

MOKELUMNE RIVER TRIPTYCH

I Am the River 1

Listen to me.

I am the wild utterance you have tried to tame.
I am the flowing night, the wet dawn.
I am the cold sweat of the earth saying I am afraid.
I am the expectation of the revelation to come.
I am the river straining against your claims.

I am the willow and the bird.
I am the basket of corn.
I am the cool antidote to summer's heat.
I am the knife that cuts a canyon through stone.
You are a sponge.

I am the boundary between two counties.
I am the rafter's adrenalin rush.
I am the innkeeper's bottom line.
I am Miwok identity.
What more do you want from me?

I am my mountainous headwaters.
I am electricity.
I am the Mokelumne.
I am flowing from faucets in the East Bay.
But even I am not infinite.

I am a gift from God, but
I am not God.
Only you can exercise intervention
approaching the divine.
Only you can save me.

I Am the Mokelumne 2

My time has been measured
by the granite clock of the mountain.
My flow has been memorized by the earth.
My story has been told for generations,
but I fear my water can no longer match your thirst.
You will drink until all your memories
taste like bitter cherries, until
all trace of what I really am is gone.

And, yet, it's not too late for you
to keep 37 miles between the reservoirs
at Salt Springs and Pardee
just wild enough to preserve my dignity.

In return, I offer beauty
as rare as the phantom orchid
that graces the wilderness
blessed with my name.

In return, I fill your glass.
I provide for the black bear and the deer.
The peregrine falcon nests in my cliffs.
I give refuge to the purple martin.

In return, I wet the beak of the bald eagle
and spotted owl. Mountain alder, flowering
dogwood and azaleas populate my riparian land.
I give you rainbows to eat.

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The Blackberry has No Remorse 3

We gathered blackberries
under the dark canopy of river trees,
escaped the late summer heat
along the bank of the Mokelumne
below Camanche Reservoir
and took our chances with sharp
prickles protecting the vines.
Children intent on cobbler,
we fought the brambles
that stung us as we broke free.
Our hands and faces stained with joy,
we got the best of the greedy vines,
and our memories multiplied
like the aggregate fruit for which
one berry is really many tiny berries,
each with its own seed.
We washed our feet in the cool green
water, waded in up to our knees,
kept clear of the current that flowed
into time's uncertain ocean, happy
at the river's edge, poised
on the bank of what was to be.
We were as innocent as the river then.
We did not understand we were the vines,
that we had taken perennial root and
infested the land adjacent to the river,
that we would flower and bear fruit
while choking out our neighbor.

The blackberry has no remorse.
The river has no alternative.
But we can change.