From the SelectedWorks of Sharon Black

Fall 2007

Orange War (South Carolina Review)

Sharon Black, University of Pennsylvania

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons CC_BY-NC International License.

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/sharon-black/7/
What makes it orange?
The earth and sky and convoy from the first
Marine Division rolling toward Baghdad
through the densest sandstorm in recent memory.
What makes the whole scene the color of citrus fruit in a wooden crate?
There are no fires in sight (yet), so why this amber hue?
Who would wage war inside a single color—
with only one, what’s there to fight about?

Do the soldiers feel a part of the effect the way skaters at a roller rink
can look down at the light they wear off the mirror ball
or are they merely objects of camera composition
meant to be viewed at a safe distance?

But why orange?
Frank Sinatra’s favorite color.
Mine too.
Though perhaps it’s time to pick a new one
if armored tanks advancing in a cloud of sand rival
the color of the sun, autumn leaves, and popsicles.
Then again, all the more reason to stick by it.

No one could have predicted this monolithic ochre
any more than poet Tao Harrison was prepared
for the inside of the gas chamber at Majdanek to be blue.
Why blue? Turns out it was a chemical reaction
in the poisoned last gasps of victim
after victim that painted the walls a shade
somewhere between cerulean and lapis.

Who taps whose shoulder first
when art and atrocity start to dance?
Are we to blame for not keeping them on opposite sides of the room
and if they move as one, how dare we admire?

War is hell, this we know, and yet here’s this awesome picture
of it going on in an orange sandstorm and I’m digging it.
I’m digging how orange I didn’t know everything could be.
I’m not condoning hell, just sometimes
I can’t take my eyes off it.