

3-2012

Dead or Exploding: A Book of Letters

Jerika Marchan

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.lsu.edu/honors_etd



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Marchan, Jerika, "Dead or Exploding: A Book of Letters" (2012). *Honors Theses*. 948.
https://repository.lsu.edu/honors_etd/948

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Ogden Honors College at LSU Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact ir@lsu.edu.

Dead or Exploding:
A Book of Letters

by

Jerika Marchan

Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

Professor Laura Mullen

Department of English

Submitted to the LSU Honors College in partial fulfillment of
the Upper Division Honors Program.

March, 2012

Louisiana State University
& Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dead or Exploding:
A Book of Letters

CONTENTS

ONE

The Incredible Sinking Girl

1

This was the plan, see

1

How do I love thee?

3

KISS

TRUST

SINK

4

new buoyant creature

5

dead or exploding

6

a new course in zooming

8

howl

KISS

TRUST

SINK

9

Summer's still a time away

10

far enough

11

relationship

14

Give me

17

How Do I Love Thee - let me

18

Trill

19

Clumsily, under my clothes

20

I keep forgetting

13

if I had enough

16

	How Do I Love Thee – Howl
	22
Get out of the car	
23	
All the news went sour	
24	
I Will Call in Ten Years And Tell You This Story	
25	
Error	err
28	28
Hello forgery	
29	
	How Do I Love Thee – (love)
	30
	failure
	31
shaken	
32	
hoping	
33	
wanting	
33	

LOVE YOU MORE THAN LIFE
24

uhhhhh, how do I?
32

I'm calling to you, just broken in
35

Glitterpageant
36

**Hush, my sweet, these tornadoes
are for you**
37

list
40

Chrysanthemum 1 *too much glass in my castle*
41

**How Do I Love Thee – wretch in my
soulcan**
42

ready, ripeflesh **How Do I Love Thee – I shhhh all**
43

Chrysanthemum 2 *I am this limited season*
44

Chrysanthemum 3
45

newfangled
46

Count the ways
34

Let me count
39

Love, I am carrying the weight
46

LOVE YOU MORE THAN LIFE
47

we are neither here nor there
47

Trill
50

dead or exploding

52

it was you, every season

55

failure

56

Better oops

57

For spring, I am rising

58

Leave the door open

59

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose

54

How do I

58

ONE

The Incredible Sinking Girl

the climbing and climbing and trickle of custard,
a jelly-bent noise of whisper resistant.
she's clearing out candy, assembling knickknacks
c-cackle the bubblegum, jujubee sweet
Her love is a

 hummmmmingbee, baby bunting , please take
care of / /me
 leaking out quiet—a quaker, a cracking, a fist.
 regret it regret it don't make a
 sound.

conniption. compunction. she's got crumbum and heady and upchuck galore,
calisthenics for her uptight bones, b-brittle, b-b-belabored
a-hum, a-drum, b-bintle thistle dew drop yawp t-tippy top copse,
a forest, a corpus unholy to hold
seen between ladle, her laddie, a daze—some terror, night terror,
she's rinse and repeat.

of distance, the nuisance, a culling of gray—terrific but static
and wanting a mess
hypnotic, delicious, the culling, the bed
October, October the further and yet
coming through distance, the distance, coming through gray

alliance! medallion! seeping intact
a letter, a weasel,
ready the ratty, a ratchet to bear.
the heady, the ready, the knickknacks of noise

This was a plan, see
to bury myself in love,
I wouldn't have to go back outside
again.

I wish my life were
surrounded with stickers.
I did good!
I did good.
This is my reward

tectonic, a fraction, the ceiling, a bed.
the sound in her bed, she knows it tectonic, heroic
neurotic, she feels it in toes
barbaric, erotic—a function, a star
collection, a value beleaguered then dead

a bright far off star
tell it to louder
(it's loudered!)
roll over
roll over
get off it.
it's dead.

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways

(hook)
(line)

sink(er)

sink(her)

KISS

TRUST

SINK

is

sin

sins

(o)k
k

in t u s t
r
ust

tin

tut
tut
sink

kit
kin

t rust

kuss

sik (sic) si(c)k
su(c)k
stru(c)k

s(h)runk

rut

ssssiinkkt
sunk t

strut

stuk

we're driving with all the windows all
the way down, you and I, the wind is deafening;
we're straining to hear the radio

beautiful

forgot to shower

I'm all messy tangles

and happy

and wanting to open up my surface cells to the air,
open up and

catch me keep me

and wanting to enfold the thunderstorm
under my skins, my layers, lay it
gentle above my muscles,
to create myself some

new buoyant creature

sudden
movements

There is no more time.

I'm no more rude than absurd,
and you speak in dead.

Say, I am
dead or exploding.

This is only because
I wanted to touch
what I thought was there.

I lingered too long,
and I was swallowed up.

This is the shape I put myself
in.
Do not look away.

Look at my skin.
Am I barbaric?

a new course in zooming--
Bones exposed to sunlight
are prone to bleaching, bright white.
My skin is the opposite.

What happens is I turn dark, brown
golden, almost, I like to think
and then I shine as I pass by,
something bright allofasudden,
illuminated, lit up.

I promise, when you see me
your face will fall off
in a good way. I am so hot
I am so hot and vibrant like a star
or a planet too close to a sun.

You have spoken in 3 hundred
different languages, all of them
coloring me pale
You speak none of my own
6 thousand tongues

 this—we
 dancing around each other now
a necessary frustration
exceeding expectation

We're never any
 more of ourselves
than when we are alone.

 You would not expect that
 at the beginning of this
 there would be the eating up
 of a very tremendous howl

sink

s ink

sin k inks
 s

(k)ni(c)ks

in

snik(er)

s

Summer's still a time away

See I have built this habitual
longing, ulcerous—for days that stretch
past sunset
I am cyclical
cyclical, rising
warm air nostalgic for season.
I need blend, upper
better breath for noises,
regardless. I need my color back
not unlike the way you'll wear January on
your backskinned coat into February
February— greetings,
take this leap year in.

This
when there were too many
words to louder

failed

reaction: I tried

to make them
whispered
and love forgot or

didn't hear or

reach

didn't listen

far enough

(I'm sure)
I'd dreamed you listened
far enough to hear my shore,
other side of the world,
across the sea, different language.

Aren't all human tongues
rough and soft and pink?
inside mouths
soft and pink, too
and rough with words?

And on my shore, I'm hunting for shells
with big, crashing sounds inside, and I can only find
teensy small shells with teensy small oceans, and
I'm left by myself wondering if
small oceans crash and crash and roll
just as violently

*I keep forgetting
my heart is not*

your heart

rela (shun) ship

rel (at) I on ship

tion
t(i)on
t() on
(i)t on ship

r at on ship

rat tails n ip s
tale s pit s

i o
aye o
(h)eigh (h)o
eye owe
I oh

rel(a) t(i) oh I
re(a)l (i)t no ship
no (s)hip
hip(s)

ti p(s) lip(s)

ties o(h) no

r a tio

ship ton

r at ions
ale

ration(ale)

shi(p) (t)on

shi ton

sh ton

shi(t) on

sh(hh) it

sh(hhh)

Love, if I had enough in me to fly

i wouldiwouldiwould

Give me

me
take 300 gallons
me to fill me up now
300 of vessel
300 of named space

aning

ing

-ing

(attach root to) ing
(a verb) ing
(dynamic) ing
happen

of value
ing
(ing)

now

It does not take

much

give

give

give

me pres(s)

me

to fill me

now.

me
presence

present

pres(et)

It does

(es)sence

not take

much.

PRES(S)

(exist)ence

against me.

much

take not

does

not

Give.

take

much.

pres(s)

I am writing to you as though I were the shadow
and you were my voice.

Give me

an

press.

in

How

(do I ?)

do

*let me
let me*

I

love thee

to the level of every day's

most

*quiet
need*

a matte-black romance teetering
on a shine

hold me hold me
I filed a request for more
further evidence, deferment
look! a delay. look! more excuses.
That is what you are.
I made it.
I paid the rent. I danced in circles.
My heart was singing and I left crumbs,
Did you not want to lick the
tips of your fingers to pick
up every one to the last? Was it
not enough?
And I laughed, oh God, was it real?
Oh it was, why was it?
ohloveohloveohlove

more pieces, a spektaklee, tiny-ee!, minisculee
crumbled cumbuschun of a small,
fragile girl.
the rusting insidee,
the squeekee noizzee—*that is the sound of
her resilience, they say that is all she has left*

Oh.

Wrong.

No, I am tidier.
No, I found the propeller.
No, I am almost there.

clumsily, under my clothes
I was a little

I was a
little. girl

and you could not see my
knees
are where you grow from, they say
doctors will measure your
bones, they count the .i .i inches
of tissue now. and estimate how
much of you
there will
be

I have not grown.
but now I can
call you baby.
you are my “baby”, babe
b-babe but see
. but I have taken up
stuttering (you see?). because
I am not sure—never. I want you to
put meaning
into my mouth. I want you to
put meaning into my mouth,
I count on you to.

Listen, I count on you to.

There was not too much to (see?)
inside of me until you
touched my knees and saw
I kept growing
even though my bones stayed the same.

I still fit into my muscle,
baby, you saw
how big. girl, now
I fit inside my skin. *see?*

TWO

Howl die love we?

(let me count)

howl dial of thee?
how I'll die of thee?

I'll of thee to the depth and breadth and height
m'eye soulcan reech, when feeling
out of sight

Let meek out thee, ways
I love theet ooh
thud

epsom breadths uhm
hights *mys ohhl!*

I'll of thee to the level of everyday's
mostqu I ate need

I'll of thee with a love ice eemed to loose

I'll of thee to the dep *thhhud* and bread *ttthhhud* and high *tthhhud*
mys ohhl!!
can reach.

howl d'I loved he.

I shall loved he better after

Get out of the car.

I'm tumbling in and out of phrases sharp

We no longer know where we're going, but

 We're chasing

We want to be on the far side of this, to a placenewplace we haven't seen before—make
there

 new destination.

 Here is not too fond of us.

Quick, before the season changes!

Take a picture.

Quickquick!

before the gas runs out and we find
ourselves riding on

 aching tires.

 Go.

We have to find

All the news went sour.
I wanted the shiny
stickers.
We were simply bad.

This is me on fire.
This is whispering with a
loud voice and you
would call it screaming,
but I don't want to care
about giving things
names.

I'm not patient. I'm not
patient anymore.

And I'm crying. I force
myself to cry in the
shower. I talk to you
when I'm naked. But
you're not there. I
wanted it to be clean.
Again. Or maybe for the
first time. I was tired of
dragging you along.

I'm not masochistic
enough to ask,
"Remember?"

LOVE
YOU
MORE
THAN
LIFE

I Will Call In Ten Years and Tell You This Story

We always find each other in parking lots—too many loosened hours, every season, even when the season makes new, the meeting place stays the same, because this, our consistency, means you sit still enough for me to see you, sit you down—look at me, hey—and that is where our conversation begins, remember?

It was winter, and I kissed you before all the snow melted, remember? And there was white, white white everywhere, and I whispered out, how unusual, for our place down here. I think I learned how to be quiet in a new way that winter, when you said everything was perfect, and I thought they could put it on a postcard, and I even made a wish, on the softness, on the whiteness, on the postcardness, but it was perfect and there are pictures to prove it, but none of me and you. It was winter, and I kissed you before all the snow melted, right after I had sat upside down in your passenger's seat, and suddenly there was the moon.

I remember looking up and touching you sideways, and I remember seeing you but not knowing what color your eyes were, and we had a moment before Erin called and asked us to please come to the shop, come and get some coffee, and so we left the gravel parking lot, the high school, the very still moon, but I was still upside down, and I told you, but did you know I was talking about my insides?

You don't drink coffee, you had tea, and I asked Erin if I could have a couple of those big industrial coffee filters, bigger than my head. I asked for scissors to cut them up into giant snowflakes, giant and paper, so they couldn't melt even as the snow on the ground did.

is so
and it can't
full of shit
Remember?"
Everything I am

teach me to be kind

R

e

m

e

m

b

e

r

teach me to be kind

that was the one thing you asked for? And it's the one thing I can't be to you. There are no words to make a balm for this. You don't believe in anything. Anything I believe is real.

I wanted badly for there to be something delicate

This is the good part, I promise—
the part where the distance allows
itself to settle after realignment, and time is
not so much shadow, but a good and present
weight—a helper, a smoother of process.

This is where the story starts
making sense. This is where
the story starts becoming
that story you'll want to tell your children
if you decide, one day, that you want them—
you will tell this story—
remember.

teach me to be kind

so that when I washed my mouth out, it
would be sore with pretty. I think to myself
that if I get desperate I can pour glitter into
my Listerine and people would be surprised
at between my teeth when I smiled. I
wanted that.

so that when I want to shine, I sing,

*I am going to say your
names out loud.*

*Something like forest
a valley, a place
where people can live
but not in total
isolation. There could be
a path.*

*There could be a right
way for it.*

And I believed all that in dreaming

Error.

err.

rr.. rrr.

or

didn't I say I was intermittent?

or

*in t er er mittent
ent*

(Babe, give me synonyms for transient.)

trans ee ent

(traveler.)

trav err l err

Hello forgery,

I am folds of skin over
nothing. I am
birthing regret again.

You know this is not how I like to
ask for forgiveness

You know I like me
on my knees

You didn't make me anything.

You're thinking that we can't
Well, we can't

(love)
(love)

thee freely
thee purely

I'll *of* *thee with a*

pass-on
put to use in my old griefs

real

I (u)

I

u

ur

u' re

fuel

al(l) ure

al(l) u're

fil(l)

Love, did you know that when I say your name,
I'm shaken. I forget I have any sound but whimper.
I cannot navigate my throat around it.

Did you catch that?

uuuhhhhhhhhhh

how do I?

count the ways

let mmmmm

mmm

l.let

mmmm

mm

eee

c.cccount uuhh

ouuuuu nnntt nnnt

uuuhhh

depth and breadth and height.

THREE

Count the ways

I'm calling to you, just
broken-in, like this is the point when
the new shoes get comfortable.
You want to walk in them every day.

I'm singing to the carpet, thinking of
dust mites as my friends.
I'm imagining their tiny chorus,
chiming. I'm not expecting you.

I'm eating through the apples,
touching their bruises with my fingers and tongue
in my head, I want to think the bruises
taste different than the rest of it.

They do. They're sweeter.

Glitter describes an assortment of very small (roughly 1 mm²) pieces of copolymer plastics, aluminum foil, titanium dioxide, iron oxides, bismuth oxychloride or other materials painted in metallic, neon and iridescent colors to reflect light in a sparkling spectrum. [1] Glitter is usually sold and stored in containers somewhat similar to salt shakers which have openings that control the flow of glitter. These containers may contain one or many colors of glitter. In 1980, the first Glamour Beauty Pageant took place as part of a summer festival to promote business in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, which contains larger pieces, and should also not be confused with sequins, which are larger yet.

Contests became a regular part of summer beach life, with the most elaborate contests taking place in Atlantic City, New Jersey (Atlantic City Frolic) and Galveston, Texas (Splash Day), where the events attracted women from many cities and towns. [2] Glitter is used as an element of decorations, and can be added to rubbers and plastics. It is also often put into cosmetic products like lip gloss and eyeshadow. Glitter was produced in a powder form by the Texas Centennial Celebrations beauty pageant in 1935, which shows models attempting to fit into life-sized cutouts of the Centennial Committee's concept of the "perfect figure." [3] Accounts conflict as to when glitter was invented—some say 1934 and others shortly after World War II.

[edit]Purpose
The word "glitter" is often used (not really) euphemistically to refer to brilliantly gorgeous but superficial beauty pageants that have come to be seen as frivolous events whose interpretation required no scholarly effort. [citation needed] Miss America, the first pageant of its kind, has made an effort to ensure that it does not appear as a "stereotypical" pageant. [citation needed]

Pageants may be multicultural or racially specific, such as the Miss Chinese International Pageant, Miss Black America or Miss Indian America.

Another stated goal of pageants is promoting self-esteem and public-speaking abilities of the contestants. Winners of these pageants have said that they feel a sense of accomplishment

Hush, my sweet, these tornadoes are for you
(after Richard Siken)

It began with the luxury of caving
in incessant beats of things outside
pushing, pushing
the rubbing and moving and pressure—
then stillness.
A watery dawn.

Waking is a different story

*we had worked, day by hour
to nightfall, lunging and weaving through
and forth, like violent stitching machinery.
We were independently straining
to touch the in-between,
the very thin middle.
But we met together
again and over
again*

*When I found you,
I poured myself out
all the way,
let you into
the core of me, and you
said
the middle was good.*

It is morning,
today and colder,
I thought of you.

I thought of you, I said,
and my voice was naked
but did not carry or perhaps
you did not listen.

Let me count

A temporary

- 1.) sharp intake of breath
- 2.) hard-heartedness

3.) letters,
a scheme—
begging you
with words

4.) feminine

5.) fuck.

*too much glass in
my castle
in the break of it
wants more breathing*

*If I could stand to
have it in picturous*

strides,

*fountainous I'm modern I'm
modern I'm*

*buoyant, revival of
me*

Something is fickle on this side of dandy
Chrys walks--leaves crystal-y wake.
Too much of live-ness, she says she says walking
and hoping and grinding her gears up in volumes

shake to nothing

herald it further.

*The whales think I
should have adopted
something more than
this type of weather. . .*

sing.

How do I love thee?

hhh

ow?

ow.

do I love thee?

o w ow

w

do

I love the

eeeeee!

depth and breadth

ouuuuhhhhfffff

w

mysoul can reech

my soul can reeeeeeeech

can

ow

reech in

my soulcan

soulcan

w

reach in my soulcan

w

reach

wreaaach wrreach

wreettch wretch in my soulcan

wretch in my soulcan reach

In you there are infinite sources at ready
because you are
 woman,

half-past girl, you are already so ready, ripeflesh.

I shhhhh

I shhhhhh all

I shh

all but love thee

bett(her) aft(her)

death.

Chrysanthemum lifts her shirt
pushes her breasts up to a fiction.
She is mustard-stained collapse
into bathtub, in the after after
glitter, after bunches of smiles
in bouquets.

I am

this limited season

this walking forward,

imagined gray only

if

you're lonely

*not as tall as the rest of the
Amazonians*

*were warriors, absent-
breasted for better aim*

Chrysanthemum

Chrrr ys anth em um ummm

Chrr

is
and them umm

Chrys and them

uhm.

Chrys anthem um

Chry sans them uhhmm

uhhhhhhhmmmmm

Chrys sans him mm uhm

himmmm uhhmm

sans him uhm

Chrys sans him um

I WILL THROW OUT ALL MY GUTS!

newfangled
a tisket bisket cccccrrrrrrrrUNCH against teeth thickening
into custard in her throat

nothing crunches in her stomach
there is juice and guts, acid
brains in her stomach

blitzing whiskey
pouring outright
6 inch heels of
overcompensating

*Love, I am carrying the weight of my
rising and opening*

torso,
head, thorax, persistent. noisy wander (want her)
lustlust see her gulping after it? for first
to quell the restless in this
tiny little

boop-boop
heart, persistent.

we are neither here nor there.

*I'm not asking how
but why we chose to survive*

separate different

My tongue on the wind like the wind on the grass
I'm crossing my fingers and
binding my hands out in the open.

I built calluses on top of yielding skin,
two years' construction on
tips of fingers, like fern fronds young and soft human you tell me,
"No I can't feel them."

But they are there and they know you.

There is paint I cannot wash away; I am colored
beside your muted bleak
style of being
in this place

*This is me on
fire.
This is
whispering
with a loud
voice, and you
would call it
screaming.*

I'm starving my eyeballs again
and you're telling me that
if it's a flower, it's
got to be more fragrant than that, and
sorry, I tell you, sorry, but it's a flower
and it's pretty, but not all of it
it doesn't really smell that good
and it can't sing to your mother
or tell you you look nice all the time, please
understand.

And see, my ashes had burned red
hot before sinking in to make better soil.

Yours washed out in the rain.

You were my darling—all that I had left
littered, falled to the ground
messy, as though you were afraid of
the immaculate, you were afraid
we could be, you were afraid of
yes. why can't we
make a better definishun for perfeckt?

You were afraid.

Remind me later about your flawed logic.
I'm making paper cranes to forget
I'm winding up balls of string.
I like to tangle my fingers around small objects.
Like your dick.

your heart

your heart

your heart

Go to sleep, yes.

And show me your heart.
And show
put on a
show
and

Give yourself your own name.
My mouth is tired of making old sounds.

dead or exploding.

I made this when I was afraid.

(This is helping me forget to be subtle)

There was a stinger, a
stinger, yes, thrusting and
punch, jab, spit
pokepoke pain tiny venom
seeds of poison,
and I let it in.

You were a dream.
In mine, there was a correspondence,
a flurry of letters
from one
 lover
 to the other.

But I dreamed you were the mailman.

What did I want to say, ask?
Why it was not
filling up to the brim?

Look, I am a clear glass, running over.
You are too small to see.

Say, *Look here—I am I AM!*

You're running over? *You're running over?*

But I can't see.

You are tiny drops, and I am gallonsGALLONSGALLONS!

Please, baby

*(I don't know how to give
up on you)*

It's just, I'm afraid of fire and
loud noises and

sudden
movements

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose

it was you, every season
on a wind, like
you were a chill
on her skin
from the air.

cling,
the soft and charismatic way your hair
curled around your ears
and the methodical way you undressed your oranges

gentle fingers
fragrant after.

F U

ail

(lure)

ire

f

u

re

ear

rail

re: fair

far

better

oops I'm stumbling over words and
images that don't mean anything
to anyone else but me, but
I balance my head a little straighter
and upright on my neck
nowadays, I can't force myself to look at the ground
around you. I'm looking past you into summer
time I've gotten over trying to blame the heat
for addling my brain. This is purposeful
malfunction of everything to do with
me and me and never you again.

For spring, I am rising

Firing.

How do I

Dial it back, new;
re: perennial
 juxtapose
recline into
assorted new ways of
perpetuating motion.

Leave the door open.
Leave the door
open.
The door leave open
door the open leave.
The open leave door.
Door leave the open.
Open the leave door.
Open door. The leave.
Door. Open the leave.
Open the door. Leave.
Open. Leave the door.
Leave open the door

Dead or Exploding: *We have to talk*

“It is in this state of fear and love, in this climate of emotion and imagination that mankind made its first, most fundamental and decisive discoveries.”

—Aimé Césaire

I began this project by giving myself permission to act on impulse. I did not know what I would find when I started writing these poems. I did not set out for them to be “experimental;” their forms come lifted out of the subconscious/instinct/dream/nightmare of heart, filtered through conscious thought, and reconstructed onto the medium of paper. The poems in this work remove themselves from convention not out of defiance or rebellion, but out of *need*.

1. Creativity is an act of *giving*, and poetry cannot begin if there is no recognition of risk.

Take it in. Sensitivity is vital. Sensitivity allows opening.

2. Language, at its heart, is not words or characters on paper, but sound. And corresponding images, feelings. Sound is visceral. (Speak poetry.) If constructed with known words and letters, what does sound look like?

3. There are traps in believing, “I don’t know what I’m trying to say.” Thoughts that cannot be conveyed within the proper conventions of language are considered inadequate and dismissed in favor of thoughts that fit themselves into the general conception of clarity; but it is conventional language that is inadequate. Lyn Hejinian describes our human psychology as “generated by the struggle between language and that which it claims to depict or express, by our overwhelming experience of the vastness and uncertainty of the world, and by what often seems to be the inadequacy of the imagination that it longs to know—and, furthermore, for the poet, the even greater inadequacy of the language that appears to describe, discuss, or disclose it” (623).

We do not think and feel in the “completeness” dictated by language. It is not nearly so organized or systematic.

There are many things to say and even more ways of saying them.

How?

What is the risk?
incoherence
miscommunication
rejection

What is gained?
discovery
newness

(perhaps) courage?
(perhaps) self?

* * *

These poems are love poems—“letters from one lover, to the other,”—addressing a breakup/down of a relationship brought on by the failure of communication. The poems also exist as a conversation into the *self*. The speaker rejects narrative simplicity, an impulse that Rae Armantrout writes is “almost immediately overwhelmed by a hyperextended and contrived metaphor” (289). History has given the story of love over to simple narrative, but love (as an idea, as a feeling, as a state of being) is anything but “simple”—and neither is hurt. What definition can be given to intimacy? To vulnerability?

If a thing (such as a feeling) lacks adequate definition, does it lack meaning? Is it in peril of dissolving into relativity, subjectivity, air?

The speaker of “Dead or Exploding” explores these questions over and over in regards to many things—especially in regards to herself. It is upon this desperation for *meaning*, for an anchor on which to stabilize identity, that the work opens up unconventional spaces. It was my hope, as writer, to use this space purposefully and creatively—as a place to make messes, a place where art could make no mistakes, only useful realizations.

These poems lament a conversation *unhad*, unable to be had, and so they use broken text and space to imitate gaps in communication—gaping holes, at times—constructed in the hope that the silences, the spaces will be filled with some (found or borrowed, but not even beginning to hope for permanent) meaning. The tension hovers in suspension between what exists on the page and what is already felt, if not entirely understood. Indeed, what is *not* understood can be used as a fuel. The absence of full understanding can perpetuate motion, and discoveries are made out of what is seemingly incoherent. Upon closer look, what seems incoherent is not—it is not unapproachable. (Can *music* be called incoherent? After all, it can be broken up, and its parts can be observed. I wanted the poetry to become something similar.)

A prominent hinge on which the collection is constructed is the very well-known Sonnet 43 by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, also referred to as “How Do I Love Thee?” I, as a writer, wanted to play with typical ideals of love and the language surrounding them and blast them to pieces, and then reconstruct new meaning out of the rubble. What I found in the deconstruction of Browning’s poem were new elements to a conversation about love I hadn’t considered before, dimensions I hadn’t yet learned to touch on

effectively. Cynicism, devotion, self-abasement, panic, anger—all of these heavy emotions emerged when the sweet and dotting Sonnet 43 was shredded and forced into a different context.

The work begins *in medias res*; the strings of its narrative begin at the end of things, at the breakdown—an opportunity to build new. The poems in “Dead or Exploding” were engendered by the necessity to break language down to find new substance, after knowledge built on a previous life/relationship had failed. The work *craves*. It is characterized by intense longing, huge waves and echoes of it piled on top and on top and on top of themselves. Repetition is vital. It became a conscious decision to include (indeed highlight) flaws in language—conversational language—to include a stutter, filler words (“uuhhmm” “errr”), and repetition of ideas as a way of propelling the conversation forward—with or without a responder.

Tenderness is present—as well as bite. Hejinian writes, “if language induces a yearning for comprehension, for perfect and complete expression, it also guards against it” (628). The poems seek to exist in a space where they are vulnerable as well as attacking. The speaker invites the reader/observer/lover to see her heart at the same time shutting down any possibility of further damage to it. She asserts herself within her vulnerability and gives herself power. This creation power and force through vulnerability was a lynchpin goal in the creation of this collection.

The entire work is heavily invested in the reaction of the reader toward form as well as content. It was a goal to merge sound with space. I desired for the poems to elicit an instinctual response, a physical one. I wanted to create visceral language and in it, the

giving into ripping and shredding and layering and pounding. It was a goal to be able to distress the reader, to thoroughly involve them in the consciousness of the speaker, to inundate them with feeling—unintellectualized feeling, upon first reading.

The speaker conveys intense feelings of claustrophobia and panic, which is key to understanding why the poems *must* spread themselves through the space. All throughout is the giant question of containment and the inadequacy or outright failure of the body, of the skin, of the heart, of the page, of convention to *hold*

(meaning)
(identity)
(answers).

This claustrophobia and panic is a most natural reaction to the weight of loss, especially if the loss is characterized by the loss of a partner, an *other* self, or a place in which identity, recognition, and *world* is invested. Clarity of identity is lost, in the speaker, and so the voices in the poems shift in and around themselves—wearing new skins, shedding old ones, attempting to wear multiple ones at a time—all in the attempt to *root down* self, to *fit*.

By the end of it, whether *self* or *meaning* is found, is up to who is reading the poems. Truly *self* or *meaning* cannot hold permanence—it cannot be forever. What is permanent, however, is knowledge—knowledge of how to navigate what was previously overwhelming, what previously could not be touched upon at all. (Pain.) The work ends with no concrete answer—there is only an open door and, surely, a space behind it.

Works Cited

Armantrout, Rae. "Feminist Poetics and the Meaning of Clarity." *Artifice and Immediacy: An Anthology of New Poetics*. Ed. Christopher Beach. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998. 287-296. Print.

Césaire, Aimé. "Poetry and Knowledge." *Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry 1800-1950*. Ed. Melissa Kwansny. Middletown: Wesleyan Press, 2004. Print.

Hejinian, Lyn. "The Rejection of Closure." *Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women*. Ed. Mary Margaret Sloan. Jersey City, NJ: Talisman House, 1998. Print.