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"Let us begin this letter, this prelude to an encounter, formally, as a declaration, in the old-fashioned way: I love you. You do not know me (although you have seen me, smiled at me). I know you (although not so well as I would like. I want to be there when your eyes flutter open in the morning, and you see me, and you smile. Surely this would be paradise enough?). So I do declare myself to you now, with pen set to paper. I declare it again: I love you."

Is there any communication more potent than the love letter? Is there any charge greater than seeing those words on paper? The editors of this collection decided to ask some of the most important writers of our time to compose a fictional love letter - breathing new life into a forgotten custom, and affording words themselves the power of seduction that they richly deserve. The result is an iridescent picture of what love looks like in the twenty-first century: a collage of methods and moods. Each letter is radically different from the others, and all but one are published for the first time. A perfect gift, this book is also an ingenious showcase for many of our most beloved writers.

Love: a vague word for an emotion so ethereal it's not always possible to demonstrate. But there still exists an assumption that experiences - and, by extension, the emotions that experiences evoke - are more resonant when you *write them down*. And it's that faith, that belief that writing down these naked, shocking, inadvisable and probably destructive feelings make them worthwhile, that powers this collection, each piece of which is a testimony to the creative powers of our leading writers today, and every piece of which will move you.

Four Letter Word: Invented Correspondence from the Edge of Modern Romance Details

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Author : , Douglas Coupland , Jonathan Lethem , Hari Kunzru , more... Jeanette Winterson , Leonard Cohen ...less

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From Reader Review Four Letter Word: Invented Correspondence from the Edge of Modern Romance for online ebook

Kinga says

When I saw the list of authors I thought: Surely, I will love this book. Then I read the reviews and remembered I don't particularly like short stories (and imaginary love letters can be treated as such) so I thought the book would leave me indifferent. To my surprise I really enjoyed it and it would get five stars if it wasn't for a few party poopers. Now I am going to do something I never do. I am going to review every single letter in this collection with only one sentence.

Excited?

Yeah, me too.

Jonathan Lethem - A letter from Mars to Earth, I don't know what the hell that was about, I don't think I am sophisticated enough to get this weird complex metaphor.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie - It had everything I love about Adichie's style: it was simple without being cliche, and sweet but not cheesy.

Adam Thorpe - This was pretty good as well, by that time I had high hope for this book

Lionel Shriver - Probably my favourite one in the collection, gotta love psychotic women, it would be funnier if it wasn't so true.

Dacid Bezmozgis - Meh, felt like something taken out of a novel and couldn't stand on its own without the context.

Chris Bachelder - This was extremely cheesy and trying to be original and ending up being quite the opposite, women writers couldn't get away with stuff like that but it is ok for men apparently

A.L. Kennedy - Don't remember, don't care

Jeff Parker - Really funny and original, I need to check him out, who the hell is this guy?

Francine Prose - Rah, rah, rah, this is what happens when you date an 'artist', the heroine should know that - artists are dicks!

Graham Roumieu - Bigfoot writing a love letter to Santa, WTF in a good way

Gautam Malkani - Amateurish and either I am not very smart or it didn't even make sense.

Miriam Toews - This would have been better if it was a full lenght novel.

James Robertson - OH my god, a love letter to Scottish mountains, what a load of boring, pretentious crap, definitely a partypooper

Etgar Keret - Seems like an exercise in writing, good writing though so gets a pass

Mandy Sayer - Bookclub favourite - you know the type?

Jeanette Winterson - This is exactly what I expected from Winterson, even though I have never actually read anything by her.

Michel Faber - You know when middle aged men write about from a young woman POV (especially young woman from some far away place like Ukraine or Thailand) and you enjoy it a little but the feminist in you wants to slap the author?

Hisham Matar - Nice, however I don't have much to say about it.

Geoff Dyer - An asshole's attempt at a love letter - brilliant.

Matthew Zapruder - What?

Carl-Johan Vallgren - I am gathering this one was actually real, so I can't really judge it.

Joseph Boyden - I was reading this one on the tube on a Saturday night and started fucking crying! Me ! Crying!! Unbelievable

Neil Gaiman - A love letter from a stalking staute, only Gaiman could pull that off

Valerie Martin - Quite enjoyable but unmemorable

Peter Behres - Unimpressed; I really cannot read about war anymore.

Ursula K. Le Guin - Hey, I didn't know she was so funny, maybe I should read something by her.

Nick Laird - Unlove letter to the father, I think I should write a similar one.

Sam Lipsyte - Letters to a woman primatologist from not one but TWO chimpanzees, it turns out that apes are JUST like men in the end.

Panos Karnezis - Interesting, in dare I say Jonathan Carroll's kind of way.

Jan Morris - A love letter to a house, a lot better than the love letter to the bloody Scottish mountains

Hari Kunzru - Most believable and complex characterization in the whole collection, who is this guy, where can I get more of him?

Anonymous - Wow, I have feeling this one was 100% real and a message to someone!

Margaret Atwood - Not too bad but I expected more from Atwood (Oh, I hated when teachers used to do that to me at school - this is not bad, Kinga, but we really expect more from you).

Damon Galgut - Pretty intense

Audrey Niffenegger - Meh.

Juli Zeh - What if , what if

Leonard Cohen - Seriously, why do people like this dude, this was SO predictable and cliche ridden.

Phil LaMarche - A winner - abusive love at its best.

M.G. Vassnji - Pleasant

Tessa Brown - Hilarious and scary at the same time, who is this woman? (On goodreads she is only listed as an author of Stitch & Stencil Flowers & Fruit and I just don't think that's the one)

Douglas Coupland - Love... well, Coupland is definitely in love with his own writing.

Jean says

A group of contemporary writers, Audrey Niffenegger among them, were asked to write a love letter however they wanted: fictional or not, current day or not. I enjoyed about half of them, the ones set in current day and to a person (as opposed to nature, to the planet Earth, or someone in Lenin's Russia, and so on). Surprisingly, Audrey Niffenegger's was among the ones I didn't particularly like, but I did like finding other writers to look up later on: Geoff Dyer, Jeannette Winterson, Etgar Keret, Juli Zeh, Neil Gaiman, Mandy Sayer, Tessa Brown, Francine Prose.

Emily says

This book contains exactly what you would expect from your basic "anthology around a theme." Some regular letters, some from or to psychos, some to non-humans, some not actually letters, blah blah blah. Problem is none were that interesting. I score three stars in honor of the letter by Chris Bachelder, an author I hadn't heard of before, whose letter, describing a student who did very well in the Intermediate Love course, was the only one that was in any way interesting, clever, or moving. EDIT: I do read a lot of "Anthologies around a theme" though. Maybe I am just jaded.

Mariana Couto Miranda says

everything you need

Emily Pomeroy says

DNF. This was a huge disappointment. I can not get over the absurdity of this book.

Circe says

I don't normally read short story books. I find them hard to get into and sit and read for a long time since each story typically doesn't flow into the next story. I certainly found that true with this book but that said, I enjoyed the many different approaches to love each author took. Some stories were funny, others heartbreakingly sad and some were just really confusing. What was especially surprising to me is the assumption I made about the gender of the narrator for each story was usually wrong.

Sinta Jimenez says

Love stories bore me for the most part, especially the more conventional they are, something strange has to be going on to compel me... and this collection is mostly of that kind. Skip to the Coupland and Kennedy stories, they were the most abstract but also the most poetic and interesting. There's also an interesting plot line by one of the British authors, Hari Kunzru, in this collection about scary sex in Jordan. And Gautam Malkani's heartbreakingly sad letter written by a child to a mother he never knew because she died in childbirth solidly shows a love letter of a different kind.

Discoverylover says

I don't usually go in for short stories, mostly because they take so long to read. I like to stop after each story and think about it which limits the amount of reading I can do in say a lunch break! I thought this one was remarkably well done though. I picked it up mostly for the Neil Gaiman story, but enjoyed so many of the others that I'm glad I did read it!

My favourite stories were by these authors:

Lionel Shriver

Chris Bachelder

Jeff Parker

Graham Roumieu (an absolutely heartbreakingly sad letter from Bigfoot to Santa trying to rekindle their friendship)

Gautam Malkani

Miriam Toews

James Robertson (a beautiful love letter to Scotland)

Etgar Keret

Mandy Sayar (this was the most haunting one from a student to their teacher)

Michael Faber (I couldn't decide if it was heartbreakingly sad or hopeful)

Hisham Matar

Joseph Boyden (I almost cried reading this story of a man searching for his wife after the New Orleans flood)

Neil Gaiman (I'd heard it before, but it was nice to see it in written form!)

Peter Behrens

Sam Lipsyte (a letter from an ape to a primatologist)

Panos Karnezis (another heartbreaking one about a man who is only able to see his love in mirrors)

Jan Morris

Anonymous

Margaret Atwood

Audrey Niffenegger

Tessa Randolph (hilarious analysis of phone calls between two people)

Brandy says

Despite the contributor list reading like a Who's Who of my bookcase, this just wasn't that good. It wasn't bad--many of the stories were enjoyable--but the bulk ends up being forgettable. Several pieces feel like they were dashed off in a "why not?" response to the project, with minimal planning or editing. The "love letter" is interpreted several ways, but most end up with sarcastic and/or "twists"--love gone wrong, I Never Want To See You Again, letters from chimps to the primatologist who's been studying his clan. Taken as individual microfictions, these might be enjoyable, but when put together into a collection, there's not enough diversity in tone and/or subject matter to hold my interest. Did every author think they were being clever to write breakups and bitter irony as their love letters? The stand-outs were the ones who broke from that mold: a husband placing ad after ad, looking for his wife after Katrina. A performance artist stalking a woman he sees daily. Descriptions of photos that chronicled a relationship. Unfortunately, these pieces were the minority and back-loaded the book (arranged loosely by tone; the organizational plan is somewhat obtuse); many readers will likely never make it all the way to the few gems that are hidden here.

Dee says

"That's what days in the hills always do: release miracles, often small, even insignificant, but always memorable." -p.87

"What does this story mean? It means nothing except what it says: that it happened, that we were there, that it will never happen again in quite the same way, and yet that it happens all the time. The story is my story about a particular mountain, but the mountain does not know it, does not give a damn about it. I love the mountain for what it gave me, but the mountain does not love me. I find myself grappling again for other people's words to explain what I mean. Only this time I am caught between two sets of thoughts: those of the naturalist John Muir, who *really* loved mountains, *really* understood them, and those of the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, who knew the futility of such love and understanding. What are we to stones, MacDiarmid asked insistently. What are we to stones? We are nothing. We must be humble, because the stones are one with the stars, however stone-like they may appear to us. It makes no difference to them where they are, on top of a mountain or at the bottom of the sea, in a palace or a pigsty. There are plenty of ruined buildings in the world, MacDiarmid reminds us, but no ruined stones.

This is from the long poem of 1933, 'On a Raised Beach,' constructed, as the title suggests, nowhere near

mountains but on a stony shoreline in Shetland, but the poem transcends its particular place and time. It is so bleakly beautiful and so true that there seems to be nothing worth saying, although MacDiarmid remorselessly exposes our fragility further: what happens to us, he says, is of no relevance to the world's geology; what happens to the world's geology is of utmost relevance to us. It is not the stones who must be reconciled to us, but we to them." -p. 88-89

"In the bedroom you were asleep. I lay down and broached the boundary. You put out an arm, a peninsula from your island home to mine. I can sometimes believe that you are there, and that I am there with you, in the same place, but that is as tantalising and impossible as this city, which can be visited but not known, which is inhabited, but by others." -p.99-100

Leighanne says

The love letter is not dead. It is not sleeping dormant through the winter. It is alive, vibrant and pulsing with possibilities. In this collection of invented love stories from a varied assortment of authors, we have a letter written from Mars to Earth, a letter which takes no prisoners; one from an internet stalker to her beloved; another from Kafka's girlfriend...

Such fun to read. And as Jeffrey Eugenides said,(I paraphrase) it's best to experience the joys and miseries of love from a safe and literary distance, tucked snugly in your single bed.

Macena Chowdhury says

The beauty and problem of a collection of different stories/letters is that you will like styles of writing/like some stories and not like others.

I enjoyed reading the collection as a whole, but there were some that lost me in plot or narrative.
The idea for this collection is great: the value and power of the old fashioned written letter to a loved one.
Including letters to mothers, partners, friends, lost friends and more, it is still worth a shot :)

Andy says

A collection of modern day love letters from a wide range of great writers. Ranging from the comic, whimsical and outright hilarious to the serious, devoted and tragic they cover a wide variety of loves, relationships and encounters. I particularly liked Geoff Dyer's letter to 'several possible recipients from the mid-1980s' and James Robertson's ode to the Scottish highlands and the pleasures of solitary hill walking. Neil Gaiman's letter seems to be a working of his subsequent short film *Statuesque*.

A great bedside collection.

Intortetor says

un gigantesco esercizio di stile: 40 autori e autrici (con molti nomi grossi e un anonimo: la curatrice rosalind porter?) si dedicano all'antica arte della lettera d'amore.

il problema è che non tutti sembrano adatti al genere: qualche racconto è davvero efficace, altri si lasciano comunque leggere ma scorrono via senza lasciar nulla e altri ancora sono proprio bruttini. come lettura da treno è efficace, ma finito non viene davvero voglia di consigliarlo...

Suzanne says

Overall an enjoyable read, although some letters were more than a little forgettable. The letters I still remember, however -- I *really* remember them. Several of the letters left me wishing for the story to continue, wishing that I could read the addressee's response. The mix of serious and light-hearted, romantic and stalker-esque, also seemed effortless, and kept the collection from seeming too long overdrawn out.
