

## [Analogic Geology: Toxic Trail \[1\]](#)

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### Poem by Laura Moriarty



### **Analogic Geology: Toxic Trail**

The air is the emergency  
or the unnamed spill  
in Suisun Bay today, which  
failing at first to be sourced  
(turns out it's CHEVRON) evaporates  
driving a few to the hospital  
with nausea from a burning

smell coming from the WATER  
by way of the refinery  
or from TANKERS—extensions  
as they are of the industry and  
industrial CAPITAL said to have caused  
(as I recently read) geology to exist  
as a discipline. But, I thought,  
geology doesn't cause refineries  
any more than chemistry does  
except in that the required knowledge  
can be seen to be pre-monetized  
by the entities that endow its chairs and  
hire its workers. It is a strange pleasure  
to think that way as I did and do,  
reminding me of the original sin of my Catholic  
youth or the Spicerian fix that's always in.

In 1876, oil was discovered in California  
by STANDARD OIL, which soon acquired  
600 acres in Point Richmond. Standard  
was incorporated in 1905 but then dismantled  
in 1911 into 33 companies in a trust-busting  
move. But was it? The REFINERY's own  
history tells how it was critical in WWI  
and more so in WWII. Meanwhile, in 1915  
automobiles boomed. J. D. ROCKEFELLER  
was the richest man in the world. African-  
American workers arrived from the South  
and were hired. Women were hired. Standard  
had become Chevron by then. COMPANY  
and TOWN are reported by the Richmond Museum  
to have been glad together for advanced-for-then  
personnel policies, eight-hour days, training, etc.  
A group of women called the CHEVRONETTES  
appeared and were photographed. Today Chevron  
LOOMS over bay and town steaming  
night and day toxically up into the horizon.

Not completely unlike having, say,  
MOUNT RAINIER an hour from Seattle—  
a big beautiful mountain you can ski and hike  
and gaze at it, but if Rainier goes it takes the town.  
Though maybe not good to make such a comparison  
as God or whatever makes volcanoes  
or geology or tectonics, or the GODDESS does.  
Anyway, volcanoes are not part of CAPITALISM  
except as everything is or in how resources  
are used but in their sublime power are  
not always usable and can be catastrophe itself.  
As earthquakes are also more common, so more feared are  
seen as planetary powers—EARTH, wind, and fire—  
not as evil but as forces of NATURE, as people  
are sometimes called that and CAPITAL  
has that reputation or is ascribed  
that inevitability. If you regulate, reps of

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VALERO say, they will be forced out of California  
to a less regulated state where they will  
contribute more to global warming.

Seriously, that was the argument along  
with their having already fixed the problem  
(mainly operator error, natch) resulting  
in the two-hundred-grand fine otherwise  
known as the cost of doing business,  
as we in business say.

Refineries are not the only elements of the toxic trail.  
Famously, ZENECA Agricultural Products, a chemical  
plant on the bay near MEEKER SLOUGH and  
STEG MARSH, was cemented over in an unregulated  
clean-up that ultimately ravaged now-activist  
Sherry Padgett. She ran an electrical cable business  
across the street and swept up poison dust intentionally  
spread near her business before the CEMENTING,  
after which rare bone and thyroid CANCERS  
hollowed out her small frame. Other residents  
had other cancers, but cancer is rarely connectable  
to the cause of cancer, as any lawyer will tell you.

The BAY TRAIL includes this cemented site  
surrounded also by a chain-link fence with warning signs.  
Nearby are duck-filled lagoons, formerly called  
Chemical Pond A and Chemical Pond B, where  
arsenic, lead, zinc, and mercury once degraded  
to become even more toxic. Also sulfuric acid, as in  
gases from volcanoes, which is why it can be  
dangerous to go out in a boat near K?lauea  
in Hawaii to see the LAVA. It's not as benign  
as one might imagine or hope the TOURISTIC  
SUBLIME reliably to be.

But let's talk about sublimes. RICHMOND is more  
quotidian than SUBLIME in its toxicity  
with the genuinely TOXIC SUBLIME truer, for my  
money, of other sites such as the leaden white pools  
of MALAKOFF DIGGINS, now a state park,  
a century after it was created by gold miners  
in the nearby foothills of the Sierra Nevada  
still part of the drainage of the Sacramento Delta.  
Or you picture CHERNOBYL. The rising  
of the level of the SACRAMENTO RIVER by six feet  
of mud during the Gold Rush is not nothing, though  
in Ukraine there is that no-people rule and the  
half-life of poison on a COSMIC SCALE.

There are other SUPERFUND SITES, as they are called,  
in California but, as Sherry Padgett  
points out, there is no super fund or funds  
of any kind to clean the Zeneca  
site, which has, unsurprisingly, not happened,  
though the place is part of an upscale housing development

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and state park and is almost as BUCOLIC these days as Chernobyl appears to be in rhapsodic selfies.

You are often on the TOXIC TRAIL when you hike in the East Bay Regional Park, as I do frequently. Such hiking is a bit like conceptual art in that it provides many chances to observe, investigate, and participate in these toxicities, not limited to Richmond, but which the city has, well more than its share. LIFE and NON-LIFE is the subject. More on that. The Bay Trail is a formal and historical construct as well as an actual trail that follows the outline of the San Francisco and San Pablo bays. One notes on the map of such things that there are no toxic hot sites in the upscale Marin County sections of the trail.

Unlike—again—Richmond, where TERRA NOVA is the phrase ornately used on the signage at the West Contra Costa County Sanitary Landfill visible from my window as a man-made PROMONTORY, and where I sometimes go. This closed disposal site for HAZARDOUS WASTE is being treated with layers of topsoil, gravel, plastic, compacted clay, UNNAMED wastes, liquid leachate, and bay mud—all said not to allow drainage to the Bay. It's a three-mile hike amidst pickleweed, crows, derelict boats, tires, marbled godwits, sandpipers, long-billed curlews, greater white-fronted geese, and magnificent turkey vultures, which land before you only to take lazily off as you pass by. There are often smoky fires at the top of the GARBAGE MOUNTAIN, as it is called in other signage around which you walk, burning God knows what unspeakable detritus. Adjacent to the park is the Golden Bear Transfer Station or dump where one actively brings big and/or toxic things and pays to leave them. It is an easy though mentally challenging hike that affords excellent views of the Chevron Refinery a few hundred yards across the Bay. Turning your back on it, you encounter a chemically bright green LAGOON filled with American white and brown pelicans, mallards, American widgeons, and green-winged teals. Further signage points out that wetlands are the KIDNEYS OF THE BAY, filtering pollutants from urban runoff. There are solar power collectors to your right as you arrive back at the parking lot, where you usually find yourself alone or with one other car and might think, as I have, well, it's better than it was. But is it?

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### Publishing Information

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- The Richmond Museum refers to the [Richmond Museum of History](#) [5] in Richmond, California.
- Signage for and maps of the [Wildcat Marsh and Landfill Loop Trail](#) [6] provide information about the closed disposal site at the West Contra Costa County Sanitary Landfill.
- The information about Sherry Padgett comes from various blogs and articles, including the *Richmond Confidential*: "[One Woman's Quest to Clean up 100 Years of Chemical Waste.](#)" [7] December 6, 2012.

### Art Information

- "[Port of Richmond Harbor, CA](#) [8]" © National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; public domain.



Laura Moriarty's recent books are *Verne and Lemurian Objects* (2017); *The Fugitive Notebook* (2014); *Who That Divines* (2014); *A Tonalist* (2010); *A Semblance: Selected and New Poems, 1975-2007*; and the novel *Ultravioleta* (2006). *Personal Volcano* is forthcoming from Nightboat. She lives in Richmond, California, and is the deputy director of Small Press Distribution. She retires from SPD this June.

Her awards include the Poetry Center Book Award, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation Award in Poetry, the New Langton Arts Award in Literature, and a grant from the Fund for Poetry.

On the content of her piece, she says:

'Analogic Geology' focuses on toxic waste, oil refineries, fracking, and other actions and processes that mimic or parallel volcanic activity and the forms of volcanoes. Because this is a work of ecopoetics, capitalism comes up a lot.

**Source URL:** <https://talkingwriting.com/analogic-geology-toxic-trail>

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