Cover photograph by Gerard Malanga
PAINTED BRIDE QUARTERLY

NUMBER 39

JOHN LOGAN ISSUE
THE ANGELUS

There is a window in my house at the top of the stairs which looks out across acres of gravestones and at St. Dominic’s Church. Sometimes in the evening when I hear the bells I look up and see John Logan’s ghost standing there.

I’d only lived in this house for a week or so in August of ’83 when I opened up the third floor to a few unexpected houseguests. It was the weekend of the first (and last!) Painted Bride Community Poetry Festival. Sally Jo Sorensen, then editor of the PBQ, as well as coordinator of the Painted Bride Art Center’s reading series, organized the weekend to bring together the various facets of Philadelphia’s poetry scene.

At the time Etheridge Knight was in town, conducting his Free People’s workshops at the Painted Bride. Etheridge, of course, was given a featured role in the festival, and for one reason or another, John Logan and Tom O’Leary flew in from Boston to check it out.

John read a couple of poems that night, an unannounced guest, including one I asked for, “The Picnic.” It was the first time I ever heard him read, and I’ll never forget his slow, gentle voice:

Yes, she said, and I felt the sound and word
In my hand join the sound and word in hers
As in one name said, or in one cupped hand.

The rest of the night is fragments. A lot of it was spent in trips to Paddy’s Bar around the corner. And I remember standing for an hour or more in the alley behind the Art Center after everything was over, most everyone was gone, and while O’Leary played his squeezebox, and Etheridge, a harmonica, the last dozen or so revelers sang and danced with the last bottles of wine and beer. Then, finally, I recall everyone at my house—my huge, hot, new but ancient, monster of a house—a dozen poets flopped on the furniture and sprawled across the floors. John and Etheridge were conducting a seminar on Poetics, irreverent and insightful, egged on by an appreciative audience. After all, everyone was eating and drinking again, and the night was young.

John read and recited a few of his poems, parts of poems, even a new work he had written only that week. What I keep seeing, though, looking back on that night, is when he picked up a book a young woman had with her and read Yeats’ “Song of Wandering Aengus.” Why hadn’t I thought to turn on a tape recorder?

That was the night a dozen poets slept in a house in Holmesburg. The next day they scattered, most of them heading back to the Painted Bride for more festival. The second night was more relaxed, but the house was not empty. After the Sunday closing session, Philadelphia’s poets digressed in their different directions. Some of us ended up in the local Holiday Inn—
we sat at the bar watching “Mommy Dearest” on cable TV while O’Leary snuck upstairs to the pool to cool off. Etheridge had to fly to Cleveland for a reading. My house was now his home, and would be for a couple of months upon his return. O’Leary and Logan decided to stay awhile too, a couple days each.

And I remember Monday and Tuesday; John taught me something I didn’t know about my new home. Each evening he would stand at the top of the stairs and look across the graveyard toward the church. He waited each night for the “Angelus,” the prayer of the bells, a regular occurrence that I hadn’t noticed before. Now, I hear the bells at six o’clock each night, and I see John standing there with his pains, his prayers and his poems.

There are a number of people who helped make this issue of the PBQ more than just a good idea. Most importantly, thank you to the editors and staff of the Painted Bride Quarterly; it was good to be involved again with them in an important project. Then, there were those friends who answered their phones one night long ago and brainstormed with me to get the idea of this volume together, especially Steve Berg, Michael Waters, Al Poulin, Bill Heyen and Roger Aplon. Without their interest, advice and encouragement, this special issue in honor of John could not have happened. And John, thank you.

Louis McKee
Holmesburg
July 1, 1989
FOR J.L.

The ducks are gone
back to the pond, the echo

of it all a curious
resonance now it's

over, life's like that?
What matters, so soon become fact.

Robert Creeley
Dear Louis,

Many thanks for the invitation to contribute to the issue devoted to John and his work. Unfortunately, after several months of trial and error, I've come up empty. I guess I'm still too close to the death of so close a friend.

I'd known John for twenty-nine years; first as his student, second as his associate editor on Choice, next and at various times, my second father, the older brother I'd always wanted but didn't have, and but always as a friend.

We'd shared many experiences. Some absurd (like the time on a train from Chicago to Minneapolis for a Little Mag. convention, when, after a nap, John got up to go to the can only to return and say, "Guess what I just did, woke up brushing my teeth with shaving cream.") and, of course, others, maybe the most memorable of which was the time one blustery spring day in Chicago when standing on a safety-island in the middle of Michigan Ave. at the peak of rush hour traffic he read in perfect voice and over the traffic's roar the complete text of his most recently completed poem (some say his best), "Spring of the Thief."

As we all know, John loved poetry and poets. He'd go out of his way to introduce fellow poets to one another and was never above celebrating work he could respond to no matter how different it may have been from his own style or intent.

He had an uncanny eye and ear for what was right in poetry—all literature—and music which was his second love. I remember his honing my appreciation for Mahler while I introduced him to Coltrane and Davis.

I hope more people will be drawn to experience the genius of this wonderful human being—maybe they'll even read his work.

Roger Aplon
JOHN LOGAN IN SEATTLE:
THE CONDITION OF ONE'S SOUL, CONFESSIONAL GUILT,
AND THE SEARCH FOR LOST SONS

I have a friend named Frank—
The only one who ever dares to call
and ask me, "How's your soul?"
I hadn't thought about it for a while,
and was ashamed to say I didn't know.
I have no priest for now.
Who
will forgive me then. Will you?
—from "Three Moves."

At the suggestion of the poet Louis Simpson, John Logan contacted
Robert Heilman, Chairman of the Department of English at the University
of Washington (Seattle) on February 25, 1964, to inquire about the
possibility of a permanent or temporary position. At the time Logan was
a visiting professor and Chairman of the World Classics Department at
St. Mary's College of California.

For better or worse, Logan had long been associated with Catholic colleges and with what might be called "Catholic preoccupations": He had
joined the faculty at Notre Dame in 1951, and that bastion of Catholic thought still represented his "home base" when he wrote to Heilman from St. Mary's; moreover, his first collections of poetry, Cycle for Mother Cabrini (1955) and Ghosts of the Heart (1960) pegged him, at least in the minds of interviewers, as a "religious poet."

Logan's letter to Heilman, however, suggests that he was not anxious
to return to Notre Dame's Golden Dome. For one thing, Logan wanted
to remain on the west coast; for another, he was "rather anxious to leave
the Catholic College environment entirely."

Logan was subsequently offered an appointment as visiting professor for
the winter and spring quarters of 1965—as the fourth person to hold the
Theodore Roethke visiting Chair. The Department got all it bargained for—
Logan taught two courses each term (one in verse writing; the other in
modern poetry)—and much more during Logan's brief visit. And readers
everywhere got the extraordinary poems later collected as The Zig Zag Walk

In 1965, Seattle was a city just beginning to feel its national oats. If it
is true that the World's Fair was fading into memory, it was also true that
some reminders—a spanking new Opera House, a string of chi-chi coffee
houses, cabaret, and fern bars that dotted downtown's Pioneer Square,
a revitalized Public Market, and of course, an infamous Space Needle—
had become permanent additions to the Seattle landscape. Something of
the same giddy spirit could be felt along the corridors of Parrington Hall,
where the English Department felt its national stock—particularly where
contemporary American poetry was concerned—rising almost daily.
In short, Seattle as it was in 1965 was probably the ideal choice for a poet such as John Logan. But that was hardly the case when a young poet named Theodore Roethke joined the English Department in 1947. As he remembers it in his notebooks:

...when I came out to Seattle, the head of the department said, “Ted, we don’t quite know what to do with you: you’re the only serious practicing poet within 1500 miles.” I sort of was given to understand that I had a status between—if it were Oklahoma—between a bank-robber and a Congressman.

Granted, Roethke was a poet around whom apocrypha clustered, and he was not above doing some Whitmanian advertising for himself. His voracious appetite, his combative brag-and-swagger, had a peculiarly American ring. His was a life and an art dedicated to taking on everything. Which is to say, there may be more crowing than truth in the words Roethke put into his chairman’s mouth.

But one thing is clear: in 1947, nobody would have thought that Seattle might be a congenial place for “schooling the spirit” (as Roethke like to put it), much less for bidding forth the Muse. Roethke’s presence made things possible, not only for himself, but also for the students he taught and for those, such as Logan, who taught in his footsteps.

Atmosphere probably sums up the situation best. As graduate students, we looked forward to those visitors who would come bearing Roethke’s name. The Department made impressive choices in the quarters that followed Roethke’s untimely death in 1963 (e.g., Elizabeth Bishop, Vernon Watkins, Henry Reed), but none struck us as more exciting, as more engaging, than Logan. To say that he was a “fresh breath” would be to say too little; he was a tornado. No doubt our professors—who invited Logan to their homes for dinner, only to have him cut out early so that he could carouse with their graduate students—thought him boorish, but such is the stuff we quickly turned into legend.

To be sure, there was a darker side to the highjinks, which is to say, Logan’s “ghosts of the heart” traveled with him. If pressed, we would have admitted that he was a desperate, haunted poet, but we preferred to fix on the energy he exuded, on his ready wit, his comic flair, and of course, on the new poems he was eager to share with us. After all, the books that had formed us belonged less to the school of T.S. Eliot’s scrupulous impersonality than to new curriculum of Lowell’s Life Studies (1959), W.D. Snodgrass’s Heart’s Needle (1959), Sylvia Plath’s The Colossus (1962), and Anne Sexton’s To Bedlam and Back (1960). Confessional poetry was in the saddle, and it rode us. Later, of course, we would learn to distinguish between those poets who could turn the litany of their private griefs into the stuff of Art and those who could not; but in that time, that place, Romanticism’s darker hues wielded deep fascinations.

We were, in short, a indiscriminate bunch. What we wanted were poets who would “tell us all”—about their smashups, their breakdowns, their ad-
dictions, their madness. More often than not, however, Logan worked his magic through understatement, indirection, and an ear finely attuned to slant rhymes:

Tame ducks and my neighbors’ boats.
The ducks honk about the floats...
They walk dead drunk onto the land and grounds,
Iridescent blue and black and green and brown.
They live on swell
our aged houseboats spill.
But still they are beautiful.
Look! The duck with its unlikely beak
has stopped to pick
and pull
at the petted daffodil.
—from “Three Moves.”

Spill/Beautiful; beak/pick—Logan’s poems were filled with as many “moves” as his rootless speaker. The difference, of course, is that we knew, without knowing the details, the biographical facts, as it were, that the lonely, confessional voice in the poem belonged, at bottom, to Logan himself. True, he was living on a houseboat near the UW campus, and true, he really did have a friend named Frank who asked about his soul, but the force that drives through the poem’s epicenter speaks to the essential difference between Logan and the ducks he so comically describes. They are “all fucked up,” too water-logged and swell-laden to fly, Icarus-like, toward the sun: “These foolish ducks lack a sense of guilt.”

By contrast, Logan was awash in guilt; we felt instinctively that his credentials as a “confessional poet” were always in good order, although we could not point to specific passages—as we could in, say, Plath or Sexton or Snodgrass—that made the pathology gut-wrenchingly clear. Rather, one began to feel a pattern taking shape as words such as “son,” “brother” and “lover” increasingly became interchangeable, often confused and confusing, terms.

In this sense, Roethke’s “The Lost Son” struck us as drawing its primary energies from a more predictable, even more “conventional,” cultural mythology—despite its verbal dazzle and technical experimentation. After all, the story of a son pitted against a strong, unappeasable father, struggling for an identity against his own doubts and a sea of Freudian troubles, is as old as the hills, as ancient as Oedipus and the Hebrew Bible. Logan, however, gave the familiar saga a new, spooky twist. His was less a flight from than a multi-layered, and obsessive, “search for.”

Often, the quest took him to Seattle’s Pioneer Square, where skid row bums shared the neighborhood with college students and those the eighties would call Yuppies. No doubt a part of Logan’s counterpunctal portrait of the “scene” could be chalked up to such venerable literary traditions as the late-Romanticism low-life slumming and the fatal attraction that “bot-
tom dogs” had for the chroniclers of Naturalism. But “Thirteen Preludes for Pioneer Square” was much, much more. For Logan, Pioneer Square was an extension of his inner geography in much the same way that, say, Richard Hugo would seek out played out, largely abandoned small towns as emblems of the Self. But lurking just behind the sharp, clinical images and the playful wit lay a Logan fascinated by the abomination, and unable to control its dark whispering:

Moe's loan
keeps the pioneers in wine.
There's a trail of blood in the alley behind...
Some wake and go to the john,
where they solicit the young.
In the Six Fourteen the queers
think they are the pioneers.
When they dance they bleed and swallow
trying to decide who should lead
and who follow.

Like his obsessions, like his guilts, Logan tried to shore the well-turned line, the slightly off-rhyme, against his run. We laughed at the poem's outrageousness, at the animated reading style that Logan brought to his comic poem, but inside, our hearts cracked.

"Lines for Michael in the Picture" confirmed our suspicions, at the same moment that we realized we were in the presence of a deeply moving, superbly achieved poem. Rendered in chiaroscuro, the poem is a series of interlocking frames: Michael "lined" in the photograph that occasions Logan's meditation/love song; Michael captured as well in the "lines" of the poem itself; the darkness in which God dwells according to the epigraph from F.W. Robertson; and the "shadow self" that emerges as the terms of Michael's—and Logan's—shifting, multiple identity.

One could, of course, talk about the poem in Jungian terms, where the word shadow has a special resonance ("you are my shadow in the picture," the opening line declares), but the painful confessions that follow—about his loneliness, his essential orphanhood, his deep need for a son/lover—resist such an easy reduction. As Logan himself puts it:

Something binds every kind of orphan.
I could find my own loneliness in your face,
hear it in your voice.
But there is something else,
some part of myself I seem to track
(did you know I used to be called Jack?),
so I follow like a blind animal
with hope (and fear)
your brilliant, shadow spoor.
Indeed, the “something else” is a fusion so intimate, so scary, that it defies categorization. What they have become—at least in the process of the poem and the wilderness outing it describes—is the enigmatic quality captured in the photograph, the moment of transformation, of soul’s merging into one, that is perhaps the province of Art alone:

It was the last ember
of that transforming island fire
that seems to fade in your eyes in the picture.
It makes you brother, friend, son, father.
If it isn’t death, it is change,
and in that fine shadow flame
what was locked is yours, Michael, as much as mine.

Not surprisingly, Logan’s fixation on Michael led directly to the griefs of “Lines for a Friend Who Left” (“I have this grief because you are a ghost/and a thief. Since you left I have missed/ my own self”) and “Letter to a Young Father in Exile”:

Thus
I am loving and as treacherous
as parent or as child—in the black
ancient figure you and he may fight to break.
Oh my lost, abandoned brother,
you know you had a father.

To be sure, it is the Vietnam War (“this fucking war/ in another land”) that occasions Michael’s flight, but Logan’s concerns, even then, were fastened to the elemental, to the “terrible inner fight” of sexuality, rather than to the narrowly political: “Sweat, tears and sperm/ press together from the muscles of a man/ such as you are in our time...” The mysteries of birth are what matter as Logan confronts the specter of Michael’s abandoned child—which is to say, when Logan confronts the ghosts of his own abandoned sons. In a world that sends its young off to die in foreign wars, Logan acknowledges, “sadly,” his own culpability:

I am cruel.
And I too know how to kill!
For when I last wrote
and said I wanted to forget
(abort
your image out of my mind)
simply because you are not around
for my solace and my life, how
I see I raised what came
into my hand
against you.
Given the heartache and resignation of "Letter to a Young Father in Exile," the desperate prowling described in "The Search" (which brings The Zig Zag Walk to its fitting conclusion). As Logan puts it: "But for whom do I look?" And in the lines that follow he ticks through a litany of negatives (e.g., "My search is not for wife, daughter or for son/ for time to time/ it has taken me from them"), nor is it "for queers/ for my search leads me from their bars." Rather, the quest is for that reader who will accept the offering of his poems, that reader who might possibly grant him the absolution that the Church could no longer provide.

In this sense, the essential spirit of Logan's Seattle poems had come full-circle, from the first poem he wrote after his arrival—"Three Moves"—to "The Search," completed when he moved to his new position at San Francisco State. But as he said when he wrote to Robert Heilman about the possibility of returning to Seattle when his stint in San Francisco was over, he had had fine students, he had made a number of friends, and best of all, he "was very pleased with the new poems I got there as well." What Logan probably didn't know is that some forty University of Washington graduate students had signed a petition asking that he be made permanent poet-in-residence. I suspect he would have been gratified by the show of confidence (one that the Department dutifully "filed," as it went about the business of hiring other distinguished visitors for the Roethke Chair). Reading over the names—including my own—I was reminded, once again, of how much John, and his poems, had become a part of our education, and our lives.

Sanford Pinsker
LINES FOR A GHOST
OF MY HUNGRY GRADUATE STUDENT HEART
for John Logan

When you zig-zagged into Seattle that wet Fall day,
we could have kissed your lapsed Catholic feet.
That’s how starved we were for anyone,
famous or not, who would talk about poetry
without footnote or bibliography. We knew you
were lugging enough crosses to make Mother Teresa
throw in the towel: booze, bad dreams, guilt.
You ran a one-man confessional school
and I signed up for more night classes
than a teaching assistant should. But I loved
bar-hopping along Skid Row, as you held court—
breaking up the lumberjacks with your songs
or telling us the latest dirt from New York.
Even though the sun beat us back to the U district,
I didn’t care. What if my themes on “Civil
Disobedience” remained unmarked? So what if pages
of Burton’s endless melancholy were still unturned?
This was the life I imagined in the poems
I, one day, imagined writing.
But when you kept calling, I found myself begging
off: “Sorry, John, but I’m drowning in papers”
or “Love to go, only I’ve got this exam...”
The truth was, night after night of those smoky joints
was too much for me. I had fears that I would cease
to be either teacher or writer. So, I played it safe.
Got tenure. And on this wet afternoon, an ocean away
from my youth and its ghosts, I write these lines
to you, hungry friend of my hungrier heart.

Sanford Pinsker
Perhaps because he began his professional career as a scientist, John Logan's characteristic poems are constructed out of the most minute details observed from the physical world around him. Such lines as "I let the rain/move its audible little hands/gently on my skin" (from "Spring of the Thief") suggest the sensuousness of his language in response to the things of this world. He lingers on things and the words for things, delighting in their sound and texture. In Logan's poetry neither physical, psychological nor spiritual suffering negates the fact of beauty in the self and non-self, nor the possibility of celebration. Pain and guilt do not nullify the alternatives of joy and grace. He recognizes with Rilke that poetry is "the bridge barely curved that connects the terrible and the tender." But his poems also repeatedly affirm that "there is a freshness/ nothing can destroy in us/ not even we ourselves."

Moreover, what distinguishes the work of John Logan from that of most personal-confessional poets is that the poems are far less confessional and self-flagellating. He spares us the leprous details of individual incidents of failure, deterioration and guilt. If he asks us, his readers, to be confessors, he doesn't seek absolution for any given act or general Manichean sense of sin. Rather, he offers an exchange of that most human and grace-giving embrace of an accepting forgiveness of the guilt that is in each of us. And thus each of his readers participating in that embrace of poetry, as it were, becomes Logan's anonymous lover.

The full organic development and structure of his poems, as well as the careful orchestration of tone, further distinguish Logan's work as one of the supreme lyric poets of his generation. At his best, his poems are utterly personal and natural, determined neither by structural, thematic nor tonal formula. His poems succeed in sounding as natural as breathing; they begin simply and grow in intensity out of their own emotional necessity, as the breath of a person in battle or in love. Through a harmonious counterpoint of tones that reflect the varied inner strains of a total personality (as opposed to tone and posture reflecting a chosen and perhaps partial personality) Logan's poems rise to discoveries of— and are themselves— bright epiphanies illumined by "all the colors of the flesh." Rich mosaics of an integrated personality's experience of the human, orchestrations of that range of music rising from the total self, the poems of John Logan are at once "unpredictable as grace" and "a ballet for the ear."

That beauty, grace and joy, the possibility of that ultimate transfiguration at the heart of Teilhard de Chardin's vision and John Logan's poetry may never be totally fulfilled, because the human journey is "too short for the hope of change." However, throughout his poetry John Logan testifies that the quest for human reconciliation and embrace, the primal wellsprings of joy, grace and beauty, must be vigorously pursued in all spheres of human experience, including the last:
I want my own lit candle lamp burned in my skull
like the Lighthouse Man of Chungking
who could lead the traveler home.
Well, I am still a traveler and don't know where
I live. If my home is here, inside my breast,
light it up! And I will invite you as my first quest.


Born in Red Oak, Iowa, in 1923, John Logan received a B.A. in Biology from Coe College, an M.A. in Language and Literature from the State University of Iowa, and did graduate work in philosophy at Georgetown University and the University of Notre Dame. He taught literature and creative writing at St. John's College and the University of Washington (following the death of Theodore Roethke), among others. John Logan's other awards and distinctions for his poetry included a Writing Grant from the John D. Rockefeller Foundation, Summer Writing Fellowships from The Research Foundation of the State University of New York, The Morton Dauwen Zabel Award for Poetry from The American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, a Creative Writing Fellowship in Poetry from The National Endowment for the Arts and The Robert and Hazel Ferguson Memorial Awards for Poetry from The Chicago Foundation for Literature.

John Logan died on November 6, 1987, in San Francisco. He was 64 years old. He is survived by his wife, Guenevere, their nine children, and seven grandchildren.

A. Poulin, Jr.
CALCO di CADEVERE di DONNA. POMPEII
for John Logan

I
Lady, I have resurrected this old
postcard photograph of you while
rummaging among mementos we accumulate

as proof that we have occupied
another time and space, perhaps some
other lifetime, more perfect than this one,

when we were merely tourists in those
ancient capitals of pain where even
daily anguish seemed fired to the pitch

of art and we still had faith in beauty
smoldering at the heart of suffering, needing
nothing but a glance to flare and suddenly

transform itself from ordinary
bone, blood and flesh into astounding presence
and outlast the sound its dying makes.

Lady, I have lived too long and logged
too many miles on foot to still believe
this dust that aches my bones and grates my throat

and swirls in fury in my lungs could blaze
into a beautiful concerto
and negate the crush of entropy

in every particle of ash of me;
but your graceful calcified cadaver,
this cold winter night, rekindles my belief.

II
That is the perfect posture for anguish:
your body turned away from it, your face
buried in your arms, and your enormous

weight balanced on your elbows and your knees;
with the gentle slope of your long legs,
the rise and fall of your small hips and breasts
carved by lava's frenzied hand, Lady,
you're more perfectly human than David
standing naked in Firenze's public square.
A mother trying to protect
the petrified foetus inside you,
you're an ancient lover, too, arched
above the man who's already vanished
in the very love of you. Solder for an-
other mouth, your burning lips kiss nothing
but the space beneath them, frozen into
silence, your smooth buttocks raised above
your belly, knees and naked feet in anti-
cipation of a pleasure, penetration
and amazement that may never end—
that moment of unearthly passion and
anxiety before the barely human
touches the divine. In one astounding
instant that the rest of us must struggle
for a lifetime to achieve, you blazed,
bloomed, and became the consummated gesture,
word, the emblem that few creatures ever
give to others. In your endless seething,
endless undulation in the agony
of passion, that grace which is most ours,
the curved and fragile bridge between
the terrible and tender, you are
what this earth, in its decreasing orbit
of the sun, returns to survivors
and to other lovers sometimes: the name-
less gift of lava rising from its center
like a tongue reaffirming the sublime
breath brooding one small egg of glorious
music in each cell of bone, blood, flesh.

III
Snow has begun to fall, a familiar
welcomed ash; an alarming fire's
raging on a distant hill; my wife
and daughter have long faded in the dark-
ness of my breath; and the veins in both
my legs throb rivulets of molten rock.
While we remain inhabitants of this
planet still in flux, through the last
dimension that will always separate us,

before I fall asleep in nostalgia
for another place, and with only that
small space beneath you to be filled

before you walk away, a vision
consummated without act, tonight, Donna,
I want to slip my body under yours.

A. Poulin, Jr.
JOHN LOGAN: SOME MEMORIES

"Do you know how to sing 'Home on the Range' in German?" Those were the first words I heard John Logan utter socially. We were in a farmhouse near Brockport, New York, relaxing with the likes of Galway Kinnell, Louis Simpson, and Carolyn Kizer during a poetry conference at the State University campus there. Al Poulin had gathered a score of important writers for the four day event in April 1973, but among the luminaries John Logan was the poet I wanted most to hear and meet. Or have sing "Home on the Range" auf Deutsch!

And so he did, leaning against the refrigerator in that rustic kitchen, having sipped some of my BYOB Jack Daniels, of course. I remember he called it "sippin' stuff," barely suppressing that smile of his. He was particularly happy that night about his work on "a long poem" to be called later "Poem in Progress."

Earlier that day we had met officially, when I introduced myself, stumbling like a schoolboy over "Why, you're John Logan." He was sitting behind me about to enjoy someone's reading. Looking squarely in my eye, he said, "Don't I know you?" Even if it was simply a gracious rejoinder, I relaxed. I think he intended that. Nevertheless, it was the beginning of a long friendship, disturbing at times, but always tinged with ingenuousness and the unexpected.

In the late fifties I had first read a poem by John in a periodical somewhere called "On a Priz Crucifix by a Student Sculptor." Perhaps I was attracted to the work because I was a graduate student at the time, but even today I marvel at the achievement. It seems to me John does several things in this poem that would frequently mark his work and life later. Most simply there is the link between student and "teacher," something John would nurture and cherish throughout his career as professor and publisher. Next, there is that sacred eroticism, the astonishing blurring of Godflesh and athlete, a subject he would master so successfully in "Spring of the Thief," where the spirit and the body become one. Finally, there are those characteristically memorable stanzas: "the awful time of being young."

Having discovered more and more of John's work over the years, I began teaching old stand-bys like "Three Moves" to illustrate the symphonic effect of lovely lines like these to students:

They live on swill
our aged houseboats spill.
But still they are beautiful.
Look! The duck with its unlikely beak
has stopped to pack
and pull
at the potted daffodil.
My enthusiasm would run over. Who would ever expect that final, magical “daffodil!” Another favorite with students was “The Picnic,” which I would assign and then play on the Today’s Poets recording John made with some others in 1968. Once again I would impress students with the need to hear the poem, especially in John’s case. The color imagery so notable in his work is so evocative here: the blackbird with “a spot of gold or red under its quick wing” and Ruth’s shells, “Green, white, blue,” that she has collected. But even more clearly the poem speaks to all of us schoolboys and schoolgirls on the edge of love.

After that fateful meeting in Brockport, I invited John to come read for us at LaSalle the following February. After some confusion about the date and his itinerary, John did descend on us and gave a memorable performance to a fairly packed Saturday night house. He wore a gray crew neck sweater and love beads made of some sort of stone, blue-green, I believe. John read only a few new poems, including “Poem for My Brother” with its remarkable blending of “gold and lapis lazuli.” I remember someone asking John if the poem did the trick, if he and his brother were reconciled. Maybe poetry could make something happen.

What John wanted more to do that night in Philadelphia was to try out something else new on the audience. He was very excited about reading some excerpts from his memoir The House That Jack Built that begins, “I was born on a street named Joy, of which I remember nothing.” Hearing a poet read prose, however, no matter how lyrical, can be a disappointment. I am afraid John did drone on and lost a good part of his audience that evening.

The party that followed was another matter. John was very anxious to converse with student writers and encouraged them to read some work. He also told me about his son John’s recording of “Suzanne” which was about to appear as part of Dryad (1975) and promised to send me a copy (which he did). That unlikely, though characteristic, poem has been an enduring favorite with students, with its flower power imagery, and, once again, those gorgeous colors.

Over the years that followed there were letters and the usual cryptic postcards whose crabbed script could sometimes appear indecipherable. There are notes from California and Hawaii, London and Ireland. Many expressed concern about misplaced addresses and loose connections. Being a Buffalo boy myself, I could especially appreciate a note from there, dated April 18, 1979, ending “Happy crocuses bloom in your yard!” Only a Buffalonian can understand such ecstasy.

In the eighties things took some serious downturns. While attending a summer seminar at the University of California in 1980, I happened to board a Berkeley bus one weekday morning only to encounter John sound asleep in one of the seats. He roused up for his stop and I joined him for a long chat after he ate a fast food sundae I was certain he should not have been enjoying with his diabetes. He was particularly depressed about his friend James Wright’s recent death and spoke of him with a real sense of loss. I mentioned that I had spoken with Josephine Miles who claimed she had
first helped John and his family into the Bay Area with a teaching job years before. Even then, according to Jo, so pitifully afflicted with arthritis, John was on the road to ruination.

Nevertheless, John begged me to attend some poetry readings being given at local bookstores like Cody's that summer by some of his proteges. He was still the supportive, proud pop, and I recalled how amiable and encouraging he had always been to younger writers over the years.

Finally, there was a local reading staged in Autumn 1982. Lou Camp had arranged an appearance at Bucks County Community College near Philadelphia. John's equilibrium was off that evening, but he valiantly tried to read with some control. For those of us who knew and loved John's work, it was particularly wrenching. At the end of his reading, John collapsed. A physician friend of mine who was along diagnosed the problem as prescription drug, not alcohol, related and helped him regain his balance with medication by morning. He was very shaky, and I was reluctant to ask for more book inscriptions. However, he took my copy of The House That Jack Built, moved to a nearby table, and wrote, "For Richard hoping he may find here a room of his own. Oct. 16 '82. John." His last postcard mentioned the Lenore Marshall prize and some new poems about Greece...

Here, then, was a man who suffered and exulted, always with compassion and writerly control. His reverence for the great ones—Keats, Yeats, Hart Crane, and Dylan Thomas—can only be matched by our memories of him.

He sees the lasting
Crucifixion in the growing man
Who every passing day lets die a little more

The body of the boy grieved for.

Richard Lautz
BY THE CHAPEL

We stood around for awhile and John said, "This is where I begin to feel the sky. If you wait for it, after someone is gone, or even in a cave, or at night, it comes near and leans on you. Afterward, any touch will connect far away."

That's what John said while we waited there.

And it's true if you lean carefully and listen you hear someone who used to wait with you, and you don't care if the sky comes or if anything tries to comfort. So I couldn't argue with John. My shoulder ached for his bowing so long without any help.

And a voice in my ear did sound good and near.

William Stafford
Love Poem
Last night you would not come,
and you have been gone so long.
I yearn to find you in my aging, earthen arms
again (your alchemy can change my clay to skin).
I long to turn and watch again
from my half-hidden place
the lost, beautiful slopes and fallings of your face,
the black, rich leaf of each eyelash,
fresh, beach-brightened stones of your teeth.
I want to listen as you breathe yourself to sleep
(for by our human art we mime
the sleeper till we dream).
I want to smell the dark
herb gardens of your hair—touch the thin shock
that drifts over your high brow when
you rinse it clean,
for it is so fine.
I want to hear the light,
long wind of your sigh.
But again tonight I know you will not come.
I will never feel again
your gentle, sleeping calm
from which I took
so much strength, so much of my human heart.
Because the last time
I reached to you
as you sat upon the bed
and talked, you caught both my hands
in yours and crossed them gently on my breast.
I died mimicking the dead.

“Love Poem” is among the contemporary pieces I never fail to introduce
to students. More important, return to constantly for the pleasures poetry
offers—some poetry. If “Love Poem” is forgotten 200 years from now, that
far age will be the poorer, one I would not care to know. I will leave it
to the erudite to comment on it, and John Logan’s other fine poems. I mean
only to express a few words of gratitude for an art without which most
days would not be worth the living.

I met John Logan over twenty-five years ago, when after a reading here
he came over to our “barracks” hut—our first home in DeKalb—we
chummed halfway through the night, as though friends forever. We had
years to catch up on. Later, I was grateful to show up in Choice, his magazine,
and even more grateful to have his poems in the first Heartland: Poets of
the Midwest anthology. Such comings together make me wonder what it is about poetry that makes us feel closer to its makers than to our neighbors. I knew John Logan intimately from my journeys into poems that stirred up love for him.

It was in the mid-sixties, after reading Cycle for Mother Cabrini and Ghosts of the Heart, I drove into Chicago to hear John Logan read again. It was an exhilarating experience. He read with astonishing intimacy, every word softly, but firmly spoken, suggesting in subtle ways the proper rhythm of the line and the experience. Half way through the hour-long reading he announced he'd take a break, and in those fifteen minutes anticipation built so that the second half rose to a climax. As the audience cheered, I thought, so that's how it's really done. It was an evening that touched me deeply, and I've remembered it as a great experience.

Over the years word reached me of John Logan's life—troubles, pains of one kind or another. Because I cared for him, and loved his work, I dare to hope he was aware, through all that, he would live on in his poems.

Lucien Stryk
AT MIDNIGHT THERE ARE NO HORIZONS

1
The suckle-skin that slakes
the smallest thirsts is fed
by what is sucking it.

Tightly
bonded at the loins, all lovers
flex and thrust in ditto
ravennings they rouse
and satisfy and, satisfying, rouse
again.

Pre-skeletal, we’re
at the mercy of our mouths.
Or are we merely one
another’s food as God is ours?
Beneath the world of the polite,
the meekly conscientious or the quietly
predictable, we vie with deeper
hunger.

Hungering, we’re like a bride
who shucks her slip and under-
silks and lets herself be loved
into a new geography.

Her final
whimpers wake her like a field
that lightning suddenly ignites
into the height and depth and breadth
of what it means to be.

Or
we can rise like Cain and kill
a brother who will be no less
a brother in his grave.

What good’s
philosophy if what we are
is what we are?

How holy
are religions if we’ve killed for God
as readily as for revenge
or jealousy or just the hell of it?
On days as brief as pleasure
or as long as sorrow, we concede
as a feeder or as food that all civility's
a lie, and everything from love
to murder is a twitch of appetite.

2
Death hides in every clock,
and so we damn them all.
They keep reverting us to bone
or else to relics that re-live us...
Dour drunk deadman's gone
to the angels.

Gone too
the southern cavalier who sang
of war and bats and what
it meant to wither.

Gone
last the lanky king
who larded wide his royalty
by cunning, craft and kin
until he paced the stage alone.
What are they now but pages
on a small, tight shelf of books?
Each one keeps to his inches.

3
Clockmakers from Ticino say
that every minute wounds us,
and the last one kills.

Wounded
every day but still undead,
we breathe behind last words—
"All else being equal..." or "Nine
chances out of ten..." or "Barring
the unforeseeable."

We learn
too late that nothing's equal
here, that single chances are the most
we get, that everything is unforeseeable.
The poem of our lives proclaims
there's something still ahead
to be discovered if we just have time.
Rush, and we miss it.

Wait,
and it finds us.

    Even
while we notch initials in a birch,
have schools or sons or streets
named after us, endow cathedrals
to remember us in bronze, the poem
of our lives is always being
born.

    We are the picture
it's creating, breath by breath.
What's taking shape is never
what we planned and not what we expect.
We call it life because we must.
We have it just where it wants us.

Samuel Hazo

Seated on the davenport at Robert Sund's Little Red House on Ravenna Avenue in Seattle, April 1966. Photograph by Mary Randlett
JOHN LOGAN AND THE WISH FOR CHANGE

John Logan was a master of sound. In an age when most poetry is written for the page, that is, mumbled, on the page and in the air, John Logan's work with sound is awesome. His rich resonant sound waves are able to support a lively narrative, embody soul-richness, catch the mood of contemporary life, and sustain themes that poetry has worked at for centuries. One of those themes is the human being's longing for more consciousness.

It is the wish
for some genuine change other than our death
that lets us feel (with the fingers of mind)
how much the foot desires to be a hand.

Not one syllable of those four lines could be changed for the better. He goes on. Each of us is like:

A squid or a slug, hope still alive
inside its mute flesh
for the grace and speed of a fish.

It is wonderful to say it so cleanly and elegantly. And who in Red Oak, Iowa, where he was born, cared for evolved consciousness but the Catholic Church? How much he loved the Church's care for forward motion. They care enough to institute confession, so that one is not trapped by the backward-moving failures.

In June of 1959 when he was 36, he visited Pittsburgh for a reading:

This bellychilling, shoe soaking, factory-dug-up-hill smothering Pittsburgh weather!
I wait for a cab in the smart mahogany
lobby of the seminary.
The marble Pietà is flanked around
with fake fern. She cherishes her dead son
stretched along her womb he triple crossed.
A small, slippered priest
pads up. Whom do you seek, my son?
Father, I've come in out of the rain.
I seek refuge from the elemental tears,
for my heavy, earthen body runs to grief
and I am apt to drown
in this small and underhanded rain
that drops its dross so delicately
on the hairs of the flowers, my father,
and follows down the veins of leaves
weeping quiet in the wood.
My yellow cab never came,  
but I did not confess  
beneath the painted Jesus Christ. I left  
and never saved myself at all  
that night in that late, winter rain.

Six years later, living on a houseboat in Seattle, he says:

Here I am with tame ducks  
and my neighbors' boats,  
only this electric heat  
against the April damp.  
I have a friend named Frank—  
the only one who ever dares to call  
and ask me, "How's your soul?"  
I hadn't thought about it for a while,  
and was ashamed to say I didn't know.  
I have no priest for now.  
Who  
will forgive me then?

In an early poem, "The Experiment that Failed," John is troubled by the  
Pope who exchanged blood with two young men in a primitive transfusion  
experiment. He mentions

the bitter fight  
in me—about the fact  
the boys died. (But so did he.)

Well then, what happens to people who do not take the transfusion from  
the Pope, who lost their forward motion, whose consciousness does not  
evolve?

In Washington, was it spring?  
I took the plane.  
I heard, on either side,  
the soft executives, manicured and  
fat, fucking this and fucking that.

I never walk down an aisle of an airplane but I hear those lines so wonderful, so accurate. Here are a few more descriptions from a poem on the circus:

Unarmed a clown,  
separated from the men  
of his battalion,  
is lost and shot down—
his dumb head blown clean
from his trunk. He trudges home
sorry and alone.

And the circus owner:

After the tent is down,
the circus owner, having
slept over, sets out
in his red car, feeding
his silver slug of a house
over the waste he is lord of.

These people, the executives, fat and manicured, the clown with head gone,
the circus owner in his silver slug, have detoured in their trip to the King,
or they have chosen a worldly king.

One of John's greatest poems is a poem evoked from Aaron Shikind's
photograph of a thick painter's glove. John describes it, flecked with white
paint, fingers stiffened and then says:

It is the left glove, the hand of The Magus,
of all who come late or by devious ways
oblique to honor Christ, all who have stopped
to see the sure, more customary king,
having set some ridiculous gift apart—
as frankincense or myrrh, gold for the child, art.

We notice that he declares that those who visit the "sure, more customary
king" always leave some gift, and at the last minute John drops in the word
"art." So it must be that by this time, or perhaps always, John considered
his poetry to be a gift to the customary king. In 1973 he wrote a poem
while in Hawaii, walking with the young poet Peter Nelson, and he said:

Peter, my absent
friend,
the blood of boys, flowering,
may keep
an aging king
alive, but not me.
I should have healed
my grotesque feet
in the silver pool
in the valley of lao
at the green root
of its great
rising, aged pinnacle.
But I did not.
And now again, it's too late.
The life of poetry, lived so diligently, so intently, did not "save" him then? Is that right? But why do we blame the poetry? What is it in him, in us, that pulls us back?

so much the worse
For the boy who flies his home
And god and verse, for the brass.
That wakes a horn. The weight
Of the gold about his waist
Shall make him sick.

Such magnificence of sound, such magnificence of thought. The poems he left are a blessing. The fantastic power of the lumpy soul held him back—something in his masculine, and in ours, that cannot separate itself from the stone.

I thank God Mother Cabrini's
Body is subject to laws
Of decay. To me it is
A disservice when flesh

Will not fall from bones
As God for His glory
Sometimes allows. I say this
For flesh is my failing:

That it shall fall is my
Salvation. That it shall not
Conquer is my blind hope.
That it shall rise again

Commanding, is my fear.
That it shall rise changed
Is my faith.

Robert Bly
DISSOLVE TO ISLAND

I can be very specific. On Wednesday evening, October 23, 1969, Galway Kinnell read his poems in the Gold Room of the Communications Building at the State University of New York at Brockport. I was nineteen and mesmerized. The reading was generous-spirited, intelligent, and lit with a language that resonated throughout the auditorium. I was beginning to write my own poems, then, and listened with an intensity that bordered on religious fervor. I believed that if I listened hard enough, some secret of skillful language-manipulation would be revealed to me, and I would be initiated into the subtle brotherhood of poets. I was a very foolish young man.

Midway through the reading, Kinnell looked into the audience and paused. “I see my friend John Logan...” he said. Then: “John, will you read us a poem?” And a few rows away from where I sat, an embarrassed, awkward, somewhat ungainly man stood up—I think of this first glimpse of John Logan now whenever I read his lovely “Moor Swan”—and began reciting, from memory, in a voice that trembled each syllable, “Three Moves”:

Three moves in six months and I remain
the same.
Two homes made two friends.
The third leaves me with myself again.
(We hardly speak.)

I was stunned. I could feel each syllable on the skin of my arms, on my face. Each word breathed its own texture as Logan wove his poem, swaying slightly where he stood, reading as much for himself as for the audience, for Kinnell.

They live on swill
our aged houseboats spill.
But still they are beautiful.
Look! The duck with its unlikely beak
has stopped to pick
and pull
at the potted daffodil.

And for the first time I understood... what?
It would be years, after I'd managed to make a few true poems of my own, before I could begin to articulate what had been given to me that evening.

It wasn't until the following April that I was able to hear John Logan give a full reading of his poems. I had arranged, through a student organiza-
tion, to bring John back to Brockport. By then I was familiar with his work—I'd bought *Ghosts of the Heart* and *The Zigzag Walk* and read them again and again. Several poems had been committed, without my realizing it, to memory. Their music was that insistent.

Hearing John Logan's voice—at his reading and on the page—changed the way I'd hear poems in the future, changed the way I'd read them aloud or to myself, changed the way, finally, I'd make my own poems. If this sounds a bit foolish, forgive me, but Logan's poems were the first to rise a bit off the page for me. I could taste each word as I pronounced it, feel its shape like a marble or bit of gravel on my tongue. For the first time, the possibilities inherent in language presented themselves to me. For the first time, although I'd fooled myself before, I fell in love with words. For this gift I will remain forever grateful.

I know this might have happened sooner or later, if not through Logan then through Kinnell, or Wilbur, or Snodgrass, or Creeley, all poets I read and heard read that same year. But the fact remains that it was John's poems that spoke to me clearly, precisely, intimately, that filled me with music, that bridged the distance between the page and the reader.

If the work comes first, as it must, and if the writer must labor in solitude, must "dissolve to island"—the phrase appears in "The Bridge of Change"—in order to create, then the work becomes a bridge to other islands, a means of communion and brotherhood among writers, among us all. John Logan was the first writer to express such yearning to me, and to make me see that an artist could express such yearning without sentimentality, without apology. The language was reliable, ever-burgeoning, and would not betray the writer who placed his faith in it.

That writer is now less young and, with luck, less foolish, but John Logan's poems continue to be remarkable gifts in my life, and his music—his extraordinary spirit—still resonates in the soul he helped to shape and enlarge.

Michael Waters
THE RETURN

for John Logan

The one night I returned home, lost
for all good purposes and dry
as a bone to the woman who slept
without a single light burning,
I lay back — down on the lawn
and felt the grass rise beneath me.
This is a feeling I would die for:
being lifted like that to nowhere,
to a solitary hawk
that circled like one empty glove
in search of the hand that has disappeared
with familiarity. We could not land.
That bird would have come
if I whistled the right notes,
gathering its wings like children
to shoot me through the heart.
But I, spread-eagled below, nailed
to the lawn and still rising,
did not choose to move,
and passed out into that night
as into a waiting home.

Michael Waters
POET JOHN LOGAN

John Logan was amazingly full of life and took joy in it in full measure. It's hard to be solemn about someone so beloved that almost everyone who knew him can tell yet another funny anecdote with John at the heart of it.

His funeral in Berkeley was moving for his family and friends who gathered in the little church, yet afterwards some few of us—among them Joe Stroud, Jack Gilbert, Stan and Anne Rice, his son John, Bob Hass—lingered on the walk outside, wondering what John thought of the minister's mispronunciation, and remembering a few amusing incidents we had experienced in his company.

As moving as the service had been, when first I looked at the beautiful casket near the altar, I couldn't help but see how it could have been modified to resemble a telephone booth.

During the memorial reading of his poetry organized by Roger Aiplon for John's birthday the year after his death, we heard his voice from a scratchy tape that resembled one of his long distance calls to read a freshly completed poem. And while we read, of course, his voice blended into ours.

John had many gifts; among them, one for making connections. He had more friends, and also more children (who were likewise his friends), than anyone else I've ever known. He was articulately conscious of his role as father and son and brother and friend and of how this was connected with poetry. It wasn't based on power and orthodoxy but on affection and diversity. He published Choice (the title was its credo, a pun on the name of his favorite novelist, and a term for comely women). In it he printed cheek by jowl a couple of overlapping generations of poets young and old, unknown and famous, raw and cooked.

As a host John delighted in bringing together old friends with new, especially for a convivial feast with free-flowing spirits that would culminate in a round-robin of poems read aloud.

You would be with John, say at lunch, in Buffalo or Albuquerque or San Francisco or Pittsburgh—anywhere his endless peregrinations took him to recite his body of poems and rejoice among friends—when suddenly he would be reminded of someone else to invite.

Out would come his tattered palimpsest of an address book. It had this appearance even if it was still a fairly new replacement for one lost or stolen (along with wallet, manuscript-in-progress, and current auto). I don't know how even John could either locate or, having done so, manage to decipher the entry he sought. But he could, and did.

The new guest might arrive to swell the party while John was yet on the phone making other connections, a lovely temptation for him—as if the snug booth combined the confessional's intimacy with a time-machine's instantaneity.

John believed with John Crowe Ransom that poetry is a secular form of religion and was fond of quoting Henry Miller about the poet as one who changes the sour dough of experience into bread, the bread into wine,
and the wine into song. He also indulged knock-knock jokes like “Ezra Pound to getcha in a taxi, Honey,” and was forever making puns. Michael Rust once replied, “How Lo gan you get?”

I met John, and his poetry, for the first time at one of his movable feasts where we talked about ideas and life, laughed a lot and read poems. He was to become my friend, and my wife’s and my son’s, although they were then only a toddler and an infant. That was more than twenty-five years ago. Through all the changes of the years his friendship for each of us held and was returned.

As for the poems I was struggling to make, I should be charitable now to that young poet as John was then, and say merely that too often those efforts were less than I could bear for them to be. But John saw through the defects of doubt and ambition to their truer substance, encouraging its development. He had a way of making you feel important for no other reason than being you. That was a gift, in both senses.

In the literary climate at the end of the fifties my life had hardly seemed adequate as a source for poetry. Thousands of hours each year spent in duck marshes, along mountain streams, along the rocky coast of Northern California didn’t jive with the worlds of Ginsberg, Lowell, or Rimbaud; Rilke, Stevens, Blake, Creeley, Yeats, Pound. I had a head full of their poems. But I was only half-sensang how my rude origins might yield anything like their artifacts. Moreover, my anarchic impulses to make poems out of obscure inner need and delight, coupled with a spontaneous disregard for fashions of coffee-house or academy, made me feel like a misfit.

My young would-be poet friends and I had learned that the object was “to find your own voice.” The actual reception of our work confused the issue. Fledgling poems usually got praised most for touches that echoed familiar masters. So the location of “your own voice” seemed in doubt, the process enigmatic. Like the fabled Lost Dutchman Gold Mine it promised a wealth beyond imagination, if it actually existed. The voice that revealed itself between adornments in your poems—idiosyncratic, uncertain, puny—was likely to be politely ignored, to spare you shame.

Logan listened with a rare and sensitive encouragement to that voice within the poem, muffled though it may be in protective devices. That it might take heart and sing a little. That it might wisely search out its own connections.

John Logan’s own splendid eccentric real-as-breathing mid-West twangy consonant-clicking vowel-moaning voice almost begged for imitation. Bob Hass and Max Wickert come to mind of the many who have thought so too and responded with parodies. Mine, “Ducks of the Heart,” was done in 1967. I wanted it to pay homage and be funny. It’s based on aspects of Ghosts of the Heart, Spring of the Thief, and poems that were to form The Zig Zag Walk.

When I first read this parody aloud to John in a San Francisco restaurant he knew only that it was a new poem. He listened, eyes closed, and was obviously slow to respond when I had finished, saying at last, in a mild tone, that it did seem derivative. “Good God, John, I hope so. It’s a parody.”
“Oh!” he said. Then, “OH!” laughing with relief. Then he read it aloud; it sounded counterfactual on a different way.

As our friendship developed he began to include me among those poet friends to whom he passed copies of newly completed poems for their response. Often these were blurred mimeo-ed copies, always they bore a personal note in his oddly graceful scrawl.

Somewhere in the San Francisco Bay Area my favorite and most indelible John Logan manuscript may yet survive, unsuspected perhaps, in a stranger’s home, where the family gathers or holds a party. It would be evident in oblique light on the varnished surface of a French Provincial coffee table once owned by my (former) wife Juanita and I. It was the first, and maybe at the time still the only, new piece of furniture we had been able to afford.

John sat in our living room in Daly City to scribble out the final draft of “Carmel: Point Lobos,” on his way back from a trip there with Thomas Sanchez and, as I recall, Joe Stroud. He laid a sheet of yellow paper from a legal tablet on the table and his ballpoint pen etched a holograph into the wood. How did we allow it to vanish at a garage sale when later we moved to the east?

Today either of us would simply knock the table apart, discarding the pretentious framework, to save the glossy pecan-colored slab of oak that had incidentally been scarred and given character. Or we might figure out how to turn it inside out to make a mock phone-booth. If we called it “the John,” friends would ask “How Lo gan you get?”

II.

The pain and misery of John’s last years, in which he suffered the consequences of his long struggle with alcohol and the stroke that cruelly threatened not only a full recovery but also the very possibility of that poetry by which he lived, is hard to talk about.

It is tempting, therefore, to imagine John Logan double-exposed as two modes of his imagery might—in a telephone booth with his lovely books of poems and (yes, even so) a fresh glass of spirits—in orbit overhead “in the brilliant.../ stars across the dark, inner wall/ of our still radiant, woman world,” like one of the trucks he said lumbered awkwardly above the town (in “Lines on Locks”), like “heavy golden cherubim/ that try to wing about/ in the old, baroque church.”

This note is not the place to examine the man or his poetry with the detailed care both deserve. And I am not ready to sum up my feelings about either.

John Logan was my friend through thick and thin for twenty-five years. That speaks for itself. Quite apart from that, I believe he has written poems with greatness often enough to be considered in the best company of our time. The chance reader who has yet to discover Logan’s poetry is encouraged to read aloud to someone keen to listen to some of the following: “The Picnic,” “Lines to His Son on Reaching Adolescence,” “Three Moves,”

How much this man survives in the poems. With an intimacy rare even in this art—a tenderness, sense of beauty, gentle wisdom that are richly human and radiant with spirit.

But the gift by which he transmuted even misery into the beauty of art could not appease the succubus released by liquor to suck at his vitals. Heroic John strove for redemption; in sometimes brilliant passages he sought the cause of his suffering—"I was born on a street named Joy/of which I remember nothing/but since I was a boy/ I've looked for its lost turnings..." But the alien spirit of alcohol is not symbiotic. It is parasitic and agrandizing.

John knew as well as anyone that he drank too much. Friends like Kit Hathaway tried to welcome him to Alcoholics Anonymous. But John took refuge in his theories and his counter-active vitamins, by-products respectively of psychoanalysis and pre-med training. The bottled spirits in which he once found succor from pain was to bring a torment all its own that even his amazing powers of recuperation would succumb to. The dark glamour of bardic intoxication, of the dionysian ecstasy, that swallowed two of his favorites, Dylan Thomas and Hart Crane, cried out for some intercession even the making of poems could not hope to provide despite John's formulations to that effect.

In "Heart to Heart Talk with My Liver," as in the earlier "Three Moves," John stresses that transformation may be effected in the man, without intercession, by the will to live realized in the creative act of making a poem. In the former poem, addressing his afflicted organ, he says, "I want to atone," and concludes with the plea, "...at least for here/ and now (perhaps for ever/ if God is no deceiver) you and I/ may be/ our own/ deliverer."

In "Three Moves," he sees himself in the figure of the ducks portrayed as walking dead drunk on the land and grounds. "But they are beautiful," he says; "They will survive." He makes it clear that he wants more for himself. He wants to climb and soar and hover near the sun unafraid (as Icarus had dared). He posits a sense of guilt as necessary for the hope of change. Therein we recognize both the lapsed Catholic—convert and the long-time deliver into Freud and Jung. The analogy of man and duck, however, is troubling when pursued.

For the regeneration, the reconciliation, arrived at in the poem by the creative act of its own coming into being is mainly literary. The guilt and the hope would seem to remain in the man. The act would therefore need to be repeated. Given the terms of the poem, the desire for change would seem to be the state of the I/man; the art that fulfills it the act of the inspired self/soul of the poet. The poem seems not to truly heal but ultimately to perpetuate the split.

John knew my thoughts, and feelings, about this were present within the comical posturing of my parody, "Ducks of the Heart." He understood its
attempt to be provocative and sobering. And that it meant to convey also an admiration and affection that may be obscured by the bluntness of this prose knocked together awkwardly to meet a deadline.

It is John Logan's poems which shall have the last word. Both the man and his work are too complex and varied to be summarized, however neatly a given passage might flesh out a commentator's thesis. So I will heed the caustic admonition that concludes "Protest After a Dream" (Ghosts of the Heart):

... If they cannot make us well, as it looks, What the hell good are our books?

... If Sophocles offered eggs To a sacred snake Or led the victor's dance Naked after Salamis He did more in this Than in his poems, for poems Are dreams and dreams are wants: Our wants are what we are And what we are is not The man we hoped, it seems, so what The hell good are our dreams?

Philip Dow
DUCKS OF THE HEART
(A parody of John Logen, 1967)

Man is a featherless biped
—ARISTOTLE
Rara Aves
—Anon
Fuck a Duck
—A STUDENT

1
I’ve a muse named Pun—
the only one
who loves my fun:
I confess
a weakness
for the corny (O, I was
lowa born), a fondness
for horny undertones;
make no bones,
I’m not afraid
to view life bottom up,
from the underside of a pond
or void

2
nor from the thunder brilliant
plumage of the family
of cumulus clouds
overhead
shepherded
by the wide eyed, knowing sun.

3
Fire
for some higher
flight
lightens these limbs: I
grow giddy, I
aspire—
this poor manflesh
does not flinch
from the fate of Icarus
4
(whose human wings
still can stir
in us
whistles angelic, ir-
resistible to the poet's inner
ear).

5
I grow web feet, I waddle.
Heaven lies in every puddle.

6
This carnal cloak
(or cosmic joke)
I pray not shirk—
but, drunk
with grace (from gliding in the drink),

transcend: become Man
-Drake!
and beg not lay but golden eggs.

7
The wholly ghost-
ly voice of Mother
Gooses my Cath
-artic
heart:
the perish
-able breath
breaks wind

8
-ing the whip and coil of sinuous serpentine singing lines
that lash my ancient
melancholy guilt of being merely human
(if I abuse
myself, my
feathered friends,
it is not without Hope
of coming to a good end).

After a Decoy that was not coy
And an Eider pillow
And a duck dinner

Philip Dow

On the deck of the house boat on Lake Union, where he lived in Seattle. April, 1966 - Photograph by Mary Randlett
FOR THE SOLACE OF THE LIVING,
AND FOR THE SOLACES OF ART:
Remembering John Logan (1923-87)

It is hard to believe he is dead. It’s not that he was too young to die—even in this day of elongated actuarial expectations, 64 years is hardly the bloom of youth. Nor is it that his death was sudden, unexpected. In many ways John was already dead when he died, and many people who had known him earlier, in happier, harder times, already spoke of him in the past tense and shunned him, avoided him altogether. He was a lonely man when he died, and I suspect he had always been a lonely man; for all his fabled excesses of the body and the spirit, he was the most solitary man I’ve ever known, one of the saddest, one of the best.

He could be mean-spirited, bitchy, possessive, self-centered, disloyal, unpredictable, unspeakably lyrical in his sense of clock and calendar, but none of these considerations matter too much to me and to my sense of him, my memory of him. Arthur Miller said, in his “Tragedy and the Common Man,” a tragic hero is anybody who will live and die if need be in order to establish his proper place in the world. I have always felt that John was a man who always had to fight for respect as a man—and as a poet, which was to him the same thing. And this struggle for recognition was not some paranoid obsession; a serious man on serious earth he was, and he put his fragile life out there on the line all the time. Mark Linenthal said once, after a reading, “He’ll say anything!” And he would, and did, and I think we should all reread and reevaluate what it was we had amongst us: “O rare John Logan!” Now he is gone I can’t believe he is not in the texts and anthologies, that he is so seldom discussed, so seldom lamented. I think he felt (or knew) he was being neglected, and for a man whose life was supposedly being redeemed by his poetry, this casual disregard was (and is) intolerable.

Reread his poetry and you will see he was right; there is in them an honesty which has nothing to do with “confessionalism,” but which is a spiritual quest on which he threw over several lives in the service of his art. We may have wished he had not been so zealous in his quest, but we have, after, the core, the body of his work—still reaching out to us.

Why this nearly universal neglect of what has to be one of our major poets? There are several reasons, I suspect—some of which have to do with John himself, and some of which have to do with the work. Too many people saw him too drunk too often (or his reputation preceded him and people believed they’d seen him too drunk). Some people were put off by his ambiguous sexuality, or by his deep-running religiosity, the seething turmoil that bubbled near the vulnerable surface of this complicated man. Most often, too, people do not recognize on the page the disciplined craft that made the passionate poetry of this passionate man cohere and contain his absolute honesty and forthrightness, his integrity.

Now I cannot apologize for John Logan’s habits. They came with the territory and, after all, harmed himself more than anyone else, and were
a too palpable evidence of the deep conflict his poems rose out of. They were also all too human.

Too human. It is that humanness, that suffering, and that absolute control while wrestling with insurmountable forces that win me over as the work continues to be assimilated and to live in me.

Let me put it this way: John Logan had an immense human heart capable of expressions of raw joy and despair, generosity and grief, revulsion and openness. Who else among us could risk lines like:

Well, I am still a traveler and I don’t know where
I live. If my home is here, inside my breast,
light it up! And I will invite you in as my first guest.

I hear in these lines, the closing lines of one of his later (1981) poems (dedicated to Tina, one of his many children), “Believe It,” a great pain in an absolute aloneness, but also a great strength. The question in the poem is rhetorical: of course the true home is in the heart. Like Gerard Manley Hopkins, “his heart in hiding,” he asks only that someone come inside and light it up. But John invites “the anonymous lover,” the all-too-human correspondent, not God. That’s risky. I suppose that riskiness, that living on the edge, is what I admire most about his work.

John Logan’s poems begin small, end large. Many readers get lost in the seemingly endless travelogues and process descriptions and miss the epiphanies that erupt like nascent from the daily rounds that are the ostensible subjects of the poems. To be with him, and especially to travel with him, was to risk being brought into the candid intimacy of one of his poems. The poem might begin with having a drink, visiting an art exhibition, taking a swim, eating a meal—but before it is over you would have become a part of a much larger world than you are accustomed to living in—a cosmology, if you will—a wholly private world in which intimacy is the norm. But more of this later. His poems begin small and end large.

In a 1981 Robert Bly workshop in Honolulu, the assembled poets were handed fruits and vegetables to touch, examine, and ruminate upon in the usual workshop fashion. John drew an avocado, which he had to share with his friend, the poet, Roger Apton:

It is a green globe like a vegetable light bulb...

He begins small, a clever and precise description of a literal in-the-hand avocado; but the line introduces a simile, the first in a series of wildly expanding associations that soon encompass the poet’s psychic and spiritual history. The vegetable light bulb is about to become the child (grown old now) and the dead mother, the life principle, the Earth Mother, etc., etc. It begins small, ends large indeed. The text:
THE AVOCADO

It is a green globe like a vegetable light bulb
with a stem to meet either soil or small living tree;
it is mottled like an old man's face or is wizened
like the enormous head of a fetus. Now the stem
has come away from the navel.
It has the stolid heft of stone. The smell seeps up
and leads the mind far away to the earth's ancient cave.
Its taste is also pungent dirt with a kind of bark
that is quite difficult to chew:
here is the small tomb of woman.
Mother smells its fresh soil even with her dead
sense. She feels
its husk. Her body inside is the soft flesh of fruit,
and her heart this oval green core.
Her grief, her anger is that she
no longer has life, but the stuff of her breaths a res-
side that has remained in earth
and in the minds of the children.
Oh, now I know her skin sighs green
as this fluted fruit: her spirit
is the taste of it, transmuted.

The stem/has come away from the navel! And thus begins a Yeatsian association of the wizened old man you can see in the fetus; all babies, we know, look like hairless old men. The poet is pushing sixty, is feeling old, and in his end is his beginning, this "sad sensualist" who never knew his mother, though "born on a street named Joy." The process described in the poem is an heretical transsubstantiation, in which the spirit and the body of the mother, at once mother and primordial mother principle (the absentee goddess revealing herself in the flesh of the fruit of her "ancient cave") are made manifest in a room in Honolulu to a poet who is also the withered fruit of "soil or living tree." The vegetable light bulb has shone upon all there is and all there can be. Watch the poem, line by line, circle, outward association by association; watch a kind of miracle take place.

What about form? What about "the zig-zag walk," the "ballet for the ear?" For this aural ballet is the heart, the substance and matter of what one felt hearing John say his poems; that is what people who heard him remember (often so clearly we've forgotten to read the poems themselves): that absurd voice, those unabashed locutions none of us would dare ven-
ture. If the poem is a kind of state of grace and we the "anonymous lovers" sharing that exalted condition, what is the nature of the liturgy, the ve-
icle or vessel that brings us there? It is here in the realm of poetics that John Logan is least understood.

He began as a Red Oak, Iowa, protestant, and then a Catholic and biologist (at John's sixieth birthday party I met a man from San Pablo,
California, who had studied biology under him at Notre Dame University. It is inconceivable that John, steeped in ritual and scientific method, could fashion a poetry that did not reflect an innate sense of order.

That order is not always evident to the casual observer, and this is as he would have it. From the beginning, he shunned all forms of the conventional yardstick and tuning fork of English poetry, the iambic pentameter line, which he found ill-suited to his needs because the pentameter line can so easily lead one into "poeticism." In his early work he found all kinds of ways to avoid ten syllables: he used eleven, eight, nine or thirteen, or three beats, or combinations of these, though never yielding to some shapeless "free" verse. Then he "invented" his own measure, one that satisfied the mathematician in him as well as the semi-fallen Catholic (who often found himself in some church, praying).

His invention was a structure of syllabic lines with either eight (5 + 3) or thirteen (5 + 5 + 3) syllables. There is no formula or pattern, but only the stipulation that lines will be either (roughly) eight or (roughly) thirteen syllables. He was no blind follower of any doctrine, but rather one who needed some guidance, some control. And he employed this measure in most of his mature work.

Some wondrous, but subtle effects come from his syllabic lines, if you can learn to see or hear them. In "Avocado," for instance, the first four meditative lines, in which the poet can be seen still examining the fruit, are all thirteen syllables. Then comes the pivotal "has come away from the navel." This line is eight syllables, a sharp, dramatic thrust of observation. The poem then lapses back into its broader meditative mode for three more lines, until:

Its taste is also pungent dirt with a kind of bark
that is quite difficult to chew:
here is the small tomb of woman.

Notice the emphasis forced upon these lines of dramatic revelation by their cut-off succinctness. This is the fulcrum of the poem, the place where general associations are "transmuted" into the ingestion of the real spirit and body (difficult indeed to chew!) of Mother:

Mother smells its fresh soil even with her dead
sense. She feels
its husk. Her body inside is the soft flesh of fruit,
and her heart this oval green core.

From here, six of the remaining lines are eight syllables, and only one is thirteen. But notice that one long line:

Her grief, her anger is that she
no longer has life, but the stuff of her breathes a residuethat has remained in earth
and in the minds of the children.
Oh, now I know her skin sighs green
as this fluted fruit; her spirit
is the taste of it, transmuted.

Note the enjambment in these lines, especially the hyphenated long (thirteen syllable) one. Res-ide. Res: “a thing; the particular thing, or matter.” Here, part of a word serves connotatively to reinforce the major theme of the poem: what appears to be merely accidental boldly serves the poet’s very serious intention. The “stuff” of her “breathes” through the avocado a res that has remained in earth (burned, in the case of the real mother, inherent, in the case of the Earth Mother), and now “her skin sighs green/as this fluted fruit; her spirit/is the taste of it, transmuted.” I’ve seen editors “correct” such line breaks as lapses in judgment; I hear instead his voice, pitched on some impossible tone and sustaining that syllable, “Rezzzzzzzzzzz///i-doo,” to break your heart. The adverb “as” is also important here. It means both ways—as a comparative (her skin sighs green as an avocado skin), and as an embodiment of a thing (her skin is the fluted fruit).

To my way of thinking, “Avocado” is a remarkable poem. It begins with a clever, almost flip opening and builds the way great poems do, into an echoing cathedral of archetypes and primal associations. And it does so without apparent conscious effort. The voice of the poem is the voice of the man within the man, “the mind behind the mind,” as Stanley Kunitz put it, as are many of John’s best poems, such as “First Prelude,” “Dream in Ohio: The Father,” “Believe It,” “The Zoo,” “Three Moves,” “The Picnic,” “The Search,” “Spring of the Thief,” and countless others.

I have access to six tapes of John Logan’s readings, and have listened often to them. Despite a set of troublesome dentures on some of the later readings and, admittedly, an excess of alcohol on some others, these tapes teach a valuable lesson to those poets who would read (and probably as a result write) better: the words of the poem are the poet, are chunks of his body and of his spirit. The moments when the words take shape in the spaces between us are holy, but not solemn, and our contact is intimate on the level of a kind of spiritual sexuality—a sensuousness that pervades his work. It is not a matter of “Poetry in Performance” so much as it is a matter of risking the revealing of his most private and sacred self.

There may be nothing on earth so hard to do as to reveal yourself that way—to leave yourself so vulnerable—and that goes a long way toward explaining why there are so few truly great poets among us.

Let me close with John’s lines about standing at the grave of Dylan Thomas, a poet he greatly admired:

Beneath my living feet, I know
your heavy body rots,
and I shake like these dying aster stems among the tombs.
Why, even the gravestones tremble
at the touch of time. So I will touch my friend once more
for the solace of the living—
and for the solaces of art,
whose mysteries deepen in the grave,
I will read your poems again.

This touching, this communion among our private selves, extends as well to the dead, who continue to reach out beyond the grave—"the solaces of art"—because we are all, always, so dreadfully alone, essentially homeless.

And I must not be alone
no matter what needs be done,
for then my search is ended.
So now the panicked thumbs of my poem pick....

Richard Maxwell
FOR JOHN: ANOTHER WRITERS’ CONFERENCE

1
the size, the hugeness of his heart
springs upon
his full moon face
when he smiles
but he doesn’t smile much
any more—
booze and babies
Catholicism and lovers
traveling
sleeping in strange beds
never having
a home: “my home room
is gone!” he wails
“even my grave
has been robbed!”
“I was born
on a street named Joy,” he cries
this
sad, flaccid bear
you want to hug and hold.

2
he’s hurting, drifts off
and comes only
part way back
he snores loudly
at a poetry reading:
Sarah has a way with him: in
Edie’s pool
a seductress of a moon overhead
after a back-rub
the two of them laughing
curling in and out
of the water like
porpoises
his Red Oak, Iowa, back
willows the waters
shines and dips
in the silver light
a temporary state
called joy
the clock ticking
methodically like a bomb inside
the provided and alien house he's
having this week to call home.

—at the Foothill Writer's Conference, June 1976

Richard Maxwell

Where John got his mail when living on Lake Union.
Where, he said, he got all his rejection slips. April, 1966
Photograph by Mary Randlett
A MEMORY OF JOHN LOGAN

It was the first poetry reading I ever attended, and I went because I had

to. This would have been sometime between 1957 and 1961, during which

years I was a student at Saint Louis University, where John Logan had

been asked to read. The source of the invitation was probably Dr. Albert

Montesi, a writer himself and a teacher responsible for much of the literary

activity at my school in those days. Logan’s visit would have been blessed

by two other writers around at that time, John Knoepfle and Pete Simp-

son. The three were friends and local literary lights, all knowledgeable about

contemporary writing, particularly poetry. I had no interest in poetry,

although I had tried to write some, for no good reasons, and produced the

sort of work that might be expected from someone who neither knew nor

cared much about what he was doing.

The reading was held in the theatre. The large room was full of students.

I remember sitting or standing at the back. Logan on-stage in my memory

is a small, distant figure, but his size obviously had no bearing on the im-

pact he made on me, or the impact his words made on me, for what I

remember most strongly or solely from that hour about thirty years ago

is Logan’s presentation of one particular passage of a dozen lines or so. And

that one passage is enough.

I no doubt had heard in a class of mine before the reading that Logan

was a pre-eminent Catholic poet. Anyone who could bring national atten-

tion to Mother Cabrini, as Logan had through his first book of poetry,

was a cultural hero at Saint Louis University in the Fifties. The universal

validation of our parochial icons validated us as well.

But it was not anything about Mother Cabrini that I remember. Rather,

what I can still see is Logan saying the passage from “To a Young Poet

Who Fled” about “the gift of the poet’s jaw.” I did not know I still carried

that experience with me, however, until about ten years later—after I had

begun, for reasons largely mysterious to me both then and now, pursuing

with some seriousness the writing of poetry myself—when I first came across

that very poem in print. I would have been living in either Palo Alto, or

St. Louis, or Iowa City, or Cottonwood, Minnesota, but wherever I was

at that moment hardly mattered, for suddenly—much to my amazement—I

remembered myself back in that auditorium, listening to Logan’s words:

The gift of tears

is the hope of saints, Monica again and Austin,

I mean the gift of the structure of a poet’s jaw,

which makes the mask that’s cut out of the flesh of his face

a megaphone—as with the goat clad Greeks—to ampli-

fy the light gestures of his soul toward the high stone seats.

The magic of the mouth that can melt to tears the rock

of hearts. I mean the wand of tongues that charms the exile

of listeners into a bond of brothers, breaking
down the lines of lead that separate a man from a
man, and the husbands from their wives, in these old, burned glass
panels of our lives.

Those words performed the action they described. The seats weren’t stone
in that auditorium, but I was at the back, among the “high” seats, and
Logan’s poet’s jaw acted as a megaphone—I almost said “metaphor”—to
amplify the light—weightless and light-bearing—gestures of his soul toward
me, an unenthusiastic but apparently not impervious listener. The words
spoke to me beyond my knowing; I heard them and then forgot them, or
thought I forgot them. He reached across space, literally and figuratively,
to give me a gift—a poem, himself, himself in the form of a poem, something
spiritual that obviously stayed with me. I was in some way truly touched
by Logan’s presentation of what it means to be a poet.

I don’t know what to make of the importance to me of that experience.
I know I don’t wish to make too much of it. It’s tempting, for example,
to say that Logan called me to poetry. God knows, I heard a lot in those
days about vocations. Sixteen years of Catholic education guarantees much
talk of calls to service. But that same education creates, or tries to create,
skepticism in the face of what’s tempting. Anyway, if it was a call, it was
certainly a delayed one, suggesting that if “God works in strange ways,”
so does, or did, Logan.

Most of the teachers at Saint Louis University in the Fifties were Jesuits,
to whose order the school belonged. The context of my memory of the
poet is inescapably religious. Maybe that reading was a kind of Mass, secular,
or not so secular. Certainly, like a priest holding up the Host at the Offer-
tory, Logan was in some way holding up an ideal, and, as far back as I
was in that auditorium, I could see it.

Philip Dacey
SUDDENLY NEXT SUMMER

In reply to a poem by John Logan, “Happening on Aegina”

I'm not about to impress Jodie Foster—she doesn't do it for me.
I'm not about to
let John Logan keep the upper hand,
reminding him I can see as well as
any man
and sometimes even better. [So it is to be better.]

No need even
to be witness to the gluteus maximus
  gastrocnemius come to life
  in the way a young person
  walks, walking the beach, for instance.
  The image of a Shulamite. The image of the Talbor's
girl,
  button-down shirt, sweater scarfed around neck,
  pure Quinnehtukquyt prototype.
The Ultra-sample
  black Lycra maillot
  issuing from the waters—
  square top front and back,
    cut high
    on the top

I've kissed the backs of knees, drawn them apart.

It's not so much what they look like
  now
but 6-years from
  now: a girl with towel
in hand walking the beach

  "blue bikini, luminescent body
    oiled, narrow hips, narrow bosom"

[Logan's words, a direct quote
appropriated, commandeered

wind in hair
sound-over waves, the
red and green flags still up on alert

blue sky turning light gray

sunlight
in
must

the sum of what survives
the short span of one personal lifetime
is a series of poems
about not surrendering
one's personal freedom
and having to
pay the
price
for it
the taboos
against
the natural
image of self,
against the human soul—
not the mind, as mis-
translated in Freud for over
forty years—but in a moment of time

or the fear
of just communicating an idea—

the simple fear
of getting to know someone

[America's fascination
with little girls
will always be there

Suddenly next summer you'll be 16- no, 17

Gerard Malanga
A CONVERSATION WITH ANTHONY PICCIONE
AND A. POULIN, JR.

This videotaped interview begins with John Logan reading two poems: "Mother Cabrini Crosses the Andes" and "On the House of a Friend."

PICCIONE: Welcome to the Brockport Writers Forum. We asked you to read those two poems to show the great movement from your first book, Cycle for Mother Cabrini, to your more recent book, The Anonymous Lover. And I notice that in this development you’re moving from the oracular voice, the voice that stands aside and pronounces, to something that many poets have been calling for, something we learned from Neruda: loving kindness in a poem, warmth in a poem, the personal evidence of a personal life, which I think exists in “On the House of a Friend.” Could you perhaps tell us a bit about what has happened in the matter of voice, in your grasp of persons during those years?

LOGAN: I think it would be to the point to mention that there are a couple poems in the Cycle for Mother Cabrini volume which don’t adopt a persona in the usual sense of, say, a figure or someone other than the author. For example, “Pagan Saturday” and “Grandfather’s Railroad” are reminiscences of childhood in which the “I” figure is the remembered boy, myself; most of that book, however, is made up of poems about saints. But there’s also “A Pathological Case in Pliny” which is about heroes, and “A Dialogue with La Mettrie” which takes the voice of an eighteenth-century figure. I think what happened was that I got more into writing poems directly out of my own adult experience. Actually, there’s no poem in Cycle for Mother Cabrini which is written out of adult experience. The only direct experience of my own that’s involved is that of the two childhood poems.

In that second book, Ghosts of the Heart, I began writing poems that also adopted a persona, in most cases that of an artist. For example, I have poems on Heine, Rimbaud, Byron, and Shelley, and there’s one on Achilles. I mention the Achilles one because it’s sort of the exception that proved the rule. Since this section from The Iliad that I chose to translate in the poem “Achilles and the King” was the first section, which ends with Achilles clinging to his mother as he moans on the shore after his harrowing encounter with Agamemnon, I began to see that I was writing poems a little closer to home—because in Ghosts of the Heart I was writing poems about artists. Actually, there’s one in Cycle for Mother Cabrini, too. The last poem and I think, in some ways, the best poem, called “The Death of Southwell”, dovetails the artist figure (since he was a poet) and that of the more saintly figure (since he was a martyr in Elizabethan England). That was the first poem on the life of an artist. Then there was the Rimbaud one, the Heine one and the Hart Crane. The thing which those poems had in common with the selection of a hero like Achilles was that they had to do with people whose mothers were very emotionally close to them. In another sense, particularly with somebody like Heine, they could be said to have been
hung up on their mothers. And I began to see that while writing about artists instead of saints I was moving closer to myself.

At that point it occurred to me that I could use poetry to continue to avoid my own adult experience or I could use it to try to encounter my own adult experience, and I did the latter thing. I wrote a poem called “On the Death of the Poet’s Mother Thirty-Three Years Later” which is about my own adult feelings about my dead mother, and I found that to be a kind of breakthrough poem, after which I could write poems that had to deal with my looking around, out of my adult life, at relationships with students and with other people. The persona went through a kind of natural shift, therefore, and I took less and less an adopted persona of another figure.

PICCIONE: You just shifted into part of your essay called “On Poets and Poetry Today,” and I wonder if you could talk a minute about this? You said that the progress in your poetry was natural, and I see that. You and others are interested in the phenomenon of finding the body, of finding the self as well. And you say it is especially true of Americans, perhaps in the Midwest, that a mother “hang-up” involves the lack of reconciling self and mother. I think it was an acquaintance of yours who said in the essay that when poets (perhaps others as well) are weaned at, say, one-and-a-half years of age, they spend the remaining years of their lives trying to come back to motherness: the mouth of the poet trying to find its motherness.

LOGAN: Yes, actually the weaning takes place earlier than that; it might take place at several months before one-and-a-half. (I changed the copy in my essay once I realize that somebody who’s had as many kids as I have should remember when children are weaned). But I first took that year-and-a-half figure, which I got from a psychologist names David Bleich: who I thought referred to weaning itself. When I read his essay, I found that that was not true. He was talking about the infant’s attempt to deal with the fact of the weaning, so it covers a period of time after the weaning and involves syntax or the child’s breaking into syntactical language.

In the existence of the language itself, according to Bleich, there’s a kind of oral recall of the earlier experience at the mother’s breast. Poetry is, of course, only one form of language, but it seems to me that it is a form of language in which the relationship to the mother continues to be expressed for some reason that I cannot account for. I don’t know enough, I know that it recurred in my own poems in my trying do deal with my mother’s death. She died when I was one month old. I had thought that the poem “On the Death of the Poet’s Mother Thirty-Three Years Later” in Ghosts of the Heart would be the last one on that subject. Let me read the last part of the poem to show you what I mean. I thought I was laying her ghost to rest:

I do not
Resurrect again her restless
Ghost out of my grievous memory:
She waits the quiet hunt of saints.
Or the ignorance of citizens of hell.
And here is laid her orphan child with his
Imperfect poems and ardors, slim as sparklers.

I thought I was through with her ghost, so to speak, but I found out that
the first of my “Monologues of the Son of Saul” (in *Spring of the Thief*)
spoke about her again. It said: “I have thieved my father’s treasure. And
I cannot pay.” And it continues in that vein. Then in the fifth of those
monologue poems I used the phrase, “The dead ducks of poets, stretch’d/
across a virgin lap.” There’s one more poem—I might as well finish this—
that shows I didn’t exorcise her ghost in that one poem. It’s called “Lines
On His Birthday,” and it speaks about her death.

So, at any rate, I began to talk about this question of the relationship
of the poet to his mother in the essay you speak of. I thought of the sense
of the word “body” to a poet, when he talks about “the body of his work,”
and it occurred to me, especially in the light of Bleich’s idea referred to
earlier, that very shortly after weaning, children break into syntactical
language and that this is a way of relating themselves back to their mothers.
Thinking of that, I also thought of the fact that so many lyric poets—who
sing, as a mother sings to her child—do not survive beyond midlife. Robert
Southwell, whom I spoke of earlier, died at thirty-three; Hart Crane was
just short of thirty-three when he died; and it occurred to me that these
poets who go ahead and die in their thirties (or earlier, as Keats and Shelley
did) are leaving an unfinished body of work behind them and that they
may have been encountering some aspect of “body” in their work which
was extraordinarily difficult for them to deal with. I also thought about
the fact that if you survive to write poetry into old age, you may find yourself
like Yeats writing about more sexual matters. So I developed this theory
that poets build, with their words, the body, really, of their mother. The
body of their work is in some way related to the body of the mother and,
if one could think of the top part of the body as connected with the earlier
part of the work, then the part of the work that continues to fail or that
does not continue to be completed is the part of the body of work having
to do with the lower part, the lower segment of the body as such: in other
words, sexuality, and particularly the sexuality in the family triangle in-
volving the mother and, of course, the father. So that was how the whole
thing got started.

**PICCIONE:** The way you speak of the body of poems that some of our best peo-
ple tragically avoid completing may sound as though you mean it to be an “exter-
nal,” but you mean the body of poems is an *internal* building.

**LOGAN:** It has an internal aspect to it which I think in some way is related
to the image of the mother; that’s my intuitive guess.

Let me say this. My friend Murray Schwartz had done an extensive study
of Sylvia Plath. Murray is a colleague of mine at Buffalo, and he is absolutely
convinced that what Sylvia Plath was doing with her work was building the body of her father, as the name “Colossus,” which is a poem about her father, suggests. So this sort of substantiated my feeling that somehow lyric poetry in particular—and I stress that because of the musicality and the questions of the singing—relates to the mother figure for the male poet and perhaps to the father figure for the female poet. Many poets find that they have to deal to some extent with problems having to do with the mother. Of course, a lot of people who are not poets do also. I’m not trying to say that there’s a one-to-one relationship, but the ability to produce poetry out of the pain and delight of this relationship is what distinguishes the poet’s hang-ups from those of the non-poet.

PICCIONE: And so, after achieving this there will be a period of calm discovery because there’s a whole being once again.

LOGAN: One would hope so, and one thinks about the old Chinese poets who wrote so marvelously and so intimately and with so little sense of hang-up in their language. They wrote about their friendships with each other and their drinking together and such; one also thinks about Yeats’s late poems which have more an edge of humor as well as an edge of sexuality to them than some of his earlier poems.

PICCIONE: Another part of this is the length of time it seems to take for a man to find his whole self. Robert Bly, in some of his talk about returning to mother consciousness, indicates at least that this period is being foreshortened by what he says is a “spiritual upsurge,” especially among the young. Can there be a foreshortened time then, instead of delay, in one’s early twenties?

LOGAN: Indeed it could. One would be fascinated to find what influence, if any, this foreshortening has on the poetry of that generation. I do think that such a foreshortening is possible, and it should result in a different kind of content in the poetry. I know Bly himself has written extensively about a certain concept of the body of the mother, the so-called “teeth mother,” a concept which he gets from Erich Neumann’s The Great Mother, I believe, a Jungian approach. Bly’s own poem, “The Teeth Mother Naked at Last,” is about that one aspect of the relationship to a mother—the so-called bad mother as distinct from the good mother—as a kind of threat which the concept of “teeth mother” tries to represent, a threat to his strength and hence to his virility. There is a kind of castration, as a matter of fact, in the idea of the vagina dentata which some “teeth mother” figures have.

Consequently, Bly wrote a long poem which has to do with, among other things, the idea that the war-making impulse results from overmasculinization of the consciousness and has less of the influence of the good mother—which would move toward love. “Make love, not war!” has become a common slogan, but it’s certainly a part of the thesis of Bly in “The Teeth Mother Naked at Last,” which is a poem against the Vietnam war. I think
he believes that this addresses the younger generation—I don’t know if we would properly call it “the Woodstock generation,” but the event of Woodstock comes naturally enough to mind, with thousands, millions of young people coming together in a benign, gentle way to share whatever they had, their food, their experience, and their listening. There seems to be a benign quality about that which relates to things of the earth and to things of the good mother rather than to the things of the bad mother or the overaggressive father.

PICCIONE: I’d like to try to go back just a step or two to some talk of technique within the realm of this theory of balanced consciousness. In his essay, “Some Notes on French Poetry,” Bly speaks not only of the voyage to the unconscious but also of that thing I keep looking for in French poetry and of which I’m not sure yet. He speaks of loving-kindness, of something our culture has felt is perhaps feminine, that warmth, that kindness. When you went to the Europeans, from Rimbaud on, was that your experience? Is that part of your connection with finally saying, Here I am, I live, I love, and I am?

LOGAN: I wouldn’t say so. My moving to Rimbaud didn’t give me any more feelings of a gentleness and benign quality than I had found any place else. I would say something happened to me in my reading of Trakl, whom I love very much and feel very close to. But something happens having to do with violence and the treatment of violence in Trakl’s poems that astounded me. Any time an image would appear in a Trakl poem that was quite violent, the next line would cancel that feeling in some way. I can remember his poem “Grobe,” about the war. Trakl served, of course, with the Germans, and because of his war experiences found that he himself really couldn’t survive and took an overdose of laudanum. He was left, I know, in a barn one night, to deal with ninety wounded men. He worked in a hospital as part of his military service and he died, a very young man, by suicide. But in his poems I’ve felt this kind of thing, the desire to cancel the feelings of violence and transmute them in one way or another.

PICCIONE: This brings me to the next part of this question. When you bring attention to the French Symbolists, from whom the whole European movement learns, you think of technique. When they used the creation-destruction process, as you speak of Trakl doing, it was literary theory: in order to make room for the next image, you cancel out the previous one. When Trakl does it, I’m not thinking of theory, but I’m involved in creation-destruction.

LOGAN: Yes, I was thinking of Rilke, too, who was my great poet-father, really. I still would rather read Rilke than any other poet who comes to mind, and his Letters to a Young Poet are absolutely essential to anybody trying to get an idea of what it is to be a poet. But Rilke, for example in the Das Marienleben sequence telling the story of the life of the Blessed Virgin, has much of this gentleness and repose, though also, of course, much of the agony of the passion that the Virgin went through. But I find in
Rilke an extraordinary ability to identify with feminine feelings. I'm thinking of his poems relating a girl to a tree, for example, that are especially beautiful and of the poem in which he talks about being with his mother as she plays the piano.

I think I was thrown off when you suggested that the Europeans might have interested me because of the presence of more of this feminine and gentle feeling and because you mentioned Rimbaud first. I don't find this in Rimbaud, but I do find it in Rilke, and I do find the tendency, as I said, to cancel violent feeling and make the experience, therefore, a cathartic one, as in Trakl. Because if one is left with naked violence in a poem, to my mind one hasn't really read a poem, as such. It seems to me that the proper sphere of poetry has to do, as Dylan Thomas so aptly put it, with the breeding of "a momentary peace." At the end of a poem one should be suffused with feelings of fulfillment and of the dream come true. I think that the impulse to write poetry comes more from the benign feelings than it comes from the violent ones. I'm talking about what Aristotle would have used the word "catharsis" to describe; but if a poem doesn't contain within it the ability to calm the very passions which it has unleashed—as great tragedy does so powerfully, for which the word "catharsis" was first formed as an aesthetic term—if a poem doesn't do that, then to my mind it falls short, and I think this is another reason why I talk about the lyric aspect of poetry. Music and rhythm can have this calming effect, and to my mind a poem is not a poem unless it has an essential surface to it which is musical in character. One reason, I suppose, why I'm turned off to many of my contemporary poets is because they have no "ears." Jim Wright, Robert Bly, Galway Kinnell, to the contrary, since they are each blessed with a musical ear. But this thing of using musical and rhythmic qualities, which are really formal qualities, to calm the reader in some way, to handle the emotions one has roused in the poem, is to my mind very much a part of the vocation of being a poet. That's why overly militant figures don't strike me as poets at all, in the proper sense of the word. They are doing something else; they are doing something with language other than making poetry out of it. They may be very much needed; I'm not saying they aren't. I'm just saying that the impulse to poetry does not spring from violent feelings. It may spring partly from violent feeling, but it has more to do with touching; this is the concept I needed to bring this around full circle. Poetry, properly, is a reaching of the poet through his language, a way of touching others and bringing them together in a shared experience. Whereas violence, militancy in poetry, is divisive: therefore it is antipoetry. Poetry must bind together, not divide from.

PICCIONE: This is not just another way of saying the poet takes all his chances and wants to be loved. I'm thinking that if you said what you just said five years ago, it would not have made the sense that it now makes. We have been coming to this. Why do you suppose that there is a fifty-year time lag between the American and European traditions? It can't just be because we lacked the translation and therefore lacked some of the technical innovations as vehicles to this great life-awakening. Is there something else, do you suppose?
LOGAN: It must have to do with the whole way in which feelings are trained. American schools are so heavily overintellectualized, they forget that part of their responsibility is to train the feelings as well as the intelligence.

PICCIONE: How about restrain as well?

LOGAN: “Train” would include “restrain,” but also “free.” I find in my teaching very often, and in my readings, say, in the high schools, that students are hungry for the activation of feeling, the kind that comes to them through poetry. They need it. That aspect of education having to do with art and poetry has often been neglected in American schools; many of them are so technically oriented. Well, I can only think of my own experience, and I went to a very good school in Red Oak, Iowa. We won the “Brain Derby,” (I think it was called) year after year, competing scholastically with other high schools around the state. But so far as poetry is concerned, I had no interest in it when I was a high school student. We had to memorize “Eldorado” by Poe and we had to memorize forty lines of “Snowbound” by John Greenleaf Whittier, I believe. There was nothing to awaken one to poetry, except for my very last year of high school when I was given some Shakespeare to read. I must have been given Shakespeare earlier, too. I think we read The Merchant of Venice and George Eliot’s Silas Marriott together as freshmen. But The Merchant of Venice didn’t do much for me as a freshman. Shakespeare’s use of language in the great tragedies (I think I read Julius Caesar) did help bring me alive to language, but I, of course, then went to college as a premedical major and had no idea that I would become a poet. I didn’t start writing poetry seriously until I was about twenty-eight years old, married, had several children, and was teaching.

One other thing that occurs to me to mention before we leave this subject of mother consciousness, so to speak, is Bly’s idea that it is part of the business of the poet to restore some of that lost mother consciousness to the reader. I agree with that entirely.

PICCIONE: You speak of students being hungry for feeling, and it seems that the next part of such a statement is that they are hungry for touching, for this type of restoration of humanness despite the tradition they come from. You feel that, too, despite the tradition you come from. This is all acceptable now. What makes this the time? Is it just that it would have been time no matter what?

LOGAN: I think it comes partly out of the really revolutionary attitude toward educational curricula that students have been involved in for the past few years. They have required the overhauling of curricula, they have broken away from the lycee/gymnasium idea that was the formation of so many high school concepts in this country, an idea which was heavily rational in character. I realize that here I’m getting back into another prob-
lem, because earlier, we talked about the fact that the Germans seem to have a freedom of sensibility. But I'm thinking of the kind of training that would be taken over in the German gymnasium. This European consciousness, which we were saying was more restorative than the American consciousness, must have come from some place other than the gymnasium, then, or else I'm barking up the wrong tree.

PICCIONE: Yes, I always want to say that the roughest background is German, and then it frightens me to find so many outstanding modern and contemporary German poets.

LOGAN: It might have more to do with the fact of the European family sense than with education. The sense of the pater familias, for example, which the Germans have so strongly.

PICCIONE: I suppose this is a transition: I admire your Trakl translations, and I notice something that occurs in looking at other translators. I'm thinking especially of your translation of "Twilight Land." I wonder if I could read, say the first part of a famous translator's translation and then have you read your entire translation. All right? This is part one of Michael Hamburger's translation of the poem. He calls it "Occident":

Occident
(for Else Lasker-Schuler)

I
Moon, so a dead thing
Stepped from a blue cave,
And many blossoms fall
Across the rocky path.
Silver a sick thing weeps
By the evening pond,
In a black boat
Lovers crossed over to death.

Or the footsteps of Elis
Ring through the grove
The hyacinthine
To fade again under oaks.
O the shape of that boy
Formed out of crystal tears,
Nocturnal shadows.
Jagged lightning illumines his temples
The ever-cool
When on the verdant hill
Springtime thunder resounds.

Now, would you read your entire translation?
Twilight Land
(after Georg Trakl)

1
The moon stepped like a dead thing
Out of a blue cave,
And many flowers
Flutter all along the rocky path.
A sick thing weeps silver
By the pond of evening.
Over there the lovers
Died in a black boat.

Or the footsteps of Elias
Sound through the wood
Hyacinth-colored
And die away again
Under the oak.
Ah, the form of the young boy
Fashioned from crystal tears,
From shadows of the night.
Jagged flashes light up the forehead;
Which is forever cool,
And now on the hill just turning green
The echoing
Of the year's first thunderstorm.

2

So gentle are the green
Woods of our home,
The crystal wave
Dying along the broken wall—
And we wept in our sleep.
Now we stroll and linger
By the thorn hedge,
Singers in the summer night,
In the holy quiet
Of the distant, radiant vineyard.
The shadows of the cool castle
Of night are mourning eagles.
A moonbeam closes gently
The crimson wounds of grief.

3
You great cities of stone
Built on the plain!
Mute, his face, dark,
The man who has no home
Follows the wind
And the barren trees on the hill.
Distant twilight floods!
The mighty, terrifying sunset glow
Is shuddering
In a mass of thunderheads.
Ah, you dying peoples!
A pale wave
Shattering on the night shore,
Falling stars.

PICCIONE: It should be obvious to anyone that there is a vast difference between the two translations. Somewhere Trakl is there, but I wonder about the business of translation. Shall we admit to America that translators use dictionaries on the side? But here’s the point: the task of transforming the German to American English as poem seems caught up especially in the element of nuance. And here I’m thinking of words like “verdant hills.” I mean, we don’t say that.

LOGAN: Well, “verdant hills” is an archaism. I don’t know why Michael Hamburger would come up with that. He’s a competent person. He’s a poet in his own right. I think he was trying to make it sound like a translation, that’s the problem, instead of just sounding like a living poem in the other language.

PICCIONE: That’s incredible, then. What is the purpose?

LOGAN: I don’t know, but a number of translators definitely give this impression. I’m thinking about translations of The Iliad, too. It just is a general quality of translations. Some translators like to try to bring alive the quality of the poem in the new language. Others prefer to have it sound as though it has been brought over from another language; therefore, it sounds like a translation. I’m thinking about the Loeb classics (which Ezra Pound once called the Low Ebb Classics) which were mainly done, not by literary people but by people who were language specialists.

PICCIONE: I think perhaps that is the greatest single flaw in the whole business. There’s the translator C.F. MacIntyre who gave me my first taste of the French symbolists. I didn’t know how wrong his translation was, but now I do and now I see something.

LOGAN: He is the person who introduced me to Rilke, also, so I’m very grateful to him, even though I know that his translations are not as close to the German as Herder Norton’s, for example. But I’m eternally grateful to MacIntyre because I first met Rilke through him. He apparently was a good enough man to carry something of the strength of the people he was
translating, even though he made errors.

POULIN: Could the problem of translation be that matter of music you were discussing a little while ago—attempting to discover another rhythm, another music for another man’s emotions?

LOGAN: It could be, indeed, the question of not having an ear that matches that of the poet in the first place, so that one is more aware of other qualities of language than the word-for-word accuracy as a quality of a translation. I think that without the essential surface, the musical surface, one doesn’t get interested in plumbing further into the depths of the poem. It becomes more like reading an essay than it does like really reading poetry.

POULIN: I say that because it seems to me that your translations often read like your poems. They assume the music that your own poems assume and, therefore, the reader hears that blend of Logan and of Trakl (or of someone else).

LOGAN: Well, that would be strongest in my Rilke poem, “Homage to Rainer Maria Rilke,” where I used fragments and in some cases complete sections, complete poems of Rilke, but I included lines of my own that were turned on by him, by his writing.

POULIN: I'd like to explore that question of music a little bit more. Some critics (I believe both James Dickey and Paul Carroll) have mentioned that some of your poems become prose-y at times. And yet I don’t sense that. What kind of music is going on in the poems?

LOGAN: I don’t know that I can answer that. I know that my development of a new line break—which all the poems in my book, The Anonymouse Lover, use—involves broken lines, and the principle of the breaking of the line is a musical one: the relationship of assonance or a strong consonance, occasionally of a full rhyme. I'm not sure where that comes from, except my desire to make the music more explicit, which is the only thing I'm clearly aware of. It often exploits, so to speak, what would otherwise be an internal rhyme.

PICCIONE: I'd like to dare ask this. I've never had a good answer. From the muscacity of the poem, according to Ginsberg, there's a way of finding the body and finding body-poems. Robert Bly and Gary Snyder also talk of body energies. And in his essay on you, “John Logan’s Field of Force,” Robert Bly speaks of the energy of body. Could you tell us about that?

LOGAN: I think that by body language Bly means the kind of language which images muscular, visceral, and interior feelings rather than images the five senses. There is a visceral sense, a kinetic sense as well. I can remember Randall Jarrell talking about this in his review of Robert Lowell’s first book, Lord Weary’s Castle, which is an extraordinary book. I can
remember it blew my mind when I was beginning to read modern poetry. Bly quotes my “Zoo” poem when he talks about this body language—a use of language to image different stances and attitudes of the body.

PICCIONE: Is it also a matter that more of the senses are becoming legitimate? For instance, Snyder again reminds us that the sense of taste is also the province of the poet. Are we ready for more sensorial experiences to reach the page?

POULIN: Or might it be related more closely to your opening remarks that you’ve broken through from your more mature intellectual life to your more mature emotional life, and in the process perhaps you also broke through to this body-language and body-music?

LOGAN: I think that makes sense, yes. Though I also think that the poems in Cycle for Mother Cabrini have a pretty strong body-sense, too; for example, the first and second poems in the “Cycle for Mother Cabrini” sequence. It would be hard for me to pull that sense out of my own work. Of course, Bly was talking about my more recent book, The Zigzag Walk; but I’m not sure that he wouldn’t also find things in Cycle for Mother Cabrini.

PICCIONE: Bly makes the distinction in that same essay between what he means by body-sound and mental-sound, and he accuses Robert Lowell of more mental-sound, just for contrast, and perhaps parts of Cycle for Mother Cabrini can still be accused of more mental-sound.

LOGAN: Yes, I think that’s true, but it’s not so in “Pagan Saturday” and “Grandfather’s Railroad.” I feel I’d like to read one of those to show you what I mean.

This is “Grandfather’s Railroad.” It’s actually the underground railroad, and it was pointed out to me by my uncle, not by my grandfather. Why I changed it to grandfather, I’m not sure. It relates to the poem “The Weeping” (from The Zigzag Walk) a little bit. This concerns the same man for whom I had much feeling. He was actually my stepgrandfather, Thomas Morgan. But while pointing out where the underground railroad used to run (I, as a child in a little southwestern Iowa town, had never seen a Negro at the time) he told me about the running of Negroes through on the underground railroad and I fantasized them just as I fantasized a real railroad. This poem came out of it.

I sort of wish Bly had talked more about some of my earlier poems. I think that there always has been music present in my work, and we or they are really talking more about a difference in content than a difference in music. The content is more intellectualized in Cycle for Mother Cabrini. I’m not convinced that it’s less musical than in my more recent work.
FACED WITH THE POETRY OF JOHN LOGAN...

Faced with the poetry of John Logan, I admit to being exasperated, disappointed, as well as intrigued and compelled. It is easy to dismiss so much of his work as coy and/or sentimental:

So, when we return to a little later
from our dance along the open shore
we find the Esalen
teacher there again,
and the watchman
each with a woman.
They wait
in that gentle, lunatic light for us.
They smile as they undress.
Eric Barker takes a leak,
beginning reciting Keats,
and we all bathe and sing together
in the new waters of brother, sister.

Here, at the conclusion of the long, garrulous "Poem: Tears, Spray, and Steam," even a fellow poet's pus is unable to draw our attention from the hazy romanticism of both sentiment and language, where even the most playful, imaginative line, the "gentle, lunatic light," is a bit cloying. This sentimentality occurs not infrequently in Logan's later work, and one does not have to look hard to find examples of it there:

Oh, I remember times I wish
I could forget.
... Once after the divorce,
confused, you asked in a small voice
(a mild one)
Daddy, do you have children?
I do, Paul. You are one.
("Poem for my Son")

The answer is hardly reassuring, the child just one or many. Since Logan used statics to emphasize the you, one suspects that he didn't recognize the less comforting implications.

Logan is the kind of poet I'd loved to be proved wrong about. His poetry frustrates me precisely because I'm attracted to the work of anyone who could write as marvelous a poem as "The Picnic":

I felt a soft caving in my stomach
As at the top of the highest slide
When I had been a child, but was not afraid,
And did not know why my eyes moved with wet
As I brushed her cheek with my lips. She said to me
Jack, Jack, different than I had ever heard,
Because she wasn't calling me, I think,
Or telling me. She used my name to
Talk in another way I wanted to know.

This unashamedly open recollection might be easy to dismiss as just an
embarrassingly simple story of puppy love, but examined closer, one sees
how it is also a poem about a boy's coming to understand the power of
language. It is about poetry, about talking in another way:

....There was a word in my throat
With the feeling and I knew the first time
What it meant and I said, it's beautiful.
Yes, she said, and I felt the sound and the word
in my hand join the sound and the word in hers.

Out of the ordinariness of the moment and the language used to describe
it, rises a recognition, a rightness not that different from when a hookshot
kisses just the strings of the hoop or a note's hit so right there seems a
wonderful correspondence between intention and act, gesture and the sound
it registers that lets one believe, even if only for a moment, that this is the
true order of life.

There are obvious weak spots in "The Picnic," overblown romanticisms
(the two "hung in a touch of birds"), and pedestrian narrative ("Our hands
were together. She laughed....."), but the poem moves bravely through and
beyond them, in its innocent recollection in tranquility of its "spontaneous
overflow of powerful feelings." In many ways the faults of Logan's are the
faults of the man whose tradition his poetry continues.

In both Wordsworth's and Logan's poetry, the degree of self-absorption
can be disturbing, a preoccupation with one's own sensibility at the
expense of recognizing and acknowledging that the world exists beyond the
concerns of this sensibility, and thus a failure of perception and engage-
ment with this world. In a letter to her friend, Theodore Roethke, Louise
Bogan wrote: "You will have to look at things until you don't know whether
you are they or they are you." This is advice of which I suspect both Logan
and Wordsworth would approve, but limited in vision by their own need
to find lessons, to see everything in terms of what it can teach or help them
to resolve, they are not able to put this advice into practice. If one is con-
cerned with what to use one can put what one observes, can one really
enter imaginatively into what's there to be seen?

Thus, in "The Zoo" from Logan's later book The Zigzag Walk, the plot
is predictable: man watches animals in zoo and draws lessons from them:

This Primate House echoes
without mixed cries;
it reeks with ambiguous breath.
Each one caged as an oracle
I feel each upright animal
can tell
how much my life is a human life,
how much an animal death.

Here the animals almost seem to exist only for what they can tell the poet
we feel little sense of any life they might have outside the poem’s thesis.
The zoo is in some real way a metaphor for our human dilemma: we do
tend to see the world only in reference to us, so much that we cage and
diminish it in our need to do so. And in fact the method of Logan’s poem
does the same thing, locking the animals into the role of oracle instead of
seeking to enter into their experience through imagery and figurative
language. Instead he ends the poem as Wordsworth might have too,
brooding on his own concerns.

This unquestioning self-absorption I find frightening because it allows
one not to look closely at the objects of one’s vision. In “Thirteen Preludes
for Pioneer Square” the inhabitants of the square are thus easily reduced
to caricature by this kind of exploitative poetic:

In the Six Fourteenth the queers
think they are the pioneers.
When they dance they bleed and swallow
trying to decide who should lead
and who should follow.

How is this any better than shithouse humour? What are we to make of
a language that seems so insensitive to his subjects, so “innocently” oblivious
to its implications?

And what are we to make also of a poetry that is so openly an act of
self-explanation? Wordsworth writes in Book I of The Prelude:

Thus far, O Friend, did I, not used to make
A present joy the matter of my Song,
Pour out, that day, my soul in measured strains,
Even in the very words which I have here
Recorded: the open fields I told
A prophecy: poetic numbers came
Spontaneously, and clothed in priestly robe,
My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
For holy services: great hopes were mine;
My own voice cheered me, and, far more, the mind’s
Internal echo of the imperfect sound.
To both I listened, drawing from them both
A cheerful confidence in things to come.

(55-67)
Through the vehicle of the “friend,” Wordsworth explains himself to all who’d listen, with the assumption that of course they ought to pay attention to the pouring out of his soul in “measured strains.” It is the nakedness of this self-absorption that makes both poets so disappointing and even repellent at times, yet also at time so disarmingly honest.

With the odes of Keats, for example, we are offered works of art so lovely they seem almost beyond human realm, a language transforming and irreplaceable. But with Wordsworth and with those whose tradition they continue, like John Logan, we are given, instead, a human mind as it struggles, right before our eyes, to understand and explain itself. Do we not feel that Logan, too, like Wordsworth, is “cheared” by his “own voice,” by his “very words here/recorded,” as in the early “Spring of the Thistle”:

Even those ducks weave down the shore

again, drunk with hope
for the April water. One spring festival

near here I stripped and strolled

through a rain filled field.
Spread eagled on the soaking earth

I let the rain

move its audible little hands
gently on my skin...let the dark rain
raise up my love.

But why? I was alone
and no one saw how ardent I grew

And when I rolled naked on the snow one night

as St. Francis with his Brother Ass

or a hard-boiled Finn
I was alone. Underneath
the howling January moon
I kneel and dug my fist
full of the cold winter sand
and rubbed and
hid my manhood under it.

I quote this passage at such length to point out how Logan exposes himself at great length. The nakedness that is most noteworthy here is not that of the man hiding his erection in the snow, but that of the writer telling us about the act, trying to understand it as he talks to us, a form of Wordsworthian presumption here that the reader cares—and ought to care. The experience is not rendered but told, and in fact, the real experience for the reader is being made to listen to the poet explain himself; what is thus exposed most by the poet is not his pouring out of his soul or his packing his stiff penis with snow, but instead the naked insistence on explaining to us this: “To me,” Wordsworth writes, “that morning did it happen so:/And fears and fancies, thick upon me came:/ Dim sadness, and blind
thoughts I knew not nor could name.” Compare these lines to any in “Ode to a Nightingale” and we see the difference between two traditions.

How easy it is to dismiss a poem for not observing the tradition of Keats, for not transcending the naked “I.” How wary we have become of the embarrassingly autobiographical voice, with all its clumsiness, its messy lack of decorum, its open struggling on the page. Do we not ask of a poem more than confession? Do we not want our poems to be so well crafted they reach beyond the awkwardly personal?

And yet what if we are offered only well-wrought urns, works of art so lovely we stand astonished before them, poems so marvellous that they seem to go beyond what seems possible to us mere mortals? Isn’t there a need, perhaps, for us to be also privy to the human—and thus messy and clumsy—struggles of the mind as it tries to comprehend and to live with itself?

Wordsworth did not simply write, “My own voice cheared me,” but followed that admission with an insight into it: “and, far more, the mind’s/ Internal echo of the imperfect sound.” Like some of Logan’s best poetry, Wordsworth’s is more than an act of self-explanation; it is an attempt to understand that act and the mind’s internal echoes. If with Keats we get the illusion of perfected sound—and of course, that is what the “Ode to a Nightingale” revolves around—the mortal longings for a loveliness beyond one’s reach—we get with Wordsworth and with Logan a recognition of our imperfect groping for these internal echoes:

...There was a sound in my throat
With the feeling and I knew the first time
What it meant and I said, it’s beautiful.

We get not the beautiful object, but the mind finding it beautiful and struggling to understand this beauty: as in one of Logan’s most moving poems, “Lines for His Son in Satin” from his early book Sprig of the Thistle:

My son, page, I feel you bear a message
to me (though I am no king)
like a magnificent, blue stone upon a pillow
or a courtier’s melancholy song:
that it is thus very youth himself,
the summer wind and grass
gentle at his legs and face,
whom the boy’s brown eye hates—
for though he wears no satin suit
or thin page’s glove, he has
too much beauty, and can win easy
too much love.

This poem offers a familiar Wordsworthian scenario: the characters in it typically end up bringing the poet a message, almost as if they only existed for this purpose. But as in the best of Wordsworth, the message comes on-
ly after the poet has moved beyond his personal anxieties and engaged his subject, seen it closely and imaginatively, be the subject the leech-gatherer or this small child in his blue satin suit and "blue silk hat with an ostrich plume."

What Logan gives us in his earlier poetry is the same kind of permission I believe Wordsworth gives us: to be clumsy, messy, naked, struggling, self-explanatory; to reveal the human mind in all its imperfect, brave gropings and puzzlings. And out of such open struggle come moments, as in "Lines for His Son in Satin," of understanding and of union. At the end of this poem, there is a correspondence between the experience of Logan's son and the young boy Logan had been ("Let me show you a picture of me at your age. This boy is handsome too.") as well as a correspondence between the poem's experience and its reader's, a kind of victory where the distance is closed, the struggle of the mind to understand ("But why is there such rage in his face?") is resolved, and the understanding is hard won.

Perhaps the danger of such poetry of naked struggle—a voice trying to make sense of the life it is attached to and the mind that gives it its words—is that it is hard to sustain. Once it loses its ardency, its edge, its innocence, it can become flaccid, redundant, deprived of its earlier urgency. This weakening of power seems to have happened in Logan's career, the later books, The Zigzag Walk (1969) and The Anonymous Lover (1973) seeming to insist on the importance of personal experience without any real energy given to the language embodying this experience. The result seems to be either a coy (as in "Heart to Heart Talk With My Liver") or pedestrian poetry (as in "The Pass"):

I will not lean farther
over the bridge's sill with the others

(who can savor such a thrill. I will go back and read the plaque

upon the rock.

The almost tortured earlier honesty lapses not into idiosyncratic cliche; a sort of complacent nakedness.

This later poetry seems emptied of the earlier ardency so that it often becomes a man telling his symptoms without the real urgency to make sense of them:

My own seas, my winds
are weak today,
and I
depend
utterly on you
who do not know
so now
you walk
suddenly out of my sight
if only for a minute
and I begin
to trem-
ble with the panic of it.

What makes this poetry memorable? What even makes it "poetry"? Not knowing anything substantial about Logan’s life, and valuing his earlier work, I can’t help but wonder at what weakened his powers as a poet and regret.

Did Logan want to push towards even more nakedness, to have his poems even more closer to a “real language of men,” to have his “poetic numbers” come even more “spontaneously”? In his early work, the tendencies already existed towards sentimentality, towards garrulousness (see the ten page “Honolulu and Back” in Ghost of the Heart), towards unadorned self-explanation. Without any hard questioning of these tendencies how could Logan escape where they might lead him: an almost complete surrender to them, to posture and gesture without any real energy behind either.

There is a nakedness in the later poetry—and a continued preoccupation with nakedness, especially that of young men—but it seems to be even more self-absorbed and exploitative, and in the later books disturbingly familiar:

Marne looked easily at your body
and smiled. You grinned
and climbed towards your clothes.
Suddenly I felt that she
had watched the dark
rich-haired shadow of me.
("Lines for Michael in the Picture")

Logan does not attempt to see or to let us see this young man’s beauty; instead the man’s beauty exists only in reference to the poet’s own self-preoccupation offered to us so unquestioned that it seems disturbingly and willfully a refusal to acknowledge any reality beyond the poet’s own concerns:

I could find my own loneliness in your face,
hear it in your voice.
But there is something else,
some lost part of myself I could track
(did you know I used to be called Jack?)
so I follow like a blind animal
with hope (and with fear)
your brilliant, shadow spoon.
One might argue that this is more brave honesty, but it seems to me that the real honesty would be in questioning this infatuation that seems to have little interest in seeing its object clearly and closely and leads to such fuzzy lines as these.

Perhaps what exasperates me most about Logan's later poetry is that he seemed to have settled too easily, to have questioned too infrequently his assumptions. "What is a Poet," asks Wordsworth in the 1802 Preface and in typical Wordsworth fashion he answers his own question:

He is a man speaking to men: a man it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions...

Perhaps, in the absence of any serious questioning of one's self and one's craft, this pleasure with one's own "passions and volitions" can become a complacency that weakens one's arder and one's commitment and thus one's poetry, a too quick and easy reliance on one's enthusiasm and one's tenderness.

But I would ask Wordsworth's question again, "What is a Poet?" Is he or she only the one who can offer us seemingly flawless works of art that reassure us about what the human mind can attain. And if this is so, what permission is there given us to struggle, to be embarrassingly human? Is it hard to be flawless and tender because tenderness is often an admission of our human imperfections and a forgiveness of them.

At the center of Logan's work is a great tenderness, expressed most frequently in his poems for his children. In "Lines to His Son Reaching Adolescence" (in Ghosts of the Heart) he writes:

...I feel we learn too late to teach.
And like Augustus's Dad I have watched you bathe
Have seen as my own hair begins to fall
The fair gold beard upon your genital
That soon will flow with seed
And swell with love and pain (I almost add
Again). I cannot say to you whether
In a voice steady or unsteady, ah Christ
Please wait your father isn't ready.
You could not wait, as he could not.
But for both our sakes I ask you, wrestle
Manfully against the ancient course of snakes,
The bitter mystery of love, and learn to bear
The burden of the tenderness
That is hid in us.
There is much in John Logan's poetry I find myself quick, from the safe vantage point of the critic, to dismiss, but I wonder if it is not useful to examine the ease and certainty of such critical judgments, the working assumptions of our times. Logan's poetry is troubling not just to my literary sensibilities, but to my soul; his earnestness, his nakedness is hard to forget, this voice that speaks to me as Wordsworth's does in his struggles. He is one of those poets we badly need, with whom we must struggle. And it is for his tenderness—and all its risks—I am willing not to let my quarrels get between me and John Logan.

John Logan asks us to "learn to bear/ The burden of the tenderness/ That is hid in us." It is not an easy burden to shoulder.

Christopher Bursk
I can say some simple things that I remember. It seems important to mention that I met John Logan when I was a younger man and had just come through an edge of language into teaching, with a new Ph.D. He was the first poet I ever saw myself clearly in. There, in 1971, we knew right off that we were both perfectly doomed, and by the highest damned pursuits. This made us laugh and hug each other: the good-hearted farewell which dumb-founded pilgrims save for each other, especially in greetings!

He was powerfully naive, all right, and would have had a sweeter life if he could have found a spirit guide or priest great enough. He never did, but he was perhaps the first in our time to discover spiritually that worrying and questing for Good without a map can—and will, if your luck’s wrong—get you lost in a painful place. I’ll just say that to me he was a spirit uncle, generous beyond our understanding, and he was framed brilliantly by his own innocence. In the last years, that’s where he ended up hanging, in full view. Therefore, he was a great man who refused to give up his ordinary human life. He is (and he knew this) the fourth man, down here, below Jesus and the two thieves on their crosses. In a glimpse of himself more ancient, more primally real that even that holy time in “Spring of the Thief,” he is whole, unified, and accepting in his human body where the Divine impulse has led him. His majestic, stunned courage will never be more beautiful:

Like sandalwood! Like sandalwood
the righteous man
perfumes the axe that falls on him.

“I was a loner,” he once wrote, and certainly he was. He might have added, “and I was a goner,” which he also knew equally clearly. I love that part of John Logan. He went where he had to go, gaining and falling. He was forever God-starved, never safe, never comfortable, and he suffered greatly to see greatly. What else? Here are nine things I know about the man:

he loved Creation literally and tried with his life to embrace it.
he ached to revive the sacramental Word by knowing it primally.
he peeled off his outer masks for this.
he turned towards everything with his true face of grief.
he loved the loving democracy of the human spirit.
he wept when he knew that poetry is the spirit’s tongue.
he grieved in loneliness for the loneliness of people.
he knew finally that his separateness was archetypal and fixed.
he stood there with a glass of wine, alone, knowing all of this.
And therefore, to anybody forgiving and unforgiving, let's just say that the whole world has gone on changing. We hate that he died, but he's around. In one place, it's Brockport, it is December, 1971, 10:30 at night, and moments ago his poetry reading has sparkled a small spark in practically everyone. Under a campus streetlamp, in dim streaky light, he's got his coat spread out on the ground. He and about eight young men and women are talking, waving hands and happy about something. We've all just met. We're digging into our pockets, tossing coins and bills onto the coat. We are going to meet somewhere, Poulin's maybe. Two kids will go get a lot of beer—a full coat's worth. We'll drink beer and stay up all night, talking of the new forgiveness, real among strangers, of God, of good neighbors, of poetry. We'll go on with it, some of us, into our lives, and sometimes, when we feel joyful about some small thing or other, something that goes right in the world, we'll hug each other, as we did, as we go on doing.

_Brockport, March 1988_

_Anthony Piccione_
NOW THAT WE KNOW WHERE WE ARE

It's time to start feeling or way again. We
can call each thing its own sweet secret desire.

Since we were flicked out of the infinite speck
just as we woke here from God wringing our hands

it must be that the rocking urge or speed of stars
holds our longing to squeeze into the dot up ahead.

It is good to lie down to die sometimes
and good to rise crying in a wild new face.

We'll need to forgive our craving for light, our mad
passage from the kingdom lost, far back down the blood

where the dark spark still hums forward as galaxies of fish
and the shaggy heads of birds go on marveling and forgetting.

Now that we know where we are, what took us?
What the hell is this? What else have we done?

Anthony Piccione
THE END OF THE ROAD

for John Logan

I imagine you sat alone with rain
on the roof of a furnished room

while the water pipes growled
each day more of the same

grief beyond articulation,
paralysis, shattered brain

gaveled under heavy bones,
Sisyphus crushed under the boulder

heaved over the edge
by a saboteur angel,

a bare-ankled shadow now
nursing a drink in a local bar,

sawdust in her hair,
breath blackening her slotted teeth,

her promise to change
your address kept.

Dan Murray
UNTITLED

I am writing quickly this morning of April 24th, 1989. My first thoughts of John are narrative images, fragments of our long friendship, but leave that to privacy. This is the way for me now, and there never is much time for peace or orderliness.

* 

John Logan wrote with exceptional beauty and intimate wisdom about the poets of the past, the lives, loves and graves of dead poets. When I visited the house of tiny Keats, I was struck by grief. The house itself and the care given to his things, though, were relieving. That's not really the way it was for John Logan and for most poets of the world.

Yet how great it would be if his long sailing many-tamboured lines of American language which he conducted hand rising to his aching ear or wiping the moisture from his voice as his mouth drew sustenance from tonal phrases and gave back a multiple-layered sound in poetry rare as an ancient horn ensemble playing the whole original human body, a sound drawing together many lands and crafts and gods, auditory and visual images: eastern and African as well as western and American, how wonderful to imagine that his poems, a few, and his name, would survive like those of the classic Chinese, a thousand years and more.

* 

Who will read John Logan's solo and choral songs and pictures a thousand years hence? Will anyone? His poems search to live as he did. His signal-pulse of desire to be recognized and to be responded to is in the world while his works physically survive and while we remember to search for them, refer to them, and when we can't recall anymore, a gathering like this one we share will reflect our admiration, our acknowledgment that we heard a truly exceptional poetry-musician in our time, and it was wonderful and useful. We are speaking to an unknown future.

* 

When a true poet dies it is a bit like the secret death of a specie we never had time enough or love enough to learn how to care for. Mirrors and echoes are our world: spirit, air, fire, water. A thousand years from now living human beings who read language would find the sad tonal clarity of John Logan's seeing and saying of phrase as wise, elegant and human as I find my ancient Chinese companions today, his phrases like theirs' linking us with the continuity of living.
Understanding him far less than they thought this moment or that John Logan's friends tried to help this scholar-poet continue with his task. When I think of him now I think of all poets everywhere, the world's poets. We don't see them: they live, sing, move from place to place, chant, grunt, inscribe, are killed or die. I sent John's family a wreath and note to be with his ashes at Point Lobos. "A garland of flowers to accompany our friend, John Logan, as he continues his spirit journey through the rhythmic multicolored seas that warm the earth."

Milton Kessler
WILDFLOWER

1.

Each early summer on this acre,
a single Jack-in-the-pulpit
in woodshade.

If you’ve ever seen one, its vertical spadix
arched over by its purple-
streaked cowl,
you know the beauty of wildflower.

2.

We walked from my cabin past the flower already
past its bloom, only its bent black stem
left to return
to the world of shades. I didn’t show him:
between episodes of delirium tremens,
he was already a dead man—
I knew I’d never see him again.

3.

Believe: the next day, miles away in wine country, an auctioneer
held up this small, iridescent, amethyst,
Jack-in-the-pulpit bud vase.

He called it poetry in black glass. I lowered my eyes,
but bid for it, and bought it. Its hood
leans over emptiness always
to hold wildflower.

William Heyen
NOT EVEN THE DREAMER: JOHN LOGAN, 1923-87

Sad news, the death of John Logan on a Friday night in early November, from injuries sustained—so the traditional but curious phrasing in the newspaper went—in a fall.

At the funeral in a quiet north Berkeley neighborhood, Monday morning, St. Mary Magdalene Church—John Logan liked to muse in his poems on the lives of saints and poets, especially the spoiled ones—I stood in the back where I could observe his sons and daughters, nine of them! and his many friends and former students, wild-haired young poets of the nineteen-sixties looking, in the muted light, middle-aged, becalmed. And somber, John’s last few years had not been easy. Looking at the plain gray casket before the altar, I remembered that he had written his own epitaph, in an early poem about his mother who died in the year of his birth:

And here is laid her orphan child with his
   Imperfect poems and ardors, slim as sparklers.

_Ardors and sparklers. Is and his and slim. But especially orphan and poems._
He had an uncanny ear. I don’t know another poet who could make you hear the rhyme in _orphan_ and _poem_. He loved puns, the corner the better. He loved knock-knock jokes with a literary twist, all manner of verbal buffoonery, singing Frost’s “Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening” to the tune of a tango, crooning out—this was midwestern humor—“Home on the Range” in comic book German. It was that sound, inappropriately, that rang in my head during the funeral, Logan when the party had thinned out, usually a party after a poetry reading, not wanting anyone to go home, wanting everyone to stay, to stay up late, to read poems or recite poems, or to take turns reading Hopkins or Dickinson or to take turns reading different translations of Dante, canto by canto, circle by circle of hell!

His friends came to understand that this was partly a drinker’s need to keep drinking and partly dread of the solitude that threw him into his terrible loneliness, but because of these things and because of his immense kindness, people usually stayed. His sweetness was so infectious. It was that absurdly happy voice that meant his friends were around him, and he had a gleaming gin and tonic in his hand and someone was going to recite a poem and he didn’t have to face the end of the evening that I heard from the back of the church, a raucous, comic voice, plangent with yearning:

_Home, home, auf den Rangen,_
_Wo der Deer und der Antelope gespielen,_
_Wo nicht is gehört_
_Eine discouraging Wort_
_Und der Himmel ist verklart all den Tag._
Biographical matter: he was born in Red Oak, Iowa in 1923, grew up partly on his grandfather's farm, raised by his father and step-mother. He had a brother. He attended Coe College, where he studied English and biology, did some graduate work in philosophy, and was a tutor briefly in biology and German at St. John's College in Annapolis before he went to the University of Notre Dame, where, a Protestant convert to Catholicism, he had his large family and wrote his first three books, Cycle for Mother Cabrini (1955), Ghosts of the Heart (1960), and Spring of the Thief (1963). During those years he taught a poetry workshop at the University of Illinios, Chicago Circle, where his students included Marvin Bell, Dennis Schmitt, Roger Apolon, Bill Knott, and Naomi Lazard. Also during this time he met and corresponded with some of the poets who became his friends and associates, Robert Bly, James Wright, Carolyn Kizer, Galway Kinnell, and A.R. Ammons. He also, together with the photographer Aaron Siskind, founded Choice, a magazine of poetry and photography.

In 1964 he moved to the Bay Area to become director of the Humanities Seminar at St. Mary's College. It was during this time that his marriage ended and he left the Catholic church. He moved to San Francisco State, taught a workshop that included Stan Rice, Shirley Kaufman, Joseph Stroud, and Philip Dow. From there he went to the University of Washington, after the death of Theodore Roethke—Keith Abbott was among his students—and settled finally at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he joined a faculty that included Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Irving Feldman, John Barth, and Leslie Fiedler. It was in the late sixties and early seventies one of the liveliest centers of writing in the country. Logan spent his summers and holidays in and around San Francisco. He continued to edit Choice, was poetry editor of The Nation, and wrote the poems that appeared in The Zig Zag Walk (1969) and The Anonymous Lover (1973).

After 1974, he traveled to Europe, moved between Buffalo and San Francisco and visiting seminars at the University of Hawaii. A long poem appeared, Poem in Progress (1975), a new volume, The Bridge of Changes, and a selected poems, Only the Dreamer Can Change the Dream, both in 1981. There was a collection of his occasional prose, a book of essays about his work by various hands, and a final small chapbook, The Transformations, in 1983. By the time it appeared, he had retired from teaching, was living in San Francisco, and was quite ill.

In the church I thought about his kindness and his poems. Lines chimed in my head. A moment in summer in the late fifties, a cabin on a lake in Michigan, all the kids asleep, he writes about skinny-dipping with his wife:

I asked her out to swim with me because
I knew how small and white she was.

He loved those sounds. A party in San Francisco:
“Chartreuse,” you chanted,
the liqueur you always wanted,
“I have yellow chartreuse hair?”
Oh, it was a grand affair...

In the wonderful poem “Three Moves” he contemplated the entirely guilt-
free behavior of the ducks around his houseboat in Seattle just after his
separation from his family:

Tame ducks and my neighbors’ boats.
The ducks honk about the floats...
They walk dead drunk onto the land and grounds,
iridescent blue and black and green and brown.
They live on swill
our aged houseboats spill.
But still they are beautiful.
Look! the duck with his unlikely beak
has stopped to pick
and pull
at the potted daffodil.
Then again they sway home
to dream
bright gardens of fish in the early night.
Oh these ducks are all right.
They will survive.

Rhyme is sexual. “The animals are sick with love,” Emerson wrote in
“Merlin,” “lovesick with rhyme.” It expresses the hunger for the perfect
mate, the perfect fit, completion. And near-rhyme, slant rhyme, slippery
off-rhyme teases the mind with that hunger. It becomes philosophical, or
theological. It teases the mind with the way things don’t quite fit, the way
the world seems to keep failing at wholeness. This play of rhyme and near-
rhyme becomes a thematic and structural principle in Logan’s work. And
it is related to his interest in psychoanalysis and to the punning sense of
the unconscious in Freud and Ferenczi and to his own tormented sexual-
ity. There is often in his poems the issue of easy rhyming and of things that
don’t rhyme. “I was born on a street named Joy,” he writes,

of which I remember nothing,
but since I was a boy
I’ve looked for its lost turning.

It is not the easy rhyme of joy and boy that counts in his poems, but the
haunting connection between turning and nothing. This is one of the many
poems that deal with his mother’s death:
Still I seem to hear my mother’s cry
echo in the street of joy.
She was sick as Ruth for home
when I was born. My birth
took away my father’s wife
and left me half
my life.

Birth and wife and half life. In other poems it is father and brother and other. And other and monster. This searching and mirroring is at the center of his art, both thematically and musically. Guilt and hope are his themes. In his poems he loved the time just before Easter: longer light, the weak new grass. He was attracted to slender hopes. And to the idea of transformation. His own sense of hope was nourished by poetry’s power to transform any experience into music.

In the end I don’t think it is exactly the case that hope failed him. There was something more deliberate than that about his death. The years of hard drinking, a violent depression, shock treatment for the depression, and a pair of strokes had left him in terrible physical condition. After the second stroke, he lost and then recovered the ability to read and write. I saw him in the hospital, frail, shrunken, his eyes as large and credulous as a child’s, being taught to read his own poems by a young Philippine speech therapist. He was timid, disoriented, slightly paranoid. But for such a self-destructive person, he had phenomenal recuperative powers. Within months he was going to concerts again, and in his increasingly halting speech criticizing—it seemed extraordinary hubris—ragged performances of third movements of late Beethoven quartets.

His impaired speech bothered him—he who loved to croon out poems. He was lonely, and when he was with people the effort of talking tired him, and he often sank into pained, baffled silences. He got around, preciously, on a three-pronged aluminum cane, and he had in the last months sieges of severe, undiagnosable abdominal pain. It was becoming evident that he couldn’t take care of himself and that he wouldn’t write again. He was about to move from his downtown apartment to one of the private care facilities on the stucco and palm avenues off Geary Boulevard with their smell of lemon varnish and Lysol and fresh flowers. He had been in them before when he was recovering from various stages of his afflictions and had submitted himself to the staff who spoke to him in the brisk, cheerful tone of kindergarten teachers. The unceasing sound of daytime television tormented him, and the front rooms full of elderly people who sat staring at it.

To get to the roof of his apartment building on Post Street he must have taken an elevator to the top floor, but he had to negotiate the narrow stairway to the roof by himself, leaning on his cane. The autopsy showed that there were no drugs or alcohol in his system, so he was apparently quite clear-headed. He had to get out the heavy door onto the roof. John was not, under normal circumstances, a physically brave person. In the comic
stories he told against himself he was always the unathletic boy who held back. This time he did not. One way or another, he got himself to the edge of the building.

At the funeral, his son John sang a setting of one of his poems:

I'm the ugly, early
Moor Swan of Morris Graves.
I'm ungainly I've got
black splotches on my back.
My neck's too long.
When I am dead and gone
think only of the beauty of my name.
Moor Swan  Moor Swan  Moor Swan.

His children, I heard afterwards, had placed a recording of Mozart with his body.

Robert Hass

An earlier version of this essay appeared in Poetry Flash, the San Francisco Bay Area monthly, in December 1987
HEAVEN'S FLOOR

I

O sinners beware!
John Logan is dead.
All his life he struggled
against the works of the devil and failed.
He kept that old bastard busy
day and night and so you've had free rein,
but finally Nick's got him. His soul blossomed
in snow and withered quickly and blossomed
again. If you can't believe in the Resurrection,
you can't believe in John.
He tried everything he could to foil the prick but
he came on harder and harder until death had him.

II

O John, dying in San Francisco when the city was white with light,
Growing old and ugly was not your style. Your
scars have grown smooth again. The hair
long gone has grown dark again and
you are slimmer and more handsome now
than all the other boys. John, John, one hand dipped in
hell and the other held up by heaven, shaking through that
tug of war we all go through,
I heard you rose on old ducks wings, the sun
squinting as you rose and St. Peter
quaking lest he had to make the judgment
at the gate, but Dismus opened up the cellar door and
let you in the way he came, old fucker.

III

St. Logan, we praise you
who has lowered heaven's floor.

Fran Quinn
TO LOGAN IN THE GRAVE

Again I see your Orphic mask unlocked
in the early morning of consciousness,
in cities of groaning and phlegm,
in the colors of the sun arrayed in gasoline
and in alleys of spittle where the priest
intones the secret wish of sons. You
whose mother died at your birth, you
for whom her death undid the scales,
you tracked her into open fires.
Now I see you emerge into a cool hell
where each autumn will be a golden falling
and the trees outreach themselves
should a man need shade or an apple.
I see you taking the apple again, and the myth,
I see you touching again the relic of Augustine
with the sympathy of one who bled for years,
I see you drink the sacramental wine. Yes,
I see you offer to share whatever you have
and everything you are and all that you were.
I see you as you were then, mouthing the O,
the language of the breast—the beautiful
poet and son, the sufferer, the undone.
And I see you off on your rounds again.
I see you slip away on the current of your thirst
and slide beneath the surface of a lonely sea,
to float facedown inside her,
tangled in the red thread of the salt.

Marvin Bell
A CHASER
    in memory of John Logan

Across a bar, that night we met,
he spoke to me—
"How did you die?" he asked.
And I answered, I remember, quickly
and without thought, without
the wonder such a query deserved,
as I'm sure the barman would agree
and the other men near us
quiet now and looking into their drinks
like they expected them to say something.
"Water," I said; I recall that much
but to this day I don't know what
I meant by saying it.
"It's always water, isn't it?" He spoke
like a man who knew
what he was saying, as though he had
said it all before
when before someone said "water,"
admitted water got the best of him.

Louis McKee
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE WORK OF JOHN LOGAN


“Cape Elizabeth, a Photograph.” Cambridge, MA. Pomegranate Press, 1974 (broadside).


Photograph by Layle Silber
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS


The poetry of John Logan throughout the text is used with the permission of his publishers, Ecco Press of New York City and BOA Editions of Brockport.


**Contributors**

Roger Aplon is a poet from San Francisco. He co-edited Choice with John Logan for many years.

Marvin Bell’s long friendship with John Logan began in Chicago in 1960, where Mr. Bell was a member of the “Poetry Seminar,” an unaffiliated group of poets which met with Logan downtown in the offices of the Midwest Clipping Association. His Selected Poems (Atheneum) appeared in 1987, and his ninth book of poems will be published in 1990 by Knopf. He lives in Iowa City and, as much as possible, in Port Townsend, WA.

Robert Bly lives in Moose Lake, Minnesota where he has been working with men’s groups and exploring the myth of the Wild Man.


Philip Dacey writes from Cottonwood, Minnesota. His most recent collection is *The Man in the Red Suspenders* (Millweed Editions), and he co-edited (with David Jama) the anthology, *Strong Measures* (Harper & Row).

Philip Dow is a widely published award winning poet who has taught at universities throughout the U.S. (including SF State and SUNY-Buffalo with John Logan). He has written more than a dozen books of poetry and recently edited *19 New American Poets of the Golden Gate* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). He now lives in the Napa Valley near where he grew up.


Samuel Haso is the director of the International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh, and is a professor of English at Duquesne University. His most recent books are *Silence Spoken Here* (poetry), *Stills* (fiction), and *The Rest Is prose* (essays).

William Heyen’s latest collection of poems, *Brookport, New York: Beginning With “And,“* was published in 1989 by Northouse & Northouse. *The Chestnut Rain* was published by Ballantine in 1986, as was his romance, *Vic Holyfield and the Class of ’59*. A series of essays on the future of our planet have appeared recently in *APR* and elsewhere.

Milton Kessler co-edited *Choice* with John Logan over its last ten years. He resides in Buffalo, NY.

Richard Lautt was a long-time friend of John Logan’s. He teaches at LaSalle University.

Richard Maxwell has taught English and Creative Writing at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills, CA, since 1965, and is director of the Foothills Writers Conference (where John Logan taught for eight of its first ten years). He is the author of Palestine, Illinois, a chapbook, and Self-Inflicted Idea.

Louis McKee, the editor of this volume, is a former editor of PBQ. His fifth and most recent collection of poems, Oranges, was published in 1989 by M.A.F Press.

Dan Murray is the author of Short Circuits, published by Street Press. He teaches at Suffolk Community College in River Head, NY.

Anthony Piccione has had two collections of his poetry published, both by BOA Editions: Anchor Dragging (1980) and Seeing It Was So (1986). He teaches at SUNY-Brockport.

Sanford Pinker is both well known and highly regarded as a poet and critic. He last appeared in PBQ with an essay on the work of Richard Hugo. He teaches at Franklin and Marshall College.

A. Poulin, Jr.'s most recent book, A Momentary Order, was published in 1987 by Graywolf. He is the publisher of BOA Editions, and responsible for John Logan's last books. Soon to come from BOA Editions is John Logan's collected poems.

Mary Randlett is a 1983 recipient of Washington State's Governor's Award. She often documents the creative people of the northwest. Her photographs are held in more than thirty permanent collections nationwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Smithsonian.

Layle Silbert writes poetry and fiction, but is probably best known for her portrait photography of poets and writers.

William Stafford is one of America's most prolific poets. An Oregon Message (Harper & Row) is his most recent book of poems, and You Must Revise Your Life (University of Michigan Press) is a new collection of essays. He recently visited the Painted Bride Arts Center and opened the reading series for fall, 1989.

Lucien Stryk has a new book of poems, Of Pen and Ink and Paper Scraps, published this year by Swallow/Ohio University Press.

Michael Waters edited a study of John Logan's poetry, Dissolve To Island, (Ford-Brown, 1984). His most recent collection of poetry, The Burden Lifters, was published this year by Carnegie-Mellon.
Ravenna Park, Seattle. April, 1966
Photograph by Mary Randlett