

II *Nightfall*

Forty years, lived or dreamed;
what memories pack them home.
Now the season that seemed
incredible is come.
Father and child, we stand
in time's long promised land.

Since there's no more to taste
ripeness is plainly all.
Father, we pick our last
fruits of the temporal.
Eighty years old, you take
this late walk for my sake.

Who can be what you were?
Link your dry hand in mine,
my stick-thin comforter.
Far distant suburbs shine
with great simplicities.
Birds crowd in flowering trees,

sunset exalts its known
symbols of transience.
Your passionate face is grown
to ancient innocence.
Let us walk for this hour
as if death had no power

or were no more than sleep.
Things truly named can never
vanish from earth. You keep
a child's delight for ever
in birds, flowers, shivery-grass –
I name them as we pass.

"Be your tears wet?" You speak
as if air touched a string
near breaking-point. Your cheek
brushes on mine. Old king,
your marvelous journey's done.
Your night and day are one

as you find with your white stick
the path on which you turn
home with the child once quick
to mischief, groan to learn
what sorrows, in the end,
no words, no tears can mend.