

Martinis With Conrad Aiken

I

Not to Bonaventure Cemetery,
Savannah, but I have been to Brewster,
Cape Cod. Rendezvous: a July garden.
The hour, post-lunch; year 1970.
(White table, chairs, silver-tray, goblets, shaker.
Acre of lawn. Memory's Inventory.)
I'm meeting Conrad Aiken—too frail, they said,
for more than ten minutes' talk, more than one
martini (day's ration). I see bloated
blue voyage ankles and how time is dice
tossed in sky, yet words win as the poet's
novels unroll hearthrugs of secrecy.
Malcolm Lowry undrowned from claw-rut sand
into the tremors of a clutching hand.

II

Not to Bonaventure Cemetery,
Savannah, but Massachusetts where
maple shadows on mown couch move 15
degrees while goblets are replenished.
His voice softly intent, his courtesies
unstudied, a face though blotched saved for eyes
which endorse the assent of youth for past
uncertainties of love, not age's cant.
There were sunglossed chuckles too: "Did you know
I beat the 'archbishop' for the Harvard
Poetry Prize?" "Please, just send a post-card
from Fiji," he said, ever the traveller,
who soon would write on a bench, his gravestone:
COSMOS MARINER, DESTINATION UNKNOWN.

SYD HARREX