

HOW SYNCHRONOUS IT ALL IS MY LETTER TO BRIAN SWIMME

Janet Boggia*

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Dear Brian,

I just completed *Cosmogogenesis*. What a gift!

My tendency when I read a book is to comment in the margins, stream exclamation marks, and underline important passages while I read. But I knew immediately that I couldn't do that because there would be one continuous underline! Now, I recommend *Cosmogogenesis* to my friends—if I could, to the whole world. It is impossible to put down. I read it in two sittings, finally staying up until 3:00 in the morning.

Brian, the essence of your unvarnished story is powerful. The true story of the universe is mesmerizing; your writing is exquisite. I love the way you weave your story and the science into conversations with important humans in your life and the way you present your ideas in dialogue. For example, you write about your stunning insight on *origin* that came to you many years ago (69). I feel your passion as you are in conversation with another physicist—

The instability at the beginning. What it really means is that we are deeply enmeshed in that moment. The slightest alteration of the initial dynamics and the whole thing blows up. Or collapses. That means that in a sense we are right there at the beginning. It did not have to be that way, but it is that way. Those connections then were profoundly necessary to cause our conditions now. Then and now coalesce. . . .

It could have been different, but it's not different.

He looks at you with “dead eyes.” He says . . . *nothing*.

* Janet Boggia's passion for the story of the universe, conflict transformation, and global education resulted in grants for projects in Azerbaijan, India, South Africa, and other countries. For her bread-and-butter career, she created risk management departments for schools in Palo Alto in the San Francisco Bay Area and Mountain View in the heart of Silicon Valley. Now her interest is in risk management of our wondrous planet. Janet has published professional manuals, articles, poems, and essays. She is a breath away from completing her *Footprints Trilogy*, the story of emergence in the cosmos and of its life full of intrigue, tenacity, response, death, and rebirth.

I felt your pain in my whole body. Your heart was crushed. I could feel you going from elation to embarrassment, confusion, and disappointment.

You raise the issue of *intention*, a great interest of mine. You speak of the *generosity of the universe*—a wonderful way to put it. In my mind intention is very much part of System 2 thinking (Kahneman’s System 2)¹ but also innate to life (System 1 is innate reaction, most of our “thinking”) and is one of the threads in my book. I like your take on it:

Intention lives at the level of matter. Matter is not inert, passive—matter’s intrinsic dynamism is the cosmic form of intention. (236)

For example, heroism, the response of firefighters, parents, even strangers putting one’s own life in danger for others, is a mix of innate reaction (System 1) and choice response (System 2). Other animals often react/respond with



generosity. I have found a lot of research regarding animal altruism, even true for rats and ants. It is embedded in the universe, but of course it would be. It comes to the human via evolution.

You highlight Thomas Berry in a heartwarming way, shine the spotlight on his ideas, and bring him to life. I love seeing how extraordinary he was and how he was able to remain a priest even with his sophisticated ideas about the universe and humanity. You incorporate his ideas and bring them forward into a vibrant and exciting “new story.” I had never met a Thomas Berry or a Brian Swimme early in life, so left the church at age 16.

I love your use of language and metaphors . . .

Understanding is a spark—the fire that flared in contact with others. (242)

¹ *Thinking, Fast and Slow* is a 2011 popular science book by psychologist Daniel Kahneman. The book’s main thesis is a differentiation between two modes of thought: “System 1” is fast, instinctive, and emotional; “System 2” is slower, more deliberative, and more logical.” Wikipedia contributors, “Thinking, Fast and Slow,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Thinking, Fast and Slow&oldid=1171164745](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Thinking,_Fast_and_Slow&oldid=1171164745) (accessed August 31, 2023)

(And that is exactly what understanding feels like.)

Soon scientists will trace our personal biographies back to the exact stars that gave us our bodies. (207)

There was only one time when the universe could construct galaxies out of clouds of matter just like there is only one time when a human embryo can create its eyes. (245)



Human embryo – eight weeks. [Wikimedia Commons, CC by 2.0](#)

and so much more—your inspired descriptions of love, both personal and cosmic. The way you convey your own exuberance, longing, despair, and joy made my heart leap.

There is a weird synchronicity in my life about receiving *Cosmogenesis* at this particular time. Your book is mentoring me in a very specific way. Because emergence is a big factor in my writing, I recently signed up for a course on the subject at our local university. At the end of the six weeks, some of us were joking with the instructor and congratulating him for a good course. Soon there were only two of us left—my instructor and me--and I heard myself laugh and say: “I’ll give you a million dollars to edit my book.”

Honestly, I don't know where that came from, because, just as you felt early in your career, I'd always felt, "I don't want to bother anyone with my ideas," or "Who do I think I am"

I caught myself and stammered out, "Well, not a million, but I would love to have you as my editor." Now I really wanted to sink into the floor because I felt certain there would be rejection, and we both would be embarrassed.

That is not what happened. My instructor replied, "I've been thinking about getting back into editing. Why don't you send me a proposal?"

I did and he read it. The first thing he told me after his review is that he believed the book is a go, but I have to put more of myself into the narrative.

I had consciously NOT written about myself (except in a few places, then beaten myself up, but figured an editor could tell me later to delete.) During all these years of hard work, I came up with ideas and did the research to support them but felt that no one would be interested in my life. I wanted to be pinpoint-accurate with the science. I wanted the book to convey how everything is connected and how each person matters. I wanted the readers to fall in love with the universe through the beauty of science.

Brian, in the midst of this, your book arrived. You show how you felt, what you did, how you were embarrassed, how you failed and succeeded. Even more importantly, your "youness" shines through and so does your love for the universe, for life, and for being alive. It reminds me of what a great (not just good, but *great*) teacher you are. I also experienced the power of using dialogue to highlight your points. Your beautiful story is a gift to the world and to me, personally. I realized the value of the personal in *Cosmogenesis* and because of this I *really* understood my instructor's point.

Now, I am inserting short personal pieces in my book that relate to the subject.

How synchronous it all is . . . like all those "coincidences" in the evolution of the universe (81).

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Love,

Jan