

## The Theme of Materialism in Pablo Neruda's 'A Dog Has Died'

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we have focused on the theme of materialism in the poem 'A Dog Has Died' by Pablo Neruda. The incident narrated by poet is trivial but the message is deep. The poet has delineated the lack of the sense of belongingness in the worldly people due to materialism. The poet finds the human beings inferior to the animals by giving the example of a dog, on the ground that the dog is a true companion to the poet while he himself is unable to feel the same. That is why man is suffering from solitude.

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**Pablo Neruda** (July 12, 1904 – September 23, 1973) was the literary name of the Chilean poet, diplomat and politician **Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto**. He selected his literary name after Czech poet Jan Neruda. Neruda won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. He has been considered as a mile stone not only in the Spanish- American Literature but also in the literary history of all over the world. His works expose revolutionary perception towards conventions, traditions and his oneself. This is the reason that he has faced a lot of difficulties in finding an initial acceptance for most of his works, today recognized as major.

In the present poem "A Dog Has Died" we find Neruda condemning the materialistic outlook of the worldly people. The theme is not new in English literature but Neruda has explained it through a very trivial incident of his personal life. In the opening lines of the poem, the poet seems to be mournful due to the death of his dog but as we proceed we feel that actually the poet is unhappy observing the materialistic outlook of the human beings. He tells us about the death of his dog and informs that he has buried him

*".....in the garden  
next to a rusted old machine."*

The lines explain his materialistic outlook as he says that he has buried his dog in a garden which is near a rusted old machine. It shows that there is no mention of particular act of kindness such as dog should be wrapped in some cloth sheet before the burial. At the same time the title shows the poet's sense of detachment from the dog who has been living with him for a long time. Again we can see that in the title he has used the article 'A' before 'Dog' which shows that the poet does not allow the dog to have any special place in his life.

The title "A Dog Has Died" shows that not a special dog has died but a common dog. Generally, the love of the worldly people is short- lived and so is the love of the poet for his dog.

The poet has declared himself inferior to the dog as he does not believe in heaven for himself because he is a materialist.

To consider:

*"and I, the materialist, who never believed  
in any promised heaven in the sky  
for any human being."*

One more explanation can be given for the above statement as the writer does not expect any heaven for him because materialists only believe in things which are visible. Neruda does go on to say that he believes in a heaven for dogs and not for himself because he feels that he has not been good enough to enter it. On the one hand the poet realizes that materialistic people commit a lot of sin and so they are not eligible for salvation. But on the other hand he says that his dog will be waiting for him in the "dogdom" heaven which may be a reference to himself as men are often referred to as dogs. The line also reveals that the poet believes in life after death.

The poem signifies the poet's jealousy upon the dog's simplicity of life and happiness. This jealousy may also be considered as a general trait of worldly human beings. The poet seems to be pessimistic as the materialistic people generally are. That is why the poet can not fully enjoy the companionship of the dog. He remembers:

*"Ai, how many times have I envied his tail  
as we walked together on the shores of the sea  
in the lonely winter of Isla Negra"*

He finds winter lonely while his dog is there to fulfill his solitude. The dog is quite away from the materialism and so the dog is able to enjoy the ecstasy. Since a high quickly waving tail is considered

as a sign of playfulness and intense joy, the poet pays attention towards his dog's intense joy but cannot raise himself to that height of ecstasy because he has confined himself in the worldly affairs. The dog is enthusiastic as he is enjoying the beauty of nature. But the poet, being a human, is unable to feel the same. The dog symbolizes optimism while the poet symbolizes pessimism. According to the poet only the dogs can feel this joy and not the human beings. Because here the dog symbolizes those creatures which are self-governed and do not care the earthly possessions.

Since always human beings are blamed of being bad companions they are not true to their near ones. In the present poem the poet praises the dog again and again due to his selfless companionship. Infact the poet is sad due to this loss. After the death of his dog the poet finds the earth full of sadness.

*“Ai, I'll not speak of sadness here on earth,  
of having a companion  
who was never servile”*

The poet does not consider his dog as servile instead he was his friend. But this friendship could not touch the depth of intimacy. The reason is that the poet was such a master who never allowed his dog to climb over his clothes. It may seem that he has not taken

good care of the dog and this indicated in the reference to the mange. The dog gives him unconditional love, full attention and care which is the need of all human beings. It is also felt that the dog's gaze made him feel adored and this is exactly what he as a human needed. But this love and affection demands nothing. This portrays true companionship on behalf of the dog but the poet lacks this quality as the poet is sad seeing the happiness of the dog.

**To sum up** Naruda really wants to say that his dog was better than him. The dog had a better sense of companionship because he was not materialistic while the poet has called himself 'materialistic' and 'vain'. This can be considered as a satire on human race. He admires dog's tendency of not showing intimacy which has never been called for and that is why he is experiencing a great loss.

**Reference:**

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