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.

MESSAGE
The poem conveys the message 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.

LITERARY DEVICES

PERSONIFICATION
Time has been personified as a ‘slut’ to indicate that it is heartless and cruel, an idea that is reinforced later in the poem by the expression ‘all oblivious enmity’.

ALLITERATION
Examples:
Not marble, nor the gilded monuments (repetition of ‘m’, ’n’, ’l’ and ‘r’ sounds)
You shall shine (‘sh’ sound is repeated)
Unswept stone, besmear’d with sluttish time (repetition of ‘s’ and ‘t’ is especially noteworthy here)
When wasteful wars (‘w’ sound is repeated)

REPEITION
Examples:
1. The repetition of ‘nor’ is important in the sense that the poet rejects a number of things that are supposed to render immortality and says they are subject to time, death and destruction which only his poetry can transcend, and which is therefore, the best means of immortalizing the poet’s friend.
2. The repetitive use of the modal ‘shall’ in the poem not only brings out the inevitability of decay, death and destruction but also highlights the tone of finality and confidence with which the poet claims the superiority of his poetry over marble tombs and gilded monuments in bestowing immortality to his friend.

EPITHET
An epithet is an adjective or adjectival phrase used to define the special quality of a person or thing. In the expression ‘sluttish time’ the adjective sluttish emphasizes the ensnaring and destructive quality of time who goes about doing his work of destruction ruthlessly. Again in ‘unswept stone, besmeared’, the epithet ‘besmeared’ invokes the image of death through ‘blood smears’. The smears here are the vestiges that time and
decay have left behind in their trail. In the expression ‘wasteful war’, wasteful not only means ‘causing destruction’ but also ‘that which is futile’. In ‘ending doom’, ending signifies the end of the world that the Doom’s Day or the Day of Judgment will usher in.

ALLUSION
Allusion means an indirect reference or suggestion. It is a figure of speech in which a passing but significant reference is made to a well known person, place or thing. The poet makes a reference to Mars, the Roman God of War (line 7) and the biblical belief in the Day of Judgment (lines 12-13)

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. But you shall shine more brightly in these contents Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time
   (a) Identify ‘you’
   (b) Explain – ‘sluttish time’
   (c) Who shall shine more brightly?

3. Nor Mars his sword nor war’s quick fire shall burn The living record of your memory
   [C.B.S.E., 2011 (T-1)]
   (a) Who is ‘Mars’?
   (b) How will ‘living record’ survive the test of time?
   (c) How are other things destroyed with time?

4. Shall you pace forth, your praise shall find room Even in the eyes of all posterity That wear this world out to the ending doom
   (a) What will happen to the praise of the poet’s friend?
   (b) What is the future of the world predicted?
   (c) What do the above lines reflect about the poet’s personality?

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS
1. How does the poet compare ‘gilded monuments’ with ‘powerful rhyme’?
2. How will ‘posterity’ react to the verses that are written?
3. How is Time personified in the poem? What purpose does it serve?
4. What is the theme of sonnet 55?
5. The poet says that neither forces of nature nor wars can destroy his poetry. What quality of the poet is revealed through these lines? [C.B.S.E., 2011 (T-1)]

LONG ANSWER QUESTION
It is the noble deeds that immortalize a man and not his imposing statues or monuments. Analyze the truth of the statement in light of the poet’s sentiments for ‘you’.