

Not Marble Nor the Gilded Monuments Explanation, Literary devices, meanings

William Shakespeare was an English Poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist. He is considered as the father of English Literature. Sometime between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King Men. He appears to have retired to Stratford around 1613, at the age of 49, where he died after three years. He is often called England's national poet. Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were primarily comedies and histories. Some of his famous tragic plays include Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear and Othello.

Sonnet - A sonnet is a poetic form which originated in Italy. The term sonnet is derived from the Italian word 'sonetto' which means little poem. By the thirteenth century it signified a poem of fourteen lines that follows a strict rhyme scheme and specific structure.

Poem and Explanation

Quatrain 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

gilded: covered with gold; gold-plated

these contents: refers to this poetry

unswept stone: a stone monument left uncared for

besmear'd: tarnished

sluttish: of unclean habits and behavior

The poet says that this piece of poetry will remain alive longer than the stone statues and gold – plated monuments built by royal men. (The royal

men build statues and monuments so that they become immortal and are remembered by the future generations). The poet's beloved soldier referred to as 'you' shall be remembered through this powerful poetry. In comparison to the statues which will be neglected and wear out with the passage of time, the poetry will remain shining and fresh as ever. Through the poetry, the poet's beloved will also shine for all times to come.

Quatrain 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

broils: tumult, fighting, disturbances, esp. in war

work of masonry: refers to monuments built by masons

Mars: the god of war

Sword: a weapon with a long metal blade

quick: lively, fast moving, searching out

living record: this written memory of your life which continues after you are dead

The poet says that wars are wasteful as they destroy the statues built by the royal men. Such fights are destructive as they destroy the great monuments and turn them into ruins. This poetry that has been written in the memory of the brave man cannot be destroyed even by the greatest warrior Mars. It will survive through all the wars.

Quatrain 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

Gainst: against

oblivious enmity: enmity which is forgetful of everything and so seeks to destroy everything

pace forth: stride forwards

posterity: future generations

doom: doomsday; the day on which the Last Judgment will occur

Even after his death and in the face of all his enemies, the brave man shall remain alive through this poem. All the generations that will be born on this Earth till the end of the world will read this poem and praise the poet's beloved.

Couplet -

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

judgement: the day of the last judgement
Dwell: live

The poet refers to the 'Judgement day' when the dead will arise out of their graves and Jesus Christ will descend on the Earth to judge their acts. He says that till the day of judgement when his beloved will arise out of his grave, he will remain alive through this poem. Everyone who reads the poem will praise the brave man and thus, he shall live in the eyes of his beloved.

Literary devices in the poem

1. Allusion – reference to 'Mars' – the God of war and 'Judgement' – the day of judgement.
2. Alliteration – 'when wasteful wars' – 'w' sound repeated, 'shall shine' – 'sh' sound repeated
3. Personification – 'Time' has been called a 'slut' and thus, personified. This poetry has been personified when called 'living record'.
4. Repetition – 'shall' and 'nor' repeated to create musical effect

5. Epithet - an adjective or adjectival phrase used to describe a distinctive quality of a person or thing. 'Sluttish' describes time, 'besmeared' describes statues, 'wasteful' describes wars.

6. Imagery – visual imagery is used in 'unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time' as the reader can imagine statues which become ruins with the passage of time and 'When wasteful war shall statues overturn And broils root out the work of masonry' as the reader can imagine the destruction caused by wars.

Summary

Not Marble, nor the Gilded Monuments is the 55th sonnet written by William Shakespeare. It tells about the limitations of worldly glory and grandeur (impressiveness) All the great monuments, memorials and statues erected by princes, rulers and the rich to perpetuate (maintain) their memory are subject to decay, destruction and deterioration. (failure) The ravages of time and the agents of destruction destroy and damage all such monuments and memorials. Only the powerful rhyme of the poet and great poetry will survive the ravages (destruction) of time. Through the written words of this poem, the poet will immortalize the memory of his friend till the day of the Last Judgment.

Question and answers

Q. On the basis of your understanding of the poem, answer the following questions by ticking the correct choice

a) The rich and powerful got ornate monuments made in order to

i) Show of their wealth

ii) Display their power

iii) Show their artistic talent

iv) Be remembered till posterity

A. iv) Be remembered till posterity

(b) The poet addresses his sonnet to

- i) Time
- ii) War
- iii) The person he loves
- iv) Powerful rulers

A. iii) The person he loves

(c) In the line 'The living record of your memory', living record refers to

- i) The sonnet the poet has written for his friend
- ii) an existing statue of his friend
- iii) his friend who lives in the poet's memory
- iv) the autobiography of the poet's friend

A. i) The sonnet the poet has written for his friend

(d) The poet's tone in the poem is

- i) Despairing
- ii) Optimistic
- iii) Loving
- iv) Admiring

A. ii) Optimistic

(e) The poem is set in

- i) The place where the poet meets his friend
- ii) A battlefield where Mars is fighting a battle
- iii) A city ravaged by war
- iv) The poet's study where he is writing

A. iv) The poet's study where he is writing

Answer the following questions briefly.

Q. Why do you think the rich and powerful people get monuments and statues erected in their memory?

A. The rich and powerful men get statues and monuments erected in their memory so that they are remembered by the future generations who will be born on this Earth after their death. They want to immortalize themselves.

Q. Describe how the monuments and statues brave the ravages of time.

A. The statues are made of stone and the monuments are covered with gold so that they remain intact over a long period of time. Thus, these cannot be damaged easily.

Q. Why does the poet refer to Time as being sluttish?

A. Time has been personified here as a slut which means being disloyal and untrustworthy. The poet calls time sluttish as it is not loyal to anyone. Just as a slut, loses its charm and beauty with time, the princes and the powerful, who enjoyed great privileges and popularity at one time get lost and 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 after some time and eventually, they are tarnished by wars.

Hence, time displays its disloyalty towards once all-powerful kings. The minds and the morals of the people change with the changing times. Wasteful wars, conflicts, etc dominate the cultural changes of the times. Unfortunately, the practices and behavior of the people get sluttish and unclean with the change in their time. Thus, the poet refers time as 'sluttish'.

Q. The poet says that neither forces of nature nor wars can destroy his poetry. In fact, even godly powers of Mars will not have a devastating effect on his rhyme. What quality of the poet is revealed through these lines?

A. These lines show that the poet is confident and optimistic. He believes that the poetry cannot be destroyed either by the forces of nature or by the wars. It will be read by the future generations and the bravery of the poet's beloved will survive in the hearts of the readers.

Q. Shakespeare's sonnet has been divided into three quatrains of 4 lines each followed by a rhyming couplet. Each quatrain is a unit of meaning. Read the poem carefully and complete the following table on the structure of the poem.

	Rhyme scheme	Theme
Quatrain 1		Comparison between poetry and monuments.
Quatrain 2		Ravages of time on monuments contrasted with _____
Quatrain 3		The recorded memory of _____ posterity
Couplet		Poetry immortalises friend

A.

	Rhyme scheme	Theme
Quatrain 1	abab	Comparison between poetry and monuments.
Quatrain 2	abab	Ravages of time on monuments contrasted with <u>living records of brave men</u>
Quatrain 3	abab	The recorded memory <u>of the brave men shall find praise for them till all</u> posterity
Couplet	aa	Poetry immortalises friend

Q. The poet uses alliteration to heighten the musical quality of the sonnet. Working in pairs, underline the examples of alliteration in the poem.

A. The instances of alliteration in the poem are as follows –

1. Line 1 – ‘marble monuments’ – ‘m’ sound is repeated.
2. Line 2 – ‘prices powerful’ – ‘p’ sound is repeated.
3. Line 3 – ‘shall shine’ – ‘sh’ sound is repeated
4. Line 4 – ‘unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time’ – ‘s’ and ‘t’ sound repeated.
5. Line 5 – ‘when wasteful war’ – ‘w’ sound is repeated
6. Line 12 – ‘wear this world’ – ‘w’ sound is repeated.

Q. Identify Shakespeare's use of personification in the poem

A. Personification is used in the following instances –

1. “sluttish time”- The poet refers to time as being ‘sluttish’ which means that it is dirty and untidy.
2. “The living record of your memory” - The record is this poetry and addressing it as ‘living’, the poet has personified it.

The poem, *Not Marble, Nor The Gilded Monuments*, by William Shakespeare, is 55 sonnet of 154 sonnets written by Shakespeare. Written in blank verse, the poem has a musical quality that is heightened still further by the use of alliteration here and there. The thought about the futility of monuments and statues is developed and wounded up very skilfully.

The phrase *Not Marble, nor the Gilded Monuments* though apparently incomplete spells out all that the poet wishes to convey through the poem. The coinage is self-explanatory and it brings out the futility of statues and monuments highlighting the essentiality of leading exemplary lives to leave behind an indelible impression on humanity. Hence the chosen title is an apt one.

The poet in the poem is highly impressed with the greatness of his friend and addresses this poem to him. Though this great man has not got any ornate statues and monuments built, the poet claims that his memory would outlive the rich and the powerful that make a conscious effort to immortalize themselves. The passage of time and the ravages of war would wipe out the monuments and statues got built by them.

However, 'the living record' of the memory of the poet's friend and his noble deeds would not be obliterated from the pages of literature and the hearts of the admirers. His achievements would leave behind such an indelible impact on people's mind that he will be remembered by posterity till the doomsday when he would rise from the grave and God would reward him with still higher statues.

Theme of the Poem

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.

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.

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 statues 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.

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

Through these two lines, the poet says that on the day of judgement you would arise with the rest of the souls from your grave. Till then you will stay alive in the poet's works and in the hearts of your admirers. The use of word 'this' in the line 'You live in this', stands for the poet's verse that would keep his friend alive till

the doomsday, whereas the use of phrase 'dwell in lover's eyes' means that even after 'he' is no more, he would live in the memory of his admirers.

On 'the day of judgement' when each individual would finally be given his due by god Almighty, 'he' would arise along with the rest of the souls from his grave.

Critical Appreciation

The sonnet *Not Marble, Nor the Gilded Monument* by [William Shakespeare](#) opens eyes to a great truth of life that nothing in life is permanent except the immortality that one can achieve through literature. Often successful people seek to immortalize their greatness and fame by erecting statues and monuments for themselves. Sadly enough, such memories are destroyed by the ravages of time that spares none however great or trivial.

There are numerous such historic pieces of evidence lying neglected throughout the world. Often they are destroyed in wars, riots etc. But the truly noble thoughts and deeds never die out. The warmth of love and reverence generated in the human hearts continue to live forever.

The ideas of great souls as Shakespeare, Swami Vivekananda, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Florence Nightingale and countless other such awakened souls continue to inspire respect and following even today. They do not need the evidence of their greatness through monuments.

Message of the Poem

The poem conveys the messages that great and noble souls leave an indelible impact on the fellow beings and they are remembered by posterity for a long time to come. Monuments and statues, howsoever ornate and rich, fail to immortalize the rich and the powerful.