
HYDROLOGY OF CALIFORNIA

AN ECOPOETICAL ALPHABET

Brenda Hillman

There's a river of rivers in California beyond all earthquakes
bringing coiled water from the north It is grammar when we are anxious
in our days bringing tumble from freshets north of Klamath where
redwoods release fog drops
ceaselessly from filtered tops Steelhead Coho salmon the few that do
to Humboldt past dams hereafter known as / where streams/ like
colorless green ideas leap furiously/ where the Eel River flooding 753,000
feet per second /sees
fewer eels than before

Future of poetry there's a stream *between a & b* as i write this a dream
of a west that would outlast us/ if we were life which we are drops
from Trinity ice storms to Smith River & down North Coast regions
brighter seaside towns with
two waitresses named Pam

Future of poetry i saw a black-faced gull a juvenile awaiting neap tide
We use the word *neap* to mean purple runnels/ Banks gathered wild force
at the edge of names Mattole Navarro /Hearts gathered wild force electrons
trading energy for food

Future of poetry Let's move between emotions in hydropoetics for i am a
pilgrim with no progress recalling rivers when we were anxious
past wetlands needing every turning time/ more than people need
little dams for arugula

Many had lawns They had to shower/ They had to eat i said to main brenda
Now don't start just ignorantly criticizing state dams the whole time
You drink gallons of it you know you do / We followed creeks through decades
left of where eagles
can eat whole deer

Stopped near Fort Ross We looked up to redwoods releasing beads fog
drops The women so kind in Mendocino They took the beyond & ran
with it You wrote on the memory tablets/ Blind sticks arranged themselves
Water-bearer was your star

Our settlements didn't last
nor should they have nor should they There were economics & lifestyles
after explorers made possible the cogs/ .00001 percent in rain fell
down /We stood & loved south/ of the delicate eerie lighthouse at
Point Arena where griefless
the sea lions loll



There's a quiver of rivers the Sacramento We saw a pleasant pheasant
 near a pylon in the Delta its back a walking rainbow in 100,000 acres
 they saved the *they* who can save\ We don't hate developers or do we
 We hate their greed
 those butt-ugly buildings Actually
 butts are adorable compared to Gated communities/ the poor buildings
 can't even cry though wild radish loves them *Raphanus raphanistrum*
 "common in disturbed places" Maltese crosses each flower a shadow/
 violet in its means/
 We ran near why-worry
 levees & one time one of the developers said Well you wouldn't want
 to live in a tee-pee now would you brenda Future of poetry we saw
dactylic glomerata Leaves of grasses\ i don't honestly mind the word
introduced as in introduced species *between c & d* dogtail grasses *cyinosurus*
echinatus Near the Capitol
 assemblymembers were drinking Fanta
 near a fanning floodplain/ coots with white beaks east of Feather River
between e & f trace horse gold rush \boys picking pyrite from the North
 Fork & 2 waitresses named Toni Gold must be so glad in heaven
 glad & gold are
 brothers w/ different mothers
 The lovely & a bit dammed American River\ mergansers & brome/
 buffleheads like reverse Oreos rice fields\ algae from phosphates Such
 afternoons might seem owned O unrushed dream of time i saw some
 earthly flapping in the
 rushes/ swallows eating pounds
 of gnats/ & both shall row My love & i leaned on our tailbone The
 Giants were ahead for a change in someone's earphones A fundraiser for
 fucked-up rivers History turned half our faces golden for a change\A
 day so bright
 we could not hear
 the paradox set up by Being Then Gary yelled Hey & a tall cloud
 passed by like a yoga teacher Inside each seed\ didn't look like
 competition but floated forever from us to you Future of poetry
 We wanted not to fear human life to know as molecules know like
 water from a book



There's a shiver of rivers north of Shasta that melts when we are faster
 storms split the plus signs lava flowed from night caves marshes
 with magpies that dipped like punk nuns we kept the word "beauty"
 in mind for Shastina
 that upside-down bride 75%
 of H₂O slides from north of Tahoe 1685 feet deep *high into nothingness*
 Twain wrote where some say the dead sink frozen in their costumes
 Future of poetry we entered the howling edges of a dream looked back to
 Celestial City texted each
 other & soon whole
 words will be gone c u l8r will remain But rain loves the day like haiku
 River goes out river comes in like a cat googled *eutrophication* for June so
 that no word should die New words shall sprout in dreams beyond time
 Trout spawned *chasmistes cujus*/
 We saw some types
 of knotting in nature *between g & h* What should we call those silvery
 gray parenthesis-type things hanging off lodge pole pines Don't colonize
 that tree by naming it a nameless poet said Lucky he doesn't have to
 hunt for his food
 a naming poet said
 The pine at the end of the mind Life from Life Form from Form Be-
 gotten not sprayed Of one being with the Mother Through Her rough
 cones were made \We hiked Desolation noted streaky granites moraines
 condensation infiltration evaporation chanted
 Byzantium past Shirley Lake
 You pronounced it *Byzanseeum* needleminer moths *what peeves you* David
 said a fly-catcher said perched in blister rust bitterbrush needing mouse-
 shit for its pilgrim's process/ under fluttering twisted braids cirrus clouds
 Leaves of grasses' panicles
 reduced in mountain air
 slowed down *between i & j* ice age relic trees *populus tremuloides*
 we worried less Glaciers beneath Boreal & Tui chub melts down to Walker
 Lake *pelecanus erythrorhynchos* if not too salty for them if not but extinction
 lasts forever in its
 rivers from a book



There's a sliver of rivers west of Napa which rhymes when we are happy
 its timed relation to high heat makes cuneiform of grapevines snappy
 sharpshooters' wings are glassy hills blonde as conference coffee/ tawny
 paws of mountain lions
 trout declined Lake Berryessa
 our hope for the good\ Dragonflies with six ankles over lightest summer
 Entered a cool winery saw oaken caskets in earth's wild force You pushed
 on in your shivers don't make pilgrim's progress /please greet us forever
between k ɛ l
 sages & mugwort where
 nostalgia happens forward / County Fair not Vanity Sweet girls in black
 hoodies alienated labor & Karmel Korn a cloying smell tho' Karmel
 Korn is also nature Future of Poetry an oak spoke to me as i walked
 on the mountain not
 like God speaking to
 Bush about Iraq The creek was full of trash & origins/ It said search *between*
m ɛ n for what we have destroyed & both shall row on Papermill Creek my
 love & i saw huge orange nonsense dragonflies like fire engines medium
 bluets like tiny folded
 pool cues & green
 ones of unimaginable luster On winter Fridays paper snowflakes taped
 on Inverness School windows County funding drying up so only one
 snowflake per child Seeds of herbs dreaming in their packets at Toby's
 Future of poetry Everything
 feels everything i don't
 just think so i know so Lagunitas Creek feels ridged horsetails push up
 from the Precambrian Beetles fringed gourds fleabane under July sky feels
 big old see-through ferns red currents There are half-emotions between all
 officially recognized emotions i
 said to the lady
 in buckeyes' sacred grove *syncaris pacifica* sulfur butterflies California sisters
 cabbage whites west coast ladies western tiger swallowtail riparian rhymes
 with carrion cowbird w/ the oil-spill neck walks like a hieroglyph\
 at Coast Camp near
 wood-rats' nests like
 water from a book



There's a giver of rivers the Central coast & you would go almost
 if you were a you instead of a Future which you are w/ all the santas
 Santa Inez Santa Cruz An owl waits nearby *cathartes aura* 14 bones
 in its head directional
 hearing owls aren't really
 wise they turn south to hear poor kids' guns going off at Travis Airforce
 orders are given between fogdrops/ money flies & money wrongs
 the Pacific This pilgrim makes no progress in her flight a marbled
 murrelet feeding at sea
 nesting in old growth redwood
 Future of poetry i
 saw shorebirds choking on shy crabs shaking sand off bull kelp tossed
 from the deep Gulls look like girls quickly judging each other's purses
 Now Democrats also say offshore drilling isn't too bad/ You came to me
 in a dream beyond
 time\This life you
 sang in your offkey way *between o'p* old moon-laden & tawdry we drove
 near Salinas a river Steinbeck called "part-time" fields of garlic red-legged
 frogs in flood plains Sang to me quite tenderly *between q'er* Carmel had
 steelhead once & pond
 turtles their necks ridged
 like destiny The stream flowed right past Tor House steelhead your *onchor-*
hyncus mykiss funny that trout has *mykiss* in its name Yes i know i know
 humans can't not play golf Geese pull worms through agricultural runoff
 pooling on side lawns
 Does use feel bad
 i asked the worms being pulled Silver butterflies feeding on deer shit
 parasite *anthopleura elegantissima* My love & i so busily drove to a poetry
 reading past fuzzy artichokes near Gilroy Prophet thistles w/streams
 that drop near Santa Cruz
 How shall we live
 & they indicated as if John Muir replied *so low a human voice cannot hear*
 you want your tomatoes don't you You want Almond Delite & golf
 You want to drink Sprite w/runnels of gravy at Denny's\faces in
 laminated menus wind-surfing widows This is the price the stream went
 refugees in aqueducts like
 water from a book



The deliver of rivers the San Joaquin that blends when we are minor
 with broken strings & finer in port towns near Carquinez saline marinas
 south Delta bevels near 57 levees the age main brenda is now writing this
 The soul is the
 water & the aqueduct
 transferred to the slough at some point i love the word *slough* Could
 write it all day long Slewed of sloughs down off 99 Saw rough-cut Berenda
 Slough pumping H₂O costs more than it makes\ under Hetch-Hetchy
 they named after seeds
 2.1 million acre feet
 into the Aqueduct past Merced Papery onion skins flying off trucks A
 billboard signed by Jesus Desire saved the Chinook 130, 000 & now only
 100 in Tuolumne\ 2 waitresses named Debbie bad snowpack year so
 almost no veil at
 Bridalveil Falls but delicate
 mists tumbled & a
 Clark's nutcracker flew thru them Future of Poetry *between s & t* We saw
 a meadow spirit a high vortex in the years of writing this hydro-ecopoetics
 Snow sparkles/ Thou shalt flow down after dusk Vernal Falls downvalley
 Cusumnes/ Fields of sticky
 tarweed pressed ham in
 convenience stores & the H₂O tastes a little chemically in Fresno We
 miss Larry Levis crystal music of his forms/ Future of Poetry This is
 your Watershed said Pam We saw rain enter a saint's mouth Interviewed
 an irrigation ditch Pray
 for us San Joaquin
 alleged granddaddy of Jesus Pray backward like a feeling Pray for river
 Merced Pray JS keeps some world in a poem so fertilizer won't kill him
 Headwaters hitched to Slurpees 7-11 swimming pools in Stockton Saw
 chlorine clouds of infinity
 we drank from Pardee
 Reservoir Sweated w/ enchantment 90 miles away Hitched others in the
 watery beyond/ Hitched to the others we drank/ If you think you're alone
 You haven't learned the language i gave you snow ^^^ from sugar pines
 falls to you in
 water for your book



The forger of rivers near Tulare that flowed when we were sorry
 His vocabulary didn't do it all/ Drinking did a little A central
 California basin\ that couldn't find the ocean Why do you write like this
 a man asked me
 Because sir i am
 a sorceress looking for my sources Because sir we were diverted/ like a
 river to mid-heaven by early salt & late capitalism We had a progress spasm/
 snowdrops to Kern chasm 13,000 feet Does use feel bad i asked my love
 as dark cast its
 opening *salma aquabonita* &
 groundwater spun below desiring to tender us perfectly unexamined 6.5 acre
 feet per year to an aquifer It did not flow from the grief tent Tule
 River Skunks & badgers willow flycatcher *epidonax traillii* we
 want to see u
between u & v
 yellow-billed cuckoo/ Agribusiness did it to our vocabulary Preoccupied
 the joy w/spray & amber waves of gray A woman stands over her sage-
 brush with a hose in the heat truckers drive through Bakersfield & one time
 at a truck stop
 i observed the flavored
 condoms on a twirling rack could hardly wait to tell Mary *i'm not fucking*
kidding u hot-fudge coconut cream pie condoms & piña colada ones also
 /We read in the guide book elegy words *once formed* as in "once formed
 Tulare Lake" That made
 me mad as Jeffers
 What about one itty bitty bomb on a dam *pow- * Use asterisks instead
 No ecoterror for the coyote it had a hurt foot for even rats are scarce
 Designated Wilderness go river-rafting/ They're shooting deer not for
 food We carry the burden not the act i did not break our noun yet i did
 drink from that well
 i drank to the
 end of time Took way too many showers for my *lifestyle* that's my least
 favorite word 4500 gallons per day Went we we wee all the way
 to Tehachipi/ & amber waves of avena & i *who had seen was implicated* all
 the way home like
 crying from a book



There's a trickle of rivers the South Lahontan that exits from
 a fountain Mono Lake's three-salt condition chlorate sulfate &
 carbons Trout came back thank god When this poet says god she
 means god of particular
 daughters/ Owens north fork
 River god of bitter waters / god of half- existence desert god so
 so erotic you know you're loved already by god of tumbleweed god
 of truck stop coffee god of better get over it get over Sarah Palin
 In the Quaternary Period
 when i was almost
 living i prayed to Mary Austin crinkly places in her spirit Mulholland
 stole her water/ L.A. Poets knew it power rhymes w/shower
 poor Mojave River & Earth will know the source When this poet says
 god she means god
 of pupfish god of
 Joseph Reddeford Walker survivor in the spine/ Some folks think malls
 in deserts are nice grasses pretending to be native brine shrimp will return
 /flies of alkali *Ephydra hians* lowest meets the highest Mt. Whitney &
 Death Valley soul &
 soil exact same word
 except for u & i
 Future of poetry i saw the great heart in a mirror /Land grew around it
 but i have not seen the Amargosa vole found there i have not seen *vireo*
belli pusillus i saw inland seas Osiris fetched from hydrogeologic edges
 from Barstow balmy Palmdale
 an Affordable Housing Aqueduct
 It does not serve water to the region/ Put on Sleater-Kinney to drive there but
 never quite arrived there diverted in 1940 like a good lie think Faye Dun-
 away in *Chinatown* don't abandon what you hope for when you brush my
 teeth in Hesperia please
 turn the faucet off
 Visit us now o vole *before the w ē x* visit us now *rhinichthys osculus* visit us
 now alluvial alluvial bearded spangletop bees in their boxes & we who
 had lived were implicated between slopes We climbed the dome & went
 home w/a history of
 glaciers in a book



There's a river of nevers the South Coast where some would like it
 most if there were a river which there were by gum by the fall of
 capitalism The banks crash as we write this We had a pilgrim's regress
 crazy brenda & her
 sorceress She ran with
 her love on the boardwalk The marine layer grows fatter/ over 13
 million travelers You know that part in *Vertigo* when Kim Novak jumps
 backward in the Bay *It looks like a set he said but it was filmed on location*
That part on the
other hand he said
 holding her other hand *was filmed in a tank in Los Angeles* We are about
 out of time O three-spine stickleback O word riparian O valley oak
 over Santa Monica o black walnut plowed under long ago Visit us now
 in our maritime routes Visit us now *Tetradymia spinosa* cotton-thorn
 Visit us now in
 the hour of our
 need Visit us now in the hour of our seed of cord grass & Gray's fescue
 Visit us now in the hour over San Gabriel short-awn foxtail & fluff grass
 bent grass & blue grama Visit us now in the hour of our native & non-
 tree that made Hollywood
 Dear love i'm tired
 Let's go to bed Maybe a college girl is reading this when we're a little
 dead O girl mind your watershed Take care of crazy poets
 Visit the inner-net In the end there will be a rupture
 said Walter whose arcade
 thought up the Web
 We are freckles of sun We are sleeping in the poem Shoppers stand
 in the little shops They don't know what to buy We lie at the Shangri La
between z & y No one knows how this sentence will end in a dream
 with a lyric sky
 Visit us Joni Mitchell
 Visit us Future of Poetry with a solitude of streamlets into a local
 pond the mind at the end of the palm Nothing was gone when we
 saw that bird We saw its feathers as water It was in & out of time

Brenda Hillman is the author of eight collections of poetry, all published by Wesleyan University Press, the most recent of which are *Pieces of Air in the Epic* (2005) and *Practical Water* (forthcoming, 2009), where "Hydrology of California" will appear. She has edited an edition of Emily Dickinson's poetry for Shambhala Publications, and, with Patricia Dienstfrey, co-edited *The Grand Permission: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood* (Wesleyan, 2003). Hillman is involved in anti-war activism with CodePink and teaches at St. Mary's College in Moraga, California, where she is the Olivia Filippi Professor of Poetry.