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as the catalyst for bonding groups of men together in national, sub-national, and larger-than-national communities. This *Calamus*-derived model makes Whitman appear strangely uninterested in including women in the different communities he claims allegiance to in "A Broadway Pageant"—despite the fact that the poem's depictions of the sub-national "crowd" he "merge[s]" with and the larger-than-national "pageant" he joins are never characterized as solely male. Still, these shortcomings do not significantly undermine the considerable contribution that this book makes in not only recovering the work of otherwise neglected nineteenth-century writers, but in expanding our understanding of the complex nature of the "nationalism" championed by Whitman and the "equals" that he hungered for. As such, this book is sure to influence scholarly discussions of Whitman's nationalism, and nineteenth-century nationalism more generally, for years to come.

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ALAN BOTSFORD. *Walt Whitman of Cosmic Folklore*. Spokane, Washington: Sage Hill Press, 2010. 294 pp.

Emerson famously said that *Leaves of Grass* resembled a mixture of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *New York Herald*; so Alan Botsford, one of Whitman's "poets to come," combines in *Walt Whitman of Cosmic Folklore* poetry, criticism, dialogues, myths and folktales, hip-hop rhymes, and postmodern surfaces interwoven with the wit and wisdom of Whitman's visionary embrace of the reader. Botsford is an American poet living in Japan, the author of two poetry collections, *A Book of Shadows* (2003) and *mamaist: learning a new language* (2002), and an Associate Professor of American Literature at Kanto Gakuin University in Yokohama, where he co-edits *Poetry Kanto*, Japan's leading bilingual poetry journal.

Books about Whitman written by contemporary poets often make for satisfying reading, and Botsford's book is no exception, for Walt Whitman as poetic progenitor stands as the great exception to Harold Bloom's thesis on the "anxiety of influence." From the late Eliot to Langston Hughes, Allen Ginsberg, and C.K. Williams, poets are enabled rather than intimidated by Whitman's looming presence. Spencer may have sought to "over-go Oriosto," and Blake wrestled famously with Milton's angel, but what would it mean to "overgo" Walt Whitman? What would such a poetry look like?

Befitting its precursor, *Walt Whitman of Cosmic Folklore* is a unique book. In many ways it recalls the Whitman imagined by the early disciples, such as Richard Maurice Bucke and Edward Carpenter. Here, Whitman speaks as a spiritual teacher, poet, and guide, aligned less with the then newly-minted spiritual movements of the nineteenth century than with those popular today in the West, such as Zen Buddhism and Jungian-inflected anthropology and psychology popularized by mythologists like Joseph Campbell and psychologists like James Hillman. This spiritual focus offers a refreshing read, for, as I have argued elsewhere, Whitman saw himself first and foremost as a spiritual and religious poet.

In "Part One: The Vision of the Dance," Botsford presents three dialogues between the book's author-persona and Uncle Walt, inter-leaved with retellings of Japanese folktales. The dialogues—lively, humorous, and often ecstatic—present a convincing, modern-day Whitman speaking. In the first dialogue, Whitman invites a hesitant author-persona onto the open road of spiritual journeying and transformation. Whitman speaks in italicized lines: "I guess what I'm more concerned about is losing the integrity / of my margins, and therefore the organization of my self. / *Everybody, of course, has got to find their own way of getting a grip on themselves / and keeping themselves together. But as anybody can tell you, being both 'nobody' / and 'everybody' at the same time is what being 'somebody' is about.* / Sounds like a lot of suffering is involved."

Puns, allusions, and wordplay provide much of the humor of these pieces. After some extensive coaxing and encouragement, Whitman begins to reveal the nature of the journey: "*Yes, there may be nothing in the world more serious than play, / but make no mistake—this body is a means the world has / of coming into meaning. And that is your story . . .*" In the last of the dialogues, "Odysseying," we come to the crux of the matter. As befits a twenty-first century Walt channeled by an American living in Japan, the dialogue takes on markedly Buddhist tones:

> The struggle to be remade out of this pregnant emptiness will
> seem endless, for the way's circuitous. But be not afraid of
> your aloneness, your uniqueness, your "I am" ness. It's the cost
> of doing business.
> . . .
> Go ahead—now peer into the heart of your darkness . . . . Do you
> see the 10,000 corpses with your likeness?
> . . .
> You must give assent and say, yes, in utter nakedness.
> . . .
> *Sing, O sing your heart out, Orpheus! Grieve and mourn your losses.*

A prose narrative, "Thinking Outside the Cave," retells the myth of the Japanese sun-goddess, Amaterasu, as a Whitmanian myth for our times. In the myth, Amaterasu retreats to a cave after her brother has violated her and her temple. Darkness covers the land and the crops are ruined. Finally, the other gods devise a means of bringing her out. The bawdy Goddess of Myrth, Uzume, stages a dance in front of the cave and a mirror is placed before it. Amaterasu comes out, like a newborn Whitman, or Eve in the morning, enticed by her own naked beauty and retakes her proper place in the heavens. Botsford envisions her as "Mother Earth," abused by modern civilization and capable of healing by a new vision of the body, by our "experienc[ing] Earth once again as lover."

"Part Two: Filled by the Spirit" presents nine essays on *Leaves of Grass*. The essays are more impressionistic than argumentative, like the work of a poet reading Whitman in the open air rather than that of a scholar in the library. The subject is the spiritual/corporeal terrain that opens up between Whitman and his sympathetic readers. In "Whitman and Us," my favorite of the essays, Botsford writes:

Indeed, in its generosity of spirit, its abundance of love, its depth of wisdom, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* offers readers an order of experience different from what we would expect from modern works of art, for Whitman returns the work of art to its original and primary function: a vehicle of awakening, of enlightenment.

Two essays pick up the folkloric theme, reading Whitman within the context of the tale of the "King with Donkey Ears," as a means to explore the tension between Whitman's openness and secretiveness. The king in the tale must acknowledge the (open) secret of his donkey ears, just as Whitman learns to acknowledge the secret of his forbidden desires, which can then become the seed from which his poetry springs.

The essays consistently maintain that poetry matters, especially Whitman's, and that poetry makes things happen. They see Whitman's work as one of healing, enabling the reader to discover the self "where boundaries dissolve and re-coagulate in constant flux," to encounter an "otherness" within that paradoxically is the key to a reconstructed and redeemed identity.

After these essays, "Part III: The Cosmic Flow" offers Botsford's own poetry in sympathetic response to Whitman. The first section of Part III unfolds in thirty-three prose poems or cantos. Here is XXXIII:

Diving head first into nature, this hot pursuit of the right to know (colorful world in all its varied hues) starting over again, at the bottom (a vulnerable labor of love) where the tale catches the rock in a hard place come in from the cold but feeling the heat in a hole so deep that no amount of tender loving care can fill its shoes. . . .

A collection of Blake-like aphorisms follows in "Notes Toward a Cosmic Poetics," which orient us toward the kind of poetry at stake. It calls for "Poems like a samurai preparing for a beheading at any moment . . . / Poems like Emily Dickinson's honoring the 'daily crucifixion.'" After these preparations, the final work of the book exfoliates into an eighty-three part poem, entitled "Singing with the Dead." The poem opens with an invocation of Whitman as forefather and muse: "There in your sky, Walt, in your celestial garb / Come down, come down to earth for us . . . / Be a taker, Walt, take us into you, take us where / We can give back to you." Individual sections appear like holograms or leaves of grass, each with an image of Uncle Walt, bearing titles inviting us in: "Lazarus of Walt," "Wound of Walt," "Walt Reading Emily," "Daedalus of Walt," "Crazy Blues of Walt," "PR of Walt's I(magi)nation." This long poem is a pastiche homage, a hip-hop, postmodern celebration, a spiritual canticle courting and cohabiting with a loved cosmic Other.

Botsford in *Walt Whitman of Cosmic Folklore* steps forward as one of Whitman's "poets to come," part of a "new brood, native, athletic, continental"—and intercontinental. Along this spiritual-corporeal road Whitman invites us to travel, Botsford has come out to pull down fences, repair bridges, and loaf with us and our uncle, observing spears of grass, journey work of the stars.

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