

Animal Voices: The Exploitation and Representation of Turtle Doves in *Kooong* (1975) by Iwan Simatupang

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Abstract

Animal studies as part of an ecocritical approach not only show the exploitation of animals, but also strive for a more active role for animals. Iwan Simatupang's novel *Kooong* (1975) presents the role of a turtledove actively responding to the situation in the story. In addition to showing a narrative of exploitation, the novel shows the trauma of the animal that prevents the turtledove from escaping exploitation. The novel also uses animal forms to depict human actions towards animals. This study uses an ecocritical perspective to broaden the reading of Iwan Simatupang's work, which is synonymous with an existentialist approach. To examine the exploitation and relationship of the turtledove and other characters in the story, this study will use Greimas's (1966) narratological analysis. This study also uses Bleakley's (2000) theory of animal form to examine the representation of the turtledove. By focusing on animals as part of nature, this study shows that animals position themselves not as objects, but as subjects.

Keywords: animal studies; animal exploitation; trauma; ecocriticism; *Kooong*

Introduction

Animals are a vital part of the environmental ecosystem. Animal exploitation not only threatens them but also the ecosystem as a whole. Exploitation and other forms of violence against animals are a particular challenge in Indonesia. Data from the Asia for Animals Coalition for the 2020-2021 period shows that Indonesia ranks first in terms of animal abuse content on social media, with 1,626 posts. This figure is significantly higher than the United States, which ranks second with 296 posts.

Another source, World Animal Protection, publishes the Animal Protection Index to assess countries' success in protecting animals. In the index, Indonesia received an E score, indicating that much remains to be done to recognize animal emotions and feelings, implement animal protection laws, and demonstrate the government's

commitment to global animal welfare standards from the OIE (Asmariah, Permana, and Semendawai, 2023).

Animal exploitation often focuses on endangered and wild animals. Domestic animals, pets, and animals far from extinction are often overlooked in this narrative. Yet, numerous cases of animal exploitation and violence occur all around us. Paying attention to domestic or pet animals is crucial. The World Society for the Protection of Animals conducted a survey in Indonesia in 2011, and the results showed that the pet population in Indonesia has increased.

Literary works often present animals as both symbols and reflections of the realities of life. Garrard (2004) stated that studies of the relationship between animals and humans in the humanities are divided between philosophical considerations of animal rights and cultural analysis of animal representation. However, exploitation narratives in literary works, particularly in Indonesia, often focus on endangered and wild animals. For example, the short stories "Macan" by Seno Gumira Ajidarma and "Harimau Belang" by Guntur Alam. Both highlight the issue of exploitation of tigers and leopards, which are protected and sacred wildlife.

One literary work that addresses the issue of exploitation of domestic animals is *Kooong* by Iwan Simatupang. The novel explores the relationship between humans and animals, where animals play a role that influences the lives of the characters. The exploitation narrative emerges for the character of the Turtledove due to myth and economic motives.

Despite the narrative of exploitation, the novel *Kooong* is often read through the existentialist approach of its characters. Mahayana (1993) found the concept of "Superior Man" in the main character, Sastro. Although discussing existentialist narratives, the relationship between humans and the environment still appears in the discussion. Hondro (2017) examined the character of Burung Perkutut, but his discussion still focused on existentialism. Based on these two studies, this study will focus on examining Burung Perkutut through an ecocritical approach to further demonstrate the forms of exploitation of the character.

Djupri (in Rampan, 1985) demonstrated a relationship between nature and the characters in *Kooong*, although he did not comprehensively discuss the relationship between the two. In this study, modern culture transformed the characters' personalities into more consumerist ones, thus altering the relationship between humans and nature in the novel *Kooong*. Based on these findings, my research will focus more on the relationship between humans and nature as represented by Burung Perkutut.

Ecocritical research on Iwan Simatupang's work was previously conducted by Ied Veda Sitepu (2024). This article discusses one of Iwan Simatupang's poems, entitled "What Do the Stars Say in the Sea?" Based on this research, Iwan Simatupang's poem

demonstrates the unequal relationship between women and men in coastal areas, where women are victims of economic conditions. The beach in the poem symbolizes the relationship between humans and nature, between home and the outside world, or safety and uncertainty. Based on this research, this study alone will add to ecocritical research on Iwan Simatupang's work, particularly the prose genre that is Iwan Simatupang's authorial identity.

Ecocritical research, particularly examining the relationship between humans and animals, in Iwan Simatupang's work may be something new. However, in general, literary research examining the relationship between animals and humans is frequently conducted. Estok (2007) discusses the representation of animals in Shakespeare's works. This research shows that Shakespeare frequently uses animal metaphors to define humans. Animals serve not only as symbols but also as tools for criticizing meat consumption and the exploitation of living creatures. Estok emphasizes that an ecocritical approach must be more explicit in connecting animal exploitation and the broader environment. However, Estok has not used a clear concept in examining the relationship between humans and nature. Sukmawan (2016) employed a clear ecocritical concept when examining animal representations in oral traditions. The concept used was Bleakley's three animal forms. In this study, this concept will be applied to modern literature.

Based on these two studies, this research attempts to fill a gap in the study of animals and humans in literary works by examining the exploitation of unprotected animals. The research will also examine how physical animals are transformed and represented into psychological and symbolic animals in these works.

Methodology

This research will employ textual analysis using the descriptive analytical method. Descriptive and analytical methods can be combined as long as they are not contradictory. The descriptive analytical method is carried out by describing facts, followed by analysis (Ratna, 2013). In this research, facts related to exploitation and representation will be presented in both descriptive and citation form, and then analyzed using ecocritical concepts.

The novel *Kooong* tells the story of the search for the meaning of freedom. Nearly every character in the story engages in this activity, triggered by the loss of the turtledove belonging to the main character, Sastro. The novel uses a fragmentary concept, so each character shares the same goal.

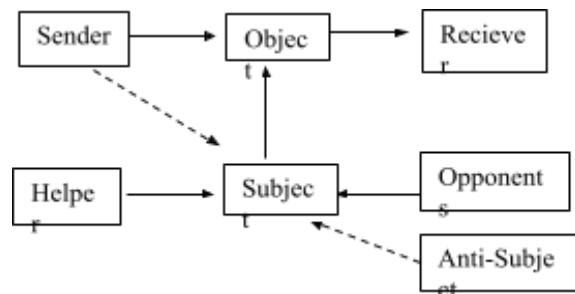
This research will focus only on events that intersect with the turtledove. The characters who interact intensely with the turtledove in the novel, along with their roles, are:

- **Turtledove:** acts as the driving force of the story. Turtledove also has a goal of

seeking freedom. This goal stems from her life experiences, including witnessing events, including exploitation.

- **Sastro:** The main character and owner of Turtledove for 10 years. Sastro saves Turtledove from exploitation by bird sellers and keepers who over-raise Turtledoves. Through his relationship with Sastro, Turtledove tries to find the meaning of freedom.
- **Bird Seller:** captures Turtledove. The bird seller treats Turtledove cruelly.
- **Turtledove Keepers:** These are people who overestimate and treat turtledoves. This results in the birds being captured. Turtledoves also develop a conscious awareness of silence due to the excessive treatment from their keepers.

This research does not delve beyond this character due to the novel's fragmentary format and minimal allusion to the Turtledove character. Three events related to Turtledove will be analyzed using the actant scheme developed by A.J. Greimas to examine the narrative development in the novel *Koong*. The use of Greimas's narratology takes into account the research objective of examining the narrative of exploitation within the story. Ratna (2013: 138) states that Greimas prioritizes action over the actor. Research that focuses on animals also aligns with this theory. According to Rimon-Kenan (1983: 34-35), an actant is an action, but it does not always have to be human; it can also involve non-humans. The actant scheme is a diagram that connects Subject/Object, Sender/Receiver, and Helper/Obstacle. In certain works, there is also an antisubject that acts as a consistent obstacle for the subject.



This research will utilize Bleakley's (2000) concept of animal form. This concept categorizes animals into three forms: biological animals, conceptual animals, and psychological animals. Biological animals are animals that are "considered ordinary," treated literally or essentialistically. Conceptual animals are described as signs in language or symbols within a system or code. Conceptual animals are often termed figuratively, such as metaphors ('a terrible situation'), similes ('cunning as a fox'), or allegories ('The Wind in the Willows', 'Brer Rabbit', 'Animal Farm'). They are used semiotically, such as in the naming of sports teams ('Toronto Blue Jays', 'Chicago Bears') or cars ('Jaguar', 'Beetle'), or symbolically (the bear represents power; the peacock, arrogance). Psychological animals exist in the realm of the mind. Psychological animals are neither 'real' in the biological sense, nor 'abstract' in the cognitive sense, but participate in both the physical and nonphysical worlds. Animals emerge in the psychological realm—or the habitat of the soul or personal and cultural

imagination—as tangible and sensual images that cannot be reduced to the realm of ideas, but are also not literal or concrete.

Belakley's theory is important because of the transformation of the role of turtle doves. Belakley also emphasizes that hunting for the pet trade is one of the factors causing animal extinction. This process also appears in the novel *Kooong* by Iwan Simatupang.

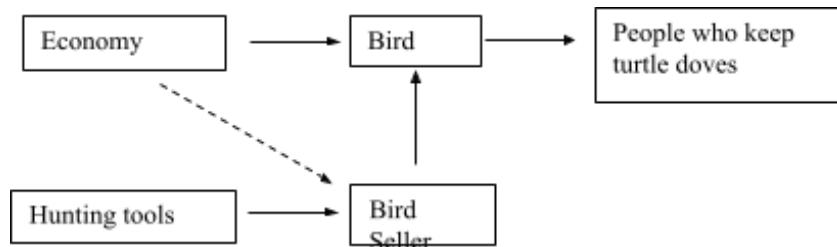
Results and Discussion

1. Exploitation Narrative

a. Exploitation Triggers Trauma

The exploitation of the Turtle Dove in the novel doesn't just have a direct physical impact. Human actions against it traumatize the Turtle Dove. This trauma makes it difficult for the Turtle Dove to accept human presence. As living creatures, animals can process this. Keraf (2014) states that both humans and animals possess cognitive and emotional abilities. Both animals and humans experience the process of awareness, recognition, knowing, and feeling through their cognitive abilities, albeit to varying degrees.

In *Kooong*, the act of exploitation begins when the Turtle Dove is captured by the hunter. This is explained in the following actant scheme.



The narrative depicts the capture or hunting of turtle doves as a result of economic reasons. Turtle doves are highly prized, one reason being their vocalizations, or "kooong" in the novel. The narrative explains that turtle doves are caught after they eat bait from bird sellers. The beneficiaries of this activity are the people who keep the birds, as the purpose of the capture is to sell them.

The result of this incident is the arbitrary actions of the turtle dove seller. From the perspective of the Turtle Dove character, it appears that the turtle dove seller acts without any remorse. On the other hand, the turtle dove's cynical view of other turtle doves who still want to sing after being subjected to such treatment is evident.

"Life in the market isn't as easy as it was with that widower, who's a occultist. Sometimes his new master forgets everything. Understandably, he has many other birds for sale. He sells a variety

of things. He's not the only turtle dove. There are dozens of them. Is it his fault that he forgot to pay attention to his empty food trough?"

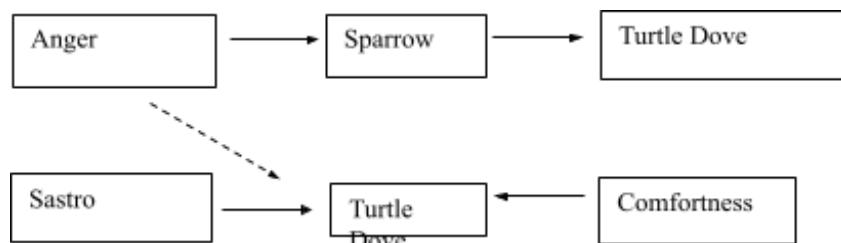
(Simatupang, 2013, p. 84)

This quote not only shows the Bird Seller's disregard for the turtledove, but also highlights the Turtledove's perspective, questioning the actions of the Bird Seller. Exploitation is synonymous with excessive worship. This is also present in the novel. This situation traumatizes the turtledove. One example is the excessive worship of turtledove keepers, particularly those with loud voices. This traumatizes the Turtledove, who was not blessed with a loud voice.

Freud (2019) states that trauma can lead a person to a dead end, losing interest in the present and future and becoming completely absorbed in their past. In the novel, *Kooong*, exploitation becomes a past experience that locks the Turtledove's thoughts. The trauma the Turtledove experiences due to the treatment of a handful of people makes her assume that others will do the same. This view is also expressed when the character Sastro buys her. However, the trauma slowly disappeared when the Turtle Dove learned about Sastro's kindness.

b. Exploitation Triggers Trauma

In this narrative, two actant schemes describe related events. These two actant schemes demonstrate the development of the characters' perspectives on animal husbandry. Although related, the elements in these actant schemes differ.



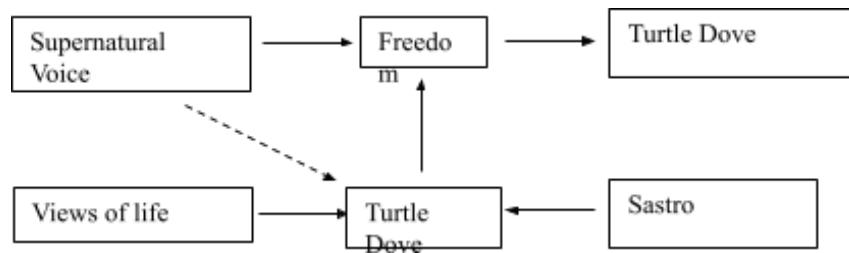
The turtledove's quest for freedom begins when Sastro forgets to close the cage door one day. At that moment, the turtledove doesn't consider leaving the cage due to the comfort it has received from Sastro for 10 years. However, the turtledove still leaves the cage, angry after hearing the Sparrow's harsh words about it.

The obstacle in this actant scheme isn't just the comfort the turtledove receives from Sastro. The trauma of the events leading up to meeting Sastro dampens its desire to leave the cage.

"But what's the point of this freedom if a bird trapper will soon appear and catch it and put it in a cage that might be even worse than Mr. Sastro's!"

(Simatupang, 2013, p. 78).

These two factors cause the turtledove to initially only leave the cage briefly. However, the turtledove eventually flies away. This is due to a vision outside the cage and a sudden, supernatural voice the turtledove hears. In this incident, the Turtle Dove character is absolutely certain that he wants to leave Sastro temporarily to enjoy his freedom. This incident is built up in the following actant scheme.



Although Sastro acts as a barrier in the incident, no direct action is taken. The barrier is more about the comfort and concern of the Turtle Dove character towards Sastro. Nevertheless, the Turtle Dove character continues to fly for a while, proving its will as a free subject, no longer an object merely used by humans.

In addition to the Actant Scheme, Greimas also developed a Functional Model to illustrate the narrative's structure. The functional model is divided into three parts: (1) the initial situation, (2) the transformation, and (3) the final situation. In the Functional Model, there is a meeting between each actant. The functional model also shows the transformation from the initial situation to the final situation. This condition also occurs in the Turtle Dove character.

Initial Situation	Transformation			Final Situation
	Proficiency Test Stage	Main Test Phase	The Stage of Glory	
Turtle doves are exploited by humans	Turtledoves experience exploitation, from hunting to abusive treatment.	The turtledove received different caretakers, both of whom were wealthy. The turtledove's doubts about	The comfort of being a pet makes the Turtle Dove hesitate to seek freedom.	Turtledoves seek the meaning of freedom

	them feel inferior to other turtledoves.	the first wealthy man caused it to run away. The second wealthy man, Sastro, was also doubted by the turtledove. But later, the turtledove accepted Sastro as its owner.		
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Based on the actant scheme and functional model, it is clear how the Turtle Dove in the story is not only an object but also has the capacity as a subject. The actant scheme also shows the existence of human actions that motivate the Turtle Dove to act. In the actant scheme, there are no obstacles to the practice of hunting, indicating that hunting Turtle Doves is something normal. However, if we look at the perspective of the Turtle Dove character, we find a narrative that the event triggered trauma for the Turtle Dove character.

2. The Form of a Turtle Dove

In the novel *Kooong*, the turtledove is a common turtledove. Besides its inability to make sounds, it exhibits no other distinctive characteristics. The turtledove's thoughts and perspectives are conveyed either directly or indirectly by the narrator. However, the role and treatment of the human characters toward the turtledove make it more than just an ordinary animal.

Bleakley (2000) proposed the concept of animal representation or embodiment into three forms: biological animal, conceptual animal, and psychological animal. Biological animals are those considered "ordinary," treated literally or essentialistically. All actions of the characters in the novel *Kooong* toward the turtledove, such as feeding, bathing, and sunning the turtledove, represent ordinary treatment of the turtledove as a biological animal.

In the novel, the turtledove also experiences unusual actions, such as worshipping a particular turtledove with high economic value. The turtledove serves as a symbol that distinguishes its owner's status from that of other inhabitants. Birds as symbols in

Bleakley's work are known as conceptual animals.

Bleakley explains that conceptual animals are often used figuratively, such as metaphors ('a terrible situation'), similes ('cunning as a fox'), or allegories ('Wind in the Willows', 'Brer Rabbit', 'Animal Farm'). They are used semiotically, such as in the naming of sports teams ('Toronto Blue Jays', 'Chicago Bears') or cars ('Jaguar', 'Beetle'), and symbolically (bears represent strength; peacocks, arrogance). In *Kooong*, turtle doves are used as a symbol to indicate one's well-being due to the established myth that turtle doves can bring good fortune. The turtle dove's symbolic appearance also triggers the exploitation or hunting of turtle doves.

“...Just because I happened to have a normal turtle dove. One that wouldn't kooong anymore, I was then rumored throughout the country as a madman. Out of my mind. Someone to be avoided.”

(Simatupang, 35-56).

This quote demonstrates the turtle dove's symbolic role in society. The character, Sastro, who is prosperous and kind to others, is subjected to negative views simply because he keeps a turtle dove that can't sing. The turtle dove as a symbol not only harms the turtle dove itself but also impacts humans.

The turtle dove in the novel *Kooong* also has the form of a psychological animal. Bleakley argues that psychological animals are not 'real' in the biological sense, or 'abstract' in the cognitive sense, but participate in both the physical and nonphysical worlds. Animals appear in the psychological realm—or the habitat of the soul or personal and cultural imagination—as tangible and sensual images that cannot be reduced to the realm of ideas, but are also not literal or concrete. This concept suggests that the turtledove is something humans believe serves a specific purpose. In the context of the novel *Kooong*, the turtledove becomes an animal that fills the loneliness of the human character.

“...again, the turtledove gives him direction. In this state of being "lost" and "searched," it has managed to perch more intimately in Mr. Sastro's heart and become a guide for his next steps.”

(Simatupang, 2013, p. 38).

This quote demonstrates Sastro's relationship with the turtledove as more than just a pet. For 10 years, the turtledove has filled Sastro's life, and when it escapes, his life is disrupted. An encounter between Sastro and the shopkeeper who keeps a turtledove named Gatut Lemu awakens Sastro to accept the loss and move on. This encounter also demonstrates an attitude in harmony with nature, as the shopkeeper cares for Gatut Lemu appropriately and not excessively.

“...What's clear is that Gatut Lemu is truly a good friend. His

presence beside me is a perfect match. As for his ordinary little friend, we don't pay excessive attention to him. In accepting each other's presence as they are, and without expecting anything in return, we feel we can live in harmony."

(Simatupang, 2013, p. 36).

Based on the analysis above, the character of the Turtle Dove plays a significant role in the story. Iwan Simatupang, as the author, not only assigns positions and roles to non-human creatures relative to humans, but also shows that the narrative of animal exploitation influences the character's perspective on the Turtle Dove. Trisman (2007) further emphasizes that the novel's research focuses too much on human life issues. Toda (1984) even calls the Turtle Dove an antagonist. Both of study paid little attention to the development of the Turtle Dove character, leading up to her abandonment of Sastro. The novel's fragmentary format, which reveals the facets of each character, including the Turtle Dove, demonstrates that Iwan Simatupang also gives non-human characters important roles and positions.

Toda also explained the characteristics of *Kooong* compared to Iwan Simatupang's other works. According to him, *Kooong* still focuses on human alienation, like other novels. It's simply simpler, adapting to the novel's theme of being written for a competition, specifically for teenagers. However, Toda neglected to highlight the role and position of animal characters, a distinction not found in Iwan Simatupang's previous novels.

Conclusion

A structural analysis of the novel *Kooong* (1975) reveals a narrative of animal exploitation. Economic motives and excessive treatment, such as the creation of myths and the classification of animals based on physical characteristics, fuel this exploitation. The analysis also reveals trauma experienced by the animal characters due to human exploitation. Although the animal characters manage to escape exploitation, this trauma becomes a barrier when the animals attempt to find freedom.

The use of animal form theory in the analysis reinforces the findings of the structural analysis. The position of animals in human relationships is not only present in physical form, but also in conceptual and psychological forms. The analysis also shows that for humans, understanding animals as psychological beings creates a more harmonious relationship between humans and animals.

The ecocritical approach to the novel *Kooong* (1975) in this study focuses on animals. However, this study opens up the potential for further research to further examine the relationship between humans and nature, both in the novel and in other works by Iwan Simatupang. The results of the analysis can also serve as a guideline for understanding the position and role of animals to avoid excessive exploitation that threatens the natural ecosystem.

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