



The Universe Is a Green Dragon: A Cosmic Creation Story

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Communicating his ideas in the form of a classical dialogue between a youth and a wise elder, cosmologist Brian Swimme crafts a fascinating exploration into the creativity suffusing the universe. His explication of the fundamental powers of the cosmos is mystical and ecstatic and points directly to the need to activate one's own creative powers.

The Universe Is a Green Dragon: A Cosmic Creation Story Details

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Peter says

Ever since I read Ishmael, I have wondered about our creation stories. They are depicted there as human-centric and the main character, a gorilla, suggests that a porcupine creation story is just as good. The Universe is a Green Dragon offers a cosmic creation story in which all beings and all things are included. It seems to make sense when I say it, but it does break the mold of man on top and the rest subservient to man way of thinking. And yet, it is also a celebration of our existence. Creativity is a celebration of our being.

Jason says

4.5 stars

[THOMAS:] We are forging a cosmology that embraces humanity as a species, one that does not ignore the special cultural contributions of each continent, but that enhances these differences. Each tradition is irreplaceable. Not one can be reduced to any other. Each is vital to the work of the future. Each will flower beyond telling in fruitful interaction with the rest in the overall embracing story of the cosmos.

During the first centuries of the modern period, such a situation was impossible. An antagonism existed between modern ways of knowing and traditional ways of life and belief. Perhaps this was necessary; the scientific enterprise needed austere isolation from both the animistic attitudes of the tribal period and the spatial cosmologies of classical civilizations. Scientific understanding was too new and too different to fit into previously existing modes of human awareness; it needed to establish its own canons, procedures, and experiments without reference to anything outside itself.

The great wonder is that this empirical, rational journey of science should have any contact at all with spiritual traditions. But in our century, the mechanistic period of science opened out to include a science of mystery: the encounter with the ultimacy of no-thing-ness that is simultaneously a real of generative potentiality; the dawning recognition that the universe and Earth can be considered as living entities; the awareness that the human person, rather than a separate unit within the world, is the culminating presence of a billion-year process; and the realization that, rather than having a universe filled with things, we are enveloped by a universe that is a single energetic event, a whole, a unified, multiform, and glorious outpouring of being. (39–40)

[THOMAS:] Drawn into existence by allurement, giving birth, then drawing others into existence—this is the fundamental dynamism of the cosmos. In this we can see the meaning of human life and human work. The star's own adventure captures the whole story. It is created out of the creations of the fireball, enters into its own intense creativity, and sends forth its

works throughout the galaxy, enabling new orders of existence to emerge. It gives utterly everything to its task—after its stupendous creativity, its life as a star is over in one vast explosion. But—through the bestowal of its gifts—elephants, rivers, eagles, ice jams, root beer floats, zebras, Elizabethan dramas, and the whole living Earth, become possible. Love's dynamism is carved into the principal being of the night sky. (58)

THOMAS: To begin with, understand that humans are not unique in having to suffer. Nor are humans unique in being violent. We live in a violent universe. Violence fills the cosmos in various forms, and human violence is only one of these. Violence is a universal fact, but not the dominant fact of the universe. The great mystery is not violence, but beauty. We note the violence, all the more amazed that such stupendous graciousness and beauty should exist anywhere at all.

YOUTH: But where does violence come from?

THOMAS: Destruction has its root in the allurement permeating the universe. Allurement is the source of all activity, even destructive activity. The star, responding to allurement, destroys itself. No one comes from outside to demolish the star. The star implodes, smashing itself into a trillion parts—its journey is ended. Or imagine the violence of two stars colliding under mutual gravitational attraction. The fire would be splashed in every direction for millions of miles. Such tremendous violence, yet see the graciousness of hundreds of billions of stars swirling in the galactic dance.

The biological world knows all sorts of violence. The same urge that draws the lion to the river for water draws it on to kill the wildebeest. Insects are so intent to stretch forth and explore that world that they will devour their own parents if they cannot find other food. Fascination with living, the enchantment of being alive, the beauty of the surrounding world—all these draw creatures into violent acts and into the destruction of being, but after four billion years into life on Earth, what beauty has blossomed forth! There is danger in the natural world, a constant challenge, excitement, violence, risk, and terror, but out of this emerges the wonder of the Earth. (71–2)

[*THOMAS:*] We need to study the cosmic story, the Earth story, the human story, until we know it in its essential forms. A person who does not know the story of the universe is not yet living up to human destiny. But this knowing is not only cerebral; to know the story of life includes eating natural foods; to know the story of human civilizations means feeling the profound intuitions they achieved; and to know the story of the universe means to allow the great, numinous past to come alive in your present being.

YOUTH: You know, this is so different from everything I was taught. I have never once thought of studying history in this way, so that the universe could come alive in me.

THOMAS: I realize that. The switch out of an attitude where the human is the center of everything, to a biocentric and cosmocentric orientation where the universe and the Earth are the fundamental referents, is *the* radical transformation that we are presently involved with. It is disruptive. We are so quickly confused because we are accustomed to forgetting the Earth and

cosmos to focus on the human world. But when you begin to grow into this larger way of living, you will discover new freedom, and a vast vision of being that makes the struggle worthwhile. (107)

[*THOMAS*:] Yes: death is terrifying. Do not belittle it. Do not try to reduce this. Do not project your puny ideas upon it. But *use* death's wareness as you would a fuel or lamp: as a secret guide who will lead you into the unknown and mysterious caverns of your self so that you can bring forth what you truly are. Your creativity needs your awareness of death for its energy, just as your muscles need long and painful workouts. Cherish your awareness of death as a gift to you from the universe. If you did not have this way of seeing the infinite significance of each moment, would *anything* have the power to get you out there to live your life?

What is especially exciting about our own time is the vision of the death of the species, and of the planet as a whole. Frightening, terrible, horrible—yes, certainly. But this is exactly what has the power to ignite the deepest riches within us. We can no longer live within the previous world-picture. We know that we have to do something, create and change in the essential dimension of things. The terrifying vision of an Earth gone black is psychic food for the human species. It brings us the energy that we need to re-invent ourselves as the mind and heart of the planet. We now take our first steps into the planetary and cosmic dimensions of being, moving out of the antropocentric modern period and into the cosmocentric, unfolding universe.

YOUTH: But what does it mean to become the mind and heart of the planet?

THOMAS: To live in an awareness that the powers that created the Earth reflect on themselves through us. That's why we are discussing the night sky, the sea, and the land. Each of these reveals cosmic powers that we are to have and become. We are to live as alluring and remembering activity, as shimmering sensitivity. And this means the cosmic dynamic revealed by the life forms: surprise and adventure. Call it play; adventurous and surprising play. That's what life reveals; that's what life *is*.(118–9)

[*THOMAS*:] The human form of life can be considered the child of the Earth. This is especially clear when we examine the anatomies of other primates. The head of an infant chimpanzee resembles the head of an infant human in size and shape, but as the chimpanzee reaches adulthood, its head changes in significant ways. The human head remains comparatively the same infant head, only larger. In fact, the infant chimpanzee's head looks more like an adult human's head than its own future adult shape. This dynamic, in which the qualities of the young are retained into mature stages, is called neoteny. We can then begin to understand the human as an eternal child. The first human types were young primates who never "left" their youth. The shapes of their juvenile bodies were retained into adulthood, as was their juvenile behavior. The great accomplishment of the human form, then, was the creation of a mature form of childhood, a form of life that, upon reaching adulthood, could continue to devote itself to a lifetime of adventurous play. (121)

THOMAS: ... Let's just *hope* we can emulate some of the achievements of the prokaryotes?

YOUTH: In what ways?

THOMAS: To begin with, it would be wonderful if we could contribute something as essential to the Earth's life as oxygen. All the animals depend on the prokaryotes' creativity. Do you think *Homo sapiens* could match that one, or even come close to the value of our little microscopic cousins?

Secondly, we must act on our innate desires with the confidence that these are not disconnected from the Earth process as a whole. We are just now discovering a deep disgust with the industrial excesses of our consumer society. This disgust is genetically anchored, just as the cancers and other industrial diseases are genetically anchored. Our disgust and our diseases are Earth's way of making clear for us what activities are required.

Thirdly, and most importantly, we must embrace and cherish our dreams for the Earth. We are creating with our imaginations a period of rebuilding, where the intercommunion of all species will guide our life activities. We must come to understand that these dreams of ours do not originate in our brains alone. We are the space where the Earth dreams. We are the imagination of the Earth, that precious realm where visions and organizing hopes can be spoken with a discriminating awareness not otherwise present in the Earth system. We are the mind and heart of the Earth only in so far as we enable Earth to organize its activities through self-reflexive awareness. That is our larger destiny: to allow the Earth to organize itself in a new way, in a manner impossible through all the billions of years preceding humanity. Who knows what rich possibilities await a planet—and its heart and mind—that have [sic] achieved this vastly more rich and complex mode of life? <138-9>

[*THOMAS:*] Remember how elementary particles spontaneously erupt out of no-thing-ness, the ultimate realm of generation? Emptiness is permeated with the urgency to leap forth. The difficulty is with language: when we say emptiness, we fail to evoke any sense of awe for the truth of the matter.

We can use another word: the ground of being is *generosity*. The ultimate source of all that is, the support and well of being, is Ultimate Generosity. All being comes forth and shines, glimmers and glistens, because the root reality of the universe is generosity of being. That's why the ground of being is empty: every *thing* has been given over to the universe; all existence has been poured forth; all being has gushed forth because Ultimate Generosity retains no thing. (146)

YOUTH: I don't know whether to be excited or angry. There's so much, I'm so full of questions and plans, and I know it's going to leak away. I know I'll forget so much of this. Can you help me remember somehow?

THOMAS: We are talking about powers, and we've discussed six of them altogether: allurement, sensitivity, memory, adventurous play, unseen shaping, and celebration....We've pointed out ways in which they are presented to us. That is, we looked at the night sky and reflected on allurement. We examined the seas and talked of absorptions, assimilation, and sensitivity in general.... We say the dynamic of memory in the way the land remembers. We

looked at the life forms and found there the presence of adventurous play, in exploration, free activity, and imagination.... Then we considered the flame, probing the meaning of the self, seeing in each of these the presence of unseen shaping. Finally, we considered wind and saw there the expansion of being, the dynamic of celebration. So: the night sky, sea, land, life forms, fire, wind. That's easy enough to remember. (149)

[*THOMAS*:] If the collision of tectonic plates gives rise to earthquakes, the emergence of the cosmic story gives rise to humanquakes. Think of it! For the first time in human history, we have in common an origin story of the universe that already captivates minds on every continent of our planet. No matter what racial, religious, cultural, or national background, humans now have a unifying language out of which we can begin to organize ourselves, for the first time, on the level of species.

All societies throughout human history have rooted themselves in fundamental stories of the cosmos. Out of their primal stories humans define what is real and what is valuable, what is beautiful, what is worthwhile, what to be avoided, what to be pursued. Modern society is no different. We too use our basic cosmology to assign power positions, making all crucial life decisions on the basis of these fundamental world views.

We are now restructuring our fundamental vision of the world. We are creating a new meaning for what we consider real, valuable, to be avoided, or pursued. The new cosmic story emerging into human awareness overwhelms all previous conceptions of the universe for the simple reason that it draws them all into its comprehensive fullness. And most amazing of all is the way in which this story, thought it comes from the empirical scientific tradition, corroborates in profound and surprising ways the ecological vision of the Earth celebrated in every traditional native spirituality of every continent. Who can learn what this means and remain calm? (161–2)

THOMAS: As you listen to this language, which is Earth's language, you become shaped by words. Your attention forms within words, your desires are shaped by words, your visions of the future are ignited by words. In all of this, the universe shapes you, shapes itself through you so that it might become more intensely present to itself through the unfurling of self-reflexive awareness.

Our primary teacher is the universe. The universe evokes our being, supplies us with creative energy, insists on a reverent attitude toward everything, and liberates us from our puny self-definition. The universe gives us fire and teaches us its use. (167)

[*THOMAS*:] And that's why I condense our contemporary cosmological scientific story of reality by saying that the universe is a green dragon. Green, because the whole universe is alive, an embryogenesis beginning with the cosmic egg of the primeval fireball and culminating in the present emergent reality. And a dragon, too, nothing less. Dragons are mystical, powerful, emerging out of mystery, disappearing in mystery, fierce, benign, known to teach humans the deepest reaches of wisdom. And dragons are filled with fire. Though there are no dragons, we are dragon fire. We are the creative, scintillating, searing, healing flame of

the awesome and enchanting universe. (171)

Tadhg Jonathan says

Excellent. Well-written and challenging. In all probability you WILL look at everything differently after reading this.

Nick Mather says

If I could give this more than five stars I would. If Maude from "Harold and Maude" had written a book, I think this might be it. It places the human dead center in the unfolding of creation without falling into anthropocentrism. It is hopeful, charming and exuberant. The book is a dialogue between an older Thomas (named after the late Thomas Berry) and an unnamed youth and finds not only meaning, but love and joy and optimism in the scientific model of the universe. It is an easy read and yet demands re-reading. Highly, highly recommended.

Katie R. Herring says

Wow.

Another book I had to read for my litco class, and it was mind blowing.

I started it on Sunday morning, and let me say reading this at 8 in the morning really put the rest of my day in perspective!

This was a very interesting interview style novel, and I can't say I'm not still thinking about it!

His theory of attraction amazed me the most.

Lily says

Enlightening! Fascinating! Uplifting and thought-provoking!
Most important - very easy to read and understand.
I finished it in 2 1/2 hours and plan to reread it so more of the physics sinks in.
Wish I'd read it decades ago, when it first came out, but it's more timely than ever today.

Paige Ellen Stone says

The problem with the Goodreads system is that, while I first read this book when it came out, I have re-read it a number of times. This book is a classic of modern spirituality based cosmology. I own a copy of the original, but bought this copy to use as a loaner to friends. This is the 22nd printing of what is now a planned 30 printings. The first printing was in 2001. Why mention all that information on the printing history of this book? Because it makes clear how popular and important this book is to cosmologists.

Brian Swimme is extremely well educated. He earned a doctorate in gravitational dynamics at the University of Oregon. He is currently the Director for the Center of the Story of the Universe, which is an affiliate of the California Institute of Integral Studies, where he also teaches. He has been mentored by Thomas Berry and his subsequent books, some co-authored with Berry, focus on the unfolding of this universe since the moment of the Big Bang.

This volume is both an early attempt at telling the "Universe Story", as well as a very inspirational book for those who read it. He posits a consciousness to the development of the universe, indicating to those who feel their life has no meaning or purpose, that of all the possibilities within the bounds of creation, the universe chose to conceive you, the one and only you who will ever exist. How can a person doubt that his/her life has meaning in the face of that point of view?

The book is set up as a dialogue between a wisdom figure, conveniently named "Thomas" and a questioner who is designated as "Youth." The youth questions almost everything possible about the cosmos and Thomas offers his answers. What is very special about this text and the words of Thomas is the celebratory nature of Thomas' answers. What is extremely creative, especially coming from a man trained in the hard physics of gravitational dynamics, is the notion that it is love that holds the universe together. Love is attraction and the moon continues to orbit the earth, yes, due to the laws of gravity, but as envisioned by Swimme, by love, by attraction. This notion expands the meaning of eros in the Cosmos to, well, universal proportions.

This book is a must read for those interested in the Cosmos, the story of Creation, quantum physics, and even, as I have found personally, to clinical psychologists and shamans.

Highest recommendation.

Jeffrey says

This is a book that brings the universe to life, literally. It puts a human face and heart on the universe. If you think it's just a bunch of space and masses floating around, Swimme will get you thinking otherwise. This is a book that shows that the universe is committed (unlike many men you know) with great tenacity and verve: "If humans committed themselves to their deepest allurements with the same devotion that stars bring to their own activation of power, Earth would enter a new era of well being." Want sexy? Enjoy romance? But down your Nora Roberts, your Danielle Steel and get down with some real romance. Universal!

Sharon says

tried reading this a few years ago... I finally get it. stretched my perspective, without being overwhelming, leaving much to journal and reflect on in the coming days.

Daniel Petersen says

2 and a half stars. That's not as bad as it sounds. I really liked aspects of this book and I'll definitely make a go of some of the author's other books. He's a mathematical cosmologist who also bases much of his thought

on the Catholic theologian Thomas Berry who in turn based much of his thought on the French paleontologist-geologist-philosopher-priest Teilhard de Chardin. Some of the ideas in this book were persuasive and fascinating. Others left me needing more argument and understanding. It's an easy read, but almost too easy. And it tries a little too hard to be enthusiastic and inspirational. It would have been more persuasive with a little more emphasis on the realities of darkness, horror, and enigma in our universe to balance out its emphasis on joyful creativity at the centre of things. It does have a chapter 'Evil from Cosmic Risk' that engages pain and suffering directly, but this aspect should have been more fully woven throughout.

The book seems to adopt and adapt aspects of the Gaia theory of Earth as a total living entity and aspects of deep ecology. Published in 1984, its ideas would now need to engage challenges to these theories, such as those posed by ecocritic Timothy Morton. I know that Swimme has co-authored books on this same cosmic theme in recent years, so I look forward to reading some of those to see how the argument is updated.

That a combination of indigenous, classical, Medieval, and modern cosmological thought show the universe to be, in the book's terms, a place of 'allurement, sensitivity, memory, adventurous play, unseen shaping, and celebration' (p. 149; each of these terms is unpacked as the book unfolds) still seems to me to have to be taken on faith. It's a faith I very much have, and I believe that faith fits the evidence well. But one can oversell the scientific aspect, as if our understanding of the Big Bang, the birth of stars and mountains, the evolution of organic life, and so on necessarily leads us to conclude that the cosmos is coming to know itself through the epic culmination of its growth, which has currently climaxed, if somewhat ambivalently, in self-conscious humans (the central premise of the book). It's compelling enough as Swimme outlines it, but it would take a lot more argument for one to walk away really impacted by this thesis, suspecting that it's just possible it could actually be true. And the science alone would never persuade us. (Just as science alone is not what persuades some to be atheists, agnostics, materialists, or what have you.)

The book's premise can easily be taken to be pantheistic, but I think it narrowly avoids this position, opting for something closer to panentheism (take note of that 'en' in there) or some kind of 'process theology' (though there still seems to be the possibility in Swimme's explication for a truly transcendent Creator). At any rate, I can resonate with this cosmology far better than a strictly materialist one. But I think Swimme would be more convincing if he dealt more thoroughly with competing views.

There's definitely plenty in this book to put into fruitful conversation with ecotheology, object-oriented ontology, and the writing of R. A. Lafferty (all elements of my doctoral thesis). There are emphases on cosmic play and laughter that fit right in with Lafferty's fiction.

Right toward the very end of the book, one passage hit me stronger than anything else and induced a genuine moment of awe. Maybe it was because it hit me where I live, in the area of language, and even sentences, and how these relate to the physical story of the cosmos:

'Think of the sacrifices required of billions of creatures to make such language possible. Take a single sentence: "The fireball exploded twenty billion years ago at the beginning of time." That sentence requires nothing less than the full twenty billion years of cosmic development. It is not "my" sentence; nor does it "belong" to the theoretical scientists who first predicted the existence of the fireball, nor the experimental scientists who first detected its heat; it is a sentence of the whole Earth. Nothing less than that is required for its speaking forth. The sentence could not exist without the oceans, the rivers, the air, the life forms, and all the thousands of years of human cultural activities. Every sentence is spoken by the whole Earth. All language is spoken by the Earth as part of a biospiritual embryogenesis. You have been sitting here listening while the Earth did the talking. Language belongs to Earth as simply as the Cascade mountains belong to Earth.' (P. 166)

You may have to sit and think about that quite literally to feel the impact. Or you may have to have read the book up to that point, for, despite some flowery rhetoric, the book makes good on all these ideas and the recurring scientific narrative on which they're based. It is humbling and awesome to think of our sentences *requiring* the entirety not only of the current ecosystem but the complete cosmic history that brought this ecology about. Everything is a gift, including our words, placed into our Johnny-come-lately hands by all that suffered and preceded us for incredibly vast eons. Reading the book was worth encountering this passage alone.

Erik Akre says

Humans are here as the eyes and heart of the universe, that it might reflect upon itself. Humans are here to experiment, laugh, and play; we are here to mess around and enjoy the process AND to pay attention to creation.

To put it in terms of the moon, for example, we arrive at our destiny when we experience the moon as a moon-human-complex, rather than a human "having the experience of" the moon. When we truly experience the moon, we are at one with the moon. We dissolve into it, and it dissolves into us. Both are changed by the process.

Swimme takes a cosmocentric look at the history of the universe. What is the purpose and the fundamental activity of the universe? Things are attracted to each other! Things organize themselves! Things dissolve! Things remember, and things are sensitive!

Read all about it in this book--an imaginative exploration of the purpose of existence and its metaphysics, based on empirical observation of how the universe behaves. There's something ever-so-slightly missing in the engagement of the writing style, but the ideas still come across, and they engage with energy and innovation.

Derek Langley says

Not my usual sort of book this, but the idea that we exist so the universe can look at itself and just go "...blimey, that's quite nice...", as a meaning of life, really appeals to me!

Jenny says

This wasn't amazing, but it was very insightful on how we may perceive of our place in nature and the universe; it provides another lens for being. A blend of Sagan's *Cosmos* and Quinn's *Ishmael*. However, it would have been better if the 'student' had more to say. Unlike the Socratic method of *Ishmael*, the student was a yes-man, a tool for the main character to just keep explaining. At times it bordered on ridiculous (Student: no way! Teacher: Yep, let me explain more...). Also, imo, 'Green Dragon' is a terrible title and poor metaphor. Still, the ideas are certainly worth these flaws, and it's a quick read! Highly recommend.

Hedi says

This might be my all-time favorite book. I've read it so many times and still discover new nuggets of wisdom and insight from it. I've given it away many times as well and usually get great feedback.

It's not a 'story' in the typical sense, but it's a discussion between an older man and a young boy about 'The Story', - the story of all of us, the story of the Universe, the amazing things we now know about this Universe and how we can learn from and be inspired by this story.

I think this book should be required reading in every school.

It's easy to read, easy language but deep meaning.

Nick says

Interesting inter-weaving of science with pseudo-spiritual/mystical concepts. While such attempts are usually enough to make me quirk the skeptical eye, this work is well-written enough to overcome the bullshit meter. Beautiful passages about the nature of the Big Bang, the mind, and mankind's relationship with the stars and the Universe give genuine cause for reflection. Recommended.

"Only by establishing ourselves within the unfolding cosmos as a whole can we begin to discover the meaning and significance of ordinary things." (31)

"The universe continues to unfold, continues to reveal itself to itself through human awareness." (31)

"In the language of physics, we call it quantum fluctuation. Elementary particles fluctuate in and out of existence. What a strange realization...A proton emerges suddenly--where did it come from? Who made it? How did it sneak into reality all of a sudden...I am not speaking here of the manner in which mass and energy can be transformed into one another. I am speaking of something much more mysterious. I am saying that particles boil into existence out of sheer emptiness. This is simply the way the universe works. We have to get used to it. We didn't construct it; we just find ourselves here." (37)

"What I would like for you to understand is that this plenary emptiness permeates you. You are more fecund emptiness than you are created particles. We can see this by examining one of your atoms. If you take a single atom and make it as large as Yankee stadium, it would consist almost entirely of empty space. The center of the atom, the nucleus, would be smaller than a baseball sitting in center field. The outer parts of the atom would be tiny gnats buzzing about at an altitude higher than any pop fly Babe Ruth ever hit. And between the baseball and the gnats? Nothingness. All empty. You are more emptiness than anything else. Indeed, if all the space were taken out of you, you would be a million times smaller than the smallest grain of sand. But it's nice knowing we are this emptiness, for this emptiness is simultaneously the source of all being. You see?" (38)

"YOUTH: What is our fullest destiny?

THOMAS: To become love in human form.

YOUTH: Love? I thought we were talking about science and religion. And emptiness.

THOMAS: Yes, that's right. The journey out of emptiness is the creation of love." (40)

"Thomas: ...If a rock is dropped, why does it move toward the Earth?

Youth: Because of gravity.

Thomas: And what is gravity?

Youth: A basic force. It pulls things.

Thomas: What is doing the pulling?

Youth: There's just this pulling, that's all. It's just there.

Thomas: That's right. An attracting activity. This attracting activity is a fundamental mystery.

Youth: But it's one we understand.

Thomas: We understand details concerning the consequences of this attraction. We do not understand the attracting activity itself. Years after Isaac Newton wrote out his equations of the Universal Law of Gravitation, he was still wondering about 'Whence is it that the sun and planets gravitate toward one another?' We can never penetrate into the basic fact of this attraction, nor determine why it operates at all.

Do you see that the universe might just as well have been different? Might have included no attracting activity? But the fact is that our galaxy is attracted by every other galaxy in the universe; and our galaxy attracts every other galaxy. The attracting activity is a stupendous and mysterious fact of existence. Primal. We awake and discover that this alluring activity is the basic reality of the macrocosmic universe."

(44-45)

"Thomas: Tell me something you enjoy doing.

Youth: Listening to music.

Thomas: Yes. Now watch. We can not give any explanation for liking music; we simply enjoy music of certain sorts. The attraction is primal. You have awakened to existence and discovered this attraction. Is it clear now that your attraction, your interest and enjoyment, are ultimate mystery?

Youth: I'm beginning to see.

Thomas: There are so many sounds in the world, and yet a very particular sort of sound interests you most deeply. Why should this be? Why not any of the other infinite number of sounds? Why music above all? Well, that is unanswerable, just as Newton never pretended to be able to say why the Sun attracts the Earth. The strangest thing is that this alluring activity permeates the cosmos on all levels of being. These allurements permeating you and everyone and everything else are fundamentally mysterious. You are interested in certain things, certain people, certain activities: each interest is as fundamental to the universe as is the gravitational attraction our Earth feels for the Sun. We cannot explain why these attractions exist. We can only become aware of them. Am I making myself clear?

Youth: Yes, but it seems that maybe we can explain them. For instance, listening to music is relaxing. Maybe that's why humans—

Thomas: When you first listened to some music you really liked, did you think, 'This is the sort of music that will relax me?'

Youth: Well, no.

Thomas: You discovered that you were drawn to the music, true? Such experiences of interest are the roots of love. You are simply attracted to something or someone, to some activity. You don't find reasons for this attraction until after the fact; then you come up with reasons. The Earth does not think: 'Well, it'll be a good thing to be attracted to the Sun. That way, humans can warm their tea in black bags and save on electricity.' The Earth is simply attracted. The electron is simply attracted. The galaxy is simply attracted, You are simply attracted. This mysterious attraction that we call 'interest', or 'fascination', is as mysterious, as basic, as the allurement we call gravitation. (45-47)

"The great mystery is that we are interested in anything whatsoever...Why should anyone in the whole world interest us at all? Why don't we experience everyone as utter, unendurable bores? Why isn't the cosmos made that way? Why don't we suffer intolerable boredom with every person, forest, symphony, and seashore in existence? The great surprise is the discovery that something or someone is interesting. Love begins there. Love begins when we discover interest. To be interested is to fall in love. To become fascinated is to step into a wild love affair on any level of life." (47)

"we discover not only that we are interested, but that our interest are entirely our own. We awake to our own unique sets of attractions. So do oxygen atoms. So do protons...Each person discovers a field of allurements, the totality of which bears the unique stamp of that person's personality. Destiny unfolds in the pursuit of individual fascinations and interests." (47)

"By pursuing your allurements, you help bind the universe together. The unity of the world rests on the pursuit of passion. Surprised? Let's experiment: Bring to mind all the allurements filling the universe, of whatever complexity or order: the allurement we call gravitation, that of electromagnetic interactions, chemical attractors, allurements in the biological and human worlds. Here's the question: If we could snap our fingers and make all these allurements--which we can't see or taste or hear anyway--disappear from the universe, what would happen? To begin with, the galaxies would break apart...The Earth would break apart as well...even if the physical world retained its shape, the human world would disintegrate just the same...There would be no attraction for work, no matter what it was. Activity would cease...Galaxies, human families, atoms, ecosystems, all disintegrating immediately as the allurement pervading the universe is shut off. Nothing left. No community of any sort. Just nothing." (48-49)

"the primary result of all allurement...is the evocation of being, the creation of community. All communities of being are created in response to a prior mysterious alluring activity. OK? Allurement evokes being and life. That's what allurement is. Now you can understand what love means: love is a word that points to this alluring activity in the cosmos. This primal dynamism awakens the communities of atoms, galaxies, stars, families, nations, persons, ecosystems, oceans, and stellar systems. Love ignites being." (49)

"Our life and powers come forth through our response to allurement.

YOUTH: No matter what allurement?

THOMAS: That's right.

YOUTH: How about reading Shakespeare? What would that pursuit evoke?

THOMAS: If you read deeply and are drawn into the dramas, you will ignite previously unsuspected capacities for being. You will evoke a spaciousness where the feelings of the human world can live. Plunge into the life of the plays, and one day you will be startled by the discovery of feelings you had not known before: an affection for the human condition, for the frailties of the human will, for the nobility of spirit that wells up in every generation, no matter how difficult the circumstances of suffering and disillusionment...A journey into Shakespeare's works enables you to enter more fully the complex relationships within the human world. You may abide more deeply in these relationships precisely because the ontological space within yourself has been opened up by the power of Shakespeare's language...You will carry within yourself the complexity of the world in a manner unimaginable to your previous self. You will know that you are not disconnected from the life of the world, nor from struggling humanity in all its difficulties throughout the planet. You will learn the first glimmer of the profound manner in which humans bind together the entire social order through a heightened awareness of what it means to be a compassionate human." (51-52)

"We awake to a universe permeated with allurement, and our most primal desire is to become this allurement. We awake to a universe filled with fascination, and our most fundamental urge is to become this fascination." (55)

"You are drawn to the works of Shakespeare, say. Through these works you deepen your sense of community...Because of these newly evoked creative powers of perception, you enter more effectively into intimate relationship with the people of your own time and place. You appreciate the feelings that others might have, and intuit their motivations. Thus you enter into more complex relationships within human groups. All of this from reading and studying Shakespeare. He wrote his plays, and through them you enter more deeply into being." (55)

Why did Shakespeare write? He wrote because the world enchanted him. He wrote to capture the grandeur, pathos, profundity, and beauty that he experienced in life. In order to do so, he had to become one with this beauty. How else can we express feelings but by entering deeply into them? How can we capture the mystery of anguish unless we become one with anguish? Shakespeare lived his life, stunned by its majesty, and in his writing attempted to seize what he felt, to capture this passion in symbolic form. Lured into the intensity of living, he re-presented this intensity in language. And why? Because beauty stunned him. Because the soul cannot confine such feelings.

Shakespeare put himself into writing because by writing he could fascinate others, just as the world had fascinated him. He could amuse, astonish, delight, and enchant others just as the world has enchanted him. Drawn into life by allurement in a thousand different ways, he himself then became alluring. Stunned by the fascinating permeating the human order of existence, he in turn fascinated. (56)

Youth: This is true for poets most of all, but...

Thomas: No, no, not at all. Consider scientists--Stephen Hawking comes to mind. Here is an astrophysicist fascinated by the primeval fireball, the initial singularity of space-time. He pursued this path further into experiences of order and beauty, of the complexity and simplicity of the universe's earliest moments. So what does he do? He articulates his experience with the languages of English and mathematics. He creates his own magnificent language forms to communicate the beauty he has uncovered, the clarity he has achieved, the insight he has seized. He hopes to capture some of this, luring others into similar moments of seeing, captivating their minds, drawing them more deeply into their own understanding and feeling of the universe. The beauty of his mathematical language is as alluring as Shakespeare's iambic pentameter. Mathematical physicists cannot resist the lure of Hawking's creations; they seize the mind as powerfully as Shakespeare's." (Dr. Brian Swimme The Universe is a Green Dragon 56-57)

"we awake to fascination and we strive to fascinate. We work to enchant others. We work to ignite life, to evoke presence, to enhance the unfolding of being. All of this is the actuality of love. We strive to fascinate so that we can bring forth what might otherwise disappear. But that is exactly what love does: Love is the activity of evoking being, of enhancing life.

YOUTH: Now is this human love you are describing?

THOMAS: No, no, no. You must begin to see this activity as basic to the universe. Consider the star again. In the core of a star helium, carbon, oxygen, silicon, all the elements up to iron are created in blazing heat. If a star is of sufficient size, after billions of years it explodes, creating all the rest of the elements, sending them off into the universe. Our own solar system emerged from an exploded supernova, creating the planets and their many elements. Minerals and life forms are created out of supernova explosions.

Think about it! When you breathe, you breathe the creations of a star. All the life you will live is possible because of the gifts of that star. Your life has been evoked through the work of the heavens, do you see? The star emerges out of its own response to allurement, then evokes the life of others. The air we breathe, the food we eat, the compounds out of which we are composed: all creations of the supernova.

Drawn into existence by allurement, giving birth, then drawing others into existence--this is the fundamental dynamism of the cosmos. In this we can see the meaning of human life and human work. The star's own adventure captures the whole story. It is created out of the creations of the fireball, enters into its own intense creativity, and sends forth its works throughout the galaxy, enabling new orders of existence to emerge. It gives utterly everything to its task--after its stupendous creativity, its life as a star is over in one vast explosion. But--through the bestowal of its gifts--elephants, rivers, eagles, ice jams, root beer floats, zebras, Elizabethan dramas, and the whole living Earth, become possible. Love's dynamism is carved into the principal being of the night sky." (57-58)

"We are the self-reflexion of the universe. We allow the universe to know and feel itself. So the universe is aware of itself through self-reflective mind, which unfurls in the human. We were brought forth so that these experiences of beauty could enter awareness." (58)

"the star can, through us, reflect back on itself...You are that star, brought into a form of life that enables life to reflect on itself. So, yes: the star does know of its great work, of its surrender to allurement, of its stupendous contribution to life, but only through its further articulation -- you." (59)

"The universe is a single multiform event. There is no such thing as a disconnected thing." (59)

"Our reverence for the holy must expand to include the whole luminous universe. What are the relics today? We are the relics, the Earth and all beings of Earth were there in the core of that exploding supernova. We were there in the distant, terrifying furnace of the primeval fireball. Not as mere witnesses, either, but as central to the event." (60)

"The universe would never bother to create two Shakespeares. That would only reveal limited creativity. The Ultimate Mystery from which all beings emerge prefers Ultimate Extravagance, each glistening with freshness, ontologically unique, never to be repeated. Each being is required. None can be eliminated or ignored, for not one is redundant." (62)

"Are you aware of the ways in which you have the power to evoke being? This question probes your destiny as a creative source, your ultimate value. To answer requires that you move more deeply into the primordial

dynamism of the universe, for as you ripen into love's activity you simultaneously enhance the life around you." (62)

"There are so many beings you can emulate: the simplest prokaryotic organisms struggled ceaselessly and with stunning success, altering the nature of the Earth permanently. They roamed through life and hatched those seeds of power we call genes. Who could have created them if they had not? We have no talent for that kind of work. We carry their achievements in our bodies. All the tens of thousands of genes in our bodies that enable such lambent beauty to delight the planet were handed to us by these primitive creatures. Your gratitude includes them. Your life emerges through their creativity.

YOUTH: But they didn't know what they were doing. I don't see how I can be grateful to them for their mindless behavior.

THOMAS: Do you know what you are doing?

YOUTH: More than they.

THOMAS: I would hope so, yes. Unless their labor was in vain. But do you know what you are doing when you find Shakespeare so fascinating? Do you know what's happening, in a cosmic sense? Can you explain to me quite simply why humans find mountains magnificent beyond capture in language, why they risk their lives to be up there on the angular planes of granite?

YOUTH: Well, no. Not in any ultimate sense.

THOMAS: Then you share the same cosmic ignorance with the microorganisms who created the informed sequences of nucleotides we call genes...The simple truth is that we do pursue the fascinating beauty that surrounds us. Can you tell me what will become of your creativity and your destiny? Of course not! Nor could the microorganisms predict the future or speak of the meaning of their labor in any ultimate sense. We are similar in hoping to immerse ourselves in the life-evoking activities that fill the Earth." (63)
