Andrew Marvell: *To His Coy Mistress*

Setting: north of England, a garden on the grounds of a country house. Time: mid-17th century. Dramatic situation: the speaker has been trying to get the young lady he desires to sleep with him, and she has so far resisted his advances. The poem belongs to a very ancient genre of lyric poetry called the *carpe diem* poem: a Latin phrase meaning "seize the day" or "make the most of time while you have it."

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find. I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood.
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow:
An hundred years should go to praise,
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast:
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
 Thy beauty shall no more be found:
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song. Then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honor turn to dust,
Internal Audience in Four Poems, 2

And into ashes all my lust.  
The grave's a fine and private place,  
Now, therefore, while the youthful hue  
Sits on thy skin like morning glow,  
And while thy willing soul transpires  
At every pore with instant fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may,  
And now, like amorous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our time devour  
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.  
Let us roll all our strength and all  
Our sweetness up into one ball.  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Through the iron gates of life.  
Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Shakespeare: Sonnets 55 & 65

Setting: England. Time: late Renaissance (16th century). Dramatic situation: the speaker, having realized that he and the person he loves are fated to die (vanish from the world), then realizes that language (poetry) has the power to make human things immortal.

55

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme:  
But you shall shine more bright in these contents  
Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time.  
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,  
And broils root out the work of masonry,  
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn  
The living record of your memory.  
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity  
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room  
Even in the eyes of all posterity  
That wear this world out to the ending doom.  
So, till the judgment that yourself arise,  
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.
Internal Audience in Four Poems, 3

Setting: England. Time: late Renaissance (16th century). Dramatic situation: the speaker, having realized that he and the person he loves are fated to die (vanish from the world), then realizes that language (poetry) has the mysterious power to make human things immortal.

65

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wreckful siege of battering days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

William Butler Yeats: Sailing to Byzantium

Setting: the country referred to in line one is the state of being old: “this world,” or “this state of existence.” (Some commentators on the poem think that it is “Ireland,” because Yeats was Irish. But that makes nonsense of Byzantium as the “realm of art” at the end: the opposition throughout is between the mutability of this world—inhabited by dying generations of men and women—and the permanence of art. The speaker is ostensibly musing to himself, but his musing is meant to be overheard by others.

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
—Those dying generations—at their song.
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unaging intellect.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.