

# Letters From Yorkshire

Maura Dooley

## OVERALL SUMMARY

"Letters From Yorkshire" is a possibly **autobiographical** poem about a speaker, who far from her home, in a city where she works for a news company. The speaker describes a person close to her, a man working on a farm in Yorkshire, writing a letter to her. The poem emphasises the **drastic differences between their urban and rural lives**.

## STANZA SUMMARY

- The speaker describes a man in her home of Yorkshire, planting potatoes and watching the first birds return at the end of winter. The man proceeds to go in doors and write a letter to her.
- The man's hands redden, because of the cold, the speaker clarifies, not because they have a romantic relationship. She addresses him directly, saying that he is able to watch the seasons while she has a busy urban job.
- She describes that she writes headlines and works at a screen, implying she works in news and she questions whether the man's life is more real because he works outside on the land.
- The speaker implies that the man wouldn't claim his life to be more real and yet she feels it is as he continues to shovel snow and write her letters.
- The speaker implies that the letters they send to each other make her feel like she has some form of connection to her home and that when they both sit down to watch the news at night, she is aware they are both doing the same thing but in different places.

## CONTEXT

- Maura Dooley lived in Yorkshire for a part of her life but grew up in Bristol. She attended the University of York and has now settled in London.
- Dooley's poem **is semi-autobiographical** because it is about her receiving letters from a friend in Yorkshire whilst she works in London and the **disparity between her urban life and his rural life as a farmer**.

# Key Themes & Analysis

## DISTANCE & LETTERS

- The poem communicates that there is an **immense distance** between the speaker and the man she describes and yet they are still able to maintain their relationships through letters.
- The speaker recounts that "he saw the first lapwings return and came in doors to write to me". The **personal pronoun "he"** in the opening lines of the poem suggest to us that the speaker knows the man she talks of personally. The **absence** of a name for this man almost tricks readers into believing they know the speaker too, giving us **a false sense of intimacy**, which is reinforced by the **first-person perspective**.
- The **syntactical gap** between the words "he" and me reminds us of the **distance** between the speaker and the man she talks of but we know from the **aforementioned** information that they are **close despite this distance**.
- The speaker **muses** "you out there in the cold". The **ambiguity** of the word "there" suggests a certain amount of **detachment** on their part as though the distance has had a **physical effect on her writing**, and she cannot describe the place she is talking about in words.
- She reinforces this by saying "its you who sends me word of that other world". The speaker feels **alienated** from Yorkshire as she sees it as another world – the natural world the person she is writing too seems distant from her present reality
- And yet despite her **vagueness** in her descriptions of Yorkshire **the personal pronoun "you"** stands out in the sentence. Her **direct address** proves that through their letters she is able to **maintain her relationship** with the man in her poem even if her memories of Yorkshire are fading.
- "Our souls tap out messages across the icy miles" she says. The **metaphor** that Dooley employs here reinforces the idea that the speaker feels **connected** to the man she writes to. The mention of "souls" gives the poem an **ethereal** (otherworldly) quality, as if their relationship can surmount (overcome) physical boundaries.
- Dooley creates a **semantic field of distance** in her poem but creates a relationship between her speaker and the man she writes to, that seems to conquer that distance. She shows the letters to the **medium** through which this is done, thus exemplifying letters to be an incredibly **intimate** form of communication.

## URBAN VS RURAL

- Dooley demonstrates, through her poem, the **disparity** between the speakers **urban life** and **the rural life** of the man that she writes to.
- At the beginning of her poem, she creates a **semantic field of nature** and farming by describing the speaker **"planting potatoes"** which she then **juxtaposes** against her and her **"heartful of headlines"**. **Contrasting rural** language against **urban** language.
- The adjective **"heartful"** portrays a sense of **fondness** the speaker has for her job, as though it genuinely brings her joy. But her description of her **"feeding words onto a blank screen"** illustrates the element of embarrassment she feels around her it.
- The verb **"feeding"** almost **personifies** her computer with its **dual meaning**, and it makes her job seem **tedious and boring**. It also depicts that her job requires constant attention, alike to an **infant who needs "feeding"**. Thus, despite her job being boring, she feels there is an element of **dependency**.
- **"Is your life more real because you dig snow?"** she questions. Her tone is **existential**, and the **rhetoric** Dooley employs sounds as though she is asking the reader the question as well.
- The speaker shows a sense of **dissatisfaction** with her life, and questions whether the man's connection with **nature** makes his life more meaningful than hers.
- She **criticises urban life and work** with this **query**. She is **insecure** in her life choices.
- She asserts that the speaker **"wouldn't say"** that his life is more meaningful, but his **humbleness** somehow confirms the answer to her question, that it is.
- Dooley's speaker demonstrates **insecurity** in the meaningfulness of her urban life and criticises urban living by extension. She seems to **idolise rural** life and in turn places the man she writes about on a **pedestal**.

## NATURE

- Dooley **evokes themes of nature** in her poem and shows it to be harsh but portrays a sense of hope with the **impending arrival of spring**.
- The description of the man ***“planting potatoes”*** and ***“the first lapwings return[ing]”*** **connotes spring**. It shows the land to be **fertile** again as potatoes can usually first be planted around the middle of march and also wildlife to be returning from their **migration** for the winter.
- The **semantic field of spring** we can see in the poem bring a sense of hope which is associated with the season because of the **new life** it promotes.
- The speaker reminds us that the ***“seasons [are] turning”***, and with that we associate a sense of **renewal** both in the land and in our mental wellbeing.
- The speaker describes the man ***“clearing a path through the snow”***, which could be interpreted as a **metaphor** for the departing of winter. It is as though the man is physically pushing out the season to make room for the arrival of spring.
- The idea that the man is ***“pouring light into the envelope”*** adds to the sense of hope as light connotes **promise**. It is as though the speaker can feel that promise through the envelopes she receives, showing the **immense power of nature**.
- Dooley shows the arrival of spring in her poem which **juxtaposes** against the **sombre** tone of the speaker, making the place she is describing sound **appealing and romanticised**.

# Form

## STANZAS

- There are four stanzas, and each stanza is made up of three lines which are called **tercets**.
- The poem is short and so are the stanzas which demonstrate the **simplicity** of their communication. It shows their letters to be brief but somehow, they are still able to communicate such emotion. This reinforces that the bond the speaker has with the man she speaks of is strong.
- The regular stanzas could also convey the **mundanity of her urban life**. The **ceaselessness** of "feeding words onto a screen" or "souls tap[ping] out messages" seems to be **cyclical and never-ending**.

## RHYME

- The poem lacks any form of **rhyme**.
- This makes the speaker's correspondence with the man seem simple which by extension portrays it to be **genuine and authentic**.
- Her language lacks anything that might hide what she truly feels, and the **absence of rhyme makes her sound honest with her emotions**, reinforcing how close she is with the man she writes to.

## FIRST PERSON PERSPECTIVE

- Dooley writes in the **first person**, which as we have explored in other poetry, gives readers an intimate insight into the mind of the speaker.
- The poem is about the speaker's **insecurity in her urban life** and through the first person we see that expressed in her own words. It makes readers feel a sense of intimacy with the speaker and thus they are more **absorbed into the world of the poem**.
- Furthermore, we view the man through the speaker's eyes, thus we see an **idolised** version of him. This contributes to the speaker's **romanticisation** of Yorkshire.

# Structure

## TEMPORAL DEIXIS

- The poem begins with a **temporal deixis** where the time is stated in relation to when the speaker is speaking.
- She says **"in February"**.
- From this we know that the speaker has been sending and receiving letters of correspondence for a while which reinforces, in the readers mind, the close bond that they have

## CAESURA

- Dooley continues sentences between stanzas creating a caesura, meaning that the addition of new stanzas continues the sentence she has written read aloud.
- This gives the poem a feeling continuous flow throughout, showing the speakers relationship with the man to be natural and instinctual.

# Comparisons

Mother Any Distance	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
<b>Similar</b>	<p><b>Fondness</b></p> <p>Both speakers possess a <b>warmth and fondness</b> for the people that they address in their poems which makes their poems seem like <b>Odes</b>.</p> <p><b>Conflict and disparity</b></p> <p>Armitage addresses the <b>disparity</b> (gap) between loving his mother and asserting his independence and Dooley too writes about disparity. She addresses the disparity she feels there is between her <b>rural and urban lives</b>. Her career and her home.</p>	<p><b>Metre</b></p> <p>Both poems seem to lack a <b>discernible, regular metre</b>, which makes them sound <b>disjointed</b> and uneven, as though they are <b>a stream of consciousness</b>, a direct insight into the speakers brain.</p>	<p><b>Enjambement</b></p> <p>Both poets make use of <b>enjambement</b>, and this makes them sound thoughtful and <b>musings</b>.</p>	<p><b>Personal</b></p> <p>Both poets poems are based on their personal lives, Armitage's about his mother and Dooley's about a person <b>evidently</b> close to her. This demonstrates the immense impacts our childhoods and family lives have on us as adults.</p> <p><b>Change</b></p> <p>Both poets show the desire to leave their childhood behind them to mature and grow but seem <b>conflicted</b> about this.</p>
<b>Different</b>	<p><b>Identity</b></p> <p>In Armitage's poem it is obviously about his mother, while in Dooley we are unsure of the relationship the speaker has with the man that she describes. Dooley's poem thus seems to have a <b>melancholier</b> tone because it lacks the personal element we can see in Armitage's.</p>	<p><b>Stanzas</b></p> <p>Armitage's poem is in the form of a <b>sonnet</b> and each stanza has a varying number of lines. Dooley's stanzas, however, are broken into three <b>unrhymed tercets</b> making her sound more <b>objective</b> in her tone. Unlike Armitage whose <b>objectivity is distorted by his immense fondness</b> and personal relationship with the subject of his poem.</p>	<p><b>Enjambement</b></p> <p>Towards the end of Dooley's poem, the <b>enjambement</b> seems to fade and the sentences become simpler. This possibly reflects her career, which is in news, making her sound conclusive at the end of her poem as she would at the end of a report. Whereas enjambement <b>permeates</b> (is in the whole poem) Armitage's poem, making him sound rambling as one might ramble about someone they love.</p>	<p><b>Complexities</b></p> <p>Dooley gives the sense that her childhood was more <b>nuanced</b> (complex) than Armitage's; that it was <b>coloured by miscommunication</b>. Armitage's account of his childhood is warm and fond whereas Dooley's seems less so.</p>

Winter Swans	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	<p><b>Insecurity</b></p> <p>Both speakers portray a sense of <b>insecurity</b>, Dooley's speaker in her career and her urban life vs the rural one the man in her poem lives and Sheers' in his relationship with his partner / love.</p> <p><b>Tone</b></p> <p>Both poems have a relatively melancholy feeling that stems from the conflict in theme but are also somehow calm and mellow in their tone.</p>	<p><b>Stanzas</b></p> <p>Both poets make the stanzas in their poem to be of <b>equal line length</b> (except for the final stanza of Winter Swans). This creates a sense of <b>calmness and regularity</b> which adds to the <b>melancholy</b> yet also <b>serene</b> tone we can see in both poems.</p> <p><b>Rhyme</b></p> <p>Both poems lack a rhyme scheme, and its <b>absence</b> makes them sound almost prose like, almost confessional. They sound more authentic as a result.</p>	<p><b>Perspective</b></p> <p>Both poets make use of a first-person perspective from their speakers and this allows a <b>level of intimacy</b> that you wouldn't achieve with a different perspective.</p> <p><b>Caesura</b></p> <p>Both poets use a caesura to extend their lines across multiple stanzas. This adds to the <b>flow</b> of the poem making them both sound <b>calm and serene</b>.</p>	<p><b>Relationships</b></p> <p>Both poets appear to have a particular interest into the <b>bonds that connect people</b> and the <b>nuances of interpersonal relationships</b>.</p>
Different	<p><b>Resolution</b></p> <p>In Sheers' poem, the speaker sounds <b>content</b> at the end of their poem and, as readers, we get a sense of resolution in regard to his <b>tumultuous relationship</b>. In Dooley's, however, the speaker ends the poem still giving the impression she is <b>insecure</b> in her urban life and the poem ends as it starts, with her writing letters to the man she tells of.</p>	<p><b>Stanzas</b></p> <p>Sheer's poem has a two-line final stanza (a couplet), breaking the established stanza regularity and it gives his poem that sense of finality that we don't get from Dooley's.</p>	<p><b>Sentence Structures</b></p> <p>Dooley is more <b>explorative</b> with the punctuation and sentences structures she uses in comparison to Sheers and as a result Dooley's speaker sounds more conflicted in her thoughts. She uses rhetoric to show that she is unsure of the answers she seeks whereas Sheers speaker seems to know the answer to his questions.</p>	<p><b>Autobiographical</b></p> <p>Dooley's poem appears to be more autobiographical than Sheers as it's speaker is similar to herself. Sheers' gives no evidence that it is about himself, rather he just seems interested in people and their complex relationships.</p>