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Letter to Emilie Buchwald

Patricia Goedicke

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Emilie Buchwald, Editor  
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Dear Emilie,

So, in the hope you really meant it when you said you'd be kind enough to look at a new version of AS EARTH BEGINS TO END, here it is. Really, you are more than generous to do so: I can't tell you how much it means to this aging poet to have someone "out there" who is -- still -- willing to help.

Anyway. If you truly can and will look at this, would you please not even GLANCE at the old version before you read this one? And, above all, don't think, when you come to familiar titles in this new collection, that the poem in question is going to be anything like -- finally -- the one you may or may not remember from the first ms. Some of them will be, of course, but several others -- in particular some very crucially "placed" ones -- (maybe you'll remember my strong feeling that a poetry manuscript should be almost as theme and plot oriented as a novel) -- are not.

Because the biggest change in this newly ordered ms. has to do with a more forthright approach to the little marriage-story which threads its way through the larger arc of the book. Originally I'd been at pains to try to submerge the more personal story in various considerations of wider, more generalized evocations of that entropically generated (or degenerated!), inevitable loss of energy (shape, body, life) which seems to me to be a constant not only of each precious human entity but of the entire natural universe. (A universe in which each one of us -- parent, child, animal, plant, ocean, mountain, rock, planet -- is quite naturally "ending"). Finally, though, at the suggestion of one of my best graduate students, but mostly because I'd begun to be afraid of losing my readers in a cloud of intellectually grandiose fuzz, I decided to try focusing the manuscript a little more narrowly.
So here it is. Changed, but not that much changed. I guess. I certainly hope you’ll like it! And if so, and if you think Sam Hamill would be interested – or even just might be interested – that maybe you’d want to write him about it, or even have the manuscript sent to him yourself? Or have me do it... or whatever.

Well, I’m still, obviously, reeling from Milkweed’s decision. But not so much anymore. The big thing is that I’ve finally got some of my health back, and that means, first and foremost, that at last I’m able to read and even write poetry again. Meanwhile, though, I continue to believe in this manuscript...

Even as I continue to believe in Milkweed and in you, Emilie, in particular: your taste, your candor, your literary and artistic wisdom and courage... Not to mention – what must be obvious, if not to you, at least to all your friends -- the intelligence, sweetness, and general “goodness” of your entire being.

With gratitude, admiration, and affection always –