

***Posthümanizm: Kavram, Kuram, Bilim-Kurgu*, by Başak Ağın, Ankara, Siyasal Kitabevi, 2020, pp. 244, ₺58,50 (paperback), ISBN: 9786057877703.**

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Başak Ağın's *Posthumanism: Concept, Theory, Science-Fiction* (2020) is an ambitious work of literary and cultural studies whose primary aim is “to give a holistic view of posthumanism to Turkish academia by introducing the theoretical framework of the theory” as well as “to scrutinise the intertwined nature of literature, media, and culture exemplifying from the fields of philosophy and science, thus concretise the theoretical dimension of posthumanism”¹ (1). With that purpose, Ağın rejects the sequence of binaries that have shaped Western liberal humanist thought and explores the intricate relationships between humans and other species, all of which she believes possess agency. Based on the necessity of reconsidering human beings in relation to other biological species and synthetic-robotic-plastic bodies, this monograph is, therefore, a call to the human species. Setting out with the critique of the anthropocentric point of view, Ağın deconstructs the established claims about the essence of being human. The reader witnesses not reversing the dualities, but ‘imploding’ them in order to understand the dynamic networks and “intra-actions,” in Karen Barad’s words (128), of human, non-human, and synthetic bodies. In this respect, Ağın’s monograph is a journey to theory, fiction, and history merged on a philosophical questioning, thus, not a strict answer but an inquisitive discourse on posthuman possibilities.

The first chapter, titled “Roots and Journey: A Brief History of Posthumanism and Its Concepts,” presents the history of posthumanist theory in a precise but comprehensive way by illuminating complicated concepts Turkish readers might not be thoroughly familiar with. In this sense, Ağın’s monograph is significant since she introduces many

¹ Translations from Turkish to English belong to the author.

concepts of posthumanism with clear explanations to familiarise the reader with the terminology. Without losing our connection within the net of posthumanist concepts, we read about the basic arguments of posthumanism. In the first subchapter, “From Prometheus to Neo: Our Mythological and Science-Fictional Relationships with Posthumanism, Transhumanism, and Technology,” Ađın scrutinises the posthuman turn, a deviation from humanism regarding its relationship with technological developments accelerated in the twentieth century but resulted in the questioning of the supremacy of human beings in the universe. It is impressive for the contemporary reader that Ađın does not take sides with anti-technological nostalgic discourses; however, she distinguishes the inevitable interdependency between the species, especially between human beings and robotics. That is a significant point where Ađın evaluates two highly confused concepts that are incorrectly used interchangeably: transhumanism and posthumanism. Thus, this introductory part discusses how transhumanism is the antagonist of posthumanism by surviving solely on technological development. Ađın comments on transhumanism as another form of liberal humanism that holds the duality of body and mind, though in a diverted version. By referring to the primary conceptualising studies on posthumanism, Ađın sheds light on the similarities and differences between liberal humanism, posthumanism, and transhumanism, which makes the reader familiar with many significant theorists such as Katherine Hayles, Francesca Ferrando, Pramod K. Nayar, Donna J. Haraway, Stefan Herbrechter, Cary Wolfe, William J. Mitchell, N. Katherine Hayles, and Nick Bostrom. The core of this section discusses posthumanism as a radical turn from liberal humanism and transhumanism. It appreciates the deconstruction of the agency of human beings and locates it within an entanglement with other species: a way to ‘becoming.’

The second subchapter, “From Potato to the Light: The Oneness of Rhizome, the Duality of Dichotomies, and the Plurality of Posthumanism,” takes the dualistic nature of Western liberal humanist thought conceived in the Renaissance period and reinforced by the Age of Enlightenment as the fundamental problem for posthumanism which collaborates with poststructuralist tendencies. Ađın weaves the critical insights of contemporary poststructuralist theories such as postcolonialism, ecocriticism, postcolonial ecocriticism, material ecocriticism, and ecofeminism with posthumanism to propose it as a comprehensive and plural theory comprising all these. Referring to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Ađın uses the concept of rhizome as a metaphor for the plural, multiple, detached, and heterogeneous, but still, rhizome-like connected organisms in posthumanist thought. Shifting the focus from the contemporary philosophical discussion to the ancient mystical poet Mewlana Jalaluddin Rumi, Ađın strikingly takes us to Rumi’s symbol of ‘light’ as an analogy for the posthumanist unity “that passes through multiplicity” (53).

The last subchapter of this part, “From *Ens* to *Asbestos*: The Eroding of Hierarchal Chain of Being and Unraveling of Naturecultures,” draws extensively on transhumanism developing as “an extreme edge of posthumanism” (56) and its relation to bioliberalism

and bioconservatism which are situated in the centre of bioethical discussions about equality, autonomy, pain, and justice. Questioning transhumanism and bioconservatism based on their attachment to the supposed essence of human beings, Ađın reveals how posthumanism is distinct in combining nature and technology (culture) without preferring one to the other. The main assertions of this part propose that if there is any essence of human beings, it is not a transcendent element solely attributed to human nature but an entangled feature inherited from other species, human, non-human, and even synthetic beings in the universe. Ađın concludes the part on the theoretical background by summarising the posthumanist tendency to stand against the ‘Chain of Being’—adopted by either transhumanism or bioconservatism—and the binaries of mind/body, culture/nature, and text/matter. The claims of the scholars such as Haraway and Bruno Latour about the naturecultures and the agency of non-humans have been fascinatingly explored by Ađın to strengthen the idea of the complex interrelations between humans and non-humans to which the rest of the book is devoted.

The second main chapter, “Posthumanism in Science-Fiction: Literary and Cultural Analyses,” scrutinises posthumanist theory by exploring the genre of science fiction in many fields, from literature to film studies. The first subchapter, “Who is Human and Who is Monster? Posthumanist Questioning in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” extensively takes the reader’s attention by combining theory with a well-known science-fiction text. Ađın consolidates the ontology of the posthuman condition by analysing Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as a portrayal of the immoral and problematic status of the human being who establishes the dichotomy of *bios/zoē* embodied in the character of Dr Frankenstein and the monster, respectively. In this subchapter, Ađın maintains how anthropocentrism constitutes the central conflict of Shelley’s novel and how Shelley manifests a posthumanist approach in narrative and content, attributing agency to the monster as much as to its human creator. To Ađın, the novel’s anthropocentric agents, Walton and Dr Frankenstein, epitomise the *bios* prioritised in the dichotomy of human/monster, subject/object, mind/body, and culture/nature. Ađın also reads *Frankenstein* as a depiction of the god complex that reminds us of the transhumanist approach and is problematised by Shelley, who anticipates the “anomaly and absurdity” engendered by obsessed rationality, objectivity, and scientific development (100).

This subchapter strikingly develops the connections between new materialism, material ecocriticism, and posthumanism that disregard the absolute agency of the human being by attributing agency and activity to nature and its elements. In this sense, the discussion compels us to ask: “Who is the human and who is the non-human, or the monster in *Frankenstein*?” By proposing the ethical necessity for taking responsibility for non-human subjects, Ađın comments on *Frankenstein* as a discourse of eroding the borders between the centre and the peripheries, humanness and monstrosity, which could be expanded to the issues of race, class, and gender. Ađın’s last remark on Shelley’s monster as a representative of “posthuman becoming” that deconstructs the master/slave dichotomy is noteworthy considering posthuman possibilities.

The second subchapter combines the intimate story of Ađın’s childhood teddy bear named “Memoş” with Brian Aldiss’s story “Supertoys Last All Summer Long” on the basis of the entangled relationships between humans, animals, and all ‘companion species.’ Titled “Teddy versus Anthropos: Necro-Robo-Politics in Brian Aldiss’s ‘Supertoys Last All Summer Long,’” the bulk of the chapter is devoted to explaining and exemplifying the theories of Haraway, Latour, Barad, and Diana Coole. Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” and “The Companion Species Manifesto,” Latour’s “Actor-Network Theory,” Barad’s “Intra-active Entanglements,” and Coole’s “Agentic Capacities” are illustrated in such a plain and well-constructed narration that even the reader unfamiliar with these theories can get into the discussion without being lost in theory. Based on these theories, Ađın reveals the need for a call to revise the human being’s relationship with companion species, including organic and inorganic bodies, which are claimed to have agency and meaning in the posthumanist approach. The common point of the theories Ađın highlights is the entanglement of the stories embodied in human and non-human bodies, which is depicted in a very concrete and enjoyable way through the writer’s relationship with her teddy bear.

By shifting the focus to the literary analysis, Ađın rests her posthumanist claims on the example of human beings’ companionship with AI. Using Aldiss’s science-fiction story primarily, though not limited to it, she takes us through the discussion of the human being not as a single and absolute actor of the universe but as a combination of various actants that have a close interaction. Ađın illustrates, with striking examples from the story, how Aldiss problematizes the dichotomy of *bios/zoë* that results in the lack of love and intimacy between the species. By claiming that as binary oppositions have connectivity, they should be evaluated together, the story is depicted as a significant criticism of the human-centred approach exploiting nature in every aspect and as an example of questioning the ethical responsibility of creating robotics. By referring to Timothy Morton’s *Dark Ecology*, which illuminates our place in the biosphere and revises our connection to non-human beings, Ađın claims the hierarchy between natural beings and technologically or culturally produced ones is destined to be shattered because the biopolitics, whose rules are established by human beings, has been paving the way for the corruption of all species. In this sense, she concludes this chapter, once more reminding Aldiss’s concerns about the destructive necro-robo-politics of human beings that need further attention in our century.

As the title of the last subchapter suggests, “May the Force Be with You: The Journey of Posthuman Subject from Absence to Plurality,” Ađın reserves this part for the discussion of a worldwide famous science-fiction narrative, *Star Wars*, which harbours posthumanist concerns. She provides an excellent overview of science-fiction, a genre that appeared as a discourse against white, male, heterosexual, and sovereign power and voiced the fight by the otherised and marginalised subjects. Especially by reminding us of the significance of feminist science-fiction, which has laid the groundwork for the representation of pluralities, Ađın evaluates *Star Wars* in terms of ecofeminism, material

feminism, and new materialism that are situated under posthumanism as an umbrella theory. Initially, she makes the andro- and anthropocentric approaches in the first parts of the series visible through specific examples. She later depicts how *Star Wars* changes course on behalf of the diversity and mutuality of the companion species.

For Ađın, the biological and robotic diversity depicted in the *Expanded Universe of Star Wars* exemplifies the posthumanist inclusive plurality—Leia and some other female characters are representatives of the empowering female subject who deconstructs the binary oppositions of andro/anthropocentric worlds. Ađın defines this transformation as the eroding of Anthropos, which she claims to be inherently androcentric and speciesist, by the rise of women and/or non-human beings, animals, and robotic bodies that represent the *zoë* and can combine reason and emotion contrary to the pure reason-oriented approach of the male characters. She discusses the posthumanist turn in the *Star Wars* series and its adaptations in terms of the claims of material feminists such as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, who reconsider the significance of the materiality, agency, and entanglement of the posthuman world. As a last word on *Star Wars*, Ađın accepts the philosophy behind this narrative as a feminist, pluralist, new materialist, and posthumanist ‘power.’ The final point in this part is striking: the ethical need to accept our age as “the age of *zoë*” (202), which requires accepting energy or power or resistance that is not lost but collected and moved among organic and inorganic actants.

Başak Ađın’s *Posthumanism: Concept, Theory, Science-Fiction* is a well-constructed study on epistemology, ontology, and ethics of posthumanism, combining theory with science-fiction in literary, film, and cultural studies. Her analysis of posthumanism in various texts, in reference to multiple theories, is based on rigorous research. Ađın’s language, satiric and humorous from time to time, pushes the reader to delve into posthumanism and its concepts by feeling joy throughout the reading process. Furthermore, I believe this book is quite remarkable for the reader because of its sincere concerns. It is a call from a posthumanist academic who frets about the possibilities of the universe with or without us. The second edition, published in 2022, indicates that her call is well-received by the reader sharing the same concerns.

Work Cited

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