

“Sonnet 75” is a poem about the power of poetry itself. The poem’s speaker wants his beloved to be remembered forever, even as she argues that such notions are vain and pointless; she’s a human being, and as such her name and memory will one day disappear along with her mortal body. The speaker, however, believes that her beauty and virtue deserve everlasting fame, and that he has the ability to immortalize her, to grant her a kind of triumph over death, through his poetry.

Despite the speaker’s deep admiration for his beloved, the poem makes it clear that *she is subject to the inevitable passage of time*. The fact that the speaker repeatedly writes his beloved’s name “upon the strand” (or shore) only for the ocean to quickly wash it away suggests that time’s passage is

relentless. The image of her name disappearing from the strand also suggests how fleeting people's marks are upon the world; after her death, time will remove all proof of her ever having lived.

The beloved dismisses the speaker's attempts as mere hubris (that is, pride), insisting that because she is a mortal, she will someday die, and that nothing the speaker does can change this simple fact. She argues that people aren't meant to live forever, and that her name will disappear from history just as the ocean keeps washing the speaker's writing from the sand.

While the speaker acknowledges that lesser mortal things will indeed die and all

traces of them will disappear, he insists that his beloved's admirable and virtuous name deserves to live forever—and that it will, through his poetry. The speaker says only “baser things,” or things with no real value, should be forgotten, but his beloved deserves to be “eternized.” In other words, the speaker thinks his love is too important, too rare and precious, to be forgotten, and so he will use his poetry to capture it for all time. His beloved will “live by fame,” the speaker says, meaning that through the power of poetry her name will be remembered by generations to come. In this way, their love will live forever, “renewing” each time someone reads this very poem.