

# **An Old Man Sees Himself**

Conrad Aiken



# Table of Contents

<u>An Old Man Sees Himself</u> .....	1
<u>Conrad Aiken</u> .....	2

# **An Old Man Sees Himself**

**Conrad Aiken**

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.  
<http://www.blackmask.com>

Solitary, before daybreak, in a garden  
Dark amid the unchanging snow,  
Watching the last star fading in a fountain  
Whence melodies of eternal water flow,

Festus, seeing the sky—line burn and brighten  
Coldly, far above the hidden sun;  
Seeing the golden thread of glory unravelled  
Along the wall of mountains run,

Hears in his heart a cry of bewilderment;  
And turning, now here, now there —  
Like one who pauses a moment before departure —  
Partakes of the grace of earth and air,

Drinks of the vast blue splendour of the sky,  
The mile on mile of dew—blanched grass,  
The cloud—swept trees, the stones, bare cliffs of bronze;  
And in the pool, as in a glass,

Ringed round with nodding asters, frosted leaf—tips,  
Stoops to see his image; and behold,  
How faded is the scarlet of his mantle!  
His face, how changed and old! . . .

Sing now the birds; on every bough a bird sings;  
Slowly at first, then fast and faster,  
Till the walled garden thrills and shrills with music;  
The cricket beneath the violet aster

Cries his joy to heaven as the first beam strikes him —  
The foxgloves bend beneath a weight of bees;  
Praise! Praise! Praise! the chorus rises,  
Drowsily, happily, dumbly, sway the trees.

## An Old Man Sees Himself

Fades the star in the mountain, and the sun comes.  
How motionless stands Festus there!  
A red leaf, falling slowly to meet a red leaf  
That rises out of the infinite to the air,

Floats, is turned by the wind about its image . . .  
Ah Festus, is this you,  
This ruin of man about whom leaves fall coldly  
And asters nod their dew? . . .

Pale, phantasmal, swirls the forest of birches,  
It is a dance of witch-girls white and slim;  
Delicately flash their slender hands in the sunlight!  
Cymbals hiss, their eyes are dim

Under the mist of hair they toss above them . . .  
But Festus, turning never,  
Heeding them not, nor the birds, nor the cricket shrilling,  
Stares at the pool for ever,

Seeking in vain to find — somewhere, somewhere! —  
In the pool, himself, the sky? —  
The slight, clear, beautiful secret of these marvels,  
Of birch, birds, cricket's cry,

Blue sky, blue pool, the red leaf falling and floating,  
The wall of mountains, the garden, the snow,  
And one old man — how sinister and bedraggled! —  
Cawing there like a crow . . .

Instant the miracle is. He leans bewildered  
Over the infinite, to search it through . . .  
Loud sing the birds! On every bough a bird sings;  
The cricket shrills, the day is blue.