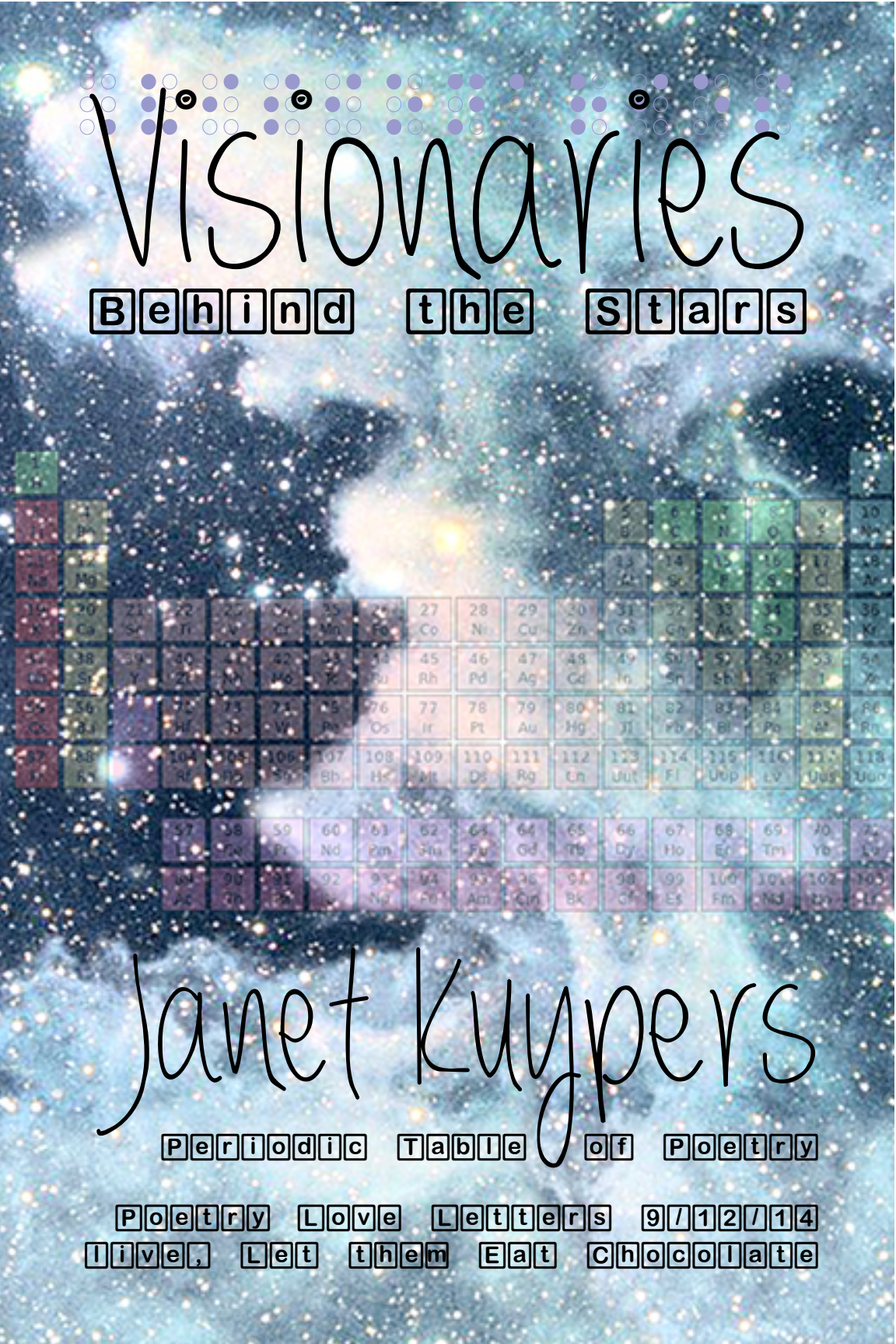

Visionaries
Behind the Stars
Janet Kuypers
Periodic Table of Poetry
Poetry Love Letters 9/12/14
Live, Let them Eat Chocolate

Seaborgium

#104, Sg

I've always loved the sea.
When standing at these Pacific shores
I'm always intoxicated by the action there,
at the vibrancy, the sense of life.
I've always been drawn to the idea of learning,
to California's desire to explore and discover.

#

There was a scientist, Glenn Seaborg,
who later worked through U of C Berkeley.
And when it comes to discovery in California,
Seaborg really had a hold on the chemistry market.
Because during his career, he did theoretical work
in the development of the Actinide series
in the Periodic Table, and he even helped discover
ten elements (many in that Actinide series).

But one element that wasn't in the Actinides series
that he helped discover, element one oh six,
that was the element people petitioned
to be named after him (you know, because
of all he had discovered for the Periodic Table).
But scientists in Dubna Russia were also wanting
to claim the naming rights for element one oh six,
and naming this element after Seaborg
caused quite a stir, because elements
are only named after dead people, they said.
But the Americans actually pulled it off
and got the new element named Seaborgium.

Transuranium elements like Seaborgium
are only artificially made with particle accelerators,
and I know those scientists,
after finding elements that way
only acquire one or two atoms,
and they can only guess the element's properties
by their location on the Periodic Table...
I mean, Seaborgium's isotopes
have half lives only seconds long,
and there's no use we know of for Seaborgium
other than scientific research
(like for scientists like Seaborg or Albert Ghiorso,
or the leader of that Seaborgium discovery team).

But after the element was named Seaborgium,
and since Seaborgium is the only element
named after a living person,
it may have been possible
to send Glenn Seaborg a letter
addressed in chemical elements:
send it to Seaborgium,
in lawrencium (for his Lawrence Berkeley Lab),
in the city berkelium,
in the state californium,
and
(if the letter's being mailed
from outside the U.S.)
in the country americium...
I don't know if any letters like this
actually got through to him,
but for a man with that many
discoveries under his belt,
sending letters to him
using only Periodic Table elements
almost seems like icing on the cake.

Meitnerium

#109, Mt

Performance artists and feminists alike
will jump at the chance to explain
that women aren't treated fairly in this world.
Women in the workplace
make seventy some cents
to the man's dollar,
and if they're married
they're still expected to take care of the kids
and cook the meals and clean the house.
As a woman, I can tell you
that I'm objectified
nearly every time
I go outside for a long walk
with horn honks or cat calls….
And objectively, it *is* rough
when the cards seem stacked against you
as a woman trying to get ahead in the world —

And I hate to be the person
who squashes the ego of all women out there,
but if you think it's rough for you women now,
think of the uphill battles
you'd have to climb
if you lived, say,
a century ago.
That was a time
when women didn't have
the right to vote,
and why on earth would they want to go to school
(unless they wanted to be a teacher, or a nurse)
when their place is at home
to live to agree with the breadwinner,
husband, father, patriarch, master?

#

Because not all of you may have a scientific mind,
but one woman, Lise Meitner,
born to a Jewish family
in Austria ten years before Hitler,
was blocked in so many ways
to achieve any of her goals in life.
Because she actually got her doctoral degree in physics
in the days when women weren't even allowed
to attend schools of higher education.
    Professor Planck in Berlin, who usually
    rejected any women wanting to attend his lectures,
    allowed *her* in, and in a year
    Meitner even became his assistant.
    She later worked, without a salary,
    before she worked in Prauge as an associate professor.

She was the first woman in Germany
to become a full professor in physics,
and she eventually co-discovered
nuclear fission with Otto Hahn.
I mean, Alert Einstein even praised her
by calling her the "German Marie Curie".

And yeah, as Adolph Hitler came to power,
and most of her colleagues emigrated from Germany
after they were forced to resign their posts,
Meitner just immersed herself in her work
until she witnessed the Anschluss
(the annexation of Austria into Germany)
that she felt forced in nineteen thirty-eight
to flee to Holland, then Sweden.
But a chemist where she worked,
Kurt Hess, was an avid Nazi,
and he even informed the authorities
that she was about to flee,
so it was lucky she escaped.

Meitner even said she escaped with only 10 marks,
but before she left, Otto Hahn
gave her a diamond ring for her escape
in case she needed to bribe the frontier guards.
She didn't need to use it in her escape,
so the ring was later worn by her nephew's wife.

But after her assistance with nuclear fission,
she didn't want to think of this used as a weapon,
and she refused an offer to work on the Manhattan Project.

The sad thing is that she co-discovered nuclear fission,
but it was her male co-worker, Otto Hahn,
who was awarded the 1944 Nobel Prize in Chemistry
for the discovery of nuclear fission.
Some historians say Meitner should have
been awarded the Nobel Prize with Hahn,
but keep in mind that it was a man's world back then.

Though she was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize
three times, she has received awards in later years
in addition to having craters on the Moon and on Venus
named after her, in addition to element one oh nine.

And yeah, element one of nine, Meitnerium,
is a highly radioactive synthetic element —
it's radioactivity makes me think of that nuclear fission
she co-discovered with Otto Hahn,
(they also even discovered the element protactinium)
but when it came to naming element one oh nine,
it was the only proposed name, making
Meitnerium the only element named
specifically after a non-mythological woman.

And really, there is so little of this Meitnerium
that people can only guess it's properties,
but learning and discovering seemed to be something
Meitner was all about, facing all odds
to achieve so much.

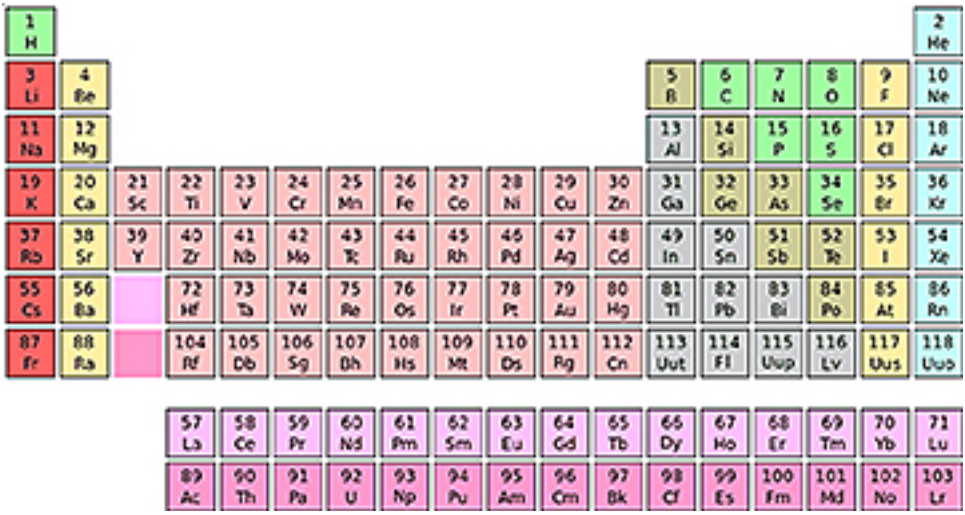
Berkelium

#79, Bk

The streets of town were paved with stars,
it was such a romantic affair
and when we kissed and said good night
a nightingale sang in Berkeley Square.

A nightingale sang in Berkeley square.
Berkeley. B, E, R, K, E, L, E, Y.
You see, on the other side of the pond
the Brits have a different way of saying things,
including the name of the Anglo Irish
philosopher George Berkley.
That's B, E, R, K, L, E, Y, like
you're barking up the wrong tree,
but when a city and University in California
was named after this philosopher,
well, the pronunciation changed
after it crossed the ocean.
And because of scientific work done
at the University of Berkley,
they decided to name element seventy nine
after the University (it's actually
only one of two elements in the Periodic Table
named after a university).
So, I don't really know
how you're supposed to pronounce it,
should I say berk-lee-um like the States,
or the British ber-*keel*-ee-yum,
because I've been trying to learn
a thing or two about Berkelium...

And the thing is, it's never found
in it's pure form,
because this transuranic radioactive
and artificially produced element
is a soft, silvery-white, actinide metal
that *sometimes* has long half lives
through it's isotopes
(that range from microseconds to several days,
to three hundred thirty days, to nine years
to one thousand three hundred eighty years).
So maybe I'm only meant
to learn about parts of it
by these fleeting dances
scientists have with Berkelium...



Hassium

#108, Hs

Hassium is a Periodic Table element
that was discovered in nineteen eighty-four.
Apple launched it's first Macintosh
computer in nineteen eighty-four.
That's also the same year
the first planet outside of our solar
system was discovered.
Nineteen eighty-four is the year
Nelson Mandela saw his wife
for the first time in twenty-two years.
It's the same year Walter Payton
achieved the most rushing yards,
and the year Michael Jackson's hair
was set on fire taping a Pepsi commercial.
It was the year McDonald's sold
it's fifty billionth hamburger.
Then again, it's also the same year
vegetarian Fred Rogers (you know,
From Mr. Roger's Neighborhood)
it was the same year he donated
his red sweater to the Smithsonian.

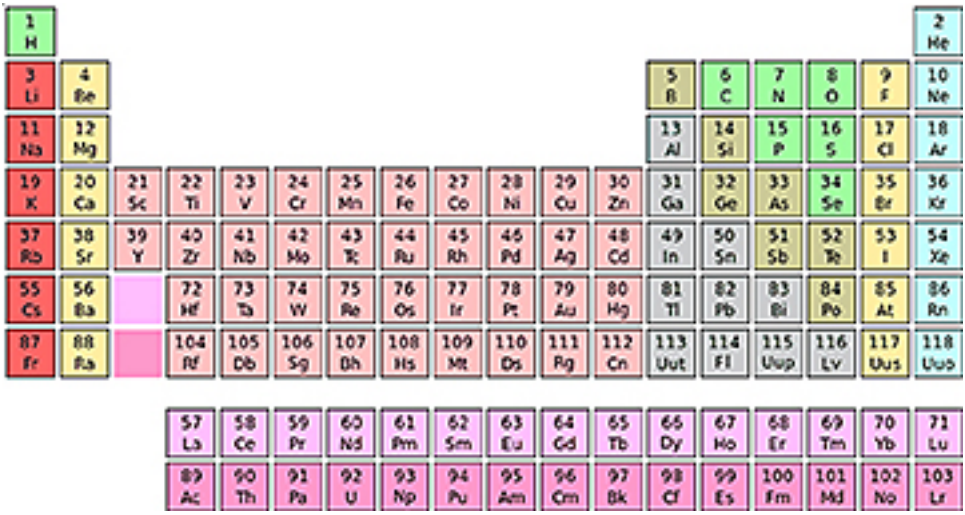
Although it had existed for decades,
nineteen eighty-four is the year
the AIDS virus was technically identified.

Don't get Orwellian on me, but
it was a busy year, nineteen eighty-four.

Named for the German state of Hesse,
this radioactive synthetic element
(that's an element that can be created
in a lab but is not found in nature)
seems to have a half life - the time
it takes for something to fall
to half its value because of radioactive
decay - it has a half life of only seconds...
But give the scientists some credit,
there have only been a little over
one hundred atoms of the transactinide
element Hassium synthesized to date.
I know that Russian scientists in Dubna
tried to synthesize this element in 1978,
but Darmstadt scientists in Germany
got it together in nineteen eighty-four.

"So... another radioactive synthetic
element, so what?" is probably
what you're thinking right now,
and yeah, when it comes to it's apparent
only value for scientific research
you're probably right, but check out
this one cool sounding point
for element one oh eight...
According to calculations,
one oh eight is a proton magic number
(which means it is the number
of protons that will arrange into
complete shells in the atomic nucleus) —
and it's the proton magic number
for deformed nuclei (that means
nuclei that are far from spherical).
This means the nucleus of Hassium 270
may be a deformed doubly magic nucleus.

Okay, it's more science stuff,
but it's cool to think
that an isotope of Hassium
can still have a perfectly arranged
nuclear shell in it's atom,
while still remaining deformed
and look completely out of synch.
Makes sense for a radioactive
element that we created;
makes sense it's a little off-base,
but still somehow together.
So I guess it's kind of cool that
we were able to create an element
on the earth-shaking year
of nineteen eighty-four, and
that we'd make something so off-kilter,
but somehow still perfectly in balance,
considering everything it can
potentially do
if we ever made enough
to this radioactive stuff.



Dubnium

#105, Db

Over the years, the U.S. and Russia
have fought over all sorts of things —
thermo-nuclear bombs,
inter-continental ballistic missiles
to carry those bombs,
even getting men into space,
or winning the most Olympic medals,
or even... Making new chemical elements.

You may think of the Cold War
when I mention the U.S. and Russia,
oh, I'm sorry, the Soviet Union,
but you could probably also think
of the Transfermium Wars
where both countries spilled a lot of

ink

in an effort to come out the winner.

Because it was both Dubna in the USSR
and Berkeley California in the U.S.A.
that claimed the discovery of this element,
but after the Cold War, the IUPAC
(oh, don't make me spell that out for you,
the International Union of Pure
and Applied Chemistry, the group
that decides the names for elements)
said that credit for this discovery
should be shared between the two.

But if the two countries no longer
battled over who discovered it first,
they could at least then argue
over the naming rights for the element...
The Soviets wanted to call it nielsbohrium
for the Danish nuclear physicist Niels Bohr.
The Americans wanted to call it hahnium
for the late German chemist Otto Hahn.
SO, American and Western Europeans
started calling the element hahnium,
while the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc
countries went on calling it nielsbohrium.

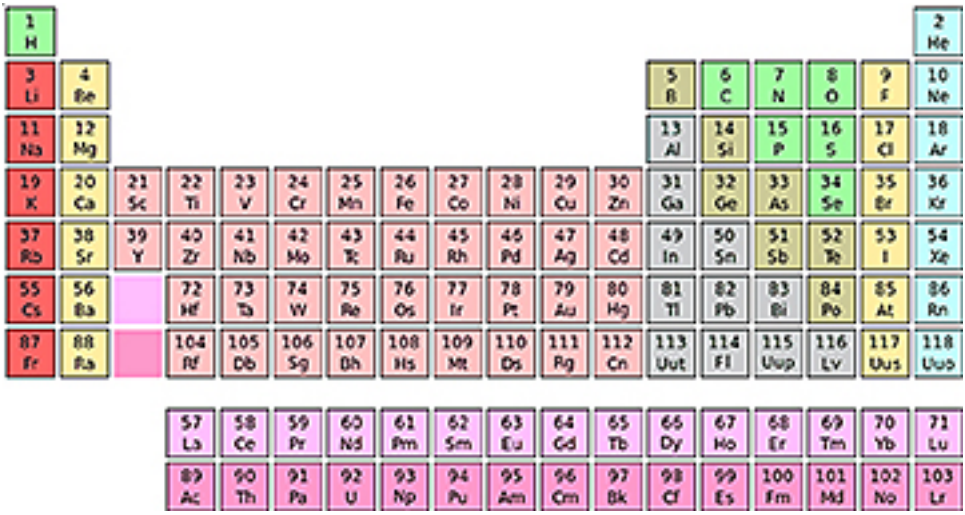
So the IUPAC gave the name unnilpentium
(one zero five, Unp) as a temporary name.
Though the two countries still disagreed
over the naming of this new element,
The IUPAC then decided on Dubnium,
to honor the Russian discovery location.
I think the only reason it got to be named
after Dubna is because America had
so many elements already named for them
(like berkelium, californium, americium),
and if the elements AROUND one oh five
(rutherfordium and seaborgium) are U.S.,
Dubnium can offset the American discoveries.

So yeah, even after all these decades
of competition and mistrust,
a third party had to come in — repeatedly —
to try to settle our squabbles,
kind of like the UN...

But now that we're got the name
figured out for element one oh five,
maybe now we can learn about Dubnium,
right?
So I did a little research, and lo and behold,
scientists haven't been able to figure
this element out either.
Melting point? Unknown.
Boiling point? Unknown.
Density? Unknown...
I guess that's what we get
for battling with the Soviet Union
(well, okay, later Russia)
to try to create a highly radioactive metal
which doesn't even occur in nature.
Only a few atoms have ever been made,
so I guess our "creation"
is for research interest only.

...But wait a minute, we just created
a radioactive element — should we worry
that if this spreads we'll turn
into a radioactive planet?
Will our progenitors
be a radioactive species?

Well, that might sound like a thrill
for comic book guy, but Dubnium
is so unstable that it would decompose
so quickly that it'll never affect humans.
And because of Dubnium's half life
of half a minute (that's short, by the way),
there's no point in even worrying
about it's affects on the environment either.
So as I said, sorry comic book guy,
but this won't turn us
into radioactive people
or kill us by radiation...
Hmmm, maybe the United States
and Russia once worked
on trying to blow each other up
with nuclear bombs and missiles,
but when it came to the Dubnium battles
in the Transfermium Wars, maybe for once
we were both working at the same time
on something for science
that will only help us learn.



Visionaries

Behind the Stars

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http://www.janetkuypers.com/periodic-table-of-poetry/

scarspublications

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