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Araştırma Makalesi

**AT THE BOUNDARIES OF MACHINE AND HUMANITY: A
COMPARATIVE POSTHUMANIST ANALYSIS OF E. GASKELL'S
NORTH AND SOUTH AND O. KEMAL'S ON FERTILE LANDS**

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Abstract¹

This study offers a comparative posthumanist analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South and Orhan Kemal's On Fertile Lands, exploring the dissolution of anthropocentric subjectivity and the evolution of humans within industrial and urban settings. By placing these novels within their specific socio-historical contexts—Victorian England during the Industrial Revolution and Turkey's rural-urban migration post-1950s—the paper explores how literature mirrors the dissolution of traditional human autonomy in favour of interconnected and distributed identities. Utilising posthumanist theories, it contends that both novels illustrate humans as interconnected with technological and socio-economic frameworks and that identities are reshaped through interaction with machines, factories, and urban environments. Through its portrayal of the alienation experienced by rural migrants and their assimilation into capitalist frameworks, On Fertile Lands highlights a transition from anthropocentric values to posthumanist interpretations. Migrants are portrayed as social subjects and as posthumanist entities, with their identities redefined through their interactions with industrial machinery, factories, and urban systems. In a comparable manner, North and South indicates the transformative impact of industrial capitalism on the relationship between humans and machines, particularly displayed through Margaret Hale's developing awareness in Milton. Labourers in the novel function as extensions of the machines they operate, presenting a complex dynamic of human and non-human interactions. Considering this, the study enhances the understanding of posthuman subjectivity in literature through the juxtaposition of these novels, providing a cross-cultural perspective on the relationship between humans and machines.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Orhan Kemal, Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South, On Fertile Lands.

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MAKİNE VE İNSANLIĞIN SINIRLARINDA: E. GASKELL' IN KUZEY VE GÜNEY VE O. KEMAL' İN BEREKETLİ TOPRAKLAR ÜZERİNDE ADLI ESERLERİNİN POSTHUMANİST KARŞILAŞTIRMALI ANALİZİ

Öz

Bu çalışma, Elizabeth Gaskell'in Kuzey ve Güney ve Orhan Kemal'in Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde adlı eserlerinin karşılaştırmalı bir posthümanist analizini sunarak, insan merkezli öznenin çözülmesini ve endüstriyel ve kentsel ortamlardaki insanların evrimini araştırmaktadır. Makale, bu eserleri belirli sosyo-tarihsel bağlamlarına yerleştirerek - Sanayi Devrimi sırasında Viktorya İngiltere'si ve 1950'lerden sonra Türkiye'nin kırsal-kentsel göçü - edebiyatın, birbirine bağlı ve dağıtılmış kimlikler lehine geleneksel insan özerkliğinin çözülmesini nasıl yansıttığını araştırmaktadır. Posthümanist teorileri kullanarak her iki romanın da insanları teknolojik ve sosyoekonomik çerçevelerle birbirine bağli olarak gösterdiğini ve kimliklerin makineler, fabrikalar ve kentsel ortamlarla etkileşim yoluyla yeniden şekillendirildiğini öne sürmektedir. Kırsal göçmenlerin deneyimlediği yabancılaşmayı ve kapitalist çerçevelere asimile olmalarını tasvir ederek, Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde, insan merkezli değerlerden posthümanist yorumlara geçişi vurgulamaktadır. Göçmenler, sosyal özneler ve posthümanist varlıklar olarak tasvir edilmekte ve kimlikleri, endüstriyel makineler, fabrikalar ve kentsel sistemlerle etkileşimleri aracılığıyla yeniden tanımlanmaktadır. Benzer bir şekilde, Kuzey ve Güney, özellikle Margaret Hale'in Milton'da gelişen farkındalığı aracılığıyla gösterilen, endüstriyel kapitalizmin insanlar ve makineler arasındaki ilişki üzerindeki dönüştürücü etkisini ele almaktadır. Romandaki işçiler, çalıştırdıkları makinelerin uzantıları olarak işlev görür ve karmaşık bir insan ve insan olmayan etkileşimler dinamiğini sunmaktadır. Bunu göz önünde bulundurarak, çalışma, bu metinlerin yan yana getirilmesi yoluyla edebiyatta posthüman öznenin anlaşılmasını geliştirerek insanlar ve makineler arasındaki ilişkiye dair kültürler arası bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Posthümanizm, Orhan Kemal, Elizabeth Gaskell, Kuzey ve Güney, Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde.

INTRODUCTION

Posthumanism, as a postmodern ideology that rigorously critiques the anthropocentrism inherent in humanism, redefines the interactions between humans, technology, nature, and other entities and builds on criticisms of Eurocentrism, colonialism, racism, and sexism. Although the intellectual origins of posthumanism may be traced to critiques of humanism by figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, posthumanism, as a postmodern paradigm, is founded on the criticisms of anthropocentric thought presented by Singer, Braidotti, and Wolfe (Çavuş, 2021). In this regard, Braidotti characterises posthumanism as an approach that perceives humans not just as biological entities but as components of a complex, multidimensional network (Braidotti, 2013). Braidotti's development of the non-

unitary subject concept undermines conventional views of a stable, harmonious and independent self. The approach advocates for a holistic and cohesive awareness of subjectivity as “‘non-unitary’ – split, in-process, knotted, rhizomatic, transitional, nomadic” (Braidotti, 2014). She asserts a thorough comprehension that recognises the plurality and interconnectedness of identities. Her main ethical obligation is “to refuse to conceal the power differentials that divide us” (2017). This perspective is essential within a posthumanist paradigm, wherein the human subject is reinterpreted in relation to nonhuman creatures, technology, and the environment. It promotes a shift from individualism to a relational and interconnected vision of life, emphasising the fluid and provisional essence of being. Braidotti’s conception of the ‘non-unitary subject’ contradicts traditional understandings of the self as a stable, cohesive, and independent being (2017). Braidotti, utilising posthumanist and poststructuralist frameworks, challenges this position by advocating for a more dynamic and interrelated conception of subjectivity.

Donna Haraway is one of the prominent scholars in this field, known for her pioneering article “A Cyborg Manifesto,” which has influenced posthumanist feminist theory as a postmodern ecofeminist figure. Haraway asserts that her cyborg myth, akin to other postmodernist techniques, subverts “the ontology grounding Western epistemology” (1991). Her cyborg imagery, which contests the anthropocentrism of humanism and the dualism prevalent in Western thought, has emerged as a prominent motif in posthumanist theory for reconceptualising the human, nonhuman and humanity.

In a similar vein, Katherine Hayles presents the notion of ‘material informational entity,’ proposing that the growing integration of people with technology is engendering a posthuman condition that obscures the conventional distinctions between human and machine, as well as between physical and virtual domains. Hayles rejects fundamental differences or absolute distinctions between “bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (1999). Thus, she states that this change goes against common ideas of what it means to be human and that we need to rethink how we relate to technology and how it affects culture and society.

Francesca Ferrando, a contemporary posthumanist feminist academic, highlights the ‘postcentralizing’ characteristic of posthumanism (2012). Posthumanism signifies a major departure from centralised, hierarchical paradigms that have historically characterised Western thought. Humanist frameworks frequently revolve around a core figure such as ‘Man,’ the human, or the rational subject around which knowledge, power, and meaning is structured. This primacy positions humans, especially a certain subgroup—a “white, European, head of a heterosexual family and its children, and able-bodied” male (Braidotti, 2017)—at the apex of the hierarchy of being, relegating other entities, nonhuman creatures, technology, nature, and marginalised groups to peripheral or inferior roles. Thus, postcentralising fundamentally underscores the deconstruction of centralised, fixed

authority and the transition towards a more inclusive, pluralistic, and linked perspective. It aligns with feminist, decolonial, and ecological criticisms that similarly contest conventional power systems and promote decentralised, egalitarian methodologies for comprehending the world. Elucidating posthumanism's connection to feminist theory, Ferrando contends that feminist literary criticism of the 1990s initiated critical posthumanism, which, alongside cultural posthumanism, established philosophical posthumanism characterised by a newly acquired awareness of the limitations of prior anthropocentric and humanistic assumptions (Ferrando, 2013). Braidotti, recognised for her notable contributions to posthumanist philosophy, has significance in this context. Braidotti proposes a critical posthumanist approach as an alternative to the Enlightenment-oriented perspective of transhumanism, grounding her framework in monistic affirmative ethics through references to Spinoza. The theorist asserts that it is essential to "refuse to conceal the power differentials that divide us" (2017) and advocates for a 'decentralized' foundation rather than a human-centered one, where differences are integrated. Braidotti highlights that the concept of 'ecosophical species equality' within critical posthumanist ethics enables individuals to interrogate the violence and hierarchical reasoning that arise from human arrogance and the presumption of human exceptionalism (2017).

In this context, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Orhan Kemal's *On Fertile Lands* serve as significant literary works that critically analyse the interplay between humans and technology. When analysed through the perspective of posthumanist ideologies, the novels indicate that humanity encounters significant conflicts in its relationship with technology. The two novels look at individual identity and the roles dictated by technological systems. Posthumanism enables the reading of these novels as network narratives, beyond anthropocentric viewpoints. Thus, Gaskell and Kemal have created literary works that reflect the social realities of their eras while also influencing future human existence. Their writings challenge the distinctions between technology and humanity, employing a methodology that diverges from traditional human-centric narratives. In this context, Braidotti proposes a new ontology that facilitates harmonious coexistence between humans and technology. In *North and South* and *On Fertile Lands*, the challenges of attaining harmony are elucidated. Individuals, caught between nature and machines, are forced to redefine their identities and social roles.

The main reason for selecting *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell from the nineteenth century and *On Fertile Lands* by Orhan Kemal from the twentieth century is the opportunity to examine the portrayal of industrialisation and human-machine interactions across different chronological and cultural frameworks. Despite being written in distinct centuries and stemming from different national literatures—British and Turkish—both novels underscore the evolution of human identity, labour dynamics, and social frameworks in reaction to economic change and mechanisation. Within this frame, the study attempts to clarify the variations in

the expression of comparable dynamics, such as class conflict, labour exploitation, and the influence of technology on human existence, based on historical and socio-cultural settings through the integration of these two works. The comparative method is deliberately chosen to examine how literature from diverse periods and regions mirrors shared concerns and desires concerning the borders between human and machine, rather than highlighting distinctions for their own sake. Thus, the study is grounded in the socio-cultural contexts of each novel, encompassing the distinct industrial circumstances of nineteenth-century England and the initial stages of mechanised agriculture and rural-urban migration in twentieth-century Turkey. This contextual approach elucidates the distinctive yet analogous ways in which posthumanist concepts are presented in both novels.

Orhan Kemal is a notable socialist-realist novelist who explores the migration phenomenon from rural to urban areas, a trend that has intensified since the 1950s. He addresses the challenges faced by rural individuals, including dilemmas, difficulties, transformation, alienation, and identity formation, all within the context of the capitalist economic structure. Kemal depicts the lives of land and factory workers, drawing from his personal experiences and observations, as well as the struggles of expatriates migrating from rural to urban settings (Oruç, 2020). In *On Fertile Lands*, the author explores the themes of rupture and reconstruction faced by individuals migrating from rural areas to urban settings. He remarks on their attempts to disengage from anthropocentric value systems and adapt to the material conditions of urban life, as well as the evolving relationships between humans and technology influenced by this environment. Kemal highlights the transformation of the individuals who, upon departing from their village and engaging with modern production tools, evolve into an entity integrated not only into urban life but also into industrial machinery, factories, and capitalist production networks. This context necessitates a redefinition of humans, viewing them not solely as social subjects but also as ‘posthuman’ entities interconnected with technological systems. The characters in the novel, viewed through a posthumanist lens, experience social alienation while simultaneously integrating into material and technological systems, thereby blurring the boundary between subject and object as they strive to acclimate to urban life. In urban environments, individuals function as nodes within networks of production, consumption, machinery, and socio-economic relations. Orhan Kemal illustrates the alienation of individuals from themselves and their environments, demonstrating that this process leads to the dissolution of the autonomy and centrality traditionally ascribed to humans, resulting in a more complex, relational, and distributed understanding of subjectivity. This situation is elucidated through a posthumanist analysis focused on comprehending individuals’ interactions with non-human entities, such as machines, factories, and urban environments. The novel depicts a multi-layered transformation process of the individual, positioned within social settings and extending beyond anthropocentric subjectivity, encompassing technology, urban environments, and ecological considerations.

On the other hand, although one of the pioneering figures in 19th-century English literature, E. Gaskell's writing adheres to Victorian norms; she typically presents her narratives as criticisms of prevailing presumptions. Her initial writings concentrate on the sociological study of her time and industrial labour in the Midlands. She often underscores the significance of women, with intricate plots and authentic female characters. Gaskell's *North and South* centres on the changes prompted by the Industrial Revolution within social, economic, and personal parameters. The novel portrays a narrative set in a world influenced by industrial capitalism, wherein individual identities, senses of belonging, and human experiences are reconfigured. The novel, when assessed through a posthumanist perspective, presents humans as entities intricately connected to complex relationships with technology, the environment, and the economy. The main conflict in the novel is the tension between the working class and the employer class, shaped by the conditions of industrial capitalism in Milton. From the point of view of posthumanism, this tension is not just a class conflict; it also represents a new way of living in which the anthropocentric order falls apart, tying people into industrial systems. Gaskell demonstrates that industrial machines function not only as instruments of production but also as entities that shape human experience. Factory environments, along with the machines and the workers operating them, represent a system in which the distinctions between subject and object are obscured. The worker figures function as posthuman extensions of the machines operating in harmony with their rhythm. The migration of the novel's protagonist, Margaret Hale, from the pastoral environment of the South to the industrial turmoil of the North, may be viewed as both a spatial shift and a movement from an anthropocentric perspective to a more intricate posthumanist awareness. In examining Milton's technological and economic framework, Margaret recognises that humanity's perceived supremacy over nature is a misconception; rather, she perceives humans as entities engaged in ongoing interactions with technological systems and environmental factors. The industrial landscape of the North introduces a new value system that reflects humanity's evolving relationship with technology. This value system repositions humanity from a position of mastery over technology to one of integration within these networks. In this particular setting, the study attempts to present a comparative posthumanist analysis of the two mentioned literary works from distinct cultures, emphasising the disintegration of anthropocentric subjectivity and the transformation of humans in industrial and urban environments.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN HUMAN AND MACHINE

Orhan Kemal's *On Fertile Lands*, the novel that established his literary reputation and drew inspiration from the lives of factory and land laborers, presents us with an objectified human. The novel addresses the migration of rural individuals who, deprived of livelihoods in their agricultural communities due to industrialisation, relocate to urban areas in pursuit of a new way of life and their

ensuing attempts to adapt there. These individuals grapple with the urban environment, which appears chaotic, leading to their alienation from society and human virtues, as well as a dislocation of ethical values (Oruç, 2020). In the novel that highlights how mechanisation affects the human body, the author describes İflahsızın Yusuf and his friends' working conditions in a factory after migrating to the city for work:

All of the machinery began up, rattling the flooring and walls. There was a constant, gritty shaking throughout. The head farmhand was randomly hitting the workers with his stick. The workshop soon reached maximum capacity. The ginner was consuming handfuls of seeded cotton and vomiting up cotton as white as tallow in handfuls. The "Cotton" lads, the eldest of whom was eleven or twelve years old, were running barefoot, their clothing tattered, carrying handfuls of cotton to the square hole in the giant vice, as if they were playing. (Kemal, 2008)

Orhan Kemal's narrative depicts Yusuf and his companions as 'hybrid entities' who have become extensions of the machinery, thereby losing their human attributes, as do the other laborers in Çukurova. From a posthumanist viewpoint, this depiction represents an environment in which human individuality converges with machinery. This aligns with Donna Haraway's concept of the 'cyborg' from *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Haraway posits that humanity is currently undergoing a transition to a multiform information system in which all facets of life are imbued with technological and scientific advancements, thereby erasing all category distinctions: "the dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically" (1990). The aforementioned argument encourages discussions that redefine the nature of existence, thereby fostering "the articulation of humans with intelligent machines" (Hayles, 1999) and perceiving humans as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon. The transformation is intrinsically linked to the human-machine interaction examined by posthumanist theory and the reconfiguration of the body within a technological context. Hayles asserts that posthumanism requires reconsideration of the connection between our bodies and the computer. She argues that technological interventions are transcending the biological confines of the human body, resulting in an increased integration of humans with mechanical systems (Hayles, 1999). In this sense, the novel prominently draws attention to the tension between humans and machines, particularly in the moment when the three companions encounter the unfamiliar factory environment. Yusuf, who bewilderedly observes as humans undergo a transformation into 'parts' that move in accordance with the machine's rhythm, is oblivious that he will soon become a part of the same wheel:

The three companions were shocked, as if they had been hit, as they entered an air with a loud rattling sound and cotton dust flying around—something they had never experienced before. Almost everything here was trembling

and twisting [...]; loud noises came from the cotton gins, which were powered by the powerful shaking of the flywheels next to them; and the dust clusters, dusty walls, floorboards, and dust flying in the air were all shaking. Young and elderly women, girls, and children sat [...] as 'balls' of the machines, ensuring that the cotton with seeds between the cylinders was entirely consumed by the balls. [...] the machine would be able to separate the cotton from the seeds more simply, rapidly, and 'efficiently.' (Kemal, 2008)

The factory area portrayed by the author illustrates the posthuman intersection where human labour and mechanical efficiency fuse. The trembling, twisting machines swallow cotton with mechanical precision, indicating a process where humans and machines co-produce value. In this context, human identity is redefined—not as a separate, independent entity—but as an integral component of an interconnected existence influenced by the constant rhythm and requirements of industrial machinery. Such circumstances compel us to reconsider human identity not in contrast to machines but in connection with the forces that shape and maintain life in its diverse manifestations.

Furthermore, the novel's depiction of humans functioning as industrial workers, integrated with machines, results in their behaviour resembling that of machines, so rendering them 'posthuman' in a particular setting. This new form alienates individuals from human emotions, transforming them into an extension of the machine in a world stripped of basic human conditions. This sort of individual, transformed into 'semi-mechanical beings,' is subjected to a life in which even fundamental human necessities such as sanitation, nourishment and rest are disregarded: "He had been working hard and hadn't even been able to pee. The inability to pee, the head farmhand's constant control, the rattling of the machinery, the dust... his throat was itchy, his eyes were burning" (Kemal, 2008). Alternatively, as stated in the quote, the head farmhand, who was reducing the workers' rest time, "looked at the haymaker—the workers who were working beyond human capacity—without seeing" (Kemal, 2008). Eventually, in an attempt to keep up with the machine's pace, Pehlivan Ali tragically loses his life due to blood loss when his arm gets caught in the haymaker: "[P]ehlivan Ali's huge body disappeared among the piled-up bundles. Then there was a scream, a tremendous crack that shook the roof, and the work stopped" (Kemal, 2008). From this perspective, the transformation is intrinsically linked to the human-machine interaction examined by posthumanist theory and the reconfiguration of the body within a technological context. Hayles asserts in her article "How We Became Posthuman" that posthumanism necessitates a revaluation of the connection between our bodies and the computer. Hayles argues that technological interventions are transcending the biological confines of the human body, resulting in an increased integration of people with mechanical systems. (Hayles, 1999) In this context, the factory workers in Kemal's novel might

be regarded as ‘posthuman’ entities who operate machinery while adapting to the rhythm, logic, and mechanisms of the machines.

In a like manner, Rosi Braidotti asserts in *The Posthuman* that the posthuman subject surpasses the anthropocentric viewpoint, highlighting how humans are influenced by networks and connections with non-human entities, including machines, animals, and artificial intelligence (Braidotti, 2013). In *On Fertile Lands*, the interaction between workers and machines constitutes not only a component of the production process; it also transforms individuals into semi-mechanical and “complex and relational entit[ies] whose boundaries are permeable and extend materially to the natural and technological environment” (2013) inside this relational framework. Braidotti’s conceptualisation of this change challenges the anthropocentric perception of existence while also underlining the system of abuse and mistreatment imposed on these laborers. Consequently, Kemal’s workers in the novel exemplify a state of being characterised by indistinct borders, as delineated by posthumanism, existing in a realm that is neither entirely human nor wholly mechanical. This being serves as an extension of the machine, simultaneously becoming alienated from the fundamental values and desires that characterise humans, presenting a dramatic depiction of a reality in which existence is reconfigured within a capitalist and industrial context.

In the same vein, the chapters in Gaskell’s *North and South*, depicting industrial life in Milton, are particularly noteworthy in relation to posthumanism. The female protagonist, Margaret, moves from a rural and agricultural environment to an industrial setting, meticulously observing the impact of machinery on the working class and societal changes. The polluted air from the industries grabs attention throughout the town, underscoring the initial impacts of mechanisation on humanity; “the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke; perhaps, after all, more a loss of the fragrance of grass and herbage than any positive taste or smell” (Gaskell, 1994). The industrial revolution has shaped a shifting environment that reflects the transformation of human-machine interaction in nature. The phrase ‘the faint taste and smell of smoke’ in the quotation underscores the role of mechanisation in human existence, highlighting it as an industrial progression and a loss of sensory engagement with nature. From a posthumanist perspective, the link between humanity and technological innovation initiates environmental deterioration and destroys the biological and emotional balance between humans and nature. Human-machine interaction, in which we are “ontologically embedded in a thick web of relations with both human and non-human others” (Braidotti, 2013), is more than just a change in how things look. It’s also a way of rethinking what nature means to humans and how it affects them.

Equally significant are Mrs. Hale’s and her maid’s observations of the industrial town of Milton: “[A]re we to live here? asked Mrs. Hale, in blank dismay [...] indeed, ma’am, I’m sure it will be your death long before, and then I know who’ll — stay! Miss Hale, that’s far too heavy for you to lift.” (Gaskell, 1994) or “[a]

continual smell of steam, and oily machinery—and the noise is perfectly deafening” (Gaskell, 1994) are descriptions of the industrial town of Milton by the new inhabitants. Furthermore, Mrs. Shaw describes Milton, urging Margaret to leave there immediately: “It was noisy, and smoky, and the poor people whom she saw in the streets were dirty, and the rich ladies over-dressed, and not a man that she saw, high or low, had his clothes made to fit him” (Gaskell, 1994). In this context, Mrs. Shaw’s observations of Milton clearly reflect the transforming impact of industrialisation on societal and individual existence. The city’s ‘noisy’ and ‘smoky’ characteristics indicate that industrial centres harm human life by degrading the physical environment, while the juxtaposition of the ‘dirty poor’ and the ‘excessively ornamented rich women’ on the streets implies that industrialisation complicates the distinction between social classes. Moreover, the assertion that no man, upper or lower, possesses a properly tailored suit illustrates the erosion of human identity and aesthetic ideals due to the homogenising and mechanistic influences of industry. This image indicates that industrialisation is an agent that transforms both the physical surroundings of individuals and their social contexts and personal identities.

In this regard, the novel aligns with Nayar’s posthumanism argument, which posits the “radical decentring of the traditional sovereign, coherent and autonomous human in order to demonstrate how the human is always already evolving with, constituted by, and constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines” (Nayar, 2014). In the novel, the role of human labour in the mechanisation process and the working class’s struggle with this transformation aligns with Nayar’s posthumanist perspective, wherein humans abandon their autonomous and central status to engage in mutually beneficial relationships with machines and other life forms. The novel’s industrial landscapes reflect the shifts in the working class due to human-machine interaction, while characters like Margaret Hale embody the attempts of humans to adjust to a new existence influenced by social, economic, and technical factors.

Furthermore, in *South and North*, Gaskell portrays machines as a sign of economic advancement while also exposing their negative effects on the working class, in line with Braidotti’s discussion of technology’s influence on human experience. John Thornton, the factory owner in the story, endeavours to perceive technology not as a means for replacing humans but as a component that harmonises with human labour. Nonetheless, this initiative neither entirely eradicates the conflicts between machines and workers, nor the risk that machines would marginalize human labour. Bessy’s following statements affirm the corrosive effect of the symbiotic relationship between machine and human:

[e]ndless noise, and sickening heat. [...] It’s sometimes in heavy rain, and sometimes in bitter cold. A young person can stand it; but an old man gets racked with rheumatism, and bent and withered before his time; yet he must just work on the same, or else go to the workhouse. (Gaskell, 1994)

Workers, presented as extensions of the machine, are regarded as mechanistic entities devoid of human necessities. This situation indicates a posthumanist connection that requires the continual revision of the boundaries between humans and machines, as articulated by Haraway in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, where she identifies cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (1991). In this respect, the novel depicts the interdependence of human-machine interaction, particularly via the perpetual engagement of looms and manufacturing machinery with the actual presence of workers.

Furthermore, worker resistance against machinery accords with Andrew Feenberg’s argument that technology serves not just as an instrument of oppression but also as a centre of social resistance. Thus, establishing a theoretical framework through the *Critical Theory of Technology*, Feenberg posits that technology and society mutually influence one another. He asserts, “What human beings are and will become is determined by the configuration of our tools as much as by the actions of statesmen and political movements. The creation of technology is therefore an ontological choice laden with political implications” (2023). Based on Feenberg’s view, Gaskell’s depiction of the challenges faced by laborers and the ‘dehumanising’ impact of machinery suggests that technology is shaped by political and social forces rather than being neutral. In this context, Gaskell’s narrative criticizes the effects of technology while underscoring society’s obligation to forge new connections between technology and humans. The manner in which the machines in the novel transform the bodies and identities of workers clearly corroborates Feenberg’s argument of a mutual relationship between technology and humanity. Mr. Thornton gives a confession that distinctly clarifies the conditions of factory workers forced to keep up with the pace of machinery, as perceived by the manufacturers: “[e]arly manufacturers did ride to the devil in a magnificent style—crushing human bone and flesh under their horses’ hoofs without remorse. But by and by came a reaction; there were more factories, more masters; more men were wanted” (Gaskell). Consequently, *North and South* establishes a realm where the distinctions between humans and machines are constantly reinterpreted through conflict and collaboration while examining the consequences of advances in technology on humanity; thus, it serves as a significant resource for posthumanist interpretations.

RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Both Kemal’s *On Fertile Lands* and Gaskell’s *North and South* contribute to a distinct discourse that presents a world where human connections are being examined in regards to social classes and economic systems. Kemal, regarded as the narrator of ‘subaltern,’ addresses the processes of disintegration and the experienced conflicts of those who have relocated from rural areas to urban environments in *On Fertile Lands* (Uyar, 2015). In this regard, it is clearly depicted how “[d]rawn to the city like ants from the rich lands of Çukurova, the farmhands worked hard to assemble there at the farmhand market in Taşköprü” (Kemal, 2008). People who

leave rural areas to live in cities where factories are located in search of work are not only a part of the mechanical production process, but they are also at the centre of the class divisions that the capitalist system keeps up. In this regard, *On Fertile Lands* “clearly reveals this changing face of the settlement type city that emerged in modern times” (Gültekin, 2006). The novel narrates the dire circumstances of those subjected to severe labour conditions in the factories and vast fields of Çukurova, struggling with survival within the social class disparities established by mechanisation that stimulate capitalist tendencies. The urbanising individuals are those who succumb to the isolating and corrosive nature of urban existence. The city is a locale where women face rape and harassment, individuals reside in animal shelters, landlords and governors indulge in luxury, while labourers are oppressed and scorned (Uyar, 2015). This is best illustrated in the following passage:

People with split lips, froth in their mouths, fatigued, and disappointed were about to get the price for their week's labour. Their eyes were sunken, and their faces were wrinkled and dark. One of the labourers, trembling with fever, would periodically leave the group and collapse on the edge of a ditch or behind a dark-shaded tree. Nobody was in a position to aid anybody else. The rest were left behind. Those who die will die, and those who can leave will do so! (Kemal, 2008)

The aforementioned statement, which starkly reflects class differences, prompts the application of critical posthumanism. The traditional conception of the human body as a site for enacting posthuman discourses is challenged by critical posthumanism, the theory that investigates the fluid, flexible embodiment of the posthuman. Critical posthumanism focuses on the intersection of bodies, discourses, and discourses of bodies. It accounts for the comprehensive impact of contemporary social, political, and technological paradigm shifts on the concept of the human. Rather than establishing itself as ‘after’ humanism, critical posthumanism deconstructs it. In addition to focusing on decentring the human in relation to ecological, technological, or evolutionary coordinates, it also critiques humanism, preserving some of its ideals and goals while demonstrating how the ethical and philosophical frameworks that were used to conceptualize them undermine them.

Similarly, Wolfe criticises traditional humanism by emphasising how nonhuman entities and systems modify our comprehension of humanity, advocating for a revaluation of the ethical and philosophical ramifications of our coexistence with other living forms and machines. Wolfe asserts that the posthuman situation is characterized not just by technical advancements but also by the disconnection of these notions from conventional foundations such as “individuality, subjectivity, and consciousness” (Wolfe, 2010). Examination of the novel in that context reveals that the exhausted and despairing condition of the labourers illustrates the materialisation of human labour under the capitalist view and the relentless exhaustion of the human body throughout the production process. The system’s exploitation of workers as ‘others’ signifies not just their individual identities but also their dehumanisation. In

this framework, critical posthumanism challenges the anthropocentric hierarchy, questioning the exploitation and prejudice faced by workers under contemporary capitalism. In the above quotation, the distinction between ‘those who are left’ and ‘those who can leave’ clearly reveals that even survival is a class issue.

Haraway maintains that humans interconnected with technology systems standardise and anonymise human experiences by converting the labour force into a mechanical extension. Migrant workers are compelled to conform to the pace and requirements of machinery, so they are reduced to a distinct social category compared to those who remain outside industrial processes, as Zeynel Ağa states in the novel, “Look at the food; it’s wormy, and the bread is moldy and stale. [...] He employs thirty-five people in a forty-five-person haymaker. We labour twenty hours every day. What’s this? Are we machines?” (Kemal, 2008). The above manifestation also expresses how workers are torn apart by technological systems as they attempt to build solidarity. This is where Jean Baudrillard’s concept of ‘simulation’ comes into play, which describes the argument that technological systems create a simulation that hides the true nature of human relationships (1981). In that respect, rather than being embraced in a real social bond, Yusuf and his friends are trapped in artificial relationships imposed by the production system. The novel demonstrates the dehumanised living conditions of the workers, with descriptions such as “labourers [...] were undressed, killing lice and sewing up their torn pieces” and “a sweating labourer with straw dust in his hair was also rubbing the hole between his right foot’s toes to remove dirt” (Kemal, 2008). Additionally, a female labourer compelled to give birth in a barn “had cut the baby’s umbilical cord with this rusty razor” (Kemal, 2008) demonstrating the severe living conditions depicted in the novel.

Braidotti’s notion of the posthuman subject demonstrates that these workers have not only transformed into instruments of technology but are also embedded as the inferior class inside social structures. In this setting, automation and migrating processes indicate that labour power undergoes economic, social, and technical restructuring. Migrant labourers have a marginal life inside anthropocentric institutions, where exploitation and class disparity are profoundly evident, as highlighted in the excerpt from the novel: “Nothing would happen, he said. They’re like dogs. They get up here, up there, and walk about. Even when you tell them to go to bed, they refuse!” (Kemal, 2008). Labourers integrated into the machine experience dehumanising conditions within the capitalist framework and are often compelled to adopt detrimental habits to cope with the severe working environment. In the novel, the head farmhand articulates his predicament: “He should smoke marijuana so that he can endure the harsh work” (Kemal, 2008). This perspective underscores the capitalist production system’s tendency to view workers solely as resources for exploitation, neglecting their inherent humanity. The incorporation of migrant workers into technological frames worsens their social exclusion, demonstrating a relevant area for posthumanist discourse. Workers should remain

unaware of the inhumane conditions they endure, as articulated in the statement, “Keep the labourers’ eyes closed” (Kemal, 2008). The assertion offers a substantial critique with regard to critical posthumanism and capitalism. This statement indicates that the capitalist system systematically seeks to prevent workers from recognising their circumstances, despite enduring inhumane conditions.

From a critical posthumanist perspective, workers are viewed as both biological entities and extensions of mechanization within production processes, which ultimately transforms them into instruments that serve the capitalist production system. Capitalism commodifies labour and aims to inhibit workers’ consciousness to sustain their exploitation. The expression ‘keeping the eyes closed’ suggests limiting workers’ access to information that limits their ability to question the injustices of their circumstances and to resist the prevailing system. This statement offers a critique of the capitalist system and elucidates its dominance over the working class. Nevertheless, critical posthumanism views the posthuman as a process of becoming, which is perpetually in a state of radical transformation, rather than as a lost or vanishing entity complying with Braidotti’s argument that posits, “Far from being a flight from the real, posthuman thought inscribes the contemporary subject in the conditions of its own historicity” (2017). Braidotti’s posthumanism points out the significance of grasping the complexity of our present period and the interrelationships between human and non-human entities. It encourages a critical and ethical approach to issues such as technological progress, environmental challenges, and global interdependence, calling on individuals to engage actively in crafting a sustainable, equitable future.

In a similar vein, “categorized as an industrial novel” (Kotan Yiğit), Gaskell’s *North and South* portrays the industrial landscape of the North, which introduces a new value system that mirrors humanity’s changing relationship with technology. The novel is particularly amenable to interpretation under the viewpoint of posthumanism, which examines the interplay between technology and humanity as well as the reconfiguration of social relations. In this sense, *North and South* confirms Neil Badmington’s claim that critical posthumanism goes beyond humanist traditions, altering social institutions and redefining humanity within those frameworks. Badmington argues that humanism has perpetually lived inside posthumanism, asserting that posthumanism “repeats humanism [...] in a certain way and with a view to the deconstruction of anthropocentric thought” (2003). He stresses that critical posthumanism endeavours to change both the way we think about things and the way society works, as well as the way people fit into these systems. When analysed from this perspective, *North and South*, similar to *On Fertile Lands*, offers a critical examination of the class differences arising from industrial transformation. Bessy Higgins, a female cotton worker in the novel, expressing an overwhelming desire for death to relieve the suffering induced by cotton spinning, asks Margaret, “Do you consider such a life worth preserving?” This statement (Gaskell, 1994) starkly illustrates the dire situation of the working class. Fluffing during the combing

process causes the prevalent disease among cotton spinners, infiltrating the workers' lungs and resulting in coughing and bleeding. Bessy elucidates to Margaret the reasons for the mill owners' hesitance about handling this issue, which poses a threat to the lives of workers:

Some folk have a great wheel at one end o' their carding-rooms to make a draught, and carry of th' dust; but that wheel costs a deal o' money- five or six hundred pound, maybe, and brings in no profit; so it's but a few of th' masters as will put 'em up; and I've heard tell o' men who didn't like working in places where there was a wheel, because they said as how it made 'em hungry, after they'd been long used to swallowing fluff, to go without it, and that their wage ought to be raised if they were to work in such places. (Gaskell, 1994)

In her novel, Gaskell underscores the impact of industrialisation on the working class, socioeconomic disparities, and capitalist ambitions by employing "a range of perspectives and contrasts in order to create complexity in the depiction of the contemporary relationship between industrialism and classes" (Lindfors, 2022). From the standpoint of critical posthumanism, in the aforementioned quote, the author stresses the integration of the human body into the capitalist production system as though it were a mechanical component. Workers have become accustomed to inhaling 'fluff' (cotton dust), thereby normalising their existence within a hazardous environment and coming to perceive even minimally improved working conditions as a rare privilege. This reflects a posthumanist critique in which the human is no longer defined solely by biological or individual traits but also through entanglement with industrial processes and technical infrastructures. This dehumanising dynamic is further manifested in the structural disintegration of communal ties within industrial towns: "in the industrial towns, the difference between the working-class and the rich capitalists is so great and the distribution of the economic welfare is so unfair that, they exist in the same town completely as strangers" (Uysal, 2021). The significant social alienation demonstrates how economic disparities, powered by capitalist production, transform urban areas into fragmented and isolating settings, therefore worsening the marginalization of the working class.

Accordingly, Kittler and Virilio's concept of 'technological determinism' emphasises that machines transform social structures; as he asserts, "[w]e should slowly let go of that old dream of sociologists, the one that says society is only made up of human beings" (Kittler & Virilio, 2001). The novel indicates that the industrial revolution not only accelerated manufacturing processes but also revolutionised worker-employer interactions and class dynamics. It is also highlighted that machines transformed the conventional interaction between humans and nature, diminished the association of production with the natural world, and rendered humanity's relationship with the environment more mechanical and alienated. Considering this, a significant class disparity has arisen between the profit-oriented

strategies of employers and the welfare of workers, as their living conditions and health have been subordinated to capital accumulation. “Theirs is a war of resistance against dehumanizing industrial capitalism.” (2019), writes Erdem Ayyıldız in her paper “An Evaluation of Proto-Feminism in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford*.” Gaskell critiques industrial capitalism by accurately portraying the living conditions of the working class and class disputes in her writings, highlighting a system that diminishes human connections to just economic interests. The seemingly subdued yet robust resistance of the female characters in Gaskell’s novels may be interpreted as an attempt to uphold social conscience and human dignity in the face of a decaying society.

In this context, Higgins in the novel recognises the immediate realities surrounding him, particularly the daily injustices faced by himself and his fellow factory workers, and asserts: “[W]hen I see the world [...] bothering itself wi’ things it knows naught about, and leaving undone all the things that lie in disorder close at its hand - why, I say, leave a’ this talk about religion alone, and set to work on what yo’ see and know” (Gaskell, 1994). Similarly, the language depicting the unhealthy and distressing conditions of the working class, exemplified in the expression, “Their nerves are quickened by the haste and bustle and speed of everything around them, to say nothing of the confinement in these pent-up houses, which of itself is enough to induce depression and worry for spirits” (Gaskell, 1994), can also be interpreted as an affirmation of the ideas stressed by critical posthumanism throughout the study.

Furthermore, the alcohol consumption among the working class is often analysed in relation to the industrial revolution. The rapid industrialisation, coupled with urbanisation and demanding working conditions, led to an increase in alcohol consumption among workers. Alcohol frequently served as a way for workers to escape and relax from the challenges of daily life. Some studies have established a relationship between alcohol consumption and economic exploitation, identifying it as a mechanism within the capitalist system for controlling the working class. Karl Marx’s concept of ‘alienation’ offers a theoretical framework to assess workers’ alcohol consumption as a method of escape or relaxation in response to difficult working conditions. Alienation theory suggests that labourer loses autonomy and life direction when he loses the right to direct his actions and his labour “becomes a power on its own confronting him” (Marx, 1975). The bourgeoisie leads workers toward goals and activities that maximize surplus value in business competition among industrialists. In this regard, the working class’s relationship with alcohol is similarly depicted in *North and South*. Bessy’s father, Higgins, sought solace in alcohol during a crisis, which ultimately led to his alcoholism. The weak girl, who was quite distressed by this situation, urges Mary and Margaret to “keep father fro’ drink” (Gaskell, 1994) after her death. Higgins exhibits coercive, even cruel, behaviour sometimes and asserts that alcohol is “the only comfort left” (Gaskell, 1994). In *North and South*, Higgins’ relationship with alcohol serves as both a means of personal escape and a response to the dehumanising effects of industrial

capitalism, which reduces workers to mere functional tools. Critical posthumanism, in conjunction with Karl Marx's theory of alienation (Marx, 1975), assesses Higgins' alcohol addiction as a result of the intricate interplay between humans, their bodies, their environments, and supra-human forces including machines, systems, and the economy.

Likewise, in *On Fertile Lands*, alcohol addiction is one of the strategies applied to maintain labourers' enslavement. Factory owners and foremen promote alcohol consumption among labourers to help them cope with difficult working conditions and to keep them from becoming aware of their situation. Exhausted and powerless workers numb themselves with alcohol in the evenings in order to get a brief solace from their terrible circumstances instead of challenging them. This condition guarantees the continuance of exploitation and acts as a control mechanism preventing workers from organising and demanding their rights. In this sense, the system renders workers mindless and compliant while physically and psychologically oppressing them.

As a consequence, both novels illustrate the dominance of industrial capitalism over human bodies and labour while also addressing the mechanisation and devaluation of humans within the framework of critical posthumanism. In both novels, workers are reduced to entities whose physical strength is assessed solely with respect to production, while their mental and emotional dimensions are overlooked. This illustrates that within the posthumanist framework, humans are not merely biological beings but also serve as instrumentalised components within economic and technological systems. As a result, by interrogating the centrality of humans, the novels demonstrate how capitalist production relations diminish human essence and, from a posthumanist viewpoint, obscure their distinctions.

CONCLUSION

From a posthumanist perspective, Gaskell's *North and South* and Kemal's *On Fertile Lands* scrutinise the complex relationship between humans and machines within industrial and capitalist frameworks. These novels deconstruct anthropocentric notions, highlighting the collapse of the human-machine dichotomy and demonstrating the integration of human labour into technology and economic paradigms. Considering this, *North and South* examines the economic and social shifts prompted by industrialisation, emphasising the reconfiguration of human identity and relationships in a mechanical world. The novel depicts the industrial town of Milton as a microcosm of posthumanist conflict, portraying workers as automated extensions of industry systems. Through the exploration of posthumanist perspectives, Gaskell analyses the exploitation embedded in capitalist structures, exposing the dehumanisation and alienation experienced by workers. The novel depicts the constant interaction between humans and technology, highlighting

the collapse of established hierarchies and providing an in-depth analysis of industrialization's societal consequences.

On Fertile Lands similarly explores the relationship between humans and machines through the viewpoint of rural migration and industrial labour. The novel effectively depicts the transformation of workers into hybrid beings, embodying Haraway's cyborg metaphor and emphasising the vulnerable status of labourers under capitalist systems. Kemal addresses the exploitation and marginalisation of the working class, contributing to critical posthumanist discourse and challenging the ethical consequences of industrial and technological progress on human life.

Both novels highlight the significant consequences of industrialisation and technological integration for humankind, transcending anthropocentric narratives to expose the interrelationships between humans, machines, and socio-economic systems. They overlap with critical posthumanism's critique of conventional humanist beliefs, promoting a relational and holistic comprehension of existence in a progressively mechanical and networked world. These literary analyses criticise the disparities of industrial capitalism and contribute to ongoing discussions regarding the ethical, social, and environmental consequences of posthumanist contexts. Consequently, both novels address the symbiotic relationship between humans and machines, highlighting the transformation of humans into posthumans, which eliminates their hierarchical superiority. However, when viewed through the lens of critical posthumanism, the novels highlight how posthumanism, which some scholars regard as an extension of humanism, still perpetuates and even exacerbates social class discrimination among individuals.

Consequently, while both *North and South* and *On Fertile Lands* discuss the effects of industrialisation and technology based on critical posthumanist ideas, they show clear differences due to their specific social, cultural, and historical backgrounds. *North and South* depicts the early phases of the Industrial Revolution in nineteenth-century England, particularly the emergence of factory-based mechanised labour and its impact on the urban working class. Gaskell portrays the machine as a crucial component of industrial capitalism, representing both technical advancement and the dehumanisation and class struggle inherent in a strictly hierarchical society.

Conversely, *On Fertile Lands* portrays the mechanisation of agriculture in mid-twentieth-century rural Turkey, where industrialisation remains in its initial phases. The technical shift occurring here focuses not on factory machinery but on the use of novel farming implements and capitalist production relations that undermine conventional community lifestyles. Orhan Kemal's narrative displays the emergence of the human-machine connection within a context characterised by poverty, migration, and survival struggles, offering a distinct perspective on posthumanist critique. These distinctions underscore the contextual uniqueness of the posthumanist implications in each of them. Both novels question humanist

assumptions while investigating the interplay between human and nonhuman agencies, yet they employ distinct representational strategies and address distinct social issues. Gaskell addresses it via the tensions of industrial urban life, whereas Kemal examines the displacement and exploitation of rural labourers.

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