

THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN HUMANS AND THE WOLF IN THE STORIES OF ERNEST SETON-THOMPSON

Khadicha Mamatkulova Zayniddin qizi

Teacher at Turon University

mamatkulovaxadicha@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article provides information about the opposition between humans and the wolf in the stories of Ernest Seton Thompson, focusing on literary, symbolic, and ethical dimensions of the relationship. In the stories of Ernest Seton Thompson, wolf represents as a loyal, intelligent and noble creature. In contrast, humans are depicted as the image of civilization who disrupt natural balance through hunting, domination and exploitation. Wolf is shown as a protector of the pack, which leads to the broader conflict between civilization and natural world.*

Key words: *Ernest Seton Thompson, human-animal opposition, nature, wolf image, literary symbolism, animal studies.*

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Seton-Thompson who was born in 1860 in England is one of the most prominent writers who portrayed animals not merely as background elements, but as independent living beings with emotions, instincts, and dignity. In many of his stories, especially those devoted to wolves, the central conflict is built upon the opposition between humans and nature. The wolf becomes a symbolic figure representing freedom, wilderness, survival, and natural wisdom, while humans often embody civilization, domination, cruelty, or misunderstanding of nature. In Seton-Thompson's stories, wolves are depicted as intelligent, loyal, and emotionally complex creatures. Unlike traditional literary portrayals where wolves symbolize danger or evil, Seton presents them as noble inhabitants of the natural world. The wolf often struggles to survive in harsh conditions created not only by nature itself but also by human interference.

For example, in *Lobo, the King of Currumpaw*, the wolf Lobo is portrayed as a powerful and wise leader of his pack. "Lobo was a giant wolf and the mighty leader of the Currumpaw pack."²² He is not simply a predator; he is shown as brave, devoted to his mate Blanca, and deeply connected to the wilderness. Through this characterization, Seton humanizes the wolf while still preserving its wild essence. The human characters in Seton-Thompson's narratives are frequently hunters, ranchers, trappers, or settlers whose primary concern is economic gain and personal security. Their attitude toward wolves is largely shaped by fear and prejudice. Because wolves occasionally prey on livestock, humans perceive them as dangerous enemies that must be eliminated. "Seton's animal heroes challenge the traditional

²² Seton-Thompson, E. T. (1898). *Lobo, the King of Currumpaw*.

boundary between human and animal consciousness”²³ claims Anderson, M. (2002). Rather than attempting to understand the natural behavior of wolves, people view them solely through the lens of human benefit and loss. This anthropocentric perspective creates a fundamental conflict between civilization and wilderness.

The opposition between humans and wolves can be summarized as follows:

Wolf — freedom, instinct, loyalty, courage, natural wisdom, and harmony with the environment;

Human — civilization, control, material interests, violence, manipulation, and environmental destruction.

Seton-Thompson challenges the traditional belief that civilization is inherently superior to nature. Through his portrayal of wolves, he demonstrates that animals possess qualities often associated with humanity, including intelligence, devotion, and emotional depth. At the same time, many human characters display traits such as cruelty, selfishness, and a willingness to destroy what they do not fully understand.

This conflict is most clearly illustrated in Lobo, the King of Currumpaw. Lobo, the legendary leader of the Currumpaw wolf pack, repeatedly outsmarts hunters and avoids every trap designed to capture him. His strength, intelligence, and leadership make him a formidable opponent. Despite using advanced hunting techniques and numerous traps, the hunters are unable to defeat him through direct confrontation. Their repeated failures suggest that human power is not as absolute as it is often assumed to be.

Unable to overcome Lobo through force, the hunters eventually resort to deception. Recognizing the deep bond between Lobo and his mate Blanca, they target her instead. “His love for Blanca proved stronger than his fear of man.”²⁴ Blanca is captured, and her imprisonment becomes the key to Lobo’s downfall. Driven by loyalty and affection, Lobo approaches the area where Blanca is held and is ultimately trapped. The hunters’ success is achieved not through bravery or fair competition but through psychological manipulation. This strategy raises important ethical questions about the morality of human actions toward animals.

Lobo’s reaction to Blanca’s capture is one of the most emotionally powerful moments in Seton-Thompson’s work. The wolf’s grief, confusion, and despair reveal a profound emotional capacity that challenges conventional assumptions about animal behavior. Rather than presenting the wolf as a ruthless predator, Seton portrays him as a devoted companion capable of experiencing love and loss. The reader witnesses not only the physical defeat of a wild animal but also the emotional suffering of a living being whose attachment has been exploited by humans. Brown (2010) argues that the wolf is represented as an emotionally complex being rather than a dangerous predator.

Furthermore, the destruction of Lobo symbolizes the broader destruction of wilderness by expanding human civilization. The wolf’s death marks the triumph of human

²³ Anderson, M. (2002). Animal Stories and the Problem of Anthropomorphism. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 18(3), 45–60.

²⁴ Seton-Thompson, E. T. (1898). Lobo, the King of Currumpaw.

dominance, yet the victory is portrayed as morally ambiguous. The hunters achieve their goal, but the narrative does not celebrate their success. Instead, it evokes sympathy for Lobo and encourages readers to question whether humanity's conquest of nature is truly a sign of progress. The emotional tone of the story suggests that something valuable is lost when humans destroy the creatures and ecosystems that make the natural world unique.

By portraying humans as agents of disruption and wolves as symbols of natural integrity, Seton-Thompson reverses many traditional literary conventions. The true tragedy of the story lies not in the existence of predators but in humanity's inability to coexist with them. Through this opposition, the author criticizes the destructive consequences of human greed and domination while advocating a more respectful and compassionate relationship with nature. Ultimately, Seton-Thompson's wolf stories serve as a powerful reminder that the survival of the natural world depends on humanity's willingness to recognize the value and dignity of all living creatures.

One important literary technique used by Seton-Thompson is anthropomorphism — attributing human-like emotions and thoughts to animals. Wolves experience love, grief, fear, and loyalty. This approach reduces the distance between humans and animals and transforms the traditional human-versus-beast narrative into a more complex ethical dialogue. The conflict between humans and wolves in Seton-Thompson's stories reflects a broader struggle between civilization and nature (Seton, 1898). Lobo's grief after Blanca's capture demonstrates that animals possess emotional depth comparable to humans. Consequently, the reader begins to question who is truly "civilized" in the conflict.

Conclusion

The opposition between humans and the wolf in Ernest Seton-Thompson's stories reflects a broader conflict between civilization and nature. Through sympathetic portrayals of wolves, Seton challenges traditional negative stereotypes and criticizes humanity's destructive attitude toward wildlife. The wolf emerges not as a villain but as a tragic and noble symbol of freedom, dignity, and natural harmony. Ultimately, Seton-Thompson's stories call for compassion, respect for animals, and a more ethical relationship between humans and the natural world.

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