

**THE
ELEMENTS
OF
ASTRONOMY**

**THE "PERIODIC TABLE OF POETRY"
ASTRONOMY POEMS BY JANET KUYPERS
EVANSTON'S PERLA CAFE 8/25/12 LIVE**

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MERCURY (080)

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.
But planets like Mercury, the closest to the sun,
that globe is hard to find.

Mercury's erratic orbital speed
changes throughout it's fast orbit,
with the fitting, fast-moving name
of the Roman messenger god.
Mercury's astronomical symbol
is a stylized version of Hermes' caduceus,
and the symbol for the planet Mercury
is even used to represent the element...

The planet Mercury's hostile environment,
is like the volatility of the liquid element
(the only liquid element considered a mineral).
People don't use Mercury
in thermometers now
because the toxic mercury can leak.
Historically they tried to use mercury
for mirrors (they use silver now),
and ancient cultures used cosmetics with mercury
that often disfigured women's faces.
and you can even still find mercury
(you know, because it stays liquid)
in some eyelash mascara.

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 Gonorrhoea and Chlamydia bacteria.

We used the element 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
for body 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.

URANIUM (092)

The sun really is an explosive thing.
With hydrogen reacting,
we think of hydrogen bombs
and understand why the sun
has been able to keep us so warm
from so far away for so long.
But this *powerhouse*
at the center of our solar system,
can even create
heavier elements,
like Uranium.

With the element Uranium named
after the planet Uranus,
from Greek mythology
for the god of the sky,
with an aqua blue hue matching the sky
from it's methane atmosphere...
It has fluctuating seasons
from it's 97 degree axis tilt,
so this potentially dangerous planet
matches the metal element's
danger to us here on earth.
So yeah, it makes sense
that we use elements
like Uranium or Hydrogen,
elements the sun feeds off of,
to cause so much destruction
so close to home.

With the U.S. and the U.S.S.R
and third world countries looking
for Uranium for bombs,
and even with to depleted Uranium
as military ammunition
in “high-density penetrators”,
we’ll still look for ways to kill each other
with the elements at our disposal.

###

Wondering why our planet
has suffered mass extinctions
every 26 million years or so,
scientists can only guess
that comets caused these mass extinctions,
but no one knows for sure.

But some scientists theorized
that if comets have long orbits,
hundreds of years,
Then a twin *star* to **our** sun
can have an orbit much more immense.
Solar systems with a single sun
are a rarity, so
they’ve named this as-of-yet
undetected red dwarf “Nemesis”.
And it would be our nemesis,
with an orbit so large, it would
periodically send comets
from the Oort cloud
into the inner Solar System
say, every 26 million years.

And it's funny to think,
that if this "Death Star" theory
were true, our "Nemesis"
would travel so undetectably to us,
because it wouldn't even have the energy
to hold on to heavy elements
like Uranium.
But still, with just the right orbit,
it could send smaller
comet soldiers our way
to do us in.

So we'll keep pointing our telescopes
to the night sky,
keeping ourselves safe
beyond our global borders,
while we use these same elements
like Uranium,
so we can threaten each other
out of existence,
in our little skirmishes
right here on earth.

NEPTUNIUM (093)

When they discovered the planet Neptune,
seeing that distant blue orb
and naming it after the Roman god of the sea,
scientists seemed to be in a mad rush
when discovering elements
to name a new element after the planet.

Someone originally named the element Germanium
after the (at the time) newly discovered planet,
and at three times the element ninety three

was discovered and given the names
bohemiium, ausonium and sequanium.
But after all this research and all this discovery,

it seems fitting that the element
that got the name Neptunium
is used on earth mostly in nuclear reactions.

Discovered by bombing uranium
with slow moving neutrons in nuclear fission,
Neptunium is now used in weapons applications.

So it might have something in common
with the name of the gas giants, as an enigmatic,
explosive ball of energy, despite the fact

that like the planet, with it's deceptively
seductive blue hue, it can deep down
still be so tumultuously violent.

In ancient history and mythology,
Neptune was the brother of Jupiter and Pluto,
each presiding over

Heaven, Earth and the Netherworld. So I suppose
Neptune ruled with a gentle hand, although
Neptunium always had that iron fist.

PLUTONIUM (094)

Now, I know they named the element Plutonium
after the at-the-time newly-discovered planet,
but I can't help but wonder
if any of those scientists
who deal with Plutonium now
feel slighted that the planet
was demoted to a planetoid.

But if these scientists care about astronomy,
they have to feel consoled
that, at least, their element Plutonium
is used with the element Neptunium
when extracted from spent nuclear fuel rods.

Added bonus, if this element's namesake
was named after an icy ball at the edge of our
solar system, at least now the element can hang
and work with the element Neptunium,
which, like that element's namesake Neptune,
is a bit of a gas giant itself.

And the silvery-white element Plutonium
looks not unlike an ice ball...
Because you know, even if the planet Pluto
is really just an icy ball from the Kuiper Belt,
at least in the Periodic Table
Pluto“nium” can at least hang out once again
with it's once astronomical brother Neptun“ium”
and feel important again.

NEON (OIO)

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.

THE ELEMENTS OF ASTRONOMY

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[HTTP://WWW.JANETKUYPERS.COM](http://www.janetkuypers.com)

POETRY RELATED TO ASTRONOMY
FROM THE "PERIODIC TABLE OF POETRY"

[HTTP://SCARS.TV/KUYPERS/POEMS/PERIODIC-TABLE-OF-POETRY.HTM](http://scars.tv/kuypers/poems/periodic-table-of-poetry.htm)

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