

Second Stanza

*Alas! for this gray shadow, once a man—  
So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,  
Who madest him thy chosen, that he seem'd  
To his great heart none other than a God!  
I ask'd thee, 'Give me immortality.'  
Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,  
Like wealthy men, who care not how they give.  
But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,  
And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,  
And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd  
To dwell in presence of immortal youth,  
Immortal age beside immortal youth,  
And all I was, in ashes. Can thy love,  
Thy beauty, make amends, tho' even now,  
Close over us, the silver star, thy guide,  
Shines in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears  
To hear me? Let me go: take back thy gift:  
Why should a man desire in any way  
To vary from the kindly race of men  
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance*

*Where all should pause, as is most meet for all?*

In the second stanza of this piece the speaker explains how he came to be in this sorry state. He is now a “gray shadow,” but was once, “So glorious in his beauty” that he was chosen by “thy” to be granted immortality. It is understood from the original myth, as summarized above, that the “thy” that is reference in this poem is Eos or Aurora, the personification of the dawn. After she fell in love with Tithonus he begged her, as many a mortal would, to “Give me immortality.” In this version of the story, Eos granted Tithonus’ wish like a “wealthy [man]” who can give away things at will without being concerned about their own wellbeing. The immortality was not what Tithonus was expecting though. Eos granted him eternal life but not eternal youth. Since he was made immortal Tithonus has been aging as would any normal man. At this point in the story the “Hours have worked “their wills,” they have “beat [him] down” and “wasted” him until he was a shell of his former self. Although time was unable to force him towards a final death it did continue the aging process. Now, Tithonus is forced to “dwell in the presence of immortal youth,” referring to Eos, while he is “in ashes.” His never ending age is made worse by the fact that Eos is completely untouched by time.

In the next lines of the poem the speaker is pleading with Eos to please, “take back thy gift.” He hopes to convince her that he is, at this point, better off dead. She has tears in her “tremulous eyes” as she listens to his plea. He tells her that no man would “desire” to diverge so far from normal mankind and that no one, if they knew what misery this was, would wish to hide from death. As was demonstrated in the first stanza, he now understands the importance of the cycle of life, he would never make this mistake again.