Spring 1985

South on the Eel River

Bill O'Connell
South on the Eel River

for J.B.

1
We map the veins of riverstones,
gently poking skeletons of a mountain
that once rose here,
each white bone a tooth
in the river’s history,
the furious current curving,
pivoting from the root,
the river’s green roar
promising the sea.

2
Ninety miles inland
cacti push up from rock-soil.
We share what light slips
between manzanita leaves,
listening to the tree’s inner chambers where
blind blood seeps upward from
dark root-hairs.

We drink wine,
dream about this manzanita’s
mahogany skin.

3
On a moonswept hill, thick grass
pulls on the river’s song.
Stones beneath the field speak
of the long sinking,
of rising with the frost.
We are among them—
footsteps, thin
shadows, particles of clay.