

A Noiseless Patient Spider-*Walt Whitman*

Poem

*A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.*

*And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the
spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor
hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my
soul.*

Plot Summary

The speaker watches a spider build a web. He compares the way this spider ceaselessly works to the way his soul works to understand the eternal.

Summary

Whitman as speaker watches as a spider builds a web, creating "filament, filament, filament, out of itself." He compares the way this spider ceaselessly works to the way his soul continues to "fling" its "gossamer thread" into the "measureless oceans of space" and hopes to "catch somewhere."

Analysis

Whitman personifies the spider of this poem by giving it human motives, that of exploration rather than instinct. This personification in the first stanza sets the stage for the reader to see that the spider and the web-building are symbols for the soul and its striving, which he explicitly reveals in the second stanza. The comparison also reveals that the human soul is much more complex than simple web-building. While the promontory may seem "vacant vast" to the spider, it has definite boundaries and shape, whereas the universe is endless. Whitman's speaker states that the soul is "detached, in measureless oceans of space," but he nevertheless seeks to form a "bridge" and a "ductile anchor." This apparent paradox leaves room for the reader to question if the soul can actually perform such a task.

This compact poem contains none of Whitman's famous cataloging, but he does use repetition, one of his favorite devices. He repeats "filament" three times in a row, a skillful and musical way to illustrate the mechanical work of the spider. In contrast, the efforts of the soul are anything but mechanical—they are "musing, venturing, throwing, seeking"—words that connote a much more active and varied journey.

Quotes to be Used

- *"A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated, Mark'd
how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself, Ever
unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them."*

The lines stated below could be used for children as an example to teach the awareness of struggle in life and how to be patient.

- *“Ceaselessly ... seeking the spheres ... Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul. ”*

Whitman often wrote in his poems of his belief in the immortal soul. In "A Noiseless Patient Spider," he compares and contrasts the way a spider spins a web to the way man strives to reach higher consciousness and immortality.