

AQA English GCSE

Poetry: Love and Relationships

Letters from Yorkshire - *Maura Dooley*

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LETTERS FROM YORKSHIRE

Maura Dooley

Brief Summary

“Letters from Yorkshire” is thought to be about the relationship between Dooley and her father. The poem describes two people, one who works in news and the other who works in agriculture. Despite their evident differences, it is apparent that they derive great joy from their correspondence by letter.

Synopsis

- The speaker describes a man digging potatoes who goes inside to write to the speaker
- The speaker then tells the listener that their relationship is not romantic
- They then question if the other person is living more authentically because they are outdoors rather than in a city writing for news
- They then say that their letter writing makes them feel connected to another world

Summary

Context – Dooley lived in multiple areas // Thought to be about her father or a friend.

Structure - Stanzas initially separate the two characters // Eventually they are described as one rather than two.

Language – Agriculture // Weather // Communication // Metaphors

Key Points – Communication shows how people can love each other over a long distance.

Context

Maura Dooley (1957-now)

Dooley has lived in multiple places throughout her life; she was born in Cornwall but has lived in London, Bristol and Yorkshire. The disparity between urban and rural life is reflected in the poem. Many of her poems also contain **the theme of communication which may also be the result of Dooley's connections around the country.**

Exam tip- It is thought that the poem is about Dooley missing her father however, others believe that it is about a friend. As this is unknown, it is important to not make sweeping statements when writing about this poem. Make it clear to the examiner that you are aware of the debate regarding the subject of the poem, this also gives you the perfect opportunity to provide alternative interpretations.



Letters From Yorkshire

The **active verb** used shows the speaker's respect for the character they are addressing by presenting them as an active character

This allusion to springtime establishes the hopeful tone of the poem and references the cyclicity of nature. This shows how their relationship is firmly planted in a mutual appreciation of nature

Dooley uses **colour imagery** in "reddened" to create a sense of warmth between the characters. The usually angry connotations of the colour red are subverted, implying that the characters are taking something negative (living so far apart) and extracting the positive from the situation

The **monosyllabic** words used suggest that he lives an uncomplicated life, this **juxtaposes** with the **polysyllabic, alliterative phrase** "seeing the seasons". This furthers the disconnect between the speaker and the person they are writing to

This **metaphor** shows the joy they receive from writing letters to each other. The image created of someone pouring air and light into an envelope suggests that the speaker feels trapped in her urban life

The poem ends with a beautiful **metaphor** showing how they are not letting themselves become disconnected from each other. "icy miles" would usually act as **pathetic fallacy** to denote something negative however, Dooley has not allowed it to do so here. It also links back to the seasonal change.

In February, **digging** his garden, **planting potatoes**,

he saw **the first lapwings** return and came

indoors to write to me, **his knuckles** singing

as they **reddened** in the warmth.

It's not romance, simply how things are.

You out there, in the cold, seeing the seasons

turning, me with my **heartful of headlines**

feeding words onto a blank screen.

Is your life more real because you dig and sow?

You wouldn't say so, breaking ice on a waterbutt,

clearing a path through **snow**. Still, it's you

who sends me **word of that other world**

pouring air and light into an envelope. So that

at night, **watching the same news in different houses**,

our souls tap out messages across the icy miles.

The **alliteration** in this phrase implies that this is a regular action for the character

This **colloquialism** shows the characters' familiarity with each other. The joyful connotations of "singing" shows that letter writing is more than a means of staying in touch for the characters

The **matter of fact** tone of this line is representative of the speaker's role in news presentation

Alliteration is used to emphasise that although the speaker loves the other character, she also loves her separate life.

This **rhetorical question** shows the ongoing communication between the characters

The **alliteration** used highlights the difference between the urban world the speaker is living in and the subject of the poem's rural surroundings

He has previously given her part of his life and now the impact she has on his life is shown



Perspective

“Letters from Yorkshire” is written from the **first person** perspective of a speaker who is assumed to be Dooley herself. Dooley is writing about somebody they love who lives far away from her as she pursues her career. Whilst Dooley lives in the city, her friend/father lives in the countryside so she makes it clear throughout that she feels their lives as distinctly separate.

Structure/Form

The **first four stanzas** are centred on the speaker and her father’s **separate lives**, the **tone** changes in the last stanza as they are no longer described separately but **together**. This creates the sense of them coming together through their letter writing. Dooley shifts through the use of different sets of **pronouns**: from “**he**”, to the direct address of “**you**”, to the use of “**our**” in the final stanza. This means that the experience of the speaker is also moving from **individual to the combined narrative of writing**.

Each stanza is three lines - which are called **tercets** - suggesting the brief nature of their communication. Most of the lines use five stresses, alongside some **enjambment**, which emphasises the poem as a piece of communicating speech. **The enjambment works to tie the poem together, making up for the lack of rhyme scheme.**

The opening

The inclusion of the **temporal deixis** “**In February**” shows the strength of their relationship over time as well as their familiarity with one another due to the **colloquial tone** created.

Dooley also uses **asyndetic listing** in “**digging his garden, planting potatoes, he saw the first lapwings return**” this gives a detailed insight into the man’s life from the outset of the poem to show the closeness between the characters.

In February, digging his garden, planting potatoes,
he saw the first lapwings return and came
indoors to write to me, his knuckles singing

Use of metaphors

The entire poem has a **joyful tone** which is created by Dooley’s use of **metaphorical language**. Beautiful **visual imagery** is used in “**pouring air and light into an envelope**”. There is juxtaposition in “**knuckles singing**” as positive connotations are attributed to something negative (the cold outside). Dooley further opposes typically negative phrases in “**our souls tap out messages across the icy miles**” by subverting the usually dismal **pathetic fallacy** attributed to winter to show the joy the characters provide each other.

Whilst Dooley is unequivocal in her love for her friend/father, her use of **metaphors** shows a more complicated relationship with her job. The **alliteration** used in “**heartful of headlines**” emphasises the happiness she gains from her job however, this contrasts with “**feeding words onto a blank screen**” in which **harsh fricatives show that the speaker feels some distaste towards her job.**



Language

Weather

Dooley uses the weather in order to show the unconventionality of their relationship. There is contrast between ***“reddened in the warmth”*** and ***“in the cold”***. The **juxtaposition between warmth and the cold** is representative of the characters bringing warmth into their lives through letter writing when there should be cold and distance between them.

Communication

It is evident in the poem that communication is significant to Dooley. The **alliteration** in ***“heartful of headlines”*** and the **metaphor** ***“feeding words onto a blank screen”*** emphasise that communication is significant to her in her job.

This theme is developed further by the **visual imagery** used in ***“pouring air and light into an envelope”*** which implies that she is freed by the letters she receives. The listener is further provided insight into the way in which she benefits human connection through the **antithesis** used in ***“same news in different houses”***.

Comparisons

Mother, any distance

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In both poems, characters employ unconventional means in order to maintain a healthy, loving relationship. In “Mother, any distance”, the speaker describes that they <i>“reach towards a hatch that opens on an endless sky to fall or fly”</i> with <i>“the line still feeding out”</i>, this shows how their mother is now allowing them more freedom in order to grow as a person. Similarly, in “Letters from Yorkshire”, the speaker maintains a close relationship with her father/friend who <i>“sends [her] word of that other world”</i>. Their means of maintaining communication is shown to be successful by the heartwarming metaphor in the final line, <i>“our souls tap out messages across the icy miles”</i>.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In “Letters from Yorkshire”, Dooley presents a gap closing between two people through the visual imagery of somebody <i>“pouring air and light into an envelope”</i> as well as the antithesis in <i>“watching the same news in different houses”</i>. Conversely, in “Mother, any distance”, Armitage depicts two people growing further apart through the extended metaphor of a tape measure in <i>“the line still feeding out”</i> and <i>“unreeling years between us”</i>.

