



Conrad Aiken

(1889-1973)

Herman Melville (1958)

“My towers at last!”--Melville

What meant the words
from what acknowledged circuit sprung
and in the heart and on the tongue
at sight of few familiar birds
when seaward his last sail unfurled
to leeward from the wheel once more
bloomed the pale crags of haunted shore
that once-more-visited notch of world:
and straight he knew as known before
the Logos in Leviathan's roar
he deepest sounding with his lead
who all had fathomed all had said.

Much-loving hero--towers indeed
were those that overhung your log
with entries of typhoon and fog
and thunderstone for Adam's breed:
man's warm Sargasso Sea of faith
dislimned in light by luck or fate
you for mankind set sail by hate
and weathered it, and with it death.
And now at world's end coasting late
in dolphined calms beyond the gate
which Hercules flung down, you come
to the grim rocks that nod you home.

Depth below depth this love of man:
among unnumbered and unknown
to mark and make his cryptic own
one landfall of all time began:
of all life's hurts it to the wounded breast,

in this to dedicate the rest,
all injuries received or done.
Your towers again but towers now blest
your haven in a shoreless west
O mariner of the human soul
who in the landmark notched the Pole
and in the Item loved the Whole.