

Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography

The Age of Maturity,
1929-1941

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The Age of Maturity, 1929-1941

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Plan of the Work

The six-volume *Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography* was developed in response to requests from high school and junior college teachers and librarians, and from small- to medium-sized public libraries, for a compilation of entries from the standard *Dictionary of Literary Biography* chosen to meet their needs and their budgets. The *DLB*, which comprises over ninety volumes as of the end of 1987, is moving steadily toward its goal of providing a history of literature in all languages developed through the biographies of writers. Basic as the *DLB* is, many librarians have expressed the need for a less comprehensive reference work which in other respects retains the merits of *DLB*. The *Concise DALB* provides this resource.

This series was planned by a seven-member advisory board, consisting primarily of secondary school educators, who developed a method of organization and presentation for selected *DLB* entries suitable for high school and beginning college students. Their preliminary plan was circulated to some five thousand school librarians and English teachers, who were asked to respond to the organization of the series and the table of contents. Those responses were incorporated into the plan described here.

Uses for the Concise DALB

Students are the primary audience for the *Concise DALB*. The stated purpose of the standard *DLB* is to make our literary heritage more accessible. *Concise DALB* has the same goal and seeks a wider audience. What the author wrote; what the facts of his life are; a description of his literary works; a discussion of the critical response to his works; and a bibliography of critical works to be consulted for further information: These are the elements of a *Concise DALB* entry.

The first step in the planning process for this series, after identifying the audience, was to contemplate its uses. The advisory board acknowledged that the integrity of *Concise DALB* as a reference book is crucial to its utility. The *Concise DALB* adheres to the scholarly standards established by the parent series. Thus, within the scope of major American literary figures, the *Concise DALB* is a ready reference source of estab-

lished value, providing reliable biographical and bibliographical information.

It is anticipated that this series will not be confined to uses within the library. Just as *DLB* has been a tool for stimulating students' literary interests in the college classroom—for comparative studies of authors, for example, and, through its ample illustrations, as a means of invigorating literary study—the *Concise DALB* is a primary resource for high school and junior college educators. The series is organized to facilitate lesson planning, and the contextual diagrams (explained below) that introduce each entry are a source of topics for classroom discussion and writing assignments.

Organization

The advisory board further determined that entries from the standard *DLB* should be presented complete—without abridgment. Their feeling was that the utility of the *DLB* format has been proven, and that only minimal changes should be made.

The advisory board further decided that the organization of the *Concise DALB* should be chronological to emphasize the historical development of American literature. Each volume is devoted to a single historical period and includes the most significant literary figures from all genres who were active during that time. Thus, the volume that includes modern mainstream novelists Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, and John Cheever will also include poets who were active at the same time—such as Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and John Berryman—and dramatists who were their contemporaries—such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and William Inge. It should be noted that the volume of the *Concise DALB* that includes these authors comprises thirty-six entries, while the volumes in the standard *DLB* covering the same period include some four hundred author biographies. The *Concise DALB* limits itself to major figures, but it provides the same coverage of those figures as the *DLB* does.

The six period volumes of the *Concise DALB* are *Colonization to the American Renaissance, 1640-1865*; *Realism, Naturalism, and Local Color, 1865-*

1917; *The Twenties, 1917-1929*; *The Age of Maturity, 1929-1941*; *The New Consciousness, 1941-1968*; *Broadening Views, 1968-1987*. The sixth volume will also contain a comprehensive index by subjects and proper names to the entire *Concise DALB*. (As in the standard *DLB* series, there is a cumulative index to author entries in each *Concise DALB* volume.)

Form of Entry

The form of entry in the *Concise DALB* is substantially the same as in the standard series, with the following alterations:

1) Each entry has been updated to include a discussion of works published since the standard entry appeared and to reflect recent criticism and research of interest to the high school audience.

2) The secondary bibliography for each entry has been selected to include those books and articles of particular interest and usefulness

to high school and junior college students. In addition, the secondary bibliography has been annotated to assist students in assessing whether a reference will meet their needs.

3) Each entry is preceded by a "contextual diagram"—a graphic presentation of the places, literary influences, personal relationships, literary movements, major themes, cultural and artistic influences, and social and economic forces associated with the author. This chart allows students—and teachers—to place the author in his literary and social context at a glance.

It bears repeating that the *Concise DALB* is restricted to major American literary figures. It is anticipated that users of this series will find it advantageous to consult the standard *DLB* for information about those writers omitted from the *Concise DALB* whose significance to contemporary readers may have faded but whose contribution to our cultural heritage remains meaningful.

Comments about the series and suggestions about how to improve it are earnestly invited.

A Note to Students

The purpose of the *Concise DALB* is to enrich the study of literature. In their various ways, writers react in their works to the circumstances of their lives, the events of their time, and the culture that envelops them (which are represented on the contextual diagrams that precede each *Concise DALB* entry). Writers provide a way to see and understand what they have observed and experienced. Besides being inherently interesting, biographies of writers provide a basic perspective on literature.

Concise DALB entries start with the most important facts about writers: What they wrote. We strongly recommend that you also start there. The chronological listing of an author's works is an outline for the examination of his or her career achievement. The biographies that follow set the stage for the presentation of the works. Each of the author's important works and the most respected critical evaluations of them are dis-

cussed in *Concise DALB*. If you require more information about the author or fuller critical studies of the author's works, the annotated references section at the end of the entry will guide you.

Illustrations are an integral element of *Concise DALB* entries. Photographs of the author are reminders that literature is the product of a writer's imagination; facsimiles of the author's working drafts are the best evidence available for understanding the act of composition—the author in the process of refining his work and acting as self-editor; dust jacket and advertisements demonstrate how literature comes to us through the marketplace, which sometimes serves to alter our perceptions of the works.

Literary study is a complex and immensely rewarding endeavor. Our goal is to provide you with the information you need to make that experience as rich as possible.

Acknowledgments

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Conrad Aiken

This entry was updated by Michael D. Senecal from the entry by Stephen Cummings (University of Western Ontario) in DLB 45, American Poets, 1880-1945.

Places

London
Savannah

Boston

Cape Cod

Influences and Relationships

T. S. Eliot
George Santayana
Harriet Monroe
Malcolm Cowley

John Gould
Fletcher
John Masefield

William Carlos
Williams
Malcolm Lowry

Literary Movements and Forms

Lyrical Poetry

Literary Criticism

The Novel

Major Themes

The Supernatural
Death
Greek, Roman, and
Egyptian Myth

Human Potential vs.
Determinism
The Voyage
Erotic Love

The Individual vs.
the Collective Mind
The Quest for
Identity

Cultural and Artistic Influences

Freudian Psychology
Vaudeville

Classical Symphonies
Modern Art

Metaphysical
Philosophy

Social and Economic Influences

Censorship

Pacifism

See also the Aiken entry in DLB 9, American Novelists, 1910-1945.

BIRTH: Savannah, Georgia, 5 August 1889, to William Ford and Anna Potter Aiken.

EDUCATION: A.B., Harvard, 1912.

MARRIAGES: 25 August 1912 to Jessie McDonald (divorced); children: John Kempton, Jane Kempton, Joan Delano. 27 February 1930 to Clarissa Lorenz (divorced). 7 August 1937 to Mary Hoover.

AWARDS: Pulitzer Prize for *Selected Poems*, 1930; Shelley Memorial Award, 1930; Guggenheim Fellowship, 1934; Bryher Award, 1950; National Book Award for *Collected Poems*, 1954; Bollingen Prize in Poetry, 1956; Academy of American Poets Fellowship, 1957; National Institute of Arts and Letters Gold Medal, 1958; Huntington Hartford Foundation Award, 1960; St. Botolph Award, 1965; Brandeis University Creative Arts Medal, 1967; National Medal for Literature, 1969; Poet Laureate of Georgia, 1973.

DEATH: Savannah, Georgia, 17 August 1973.

BOOKS: *Earth Triumphant and Other Tales in Verse* (New York: Macmillan, 1914; London: Macmillan, 1914);

Turns and Movies and Other Tales in Verse (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1916; London: Constable/Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1916);

The Jig of Forslin: A Symphony (Boston: Four Seas, 1916; London: Secker, 1922);

Nocturne of Remembered Spring and Other Poems (Boston: Four Seas, 1917; London: Secker, 1922);

The Charnel Rose, Senlin: A Biography, and Other Poems (Boston: Four Seas, 1918);

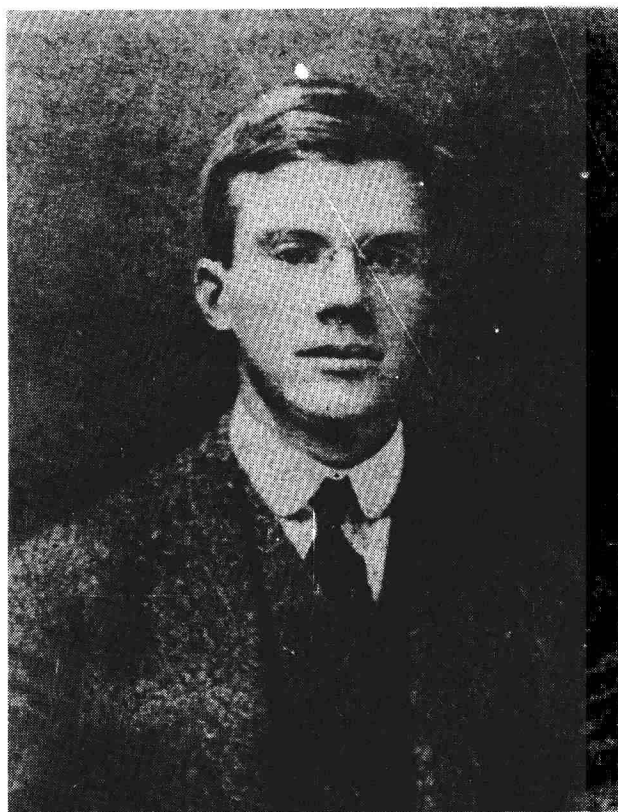
Scepticisms: Notes on Contemporary Poetry (New York: Knopf, 1919);

The House of Dust: A Symphony (Boston: Four Seas, 1920);

Punch: The Immortal Liar, Documents in His History (New York: Knopf, 1921; London: Secker, 1921);

Priapus and the Pool (Cambridge, Mass.: Dunster House, 1922);

The Pilgrimage of Festus (New York: Knopf, 1923; London: Secker, 1924);



Conrad Aiken, 1914

Bring! Bring! (London: Secker, 1925); republished as *Bring! Bring! and Other Stories* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925);

Senlin: A Biography (London: Leonard & Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1925);

Priapus and the Pool and Other Poems (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925);

Blue Voyage (London: Howe, 1927; New York: Scribners, 1927);

Conrad Aiken, The Pamphlet Poets, edited by Louis Untermeyer (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1928);

Costumes by Eros (New York: Scribners, 1928; London: Cape, 1929);

Prelude, The Poetry Quartos (New York: Random House, 1929);

Selected Poems (New York & London: Scribners, 1929);

John Deth: A Metaphysical Legend, and Other Poems (New York: Scribners, 1930);

Gehenna (New York: Random House, 1930);

The Coming Forth by Day of Osiris Jones (New York: Scribners, 1931);

Preludes for Memnon: or, Preludes to Attitude (New York & London: Scribners, 1931);

- And in the Hanging Gardens* (Baltimore: Linweave Limited Editions, 1933);
- Great Circle* (New York: Scribners, 1933; London: Wishart, 1933);
- Among the Lost People* (New York: Scribners, 1934);
- Landscape West of Eden* (London: Dent, 1934; New York: Scribners, 1935);
- King Coffin* (London: Dent, 1935; New York: Scribners, 1935);
- Time in the Rock: Preludes to Definition* (New York: Scribners, 1936);
- A Heart for the Gods of Mexico* (London: Secker, 1939);
- Conversation: or Pilgrims' Progress* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1940); republished as *The Conversation: or Pilgrims' Progress* (London: Phillips & Green, 1940);
- And In The Human Heart* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1940; London: Staples, 1949);
- Brownstone Eclogues and Other Poems* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1942);
- The Soldier* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1944; London: Editions Poetry, 1946);
- The Kid* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1947; London: Lehmann, 1947);
- Skylight One: Fifteen Poems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949; London: Lehmann, 1951);
- The Divine Pilgrim* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1949);
- The Short Stories of Conrad Aiken* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1950);
- Ushant: An Essay* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce/Boston: Little, Brown, 1952; London: Allen, 1963);
- Collected Poems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953; augmented, 1970);
- A Letter from Li Po and Other Poems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955);
- Mr. Arcularis: A Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957; London: Oxford University Press, 1958);
- Sheepfold Hill: Fifteen Poems* (New York: Sagamore, 1958);
- A Reviewer's ABC: Collected Criticism of Conrad Aiken from 1916 to the Present*, edited by Rufus A. Blanshard (New York: Greenwich/Meridian, 1958; London: Allen, 1961); republished as *Collected Criticism* (London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1968);
- The Collected Short Stories of Conrad Aiken* (Cleveland & New York: World, 1960; London: Heinemann, 1966);
- Selected Poems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961; London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1969);
- The Morning Song of Lord Zero: Poems Old and New* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963; London: Oxford University Press, 1963);
- The Collected Novels of Conrad Aiken: Blue Voyage, Great Circle, King Coffin, A Heart for the Gods of Mexico, Conversation* (New York, Chicago & San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964);
- A Seizure of Limericks* (New York, Chicago & San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964; London: Allen, 1965);
- 3 Novels: Blue Voyage/Great Circle/King Coffin* (New York, Toronto & San Francisco: McGraw-Hill, 1965; London: Allen, 1965);
- Cats and Bats and Things with Wings* (New York: Atheneum, 1965);
- Preludes: Preludes for Memnon/Time in the Rock* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966; London: Oxford University Press, 1966);
- Tom, Sue and the Clock* (New York: Collier/London: Collier-Macmillan, 1966);
- Thee: a Poem* (New York: Braziller, 1967; London: Inca, 1973);
- The Clerk's Journal: Being the Diary of a Queer Man* (New York: Eakins Press, 1971);
- A Little Who's Zoo of Mild Animals* (London: Cape, 1977; New York: Cape/Atheneum, 1977).
- OTHER: Thomas Hardy, *Two Wessex Tales*, foreword by Aiken (Boston: Four Seas, 1919);
- Modern American Poets*, selected, with a preface, by Aiken (London: Secker, 1922); revised contents, with a new preface, by Aiken (New York: Modern Library, 1927); enlarged as *Twentieth Century American Poetry*, with an augmented preface by Aiken (New York: Modern Library, 1945; revised, 1963);
- Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited, with a preface, by Aiken (London: Cape, 1924);
- American Poetry, 1671-1928: A Comprehensive Anthology*, edited, with a preface, by Aiken (New York: Modern Library, 1929); revised and enlarged as *A Comprehensive Anthology of American Poetry* (New York: Modern Library, 1944);
- An Anthology of Famous English and American Poetry*, edited, with introductions, by Aiken and Wil-

liam Rose Benét (New York: Modern Library, 1945).

Conrad Aiken's long and productive literary career has prompted such descriptions of him as "the buried giant of twentieth-century American writing" (Malcolm Cowley), "the best known unread poet of the twentieth century" (Louis Untermeyer), and appreciations such as "When the tide of aesthetic sterility which is slowly engulfing us has withdrawn, our first great poet will be left. Perhaps he [Aiken] is the man" (William Faulkner). Hayden Carruth has suggested that Aiken's influence had significant impact "in determining, almost while no one was aware of it, the look and sound of the poetry written in our age." While no consensus has been reached, Aiken's thirty volumes of poetry, five novels, dozens of short stories, hundreds of critical articles and reviews, and his autobiography, plus collected and selected editions of poetry, short stories, novels, and criticism, constitute a major and imposing body of work. Translations have appeared in fifteen languages, and adaptations or readings of his work have been presented on radio or television on seventy different occasions between 1936 and 1971, in the United States, Canada, England, and Germany. The argument concerning its value has extended through hundreds of journal articles and reviews of his work and in four full-length treatments by Houston Peterson (1931), Jay Martin (1962), Frederick J. Hoffman (1962), and Reuel Denney (1964); in two Aiken "numbers" of literary journals (*Wake* 11, 1952; *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 1980); in sixteen Ph.D. dissertations since 1961; and, by implication, in an edition of his letters (1978) and in a recent "confession" by his second wife (1983).

The body of work posed—and poses—a reading problem to critics, which perhaps arose from both the bulk and the nature of its content. In a bibliographical review of Aiken criticism Catherine Harris points out that "Scholars and critics of the nineteen-seventies re-emphasized that Aiken's poetry deserved to be, indeed benefitted from being, considered as a whole," and "Many critics found Aiken's fiction to be a prose version of the poetry." This remarkable sense of integration among both poetry and prose seems to center upon Aiken's notion of the autobiographical. Freud and the apparatus of psychoanalysis are essential to his method, and his theme, as R. P. Blackmur describes it, "is the struggle of the mind which has become permanently aware of itself to

rediscover and unite itself with the world in which it is lodged." The object of Aiken's autobiographical analysis is, then, not merely Aiken-the-man, but Aiken-the-consciousness, by which his work rises above the personal and becomes the record of a pilgrimage in which the reader may share. Such a pilgrimage must be, of necessity, circular in form, for the arrival at one's goal is marked only by an enlargement of consciousness in an ever-changing and at the same time alienating present. That Aiken's life reflects an astonishing symmetry attests, perhaps, to a relentless honesty and to a will to fuse the realms of art and life.

Although Conrad Potter Aiken was born in Savannah, Georgia, in 1889, lived there with his two brothers and one sister until 1901, and died there at the age of eighty-four in 1973, he was not a southerner. Both of his parents were descendants of John Akin, a Scottish Quaker who arrived in America in 1680 and settled in New England. His mother's maiden name was Anna Aiken Potter. Thus her marriage to Dr. William Ford Aiken meant that her married name was a transposition of her maiden name: Anna Aiken Potter became Anna Potter Aiken. "It was just an accident my father came to Savannah. Physician's jobs were hard to find in the North and there was a scarcity of doctors in the South," Conrad Aiken explained in an interview. His maternal grandfather, William James Potter (1829-1893), proved a lifelong influence. Potter was a radical Unitarian minister, who with Ralph Waldo Emerson and a "Colonel Higginson" (probably Thomas Wentworth Higginson) founded the Free Religious Association in 1867. Conrad Aiken later said that he always had with him a copy of his grandfather's collected sermons. He has also said that summer trips to New England were useful to him, as "Shock treatment . . . the milieu so wholly different," but simple transplantation was not to be so shocking as what happened in 1901 when he was eleven.

In his edition of Aiken's *Selected Letters* (1978) Joseph Killorin reports a conversation with Aiken: "On the morning of February 27, 1901, he awoke about seven to hear his father and mother, in their bedroom, quarreling: 'And I heard my father's voice counting: "One, two, three." And a pistol shot, and then another shot. I got out of my bed and walked through the children's bedroom, next to my parents' and where Elizabeth and Kempton and Robert were in their cribs, and opened the folding doors to

my parents' room. I had to step over my father's body to go to my mother. But she was dead, her mouth wide open in the act of screaming. I came out, closed the folding doors, told the children to stay in their beds and that the nurse would come to them. I dressed myself, went downstairs and told the cook there had been an accident and to give the children breakfast downstairs, and to keep them in the dining room. Then I walked to the police station a block away and told them my father had shot my mother and himself, and they said: "Who is your father?" And I said: "Dr. Aiken." So they came with me and took command.' The murder-suicide of his parents dramatically ended his childhood, dissolved completely his life in a family—his brothers and sister were adopted by Frederick Winslow Taylor in Philadelphia, while he was moved to Cambridge to live with his Uncle William Tillinghast where, as he says, "I more or less lost touch with them"—and opened a psychological door through which his pilgrimage in search of self began.

Aiken committed himself early on to writing, producing a handwritten and later typed magazine called the *Story Teller* at the age of thirteen, and writing for and editing the Middlesex School (Concord, Massachusetts) magazine, *Anvil*, between 1904 and his entrance to Harvard in 1907. He was part of the illustrious Harvard classes of 1910-1911, which included Heywood Broun, Stuart Chase, E. E. Cummings, Walter Lippmann, and John Reed, but perhaps his most important friendship was with T. S. Eliot, who had entered in 1906. At the end of his freshman year Aiken was elected to the Harvard *Advocate* and began to write for it. In his junior year he was elected its president. During his senior year he took advantage of his place on the dean's list to cut classes to translate Théophile Gautier's *La Morte Amoureuse* but was placed on probation (the translation was never published; Aiken acknowledged *La Morte Amoureuse* as the source of the vampire narrative in *The Jig of Forslin*). He felt his probation to be unfair treatment, but his resignation from Harvard was perhaps also prompted by shyness: he had been chosen class poet and would have had to perform the public duties of that office. Among the teachers who influenced his thinking were Charles T. Copeland, Dean Le Baron Russell Briggs, and George Santayana. Robert Hunter Wilbur has pointed out in his 1965 dissertation (Columbia University) that "Santayana's ideas on poetry had a lasting importance upon Aiken. . . . Santayana's insistence that the greatest



Aiken, circa 1895 (courtesy of Mary Aiken)

poetry was 'philosophical poetry,' said Aiken . . . 'fixed my view of what poetry would ultimately be . . . that it really had to begin by *understanding*, or trying to understand.' After resigning from Harvard he traveled in Europe, visiting Eliot in Paris, but he returned to Harvard in autumn 1911 to complete his degree (1912).

As Aiken describes it in his autobiography, *Ushant* (1952), this interlude in Europe was formative: "He had himself a hand in the shaping of that magical spring and summer, which had, for him, the effect of finally opening doors, everywhere. It was his decision that his life must be lived *off-stage*, behind the scenes, out of view, and that only thus could he excel, . . . that had now established for the first time his freedom to maneuver as he wished to, and as he knew best he could. And this freedom, for him, must be inviolable." Aiken would, all of his life, maintain his distance from subjugating group identities, even stating this distance to be a necessity in a *New Republic* essay (18 September 1935) titled "A Plea

for Anonymity": "Our writers must learn once more in the best sense how to *stand clear*, in order that they may preserve that sort of impersonal anonymity, and that deep and pure provincialism, in which the terms approach universals, and in which alone they will find, perhaps, the freedom for the greatest work."

Upon his return to Cambridge, Aiken fell into regular meetings with Eliot (who had returned in the fall of 1911 from the Sorbonne). Much has been argued concerning the influence of the two young poets on each other; Aiken says, "the juices went both ways." The general opinion of Aiken as imitator, preferred in the 1920s and still echoed by Frederick J. Hoffman in 1962, has perhaps reversed. An anonymous *Times Literary Supplement* review in 1963 suggested that "the test of time had revealed Aiken as an innovator rather than a copier, a lender rather than a borrower." It was, however, Aiken who advanced Eliot when he carried typescripts of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "La Figlia che Piange" to England on a trip in 1914 and showed these poems to Ezra Pound. In 1922 Aiken confirmed that their relationship was a two-way street when he wrote to Robert Linscott about Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922): "Am I cuckoo in fancying that it cancels the debt I owed him? I seem to detect echoes or parodies of *Senlin*, *House*, *Forslin*: in the evening at the violet hour etc, Madame Sosostriis etc, and in general the 'symphonic' nature, the references to music (Wagner, Strawinsky [sic]) and the repetition of motifs, and the 'crowd' stuff beginning 'Unreal city.'"

Aiken's earliest verse was unimpressive, at best. The lyrics published in the *Advocate*, and even the long narrative *The Clerk's Journal*—which, although written in 1910-1911, was not published until 1971—are often clumsy and labored with heavy-breathing sentiment. *The Clerk's Journal* is important, however, because it shows Aiken already at work on the problems of adapting musical structure to poetry and his use of ordinary citizens as central characters. A two-part narrative, of more than four hundred lines, it relates the aspirations and general moodiness of a clerk whose love affair with a waitress has gone sour. In his preface Aiken himself described the poem as "unmistakably the work of a very young man," and noted that it was often "very funny when it didn't quite mean to be."

Three years after he completed *The Clerk's Journal*, in September 1914, Aiken's first volume

of poetry was published by Macmillan. The poems in *Earth Triumphant and Other Tales in Verse* represent continuing experiment and should be viewed as products of the discipline of a poet-in-training. Many were written during a year in Europe with his wife Jessie McDonald, whom he had married in Canada in August 1912. Others were written in Cambridge, to which they had returned in preparation for the birth of the first of their three children, John Kempton, in October 1913 (all of his three children were to publish novels, although the youngest, Joan Aiken, is best known). None of the poems in *Earth Triumphant* has been included in any subsequent selected or collected edition of his poetry, for none was considered to be, as he says in the preface to the *Collected Poems* (1953), "even remotely salvageable." The book shows no sign of experimental or original verse. Traditional and romantic in their rhythm and rhyme schemes, the poems owe much to John Masfield. The title poem, a narrative written in octosyllabics, describes a young man's disillusion with life and asserts the solid realities of earth and love over the abstractions of art and intellection.

Aiken had begun to produce, and by 1920 he would publish another five books of poetry. His next, *Turns and Movies and Other Tales in Verse* (1916), contains his first explicit experiments with musical form. "Turns and Movies," a collection of fifteen vignettes concerned with the lives of vaudeville actors, takes its title from the *Boston Transcript*, which published an entertainment column under that name. These poems are dramatic where "Earth Triumphant" was narrative and exhibit a surer hand than those of the earlier volume; as Hoffman says, "We have a sense of genuine, legitimate feeling in these statements by vaudevillians and circus-men." According to Jay Martin, Aiken produced a second series of vaudeville poems, "The Tinsel Circuit," in the fall of 1915. Although three poems from this sequence appeared in the December 1935 issue of *Esquire* and seven poems from it appeared in the Fall issue of *Carolina Quarterly*, the whole sequence, much revised from earlier appearances, was first published in *The Morning Song of Lord Zero* (1963). The full sequence reappears in the 1970 edition of his collected poems, where it is dated "1916-1961." Martin suggests that "The Tinsel Circuit" contains elements of both *Turns and Movies* and of the later symphonies and is thus transitional in nature.

Of the other four poems in *Turns and Movies* two are love lyrics ("Discordants" and "Even-song"), one, "Disenchantment," is a narrative concerning disillusionment in a marriage, and the last, "This Dance of Life," is a second installment of the long title narrative of *Earth Triumphant*. The first section of "Discordants" became so popular with anthologists—who seemed to prefer it to more current work—that eventually Aiken refused to allow it to be reprinted. "Disenchantment: A Tone Poem" is perhaps Aiken's first explicit experiment with musical variation as a poetic method: he uses variations rather than simple repetitions of phrase, and juxtaposes cacophony and harmony, stanza by stanza and section by section. It is dedicated to Lucien Crist, an American composer Aiken met in England during his absence from Harvard.

Nocturne of Remembered Spring (1917) contains ten poems, largely concerned with themes which had become familiar to Aiken's small group of readers: disillusionment, guilt, nostalgia, anxiety, and melancholy. They may still be considered experimental, and at least half are attempts at adapting ideas of musical structure to poetry (an analogy Aiken was developing on a larger scale in his symphonies, which include *The Jig of Forslin*, published in 1916). Aiken called "Episode in Grey," to be included in his *Collected Poems*, "a sufficient example of the lengths to which an obsession with the 'musical' analogies of poetry could be carried." The book also contains the third and final installment of "Earth Triumphant." In an anonymous review of his own work, published in the *Chicago News* (January 1917), Aiken disinflated himself: "In *Turns and Movies* he willfully sacrificed his ability to write in smoothly involute curves for a dubious gain in matter-of-fact forcefulness. In *The Jig of Forslin* he recanted, and, with occasional sops to downright and rigid realism, abandoned himself to a luxuriation of romantic virtuosity. And now, in *Nocturne of Remembered Spring*, he is more clearly than ever a schizophrenic."

Among other reviewers of his early work, the names of William Faulkner (*Mississippi*, February 1921), John Gould Fletcher (*Poetry Journal*, July 1916), H. L. Mencken (*Smart Set*, February 1917), William Dean Howells (*Harper's Monthly Magazine*, September 1915), and Harriet Monroe (*Poetry*, November 1918) indicate an awareness of Aiken's poetry in some of the most widely read writers of the time. In general, critics both well known and little known commented upon the in-



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fluence of John Masfield on the poems of *Earth Triumphant* but noted Aiken's originality; poems in *Turns and Movies* and *The Jig of Forslin* were variously praised for their vivid imagery but faulted for psychological or sensational themes; those of *Nocturne of Remembered Spring* revealed to several critics a growing mastery of technique but were called too intellectually slight. Critical reaction was, if mixed, at least constant.

By 1917 Aiken had begun to establish himself as a critic. Of the 238 articles and reviews listed in Rufus Blanshard's "Checklist of Conrad Aiken's Critical Writings," in *A Reviewer's ABC* (1958), some sixty-two appeared between 1915 and 1919 (the publication date of Aiken's first collection of criticism, *Scepticisms*). He had distinguished himself by attacks on imagism—or "Amygism," with reference to Amy Lowell—in the *New Republic* and *Poetry Journal* and had addressed himself to recent poetry of many of his contemporaries in newspapers, the *Dial*, and *Poetry* (Chicago). That Aiken's acute, candid, and occasionally cutting observations were sometimes directed toward poets who would later review his work has been suggested as one source of the generally unfavorable reviews his work received, as book by book it emerged. Whatever the political

wisdom of his reviewing, Marianne Moore was later to say of him, in *Wake 11* (1952), that "he was the perfect reviewer, Diogenes' one honest man, fearing only to displease himself. . . ." General reaction to the collected criticism in *A Reviewer's ABC* was very favorable. And Blanshard, in his introduction to the volume, suggests that Aiken's criticism was "everywhere informed with that natural but unassertive authority of the dedicated and engaged writer to whom the extra reputation he might win as critic is not so important as the self-rewards of the critical experience."

During this period Aiken launched what was to be the major work of his early career, the six "symphonies." He and Jessie Aiken continued to live in Boston, where their second child, Jane Kempton, was born in December 1917. His encounter with army conscription in 1917 brought about a change in the law: he successfully argued that his profession as a writer was an "essential profession" and became the first American poet to be deferred because he was a poet. They lived on a small income, supplemented by earnings from reviewing. But neither the necessities of daily life nor the relative contentment of his domestic environment distracted him from a feverish production of poetry.

In a letter to Houston Peterson in 1928 Aiken traces the source of the symphonies back to 1912-1914 and a "passing passion for Richard Strauss," and provides this account of their writing: "In 1915, then, I began the first out-and-out symphony, on the theme of nympholepsy: *The Charnel Rose*. And it was as I was bringing this to a close, in November of that year, that I first thought of a series of symphonies which might project a kind of rough and ready 'general view.' I think Santayana's preface to *Three Philosophical Poets*, and the book itself, were deeply influencing me at this time. . . . Anyway, I began *The Jig of Forslin* on the same day that I finished *The Charnel Rose*, and had it done early in 1916. And here again the new poem led on to the next one: I saw the *House of Dust* as I was finishing *Forslin*, saw it as a corollary." After writing *The House of Dust* in winter 1916-1917, Aiken wrote the first half of his long narrative poem *Punch: The Immortal Liar* (1921), but he put it aside in early 1918 to write another symphony, *Senlin*. Returning to and finishing *Punch* later in 1918, Aiken began *The Pilgrimage of Festus* in fall 1919 and took "(with intermissions) two years" to complete it.

The symphonies were published in a slightly different order: *The Jig of Forslin* (1916),

The Charnel Rose, *Senlin* (1918) in a single volume, *The House of Dust* (1920), *The Pilgrimage of Festus* (1923). When they were gathered in *The Divine Pilgrim* (1949), they were arranged in their order of composition and a sixth poem, *Changing Mind* (written in 1924-1925), was added as a coda to the whole series.

In the symphonies Aiken's interest in the long poem, pursued since the early experiment *The Clerk's Journal*, comes to fruition on a grand scale. Musical analogy in Aiken's "symphonic form" refers to patterns of narrative repetition and variation: words and in some cases whole lines are repeated (as in the opening and closing sections of *The House of Dust*); situations are varied (as in the morning, noon, and evening songs of *Senlin*); and words and phrases are repeated or echoed in repeated or varied situations (as in the opening passages of parts 1 and 2 of *The House of Dust* and in such lines as "Beautiful darkener of hearts, weaver of silence," "Beautiful pale-lipped visionary," and "Beautiful woman! golden woman whose heart is silence!" in part 2, section 1 of *The Pilgrimage of Festus*). In abandoning smooth, chronological narrative structure which might be likened to the classical symphonies of Mozart, Beethoven, and Haydn, Aiken is working in a more contemporary tradition of the symphony, derived from such composers as Anton Bruckner, Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schoenberg, Anton von Webern, and Igor Stravinsky. The juxtapositions, abrupt transitions, repetitions, and variations of his narrative structures are also analogous to the work of such artists as Cézanne, Picasso, and; for occasional cacophony, Duchamp.

The Charnel Rose is the least effective of the symphonies, as Aiken himself said in a review of his own work, published in *Poetry* in 1919 at the invitation of Harriet Monroe. Concerned with the pursuit of, possession by, and disillusionment in, love, it contains dreamlike visions of lamias and death—for which, as Steven Eric Olson says in his 1981 dissertation (Stanford University), "Aiken has often been regarded as a latter-day decadent with Freudian proclivities." In his prefaces and in the 1919 review Aiken established for each symphony a precise though lengthy statement of theme, but Olson suggests that these statements have led critics to read them "as over-structured works hopelessly burdened with musical analogies and intellectual themes verging on the didactic. Aiken so lucidly described his technique and 'themes' that he led critics down a garden-path of