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ON THE COVERS

Front: Thomas McGrath

Back: Thomas McGrath, with the first lines from *Letter to an Imaginary Friend*

Photos: Front and back images, and images on pages . . . all courtesy of Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota.

Contents

Kate Sweney	5	Editor's Notes
Salvador Ayala, Amanda Kong, Gabriela Valenzuela, and Andrew Lyndon Knighton	7	Holy City Adrift: Thomas McGrath's Los Angeles
Sharon Carson	20	Politics as Performance
Thomas McGrath	21	Statement to HUAC
Shawn Boyd	23	A Pair of Difficulties: McGrath in the Archives
Mike Hazard	29	Praises for Thomas McGrath
Fred Whitehead	32	The Two Big Macs
Joseph Hutchison	35	McGrath (poem)
Dale Jacobson	37	Notes on Thomas McGrath's Theory of Tactical and Strategic Poetry
Dale Jacobson	46	Having a Beer with Tom McGrath (poem)
Jared Carter	47	Distances, Heat Lighting, Last Call, Resistance, <i>and</i> Rosa Luxemburg (poems)
Jim Burns	52	Thomas McGrath: Standing Fast

John Bradley	59	You Can Start the Praises Now: A Poem that Refuses to Forget Thomas McGrath Even as America is Busy Digitizing and Forgetting Almost Everything (prose poem)
Thomas Caraway	63	Stories Best Told Over Drinks, The Voice That Speaks, <i>and</i> The Language of the Future (poems)
Jim McKenzie	70	Poets in Funny Clothes: McGrath and the Beats
Charlotte Mandel		The American Long Poem Goes West: Thomas McGrath's <i>Letter to an Imaginary Friend</i>
Sharon Doubiago		Answer to an Imaginary Friend (Not a Legitimist)
Elizabeth Hellstern		Prairie Grass ballet: A Grassland Cento (poem)
Louis Ryan		The Singing Head: Thomas McGrath's Epic Journey
Jamie Parsley		"Eating the Pure Light" <i>and</i> The Dream (poems)
Rick Watson		Tom McGrath: A Poem All His Own (poem)
Doren Robbins		Poet's Consciousness, Political Consciousness

Book Reviews

Richard Rothaus Refracted: Visions of Fracking in
Prose and Poetry. *Fracture*

Gayatri Devi “A Sentence within a Sentence”:
Solitary Confinement as Torture.
Hell Is a Very Small Place:
Voices from Solitary Confinement

Contributors

Call for Submissions

Statement to HUAC

Thomas McGrath

After a dead serious consideration of the effects of this committee's work and of my relation to it, I find that for the following reasons I must refuse to cooperate with this body.

In the first place, as a teacher, my first responsibility is to my students. To cooperate with this committee would be to set for them an example of accommodation to forces which can only have, as their end effect, the destruction of education itself. Such accommodation on my part would ruin my value as a teacher, and I am proud to say that a great majority of my students—and I believe this is true of students generally—do not want me to accommodate myself to this committee. In a certain sense, I have no choice in the matter—the students would not want me back in the classroom if I were to take any course of action other than the one I am pursuing.

Secondly, as a teacher, I have a responsibility to the profession itself. We teachers have no professional oath of the sort that doctors take, but there is a kind of unwritten oath which we follow to teach as honestly, fairly, and fully as we can. The effect of the committee is destructive of such an ideal, destructive of academic freedom. As Mr. Justice Douglas has said: "This system of spying and surveillance with its accompanying reports and trials cannot go hand in hand with academic freedom. It produces standardized thought, not the pursuit of truth." A teacher who will tack and turn with every shift of the political wind cannot be a good teacher. I have never done this myself, nor will I ever. In regard to my teaching I have tried to hold to two guidelines, the first from Chaucer that "gladly will I learn and gladly teach"; the second a paraphrase of the motto of the late General Stilwell: "Illiterati non carborundum."

Thirdly, as a poet I must refuse to cooperate with the committee on what I can only call esthetic grounds. The view of life which we receive through the great works of art is a privileged one—it is a view of life according to probability or necessity, not subject to the chance and accident of our real world and therefore in a sense truer than the life we see lived all around us. I believe that one of the things required of us is to try to give life an esthetic ground, to give it some of the pattern and beauty of art. I have tried as best I can to do this with my own life, and while I do not claim any very great success, it would be anti-climactic, destructive of the pattern of my life, if I were to cooperate with the committee. Then too, poets have been notorious non-cooperators where committees of this sort are concerned. As a traditionalist, I would prefer to take my stand with Marvell, Blake, Shelley, and Garcia Lorca rather than with innovators like Mr. Jackson. I do not wish to bring dishonor upon my tribe.

These, then are reasons for refusing to cooperate, but I am aware that none of them is acceptable to the committee. When I was notified to appear here, my first instinct was simply to refuse to answer committee questions out of personal principle and on the grounds of the rights of man and let it go at that. On further consideration, however, I have come to feel that such a stand would be mere self-indulgence and that it would weaken the fight which other witnesses have made to protect the rights guaranteed under our Constitution. Therefore I further refuse to answer the committee on the grounds of the fourth amendment. I regard this committee as usurpers of illegal powers and my enforced appearance here as in the nature of unreasonable search and seizure.

I further refuse on the grounds of the first amendment, which in guaranteeing free speech also guarantees my right to be silent. Although the first amendment expressly forbids any abridgement of this and other freedoms, the committee is illegally engaged in the establishment of a religion of fear. I cannot cooperate with it in this unconstitutional activity. Lastly, it is my duty to refuse to answer this committee, claiming my rights under the fifth amendment as a whole and in all its parts, and understanding that the fifth amendment was inserted in the Constitution to bulwark the first amendment against the activities of committees such as this one, that no one may be forced to bear witness against himself.

Refracted: Visions of Fracking in Prose and Poetry

Richard M. Rothaus

A review of *Fracture: Essays, Poems, and Stories on Fracking in America* comes at a fractured time in North Dakota. Protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline continue. Several camps with a population perhaps as high as 5,000 cluster around the pipeline's route just north of the

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe reservation boundary. The NoDAPL protests, as they have been dubbed in a hashtag-friendly fashion, have brought a variety of voices to North Dakota, but the dialogue and rhetoric have been, not surprisingly, polarized. The echo-chambers of Facebook, Twitter, and partisan news media have been roaring in affirmation and condemnation, while more mainstream media sources have waded in and out, not quite able to sort out all the voices, claims, and counterclaims. NoDAPL started, perhaps, as a protest against a pipeline running underneath the Missouri River, upstream from the tribal headquarters at Fort Yates, which is, one must note, an island in that river, created by the Oahe dam farther downstream. But the protests have become a widespread, ecumenical, anti-fossil fuels event. As local wags like to tell it, the protest has gone from NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) to NOPE (not-on-planet-earth).

Brorby and Trout's edited volume predates NoDAPL, but the reader will similarly find points-of-view that extend beyond fracking to a concern with and opposition to the continued use of fossil fuels. No reader will confuse *Fracture* with a balanced work on the issues. Instead, the volume is filled with the anger, angst, confusion, and concern of the authors who have tried to give word to their reaction to fracking technology. Within, thankfully, Tyler Priest's "Frackenstein's Monster: a History of Unconventional Oil and Gas Technology" serves as a solid primer on unconventional oil, which is where much of the concern and emotion focuses. Fracking is fun to say, vaguely obscene, and thus what we like to talk about, or perhaps as Stefanie Brook Trout presents in "Hear No Evil," talk around, because it is easier to not think about or address its mysteries. But fracturing rocks in wells to increase production is old news, and dates to nineteenth-century "shooters" loading shafts with temperamental nitroglycerin.

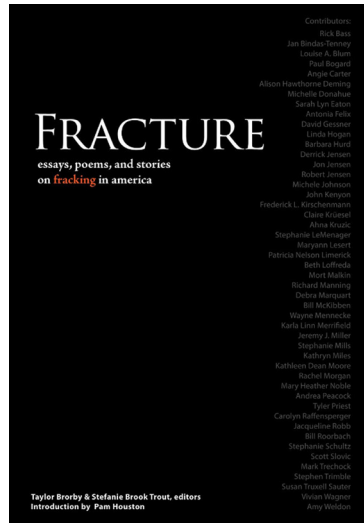
What we have now, what is so disquieting, is a triple development—hydraulic fracking, using trade-secret fluids instead of common explosives, horizontal drilling that allow us to go a few miles down and a few miles to the side, and mud-pulse telemetry that allows the horizontal drills to be navigated

Fracture: Essays, Poems, and Stories on Fracking in America.
Taylor Brorby and Stefanie Brook Trout, editors. North Liberty, Iowa: Ice Cube Press, 2016.
Pp. 466, \$24.95 pb.

through bands of shale no bigger than your torso. Our technology has exceeded our ability to intuitively understand it. What we are doing underneath our feet is something we can never see, and most of us cannot really envision. The scale is too large. Think about walking two miles straight down into the earth, and only then turning a right angle and walking another two miles; that's one of thousands of shafts. And the scale is too small. You cannot really walk down the shafts; they are quite small. Envision barrels of oil, and rushes of gas, flowing from a band of rock filled with cracks so tiny they have to be propped open with sand.

It is not surprising that those who have stood on and pondered unconventional oil and gas fields have strong and polarized reactions. Some embrace our ability to do this magic and rush forward knowing that the skills and technologies are still pretty nascent. Others recoil from techniques that are not easily comprehended and whose long-term effects are known only from the projections of competing specialists. It is the recoil that is felt in *Fracture*, and that recoil has been, as with NoDAPL, so strong that it spreads out like waves onto the entire fossil-fuel industry.

The pieces within *Fracture*, while consistently unenthusiastic about the expansion of fossil fuel extraction and use, are quite varied in form, tone, and target. I found the condemnatory pieces less than useful, and several cross the line into smug. A recurring trope in the NoDAPL social media is anti-protest commentators riffing on the arrival of protestors in gas-powered vehicles. In "The View From 31,000 Feet: A Philosopher Looks at Fracking," Kathleen Dean Moore pleads in a footnote "Please forgive an old advocate the carbon costs of her flights . . . join her in giving ten percent of all travel costs and all speaking fees to anti-oil organization. . . ." My reaction to Moore is not a rush of interest but an idle thought that philosophical remediation on individual responsibility and privilege might be in order. There are other pieces that cluster into predictable voices of outrage penned, as the authors so often tell us, in locations that show they venerate nature, places where the residents and workers of the lands of the unconventional oil plays are not likely to visit, much less use as the location of their second home. These works strike me as the literary equivalent of the Facebook echo-chamber, and they have the sticky feeling of people who love the earth from their comfortable position, not radical, but actually conservative in their desire to not see it change. A



much better approach is found, I believe, in Jon Jensen's "Sand in my Backyard," which insists, perhaps in vain, that the problem is not simple, and we all have complicity:

Am I a hypocrite if I oppose fracking but also drive a car running on gasoline that may have come from fracked oil? Not necessarily, but simply posing the question illustrated the ways that it is problematic to see this as "us vs. them," the evil despoilers of the environment. We are all complicit in the structures and systems that create and sustain the industrial economy. . . . Once we fully grasp this complicity, it should be clear that it is not enough simply to fight; we must change the game.

One perhaps wishes for more analytical depth and self-awareness like Jensen's in the volume, but there is plenty to be found. Michelle Donahue's poem "A Stranger in a Bar" gently probes at the truth that there is much talking, but little communication, and even less understanding:

I wonder at that rise & fall,
how words gather, escape
from lips unheard. I know
nothing, a man delivering
a story like glass: transparent until broken, seen only
as shards, from a glimpse
of that splintered edge.

Most of the works reach deep. As Pam Houston tells us in her introduction, written, we must be told, from a ranch at 9,000 feet in Colorado, the authors "stared down their sorrow and their fears, faced the difficult facts and made art of out of them." Bill McKibben's "Why Not Frack" is a serious consideration of too much, too fast, and the impacts to land, population, and health. Patricia Nelson Limerick's "Hydraulic Fracturing: A Guide to the Terrain of Public Conversation" reads as a prescient guide to the NoDAPL protest and response waves in North Dakota, and drills down to the levels of sub-contractors and royalty owners, workers and residents, to give a glimpse of why the dialogues are just so hard. Bill Roorbach's "Huckster" nicely captures the concerns of people in the fray, regardless of their position on fracking. Amy Weldon, through prose, and Susan Truxell Sauter, through verse, bring the discussion to larger issues of societal values and how they are framed, or maybe even created, by corporations. While my tastes obviously skew moderate, there are fine pieces from fairly extreme points of view. Stephanie Mills' "Last Call: Frack Wells, Wood Frogs and Leopold's Ethics" has a very strong leave-it-in-the-ground ethos, which is a much more coherent and attractive alternative to aimless nay-saying.

Paul Bogard's "Occupation" wrestles with what is left to be said on the issue, and finds a way to say something new by considering not major disasters but the slow cumulative loss faced by the environment and communities when things do not turn out as expected. Louise A. Blum's "Faith on the Front Lines" is a brutally honest, introspective, and insightful view from a protestor. Instead of rechanting slogans in a longer prose form, she turns inward and shares the complexity of motivations and responses:

The previous week, at the Water Equals Life blockade, we were all so serious we never let go of the banner, never took a break, refused to drink anything because we were so afraid that if we left to pee we'd miss our chance to be arrested. We were so sunburned and dehydrated we couldn't have smiled if we'd tried. If we'd been people of faith we would have been the kind that flagellate themselves.

John Kenyon's "The Way of Sorrow" is similarly notable for the verisimilitude of dialogues that occur in the extraction regions, and the fiscal realities of people working on the ground in the industry, that far exceed other more abstract considerations in urgency and size. Several contributions grapple with the sense of place. Stephen Trimble's "One Well: Drilling the Bears Ears" ponders the archaeology and landscape of the Canyonlands in Utah and the hotly contested proposed Bears Ears monument, appropriately invoking Aldo Leopold: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." And as Kenyon notes, it is the vastly divergent view of an industry that views exercise of property rights and extraction as a good that creates the gulf between the polarized viewpoints. Rachel Morgan's "An Orbital Tour of Cities at Night" uses poetry to illuminate the intense activity of the emptiness of an extraction region:

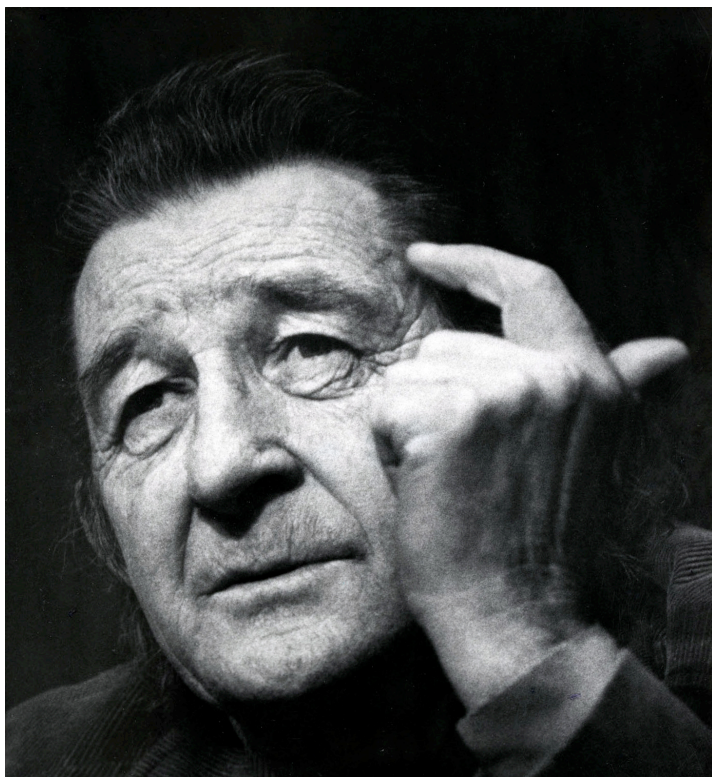
In the fracking fields burn-off glows
and roads connect, but lanes and places
lead nowhere. It's true the wheat glows.

Stephanie LeMenager struggles similarly in "Oil Town Palimpsest," which tries to address the play of perceived heritage and pristine wilderness with the reality of rapid change and a heritage that is actually just as toxic as wilderness. Her piece probes the polarity of our dialogues around an imaginary Ecotopia, by invoking "working people . . . capable of remaking words through physical force" and noting how fracking in Santa Barbara County, California, has created an intersection of landscapes identified by "artisanal food production and the sacrifice of the rural outlands to toxic degradation." This theme is similarly addressed by Jan Bindas-Tenny, who captures the juxtaposition

of the mythical pasts in North Dakota, colliding at the fracking epicenter of Williston in “The Story of Staying.” Williston is also the focus of Jeremy Miller’s “The Shining,” which is near-perfect in capturing the ethos of a visit to Williston (and Stanley) at the height of the North Dakota boom. Andrea Peacock’s “Three Rivers Quartet” captures the ambivalence of a boom, which brings development, but not necessarily improvement. These pieces are far more effective and stand in juxtaposition to, I think, Richard Manning’s “Now We’re Talking Price,” which posits a mythical North Dakota badlands not hammered by generations of ranching, but rather so pure, so sacred, that none of us have the right to enter it.

Taylor Brorby addresses the sense of place in his “White Butte” that chronicles his trek to the top of North Dakota’s not very impressive highest point. It is a journey that does not bring satisfaction, only Brorby’s uncertainty of anything except his consciousness in a moment “witnessing the decapitation of buttes, looking as if they were sliced sideways by swords, opened to bleed black blood. . . .” Brorby captures the ethos of *Fracture*, which is filled with emotion and anger and a sense of violation, but it cannot find clear answers, probably because there are none. This world of non-decisive answers is captured as well by Antonia Felix’s “Extravagance of Vice,” which is perhaps my favorite piece in the collection. The fictional story nicely captures the implacable buffeting by external forces, as well as the inextricable link, between petroleum and military infrastructure and workforce. Her work is matched perhaps, by another favorite, Mark Trechock’s poem “Down the Road,” which captures the rhythmic, almost staccato, highway trip through oil country, recognized by any who work or live there. I think, however, Michelle Donahue’s “Digging” and “A Stranger in the Bar” are the evocative poetic pinnacles of the collection.

Fracture is, to my mind, vaguely unsatisfying, perhaps because its uniformity of viewpoint comes perilously close to a long-slog of jingoism, a literate inverse of “Drill, Baby, Drill.” But there are gems in the collection, more than I have highlighted here. Proponents of fracking and extraction will find it utterly unpalatable. NoDAPL enthusiasts will find it nigh unto scriptural. The collection itself demonstrates that, for the most part, large portions of our population are not having a discussion about unconventional oil and gas extraction that crosses over from entrenched positions. An imperfect start is a start, nonetheless.



—“From here it is necessary to ship all bodies east.”
I am in Los Angeles, at 2714 Marsh Street,
Writing, rolling east with the earth, drifting toward Scorpio,
thinking