

The Elements:
Water

By

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THE ELEMENTS:
WATER

Scene: 1

Introduction

MUSIC IN: CAL LEGACY UPDATED THEME

NARRATOR:

Great writing about California's natural world is compelling and concrete, encouraging us to be personally in touch with the elements of our environment.

Earth, wind, fire, and water, timeless elements of California's natural world.

Hear now--Water!

SOUND: RUSHING WATER NOISES, IRRIGATION

MUSIC: SOFT TRANSITION TO NARRATION

NARRATOR:

Nevermind gold and oil. Water is California's most precious resource, so much so that writers here have long written about the problem of treating water as a finite commodity, one everyone needs.

Here's Professor John Farnsworth from the Environmental Studies Institute of Santa Clara University:

FARNSWORTH:

Because upwards of 80% of our water goes to agriculture, California is the most thirsty state in the nation. To help quench our thirst, we've built over 1,400 dams throughout the state. We're only now beginning to understand the environmental consequences of these dams as far as native California fish are concerned.

NARRATOR:

During the 1960's California author Richard Brautigan made a splash with the novel TROUT FISHING IN AMERICA. 100 pages into the book, Brautigan walks into a wrecking yard and sees a sign saying, "Used trout stream for sale--must be seen to be appreciated."

MUSIC: BRIEF INTERLUDE

SOUND: SOFT FLOWING WATER SOUNDS FADE IN

(CONTINUED)

BRAUTIGAN:

Then, a salesman came up to me and said in a pleasant voice, "Can I help you?" "Yes, I said. "I'm curious about the trout stream you have for sale. Can you tell me something about it? How are you selling it?" "We're selling it by the foot length. You can buy as little as you want, or you can buy all we've got left. A man came in here this morning and bought 563 feet. He's going to give it to his niece for a birthday present," the salesman said. "We're selling the waterfalls separately of course, and the trees and birds, flowers, grass and ferns we're also selling extra. The insects we're giving away for free with a minimum purchase of ten feet of stream."

SOUND: WATER SOUNDS FADE OUTSCENE: 2The Family Farm

MUSIC: BRIEF INTERLUDE

MILLER:

The . . . waters rushed into the void. One huge shining silty moving mass, a momentary crashing waterfall, then released, pouring and thrashing down through the wooden flume-box into the way cut for it in the dry valley earth.

NARRATOR:

May Merrill Miller grew up near Hanford, in the southern San Joaquin Valley. Inspired by stories of the pioneers who settled the area--and banded together to create *local* irrigation projects to water their family farms--she wrote the 1938 novel, *First the Blade*, whose main character Amelie Blansford is deeply moved when a local irrigation project is completed.

MILLER:

Amelie's eyes followed the running tongue of water, the ditch bed dry before it, until it reached to the next gate, with a group of men standing ready; then it too was opened--and on to the next, and the next, and the next, men standing waiting by the gates as far as she could see. . .

Amelie looked once more toward the blue Sierras. She could see the constant snow upon them. Her eyes were wet as she turned again to her neighbors, silent beside the controlled waters.

MUSIC: BRIEF INTERLUDE

(CONTINUED)

SOUND:WATER LAPPING AT SHORE OF LAKE, SOFT, RHYTHMIC

NARRATOR:

Water gives us life and waters our land, but it also nourishes our hearts. When Mark Twain visited Lake Tahoe in 1861, however, the clarity of the water astonished him, and in his 1872 book *Roughing It*, he recorded his impressions.

TWIN:

So singularly clear was the water, that where it was only twenty or thirty feet deep the bottom was so perfectly distinct that the boat seemed to be floating in the air! Yes where it was even *eighty* feet deep. Every little pebble was distinct, every speckled trout, every hand's breadth of sand. Often, as we lay on our faces, a granite boulder, as large as a village church, would start out the bottom apparently, and seem climbing up rapidly to the surface, till presently it threatened to touch our faces, and we could not resist the impulse to seize an oar and avert the danger. . . . Down through the transparency of these great depths, the water was not *merely* transparent, but dazzling, brilliantly so. All objects seen through it had a bright, strong vividness, not only of outline, but of every minute detail, which they would not have had when seen simply through the same depth of atmosphere. So empty and airy did all spaces seem below us, and so strong was the sense of floating high-aloft, in mid-nothingness, that we called these boat excursions "balloon-voyages."

NARRATOR:

Again, John Farnsworth

FARNSWORTH:

Here in California, we've learned that it's far more cost effective to spend money conserving water than developing additional water supply systems. Since the 1980's, our urban water use has actually dropped 20% in this state. Some experts predict that we can save another 2.4 million acre feet of water using off-the-shelf technologies currently available. That's a lot of water!

NARRATOR:

Next time you fill a glass, take a shower, catch a fish, even the next time you admire the "dazzling" beauty of a mountain lake, think of how we take seemingly ordinary water for granted.

Examine your own experience of outdoor California to appreciate better what's at stake here.

(CONTINUED)

For the California Legacy Project at Santa Clara
University, I'm Terry Beers

MUSIC OUT: CAL LEGACY UPDATED THEME

CREDITS:

Water is a production of the California Legacy Project
at Santa Clara University, californialegacy.org, and
featured Kevin Hearle, Dan Maloney, and Jessica Teeter.

Music and post-production by Bernhard Drax at
draxtor.com.