Brenda Hillman was born in Tucson, Arizona, and attended Pomona College, where she received a bachelor’s degree, followed by the University of Iowa, where she earned an MFA. She has been a member of the faculty at St. Mary’s College in Moraga, California, since 1984. She once told Contemporary Authors: "I am interested in the presence of spirit in matter and in how to have joy in a divided universe—that's what my poetry is mainly about. My tools are irony, the image, the broken narrative, and an intensely personal voice."