

Sampling the
Poetic Works
in two volumes,
by Donovan Bessinger

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(Numbering refers to sample pages, not book pages.)

A Prevérsary Note

He (aspiring poet known to me) once
 from a high ridge before the dawn
 besought an audience with Apollo,
 but forgot to sing a paeon.

Rushed as was the god to find an edge
 within dense wall of eastern cloud
 'gainst which to spray first ray
 of morning, and no doubt miffed,
 he dealt with our aspiring poet
 rather brusquely, and rushed away.

The poet then petitioned choir of muses
 standing close behind in robes of white,
 preparing anthem for the morning.
 They too, all, demurred.

An elder centaur, of rustic conformation
 standing near, suggested consultation
 with apprentice muse not yet admitted
 to the choir, but who was most assuredly
 adept already at all versary uses
 as practiced by the muses—verse-making
 short and long, for enjoyment of the
 languages of Earth, in verses lyric, epic, and
 hymnodic, and theatrics played in speech and
 song, so many are the uses of verses
 already known.

Thus came he (my timid friend) to meet
 the young aspiring muse who not so eagerly
 accepted for review the work here to be
 introduced.

“It started out as prose,” he said, “but then kept breaking into verse, and thus I left it many years, languishing alone unseen, as work *sans genre*. I’m at a loss about it, unknowing what to do.”

He was heartened by her smile, but gently then she offered only, “H’mmm.”

Timidly, but patiently, he waited as she read further. “Verse does indeed have many uses. Even when so thin the layering of its meanings and allusions perhaps there is a place for verse didactic too, and even for the journaling in verse of growing understandings, and verse for sharing hope, in your century of war and stress.”

“Why not?” she added, after musing further. “But this I caution—Dare you proceed alone? At your own risk?”

He (aspiring poet known to me) then smiles, as from a golden edge of cloud there splashes upon her gentle face a glimmering ray, and in the growing morning light first glimpses then how gossamer is her gown.

Donivan Bessinger
April 2009

The Trail

1

It is a secret place to which I walk
Somewhere there, ahead
Somewhere high within these mountains
Which once I'd known so well, through
Which I'd walked so many years ago
 _ not searching then
 _ just boy-rambling,
 _ randomly.
Yes, there, somewhere there ahead
Somehow the man must find the boy's
 _ lost trail.

The trail once so well-worn, compacted
 _ environment impacted
By the feet of many hiker generations
Is now so overgrown, rutted and eroded.
Few feet fall here now
 _ few soles
 _ few souls
With strength to spare for climb
Beyond the edge of chaos.
Beyond Catastrophe.

The invitation came by phone
Was followed by a fax
A single squiggly line
An overlay, unlabeled, then
On another day another fax with ...

(from a narrative of one-hundred pages)

Prolog

Theology, System?
Yes! Beliefs, hard held
Tradition! Orthodoxy!
Church embattled must stand firm
 against new thought,
 against herètic hoard!

Theology, Poetry?
No! Whoever heard of such a thing!
What place has poetry here
For who can say what poetry means
And who believes a poem?

Beliefs poetic?
We then would have no way
To diagnose the heresies
If Word Incarnate here prevailed
And each believes himself to be a priest!

Theology, Meaning?
Word made Meaning?
Meaning beyond the Law and Prophets
Meaning dwelling now among us
Meaning full of grace and Truth
Truth beyond the Word Interpretate
Truth within the Word Incarnate.
That is Theology!
That is Poetry!

Belovèd reader, bear with me.
If that and this not Poetry,
Perhaps poetic essay?

Essay with me
Explore with me
New Meaning in the Word

Word made flesh anew
Transcendent, radically immanent
Word.

Is not all deep reality the same?
Quark and Self together touching All?
Reality of the Word made Flesh in
Quark and Spirit same?

If so, then let us all
together
sing a Cosmic Hymn.

Oh, Lord let every quark
Link us to Thee,
Link us to Love.

(from Cosmic Hymn, a collection of thirty poems)

Three

From depths of salty sea we crawled
fins now our hands and feet and eyes made fit
for vision in the air. We looking up
made for ourselves the wings which made us eagles.

Fired by that vision, suits-ships fashioned
fly by fire still higher into thinner air
and higher still beyond the air to moon,
and then we sent our ships to stars beyond.
Our breathing is adapted too
to greater heights of air, or bottled air
life spirit in a bottle
spirit suited 'gainst the emptiness of space.

Yet we are spirits still of sea
whose gills vestigial breathe
the life dissolved within the deep,
We, spirits breathing archetypal air.

Though dazzled by fire eagle's view of stars
enrapt in thinness of that height
we still must see the imaged depth
and navigate therein.

Are they still there, vestigial gills
respiring archetypal life?
Are they still there, vestigial eyes
perceiving archetypal way?

Oh Mystery One give back the soul, the gills
by which we swim in psyche's fluid sea
and give us eye to fathom clear
thy fluid image mystery.

(from Quest, a collection of eleven poems)

Ten

The People of the Turtle Island
come to Center-Place
to dance in cycles, circles, all
a cosmic dance. Kituwah.

Lord, would I that thou shouldst
dress my words like them
in bone breastplates,
in bracelets beaded
with bustle fan as eagle's tail
and feathered fans two wings,
with spangled beaded coronet
lift fronds to sway in time.
On ankles place
loud rattles
each syllable a step with
drum
a song of praise to life.

Would that my words could dance
like them in rhythms of creation
to draw in cycles, circles, all
much closer to Kituwah.

(from Quest)

Ekklesia

(2)

I climbed the stair for many years.
The air was thick and warm
for many others climbed there too,
a narrow stair, but then more narrow still.

At each landing, some (panting) left to wait,
for rumor said the elevators soon would run
to give a way direct. Some gave up, but I pressed on
for at the top a Will was being read.

But soon the stair seemed blocked. For longest
time did no one move, but then I found a way
and entered upper floor. There too the crowd
milled 'round confused in front of elevator door.

I waited, asking. No, no one had seen an elevator come.
They argued. What could be done, who was the first,
who would be first, or who could hold the door?
but others said that elevator power had failed.

I asked again. They looked distracted, nothing new to say,
and some there had forgotten why they waited.
Many argued, some pushed. I paced, but patiently, for this
was where the Notice said to wait. Someone fainted.

I could again take stair which leads back down.
That way already known, for I was there,
But what's the point of going down again, and so I
squeeze around and find another door.

(from Ekklesia, a narrative of thirty-two pages)

Anno Domini

19. Saint Michael and All Angels

Once again you lie upon Sistina's frame
 to clean away the grime of candle-years
 which clouds the cosmic vision.
 Unveil anew the view
 of God who beckons us as Adham
 to reach, to touch divine and cosmic mind.

As you toil there, shoulders aching
 where muscles once worked wings
 brush too, away the film of torpid sleep
 which clings to every eye
 that we might see with thee that
 figures circling round the Christ
 are not a view of final point in time
 but cosmos every moment organizing
 'round its Word made flesh
 bright flesh naked
 writhing, seeking
 Meaning in the all.
 Seeking to embrace Truth-Beauty-Goodness
 Trinity
 from Whom creation daily springs.

Earthly oils cannot be mixed
 so bright to show
 the brilliance of thy vision.
 Oh Michael, my heart and shoulders
 ache with thine
 to reach out, grasp, forever hold
 the Beauty
 of it all.

(from Anno Domini, a collection of twenty-one poems)

(1)

'Twas in the morning of the moon
the month of Mars
When Venus, nestled in the crescent arms
Descending
Came to me as child of chocolate hue.
She was All dark, except for giggle and a grin
Of tooth and eye of perfect white,
And lacy gown.
The bows attached to braids bounced high
with every twist of head
responding in her teasing game

No! A giggle here adds exclamation point
That is not my name.

I tried again, and failed again
to say her name
But by that loss I gained another round
and kept the game alive.
Now you must guess again, she says.

When she had asked my name
With bounce of braid, and grin
I gave her quite an ordinary name
The one by which I'm known to everyone
Which every day is called a hundred times
Marking passage of the hours and days
As many moons are born anew
and all the years stretch
into aeons.

We played our game in airport lounge
Awaiting flight across a southern sea.
Her mother called—
that's when I heard her name ...

(from Ouandi, a narrative of seventy pages)

Vision

*Who is that Invisible One
Who sees through my eyes
Who hears through my ears?
Kena Upanishad 1:1*

*I who speaks to you am he.
John 4:26*

(1)

Ashok, you have come to these Pavilions
Seeking.
Solitary, Searching.
You sit in Silent meditation
Naked
From dawn to dusk
And yet beyond the dusk
Into a night so dark
Where clouds eclipse the star
Which hope would raise into your view.

Sitting high on pinnacle above the forest
Sprucetops pointing toward you
Toward these peaks, thus so
Your eyes will never see
The One Who Sees.

Ashok, if it is I whom you would see
Go back into that forest
Where all which is Invisible
Can yet be seen.

I who speaks to you am she.

(from Vision, a narrative of twenty-eight pages)

*Being the Journals of His Recent
Intergalactic Nuonic Deputation*

alpha

To You most gracious Majesty panentic
Do I now make these nebulous presentments
Recorded in the luminescent wake of Your most splendid
Ship, formed there within the omatidian chambers by the
Birefringent rays reflected from your Ring, as cloud
Of Hand so gently brushed away debris of passing comet.
That Cutter traced by keel and rudder
Wordless words upon the seas of night, these
Sublimating images, effervescing, recrudescing
Evading capture, save by soul's own sight.

Those I have recorded here for study by your minions,
The Governors of your galaxies, coded now for pantransmission
Upon the transnuonic net, that Justice may be served entire.
Isolated there upon oblate spheroidal nanochip, so many
Of your subjects did not see my Ship waft past,
Bowed not to Flag e'er high, there flown upon my spanker gaff
Your Ensign, symbol of Yourself, Panfire.
Alas, Your Majesty, their mutiny continues.

But that anticipates my story.
First there is much more to say. ...

(from Jivinandra's Voyage, a narrative of sixteen pages)

Nousa's Sword

Whoever has no sword should get one.
 What kind of sword ? Now there's the question
 Hanging over centuries. That one there will do, that one
 Hanging in the darkness of the night, that one
 Hanging over us, there, now catching glint of morning
 light.

Behold ! It slowly turns to stand before us
 Steelsilver glinting in the morning light.
 It now stands vertical, blade *en face*
 Reflecting all the faces of the centuries.
 Time passing, time dawning, faces of the centuries
 Momentary faces coming going coming
 Pulsing faces here and there. Everywhere
 Without the where. Nowhere faces
 Soul-functions reflected in Gestalt of Angst
 Ansicht of sword *en face* a mirror of the soul.

Here, take this sword. Hold it thus
 Edge on, utterly and infinitesimally thin
 But feel its heft. Grip tightly on this
 Handle wet by waters of the lake
 Face thus the fiery rose of dawn.
 Firmly with two-handed stroke reach out
 Full strength to strike the image of the sun. ...

(from a poem of ten pages)

Et Alia

Genesis	363
Homer Sang	364
The African Boy	366
Homily on the Seven Seals	370
Christmas Cancer	372
Sharp Shadow	373
What can I make	373
What sort of creature thou	374
Lord, you are at the wedding	376
Wedding Reflection	376
Which sun is real?	379
Epheboi	380
Pan's Flute	380
Golden light hangs heavy	380
MyDome	380
Temagami Shores	381
Lakeshore	381
Cloud shadow	381
Lightdrop	381

(Contents of Et Alia, a collection of poems)

(End of Volume One)

The Twenty-first

<i>A fu haiku</i>	13
<i>MM</i>	14
neuroplanet	17
<i>Tombs</i>	18
Sheeting rain	18
Soft breeze	19
Redleaf	19
Soul's bowl	19
Still moment	20
Poof!	21
Source	22
Number	25
Victor	26
Commuting in the smoky pink	27
Crypt	28
Poetry reading	28
Venetian window	28
Hilbert's pond	29
Squid	30
It's dark in here	31
(as yet) untitled	32
Highest heaven	33
April Frost	33
Excursion	34

Italics indicate collections

*(Contents of the collection of poems introducing
Volume Two.)*

Waiting at Epidauros

*You must be pure to enter
 where the god dwells
 in incense-scented air.
 Pure thought
 seeks to know what is holy.*

AC-Epid;
 AW-Asklep

(1)

Beside the Propylea,
 into the shade of our own temenos
 we have wandered, Timaeus and I
 escaping the sun of warming October morning.
 Incense of pine moves in faint breeze among the limbs.
 Gorgias hasn't noticed us yet.

Then and now. There and here
 suspended together amongst the nearest
 gossamer veils of memory and thought.
 My vantage point today
 on the slope beside the Katagogeion
 overlooks the Tholos,
 ancient temple, once so conspicuously ornate,
 a shrine of healing now completely ruined.
 The circle of its colonnade no longer stands
 except as museum fragments
 reassembled in the mind.

A group of students listens to a guide,
 speaking German. Her voice within the
 amphitheater was clearly heard from far away, but
 here is muffled across the narrow vine-clad plain
 strewn with time-bleached stones. ...

*(From Waiting at Epidauros, a mystery in verse,
 136 pages. An extensive glossary is provided.)*

Petaloudes

α

Flutterby
 blossom in flight feeding on blossoms
 sampling many nectars gathered here and there
 in brilliant light from your large-eyed world

Flutterby
 released from a stiff cocoon
 to be re-formed for flight into splendor
 hungry for nectar
 let me taste your samples
 mixing thoughts
 making meanings
 pollinating

Butterfly
 nectar dissolving aftertaste of
 stiff cocoon, tasting afresh anew,
 dissolving dogma, every doctrine
 all thought of self except that Self
 which holds together All-That-Is

All-That-Is
 being *and* becoming
 local *and* nonlocal
 perishable *and* imperishable
 the transient *and* the non-transient
 that which is extended in space
and that which is tangent to all points in space
 that which is extended in time
and that which is eternal ...

(From Petaloudes, a metaphysical poem, thirty pages)

The Pond

turtle

An early morning mist is lifting quickly from the placid pond, pointing ephemeral fingers briefly into the crispness of the air, touching faintest tint of Lenten rose. Soul, too, awaking into morning sends insubstantial fingers to touch the airs around, to reestablish claim to being, yesterday assumed, but which by sleep was faded, and in this new day needs reaffirming. But what can have changed in sleep, in dreaming, to erase all sense that the world itself somehow is real, and needs no re-creation? From the ether of new day question follows question. Where was the mist before it rose, and where now going, where too that sense of yesterday, offset from now ? And who, here, coffee mug in hand, looks out upon the pond to muse upon the mists, tainting them with questions? Yesterday I thought I knew.

This cherished and protected private place hidden well among ridges of endless mountains, long my retreat and the repository for my most persistent questions, I have often visited in high summer, exploring mind and its environs. Now in long-anticipated retirement, hope rises in me like the mists in the fairing weather of the pre-spring ...

(From The Pond, a narrative of thirty-six pages)

Universe and Nuoverse
or,
The Ways of Providence are Strange Indeed

I

There is an air beyond the air
wherein wafts a steady breeze
across the shifting isobars between the
probable and the improbable. Those
who listen closely sometimes hear a wail
—surely only faintly though, for these
infinitesimal sounds are far beyond the
adaptations of our land-based ears. Be not
dissuaded by skeptical derision, the bane
of all explorer poets, but trust what you
yourself can hear, and be attentive to these
fancies that Ultimate Nature is unfolding.

There is a cat
who lives within a box,
whose very tiny pulsing heart
keeps time to primal fields and forces,
the Ultimate tachycardia. Each beat renews
its life, but only for a moment, for its beats
are ticks timed to the Planck vibrations of the
Energy of the All.

Something else about that cat is strange,
besides its nickname, Plick ...

(From Universe and Nuoverse, a fantasy of twenty-two pages)

*The Otherworld, now as then
spreads over the land and the sea;
memories mingle amongst the mists
of the lakes and the streams coursing
deep-forested mountains; vested dark
green, they meet seas blue and gray
rolling inward and outward,
washing rocks at the shore, sifting
and shifting free-flowing sands,
tracing day and night the dreams
of the People. Listen ... Listen
there in the mists to the dreams
of the People.*

Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed

from the Mabinogion

Pwyll was the prince then in Dyfed,
of seven cantrefs the lord. During sojourn
in Arberth, one evening he said,
“Tomorrow we hunt at Glyn Cuch.”

On the morrow his nobles he mustered,
and the handlers of his hounds. He raised
high his horn, “Let the hunt now begin!”
The hounds leapt up at the sound, baying loudly,
surging ahead of them all, swiftly into the forest.
Pwyll followed apace, his companions fell behind.

Alone Pwyll followed his hounds, seeing a clearing ahead.
But hark! The sound of more dogs! A magnificent stag
stood there fearfully, surrounded by the strangest of sights.
Lowing with pain the stag was soon felled, but the sound
was made faint by the howling.

How strange was that pack, the dogs much larger than Pwyll’s ...

(From a narrative of eight pages)

Kareol

*On the alchemy of Isolde's potions:
death, love, and life*

A sequel to *Tristan und Isolde*: King Marke had given Tristan's castle, Kareol, to Brangaene after the death of Tristan; a son of Kurvenal is her protector and administrator. Upon the death of Isolde the treaty between the two realms had been broken, leaving intervening years of war and plague. Though hostilities have since given way to a *de facto* truce, a state of war officially obtains.

Years later, at Kareol.

The Cast

Aubrey [*tenor*], shepherd and musician
 Brangaene [*soprano*], now much older
 Kurvenal's son [*bass*], her protector and administrator
 King Marke of Cornwall [*bass*], now very elderly
 Melot, Marke's equerry [*bass-baritone*], namesake of his uncle Melot
 Tantris [*tenor*], son of Br. and Marke
 Princess of Erin [*soprano*], "Erin", daughter of King Morold of Erin
 Knight Admiral, of Erin [*baritone*], envoy of King Morold
 Steersman [*tenor*]
 A Chorus, including an aide to Kurvenal, a lady-in-waiting to Erin, a youth, Marke's retinue, Irish crew, and others.

Prelude

Scene One

*A winter morning around a fire, on the stone roof of Kareol;
sea view; sunrise*

Aubrey softly plays a flute; leaves watchtower to warm his hands

Aubrey:

Faintest twilight
 marks the ending
 of our longest night—

(First page of a libretto for a salon opera)

Holy Space

A Metaphysical Fantasia in Four Acts

The Players: • Externals (“Exts”, alien to Earth)—governor-general, informacien, synouist, hacker, others • Virtuals (“VLs”, humans)—athlete, philosopher, physicist, politician, psychologist, soldier, worker

A large planet, distant and unknown to Earth.

Overture

Music and video images of deep space, fractals, and mathematical symbols perhaps interspersed with pan shots of audience. The Prolog begins as lights are gradually lowered, and video fades to black.

Prolog

Chorus of voices, off-stage. Lines are assigned variously, as unison, solo, duet, quartet, etc. passages. (The notation ‘<>’ indicates continuing repetition and reversal of terms, e.g. A <> B indicates spoken repetitions ad lib of “A-B, B-A, A-B, ...”.) The sound begins as a soft general murmur of all the lines, gradually building to moderate volume allowing each line to be heard distinctly, then fading to an indistinct murmur.

- stillness is timeless <> timeless is stillness
- motion <> time
- motion <> flow
- thought <> time
- mind <> flow
- each <> all
- the end is the beginning
- middle <> end
- middle <> beginning
- all is in the middle

solo voice, spoken distinctly, thrice

- the that is a this to the that

duet

- the me is my that \diamond my that is a me

Chorus, repeat ad lib then fade to silence and darkness

- stillness \diamond timeless

Act One

Externals (Alien to Earth) are grouped center stage into a fantastic amoeba-like shape, not discernably human, which send out "pseudopods". A shape at the end of one of the amoebal arms stands up, revealing knee, leg, and bare foot, which then are hidden as the Ext turns, revealing arm as it gestures, and then its face. All movements are 'danced', whether or not to music. Two or three other forms emerge separately, moving away from each other.

Informacien— How wan the light of dawn this demi year.
Once again we cross between the distant stars who are
the strange attractors of our bi-lobed path through emptiness.
Gywm hands us off to Abym's care. How long shall it spin us so?

How can we know? Thus shall we orbit until by the fractal whims
of cosmic mind Gywm claims us once again, as Gywm and Abym
dance around each other, moving to and fro, moving to the
music whose mystery still engulfs us, eluding all our understanding.

How long? O what a tantalizing question! Some sense of something
shapeless wafts past us vaguely, in our moving o'er and under
this forbidding surface, point to point, from one feature to another.
No one yet knows what to call that sense, nor how to quantify it.
We have no reference point outside our system
by which to measure passing of duration's vapor,
so deep are we into this empty room of sky.

(Beginning of Holy Space, a play in four acts.)

MASTER INDEX
of Titles, First Lines, and *Collections*

Volumes One and Two

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|-------|
| (as yet) untitled | 2-32 | Come / Thou Most High | 1-213 |
| A bone is living | 1-173 | Commuting./...smoky pink | 2-27 |
| A cosmos forms by day | 2-30 | Conceptus, once existent | 2-283 |
| <i>A fu haiku</i> | 2-13 | Consciousness is the lens | 2-280 |
| A lion loudly roars | 1-144 | Contemplating nothingness .. | 2-281 |
| A pipe can play | 1-380 | continental face, The | 1-167 |
| A Prevérsary Note | 1-7 | continental mother, The | 1-125 |
| A quantum cosmos | 2-283 | <i>Cosmic Hymn</i> | 1-109 |
| A river flows | 1-217 | Cosmos / tell me the secret | 2-22 |
| Advent | 1-213 | Cosmos canvas | 1-132 |
| African Boy, The | 1-366 | Cosmos known | 2-280 |
| All Being is One | 2-284 | Costumed by convention | 1-153 |
| All Saints / All Souls | 1-233 | Counting decades | 2-16 |
| Alpha affirmations | 1-146 | Creator Mystery / Forgive ... | 1-228 |
| An early morning mist | 2-203 | Crypt | 2-28 |
| Anima, Eleousa | 1-231 | Crystal of cosmos | 1-169 |
| <i>Anno Domini</i> | 1-209 | | |
| April Frost | 2-33 | Dasein | 2-284 |
| Apples on a canvas | 2-17 | death of day, The..... | 2-284 |
| Ash Wednesday | 1-218 | Directly behind | 2-15 |
| Ashok, you have come | 1-307 | Does not the building | 1-172 |
| At the very first...Elohim | 1-363 | | |
| | | Easter | 1-226 |
| Baptism of Our Lord | 1-217 | Easter Day | 2-285 |
| Bardo | 2-284 | <i>Ekklesia</i> | 1-177 |
| BASIC christologic | 1-134 | enpantos | 2-17 |
| Before creation ? | 1-140 | Epheboi | 1-380 |
| Beloved physician | 1-232 | Epilog, <i>Cosmic Hymn</i> | 1-160 |
| Beside the propylea | 2-37 | Epiphany | 1-217 |
| Black holes | 2-284 | <i>Et Alia</i> | 1-359 |
| Blank page | 2-282 | Excursion | 2-34 |
| | | Existence / twisted | 2-281 |
| Christmas Cancer | 1-372 | | |
| Christmas Eve | 1-215 | Faintest twilight marks | 2-290 |
| Cloud shadow, sleeping | 1-381 | Father Earth | 1-125 |
| Colors of being | 2-285 | first act of creation, The | 1-224 |
| Come Lord my Spirit Twin | 1-214 | Flutterby / blossom | 2-173 |

- From adhamah...earth 1-136
 From depths of salty sea 1-166

 Genesis 1-363
 Give me to understand 1-165
 God / cosmos 1-165
 Golden light hangs heavy 1-380
 Golden morning light 1-381
 Gone to Seed 2-14
 Good morning 2-28
 Gravity of Consciousness 2-283
 Green, burnished red 2-19

 Haiti / Chapel on the public 1-142
 Haiti. Deep night 1-140
 He (aspiring poet known 1-7
 Head tossing 2-26
 Here am I ! 2-283
 Here, Lord. Hop on! 1-224
 Highest Heaven 2-33
 Hilbert's Pond 2-29
 Holy Name 1-216
Holy Space 2-321
 Holy Week 1-224
 Homer sang of many gods 1-364
 Homily on the Seven Seals ... 1-371
 How wan the light 2-324

 Images of energy 2-281
 I-moeba 2-284
 I am Word 1-134
 I cannot believe 2-285
 I often wish to sing my 1-114
 I once had walked 1-376
 I thought I was alone 1-380
 I wish to know 1-123
 I am quark 1-137
 If each of us were giv'n 1-131
 Images of Energy 2-281
 In deepening shade 1-381
 In God we trust 2-269

 In the dome of Gaia's 1-233
 In tiny life-steps 2-282
 In two thousand thirty 1-227
 It's Dark in Here 2-31
 It is a secret place to which 1-11
 It was an item...shopping 1-372

 Jesus, Holy Name 1-216
Jivinandra's Voyage 1-333

Kareol 2-287
 Kosmos known 2-281

 last rhodora, The 2-16
 Lakeshore 1-381
 Lent 1-218
 Let me as Paul upon 1-230
 Life-spirit MVTABILITIE 2-27
 Lightdrop 1-381
 Line of pelicans 2-16
 Logos. Word. 1-117
 Lord...Thy light..... 1-231
 Lord, you are at...wedding 1-376
 Lord you were tried 1-218

 Mitakuye 2-17
MM 2-14
 Monday of Easter week 1-226
 morning sun casts, The 1-226
 Mount Fuji 2-283
 MVTABILITIE 2-27
 MyDome 1-380
 My son, my son 1-366
 My soul does magnify 1-215
 Mystery of Being 1-165

 Neuroplanet 2-17
 Nothing 2-282
 Nothing / to be seen 2-29
Nousa's Sword 1-349
 Number 2-25

MASTER INDEX

- Object of Thought 2-281
 Oh! Blest Infinity! 1-381
 Oh Lord / Impose 1-218
 Oh most brilliant diamond 2-15
 Oh timeless seamless 1-138
 Oh tipi-cosmos 1-175
 Oh unlimited one 1-139
 Om mani padme hum 2-15
 Once a blossom 2-14
 Once again you lie upon 1-231
 only rule about, The 1-160
 Orion, Christ, cosmic 1-160
 Otherworld, now as then 2-261
Ouandi 1-235

 Palm Sunday 1-224
 Pan's Flute 1-380
 Pen a note 2-25
 Pentecost 1-227
 People of the Turtle, The 1-174
Petaloudes 2-171
 poetry reading, The 2-28
Pond, The 2-201
 Poof! 2-21
 Prolog, *Cosmic Hymn* 1-113
 Pseudopods engulfing 2-284
 Psyche fluttered by 1-130
 Pulsed entanglements 2-283
Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed 2-259

 Qualla drum 1-123
Quanta of Cosmos 2-279
 Quantum-atom clusters 2-283
 Quantum classical 2-283
Quest 1-161

 Redleaf 2-19
Respecting God in America .. 2-267
 Rose, first ray 2-15

 Saint Luke 1-232
 Saint Mary Magdalene 1-229
 Saint Mary Virgin 1-231
 Saint Michael 1-231
 Saint Thomas Day 1-214
 Saints Peter and Paul 1-230
Seaku 2-13
 See is calm, The 1-150
 Sharp Shadow 1-373
 Sheeting rain 2-18
 Silver night 1-170
 Sisters all, now gather 1-229
 Sitting here behind home 1-380
 Sky broad expanse 2-17
 So Proudly do I defend 2-32
 Soft breeze 2-19
 Soul's bowl 2-19
 Source 2-19
 Squid 2-30
 Still moment 2-20
 Stillness / of the moving 2-20
 Sweet morning 1-170

 Temagami Shores 1-381
 Theology, System? 1-113
 This aching wound 1-373
 This is the Truth 2-285
 Thoughts becloud 2-16
 Time ticking endlessly 2-33
 To You most gracious 1-335
Tombs 2-18
 Tonight the Magi 1-217
Trail, The 1-9
 Transcendent one 1-26
 Transfiguration 1-231
 Transillumination 2-15
 Transit 2-284
 Traveler to Emmaus 1-226
 Trinity Sunday 1-228
 Twas in the morning of 1-237
Twenty-first, The 2-9
 Two one 2-15

<i>Universe and Nuoverse</i>	2-237	Were I designing cosmos	2-21
Upon a Sunday morn	1-155	What are you building	1-159
Upon the landscape of the	1-115	What can I make of	1-373
Venetian window	2-28	What is there in earthair	2-19
Verity, Verity	2-285	What sort of creature thou	1-374
Victor	2-26	Which sun is real?	1-379
Vision	1-305	Who could say	2-28
		Whoever has no sword	1-351
<i>Waiting at Epidauros</i>	2-35	Whose words these are	2-33
Walking the Planck	2-282		
Wall of age-stained brick	2-28	Yes, Father	1-154
We who weep beside	2-34	Yes, you could say	1-179
Wedding Reflection	1-376	Your super-lenses fill your	1-371

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