

English Professor Wins National Book Critics Circle Award

March 10, 2006

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — University of Florida English professor William Logan has won the National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism for his book “The Undiscovered Country: Poetry in the Age of Tin.” Logan accepted the award at the annual NBCC Awards Ceremony in New York City on March 3.

“Winning was like being struck by lightning,” Logan said. “The best aspect of the honor is that even my friends seem impressed. I’m sorry that my parents weren’t alive to see it — they always said I was too critical, but they would have been proud.”

The award-winning book includes essays about Shakespeare’s sonnets, Whitman’s use of the American vernacular, the mystery of Marianne Moore, and a groundbreaking analysis of Sylvia Plath’s relationship to her father, as well as the chronicles of the poet whose sharp opinions of contemporary verse have sometimes been controversial.

The NBCC, a 700-member nonprofit organization founded in 1974, honors authors for quality writing in five categories: fiction, general nonfiction, biography/memoir, poetry and criticism. The members -- all book reviewers -- elect a 24-person board of directors, which nominates and judges books for the awards.

Logan, who was a finalist for the award in criticism in 1999, is the author of three other books of criticism, “All the Rage” (1998), “Reputations of the Tongue” (1999) and “Desperate Measures” (2002). He has also written seven books of poetry: “Sad-faced Men” (1982), “Difficulty” (1985), “Sullen Weedy Lakes” (1988), “Vain Empires” (1998), “Night Battle” (1999), “Macbeth in Venice” (2003) and “The Whispering Gallery” (2005).

Logan said poets commonly react to his criticisms with a blissful — or perhaps a stunned — silence. “On some occasions a poet has threatened violence, either jokingly (in the case of the Pulitzer Prize winner who offered to run me over with his car) or not so jokingly (in the case of another Pulitzer Prize winner who offered to give me the beating I ‘so richly deserved’),” he said. “Mostly, though, poets have hides thick enough to take criticism, and perhaps some poets need even thicker hides to accept praise.”

Logan was director of UF’s Creative Writing Program from 1983 to 2000. He continues to teach poetry workshops and seminars on modern poetry. He has been a regular critic for The New York Times Book Review for more than 20 years. Some of his other awards include the Corrington Award for Literary Excellence, the J. Howard and Barbara M. J. Wood Prize from Poetry, and the Randall Jarrell Award in Criticism.

“Apart from writing more criticism, I’d like to think that when I clear my desk, I’ll be back writing poems, which is, after all, where my imagination seems happiest,” Logan said.

Logan is on research leave from UF and living in England until August.

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Credits

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Photo available at <http://clasnews.clas.ufl.edu/news/clasnotes/0008/images/logan.jpg>