

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

Letter from Yorkshire

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 heartfelt 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 water butt,

clearing a path through the 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.

Summary of "Letter from Yorkshire"

"Letter from Yorkshire" by Maura Dooley explores the connection between two people who live in different places, contrasting rural and urban lifestyles. The poem is about the speaker receiving a letter from someone in Yorkshire who describes his life of planting potatoes, digging the garden, and observing nature. While he is rooted in nature, she is absorbed in her writing and modern city life. Despite their physical distance, they maintain a strong emotional bond through communication. The poem reflects on how words and letters can connect lives, and though their lives are different, they are still linked by their shared experiences and feelings.

Themes

1. **Connection and Distance:**
 - The poem reflects the emotional connection between two people despite the physical distance between them. The act of letter writing represents their relationship and the ways they maintain closeness across different places.
2. **Contrasting Lifestyles:**

- There is a contrast between rural and urban life. The man in Yorkshire is connected to nature, while the speaker is linked to a more modern, perhaps office-bound life. This contrast creates a reflection on different ways of living, with the rural life portrayed as more rooted and connected to the earth.
3. **Nature and the Seasons:**
 - The poem explores the theme of nature, with the imagery of planting potatoes, the return of lapwings, and the changing seasons. This connection to nature contrasts with the speaker's more disconnected, modern existence, emphasizing the simplicity and groundedness of rural life.
 4. **Communication and Relationships:**
 - The poem highlights how communication, especially in the form of letters, bridges the gap between two people's different worlds. The shared words represent an emotional closeness, allowing them to stay connected despite their physical separation.

Poetic Devices

1. **Imagery:**
 - Nature imagery is prevalent throughout the poem, with references to planting potatoes, digging in the garden, the return of lapwings, and the warmth of February. These images evoke a sense of rural life and contrast with the speaker's more disconnected, urban life.
2. **Enjambment:**
 - Enjambment, where sentences or phrases run over from one line to the next without a pause, is used to create a sense of flow and continuity, much like the continuous connection between the two characters. It gives the poem a conversational, natural tone, which mirrors the ongoing communication between the speaker and the man in Yorkshire.
3. **Contrast:**
 - There's a clear contrast between the physical activities of the man in Yorkshire, who engages with nature, and the speaker, who is likely engaged in writing or another sedentary, intellectual pursuit. This contrast emphasizes the differences in their lifestyles, while also showing that their lives are still connected.
4. **Symbolism:**
 - The potatoes, garden, and lapwings symbolize the natural, cyclical rhythm of life in the countryside. Meanwhile, the letter itself is a symbol of communication and connection, linking two distant lives.
5. **Alliteration:**
 - Alliteration occurs in lines such as "planting potatoes" and "seeing the seasons," giving a rhythmic and musical quality to the poem, which enhances its lyrical tone.

Analysis

- **Tone:** The tone of "*Letter from Yorkshire*" is reflective and meditative, with a sense of quiet connection between the speaker and the person in Yorkshire. The poem is not overtly emotional, but it subtly conveys the speaker's appreciation of the connection they share through the simple act of writing and receiving letters.

- **Structure:** The poem is structured in free verse with five unrhymed tercets (three-line stanzas). The lack of rhyme and the conversational tone created by the enjambment make the poem feel personal, as if we are reading someone's thoughts or a letter.
- **Theme of Nature and Work:** The man's connection to nature through planting and the changing seasons contrasts with the speaker's perhaps more intellectual, less physically engaged work. Yet, despite these differences, the poem shows that both kinds of work – manual labor and intellectual activity – are valuable and meaningful. The speaker is aware of this contrast but does not express envy or regret, instead appreciating their ongoing connection.
- **Ambiguity of Relationship:** The exact relationship between the speaker and the man in Yorkshire is left ambiguous, which gives the poem a universal quality. They could be friends, lovers, or relatives, but what matters is their enduring bond and their ability to communicate and connect across distances.
- **Nature and Simplicity:** The poem reflects on the simplicity and beauty of rural life, and though the speaker seems to live a more complex, modern life, they appreciate and feel a sense of warmth from the connection to nature that the letter provides. The rural imagery suggests a deeper, more meaningful connection to the land and seasons, while the speaker's own life is perhaps more disconnected from these natural cycles.

Conclusion

“*Letter from Yorkshire*” explores the themes of distance, connection, and contrasting lifestyles through the simple but evocative imagery of rural life and communication. Through the letter, the speaker maintains an emotional bond with the man in Yorkshire, despite their different lives. The poem emphasizes the power of words to bridge the gap between people and their worlds, showing that even though they are separated by distance and experience, they remain connected.

Comparison with,

1- Walking away

2- Mother any distance

Here's a comparative analysis of “*Letter from Yorkshire*” by Maura Dooley, “*Walking Away*” by Cecil Day-Lewis, and “*Mother, Any Distance*” by Simon Armitage, focusing on their themes, tone, structure, and use of imagery.

Summary of the Poems

- “**Letter from Yorkshire**” is about the emotional connection between two people living in different places, exploring themes of communication, rural and urban life, and relationships across distance.
- “**Walking Away**” by Cecil Day-Lewis reflects on the memory of watching his son grow independent and the pain of letting him go. It focuses on the themes of separation, the parent-child relationship, and the inevitable process of children growing up and moving away from their parents.

- **“Mother, any distance”** by Simon Armitage also deals with the relationship between a mother and her child. The speaker reflects on the transition from childhood dependence to adult independence as he measures a new home, using the metaphor of distance and connection to describe his changing relationship with his mother.

Thematic Comparison

1. Separation and Distance:

- **Letter from Yorkshire** explores physical distance and how communication keeps the relationship alive, despite being separated by geography. The two people in the poem are connected emotionally, even though they live different lives.
- **Walking Away** focuses on emotional and physical separation, but in the context of a parent-child relationship. The speaker reflects on the moment of “walking away” when his child first began to assert independence, a bittersweet moment for a parent.
- **Mother, any distance** also deals with the theme of distance, but it is more symbolic of growing independence. The mother-child relationship is strained by the speaker’s movement toward adulthood, represented by the stretching of the metaphorical “tape” that connects them.

2. Relationships:

- **Letter from Yorkshire** explores an unspecified relationship, possibly between friends, lovers, or family members. The relationship is characterized by connection and appreciation despite different lifestyles.
- **Walking Away** and **Mother, any distance** both centre on the parent-child relationship, exploring the tension between dependence and independence. In **Walking Away**, the father must come to terms with his child’s independence, while in **Mother, any distance**, the mother struggles to hold on to her child as they grow more self-sufficient.

3. Communication and Connection:

- In **Letter from Yorkshire**, communication through letters symbolizes the emotional bond between the two people, despite their physical distance. Their connection is maintained through words and shared experiences.
- **Walking Away** expresses the difficulty of communicating or maintaining connection when a child becomes independent. The father recognizes that letting go is a natural part of growing up, though painful.
- In **Mother, any distance**, the tape measure represents the literal and symbolic distance between mother and child. The speaker acknowledges the inevitable loosening of ties but expresses a lingering attachment and dependency on the mother.

4. Nature and Life:

- **Letter from Yorkshire** uses nature imagery to represent rural life and its connection to the land. The speaker contrasts their life with the natural, seasonal rhythms of the man in Yorkshire, which fosters a sense of admiration.
- **Walking Away** also uses nature imagery to represent separation and independence. The image of the “wrenched” child, “like a satellite / Wrenched from its orbit,” and “leaves just turning” symbolizes the natural process of children growing up and breaking away.

- In **Mother, any distance**, nature isn't explicitly invoked, but the "endless sky" represents the possibilities and vastness of independence, mirroring the growth and separation the speaker is experiencing.

Tone and Mood

1. Melancholy vs. Acceptance:

- In **Letter from Yorkshire**, the tone is reflective and warm, with an undercurrent of melancholy as the speaker contrasts their life with that of the letter-writer. The physical distance is acknowledged, but there's also a sense of appreciation for their continued connection.
- **Walking Away** is more sorrowful, but tinged with acceptance. The father feels the pain of his child growing distant but knows that it is a natural and necessary part of life. The tone is melancholic but resigned to the process of separation.
- **Mother, any distance** carries a tone of anxiety mixed with hope. The speaker acknowledges the inevitable growth and separation from the mother but expresses uncertainty about the future. The poem balances between the mother's struggle to let go and the speaker's desire for independence.

2. Tension vs. Resolution:

- In **Letter from Yorkshire**, there is little tension—rather, a sense of peaceful acceptance of the differences between the two lives. The relationship remains strong through communication, even though they are living in separate worlds.
- In **Walking Away**, the tension lies in the father's emotional struggle to let go of his child. The poem moves toward a resolution of acceptance, recognizing that the separation is necessary for the child's growth.
- In **Mother, any distance**, the tension comes from the speaker's move toward independence and the mother's fear of losing her child. There's no clear resolution; the poem leaves the reader with the image of the speaker "falling or flying," suggesting the uncertainty of this transition.

Poetic Devices and Imagery

1. Nature Imagery:

- **Letter from Yorkshire** uses nature imagery extensively, such as "planting potatoes" and "lapwings returning," to emphasize the grounded, seasonal rhythms of rural life. This contrasts with the speaker's more disconnected, modern existence, creating a sense of longing or admiration.
- **Walking Away** uses nature to symbolize the inevitable growth and separation of parent and child. The image of the child as a "satellite / Wrenched from its orbit" and "leaves just turning" evokes the natural process of change and distance.
- **Mother, any distance** doesn't explicitly use nature imagery, but the "endless sky" at the end symbolizes freedom, opportunity, and the uncertainty of the future. It's a vast, open space that suggests both possibility and risk.

2. Symbolism:

- In **Letter from Yorkshire**, the letter is a key symbol of communication and connection between the speaker and the man in Yorkshire. Despite their different lives, the letters keep them emotionally close.

- **Walking Away** uses the image of the satellite and the metaphor of walking away as symbols of separation and independence. The father's pain is symbolized by the child's movement away from him, both physically and emotionally.
- **Mother, any distance** uses the tape measure as a symbol of the mother-child bond, stretched to its limit as the speaker measures the distance of his new home. The tape represents the tenuous connection between them, and the "fall or fly" moment symbolizes the uncertainty of independence.

Structure and Form

1. Free Verse vs. Regular Structure:

- **Letter from Yorkshire** is written in free verse, with five unrhymed tercets. This informal structure reflects the conversational tone of the poem, which mirrors the communication through letters.
- **Walking Away** has a more regular structure, with four quintains (five-line stanzas) and a regular ABACA rhyme scheme. The steady structure mirrors the inevitable, orderly process of the child's separation from the parent.
- **Mother, Any Distance** is also written in free verse but contains three stanzas of varying lengths. The flexible structure reflects the speaker's fluctuating emotions as they transition to independence, with the final short line highlighting the poem's ambiguous conclusion.

Conclusion

"*Letter from Yorkshire*", "*Walking Away*", and "*Mother, Any Distance*" all explore the theme of relationships and distance, though they do so in different contexts and with different focuses. While "*Letter from Yorkshire*" looks at maintaining emotional connection despite physical separation, "*Walking Away*" and "*Mother, Any Distance*" focus on the parent-child relationship, particularly the tension between dependence and independence. All three poems use vivid imagery, contrasting tones, and reflective moods to express the complexities of relationships and the inevitable transitions that come with distance and growing independence.