

We Contain Multitudes

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Sarah Henstra. Little, Brown, \$17.99 (400p) ISBN 978-0-316-52465-0

Henstra's return to YA (*Mad Miss Mimic*) tackles gay contemporary teen life via epistolary format. High school student Jonathan "Little Jo" Hopkirk is a gay, bow tie-wearing Walt Whitman fan. Adam Kurlansky (Kurl) is a reserved former football star who quit the team suddenly under strange circumstances. Assigned to one another as part of a weekly pen pal exchange at their high school—and despite their vastly differing interests—they develop a rapport via classroom mail that builds into frequent correspondence and, eventually, romance. Jo's formally styled writing, studded with Whitman quotations, touches on life's passions and on being bullied at school, and Kurl's more casual missives discuss his family: his brother's return from Afghanistan and his mercurial, controlling uncle. The correspondence at times stretches believability by recounting events and conversations for which both characters were present ("You were there, after all. You don't need me to reconstruct the scene for you"). But as a medium for reporting day-to-day occurrences and conveying intimate feelings and classic themes—love, lust, and betrayal, among others—the letters shine. While the story's format and build may strain credulity for some, the volume is likely to find admirers among fans of teen romance. Ages 14–up. [em](May) [/em]