

Not Marble, nor the Gilded Monuments

- (Sonnet 55) by William Shakespeare

KEY WORDS

1. **gilded**: covered with gold; gold-plated
2. **unswept stone**: a stone monument left uncared for
3. **besmear'd** : tarnished
4. **sluttish**: of unclean habits and behaviour
5. **broils**: tumult, fighting, disturbances, esp. in war
6. **Mars**: the god of war
7. **quick**: lively, fast moving, searching out
8. **living record** : this written memory of your life which continues after you are dead
9. **outlive**: live afterwards
10. **overturn**: destroy
11. **room**: place, space
12. **dwel**: live

STANZA WISE EXPLANATION:

Important Paraphrase:

1. 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**, **besmear'd** with **sluttish** time.

The first stanza talks about how time will not destroy the poem, though it destroys the world's most magnificent structures. The poet says that whether it is marble or gold plated monuments of princes, all will get destroyed but the magnificence of his poetry is alive forever. Time is compared to a slut, who loses her glow and beauty with time. Shakespeare compares time unfavourably to a female subject.

2. 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.

These lines begin with a new idea. Shakespeare says that when destructive wars take place, they will destroy statues also and due to its tumult (loud noise), all the work of the masons will be destroyed. Even the Sword of Mars, God of War, or the destructive fires of war will be able to destroy your memory. The poet is basically saying that, even wars will not destroy the written memories of your life, for they will survive even after deadly wars.

3. '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**.

This stanza doesn't talk about survival, but of human appreciation. The poet continues to praise his subject. Slight deviation of the meter in the words "Even in" creates emphasis for this permanency. The poet says that, death and enmity destroys everything, but poetry written of the subject will be immortalised for all generations to come.

4. So, till the **judgment** that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

The ending couplet is a summary of the survival theme. The couplet not only summarises the rest of the sonnet, but also seems to contradict itself. "Judgement" goes with the talk of judgement day in the last stanza, but implies that the subject is alive and will be judged on that day. "Dwelling in lover's eyes" suggests that subject is love itself. Thus Shakespeare seems to consider the subject so lovely that he is a personification of love, which could be conquered and to which no poetry can do justice. So, the thesis of the sonnet is that the subject will be honoured forever and eternal.

REFERENCE TO CONTEXT:

1. *Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme*

a. What are gilded monuments?

b. What purpose do the monuments serve?

c. What will powerful rhyme achieve?

2. *Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.*

a. Who is Mars?

b. How will 'living record' survive the test of time?

c. How are other things destroyed with time?

PRACTICE QUESTIONS:

1. How does the poet compare 'gold monuments' with 'powerful rhyme'?
2. Explain – "Nor Mars his sword nor wars' quick fire shall burn the living record of your memory".
3. How will 'posterity' react to the verses that are written?
4. Explain – "You live in this, and dwell in lover's eyes"
5. What happens to monuments with time?