English 12A - *Carpe Diem* Poems

The Latin phrase carpe diem originated in the “Odes," a long series of poems by the Roman poet [Horace](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/horace). He wrote:

Scale back your long hopesto a short period. While wespeak, time is envious andis running away from us.Seize the day, trustinglittle in the future.

For each of the following poems, answer this question:

How does the poet use the carpe diem motif to convey a meaning/theme within the poem? Which images, literary devices, and/or figurative elements help the poem achieve this meaning? Use specific details from the poem to support your response.

“To His Coy Mistress” – Andrew Marvell (page 524)

“To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” – Robert Herrick (page 526)

“Sonnet 12” - William Shakespeare

When I do count the clock that tells the time,  
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;  
When I behold the violet past prime,  
And sable curls, all silvered o’er with white;  
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,  
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,  
And summer’s green all girded up in sheaves,  
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,  
Then of thy beauty do I question make,  
That thou among the wastes of time must go,  
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake  
And die as fast as they see others grow;  
 And nothing ‘gainst Time’s scythe can make defence  
 Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

“First Fig” – Edna St. Vincent Millay

My candle burns at both ends;

   It will not last the night;

But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—

   It gives a lovely light!

“The Shortness of Life” - Francis Quarles

And what's a life? A weary pilgrimage,  
Whose glory in one day doth fill the stage  
With childhood, manhood, and decrepit age.  
  
And what's a life? The flourishing array  
Of the proud summer-meadow, which to-day  
Wears her green plush, and is to-morrow hay.  
  
Read on this dial, how the shades devour  
My short-lived winter's day! hour eats up the hour;  
Alas! the total's but from eight to four.   
  
Behold these lilies, which Thy hands have made  
Fair copies of my life, and open laid  
To view, how soon they droop, how soon they fade!  
  
Shade not that dial, night will blind too soon;  
My nonaged day already points to noon;  
How simple is my suit! how small my boon!  
  
Nor do I beg this slender inch to wile  
The time away, or falsely to beguile  
My thoughts with joy: here's nothing worth a smile.

“The Flower That Smiles Today” – Percy Shelley

The flower that smiles to-day  
To-morrow dies;  
All that we wish to stay  
Tempts and then flies.  
What is this world’s delight?  
Lightning that mocks the night,  
Brief even as bright.

Virtue, how frail it is!  
Friendship how rare!  
Love, how it sells poor bliss  
For proud despair!  
But we, though soon they fall,  
Survive their joy, and all  
Which ours we call.

Whilst skies are blue and bright,  
Whilst flowers are gay,  
Whilst eyes that change ere night  
Make glad the day;  
Whilst yet the calm hours creep,  
Dream thou—and from thy sleep  
Then wake to weep.

For this final poem, respond to the following question:

Though Frost titled his poem “Carpe Diem,” in what ways does it contradict or subvert the common theme shared by the other six poems? Use specific details from the poem to support your response.

“Carpe Diem” – Robert Frost

Age saw two quiet children   
Go loving by at twilight,   
He knew not whether homeward,   
Or outward from the village,   
Or (chimes were ringing) churchward,   
He waited, (they were strangers)   
Till they were out of hearing   
To bid them both be happy.   
"Be happy, happy, happy,   
And seize the day of pleasure."   
The age-long theme is Age's.   
'Twas Age imposed on poems   
Their gather-roses burden   
To warn against the danger   
That overtaken lovers   
From being overflooded   
With happiness should have it.   
And yet not know they have it.   
But bid life seize the present?   
It lives less in the present   
Than in the future always,   
And less in both together   
Than in the past. The present   
Is too much for the senses,   
Too crowding, too confusing-   
Too present to imagine.