

“KHON NAI NITHAN” (PEOPLE IN STORY):  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND ANIMALS  
FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF ECOCRITICISM

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**Abstract**

This article aimed to analyze the relationship between humans and animals in the novel “Khon Nai Nithan” (People in story) from the perspective of ecocriticism. The research utilized qualitative methods and descriptive analysis. The results revealed that there were two forms of relationships between humans and animals namely: normal and abnormal relationships. The normal relationships were: 1) labor-related relations, 2) animals were organisms that were used for human’s food, 3) animals were used as tools for human’s benefit, 4) animals created aesthetics for humans, and 5) animals created fear in human’s mind. The abnormal relationships between humans and animals was animals responding to human sexual instinct. Traditions, values, and culture in society affected human living and they were significant variables to determine the relationships between humans and animals. Traditions, values, and culture created ideas for classifications of living things by creating a system of ideas that humans were higher classes than animals, like masters and servants. This showed the human’s perspective that animals are inferior to humans which reflects ways of thinking that nature has different viewpoints from humans.

**Keywords** : Khon Nai Nithan, People in Story, Humans and Animals, Ecocriticism

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Received: 8 January 2020; Revised: 6 July 2020; Accepted: 11 July 2020

## **Introduction**

Humans have had a close relationship with animals for a long time. Animals play an important role and are adapted in everyday life, occupations, and literature. The animal characters in the novel were presented in various ways; for example, being friends and being enemies with humans. The representation of animals in the novel would be presented in two different ways. Firstly, if the animals were raised by humans like dogs and cats, they were made to represent cuteness and adorableness and secondly, if they were not raised by humans like wild animals, they represented fierceness and savage. The basic concept of human to create identity of animals by classifying into “wild animals” and “urban animals” or “pets” (Sangkapantanon, 2017). Humans’ attitudes towards animals were shown in two different forms. Pets were represented to be friendly, got sympathy from humans, tamed and could be controlled while wild animals were defined as savage, cruel, natural impulse, and could kill human beings. For these reasons, humans usually killed wild animals. A long-time ago, animals in literature and novels were presented as inferior to humans even in the Bible dignified humans to control animals as cited in Punha (2015). The Bible was a tool that gave humans authority over animals as seen that “God” empowered Adam to name animals. Naming was a sign of dominance of humans to control animals using language to describe the nature of animals. This revealed the relationship between human feelings and literature. In addition, humans used literature to express opinions towards animals to show the relationship between humans and animals.

Literature criticism constructed important conceptions of how and what humans think of animals from the perspective of ecocriticism. This type of critics focuses on the relationship of humans and environment and nature world appeared in literature, especially about nature. Based on common reading strategy of reading carefully for specific details and questioned the connection to nature issues (Sangkapantanon, 2013), ecocriticism first appeared in the article “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” of William Rueckert (1996) in 1978 which defined ecocriticism in summary as an application of ecological ideas used in

the study of literature, especially poetry. Later, the definition of ecocriticism was broadened. Glotfelty (1996) described that “Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between Literature and the physical environment ... Ecocriticism takes an earth – centered approach to literary studies.” In the literary criticism in Thailand at present, ecocriticism is very popular because of the deterioration and destruction of the natural environment, which affects non-living organisms and living organisms in nature. Animals lived in nature and some were raised by humans, genetic transformation to respond to human needs. Chotiudompant (2017) presented animal studies in perspective of challenging educational illustrated framework which stated that humans should step over the challenges of identity to other species such as animals, both pets and wild animals. The perspective of ecocriticism in animal studies analyzed the relationship between humans and animals.

“Khon Nai Nithan” (People in Story) is a story of Termtod who was curious to have an affair with dogs, both stray dogs and pet dogs. Having an affair with dogs was considered immoral in the society. Grit was Termtod’s son-in-law who knew his embarrassing secret. Grit took advantages of this secret to threaten Termtod and forced him to do everything he wanted to. This novel won the Seven Book Award for 2018. As announced by the Seven Book Award committee (Siriwattano, 2018) he stated that “Kon Nai Nithan” (People in Story) written by Korn Siriwattano was a social vintage novel of traditional agriculture. The author deliberately wrote and asked about sexually suggestive issues. There was a serious conflict between father-in-law and son-in-law in this story. This fiction derived its humorous behind the scenes by showing a bitter story of someone’s failure as a result of satisfying his lust in a way which was unacceptable in the society. The answer to this problem depicted the scenes of rural life by considering local knowledge, livelihoods, and coordination of storytelling strategy in ingenious ways. From the above declaration, it can be seen that the content of this novel was portrayed in an agricultural society as known that animals played a great role in human lives. It could be said that some animals had the merit of being labor-saving equipment in plowing using animals like cows and buffaloes. This novel also used animals to

describe an important part of the story which created realism and stimulate the awareness of people in the society. Therefore, the researcher is interested in analyzing the relationship between humans and animals from perspective of ecocriticism of the novel “Khon Nai Nithan” (People in Story). The research results would explain a variety of concepts and perspectives that humans had about animals. The research objective was to analyze the relationship between humans and animals in the characters of the novel “Khon Nai Nithan” (People in Story) from the perspective of ecocriticism.

### Research Methodology

The research was conducted using qualitative methods and presented by descriptive analysis.

### Research Findings

“Khon Nai Nithan” (People in Story) is a novel that describes a period in an agricultural society in which humans rely on nature. Animals were members of the family and used as laborers. Therefore, the fiction represented a relationship between humans and animals. Most animals were depicted as preys that humans used to meet their needs in two ways: 1) a normal relationship between animals and humans as animals are used as laborers, as food, as tools for human’s benefits, and as aesthetic value to humans. Besides, there were some animals that humans could not control and as such, they carried out threats to human’s mind, and 2) an abnormal relationship with animals in ways like animals were stimulus-response to sexual instinct explained as follows:

#### 1. A normal relationship between humans and animals

##### 1.1 A labor relationship between humans and animals

Cows are important labor animals in agricultural societies. Based on the story, there existed a relationship between humans and cows as humans raised and used them as laborers for the purpose of farming. As appeared in the scene “Termtod ate and carried a rake and led his oxen to the field ... Termtod carried a rake and took the cow, then Grit came to eat and carried the cow to plow the field as well” (Siriwattano, 2018). According to the story, other people

who owned cows also had exclusive right to handle everything with them to response to their needs as follows “Some people brought their cow to breed his friend’s ox because they wanted a beautiful calf like his bull” (Siriwattano, 2018). As mentioned, that even breeding cows, humans had used the authority to control over animals to serve their own needs.

Furthermore, humans’ view considered cows as uncivilized, vicious, and cruel. as seen in “Herd of oxen gathered around and bred cows. The cowboys watched the flocks excitingly mating and giggling uncontrollably (Siriwattano, 2018). As seen from the cowboys’ reaction towards the cows, they believed that cows were animals that cannot control their sexual instincts and released them without shame. The way the cowboys laughed happily demonstrated animal abuse and they must be controlled by humans because they cannot control themselves. According to the text, it shows how humans considered themselves superior over animals. Animals must be under the control of humans and the cows were raised as laborers as shown “during the rainy season, a herd of cattle had no grass to eat. It was difficult to cut the grass for them to eat” (Siriwattano, 2018). People therefore had a relationship with their pets. Even having close ties with pets, humans had never thought animals were united in the same way. The animals had instinct that need to be controlled by humans. They were weak and unable to take care of themselves. They need humans to treat and take care of them to live. As such they were seen as inferior to humans.

### **1.2 A relationship between humans and animals as human’s foods**

Based on the story, it was found that animals were human’s foods such as some wild animals, fish, pig, chicken as follows.

A relationship between humans and animals in this way was signified that humans hunted animals for food and some were sold in situation of excesses. The animals found in the novel were wild animals such as tiger fish, mouse deer, wild rabbits, wild rats, including monitor lizards.

Pigs are animals that humans raise for eating, but the main purpose of raising pigs is for sale. Humans hope to gain economic benefits from animals. It was found in the story that the pigs were animals that humans raised for economic benefits. They were not raised as farm animals but as general pets in house. By the time the piglets grow, they were sold. Based on the story, “At the end of the rice seedling. Chickens are pet that humans raise at home and hope to gain benefits both directly and indirectly. For example, chickens can tell the time. Raising chickens is a simple way of life. When the chicken is fully grown and lay eggs, humans will eat and sell their eggs. Humans not only eat and sell the chicken eggs, but they also eat chickens. This example expresses that humans raise chickens as tool to benefit them as humans think that animals are creatures that were (เล้ากอก) born to be inferior to and to response to human needs, which reflect ways of thinking that nature has different viewpoints from humans.

It could be seen that humans hunt animals for food, careers and incomes. It also shows how humans think about animals as living creatures that humans have rights to control or kill. It equally demonstrates the human’s way of thinking that humans are masters and animals are servants which emphasize the view of self-centeredness of humans and animals have a duty to serve humans.

### **1.3 A relationship between humans and animals as tools for human’s benefits**

Based on the story, it was found that there existed a relationship between humans and animals as tools for humans’ benefits as was the case with the elephants. Elephants in the story were wild animals raised by humans and it was believed that walking under an elephant’s belly was supposed to bring luck as follows.

The elephants presented in the story were animals that influenced human beliefs controlled by humans. In the story, elephants were wild and powerful animals. It could be seen from the story that no matter how terrifying and powerful the elephants are, they stay under the control of humans. Therefore, it could be stated that humans have a relationship with animals as

other beings. Although humans believe that walking under the belly of an elephant is a blessing; if analyzed, it was human beings who set a system and control the mechanism of thought including the behavior of animals. Therefore, humans are superior to animals.

#### **1.4 A relationship between humans and animals as a role in aesthetic value to humans**

Based on the story, it is found that the author uses animals, especially various kinds of birds presented in the scene to create aesthetic pleasing and fulfill the character's life. In the scene when Termtod sailed along with Grit and Sinchai in the river. "Termtod told Sinchai to paddle the boat to the North because he enjoys watching birds and trees on both sides of the canal along the way. Various birds sing along the way. The sound of a bang showed that fish catch their prey in the bushes near the bank of the river. Termtod looked joyously to the left and to the right. (Siriwattano, 2018). From the example above it shows that humans saw nature as something that helped to create aesthetic pleasing to fulfil their way of life.

#### **1.5 A relationship between humans and animals as threats to human's mind**

Some animals affect human beliefs, especially creating fear. These kinds of animals are usually the ones that people cannot control. There are two kinds of birds in this story namely owls and vultures. An owl is a bird that affects human beliefs through faith of death. As shown in the scene "The noise produced by the owl was heard in wooded areas and people didn't want it to fly and hoot on their roof. It is known that if an owl flies and hoot on any roof, the people in the house will be seriously ill and that the sick person will soon die (Siriwattano 2018: 128). These things reflect belief. When an owl flew to any roof, it was an omen that someone would soon die. From the example above, we can explain that people are afraid of animals that they cannot. It is impossible for people to control the owl not to come to their roof. Therefore, it reflected ways of thinking that nature has different viewpoints from people, misfortune and misery.

The relationship between humans and animals as appeared in the story shows differentiation between people and animals. People classified themselves as nobles while animals were creatures that were born to serve humans in all aspects. Humans therefore insulted animals as being a low-class civilization. Even humans who behave no difference from animals, they thought they were superior to animals. When interpreting the animals in the story, all are done by people unilaterally. Even people who behaved and used innate behavior, lack of civilization which is no difference from animals, they are trying to create a way of thinking to nullify the existence of animals in people. These things are deeply implanted in people's way of thinking.

## **2. Abnormal relationship between humans and animals**

A relationship between people and animals as stimulus-response to sexual instinct.

The story shows that dogs are a stimulus-response to people's sexual instinct. Dogs are important characters in the story. The story started from the sexual relationship between dogs and people. Termtod had a sexual relationship with two dogs. The first one is a white and red striped dog that Termtod found in the temple. When Termtod saw this dog, he became sexually emotional. As shown in the scene "Mysterious power driven by strong desire that is hard to control causing him to want to release and want to try" (Siriwattano, 2018) and have sex with the dog. Another dog that Termtod almost had sex with was TeenKhao, a female dog that he raised and he always took it together with him. One day, Termtod became sexually emotional, he thought of having sex with TeenKhao as he used to do with the white and red striped dog. Termtod grabbed TeenKhao and gently caressed it, swallowing saliva until his "Adam's apple" ran ripple with his lustful eye. TeenKhao was groaning, snuggling, licking hands and arms, wiggling its tail (Siriwattano, 2018). At that moment, Termtod thinks of a tale in which the female character has sex with a dog. At the end, TeenKhao was shocked that Termtod was trying to harass her. It then turned to bite Termtod's penis.



Termtod's behavior is from a subconscious mind that does not have racial discrimination. Humans see that animals are living creatures in the same natural ecosystem with a different appearance from humans. Sexual instinct is the connection point for people and animal relationship according to the content of the script. More importantly, Termtod's behavior can be called an animal persecution because the two dogs did not agree to have sex with him. The white and red striped dog captured by Termtod, cannot escape and was raped by Termtod. In the case of TeenKhao, Termtod cannot successfully rape it, because it tried to resist to survive and fight him back. When considering the story, the animals presented in this scene become innocent creatures. As animal trust humans and think that human beings have mercy, they have been the victims of a cruel practical for person. Therefore, it can be said that people have a boundary line between animals and men by praising their race as noble. At the same time, some people behave worse than animals.

People used their innate behavior, which come from unconscious mind. When people live together as societies, there must be social norms, such as values, traditions, and culture, as a common practice for people to live in a peaceful society. The culture that has significantly influenced characters is a separation of levels between people and animals, in which humans define their race as being elite. The animals are low classed in the same ecosystem (world). Therefore, the lower classes must be responsible for the command of taking benefits and advantages of the upper classes. When the upper classes have sexual relationships with the lower classes especially with different races, those classes therefore are abhorrent and unacceptable to the communities. Culture is therefore considered as a class divider between humans and animals as well as determines people's thought and behavior. Having sex with dogs was a brash emotion of Termtod which was a lack of thought and it was the driving force of the subconscious mind. However, when Termtod became conscious; that is; consciousness under the cultural context, he realized that having sex with dogs is an abomination and is a stigma in life. As shown in the scene "when Termtod

revealed his feeling to Sinchai about the relationship between himself and TeenKhao. When people know that Termtod had sex with dogs, they condemned him. In the scene when “Grit doesn't want to believe that his own father-in-law is so weird (Siriwattano, 2018). “Bastard” a woman swore at him. “Yes, a total evil” another condemned (Siriwattano, 2018). At one point of Termtod's behavior though he wanted to have sex with dogs, he was trying to cover up the truth with the fear that others would see his behavior. He then tortured those dogs when having sex with white and red striped dog. He grabbed the dog's head, stuffed it into the small hole of a drum and beat the drums for fear that the mother dog would howl in pain. When he raped TeenKhao, he tied it front feet together with its neck and made a loop and tied them tightly to its mouth (Siriwattano, 2018). This behavior shows that animals are preys to respond to human needs which reflected the human way of thinking that culture plays a major role on human thinking systems as well as a class divider between people and animals. Moreover, it shows a system of thinking that low-ranking creatures like animals are different from the human race. Therefore, humans are able to carry out aggressive behavior and can be violent to animals.

The unusual relationship between humans and animals shows that humans are self-centered and empower themselves using cultural myths to differentiate classes between humans and animals leading to oppression and cruelty to animals in the aforementioned situations. There may, however, be another issue to consider which is the theme of the proposed story. When the character in the story had sexual relationship with animals. As Termtod's behavior in satisfaction with the physiology of the white and red striped dog. Termtod stared at its eyes, stretching his toes on its side. Immediately, the warmth from the dog spread up into his heart, so he had to quickly get his feet back. Termtod felt so strange that he surprised himself (Siriwattano, 2018). Also, Termtod's behavior towards TeenKhao “Termtod grabbed TeenKhao and gently caressed it, swallowing the saliva until his Adam's apple runs ripple, his bald head is red, his eyes were lustful. TeenKhao is groaning, snuggling, licking hands and arms, waggle its tail...

after that, he carelessly opened his sarong and squatted on the ground (Siriwattano, 2018). This reflects the unity of subconsciousness of creatures in the same ecosystem. This leads to the conclusion that instincts without culture, society, and or morality, humans think that all living things, both humans and animals, are equal. Termtod had a sexual relationship with a dog. If analyzed the Termtod's character, he is a normal person with no neurological disorders at all. He is a leader who is responsible for both work and family without a flaw. This reflects that sex drive is an innate instinct for both humans and animals. Sexual drive shows a feeling of the unity of humans and there is no difference between them. However, when humans live in the society, they are controlled by tradition or culture. These are the social norms of people that attributed thought to their races as high ranking and therefore resulting in racial discrimination between humans and animals. As presented in this novel when Termtod had sex with the animals, causing him to be diminished the divine and human wholeness of the humans. Grit, Termtod's son-in-law, holds Termtod secret about having sexual relationship with the dog. Grit used this secret to intimidate and take advantages of this secret to threaten Termtod and forced him to do everything he wanted. Despite the family structure in the old agriculture, a father would act as a leader and a son-in-law must comply. In this case, Termtod is therefore under his son-in-law without any opportunity to rebel. Grit uses social norms as a tool for negotiation and forces Termtod to lessen his power and became "the herd leader" or the head of a family instead of Termtod. In the end, when Termtod's secret was revealed, He was judged by people in the society using the framework of traditional culture called a freak causing a protest and unacceptance in society.

### **Discussion**

The relationship between humans and nature as shown in "Khon Nai Nithan" (People in Story) was the way of thinking in which people saw nature as being different from their own species. Therefore, people think that animals are inferior to them in the form of masters and slaves. Due to the social conditions, animals were used as laborers to make a living for humans. Thus, humans are

predators and animals are victims. Based on the abnormal relationship between humans and animals, it can be represented that humans are self-centered and empower themselves using the illusion of culture for their separation of classes between humans and animals which caused the oppression and cruelty to animals. The research results were consistent with Chotiudompant (2017) which explained that human's perspective on being superior to animals, is as a result of cultural interpretation and revealing an imagination of inequality between humans and other life forms around them, including animals. As shown in the story, humans raise themselves as nobles and create negative images for things around them, especially animals. Regarding the results of the relationship between humans and animals, it can be discussed that humans considered themselves superior to animals, having power to control animals and their lives belong to humans. Therefore, humans act like masters and treat animals as slaves. These reflect ways of thinking that nature has different viewpoints from humans which is in agreement with Pritchard's as cited in Sangkapantanon (2017). The research stated the ways humans think affects behavior that humans show on animals, and explained that humans separated themselves from animals according to the three criteria: reasoning, spoken language, and moral response which brings a distinction between humans and animals leading to the state of "being different" from each other. Furthermore, Sangkapantanon (2013) proposed the idea that animals are cruel which means they are "wild animals", not as delicate as humans. Animals cannot realize the states of being reasonable or unreasonable. Based on this concept, it reflects the idea that humans are the most noble animals who have consciousness that is sometimes seen as arrogance in their species above other species. All in all, nature is always inferior to humans and humans have the right to perform and control nature.

In addition, the research shows that humans treat animals regardless of morality and accuracy; for example, hunting or raising animals for food, raising animals for labors, or using animals as stimulus-response to sexual instinct. All of these depicts that humans are self-centered. The ways human behave towards

animals are therefore for their benefits; which is consistent with Pradittasanee (2016). This research analyzed and examined a state of laboring under the illusion behind human self-righteousness in the novel called “Ishmael”: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit of Daniel Quinn. Ishmael was presented as a victim of human cultural institutions. The use of Ishmael's image was a critique of human attitude that other animals were inferior, which were described as inhumane treatment in animal detention and exploitation. In response to the mainstream of human culture under the illusion that the world was created to serve humans. Humans have ownership to control and take advantage of the world.

It can be seen that the novel “Khon Nai Nithan” (People in Story) reflects the agricultural society in which people have a close relationship with nature especially in the agricultural society in the past, where humans and animals lived together with a close relationship like a family because humans relied on animals as labor for their careers and living. From the novel, which reflected the context of Thai society in the past, therefore, in creating the scene, storyline including character behavior, it was a picture of people and society in the past that had strict traditions, guidelines, and common norms of society. From the story that presented sex between humans and animals, it was customary. Therefore, the character was punished by people in society because humans think that their species was higher than other living things in the same world, especially animals. Therefore, having sex with animals is an abomination and diminishes human dignity. It showed the inequality of life in the natural world between humans and animals. From the story, the main character was a rapist of animals, but animals were not mentioned as deprived of rights in any way. It showed that although humans relied on various aspects of nature in their lives, humans saw nature as being different from their own species. Humans therefore behave and take advantage of nature in all aspects. The ways of thinking were cultivated and inherited until today as can be said humans consider themselves superior to nature. Human's prosperity is always destroying the balance of nature because of those beliefs. Humans have created sport games; such as hunting, as a result of the

way they think that animals' lives belong to them. Hunting is a stress relieving or a form of relaxation for humans. Although the novel depicts that humans hunted for survival in the past; considering the current context, it can be seen that no matter how the world has progressed, hunting is still a sport game that some people adhere to. These practices are all the results of the way of thinking that humans always see nature different from their species. From the literary texts that revealed an importance of animal instinct in humans. It was presented as an important clue in the story for the readers as humans beings should become aware of the real status and identity of humans and change the original viewpoint that animals are inferior creatures. Animals were defined as savage, cruel, uncivilized, and self-uncontrollable. However, humans allow their instincts to dominate their thoughts and actions which is not admirable or different from animals.

### **Conclusion**

From the study, there are 2 types of relationships that exist between people and animals

1. Normal relationship between humans and animals: The relationship appeared as follows: 1) Labor relationship, 2) Animals were recognized for human consumption, 3) Animals were used as tools for human's benefits, 4) Animals had a role in aesthetic value for humans, and 5) Animals were used as threats to human mind.

2. Abnormal relationship between people and animals: The relationship appeared as follows: Animals were stimulus-response to sexual instinct.

### **Acknowledgement**

This research was supported by Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University.

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