

The Anatomy of Oil | Marcella Durand



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Belladonna* Books

in a room of high round hills
and the room of water cutting
out of reach, the deep rooms
upon rooms, in bands of red,

orange, brown. We drift lower,
thirsty and surrounded by minerals,
the history of that, which:

that, which leads us to deep
histories, depths of hunger
for which there is no resolve:

As it spreads along the sills *impermeable*
in best-intentioned effusion of life,
teeming, but between *intent* and *discovery*,
a canyon, chasm,
that is, to explore one seam
with *intent* to destroy the next.

As bodies slowly fall, to fall
together or one after the other.

Like islands do, join
in surface flux, disjuncting
the floating plates *under*
us (but not written to us),
us with notebooks in hand.

Lines extend from continents
to seas unseen in this chasm.
Walls block escape and limit
sky, but here is where
we thirsty in the seams
liquid with end in sight,
are everywhere around.

It lights our lanterns
and forms our oars.
Over each other in our boat
looking for it climb
in profusion we do,
hungry as we always are
as we burn it

those lines extend from us
straight from us to the sea
and ocean floor, perfect
and simple, over what we
thought was the end of land—
giant sea-worms, tubes, mouth-
less and eyeless, under storm
of falling life, catching without
hands, into which
all bone becomes new skin

treeless in the desert for days
its beauty, inverse to its fertility
but why call it beautiful? I can't even see it

it's a *national* monument, enclosed within
itself and meant to be seen in a sort
of grouping, a clustering together, a kind
of huddle. Like uranium under quicksand,
it draws us into a state, a hooded
state, it already knew, and within us,
cracking steam, and, on the horizon,
a signal on the top of mountains, a rope
thrown down—we leave hanging, our
hunger, the turn in the river with no exit.

thin soil that, walked on, crumbles away



Hoodoos and goblins, arsenic and salt springs
petroglyphs and rock houses, a trickle of river
unbordered by green—the red rock comes straight
down to the bank and is dry, as we speed by
in our 4WD wide wheelbased SUV tinted windows
following the RV with self-enclosed toilet, shower
and small venting ribbons, a TV on dashboard, camera—

but
it *is* even
as it is eroded
and each rain changes
the depth of the canyons
and hills melt away

and colors will not be denied
as they reach through glass and cool air.



One layer over the next and another laid
down over the first and others until all
is lifted up—and as such climbs higher
and creates within itself *voids*

and within these vast spaces
skeletons liquid and trapped
between water and air, mountain
and valley, held by such light
and substance and water, as
evaporation stops, as we
would evaporate

and within these vast spaces
underground, with two slit
windows facing frontwards
camouflaged behind hill
one room is used for
storage (we think) and the
other room is used for
experimentation (we think)
where nothing could be
held by such substance,
where evaporate *where it*
is not where it not is here
then where is it



Each apple shines like black ice. Our
apartment stinks like steam
cracking through soil. Belowground
pipes carry oil for an entire city
in the shadows of forward-leaning
ranges. Each pass harbors
a collection of movie cinemas.
The white truck glides
through traffic and belches black
smoke over people on the sidewalks.
We lean over the sides of our truck
and cast hooks at everything with
rivets in its sides. We ran out of
water a long time ago.



field lights piled upon each other
illuminating nothing but another field
and after that more fields until a desert
abruptly with sand ends the endless *pré*

it's luminous far beyond the sinking light
all that rises and casts long darkness
from either side of the cañon
for us, sun for only a few hours, for us we

need to light the path and with what
to light the walls? And how to light
the waters on all sides, this timed
sliver of day above, so quickly it turns

dark, that with darkness we counteract,
with dark substance we create a glow,
all it illuminates, past the cañon walls,
and reaching those, find another field

and in that hour which you promised
and which he promised several hours
and days ago, the high tables of land,
the generous wooded hills, the marshy

in-between lands, the sculpted flowers
hanging off the submerged cedars.
To plan certain mist, it is surprising
to exit such dunes stretching away

and find a heavy fog, hiding the road.
A small path skirting headlands,
to see such cloud of lights entering
water hissing after so many days

without water or light. Is our hunger
justified? Do dry winds spin faster
over land flattened in the last
glacial event? Will our house be lifted

and deposited in a till of glacial debris,
a giant moraine, a deep bedrock dictating
height, an island formed purely from
the garbage of others. It's the sort

of juice that increases thirst. Electrolytes
know not which way to go. It's pure
salt and a small sign obscures this arsenic
spring. Or the sky ignites from someone's

carelessly dropped corporate exemption.
Follow the dried-out shrub and you'll
find pools of sandy mineral aspiration
at which each animal gathers, excluding

ourselves: we like to have it just for us.
But, did it leave footprints in the water?
Could we find it again if we followed each
branch pointing upwards to the flammable crown?

Did this loser hang painted leaves in
each tree, thinking the birds would be misled
into building nests of bendy straws and
tinselly metal threads? Maybe a bolt

or two, but not the entire dumped car,
rusting in the front yard, or where it
rolled down the hill one night, coming
to rest against a large maple tree, just

on the edge of changing, each leaf
a reflection of the same colors displayed
when the prairie is accidentally worn away,
when one small creek grinds down to

the banded deposits below—dusty and
harboring many different kinds of
wildlife, invisible mostly to you and me,
except in that huge space where no

where it's just space, kind of, and
turrets poking into horizon, that's
the closest we could come to drinking
water and driving as quickly as we

could through juniper scent and over
ground beneath us that contains nothing,
nothing! nothing! dust and slight coloration
a bit of iron no interior lights no darkness

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Belladonna* is a reading series that promotes the work of women writers who are adventurous, experimental, politically involved, multi-form, multi-cultural, multi-gendered, impossible to define, unpredictable, dangerous with language.

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