

# BLOOM IN BLOOM

By Larry Lefkowitz

**WHY WE LIKE IT:** *This is probably the most ingenious submission we've received to date. If, after you read it, you haven't a clue to what's going on it means 1) you're not alone—we're not sure we do, either; and 2) the author's literary prestidigitation is off the charts. But you can love something completely without completely understanding it and we love, love, love 'Bloom in Bloom'. This satirical arcane comedic short—jests with a taxonomy developed by the brilliant educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom, in the 1950's. It consists of a hierarchy of models divided into categories like knowledge, application, synthesis, organizing, perception, adapting and so on that deconstruct and codify information clusters in the name of enhanced learning. Bloom's model is a closed system but author Lefkowitz employs it to create a taxonomical app for a poem by Walt Whitman, with Greek literary classifications replacing the English psychological objectives. Very, very funny and very, very smart. Five stars.*

## Bloom in Bloom

Harold Bloom, Harvard professor, literary revisionist, synergizes Freud, Gnosticism, and Cabalism in the service of poetic exegesis with respect to the poem, "Song of Myself" (hereinafter "song") by the American pantheist poet, Walt Whitman.

Although Whitman had a low opinion of the Greek classics ("those overpaid accounts") and presumably was less than enamored of the Greek language, Bloom embraces it to elucidate Whitman's song in the form of the following classification:

Sections 1-6 *Clinamen*, irony of presence and absence

7-27 *Tissera*, synecdoche of part for whole

28-30 *Kenosis*, metonymy of emptying out

31-38 *Daemonization*, hyperbole of high and low

39-49 *Akesis*, metaphor of inside vs. outside

(The suspicion grows that the inside or outside formulation of this category and the high and low of the immediately preceding may have epiphanized during viewing of a carefully pitched Gnostic baseball game. Whitman, himself, was a devotee of the game.)

50-52 *Apophrades*, metalepsis reversing early and late

Let us now turn to an application of Bloom's categories – and here I wish to emphasize that the applications are solely my own – my limited Greek having prevented me from reading his book and comprehending his applications. But if Bloom can appropriate from Freud, from Valentinus, and from Moses of Leon, I can appropriate from him. Such emulation, likewise, is entirely complimentary.

Section 2 of song contains the line

"Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?"

This jolted me so much that I jumped clear out of *Clinamen* and found myself wallowing in *Tissera* which, you will recall, is synecdoche of part for whole.

Section 20 contains the line

"Who goes there? Hankering, gross, mystical, nude"

Clearly synecdoche for, yes, Whitman himself. As confirmed by a later line in the same section:

"I wear my hat as I please indoors or out"

Although this sounds suspiciously like *Akesis* (inside vs. outside), it may very well be synecdoche for "I wear my pants, my shirt, etc., indoors or out." Why? Because in being clothed Whitman avoids becoming the hankering, gross, mystical, nude of the previously quoted line.

Section 24 contains the line

"Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son"

"Of Manhattan" is clearly synecdoche for "the Bronx," "Brooklyn," "Queens," and "Staten Island, as well, and the whole ("New York") synecdoche for the kosmos itself (and note the Greek k spelling, antedating Bloom).

This section also contains

"Unscrew the locks from the doors!

Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!"

Synecdoche for "Unscrew the whole damn house!"

*Kenosis*, metonymy of emptying out, seems to be confirmed by Whitman's line in section 28: "Straining the udder of my heart for its withheld drip."

With regard to *Daemonization*, hyperbole of high and low, we have in section 31 an example of low hyperbole

"In vain the ocean sitting in hollows and the great monsters lying low"

Section 33 contains an example of high hyperbole:

"I skirt Sierras, my palms cover continents" and also "Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars." Bloom is definitely onto something here.

*Akesis*, metaphor of inside vs. outside is confirmed by section 40

"Flaunt of the sunshine I need not your bask – lie over!"

Definitely an outside metaphor (with syntax perhaps borrowed from the Yiddish), probably for "beach" where Whitman liked to bask between stanzas.

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"Every room of the house do I fill with an arm'd force"

An inside metaphor.

So far Bloom is vindicated. But then we come to section 41

"I heard what was said of the universe"

A puzzler, this. The universe is outside metaphor, but *where* did Whitman hear it, sitting on a tree stump (outdoors) or inside his lean-to (indoors). The next line only deepens the mystery

"Heard it and heard it of several thousand years"

I cannot accept this literally and suspect we are back in *Daemonization* in the person of a particularly high hyperbole unless it is *Tisseran* synecdoche for an even larger epoch. One is sorely tempted to throw up one's hands and move on to *Apophrades*, which I did.

*Apophrades*, you will remember, is reversing early and late.

Section 51

"Do I contradict myself?"

Very well then I contradict myself"

The first line obviously comes in time before the second so that here there would seem to be no reversal. If the lines had read

"Very well then I contradict myself.

Do I contradict myself"

I would subscribe to Bloom's formulation. Alas, I cannot. The same difficulty arises with respect to the line

"I depart in air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun"

I contend Whitman departed before he shook, and not the reverse.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Once I saw the Bloom's categories, my humorous instinct considered them overblown. I couldn't resist taking Whitman's poem and subjecting it to a humorous categorization and evaluation according to Bloom's Greek format. The late Professor I admired, but for a humorist anyone and anything (almost) is fair game.*

**BIO:** *Lefkowitz has had published approximately 140 stories, as well as poetry and humor. His literary*