



## One Last Epistle to Ms. Hillman

We've had 15 weeks to cover 178 pages of *In A Few Minutes Before Later*, reading deeply the work of a poet at the height of their creative powers. That the book delves into life during a pandemic, during a catastrophic fire that came very close to her world and also during her husband's scrape with mortality, shows her ease with potent (& personal) subjects. To communicate with this potency without sentimentality, cliché and rhetoric and with humility, surprise mind and a kindness that's rare in today's poetry world is quite an accomplishment. Here is your last chance to thank Brenda Hillman for what this journey has meant to you.

And with any good writing exercise, the tone you can use for this letter is right there on page 166, in full display, removing any uncertainty as to how you might approach this epistle.

*hyaline*

### **During an enchantment in the life**

Do you love a living person  
absolutely? Tell them now.  
In a half-unwieldy life you made, under  
the hyaline sky, while the dead  
drank from zigzag pools nearby,  
if they saved you in your wild incapacities,

in timing of the world's harm  
in a little pettiness in your own heart while others took  
your madrigals in shreds to a tribunal,  
when others said you should feel grateful  
to be minimally adequate for the world's  
triple exposure or some tired committee . . .

The ones who love us, how do they  
break through our defenses?

We're tired today. Come back later.  
Their baffled voices melting our wax walls  
with a candle, the ones who understand  
what being is—the glowing, the broken,

the wheels, the brave ones—

they have their courage,  
you have yours,,,:

when you meet the one you love,  
it is so rare. When you meet  
the one who loves you, it is extremely rare.



Brenda got the job done in four stanzas and brevity is the soul of wit. Could you find your own stand-in for *hyaline*? Whether glassy or cartilaginous, it is a word that adds depth to the poem. Not everyone gets away with 3 consecutive commas and a semicolon, but surely there is “typographical expressionism” that suits your own personal myth.

Part of the epistle tradition is to write as if you know the person. If you have given any poet's work enough of your time, you do have a sense of them, at least for you, and that is all that's required here. Maybe some of these letters by Sam Hamill, a master of the epistle form, can give you some clues as to how to approach this last Brenda task for now.

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Casa del Colibrí

2:40pm, 2-MAY-2023



#### Work Cited:

<https://poets.org/glossary/epistolary-poem>

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/in-a-garden-of-zeroes-on-brenda-hillmans-in-a-few-minutes-before-later/>

<https://paulenelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Some-Letters-by-Sam-Hamill.pdf>