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Shale Play: Poems and Photographs from the Fracking Fields by Julia Spicher Kasdorf and Steven Rubin

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tree
near the well that loses its leaves in the
middle of summer. (18)

This particular poem is illustrated with a close-up image of bubbling water: the notes explain that this had been a spring, where the horses drank; now the methane content makes it undrinkable. The methane bubbles didn't appear until after the drilling began.

Water is mentioned frequently throughout this collection, because of the extraordinary amount of water the hydraulic fracturing process requires (an estimated 4.5 million gallons for a single well). Residents quoted in several poems express their concerns over the quality of their drinking water, a dwindling fresh water supply, and the effects on biodiversity. One photograph shows a gas station advertising water, pumped from a nearby river, for sale.

There are other health-related impacts discussed, and concerns over strangers coming to live and work in what are otherwise small, quiet towns and rural areas. "Along Hope Hollow Road, a Grandma Talks on the Phone" describes a mysterious fog that seems to make everyone in the area sick (51); "At Jersey Mills, a Ridge Runner from Way Back Remembers the Wild Life" discusses the influx of workers from mostly southern states and the changes they bring with them (61).

As these long poem titles suggest, much of the book's material comes from interviews and conversations; Kasdorf's writing is notable for its use of individual voices and colloquialisms and its frequent references to local people and places. Some poems are based on archival materials, letters, and the memories of elderly community members.

Rubin's photographs are similarly candid and sometimes heartbreaking. Several focus on the individuals involved in community meetings, protests, and legal proceedings: the people in these pictures are discouraged, exhausted, disheartened. Lush green farmland and forests are juxtaposed with drilling rigs and pipelines; individual studies draw the reader's attention to truck culture, local signage, and details from the daily lives of rig workers.

While it does strive for balance—it's acknowledged that there are no better options forthcoming for this region, and that some people do benefit from the fracking industry, after all—the overwhelming feeling of *Shale Play* is grief. This book is important because it bears witness, and it laments.

KELLY SHEPHERD has a Creative Writing MFA from UBC Okanagan, and an MA in Religious Studies (with a thesis on sacred geography) from the University of Alberta. His second book, *Insomnia Bird: Edmonton Poems*, was published by ThistleDown Press in fall 2018.