

*If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
 Injurious distance should not stop my way,
 For then despite of space I would be brought,
 From limits far remote, where thou dost stay.
 No matter then although my foot did stand
 Upon the farthest earth removed from thee,
 For nimble thought can jump both sea and land,
 As soon as think the place where he would be.
 But ah, thought kills me that I am not thought
 To leap large lengths of miles when thou art gone,
 But that so much of earth and water wrought,
 I must attend time's leisure with my moan.
 Receiving naught by elements so slow
 But heavy tears, badges of either's woe.*

Sonnets 44 and 45 are meant to be read together—like one poem of twenty-eight lines—and therefore have a more spacious feel. They depend on a large symmetrical scheme based on the old four elements: Sonnet 44 centers on earth and water (the heavy elements) and Sonnet 45 balances these with the lighter ones—air and fire. Much is made of space and motion, as well. Though metaphors abound as usual, the conceits are not as contorted with paradox as they are in Sonnet 43.

The speaker addresses his friend (their mistress seems to have disappeared from the landscape), who is distant and cannot easily be reached because the speaker is held back by the heaviness of flesh. If “dull substance” (l. 1) were thought, he says, transportation would be instantaneous. The speaker would be able to overcome space and distance and reach his friend even if his feet stood at the other end of the earth. “Nimble thought can jump both sea and land” (l. 7) and leave dull flesh (traditionally made of earth and water) far behind.

In the sestet of Sonnet 44, the speaker reverts to the playful tone of earlier poems. His nimble jump comes to a jolting stop: “But, ah, thought kills me that I am not thought.” (l. 9) The pace slows down after the alliterative “leap large lengths of miles,” and the sonnet ends with the weight of earth and water, elements so slow that they yield nothing but “heavy tears” (l. 14)—earth being heavy and water being wet, like tears.