
The Theme Of Human And Nature In To Build A Fire

When man faces against nature, he does not win. In “To Build a Fire” Jack London explores this theme. The unnamed protagonist overestimates his own abilities while lacking to understand how unforgiving mother nature is. He ventures out when it's below fifty degrees does every possible thing he can think of to try to survive—while simultaneously not thinking things through, like setting a fire under a tree with branches of snow on it, and not following the advice of locals—and finds death.

On the other hand, the dog in the story moves on to find other humans and lives to see another day. In “To Build a Fire” London explores the theme of man versus nature in a heartbreaking tale about a foolish man. The first mistake the man does is being outside in the first place. A newcomer to the land, and his first winter there, he only sees the cold as uncomfortable and not as dangerous. He does not stop and think about how humans are fragile and cannot be in a place where it's too cold or too hot. Instead, he figures he will be okay despite the advice given to him because, “Those old-timers were rather womanish, some of them, he thought” (1119).

The man tries so hard to prove that he is man enough to be out on the cold by himself, that he dismisses the advice and it costs him his life. Similarly, Sandra Bucheler the author of *Understanding and Treating Patients in Clinical Psychoanalysis: Lessons from Literature*, points out, “The protagonist is called, simply, ‘the man,’ perhaps a reference to how much his identity is built around his conception of manliness” (Bucheler 19). On the other hand, the dog is not trying to prove anything to himself. Thus, he is able to quickly realize how it is much colder than below fifty degrees and too cold to be traveling. The dog, “Had its instinct...and that made it question eagerly every unwonted movement of the man as if expecting him to...seek shelter somewhere and build a fire. The dog had learned about fire, and it wanted fire” (1115). A hint of worry enters the man's mind when he begins to experience frost in his cheeks. However, he quickly dismisses it by stating that while frosted cheeks are painful, they are not dangerous. Though the dog is often disappointed in the man, the dog never tries to stop him. This is because, “It was not concerned in the welfare of the man” (1117). This is due to the fact the man shows no affection towards the dog and only sees it as something else he must assert dominance over (Rothstein). In addition, this line explains how mother nature feels towards people, or rather how it does not. When the man dies after attempting to build a fire for the second time, the dog lingers on for a little while. However, when the man does not wake up, the dog leaves.

The dog does not really mourn the death of the man, only the food and fire he provided. This is another example of how mother nature does not mourn the death of people, rather it goes on like nothing ever happened. A real life example of man versus nature is explored in Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. Krakauer tells the story of Christopher McCandless, a recent college graduate. Inspired by London's stories of Alaska and transcendentalism, he ventures to the Alaska wilderness alone while lacking the proper tools and experience. McCandless only makes it about three months before dying from hunger; or as others theorize, an accidental food poisoning from seeds. Krakauer also explores the death of Carl McCunn. McCunn was a Texan who moved to Fairbanks and arranged a trip to a remote lake (81). However, McCunn neglected to arrange to have a pilot pick him up by the end of the summer, and he died. A friend of

McCunn expressed he was not surprised, “He had a tendency to wing it sometimes, to act impulsively, to get by on bravado and style” (81). This quote, though not about London’s fictional character, perfectly describes how people tend to think everything will work itself out, though when it comes to nature that is rarely the case. When one ventures out to nature, one should be prepared for everything.

In “To Build a Fire” London explores the theme of man versus nature in a heartbreaking tale about a foolish man. While the dog senses what the man is doing is wrong, he does not warn him; the dog does not feel he owns anything to the man as the man has never treated him well. The dog’s poor treatment can be traced to the fact the man only sees him as a tool and as something he needs to establish dominance over. In the end, nature wins, and the dog trots up the trail to find for other providers. Other real life examples, include Christopher McCandless and Carl Mccunn as they ventured into the wilderness and ultimately lost.

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