

*Giving Love a Chance ...*

Jinny had breathlessly run off to catch her meeting with the Literary Agent; a muttering Colin had squared away the Bucket O' Blood and was about to head home; and the odd threesome—Owl Man, Heron Man, and Xhactu—tumbled out of the pub and onto the wet sidewalk.

Xhactu still wore his Highland Piper's costume and carried the bagpipe. It was too late at night for him to start piping now, for he would be "disturbing the peace." When he first mentioned to Owl Man his desire to learn the pipes, neither the Owl nor anyone else had guessed how much lung-power little Xhactu could actually wield. The volume of his screeching inside the pub put all those doubts to rest.

The night qualified as a "London foggy" sort, which meant that condensation falling from the leaves of the hundred-foot-tall London plane trees that towered overhead, created a drip-drippity-drip racket on the broadleaf shrubs down below. Xhactu commented that the rhythmic drips sounded just like the snare drum from "his" marching band. No sooner had Xhactu spoken than his *universal translator* began crackling again. He expressed concern that a fatal flaw might be ravaging the translator's internal circuitry. As if to confirm his concern, just as he began to explain in greater detail the operation of the circuits in the device's *motherboard*, he suddenly lost the English translation and lapsed into galac-speak:

"Xrrrpt eengaw chow-chow vcilli obgnk."

"What was that, Xhactu?" said Owl Man.

Xhactu's next utterance was also rendered in galac-speak:

"Xului banqwp jrrn."

"Xhactu, can you repair the translator? We can't understand you." And the Owl pointed at the translator, wiggling his fingers in the universal sign for SNAFU. Xhactu saw

the sign and understood. Since his entire Earth-mission depended on the translator and its proper functioning, he carefully removed the device and banged it against a heavy cast-iron fence post. This abrupt maneuver seemed to correct whatever was wrong with the translator, since it popped right back into English:

“I had just begun to talk about love.”

“Wonderful, Xhactu. Your English is back. We can understand you again. Maybe you could start by telling us the galac-speak word for love.”

“Oh, yes. In galac-speak, the word for love is *chow-chow*. Very old word.”

“Sounds like it. Can you give us an example of how it’s used in a sentence—in English, that is?”

“Of course. Here’s a good one. *You want go make chow-chow, baby?*” But the translator signal was starting to break up again, and this time the resumption of crackling was ominous. Would the device hold up long enough in Earth-speak mode for Xhactu to complete his mission, or not? Owl and Heron were having doubts about its present degree of accuracy, since it seemed to be producing garbled English again. And the bird-men were hardly in a position to learn galac-speak.

So, Owl and Heron held a brief *tête-à-tête*.

“I’m not sure the translator is working, Owl,” said the Heron. “Doesn’t *chow-chow* refer to a Chinese dog? And also to a type of tangy pickled relish, sort of like *kim chee*?”

“Yes, Heron, that’s exactly correct. *Chow-chow* does come from Earth-speak. But perhaps, as Xhactu says, *chow-chow* is also a legitimate galac-speak word for *love*, and it just *happens* to be spelled like the English terms for the Chinese dog and the Louisiana *kim chee*. A cosmic coincidence, might we say?”

Heron Man opened his mouth to respond to the Owl’s comment, when the translator emitted an ear-splitting shriek similar to what Xhactu had yelped in the pub, when he was so

afraid of being “written out of the novel.” It was not clear whether the two shrieks—the biological one from Xhactu and the technological one from the translator—somehow “belonged” together, or whether they were “accidentally but similarly familiar.”

Owl Man tried to reassure Xhactu that he could not be “written out of the novel,” because he would *always exist as a person*, with or without books, alien or otherwise.

Unfortunately, the translator chose that precise moment to malfunction again. Thus, English flew out and away from the translator, and galac-speak flew in to take its place. Xhactu bashed the device against the cast-iron post again, which this time did nothing to restore its functionality. The only thing the bird-men could hear, besides the incessant dripping from above and the occasional taxi from below, was the stream of galac-speak emanating from Xhactu’s mouth.

If they had actually understood his “words,” Owl and Heron would have sworn that Xhactu was swearing like a sea-captain. At least, that’s what the galac-speak sounded like to them—pure swearing.

Finally, a short-circuit overwhelmed and fried the translator, a puff of smoke spiraled up from the ventilation grille on the device, and English was erased forever from its condensed inner coils. With no possibility of communicating, verbally, with the Owl or the Heron, Xhactu began to fade and shrink. Soon, he had disappeared, and only the dripping leaves, the burbling diesel taxis, and the occasional, lonely night-owl remained to keep the birds company.

They had not realized how crucial the universal translator was to Xhactu’s ability to function on lesser planets like the Earth, in star-fields like the *Via Galactica*, or as Xhactu called it, *Ye Olde Dairy Road*.

“Where did he go, Owl?” asked Heron Man. “Back to give his full report to Supreme Commander Zrrongo?”

Owl Man lifted his head, trying to fix his focus on the watery overcast above, hoping to see perhaps a streak of light zooming spaceward.

“Back to his wormholes, stars and galaxies, I presume,” said the Owl.

And the two birds walked at leisure back toward their London quarters. A dim glow of rosy light laced with gray rimmed the London skyline, as the City came to life.

[Authors' Note: The engaged reader will have noticed by now that *fiction never really ends*. This is not to say that a story cannot stop. It can. But even when the story stops, the lives of the characters, in a story such as this, go on indefinitely, *ad infinitum*. We could say that this serves as a kind of eternity, like an afterlife. We both suspect that there is more after-living to be done when the fiction is *pantsed* rather than *plotted*. Writing by the seat of one's pants compels the author to enter fictive fields that are full of spontaneous surprises. One discovers that, simply by paying attention to what rises to the surface, as it were, the *creative mind* organizes itself, and the characters it liberates have their own personalities and quirks, their own desires, needs, and aims.

When writers give their substance, the characters become substantial.]

### *Russ and Paco in Dialogue*

**Russ.** *Fex & Coo* began with an experience in Tulley’s Coffee Shop in Seattle. I had been ruminating on Goethe’s admonition to *look* at what one sees, to find the *story* there. I have come to call these experiences *oddlings*. Oddlings are “at odds” with one’s conscious intentions and they lead one into byways that are not anticipated and whose outcome cannot be predicted. When I sent Paco my fragment of “story” I had found in Tulley’s, I had no idea or intention of working on what came to be called a “novel novel” that would take us years to unfold together.

As *Fex & Coo* got underway, with our back-and-forth additions to the story fed mostly by letting the empty page show the way by what would spontaneously appear there, I had a dream that seemed in some strange way to belong to what we were doing, yet separate. I dreamed about the *Deathling Crown Lottery*. According to the dream, this was a lottery that took place in England, and the grand prize in this lottery was to “narrate someone back to life.” So, Paco and I began working on this separate story, but working on it in much the same way as we were doing with *Fex & Coo*.

The Rule of Three demands a third thing. And this third thing came to be known as the *Cèilidh of Dreams*.

Paco, help me out here. I can’t recall how we got on to the *Cèilidh of Dreams* as a separate narrative. But before that, can you recall, all these many years later, *why* you responded to that email of mine with a fulsome continuation of the story fragment I sent you?

*Russ and Paco in Dialogue, Continued*

**Paco.** It would be a pleasure to offer a few details, Russ, of why I responded so “fulsomely” to your initial prompt. Let’s back up then. Some readers may already know this, but then again ... *you never know*. Besides, it’s worth telling again, in my view.

You mentioned to our readers having sent me the inaugural email for *Fex & Coo*, on October 10, 2010. It was a complete surprise to me, and quite brief, so it didn’t take long to read. But it took a long time to assimilate. In fact, almost twelve years have passed now, and I’m still not over it.

At first, nothing about the email surprised me, to speak of—only that I didn’t expect it. An unexpected communication. Nothing earth-shaking. You were telling me about something you were working on. Something about Goethe, about his approach to science.

*Then something else happened.*

My strongest, most immediate, reaction was to the first two *opening lines of the story* that spontaneously *came to you that day* in Tully’s Coffee Shop, in Seattle, as you looked at the delivery trucks, pondering Goethe. Here again is how you described the story that finally came to you, what you called “the set-up”:

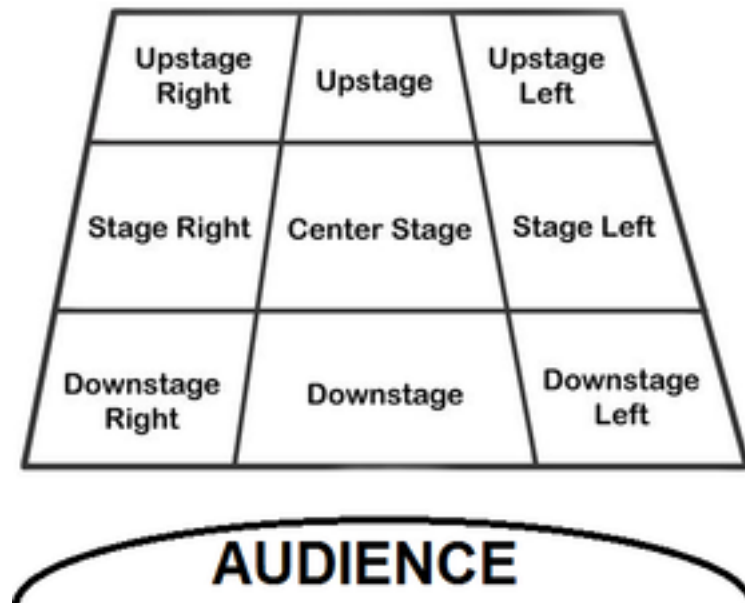
*“Sal is a teller at Ling Bank. Fex and Coo have decided ending it is the key.”*

There was a little more content, but with those two sentences the hook had been set. Of course, not everyone will have responded to those lines the way I did. The fact is, however, that you might as well have lit the fuse on a stick of dynamite and tossed it onto my computer. It was only when you got my response a day or two later, that you found out *the stick of dynamite had gone off*.

As I recall, I wrote a continuation of the story—a page-and-a-half’s worth, single-spaced. I discovered that Sal was indeed working at Ling Bank. His immediate boss there was Miss Jolene Baker-Tom

He extricated himself from the bank, over Jolene’s protests, and walked across the street to Tully’s to meet Fex and Coo. It was crowded. The only open seat was next to some old guy with a laptop. Sal called him “Pops,” but the old guy’s way of responding had an uncanny effect on Sal, who was by nature suspicious, but also curious.

What shook Sal most of all was when the old guy showed him what he was writing. It didn’t make any sense. The old guy knew all about him, and about Fex and Coo. Sal had begun sweating. The coffee shop was warm, but not *that* warm. Soon, like actors following stage-directions in a theatrical play (see diagram below), the old guy had left and, not long afterwards, Fex and Coo had entered.



Sal nervously tried to explain to Fex (always Fex, never Coo) what the old guy knew about them, including what they were planning. Then the old geezer returned, this time with a friend. He introduced himself as “Owl Man,” and his friend as “Heron Man.” Fex, Coo and Sal were all suspicious of the two “bird-brains” (Fex’s term). Nevertheless, things continued to develop from there.

You and I, Russ, wrote several segments that took place at Tully’s, before the scene shifted to Fex’s

houseboat on Lake Union, where several more scenes took place, and things started to get *wilder yet*.

\* \* \*

It might interest our readers to note that, just as I picked up and followed “your” story-line from the start, so also you picked up and followed “my” story-line from the start—and flawlessly so. There was never any question, beyond the normal “Oh my god, what am I going to do with this?” sort of thing.

Before long, and though neither of us was trying to force anything, it was hard to tell the difference between the two “voices”—i.e., who was writing what or whom.

Over the years, we have both had similar experiences, as the line between reality and fiction began to blur. Today, my sense of reality has shifted, and I’m finding that an “enhanced” reality attaches to certain types of fictive writing.

It would require considerably more space to describe the process of how we came up with the *Cèilidh of Dreams*. That’s another story. How it happened is complicated, really. By the time we got to that point, we had already amassed I don’t know how many hundred thousands of words, even if they didn’t all make it into the final “products.”

That last word is a funny one, as if we were butchers, or carpenters, or software promoters.



### *Russ and Paco in Dialogue, Continued*

**RUSS.** That hook you mentioned, “Sal is a teller at Ling Bank. He does not know that Fex and Coo have decided ending it is the key,” calls me back to that day at Tully’s. How did I come up with that? Clearly, those were the pieces of what I saw when really looking, but how did they come to form themselves into that *fictional* hook? Of course, I was under the weight of Goethe’s admonition to *find* the story. But even though I had those pieces, those elements, I did *not* go looking. I did not *do* anything to find.

The hook *found* me.

It is crucial to note that I *heard* these words. I was not aware of any *conscious* intention in *doing* this. I was not speaking to myself. I was hearing. The words did *not* “go in one ear and out the other,” so to speak; instead, I *listened*, and I wrote down what I heard.

I belabor this point because it is from such hearing that I write most of what I write, whether it is *Fex and Coo*, a blog post, an essay, or a book. And this has been true for a long time. When did it start? I think it began when I was eight years old, when I was tumbling down a mountain side, headed for a cliff and death. As I was falling, I saw a huge owl in the sky, and it spoke: “Grab hold the tree.” And as I crashed into a slender tree at the cliff’s edge, I grabbed ahold. Hearing the owl vision speak saved my life. That is why the owl has been my totem all these years.

Since that early time, I frequently have “auditory” dreams. I can’t help but feel that the auditory dreams and the auditory experiences I have when writing are linked in some way. This is also why I was so impressed by the work of Julian Jaynes. His book (*The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*), published in 1977, hit me like a thunderbolt. It remains completely undervalued, but research prompted by his views is giving further support to the core of his ideas. For access to the current status of Jaynesian work, go to the following website:

<https://www.julianjaynes.org/about/about-jaynes-theory/overview/>

I do know the difference between talking to myself (for example in doing taxes, or writing emails, or any such ordinary activities), thinking (for example, when solving a formatting issue in publishing), or memory (for example trying to remember a date or title), and all such everyday “voicing.” Quite different than “hearing” voices. The latter, of course, has been completely pathologized. I think this is largely because our early experiences with hearing are rejected, similar to what has happened to dreams.

For sure, my experience in writing *Fex & Coo*, *Deathling Crown Lottery*, and *Cèilidh of Dreams*, and particularly so with you, Paco, has deepened my respect for and valuing of *hearing* and writing from what I hear. This is true as well in my other current writing, *Dreams: The Final Heresy* and *The Rule of 3*. Both novels. How about you, Paco?

*Russ and Paco in Dialogue, Continued*

**Paco.** I have had my own share of “auditory” dreams, Russ, though probably not as many as you have had, and continue to have. In any event, I take those dreams as portentous, since an importance inevitably attaches to them. They tend to be quite stunning—emissaries with greetings from *somewhere else*.

Interestingly, the first *unexpected* thing that spontaneously entered my mind as I began reading your COD 30, was the stunning work by Sir Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Bicameral Mind*. By the time I got around to reading that book, close to forty years ago, I had already begun recording and studying my dreams. I had also built an art bronze foundry. Thus, my mornings were filled with dream texts and related materials, my days were filled with making plaster molds, wax sculptures, investment molds made out of plaster and silica sand, firing a burn-out kiln to “lose” the wax model (cf. “lost-wax casting”), then melting crucibles of bronze and filling the evacuated molds with that beautiful, golden molten metal. My evenings, generally, were filled with reading, writing and flamenco guitar.

Your reference to Jaynes’s remarkable book brought it back to me—not the complex details of the nearly 500-page volume, but the sheer emotional impact of several chapters that resonated with that particular dream series I’d had.

I found Jaynes’s book, then, to be a marvel, and I read it from surprise to surprise, as it altered my sense of reality in conjunction with those rare dreams. To my knowledge, this dream series only consisted of three dreams.

In the first dream:

*I have just removed a large plaster mold from the burn-out kiln, and have filled the empty mold with molten bronze. The bronze has to reach around 2000 F. or more, before it is fluid enough to pour. Once the bronze has cooled and solidified (crystallized), the mold is still quite hot—somewhere in the several hundreds of degrees. As soon as I can, I begin to*

*break open the mold with a sledge-hammer, exposing the hot, fire-scaled metal that resulted from the pour. I look down and see, among the broken chunks of hot plaster, the heat-radiant metal. When I look more closely, however, I realize that I am looking down at my own feet. The fact is that I am inside the mold I am breaking apart. I am the casting. [End of dream.]*

This was one of the first dreams I had recorded that threw open to question the issue of just what I thought I was “making.” The dream-bronze I had poured in the dream was ostensibly devoted to sculpture, to art, to something *outside myself*, as we say. And yet ... in some strange sense, I was the sculpture. That’s like saying, I was creating myself. In essence, *I was being relativized* by the dream’s viewpoint of me, in relation to the bronze-casting process.

The second dream also dealt with a kind of relativization of being. In this dream:

*I am asleep, dreaming. I am also a complicated “plaster piece-mold.” A piece-mold is a rather difficult studio operation, requiring lots of effort and skill, to form and assemble all the separate plaster pieces in such a way that the re-assembled mold can be filled with—and contain— molten wax. This is a crucial stage insofar as it determines how thick the wax coating the interior mold walls will be, and therefore how thick the bronze will eventually be, after the burn-out and pour. In this case, however, I kept waking up, then falling back to sleep. The curious thing was that, so long as I was asleep and dreaming, the wax inside the mold-that-was-myself, was contained. But as soon as I began to wake up, the piece-mold would fall apart into its constituent fragments, and the molten wax would spill out. As if the dream wanted to make sure I got the message, this occurred over and over. The gist of it was this: Dreaming means contained coherence, whereas waking up means fragmentation, like a form of disaster. [End of dream.]*

To me, this dream delivered a blunt statement. In short, it said that dreaming was a more *complete* psychic state than waking consciousness.

The third dream in the series was most resonant with Jaynes's work. In that dream:

*I walk down a stairway and find myself in a long, rectangular, underground room. Behind me is the stairway, and ahead of me, at the end of the room, is a door. Along both side-walls of the chamber there were niches carved into the stone or earthen wall. In each of those niches was a human skull, like the remains of deceased ancestors. I walk between the two rows of skulls toward the door. I have an intuition that, on the other side of that door, I would encounter something like "absolute reality." When I reach it, the door opens by itself and I see a man on the other side. He is wearing a suit. His back is toward me. Slowly he turns around, facing in my direction—like Boris Karloff or Bela Lugosi in some horror film. I had no capacity at the time for engaging with this unknown, mysterious figure, so I withdrew toward the stairway again. As I approached the stairs, I realized that, if the other side of the door was a form of "absolute" reality, then the underground chamber with all the skulls was "real" reality, and at the top of the stairs was the outer world, which I understood was only "relatively" real. [End of dream.]*

Since recording this last dream, decades ago, I have not been able to forget its message—that what we call "waking consciousness," and take for granted as if it were something absolutely real, is *only relatively so*. In short, I give greater credence to the reality in and behind dreams, intuitions, visions and so forth, than to the ephemera of the waking world.

As you well know, Russ, Jaynes's book has so much material of interest—page after page—and is so replete with things of value to say about your auditory dreams and other psychic autonomies, that we could write a book about it— *were there but world enough and time*. Instead, today I pulled my copy of Jaynes's book from its shelf, and discovered the old volume was peppered with notes I had left between the pages.

Virtually at random, here are a few underlined passages that just one of my notes referenced. In his discussion of the phenomenon you mentioned—that of the Voice—Jaynes wrote:

(P. 86) “ ... it is highly probable that the bicameral voices of antiquity were in quality very like such auditory hallucinations in contemporary people.”

(P. 86) “One afternoon I lay down in intellectual despair on a couch. Suddenly, out of an absolute quiet, there came a firm, distinct loud voice from my upper right, which said, “Include the knower in the known!”

(P. 87) “At a suspicion of hallucinations, distressed psychotics are given some kind of chemotherapy such as Thorazine, which specifically eliminates hallucinations. This procedure is at least questionable, and may be done not for the patient, but for the hospital which wishes to eliminate this rival control over the patient. But it has never been shown that hallucinating schizophrenics are more intractable than others. Indeed, as judged by other patients, hallucinating schizophrenics are more friendly, less defensive, more likeable, and have more positive expectancies toward others in the hospital than non-hallucinating patients. And it is possible that even when the effect is apparently negative, hallucinated voices may be helpful to the healing process.”

I know that all this is familiar to you, Russ, but perhaps it will be of value to some of our readers, especially as you elaborate on these and other points.