Poem for My Friend Peter at Piihana

John Logan
POEM FOR MY FRIEND PETER AT PIIHANA

We all live
on islands.
And you and I've
wandered far this day
on one: on Maui
enroute
to Hawaii
which they call
the Big Isle.
I've gone farther than you have
due because I find myself
catapulting away
from you as if afraid
to meet,
then back.

Though it is
a horizontal zig
zag

I thought
of the vertical drop
of young men,
a rope of hemp
around their feet
in the initiation ceremony
down a sheer hill
that (without skill)
could easily crack the skull.
We've seen the beautiful
pink
anthurium plant,
part of it
erect out of its broad
adamic leaf, the scarlet I'ishi
bird
and the strange boned
gorgeously formed
and mixed
native girls with hibiscus
in their dark hair.

That far
sheer, ancient wind blown
mountain,
lush
at its base,
its long
feminine
erotic lines
partly shrouded
hushed
in mist,
the sun sometimes just
catch-
ing for a moment
the rocketing red
ohia-lehua flowers
which spring up
in the wake
of volcanic fires;
the yellow mamani
clustered like a family
of friends
on their stalks in bril-
liant patches
along hills
and roads above
the native
houses
or falling terraces
of taro fields that
run
stretching down
like quilts
or tawny animal pelts
toward the sea again.
II.

You are patient with the pain
I keep
which I can
neither explain
   (even to myself)
or escape. And therefore I half
begin
   to love you, Peter,
as your quick black hair
lifts as gentle
   as your brown eyes still
seem
   in the wind
that shifts from higher up the sacred ground.
At Piiliana you stand
   where Kamehameha shed
the blood of young Hawaiian Men
in thankful sac-
   rifice
some few of his bat-
tles won. (He was
turned on to blood
   by Captain Cook
and showed
   a tenacity like
that of the later ministers
   of Christ.)
The stones of the heiau
   now
are the horrid black
   of that
old
   dried blood.
Once before, you said,
you took
three
   of these
holy stones away
   and they've
caused you more cursed grief
than
you deserve, Peter, my friend,
well meaning thief.
But there's just
too much
dangerous life
in these ghosts they've left behind.
Perhaps
the sensual red African torch singer
should first have made you wonder.
For my part
I
wonder if the urge to rape
an orphan child
and steal
his semen,
leaving his bones all
broken up
and black
inside the private temple of his flesh
is like that sacrifice
by which Kamehameha thieved
young life
for himself
and for the wife-
ly earth into which
it still soaks
slowly back.
It
drips
in the enormous mother vein
or extended island cunt
left by lava tubes
we found
and went
through
underground.
Kamehameha had less mana than
you said, my guide,
and less even
than his queen
whom he therefore needed
to approach naked
on his belly
like a baby.
A thousand youths he threw
(or like a mad Circean swineherd drove)
over
the Pali,
Oahu cliff
of sheer
fall and of
sure,
overwhelming beauty—
where the wind's so strong
it sometimes
hangs
you or wafts you back again
like a sorcerer's wand,
or like the spores of ferns
or the cork-like
seeds of screw-pine
the waves will float
for months.
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.
My eyes drop at once
from this beautiful island place
to my own two feet
which I see
monstrous
in their blackened socks
split
by plastic thongs
into two club shaped parts
like the frozen lava flows
from Haleakala.
The naked feet of Hawaiian men
and women
are graceful as their hands.
But my feet
are black and swollen
because I've died in this exotic heat
that gives
life
to all other manner of men
women and plants,
the hanging red heliconia, the hundred orchid kinds,
and tamarind.

III.
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 Iao
at the green root
of its great
  rising, aged pinnacle.
But I did not.
And now again, it's too late.
For Christ's sake
  Peter why don't you come back!
If you're really gone for good
would
  you at least
  respect my wish?
On my Maui grave
I want someone to leave
a half
  empty bottle of wine
( perhaps some food
  for our continuing need.)
And don't let
  some kid
steal it from my tomb!
Just give me that
  blood red funeral urn
at my foot. Perhaps an Uwekahuna, wailing priest,
may wander by then
  toward home
and in the trained spirited light
from his lean body
you will all see
the gorgeous white plumeria trees
that fill
  my cemetery up like girls.

IV.

Thank
  God
  or Madam Pele
whose firey
  goddess home has been on Maui
and is now in the still smoking
sometimes flowing
young Volcano where we head—
the desolation blasted stretch
on Hawaii.

Or thank someone I say—
even A’puaa
  the lusty pig
god whose prick
    is like
a cork
  screw.
Thank one of them that you
are walking back in sight again.
I know you’ve been

looking for green leaves
to place on
  the stones
    of the heiau
in hope of a safe passage
      for all of us.

But please don’t
go
again, Peter.
(That’s my oracular
  message.)

Don’t leave,
and don’t let me drive,
but get me out
of this astonishingly bloody place
and after this
please keep such terrible beauty to yourself.