

Multiple Meanings of a Symbol in Paseo

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The use of symbolism has long been a technique by which an author can present far more than the literal meaning of a story. However, symbols are not always easily defined; indeed, it is sometimes possible that one symbol in a story may be endowed with multiple meanings, all of which lead the reader to a greater understanding of the author's message. Such is the case in Jose Donoso's short story "Paseo." The story is told from the point of view of a grown man looking back on the isolated, frightened child he was. As the boy's jealousy focuses on the attention gained by a nondescript but persistent dog, Donoso leads us into the [realm](#) of multiple symbolism.

Perhaps most obviously, the dog represents emotion. The boy in the story grows up with cold people in a house that is "not happy" (316) and that expresses "an absence, a lack, which because it was unacknowledged was irremediable" (316). The boy [wishes](#) that his family's "confined feeling might overflow and express itself in a fit of rage . . . or with some bit of foolery" (317). Of course, he knows it is not to be. The dog that his [Aunt](#) Mathilda adopts, however, represents the opposite of repressed, or perhaps nonexistent, emotion: "Her whole body, from her quivering snout to her tail ready to waggle, was full of an

abundant capacity for fun" (323). It is the dog's expression of emotion that permeates Aunt Mathilda's cold exterior and provokes her to express emotion of her own. Yet the boy is still isolated, perhaps more so, as his jealousy takes hold. As he watches his aunt stroke the dog sleeping on her lap, he realizes the extent of his own isolation and feels the loss of any hope that he, too, might be the ...

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...nt come in, the boy recognizes the final influence the dog and the madness it represents are to have on his aunt: "I went to bed terrified, knowing this was the end. I was not mistaken. Because one night . . . Aunt Mathilda took the dog out for a walk after dinner, and did not return" (327).

Who is to say whether the aunt's disappearance is a manifestation of her madness or simply a rebellion on her part, an affirmation of the life she has never before experienced? Yet, in the boy's mind, she is dead, and her death has been brought about by the dog and all it symbolizes. The repression of emotion in his aunt has been freed by something not human, and in doing so, it has brought disorder to order and madness to composure.

Works Cited

Donoso, Jose. "Paseo." *The Riverside Anthology of Literature*. Ed. Douglas Hunt. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton, 1991. 315-27.

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