

# Cosmic Hail

Bronislaw Szerszynski<sup>1</sup>

“O cosmic dust!”

We are planet Gaia, living world,  
And as you transit through our shade

Our very planetary form  
Creates for you a ring of sun-limned air,  
And thus inscribes the “O” that signifies  
The vocative – direct address.

It shows we do not *name* the crowd of dust  
That passes through our neighbourhood  
But *call direct* to you, a single mote.

O small but travelled nomad,  
Just a hundred microns wide,  
Porous, gritty, asymmetric –  
Your very nature gives a tell:

You’ve never passed through giant worlds like ours.

No compaction, no hydration,  
Metamorphic transformation,  
Chemical equilibration –  
No, you are a pure, chondritic  
Recollection of the time

Before our worlding came about.

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O worldless world,  
You are like us a compound thing,  
But whereas we divided you combined.  
Your composition shows your own slow gathering:  
A thousand flecks of pale green olivine,  
And five, no, six hundred more of feldspar, flushed potassium pink,  
All formed in heat around the solar hub  
And blasted out to colder climes.  
Then noble gases harvested from solar wind,  
Seven precious, ancient grains from distant, perished suns,  
And three long damage tracks from passing cosmic rays.

Then you and we approach,  
We turn toward each other, orbits lock and bend,  
Conjoined apostrophe of planet and planetesimal –  
Your arcing strong and visible,  
Our own infinitesimal.  
And you become a message hurled to us,  
Come down from coldest space to warmer middle world,  
From slowtime of cosmic drift to quicktime of Gaia.  
Feather-light, your kind should float down gently over days,  
But your address was too direct, your angle far too sharp.  
Our mutual speed, always too high, it grows and grows.  
And then you warm and hold your breath,  
Your vesicles they merge and grow,  
And your expanding girth then feels the thickening air,  
And – oh! – what drag, what heat!  
In lucent flight you blaze at us,  
Your volatile expression bursting out!  
And what is left of you feels liquid forces  
Pull your body in and round –  
And sudden cold then quench you into glass.

oOoOoOo

Coming after cosmic drop

We find you on the snow.

A single bead of hair-breadth span –

Inside your glassy matrix, relict granules glint and glister.

You too now take the shape of direct address,

And you join us, small circle next to large circle.

You are the “o” in “o Gaia,”

Primitive particle of language, joined to planetary noun.

Your age-long history was burnt away in your brief, bright celestial greeting.

Now you say “o,” and your message is pure vocation, pure calling.

You say “o,” and your tidings are now unalloyed,

For you are now pure cosmic “hail.”

And what you say is this:

“Know that your world is open,

And is never, ever sundered from the undivided whole.”

Thus your “o,” joined with our “O,” opens up the Earth.