecil Day-Lewis

Biographical Note (courtesy: bookrags.com)

The British poet, essayist, and detective story writer Cecil Day Lewis (1904-1972) regarded himself as a voice of revolution, both poetic and political, taking as a necessary starting point the "certainty of new life."

Born on April 27, 1904, in Ballintogher, Ireland, C. Day Lewis was the only child of the Rev. F. C. Day Lewis. When Cecil was 4, his mother died and the family moved to England. He was educated at Sherborne School on a scholarship and was an exhibitioner at Wadham College, Oxford. Of necessity he taught at various schools until 1935, when he began to give full time to writing, editing, and political activity. During the 1930s he was a friend of W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, sharing their leftist political views.

Lewis had written poetry seriously since he was 6 and in 1927 had been coeditor of *Oxford Poetry*. But his financial independence was achieved through his detective stories, which have been highly praised and have been regarded by some critics as achievements on a par with his poetry. He said of them that they release "a spring of cruelty" that is in all men.

During 1941-1946 Lewis was editor of books and pamphlets for the Ministry of Information. In 1946 he was appointed Clark lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge, and in 1951 professor of poetry at Oxford. He has been said to have mellowed by this time and abandoned the revolutionary direction of his early work, with some loss of force. In 1964-1965 he was the Charles Eliot Norton professor of poetry at Harvard. After 1962 he was a member of the Arts Council; he was a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Society of Arts.

Throughout his career Lewis published poetry, an increasing amount of criticism, and detective stories signed Nicholas Blake. In 1964 he edited the amended edition of one of his spiritual ancestors-*The Collected Poems* of Wilfred Owen. His publications are too numerous to list or to discuss here. The reader may want to explore first what has appeared in standard anthologies and in Lewis's own collections: *Collected Poems*, 1935; *Short Is the Time* (poetry from 1936 to 1943), 1945; *Poems, 1943-47*, 1948; *Collected Poems*, 1954; *The Gate, and Other Poems*, 1962; *Requiem for the Living*, 1964; and *The Room, and Other Poems*, 1965. For his critical views, one may look at *Revolution in Writing*, 1935; *The Poet's Task*, 1951; *The Poet's Way of Knowledge*, 1957; and *The Lyric Impulse*, 1965. Louis Untermeyer has said that the essays in Lewis's *A Hope for Poetry* (1934) are "by far the best analysis of recent poetry that has yet appeared."

In 1968 Lewis was appointed poet laureate. He died in London on May 22, 1972.

VOCABULARY

leaves just turning

leaves turning orange in Autumn

touch-lines

referring to the boundary lines on the football field

wrenched

torn

orbit

natural order, usual path

half-fledged

not fully grown

pathos

sadness, tragedy, a quality that evokes pity or sadness

gait

walk, step

hesitant

unsure

eddying

floating, circular swirling

grasp

comprehend

convey

communicate

scorching

burning

ordeals

difficult experiences

irresolute

uncertain

gnaws

to nibble something persistently

selfhood

knowing and understanding one's self

CONTENT SUMMARY

The speaker narrates an event that took place eighteen years ago. He describes how he had watched his son play his first game of football and then walk away. At that moment he realized that his son is no longer dependant on him. As he observed his son, he was reminded of a young, immature son that was compelled to leave his father's care before his time.

This is not the worst parting the poet experienced, however, this particular parting had persisted in his memory for many years. The poet had learned that the true parental love and care for a child is not holding onto a child, but rather letting the child go. Similarly, knowing yourself truly begins when the child is capable of parting with its parental care.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Stanza One – Lines 1-2

The speaker is very precise of his account of the day this parting took place. Although the event took place eighteen years ago he recalls it “almost to the day”.

The speaker gives an account of the exact details, such as the weather. Nature also attributes a symbolic effect, because just as the leaves are “turning”, so is a turning point experienced by the poet.

“leaves just turning” indicates the start of Autumn, the start of the football season where he takes his son for his first game.

Lines 3-4

The boundary lines of the football field are newly painted. This is symbolic in that it signifies the new boundaries in the lives and relationships between the father and son.

Likewise, it is also symbolic of the fact that this is the first football game of the child.

Lines 4-5

The use of the simile effectively expresses the newness – of the situation – to the child. The word “wrenched” suggests that the child was compelled to partake in this. The natural order of life (“orbit”) of the child has been disturbed.

The word “wrenched” also reflects the pain experienced by the father as he watched how his son goes “drifting away” from him.

Stanza Two - Lines 6-7

The child is hidden from his father's view by a “scatter of boys”. The word “scatter” is

carefully used as a collective noun, to describe the manner in which the boys are moving around.

The speaker then reinforces his idea and sense of **loss** suggested in stanza one (“drifting away”), by narrating how clearly he remembers the way the boy went “walking away” from him “towards the school”.

Lines 8-9

The poet now uses images suggesting the child’s vulnerability and young age. The child is compared to a “half-fledge thing” (see vocabulary). This refers to a fledgling bird. The environment is new, strange and the child may experience a sense of confusion.

The father also experiences a sense of loneliness, desolation and loss.

Lines 9-10

While the child is in this unfamiliar territory he possess a particular walking style of someone that is lost and cannot find the familiar path. This image suggests that this experience is not easy for the child. The father knows what the path should be and the lines convey that he is longing to lead him on but tends to resist this natural impulse.

Stanza 3 – Lines 11-12

The boy is described as “hesitant” and resembles a “winged seed loosened from its parent stem”. These images reinforce the child’s sense of uncertainty and vulnerability. The idea of the boy “eddying away” also builds on the emotions experienced by the father in **lines 5 and 7**.

Lines 13-14

The real meaning of poet’s message becomes clear as he explains, by having to let go of his son in this manner, he began to understand “nature’s give-and-take”.

The poet had learnt how the “small, the scorching / Ordeals” actually teach us lessons for life and make us the people we become. Just as the fire moulds and shapes clay, so does these little hardships mould and shape us as beings. The speaker thus admits that he had always found it difficult to convey this mystery.

“scorching” – this word clearly convey the pain of some of life’s necessary, yet painful experiences. It also gives effect to the physical intensity of the father’s pain.

Stanza Four

Lines 16-17

In this stanza the poet confesses that this had not been the worst parting he had experienced. However, it is the one that constantly persisted in his memory. He uses

the word “gnawed”, thus it suggests an endless, constant chewing and clearly expresses the almost endless mental distress that this experience had caused him.

The poet concludes by saying that a lesson of such magnitude is one “God alone could perfectly show”. God alone can understand a lesson of such magnitude and significance. The only way to attain selfhood is to break away from one’s security and comfort and face life’s problems and difficulties on one’s own. On the contrary, the way to prove parental love is to allow one’s child the freedom to break away – no matter how painful the parting.



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“He is not of us, unless he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself”

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