

sonnet 55

William Shakespeare

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.
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.

Theme:

The sonnet, Not Marble, nor the Gilded Monuments brings out the futility of statues and ornate monuments raised by the rich and the powerful to immortalize themselves. The ravages of time on these monuments defeat the very purpose of building them and rob their architects of the pleasure of being remembered by the generations to come. The poem also brings out the poet's faith in his verse and its ability to outlive the transient monuments.

Summary:

Not marble nor the gilded monuments of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme, but you shall shine brighter in these contents Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time. The poet in Sonnet 55: Not Marble, Nor The Gilded Monuments, says that his verse will survive longer than the marble statues and the gold-plated monuments of the rich and powerful. With the passage of time these monuments would wear a neglected look and unfaithful time would take its toll and leave the monuments perishing. The word 'marble' in the above lines stands for the ornate

statues of the princes, that they get built to immortalize themselves. In the fourth line of this sonnet, the poet refers to Time as 'Sluttish, which is a derogatory word and refer to a dirty, untrustworthy woman. The poet in this line calls time 'sluttish' as it too is not loyal to anyone. Just as a slut loses her charm and beauty with time, the princes and the powerful people, who enjoy great privileges and popularity at one time lose them and are forgotten with the passage of time.

The ornate monuments and statues that they get erected to perpetuate their names even after their death stand neglected and, eventually, are decayed and get destroyed by war or ravages of time. Hence, time like a slut is not loyal to anyone. However, according to the poet, it is unable to obliterate the impact of poetry that is written in praise of great souls like the poet's friend. The value-oriented lives lived by such people are commemorated in verses which are preserved in the admirers' memory which even time finds difficult to wipe out.

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. The destructive wars' chaotic effect would ruin the statues and
monuments. However, 'your' biography recorded in the poet's verse would outlive
the ornate works of art and architecture and both the god of war's sword and the
destructive power of war and time would fail to fade your memory from the minds
of people. In the above lines, the poet calls the wars wasteful because they cause
widespread death and destruction. The word 'your' in the last line of the stanza
stands for Shakespeare's friend or a worthy man who lived a commendable life,
while 'living record of your memory' refers to the sonnet that the poet has written in
the memory of his friend. It would outlive all the status and monuments.

"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.

In these lines, the poet says that despite death and the enemies' prejudice, you
would continue to be praised and would live in the memory of people. Even
generation to come would remember you and thus you would live in people's minds
till the doomsday. These lines are addressed to a praise-worthy friend of the poet,
and when the poet says,

"oblivious enmity", he means the enmity that makes one forget the values of life.