Mother, any distance / Walking Away

Love and growing independence

Comparative argument

Both poets present separation as necessary but emotionally risky. Armitage speaks from the adult child's threshold of independence; Day-Lewis gives the parent's retrospective struggle to accept that letting go can itself express love.

Different viewpoints

Mother, any distance - Metaphor ("Anchor"): The mother offers practical security, though an anchor can also prevent movement.

Walking Away - Simile ("satellite"): The parent sees the child moving outward while still belonging within a relationship.

Connection: Compare security as the child experiences it with separation as the parent watches it.

Fragile release

Mother, any distance - Metaphor ("Kite"): Flight still depends on a connecting line; independence and attachment coexist.

Walking Away - Bird imagery ("half-fledged"): The parent's image stresses incomplete readiness, making release feel vulnerable.

Connection: Both images complicate a simple opposition between dependence and freedom.

Different kinds of ending

Mother, any distance - Alternative outcomes ("fall or fly"): The extra fifteenth line of the sonnet-like poem opens beyond a familiar boundary without resolving the risk.

Walking Away - Reflective conclusion ("letting go"): Looking back across eighteen years allows the parent to formulate a principle of love.

Connection: Contrast an unresolved next step with a principle reached through long reflection.

Relevant context

Connect family roles to the poems' speakers: parenthood and adult independence matter more than detached biographical facts. Do not call Armitage's fifteen-line poem a regular fourteen-line sonnet.

Plan your argument

Open with the comparative thesis and qualify the main difference.

Paragraph 1: Different viewpoints. Compare security as the child experiences it with separation as the parent watches it.

Paragraph 2: Fragile release. Both images complicate a simple opposition between dependence and freedom.

Paragraph 3: Different kinds of ending. Contrast an unresolved next step with a principle reached through long reflection.

Conclude by explaining how the endings change your understanding of the shared theme.

Try a question

Compare how poets present love and growing independence in 'Mother, any distance' and in one other poem from your anthology.

Suggested comparison: Walking Away. You may choose a different poem from your prescribed cluster.

Check your understanding

How does viewpoint change the presentation of separation?

Why are the flying images not simply celebrations?

Which speaker has had more time to interpret the experience?

Original critical notes by Exam Stash. Use your own edition or anthology alongside these notes.