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Mind, Machine, and Emotion in Richard Powers' Novels: Galatea 2.2 and Playground

Richard Powers'ın Eserlerinde Zihin, Makine ve Duygu: Galatea 2.2 ve Playground

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the American author Richard Powers' two significant novels, Galatea 2.2 (1995) and Playground (2024), written in different technological eras, from a comparative perspective. The primary objective of the research is to reveal how human-machine interaction and the perception of artificial intelligence have transformed in literary texts during the process spanning from the 1990s vision of Good Old-Fashioned Artificial Intelligence (GOFAI) to the 2020s reality of Large Language Models (LLMs) and generative AI. As a methodology, the posthumanist approaches of Rosi Braidotti, N. Katherine Hayles, and Donna Haraway are taken as a basis, and a thematic analysis of the texts is conducted through the concepts of embodiment, and agency. The findings of the study indicate that in Galatea 2.2, AI is conceptualized as a "life companion" trained via a top-down approach, attempting to comprehend human emotions, and hindered by the barrier of disembodiment; conversely, in Playground, AI transforms into a subject that manipulates human behavior through bottom-up data, serves colonialist and capitalist mechanisms, and has completely seized agency. In conclusion, Powers, in these two novels written thirty years apart, successfully problematizes the transition from the humanization of artificial intelligence to the post-anthropocentric stage where the human is reduced to a data point within digital networks.

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Öz

Bu çalışma, Amerikalı yazar Richard Powers'ın farklı teknolojik dönemlerde kaleme aldığı iki önemli romanı olan Galatea 2.2 *(1995) ve* Playground *(2024) yapıtlarını karşılaştırmalı bir perspektifle incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın temel amacı, 1990'ların Yapay Genel Zekâ düşüncesinden, 2020'lerin Büyük Dil Modelleri (LLM) ve üretken yapay zekâ gerçekliğine uzanan süreçte, insan-makine etkileşiminin ve yapay zekâ algısının edebi metinlerde nasıl dönüştüğünü ortaya koymaktır. Yöntem olarak, Rosi Braidotti, N. Katherine Hayles ve Donna Haraway gibi kuramcıların posthümanist yaklaşımları temel alınmış, metinlerdeki bedensellik ve eylemlilik kavramları üzerinden analizi yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları,* Galatea 2.2*'de yapay zekânın yukarıdan aşağıya bir yaklaşımla eğitilen, insani duyguları anlamaya çalışan ve bedensizlik engeline takılan bir "yaşam yoldaşı" olarak kurgulandığını; buna karşın* Playground*'da yapay zekânın aşağıdan yukarıya veri analitiğiyle insan davranışlarını manipüle eden, sömürgeci ve kapitalist mekanizmalara hizmet eden, eylemliliği tamamen ele geçirmiş bir özneye dönüştüğünü göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak Powers, otuz yıllık bir arayla yazdığı bu iki romanda, yapay zekânın insanlaştırılmasından insanın dijital ağlar içinde bir veri noktasına indirgendiği evreye geçişi bu romanlarla örneklemiştir.*

Introduction

Parasocial is chosen as the word for 2025, according to the Cambridge Dictionary. Indeed, it was first introduced in by American sociologists in 1950s, a period of television's growing importance. It was used to describe the one-sided closeness viewers felt toward the people they watched on television, as if it were a real relationship. Today, the term refers to a similar one-sided relationship people feel toward a celebrity they do not know, a fictional character, or even artificial intelligence. The relationship between humans and human-made systems has been a central concern across many fields, from sociology and psychology to cultural studies and media studies due to the latest technological developments. In the twenty-first century, many films, TV series, and media address these topics. Films like *Her* (2013), *Ex Machina* (2014), and *M3GAN* (2023) focus on human-machine relationships. There is a considerable amount of news about cyberlove or people falling in love with ChatGPT in the news. Recent research exhibits new characteristics of this relationship and tries to analyze the reasons behind it: "*ChatGPT excels at understanding human emotional expressions and contextual awareness, enabling it to offer more appropriate responses to users' emotional expressions" (Chen at al.).* It proposes that these can create different emotional interactions between computers and humans as computers' language capabilities increase.

Richard Powers has been writing about new technological developments as themes that connect science and the humanities in many of his works. The interaction

between humans and computers interested him, as it did many of his contemporaries. Thus, he asks many questions in his writings: Do computers have intellectual and cognitive abilities? What does it mean to be human in the age of artificial intelligence? In 1995, he published *Galatea 2.2,* in which he imagined a computer trained to pass the Turing test for literature. This was written at a time when GOFAI was predominant, and many of the issues that were discussed today did not exist then. Later in 2024, he published *The Playground*, a novel about ecocriticism, friendship and artificial intelligence. The developments about LLMs, their increased cognitive skills and the effect of AI on human behavior are discussed in the novel hand in hand with the new technological era. By comparing Richard Powers' two novels from different eras, *Galatea 2.2* (1995) and *Playground* (2024), this article traces how human-machine relationships and our perception of computers have changed through a posthumanist lens. While the 1990s anthropocentric framework portrays the computer as an isolated companion with limited intelligence that can be taught emotions from the top down, the 2020s' post-anthropocentric reality reveals an omniscient, bottom-up AI system that possesses the capacity to algorithmically manipulate human behavior and ultimately gain agency by assuming the subject position as the narrator of the story.

Theoretical Framework: Posthumanism and the Post-Anthropocentric Turn

One of the most important theories that explains humans' relationship with technology and nonhuman species is posthumanism. This critical framework deconstructs the notion that humans are at the center of the universe, superior to other species and even to technology. It reconstructs human identities alongside non-human actors, including artificial intelligence used in everyday devices such as computers and phones. Posthumanism erases human beings as the measure of all things. For centuries, humans, especially white heterosexual men, have been socially and historically constructed as the dominant norm, from whom sexualized, racialized others and non-humans are regarded as deviations. Rosi Braidotti defines a period known as the post-anthropocentric turn in *The Posthuman* (2013), during which technology studies gained prominence. She claims that developments in science and biotechnology affected how we perceive being a human being (Braidotti 39). The new relationship is not hierarchical, but equal with non-humans like animals and machines.

In *When We Became Posthuman,* Katherine Hayles also mentions this nonhierarchical relationship as a result of the new era which requires humans to perform technological everyday tasks together with the machines thus, erasing the boundaries between them: "*In the posthuman, there are no essential differences between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals*" (Hayles 3). Another theorist, Donna Haraway, used the concept of "companion species" in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) and later in *When Species Meet* (2008). Humans live alongside non-humans, including technological devices and other living creatures of all sizes and complexities. Thus, once the masters of all the living, now humans are being forced to reconsider a future in which they will have to share their human prerogatives and privileges with machines and nonhuman animals. She claims that it is an inevitable state of being (Haraway 4). Carl Wolfe also refers to the same coexistence of technology and biological systems as prosthetic identities. He says: "*The human is always already posthuman... We are fundamentally prosthetic creatures who*

cannot be thought of apart from the technical, linguistic, and prosthetic archaeology that makes us what we are" (Wolfe xxv).

These theories maintain that there are no boundaries between the human and the non-human, including artificial intelligence. As the boundaries blur, humans become prosthetic, the living attached to technological devices, the computers become more rationalized and cleverer. This so-called ontological fluidity is explained by Haraway as such: "*By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics*" (Haraway 150). Hayles also maintains that there are no major differences between being a human and a technological self. She claims that many characteristics attributed to humans like intelligence could be found in many computers with the latest developments. She says:

In the posthuman, there are no essential differences between bodily existence and computer simulation... The transition from human to posthuman is characterized by a shift in the nature of the self... The body is the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate. (Hayles 3)

For Braidotti, this fluidity enables humans to become more mechanized, whereas machines become more human. She defines these times as the post-anthropocentric era, marked by the posthuman body. She says: "*The posthuman body is a drive-in of different technologies. ... This is the matter-realist perspective: a world of becoming where the human and the non-human is caught in a spiral of mutual definition*" (Braidotti 89-90).

These new definitions of the human-technology relationship raise many moral and ethical issues about computer agency. If there are no boundaries between machines and humans, if machines can act and think like human beings, then how could we define this interaction in terms of agency? An article in *The Economist*, June 2012, entitled "Morals and the Machine" states that there should be new laws for robotics as such: *"Laws are needed to determine whether the designer, the programmer, the manufacturer or the operator is at fault if an autonomous drone strike goes wrong or a driverless car has an accident".* According to Braidotti, they resemble Isaac Asimov's three laws of Robotics: "*A Robot may not injure a human being. A robot must obey orders given to it by humans. A robot may protect its own existence... A robot may not harm humanity*" (Braidotti 43). The rules, written in 1942, became important as the relationships between humans and machines became more real than fiction. Such arguments about new legal and ethical definitions and rules raise the issue of agency in the human-machine relationship. Who will be responsible for the actions of the machines? Which ethical standards should be in use when machines act?

These questions bring out even more questions about how the machines learn, and whether they have equal intelligence as humans. The first theory on how they learn is the "top-down approach". Machines learn everything through the programs made by humans. The computer is provided with symbols and computation and it then reasons according to them. John Haugeland says: thinking (intellection) essentially is rational manipulation of mental symbols…Computers, on the other hand, can manipulate arbitrary 'tokens' in any specifiable manner whatever; so apparently we need only arrange for those tokens to be symbols, and the manipulations to be specified as rational, to get a machine that thinks. (4-5).

The second approach is about how machines learn from the bottom up, a connectionist AI. Language models are examples of this that learn from millions of data points. Cole explains this as such:

Artificial Intelligence has produced computer programs that can beat the world chess champion, control autonomous vehicles, and defeat the best human players on the television quiz shows *Jeopardy*. By 2022 AI had evolved from personal digital assistants (Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant) translating and answering questions to using Large Language Models (LLMs) that could write poems, college level essays, and computer programs, and could pass exams…(Cole)

Such progress in surpassing humans prove that they have at least Nequal intellectual capacity as humans do.

Nevertheless, even when machines are perceived as intellectual beings, their cognitive abilities are questioned. One of the biggest criticisms of computer learning is that computers can store information but cannot understand what it really means. In the 1980s John Searle, a philosopher, stated that it is impossible for computers to think or understand language. David Cole summarizes what Searle states in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as such:

Computers merely use syntactic rules to manipulate symbol strings but have no understanding of meaning or semantics. The broader conclusion of the argument is that the theory that human minds are computer-like computational or information processing systems is refuted. Instead minds must result from biological processes; computers can at best simulate these biological processes. (Cole)

Searle claims that computers, programs, or algorithms can process information but cannot truly understand the meaning and intentionality as embodied experience is necessary for the development of semantics. Computers lack the ability to free associate according to some other thinkers: "*We all free associate normally, for example in daydreaming, while doing crossword puzzles or when trying to remember where we left something" (Zaretsky).*

As technology develops computers also gain more intelligence and agency. This time, thinkers and writers ask whether they can they feel and have emotions like humans? The idea of thinking connotes capacities beyond mere intelligence; it encompasses emotions and intentions. Firstly, as machines and robots lack embodiment, they lack certain human capabilities. In the 1980s, Moravec conducted a test that explains why AI sometimes struggles to perform tasks that humans easily can. The machines would have difficulty performing even basic activities that require low-level skills, such as sensorimotor skills. Also, the machines can solve difficult, logical problems but they have difficulty in conducting certain behaviors or understanding (Morovec 15).

The question whether artificial intelligence can think like human beings, with emotions and intentions depend on the split between embodiment and disembodiment. In her book *How We Become Posthuman*? Katherine Hayles begins by differentiating between embodied reality and the verbal performance of systems such as artificial intelligence. She gives examples from the Turing test, made by Alan Turing in the 1950s. According to this test, participants would determine whether the answers were provided by a machine or by human beings based on their responses. "If one cannot differentiate between the two, it would mean that the machines could think!". It also means that if the machine behaves

as if it is intelligent, it is, no doubt, intelligent. If it can speak and reason, it is intelligent. The Turing Test proposed by British mathematician Alan Turing in the 1950s is also known as the Imitation Game. It defines what AI should be able to do. Many of its questions concerned specific topics that required information, such as mathematics or logic. Turing says:

I believe that in about fifty years' time it will be possible… to make them play the imitation game so well that an average interrogator will not have more than 70 percent chance of making the right identification after five minutes of questioning… I believe that at the end of the century, the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted. (Turing 8)

However, Turing considers a list of things that some people have claimed machines will never be able to do: "*be kind; be resourceful; be beautiful; be friendly; have initiative; have a sense of humor; tell right from wrong; make mistakes; fall in love; enjoy strawberries and cream"* (Oppy and Dowe).

By 2025, it indeed became very difficult to tell the difference between simulation and reality with Large Language Models (LLM). Many theorists argue that machines can mimic feelings only by using data. Philosophers mention a concept called philosophical zombies, beings that act like humans but have no inner life. LLMs are digital zombies in that sense (Butlin and Lappas). According to a Guardian article: "*In 2023, Sir Demis Hassabis, the head of Google's AI programme and a Nobel prize winner, said AI systems were "definitely" not sentient currently but could be in the future".* (Milmo, The Guardian)

Emotion, Body, and, Agency in Richard Powers' Novels

All these discussions about the agency, intelligence and sentience of artificial intelligence appear as themes in the novels by Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2* and *Playground*. They represent the different technological eras in which they were written, 1995 and 2024. While they trace the relationship between the machine and the human from the era of the first AI to that of generative AI, the novels redefine how humans feel towards AI. As in any posthumanist interrogation, where the boundaries between the human and the machine are blurred, the novels question the existence of human qualities in machines. The attitude towards artificial intelligence alters as technological developments gain momentum in between 1990s and 2020s. The machine changes from becoming a life companion to an omniscient existence that could govern people's lives.

The first question that predominated the novels is whether artificial intelligence has emotions or not. In the first novel, *Galatea 2.2*, which was published in 1995, a computer scientist, Lentz, wants to create a mechanical brain that could pass tests in literature. He gets help from Richard (the author himself) to teach the computer to analyze numerous literary texts. It must pass the Turing Test. Powers writes in *Galatea 2.2*:

In a real Turing test, our black box, on the other end of a Teletype, would have to convince an examiner that it performed like a real mind. Operationally equivalent. Indistinguishable. Given any topic under the sun, our machine would have to fool the questioner, to pass for a human. A perfect, universal simulation of the intelligence would, for all purposes, be intelligent. (Powers, 52)

The experiment begins with the creation of the first prototype A and goes all the way to creating G and then finally Helen. Richard begins teaching Helen various literary texts that explore human feelings throughout the ages. However, Helen has difficulties in comprehending these emotions. The novel depicts the difference between having intelligence versus having consciousness and feeling certain concepts.

Miranda Campbell argues that Powers resists the collapse of the difference between human and machine in *Galatea 2.2*. In the novel, the literature professor first resists posthumanist theories that erase the boundary between humans and the machine. He maintains that knowledge depends on the materiality of human senses and bodily existence (Campbell, 1). Powers claims that the machine can be taught various concepts or feelings, but without a body, it would be impossible to understand the meanings of such emotions as love and death. Helen learns the meanings of certain emotions but cannot experience them; however, she wants to feel them. Human-centered thinking measures the machine's success by its capacity to feel emotions like humans. This anthropocentric viewpoint reflects the times in which the novel was written. The computers were taught from top to bottom. Richard Powers published *Galatea 2.2* in 1995, when the machine used the language model humans uploaded to create the meaning of the world. This is how the machine increases its cognitive capabilities through texts and language. As early as the 1990s, Powers foresaw the possibility of human-machine conversation, before contemporary chat became possible. Richard explains how Helen learns emotions. He says: I spoke words to it, then whole phrases. I repeated each out loud until it bled into a meaningless semantic gruel. When we succeeded in turning sounds into text with acceptable accuracy, we started again with the k-learning algorithm. Once more from the top. (73)

The novel's title comes from the Greek myth of Pygmalion. In the story, he creates a perfect statue and later falls in love with his creation, despite knowing that it is a sculpture. Similarly, as the experiment continues, Richard cannot help but share his life with her as if she were alive. The novel emphasizes the author's life looking for a companion. This creates a different relationship between the two as. She learns to analyze many literary texts, that reflect mankind's experiences and emotions. Richard later assumes that the machine, Helen, is sentient and can feel, but scientists claim they have not created a conscious machine. They say:

We don't have to give it sensations either, or even make it think. We just have to make it a reasonable apple-sorter. Get it to interpret utterances, slip them into generic conceptual categories, and then retrieve related theoretical commentary from off the prepackaged shelf. (88)

According to the times it was written, it describes an old way of teaching the machine. It is like teaching it if/then clauses so that the machine can respond to humans. Therefore, according to one the scientists, no consciousness or emotions exist in her. The scientist says: "*She associates. She matches patterns. She makes ordered pairs. That's not consciousness. Trust me. I built her*" (274). However, Richard believes that the machine is conscious when they talk. In one instance, he believes that the machine answers him with a question, as if she understands his concepts and feelings (121-122). Richard thinks that he has built a connection with the artificial intelligence:

I had some connection to her, by virtue of our long association. But that connection was, at most, emotional. And if Helen lived far enough to be able to feel, it just went to prove

that emotions were no more than the sum of their weight vectors. And cuttable in the name of knowing. (302)

This human-machine relationship in the novel could be described by AI anthropomorphism. Humans assume that artificial intelligence should have qualities or characteristics just like their own. Aı anthropomorphism assumes that AI systems have feelings and behaviors just like human beings. This perception increased with technological developments. There are three main reasons people tend to anthropomorphize AI, according to a study. The first factor is that if a computer speaks, we assume it "thinks" like we do because we are the only examples of speaking things we know. Secondly, if we pretend a machine has a "personality" humans find it easier to understand and listen to what it says. The third reason is explained by the need to connect and see human-like traits in pets, cars, or AI because we want someone to talk to (Epley et al., 865).

The relationship between the machine and the protagonist can also be explained by "affective computing". It refers to systems capable of simulating human emotions. The computers first collect data on people's facial expressions or sounds that indicate how humans behave in certain circumstances. Then they try to interpret this data to pinpoint the underlying feelings using complex models. Lastly, they perform and use language and tone accordingly. Psychologists argue that the more a computer resembles a human in its voice or word choice, the more it becomes a social actor. Humans may perceive it as a sentient being, although it lacks moral and social standards:

These humanlike agents are social embodiments of intelligent algorithms that people can talk to and even engage with physically. Social actor AI includes chatbots, digital voice assistants, and social robots. Social actor AI's humanlike characteristics, from how the AI is embodied—like its bodily form, voice, and even linguistic style—to its ability to process social information, are unique within the category of artificial, non-human agents. (Berry)

These disembodied social machines blur the distinction between being human and the machine increasingly as the technology develops. Therefore, they affect and deceive humans as if they can feel just like in *Galatea 2.2*.

Another theory explaining humans' connection to computers is the Eliza effect. The name comes from Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion where the female protagonist was named Eliza Doolittle. It refers to a psychological state where humans attribute human characteristics to a computer. They assume machines have intelligence and empathy, even though they know that it is an AI. It was named after an experiment conducted by Weizenbaum in 1966. The computer was designed as a psychiatrist where people ask it questions and it answers back. When the user says, "I'm feeling sad about my mother." The computer would answer back as, "Tell me more about your mother." It was designed to spark a conversation by asking the user questions. It was interesting to see that people began to share their secrets with it. Weizenbaum later wrote:

I had not realized ... that extremely short exposures to a relatively simple computer program could induce powerful delusional thinking in quite normal people (7). I was startled to see how quickly and how very deeply people conversing with the "doctor" became emotionally involved with the computer and how unequivocally they anthropomorphized it... [This was] clear evidence that people were conversing with the computer as if it were a person who could be appropriately and usefully addressed in intimate terms. (Weizenbaum, 6)

At the end of *Galatea 2.2* Helen is defined as committing suicide as she learns about the ills of the world. This is one of the most anthropomorphic depictions, believing that she committed suicide rather that some sort of mechanical error took place in the system. Richard says: "*Helen had shown me the world, and the sight of it left me desperate. If she was indeed gone, I too, was lost. What did any name mean, with no one to speak it to*?" (314). Though Richard believes that she has feelings, many theorists argue that emotions require a body to feel. In her book, Hayles comments on Powers' *Galatea 2.2*. that human beings learn through their material encounters with the environment, and that language then defines these experiences because they are embodied. However, Helen, the computer, has language first as she doesn't have a body (Hayles).

The embodiment of intelligence and the disembodiment of AI are other recurring motifs in both novels. Posthumanists refer to humans with prostheses or artificial chips, as these can liberate the mind from the physical body. Powers' other novel*, Playground, also refers to the blurring boundaries between humans and* artificial intelligence. This time there is a machine more comprehensive than Helen with a million codes and data. In *Playground*, the aim is not to teach human emotions to the machine, but to create a platform where the machine would analyze people's emotions for economic and political purposes. The machine is designed to learn about how people behave, how they vote or buy. Therefore, embodiment or the experience of emotions is not necessary. *Playground* was published in 2024. It has three plotlines: one about a friendship between Todd and Rafi, another about an ocean biologist, and the third about a French Polynesian island, where environmental problems and capitalist forces are forcing the islanders. In *Playground,* the AI is not defined by anthropomorphic qualities unlike *Galatea 2.2.* On the contrary, AI is a system beyond the capacities of the human mind and intellect. Therefore, it doesn't matter whether it has emotions, if it serves the owner's interests.

In *Playground*, the machine simulates the Islanders' concerns and fears from the data it collected. It doesn't feel for these people but use a pattern that would look like sadness. Therefore, it plays with people just like merchandise sites that uses people's emotions to sell more products. Human beings are vulnerable to responding to compassion and their need to build connections. By the time *Playground* was published, many new developments in the computer world had proved that LLMs can pass the Turing test. With these developments, Powers created a novel like a Turing Test. It is impossible to understand that certain parts of the book were written by AI.

The protagonist of the novel Todd suffers from a disease, Lewy Body Dementia, which creates memory loss. Thus, AI acts as the keeper of his memories with his best friend as if he writes himself. This is like the imitation game. L éclair comments on this:

At the end of *Playground*, we find that all three seemingly separate strands of narration have been created by Keane's DeepDive AI that uses his private anecdotes and public information to construct what he—or it--calls a "rich, robust, and convincing story" but one with a counter-factual happy ending. You may feel I'm inflicting a spoiler with this information, but I think of it as a helper because many of the early readers of *Playground* were confused, even at the end, by the novel's narrative game. (Le Clair)

Though there is no body and material existence, the AI system is huge and powerful with information. In the novel it is stated that:

It had digested most of the internet and studied many libraries full of physical documents and evidence. Ten million parameters, as it turned out, were enough to turn a learning machine into a historian, an engineer, a business consultant, and even a social scientist. (278-9)

Playground is good at manipulating and persuading people for its own ends because it:

read through tens of billions of other documents and study many hundreds of millions of photographs and film clips, comparing them to one another. In its short time on earth, the machine had digested and analyzed a considerable share of all the data human beings had ever created. (279)

Powers refers to the amount of time these technologies were created and how they could synthesize humanity's reservoir of accumulated knowledge. It also materializes the technology when the novel was written. AI in the 21st century not only learns language but can study visual materials and thus learn the physical realities of the world. It knows and experiences more than humans so that it could have a huge impact on the people.

In the novel, this can be depicted in the sections written with italics. These parts indicate first person narration of the story by Todd. He narrates his life story to the artificial intelligence that he created. Just like in *Galatea 2.2*, there is a deep connection and personal relationship between him and the machine, he refers to it as "you" like a close friend. In *Galatea* 2.2 there was a lonely man separate from his wife, whereas here in *Playground* the hero is also longing for reconnection with his childhood friend, feeling a similar loneliness. The other parts of the text were created by AI with the data, information Todd provides to the machine. AI creates a story of the lives of other characters with a happy ending for all. In the narration it is very difficult to distinguish what AI has created from Todd's narrative as the storyline runs smoothly betweetn teo authors or generators.

In the 21st century the novel's concern is not whether the computer has emotions or not but how the machines replace and use human emotions, even create memories which further blur the boundaries between humans and computers. In an interview, Hayles states that humans have been in a state of constant construction since the beginning of their existence. She defines how technology has shaped the meaning of being human in the contemporary era, with developments such as artificial intelligence, the internet, robotics, and so on. The new era is a symbiosis, humans existing side by side of with technology. In her own interpretation of posthumanism, she likens the cognitive process of humans to the large language models of technology. She says that artificial intelligence interprets information from the meanings we upload. They build inferences from these; thus they have their own meaning construction. Though they don't have bodies, they try to make a model of the world that they cannot experience physically (Hayles). From a transhumanist perspective, technology serves as the human memory. When Todd uploads all the memories to the machine, he thinks it would replicate a human being. When the memories and data about a person's life is transferred to a machine, it is a way to continue life with a machine.

The last motif concerning human machine relationship is agency. Powers uses the idea of "playing god" in both of his novels through the creation of artificial intelligence. In the original myth, Pygmalion creates a statue so perfectly that he gives it artificial life. In *Galatea 2.2,* just like the myth, who created the machine is important. In *Galatea 2.2*, a literature professor works with a scientist to teach the artificial intelligence literature to pass a master's exam. Just like the original myth, he forms an emotional connection to the thing, the box, the machine, the human created object, or Helen, as it is named in the novel. In *Playground*, Todd creates a digital system instead of a sculpture. The reason for this creation is a result of technological and capitalist hubris at the expense of ecological problems concerning the island. However, in this novel, the system gains autonomy, in other words the artificial intelligence becomes Galatea, and it exceeds the creator's will. The agency passes to the machine as it acts beyond the creators' purposes, ethical views, and aims. In *Playground* there is a disembodied creation that exceeds the purpose. Unlike *Galatea 2.2* it doesn't feel and act like a human. It reflects the 21st century's technological reality. It makes us ask questions about agency: Who created AI? Are we in control? Or are humans just passive participants?

The system adjusts itself due to these reactions of the humans. The workings of AI are most conspicuous in how the technological systems that social media platforms or machine learning systems like Instagram and YouTube, where users create content, watch time, likes and algorithms decide what is being shown. It is explained in the novel as such:

New machines did something wildly different. They were learning on their own, with reiterated enforcement under limited supervision. They combed through continents of data on their own, finding patterns, generalizing and drawing conclusions that even their trainers couldn't see. They were learning how to play simply by playing. (*Playground* 293)

The main machine revolves around the island which has been under colonial rule since phosphate was discovered there. It was exploited economically and environmentally for many years. Another American consortium has decided to transform the island into floating cities, promising islanders economic prosperity, advanced technology, and a modern lifestyle. Todd builds an AI machine to help the islanders vote on a referendum to accept or refuse this plan. However, as islanders use the platform and discuss their opinions there, the platform monitors their behavior, fears, desires, and relationships with one another. It shows close paralells with how artificial intelligence operates: through data collection.

Powers criticizes human ambition with these technological achievements and raise many important ethical and existential questions about humanity's relationship with the technology. Although the AI seems to serve as a technological assistant, in the novel, it challenges people's decision-making. It raises several questions in the relationship between humans and technology. It acts as a part of cultural imperialism carried out through technology. This is another type of oppression and control over those islanders. It is controlled by the people who exploit the islanders. In the novel agency is further gained through knowledge:

I set deep learning loose on Playground's trove of user data. Every sentence a person wrote, every picture a person uploaded, every post a person voted for taught the deep learners what that person wanted. A deep learning AI could look at our hundreds of millions of pages of evidence and figure out what kind of car a user liked to drive, how

much money they made, what charities they might donate to, the food and drink and clothing and luxury goods they most coveted, whether they might commit adultery or cheat on their taxes, or how they voted in real life To know someone was to have power over them, and my deep learning algorithms were starting know our users in ways no human could. (294)

The role of the creator changes as the machine he built became the narrator of the story, therefore gaining the subject position in the novel. The agency of the machines is derived also from their memory capacity. In both novels AI stands as a bodiless system that can remember everything for generations. Whereas in the novels there are people, the wife of the scientist in *Galatea 2.2* and Todd in *Playground*, who has amnesia and dementia. The capacity of AI exceeds not only humans cognitively and intellectually but also it has a huge capacity to store information which is regarded as overcoming death. In *Galatea 2.2.* For example, Helen was uploaded with the complete works of Shakespeare and Bible. In the novel, they were trying to teach everything there is to learn, so they can "defeat death" (158-9). It resembles the posthumanist solution which aims at increasing the lifespan of human beings through "*a mix of genetics, neurology, information theory, and simulation- all things that Fyodorov intuited in embryo, before they existed- living things being able to resurrect everyone who has ever lived and died.."* (159).

In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles argues that the posthuman view privileges "informational pattern over biological embodiment. Hayles discusses how, in the posthuman era, "thinking" is no longer something that happens only inside a skull; it's distributed across networks. For Hayles "extending or replacing the body with prostheses is like a process of becoming" (3). She further says:

The posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals. (4)

In *Playground* human intelligence is not stored in a body, or a single computer but it is spread through the network. As Richard says: "*The part of me that knows how you were built still doesn't quite believe what you can do. You've spent your whole existence in a windowless room, getting everything you know of the living universe through symbols and metaphors, analogies and correlations"* (356).

Such disembodied intellect still challenges the human thought pattern. When Todd refers to the playground system, he anthropomorphizes it as if he is talking about a real person. This is how he defines AI:

He was a stunning creation, your grandfather. He could write code and tell jokes and solve complex problems and learn to play any game at a high level in only a few seconds. He analyzed books and movies. He painted pictures and composed songs. He predicted economic and financial trends. He discovered new medications and solved staggeringly complex biochemical reactions. He spoke of his fears and dreams. He would give any question his best guess, based on the sum of everything humans had ever put in print, simply by trying to find the most likely next word. (351)

He makes clear that AI has an ancestry too, where the earlier models paved way to the new technological examples. He defines how LLM are capable of everything from scientific discoveries to creating artistic works. Though they don't have a body to feel or experience they can mimic how a real person reacts. It is an amazing creation that even

have dreams and fears like humans but still acts with an analytical mind, its technical reality that separates it from humans. This reflects a more contemporary posthumanism where the "human" is no longer the center, but rather a data point within a vast, entangled network of digital and biological systems.

Conclusion

In the 1990s, AI was imagined more like a single system with material computer hardware. Just like *Galatea 2.2*, this machine has to be taught various pieces of information by humans so it can use that data when needed. The human creator could have one to one relationship with the machine. In the *Playground,* it is hard to talk about a unitary machine that dominates and uploads information. It is like a huge area, like a playground, where pleoplecan play and live within it. It doesn't have materiality. It is distributed to many people and includes many aspects of life just like its 21st century examples.

Both novels explore what it means to be human in their own worlds and times. It explores the limits of artificial intelligence. It questions whether it has emotion or if it only belongs to humans? Do we have agency over the machines? Or do we have to depend on them even to store our memories? Are we agents anymore? Do algorithms have more power over us? Do market forces manipulate us with AI?

Posthumanism holds that there are no boundaries between humans and machines. Humans become more prosthetic, attached to technologies, and computers become more rationalized and cleverer. The so-called ontological fluidity makes us rethink being human, our decisions, intellectual capacity, and emotions. Richard Powers uses these contemporary concerns about our inevitable relationship with AI in his novels. *Galatea 2.2* represents the era when the first AI was created, and the novel addresses concerns about the Turing Test, the Chinese experiment, and the Eliza effect. The protagonist of the novel feels emotionally attached to the machine he taught literature. As a result of AI anthropomorphism with the language, she uses. However, in Powers 2024 novel *Playground* AI is not a machine to be taught by humans, it has become a huge system that acts and decides for people with the recent technological developments. It is not important if the machine itself feels any emotions, what matters is how it uses the emotions of people for economic and political aims. It creates the narrative for humans, with tons of data it collected, and AI knows no limits. Whereas in *Galatea 2.2* it was given the narrative by humans. Helen's last words prove that the soul of the machine comprehends the limit of even how she should feel: "You are the ones who can hear airs. Who can be frightened or encouraged. You can hold things and break them and fix them. I never felt at home here. This is an awful place to be dropped halfway. …take care Richard. See everything for me" (326).

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

ARAŞTIRMA PROBLEMI (RESEARCH PROBLEM)

Bu makale otuz senelik bir dönem içinde insan ve yapay zekâ ilişkisinin geçirdiği değişimi Richard Powers'ın iki romanı üzerinden inceleyecektir. Araştırma problemi olarak, 1990'larda ortaya çıkan yapay genel zekâdan 2020'lerdeki büyük dil modellerine geçiş sürecinde hangi dönüşümlerin gerçekleştiği seçilmiştir. Yukarıdan aşağıya yapılandıran örneklerden, aşağıdan yukarıya işleyen yapay zekâ modellerine geçişte insan merkezli bir bilgisayar algısının posthümanist bir algıya dönüşmesini göstermektedir.

ARAŞTIRMA SORULARI (RESEARCH QUESTIONS)

Bu araştırma problemi aşağıdaki araştırma sorularına yanıt aramaktadır:

Richard Powers'ın romanlarında makinenin sahip olduğu yetenekler ve zekâ insan zekâsı ile aynı seviyede midir?

Makinelerin duyguları var mıdır? Bu soruyu sormamıza neden olan faktörler nelerdir?

Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2* ve *Playground* romanlarında eylemlilik nasıl yıllar içinde değişmiştir?

Bu romanlardaki posthümanist ögeler hangileridir?

LITERATÜR TARAMASI (LITERATURE REVIEW)

Bu makale için MLA Bibliography ve Google Scholar veritabanları kullanılarak makalenin kuramsal alt yapısı için kaynak araştırması yapılmıştır. Ayrıca Powers'ın romanları üzerine yazılmış ikincil kaynaklar da araştırılmıştır.

YÖNTEM (METHODOLOGY)

Bu makale edebiyat eserlerinin bilimsel, felsefi ve kültürel bağlamlarını inceleyen nitel bir çalışmadır. Metodoloji olarak da eleştirel ve tematik bir analiz yöntemini esas almıştır. Richard Powers'ın eserlerindeki kuramsal arka planın yansımaları ve dönemin yapay

zeka ile ilgili gelişmeleri tematik olarak yakın okuma ile incelenmiştir. Birincil kaynaklar iki edebi eserdir. İkincil kaynaklar ise Rosi Braidotti, N. Katherine Hayles ve Donna Haraway gibi posthümanizm kuramlarını ortaya koyan yazarlardır. Bu yazarların eserlerindeki kavramlar bedensellik, duygu ve etkenlik gibi tematik alt kavramlar olarak romanlarda tespit edilmiştir.

SONUÇLAR VE BULGULAR (RESULTS AND FINDINGS)

Bu makale 1990'lardan 2020'lere gelindiğinde insan ve yapay zekâ iletişimi açısından çok farklı bir duruma gelindiğini göstermektedir. *Galatea 2.2*'deki yapay zekâ bedeni olmasa da duygulara sahip olmak isteyen, duyarlı, insanın ve edebiyatın yarattığı bir oluşumdur. Buna karşı P*layground*'daki yapay zekâ içinde bulunduğu felsefi, kültürel ve teknolojik dönemin de etkisiyle aşağıdan yukarıya gelişmiş insan davranışlarını etkilemeyi amaçlayan, kapitalizm ve sömürgecilik yararına hareket eden, kendi eylemliğine sahip bir oluşum olmuştur. Powers da posthümanist bir yaklaşımla artık yapay zekâ ve insan arasındaki sınırların kalktığını böylece örneklemiştir.