

Ruth Fainlight, "Ageing" (2010)

I

Since early middle-age  
(say around forty)  
I've been writing about ageing,  
poems in many registers:  
fearful, enraged or accepting  
as I moved through the decades.

Now that I'm really old  
there seems little left to say.  
Pointless to bewail  
the decline, bodily and mental;  
undignified; boring  
not to me only but everyone,

and ridiculous to celebrate  
the wisdom supposedly gained  
simply by staying alive.  
– But maybe, to have faith  
that you'll be adored as an ancient  
might make it all worthwhile...

II

Ageing means smiling at babies  
in their pushchairs and strollers  
(wondering if I look as crazy  
as Virginia or Algernon –  
though I don't plan to bite!)  
Find myself smiling at strangers.

It means no more roller-skating.  
That used to be my favourite  
sport, after school, every day:  
to strap on my skates,  
spin one full circle in place,  
then swoop down the hill and away.

When I saw that young girl on her blades,  
wind in her hair, sun on her face,  
like a magazine illustration  
from childhood days, racing  
her boyfriend along the pavement:  
– then I understood ageing.