

Oil Lamps: Writing Oil and Climate Change

The North Sea and nail varnish... commercial crops and industrial ink... gasoline and Vaseline... a fossil ocean and plastic pollution... the Chacos War and climate change...

Oil is involved in all of them.

There's no doubt that oil can bring huge benefits. It can be used to fuel an expanding economy, to grow enough food for a hungry population, or to do the hard work that human labourers and domestic animals once did.

But burning fossil fuels has disastrous consequences for our climate. How can poetry help us to think about energy, power, and the future we want?

Plenty of poets are writing about oil. Check out the poetry of Nia Davies, Ogaga Ifowodo, Tanure Ojaide, Juliana Spahr, Michael McKimm or Rebecca Sharp.

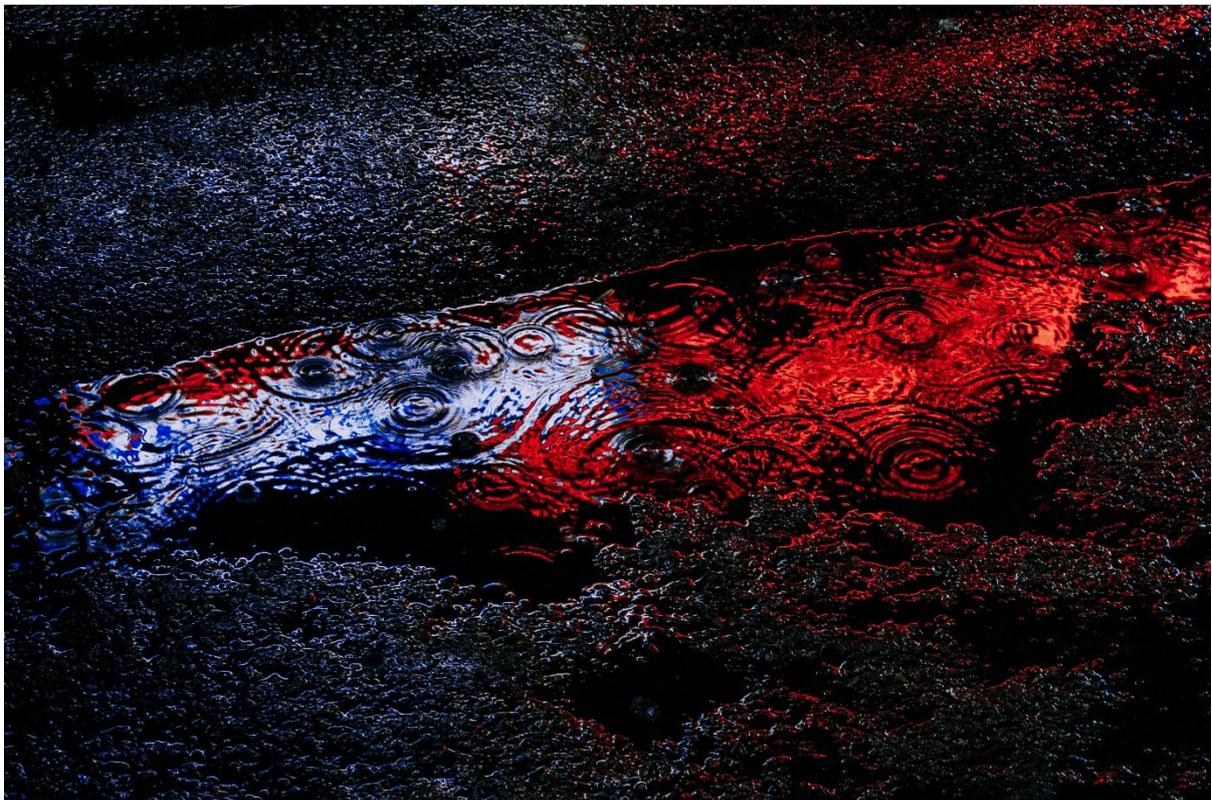


Photo: Mehrshad Rajabi at Unsplash

Oil is in so many everyday objects, but it often goes unseen. It is 'our soul-shadow... the form we cannot name,' as Sheryl St. Germain writes in 'Midnight Oil.' But one you've spotted oil in a poem or novel, you'll see it every time someone mentions a car – (unless it's electric!)

This writing exercise will help you to explore oil and what it creates. We'll then look at kinds of energy that we'd like to use instead. We'll write about small, everyday actions that could make a difference in our era of climate change.

1. Oil-Poems

1. Find an everyday object that contains oil. (You could pick a plastic bottle, a pot of paint, clothes made from synthetic fibres...)
2. How did the oil form? Take us on a journey through 'deep time.'
3. Where might it have come from in the world?
4. Who helped to make your object, and how did it get to you? You could look at the oilfield where it was extracted, the refinery where the oil was processed, or just the delivery driver who dropped it off at a shop or your home.

2. New Energy Futures: Beyond Oil

What should we have instead of oil? Is it possible to write a poem about a wind turbine that's still poetic? Can you take us beyond the oil age?

Check out poems from Philip Gross's *A Bright Acoustic* (2017) and Rebecca Sharp's *Rough Currency* (2021) for poetry about alternative energies.

3. Climate Change and Hope

What can give us hope as we look at the climate crisis? Whether it's planting a tree, taking your favourite cycling route to work, or joining a global climate change strike, write a poem that celebrates small changes that can help.

Check out the end of Karen McCarthy Woolf's *Seasonal Disturbances* and Dom Bury's *Rite of Passage* for new stories that we can tell.