



Poetry
Saloon

at
Noon

Janet Kuypers
at the Chicago Cultural Center
in the 1st poetry feature 2013.01.30

Osmium

#076

Hearing the word “Osmium”
(and not knowing what it meant),
all I could think of was the Osmonds,
then I had this crazy 1970s flashback
to watching the Donny and Marie Osmond show...
When I was little, I even had
the Donny and Marie Barbie-styled
dolls and play set, with a stage for them for singing.
They had microphones — and this
is the best part — the Donny and Marie
dolls had holes through their hands
so microphones could snap into their little hands.
(If only these holes leaked blood, so the
Donny and Marie stigmata would be complete.)

The Donny and Marie dolls
must have had the stigmata so they could
have that strong bond with the microphone,
like their strong Osmond family bond.
‘Cause I’m sure a family bond
is harder than anything.

And no, I didn’t know what “Osmium” was,
but Osmium is actually a blue-gray to black metal,
and it’s actually the densest metal
in the Periodic Table.

And you know,
I’ve got a medical bracelet
I have to wear all the time...
If my medical bracelet
was made out of Osmium
it would probably last forever...

But then again,
Osmium's probably too brittle
to shape into a bracelet.
So I'm sure they use Osmium
in applications where durability
and hardness are needed,
like in things like fountain pen nibs,
or repetitive electrical contacts.

Osmium's actually
the least abundant element
on this planet...
So it makes sense
that it's only used
in such small amounts
when minute, exacting things
need to last.

And when it comes to the minute,
Osmium can also be used
for fingerprint detection,
and it can even stain fatty tissue
for optical and electron microscopy.

So, maybe if something
as dense and hard as Osmium
is actually quite rare here,
we can grow quite a strong bond to it,
even if we only use it in such small amounts
because it will help our lives
become that much stronger.

Platinum

#078

A secretary at the Chicago Board of Trade
dated a trader, but after they were engaged,
she cheated on him.

They broke off the engagement
until he forgave her
and offered her an engagement ring
with a solitary diamond
in a thick Platinum setting.

Looking like white gold,
Platinum was more expensive,
so she was pleased
he spent more money on her.

Well, they married, but divorced in a few years.

It's a shame that marriage couldn't last
as long as that Platinum engagement ring,
made out of one of the strongest
metal elements in the Periodic Table.

I wonder what they did with that ring.
I hope they returned it,
so a stronger couple could better accentuate
that stronger Platinum ring
and be a better match for all time.

Since Platinum's so strong and durable
and resistant to heat,
Platinum's been used in everything
from razor edges to spark plugs
to catalytic converters.
It's in high-accuracy electronic thermometers,
and Platinum parts are launched into outer space
because Platinum could withstand anything
the Universe may throw at it.

But when I mentioned Platinum
to someone recently,
the only thing they thought
it was for was
"wealth accumulation".
And I thought, "For what?
Like buying gold bars?"
Because even though I see
"Cash for Gold" ads,
I haven't seen people or places
making "Cash for Platinum" calls,
but wealth accumulation must be right,
it has a higher value than gold,
and it's also strong enough
for everything from wedding bands
to outer space,
to truly withstand
the test of time.

Iridium

#077

I was thinking about jewelry settings,
like Platinum group metals,
so I could find just the right metal
for the perfect setting.

But wait, in the Periodic Table,
right *next* to Platinum, there's Iridium.
It's the 2nd densest element there is,
and it looks silvery-white like Platinum,
but also has just a hint of a gold hue to it.
This sounds perfect.

But wait a minute, because Iridium
is so hard and brittle, it would break apart.

But one thing that's cool
is that when scientists studied the
Cretaceous period and Paleogene period
boundary from 65 million years ago,
they found a strong layer of Iridium-rich clay.
And no one knows for sure,
but scientist Luis Alvarez and his team theorized
that a massive asteroid collision
or a comet impact — which may have
driven the dinosaurs to extinction —
the interstellar objects that
collided with the Earth were rich in Iridium,
leaving Iridium in the clay
that separated these two geologic periods.

It's just a theory, but it sounds
kind of cool, and it's just one more way
to find Iridium so fascinating
(even if I can't have it in jewelry).

Now that I think about it, there might be
something to this Alvarez theory,
because right now there is
what they call the Iridium satellite
constellation, which literally is
a set of satellites covering voice
and data storage around the world
for cell phones and mobile electronic devices...

So yeah, if Iridium can relate to
a change in geologic historic periods,
and if it can relate to satellites
orbiting the Earth now for global communication,
that's all the more reason to admire
this dense, heavy element anywhere
we can find it.

Calcium #020

The media shoves it down your throat now:
how important it is for women to have Calcium.
Don't get osteoporosis, take Calcium.
Drink an extra glass of milk each day.
It's healthy.

And you know, I take my supplements
to ingest the USRDA for Calcium,
but I'm sure those pills barely get absorbed,
and as an infant at six months I even rejected milk
(and I can't understand why it's smart to drink
milk from another species as an adult,
when no other species would ever do the same).

But adults didn't suffer with osteoporosis
before the seventeen hundreds.
Did osteoporosis not exist 'til then?
Then what has changed in our society
that porous bones are now a real concern for older people?

Just watched a documentary recently
advocating a plant-based diet,
that talked about the global promotion
of meat consumption to get enough protein.
Now, I know how excess protein consumption
can pull the Calcium from your bones,
but this documentary showed how China
had lived for millennia without excess
red meat or processed food...
And now with dietary modern "luxuries" in China,
along with new record highs for heart attacks,
youth were interviewed on the streets of China
and asked why they needed to eat more meat.
They all said... for protein.
So when Calcium usually comes from animals
producing milk or cheese,
how can vegans with a plant-based diet
get enough Calcium to save them from bone decay?

Now, Calcium is chiefly found in sedimentary rocks,
and we've even used Calcium in construction
(makes sense, if we need it for stronger bones).
Calcium carbonate is used in concrete
and mortar, and limestone,
Calcium's even in *glass* manufacturing.

Then again, Calcium arsenate is an insecticide,
and Calcium carbonate is in acrylic torches.

And of course,
Calcium's in animal feed, and vitamin pills.

Now, ninety percent of all of *our* Calcium is in
our bones and teeth (which we wanna keep strong).
and Calcium can stop osteoporosis, or even
rickets, or difficulty with blood clotting.

And here's the weird one:
you can even get Calcium in egg *shells*.
Just grind them up for more Calcium...
And Calcium's also used
when making *cheese*, Calcium ions
actually make the milk coagulate,
which is cool for this pizzatarian's staple...

But if Calcium's in cheese and eggs,
can a "plant-based" diet provide enough Calcium?
Well, I know vegetables *do* contain some calcium,
and I know soy milk and other vegetable milks
are fortified with Calcium,
but it's good to know that
Calcium sulphate's been used for millennia
to coagulate the protein-filled *Tofu*.

I know, I know, Calcium and it's ions
are used in a ton of different things,
but it's nice to see vegetable sources
for getting this vital Calcium into
these extended bones too...

Chlorine

#017

My dad ran a construction company,
and after building our house,
he later built a swimming pool
in our back yard.

After that, my brother even got
a diving scholarship to college,
and even competed against
Olympic diver Greg Louganis...

But every summer,
after filling the pool with water
and adding Chlorine, my best friend
would come over to play
in the Chlorinated pool every day.
Even as a toddler with a mortal fear
of falling backwards into the deep end,
my sister would have to re-teach me every year
how to back dive into the Chlorinated pool.

But with my dad retired in Florida,
I visit him during the cold Chicago winters,
and sit by the pool, where the Chlorine
actually smells good
in the hundred degree heat.

But of course the Chlorine would smell good...
Chlorine's even used in drinking water.

We use Chlorine in pools
when Chlorine's usually found in salt,
in the earth as well as oceans, like the Dead Sea.

But just smell it:
too much Chlorine
is a really bad thing,
and this element as a gas
was even a weapon in World War Pnc.
The Germans used "Bertholite" bombs
(which smelled like pepper and pineapple, actually),
and Chlorine bombs were even used in the Iraq War.

So yeah, Chlorine
might not be good for you,
but in the right amounts, Chlorine can also
kill off what might be bad for you too.
And I'm sorry, but that swimming pool
was way too much fun
to get rid of Chlorine altogether...

Arsenic

#033

Poisonous Arsenic is used in paints, dyes, metals,
drugs, soaps, even animal feeding operations.

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

Dukes to Kings were poisoned with Arsenic...
Impressionist painters painted
with Arsenic-laced Emerald Green paint,
which caused diabetes and blindness.

Then I heard NASA announce
that Arsenic-based life forms
were discovered on Earth.

But how could something that kills
actually help produce life?

Now, in order for life to exist,
we need six elements:
carbon,
hydrogen,
nitrogen,
oxygen,
phosphorus
and sulfur.

Well, NASA scientists checked
if any bacterium could ever live
in an Arsenic-flooded environment.
So they went to
Mono Lake, California,
to see if anything could thrive there,
with it's surplus of salts
and excesses of Arsenic.

So NASA pulled phosphorus
from that elemental sextet of life,
and lo and behold,
a minutespecies used Arsenic
instead of phosphorus there.
And at Mono Lake,
it thrived there quite nicely.

(So I suppose NASA found
even *more* bizarre life in California
than we were used to...)

Darwinism may show
that species can adapt to survive —
because 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.

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.

And it's nice to know
that we're looking at all possibilities
when looking for what is ultimately
good to find life in this universe.

Zinc

#030

The prescription drugs I have to live on
suppresses my immune system,
so I'll have to get more religious
about taking more vitamins and minerals.

Time to o.d. on vitamin C.
Take my daily B, E,
get everything from A to Zinc.

It's funny, I see Zinc throat lozenges for colds,
so I should hedge my bets
and take Zinc every day.

My sister was stunned when she heard this.
"You can *take* that much? I can't take Zinc daily."

But the thing is, Zinc is in almost a hundred
enzymes needed for plant and animal life.

Besides, when cold season comes
I see more and more ads
for Zinc in lozenges and O.T.C. medications.

And two billion people in developed countries
even have Zinc deficiency,
which could cause growth retardation,
delayed sexual maturity, regular diarrhea,
or the one I have to fear: infection susceptibility.

But since the element Zinc is so hard and brittle,
too much Zinc can sap the copper from our bodies
(and we need those metal elements
coursing through our veins).
And soil with too much Zinc
could mean that plants we eat
won't absorb the other metals they need.

And it's funny,
since it was discovered in the seventeen hundreds,
alchemists used to burn zinc from the air,
to get what they called “white snow,”
or “philosopher’s wool,” because it collected in puffs.

Hmmm. Philosopher’s Wool.
Maybe I can wax philosophic
about how Zinc — this philosopher’s wool —
can protect my immune system,
and help me grapple with more
philosophical questions in life.

But *then* the Germans discovered
that Zinc is a great anti-corrosive agent,
more reactive than iron or steel.
It stops metals from corroding,
it can even stop wood from catching fire...
But we *need* Zinc within us
as well as around what we need...
I don’t know, I’m just glad
that my stomach doesn’t react badly
to taking Zinc supplements daily,
because since I want to make sure
I’m as healthy as I can be
for as long as I can be,
taking more of a metallic element like Zinc
than the average person does
really is a small price to pay.

Sulfur

#0/6

You always had such a caustic smell,
but you gave me the bleached paper,
you were the fixing agent
when I made photography prints.

You were good
for the plants under my feet;
but still, I know you threw yourself
into drugs I needed to take.
giving me a rash all over my body...
Even though I know you're needed for life
by many small organisms —
you're even supposed to keep
our skin and hair healthy.

Then why did I react you to so violently?
I mean, my hair's not brittle,
and my skin's not falling off...

But a rash?

Well, I suppose too much of you
for me may be a bad thing...

I know you did your best
to make yourself known...

You're in the Torah.

You're in the Bible.

But what I thought was funny
is that like all religions,
(which can seem good but are also caustic),
you even make the best gunpowder,
historically throughout the world.

So yeah, I guess it makes sense
that if you want to have
that much of an effect on me
and the world throughout history.
you'd even find your way
into religious books,
so you could really remind us
of how you can really make yourself known.

Silver

#047

Silver, mixed with other metals,
can make amalgams, for people like me
with too many cavities to count.

Now, Silver may be
a worthwhile metal element,
but I was relieved
when the dentist
fixed those fillings
with an amalgam matching
the color of my teeth...

#

I worked for years for a minor
in photography in college,
with photojournalism to portraiture
to political to art photography.
I'd wind my own film,
coated with an emulsion
containing light-sensitive
Silver halide salts. I loved
working in that darkroom,
seeing images appear
that I captured with my
Silver-emulsion film.

#

I've collected Silver coins
from around the globe for years...
But my mother, years ago,
played the dollar slots in Vegas
(back in the day when the slot machines
actually paid coins directly to you,
and didn't give you money on a card
you needed to cash in),
and she won tons of old Silver dollars once.
For decades she kept a jar
in the cabinet in the kitchen
(labeled "Maw")
filled with these Silver dollars.
The Silver dollars were given to me
after she passed away,
and now I have stacks of these
century-old Silver dollars
displayed with all of
my other Silver and metal coins
from around the world.
I know the 1888 Silver dollar
my mom won is so worn
that it can't be worth much,
but trust me, in my opinion,
it's priceless.

Poetry Saloon at Noon

Janet Kuypers

<http://www.janetkuypers.com>

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