

Oklahoma r e v i e w

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NINE BOOKS ON THE DIVINING ROD

BOOK I

Imagine Moses, wild eyed, his heart battering
in disbelief as he drove his staff twice
into that most ordinary stone,

and how his jaw must have slackened
when the waters poured forth
clarifying the way of things.

BOOK II

At the meeting of the Augustinian Order
in Heidelberg, only months after posting
his theses, Martin Luther stood,

scanned the room, cleared his throat,
and declared that the *virgula divina*
violated the First Commandment.

BOOK III

In 1556, Georgius Agricola inched his way
deep into the throated gold mines of Bohemia, sweeping his torch
back and forth, until his light caught the men

tracing a vein in a subterranean rib,
with forked twigs cut from hazel shrubs,
their sticks scratching out a map of impossible fortune.

BOOK IV

Twelve years later, upon an offering of land
for a convent, Saint Teresa of Spain refused the ground
noting its absence of water.

Friar Antonio appeared before her
in the wooded grove clutching
a twig; he then signed a cross and divined a gushing well.

BOOK V

The Baroness de Beusoleil discovered hundreds
of lost mines in ancient France
and oceanic caverns of water

all under the tip of her rod. But in 1642, she admitted divining,
and alchemy too. Charged with sorcery, she was imprisoned
in a Parisian dungeon until her end.

BOOK VI

Someone among the throng of those dour
stone-eyed Puritans packed among their buckled
shoes, chamber pots, and linen a curious thing

for the New World: Y-shaped, a snake's tongue,
a devil's arm, an instrument so wicked
it could, in the hands of a witch, summon the fluids of the earth.

BOOK VII

The American Journal of Science lent its leaves
in 1821 to the singular debate of the divining rod,
wherein the Reverend Ralph Emerson

claimed its virtues, had seen with his very eyes
water surface under the spell of the stick
despite what he thought he knew.

BOOK VIII

Meanwhile, self-proclaimed Mormon Prophet
Joseph Smith prowled the backwoods of Palmyra,
New York, forked willow branch in hand, soaked in fever sweat

divining the maddening promise of treasure. Later,
Mormon farmers would teach the Navajo
how to witch for water in the desert wash of Ramah, New Mexico.

BOOK IX

Before we raised the drill rig's tower, before we sunk a single
gleaming bit into the earth, we waited
in that sagebrush draw for Alma Bassett

to slam his truck door, light a smoke, and fish out a bronze rod;
for it to pull him forth into the wind, for its end to dip,
and for Alma to stop, kneel, and whisper, "water."