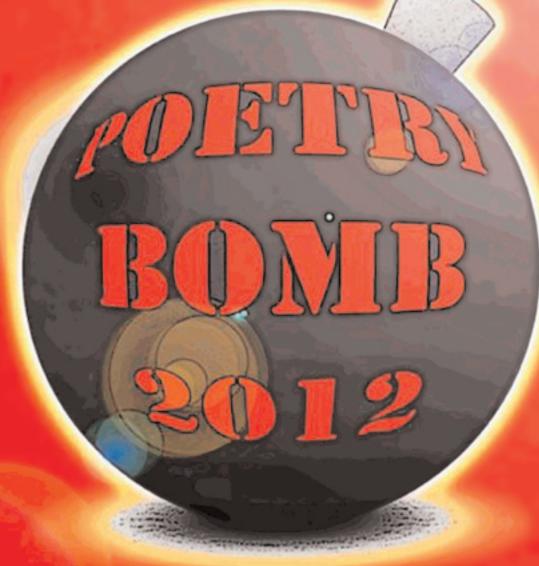
POETRY ON THE EL TRAIN

OF PERIODIC TABLE OF POETRY
POEMS BY CHICAGO POET
JANET KUYPERS



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BIO Janet Kuypers is a professional performance artist, a writer, photographer, and a literary magazine editor, while running Scars Publications, which hosts two literary magazines, publishes books and releases CDs. She has had 76 books published (as of 4/27/11, of poetry, prose, novels and art), has sung in 3 acoustic bands, and worked with 8 music groups (combining her poetry with music. In 2010 she began hosting a weekly Chicago open mic "the Café Gallery" with weekly podcasts. Her CD releases (41 through 2011) appear at iTunes and other online vendors, and she also produced an Internet radio station (2005-2009), found on line through http://scars.tv or http://www.janetkuypers.com.



The poems are listed in this collection in the order they appear on the Periodic Table (not necessarily in the order read live on the el train during the Poetry Bomb. Their periodic number is to the left of the element/poem name in this Table of Centents.

HYDROGEN

when I thought of our relationship, when I thought of your relationship to me, I thought of a molecule of Hydrogen:

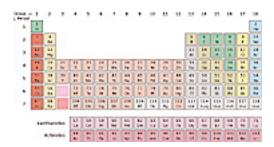
how you were afraid of me, but also how you were so obsessed with me... and although you always kept your distance,

you were always revolving around me. and when we finally eventually fused together, you were like a Hydrogen bomb:

forcing me to push away everyone I loved, forcing me to hurt everyone close to me. and that is when I snapped and lost it,

because I couldn't let you use me like this. I couldn't let you cause so much destruction. I couldn't let everything I valued be destroyed.

I know it was a basic attraction with us, but although you might not have liked it, I think it was better when you just kept your distance.



HELIUM

I couldn't help it. I was attracted to you. You elevated me.

You seemed so content, so light, and when I saw you, you looked so hot, like a solar flare.

Whenever I see you outside, I feel you penetrating my pores every single day.

But I didn't realize that outside like this, we were never truly alone.

But being near you made me giddy, I'd even raise my voice whenever you'd come near me.

But only now I learn That even though you're hot, you're colder than anything I've ever touched.

So maybe it wasn't your heat that drew me to you...

I think you're truly unique, but you tell me you're common, even though you're still so hard to find. I'd have to search the Universe for you to realize

you're not as special as you've led me to believe. So, I'm sorry.

I couldn't help it. You have this effect on me whenever you come to me like this.

I'm always so tense, but with your low boiling point, and the way you connect with me

you've calmed me down and shown me a new perspective. Because of this,

I avoided the fact that we don't really mix well together. Either way, I still hoped

you could help me -I mean, you can make me feel like I can fly when I'm with you.

I just have to remember that even though, Every once in a while,

I can literally breathe you in, A few second later, you're gone.

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LITHIUM

I know I needed you around me, I was desperate. I know I wanted you in my life to calm me down. I know I needed you to stop me from my manic episodes.

They told me it's not an addiction I have with you, but then they told me that if I broke away from you altogether I would cycle back to my old psychotic, unhealthy ways.

So please don't tell me I'm crazy for wanting you. But I just couldn't stand being me. I just wanted to calm down. I was desperate for you. I wanted to feel normal again.

You were the one to calm ME down, but the thing is, you were the one that was also supposed to help me with my poor judgment and aggression.

Because when I was with you, I felt like my blood was on fire. With you around I couldn't eat any more. I felt dizzy with you, I'd feel tremors and twitching. You made me unsteady.

On the surface, you seemed soft to me, with you silver-white hair. With your lightness, I forgot how metallic you were when we joined. And now look what we've become.

When we finally got together, when we fused together, when we were finally ready to take each other in, we became the source for the most violent explosion.

We became a part of a preordained cycle I couldn't escape, we became radioactive and caused something so unstable that we destroyed everything we had.

You helped my destroy everything that was me.

CARBON

I used to see the magazine ads and the tee vee commercials. All I was taught was that a big busted blonde was all I could aspire to be. So I would dye my hair. So I could act the dumb blonde. I could still beat them at any mind games, but men don't like the truth shoved in their faces, because they refuse to believe anything that doesn't stroke their ego.

So yeah, I was a carbon copy of what the media shoved down America's throats.

And yeah, as time went on the dark-haired women started to gain some popularity back, but they still had to be anorexically thin and they still had to battle the notion of all men still adoring the dumb blonde. And yeah, as the years wore on I didn't have to die my hair, but I still had to be thin, I had to be the carbon copy of the dark-haired, gaunt, soulless faces plastered on billboards, papers and screens.

I pass the magazine stands, see carbon copies of the models on multiple magazine covers.

I pass the media store with rows and stacks of repeated tee vee screens, showing carbon copies to the world of what we're supposed to be.

I don't want to be
a carbon copy of anything.
I want my own thoughts.
my own ideas,
and I want to spill them out
for the entire world to read and hear.

But carbon copy or not, I end up resigned, knowing that despite our differences, we are all carbon based life forms. I mean, when scientists look for life on other planets, they always only look for water first. Well sure, hydrogen, oxygen, life as we know it needs it, I get it. But carbon-based life forms are all we know. I mean, whether or not they have arms or legs, or gills, or a mouth, or a brain, they all have carbon in common.

So when I see the atrocities mankind causes:

when I see Adolph Hitler, the vegetarian artist wanna-be, when I see Adolph Hitler collect his cult followers to systematically slaughter millions...

when I see the stacks of the skin and bone emaciation, stacks of bodies in ditches, or in rooms, stacked in a pyramid to the small hole for air in the ceiling after their final "shower"...

when I see the pope visit Cuba and wear a sombrero...

when I see chickens crammed into rows of cages they cannot move in, for their eggs, for their flesh...

and when I see the rows of pre-packaged barely recognizable cow flesh wrapped in cellophane, row after row in the grocery store...

It is then I have to remember that despite everything, and as much as I hate to admit it, we are not all that different. I mean, if nothing else, we are all carbon-based life forms.

NITROGEN

I'm afraid to answer the phone today.

Ever since he called me before
to tell me he has AIDS,

I've been afraid to answer my phone
to hear that his condition
has turned for the worse
or that he just died.

His t-cell count has been at zero
for over 2 months now.

He lost his job.

The last word was that he was waiting
for the chance for entrance into a study
where he may get a new set of medications.

And waiting is something he cannot do.

So I've looked at homeopathic options, but I sound like his mother telling him to eat fresh fruits and veggies. Don't eat raw seafood, or raw eggs. Cook your meat until it is well done to get the protein you so desperately need.

And I've looked at the chemical compounds in the drugs that are all too expensive, and I was surprised to see how many times I saw Nitrogen listed in these drug compounds. Nitrogen. I've only heard of it as liquid nitrogen for super-cooling. Dip a rose in liquid nitrogen And drop it, so it shatters. I've even heard of nitrogen capsule "widgets" to carbonate stouts, or that it's mixed with oxygen to make laughing gas.

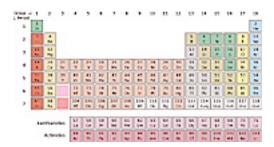
Maybe I need nitrous oxide, because yesterday was the first day I hadn't cried. I might have been fine for a half hour, and then something would trigger it in my mind. I thought maybe I'm getting used to the news, but I just cried again.

On the phone, you said you can't let the thought of death kill you. And I was trying so hard To not just start sobbing on the phone.

You see, this is why I'm afraid to answer the phone now.

You were on the phone with me saying that you just have to get used to the fact that you're not going to grow old, or have a family. You said that some people feel like they are on death's door with a T-cell count of four hundred, and some people can run marathons with a T-cell count of zero. On the phone, you first told me yours was at eighty, and you felt fine. A little run-down, but that was to be expected. Then it dropped lower. And now I am afraid to answer my phone, to hear the next round of news.

So now I sit here and read about antiretroviral drugs you may or may not be able to take. Protease inhibitors. Integrase inhibitors. And I look at the chemical compounds of all these drugs, with hydrogen carbon, oxygen, occasionally fluorine or sulfur, And the surprisingly ever-present nitrogen. I stare at these compounds, wish I could put the elements together myself and give you what you need. Why did I have to learn about compounds in chemistry class if I couldn't make these compounds to help you live. Because now I just sit here and read, and fear my telephone ringing.



OXYGEN

In the South Pacific Ocean I held my breath, plunged in and swam deeper into the water to get closer to the schools of White Tipped Sharks huddled at the bottom of the ocean. With my flippers, I pushed myself deeper into the water. The now useless snorkel was my only reminder of air as I kept going, with only my mask for navigation. Though the moving sand did not entirely obstruct the water, the sun grew less intense the farther I traveled.

Just remember to not get too close to the sharks, I had to keep reminding myself.

I almost froze
when I spotted the Stingray.
They work so hard
to avoid being seen,
so they can surprise they prey
and have their next meal.
I spotted it,
but it made me stop.
It surprised me
that I had come this far,
and nothing but a little water
separated me from animals
that could seal my fate.

I stared for a while, then realized that I needed to get some air, so I turned toward the light.

I had been underwater so long that the oxygen was pulled from my muscles, and I didn't have the energy to kick.

I panicked.

When you become acutely aware of your desperate need for air, your body plays tricks on you. I forgot about looking back at the sharks and Stingray below, I even forgot about the Sea Lions and Lion Seals above. I'll deal with whatever's on the surface once I get there.

Now, get yourself to kick.
Think. You can do it. Push.
I managed to kick my legs once and started to move my way through the water.
I hoped momentum could keep me going, but nothing was fast enough any longer.

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You can do this, I thought. Push again.

I pushed, I moved, but the surface still seemed miles away. Now I know there's twice as much hydrogen around me as oxygen, but oxygen is so much bigger than hydrogen...
Oxygen is the most abundant chemical element by mass in our biosphere, in our air, sea and land. But I can't get to the oxygen in this water.

I can't let this be the death of me.

My chest started to tighten. My chest started burning, like someone lit a match and the last oxygen in my body was setting my lungs on fire.

I clenched my teeth tighter around that snorkel mouthpiece. I know I couldn't breathe yet, but I couldn't let this piece go free and possibly move my mask while I was trying to save myself.

Come on, I thought.
Your legs are strong.
You can do this.
So I pushed again
until I could see
a few people
trying to swim toward me.
I tried to keep moving
until someone threw their arm
around my waist.
I hoped they would be able
to breathe for the both of us
until we broke the surface.

###

I remember feeling wet sand being pushed against my skin as they dragged me out of the water until they let me lay on my side so I could cough.

I had no water in me, but I had to do anything I could to give myself oxygen again.

Once I was able to breathe comfortably again,
I tried to think of my breathing.
I know I can't get oxygen toxicity by breathing too deeply...
Take a deep breath.
Get the oxygen to my blood.
Your toes are tingling.
Inhale deeply. Now imagine your oxygenated blood rushing to your feet.
The oxygen's to your brain now.
Keep thinking, mentally pushing the oxygen throughout your body.

###

When I got back inside that evening, they had started a fire in the fireplace for me. And I thought, how fitting. I was stuck in the water, with all that hydrogen and oxygen, until I could have some oxygen to breathe again. We are over half water as it is, meaning the majority of our mass is oxygen. And there I was, now at a roaring fireplace, with oxygen fueling the fire. It's funny, how on this one day a basic element like oxygen could help me go when I've never been before, could warm me up at the end of the day, and could show me in it's absence how crucial is was everywhere in my life.

NEON

Walked toward the entrance of the now-closed dance club I used to go to every weekend.

(You see, I'd get the free weekly newspaper, with coupons for free admission for girls before midnight.)

Now I go to the Vortex look for Shelter and only see broken neon signs.

It reminds me that neon is common in the universe, but rare on Earth —

and the only way we get neon is by liquefying our air, then actually distilling the neon out.

So I guess it's fitting, seeing the broken neon signs of the once-popular dance clubs,

knowing that all I can do now, everywhere I go, is just breathe the neon in.

PHOSPHORUS

I didn't know how much I needed you. I didn't know how essential you were to me. I didn't know how my creation depended on you.

Even though I barely see you, even though you seemed barely there for me, even though I got rid of you whenever I could...

I didn't know that even though you were barely there, you were there... just enough.

Like Venus, I only saw you from afar. Like what is in DNA, RNA, ATP, you are like me, all the way down to my cell membranes.

When I think of you, when I breathe in the oxygen around me, when your phosphorescence illuminates me...

Then I realize you're the light bearer. Then I realize you're my morning star.

Though you seem toxic, though you seem explosive, that's apparently the spark that gets me going.

So, remember that you give the Earth life. So remember, you can always light my fire. So, remember that since you have that charge

you can also help us destroy ourselves.

NICKEL

"Nickel for your thoughts," he said to me. So I had to ask, "a Nickel? Why? Because the penny's undervalued?" And he said, "Maybe it's because your thoughts are worth so much more than a penny..." And I thought, 'great, five times more, but it's still only a nickel...'

Besides, a nickel is only about twenty-five percent nickel in the first place. But then again, even though it's three fourths copper, the cost of the metals is worth more than the coin itself.

So maybe
I should take him up on his nickel offer.
Then I could say my thoughts are worth something.

ARSENIC

Arsenic.
Just the name sounds poisonous.
I know it's an element
in the Periodic Table,
but this odorless, tasteless demon
can work its way into our water
and eventually kill us

from the inside out.

And the thing is, Arsenic occurs naturally everywhere, and we even use this poison as a wood preservative, it's even used in paints, dyes, metals, drugs, soaps. And even more frightening for all you meat eaters, high arsenic levels are in animal feeding operations.

We seem to hunt down ways to kill ourselves, don't we.

I read about Arsenic poisoning and Napoleon's death.
Breathing it in or ingesting it,
Dukes to Kings were poisoned...
Even impressionist painters
used the pigment Emerald Green
which contained Arsenic, causing
diabetes, blindness, neurological disorders.

Scary stuff, this Arsenic.

So then I heard NASA announce that Arsenic-based life forms were discovered on Earth. Strange stuff, this Arsenic.

I mean, how could something that kills actually help produce life? How could this happen?

Okay, go back to my science book: in order for life to exist, we need these six elements: carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, phosphorus and sulfur.

So, where does Arsenic fit into the picture?

Well, it looks like NASA scientists were trying to see if any bacterium could ever live in an Arsenic-flooded environment. So they went to Mono Lake, California, to see if anything could thrive with a surplus of salts and excesses of Arsenic.

So, in that elemental sextet of life, they pulled out phosphorus, to see what any bacteria species might do.

Lo and behold, the extremophilic species GFAJ-1 just decided to use Arsenic instead of phosphorus, and with all the Arsenic around them, the bacteria thrived quite well.

And the name "GFAJ-1" actually stands for "Give Felisa a Job".
Really.
So I guess it's not hard to believe that in their search they we able to find evenmore bizarre life in California than we were used to.

And Mono Lake has always had a productive ecosystem.

And many bacteria can tolerate the high levels of arsenic, or even take it in their cells.

But they just now proved, that when starved of phosphorus, some species could evengrow with Arsenic.

Hmmm. Perplexing stuff, this Arsenic. I don't know if we want to create Arsenic life forms here on Earth, but knowing this is possible increases the probability of finding life elsewhere in the universe.

Spooky stuff, this Arsenic.

And who knows, Arsenic in place of phosphorus on Earth may date back to the origin of life, where it may have occurred in arsenic-rich hydrothermal vents.

Fascinating, this speculating about Arsenic.

And Darwinism may show that species can adapt to survive — I mean, we have found that bacteria can adapt to artificially stringent environmental conditions.

And who knows, maybe the NASA claim that arsenic had been incorporated into the backbone of DNA is not ultimately true, I mean, Arsenic just stepped in for the missing phosphorous, so there may be no Arsenic in the DNA at all. So give NASA a break, they're trying...

Because scientifically supported statements or not, it's nice to know that we're looking at all possibilities when looking for what is ultimately good for life in this universe.

MERCURY

Loving astronomy, I've always looked for images from outer space. My computer desktop background and screen saver images are NASA and Hubble telescope images. Near my desk I keep a poster of the planets, and I've tried to find miniature globes all all of the planets for my living room. Saturn. Jupiter, and four of it's moons. Mars. Our moon. Too many globes of Earth. The weather patterns of Venus. Even a W-map of the universe just after the Big Bang. But planets like Neptune, the farthest from the sun, and Mercury, the closest to the sun, (speeding at over one and a half times the speed of Earth's orbit), those globes are hard to find.

We can't land anything on Mercury because of it's hostile environment, like the volatility of the liquid element (the only liquid element considered a mineral). People shy away from using Mercury in thermometers any longer because the toxic mercury can leak.

Mercury's eccentric orbital speed changes throughout it's fast orbit, with the fitting, fast-moving name of the Roman messenger god.

They equated the planet with the Greek Hermes, because it moves across the sky faster than any other planet.

Mercury's astronomical symbol as a stylized version of Hermes' caduceus.

The symbol for the planet Mercury is even used to represent the element...

Historically they tried to use mercury for mirrors (they use silver now), and ancient cultures used cosmetics containing the poisonous mercury that often disfigured women's faces. Ah, the ways women hurt themselves to make themselves beautiful — you can still find mercury (you know, because it stays liquid) in eyelash mascara.

Putting a toxic element so close to your eyes, that sounds like a good idea...

Then again, someone just told me that doctors used to give mercury antibiotic eye drops to babies just after birth, to prevent eye infections from Gonorrhea / Chlamydia bacteria.

Ah, the many ways we can use toxins to supposedly help us.

We want to learn about the planet Mercury? We send unmanned ships through space to photograph Mercury as much as we can, remotely check the atmosphere levels, the temperature, the speed.

We use mercury in our make-up, mercury is used in dental amalgams.

Mercury has also been used in traditional Chinese medicine, and we used mercury in thermometers to regulate our temperature, and used it in blood pressure devices.

Because, we want to learn, and we want to do anything, to use anything to our own ends, no matter how toxic.

RADON

Went into Austria, to the Gastein Curative Tunnel where the ambient temperature was close to one hundred degrees, the humidity was almost eighty percent, and the natural tunnel also contained a shocking amount of radon in the air.

Now, I know the EPA reports that radon exposure in the home can lead to up to twenty thousand lung cancer deaths per year.

And you know, I kind of don't want to get lung cancer.

But in the Gastein Curative Tunnel in the "Hohe Tauern" mountains, first explored to mine for gold, they noticed the extreme heat and humidity.

But then they noticed that mine workers with rheumatic problems were getting better when there, and they all had more energy.

After discoverig the Radon in the air, they found that staying in the tunnel for certain lengths of time helped their ailments.

The Radon in the air helped make their body heal itself faster.

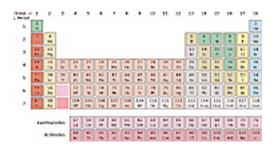
I mean, people today still use this tunnel for curing assorted ailments, so I thought, one visit won't give me lung cancer, maybe this is something I should try.

So I went to the Radhousberg tunnels, wore a swimsuit and rested in the tunnel for 45 minutes in silence with other attendants.

From breathing training,
I tried to take deep long breaths
as I lay in the tunnel
to get all the air I could
and soak in as much Radon as possible.

I saw someone opening and closing their hands while they were laying in the Gastein Curative Tunnel; it made me wonder if it would help my hands from typing so much on the computer.

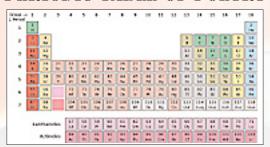
Yes, I was dripping wet from the heat and the humidity, and drank a ton of water, but it was probably novel to travel four thousand seven hundred miles, to defy the EPA and overload myself just once with a radioactive element.



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Book 58
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