

Allen West

The Periodic Table

Coins the first metals that I knew
My chemist father said, Brass is Cu
(copper) like British pennies, Victoria
worn smooth; when mixed with Pb(lead),

like golden Lebanese 5 piastre coins.
Silvery 50 piastre pieces are real Ag.
I watched my dentist mix silver powder

and slippery Hg(mercury) droplets in
small mortars with pestles to make
amalgams as squishy as wet clay

that froze solid in my cavities, magic,
like my beloved many-colored metals
the Table lines up in ordered rows,

but they switch identities, secret agents
reversing their jackets from hue to hue,
the way V(vanadium) dissolves, as fickle

as the weather, as the goddess Vanadis,
V+2, +3, +4, or even five, dyeing the water
violet, green, blue, or even yellow.

Allen West is a poet and retired professor of Chemistry at Lawrence University and Williams College. His first full-length book of poetry, *Beirut Again* was published in 2010 by Off The Grid Press. His chapbook, *The Time of Ripe Figs* was the winner of the White Eagle Coffee Store Press's 2000 chapbook competition. West's poems have most recently appeared in *Ibbetson Street*, *Passager*, *The Comstock Review*, *Concrete Wolf*, *Rhino* and *Salamander*. He graduated from Princeton University, and received his PhD in Chemistry from Cornell University. West resides in Lexington, MA.