

We Contain Multitudes

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By Sarah Henstra.

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Where to begin? This novel's conceit is that it consists entirely of letters exchanged by two boys as part of a sophomore English class project. Adam Kurlansky and Jonathan Hopkirk (or Kurl and Little Jo, as they address each other) make an unlikely couple. Kurl is taciturn, expressionless, and an erstwhile football player who has quit the team under mysterious circumstances. Little Jo is a short, slender, openly gay boy, who idolizes the poet Walt Whitman, whose words become a leitmotif of this remarkable novel. Both boys are gifted writers, and their letters grow increasingly artful as they get to know each other on and off the page—and subsequently fall in love. However, this is not the denouement but rather the beginning of a closely examined relationship that, as the two unusually introspective boys describe it in their letters, becomes almost philosophical. This is an absolutely extraordinary work of fiction that illustrates how artful epistolary novels can be. Kurl and Jo are characters to die for, emotionally compelling and empathetic. Their quotidian lives are riveting and their story unforgettable. At one point, Jo describes a novel he's reading by saying, "I can't even summarize the plot; it's that strange and sad and marvelous a story." There's no better way to describe Henstra's own novel. It is not to be missed.

— *Michael Cart*
