Letter to Sam Hamill

Patricia Goedicke
Dear Sam,

Under separate cover I'm sending you -- I fear with way too much chutzpah -- my latest poetry manuscript, AS EARTH BEGINS TO END. I can only pray you'll be still be interested enough in my work to look at it.

It's been a long time since Copper Canyon's beautifully produced THE WIND OF OUR GOING! But I've continued to watch -- always with great admiration -- all you've been doing.

In the meantime Milkweed, as you may perhaps know, has published my last three books of poetry. But -- hence my sending you AS EARTH BEGINS TO END -- there's recently been a shift in Milkweed's policy -- a decision to publish mostly books which deal with "The World as Home: Literature About the Natural World". It is a decision which, even though Emilie Buchwald says she continues to love and admire my work (indeed, she's offered to write letters in support of it to anyone I choose) has brought us -- sadly, because I've been happy with Milkweed and with Emilie in particular -- to a parting of the ways.

It's not that my new manuscript is "against nature" -- how can any poetry worth its salt be that? But this latest book, AS EARTH BEGINS TO END, just isn't all that comfortable with the natural world. In it, as you'll see if you take a look at it, one of the things I'm trying to focus on is, besides one's personal and private sadness over the inevitable loss of loved ones, the more public sadness one can't help but feel over that entropically generated (and far too often mankind-assisted) loss of energy (shape, body, life) which I take to be a constant of the entire universe. It is an environment in which each one of us -- plant, animal, human being, earth itself -- is, quite naturally, "ending".

Nor is it that Milkweed has anything against my work, either. Marilyn Chin, who'll be teaching it in her graduate workshop at San Diego this year, tells me that my third Milkweed book, INVISIBLE HORSES, was very nearly on the short list for the National Book Awards in 1996. And my first one, THE TONGUES WE SPEAK, was a New York Times "Book of the Year" for 1990.
Meanwhile, ever since and even before Milkweed’s decision, I continue not only to polish and edit this new manuscript, but also to write more poems having to do with its central issues. Though probably very few of them will end up in the new manuscript, I know you’ll understand how hard it is to let go of this particular subject.

But now I’m hoping, obviously, that Copper Canyon will want to pick up where Milkweed left off. Would you be at all interested in publishing AS EARTH BEGINS TO END? I’d be delighted if you were.

Happy New Year

and best wishes, as always –

Patricia Goedicke

PS. I find I have to add that just next day, the day after I finished this letter, I ran into your wonderful tribute to Hayden Carruth in APR. A fine poem, to a fine fine poet. I wrote to him about SCRAMBLED EGGS myself, and he replied – we’ve been intermittent epistolary acquaintances for years; he used to publish me sometimes, when he was poetry editor at Harper’s -- in his usual direct, utterly generous fashion.