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Ecocritical Reflections: Post-Anthropocentrism in Bilge Karasu's *The Prey*

Ekoeleştirel Yansımalar: Bilge Karasu'nun *Avından El Alan*
Masalında Post-Antroposantrizm

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Abstract

In his attempt to critique anthropocentrism and speciesism, Bilge Karasu, a postmodern Turkish writer, problematizes the relationship between human and non-human entities. In "The Prey," one of the short stories in *The Garden of Departed Cats* (2003), Karasu employs surrealist and unnatural narrativity to disrupt the mimetic illusion considered by many posthumanist scholars as essential for the formation of new subjectivities. Through a narrative rich in figurative language and metafictional elements, Karasu engages with the complexities of species hierarchy, power relations and the redefinition of love. Surrealistically, set against the backdrop of variable weather conditions, the story questions human superiority over nature, highlighting

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the vulnerability and interdependence of all beings. Initially viewing the fish as a burden, the fisherman's journey parallels his childhood memory of encountering a snake, leading to a profound realization of the fish's capacity for affection and suffering. As empathy grows, so does the fisherman's ability to comprehend the language of the animal, culminating in a physical and spiritual metamorphosis upon their union. Through exploration of human cruelty and the possibility of harmony with nonhuman animals, the story highlights and subtly critiques the nature of humanity. Thus, by depicting a unification between human and nonhuman, "The Prey" suggests that genuine humanity lies in embracing interconnectedness and fostering equality-based relationships with the animal other.

Keywords: *Bilge Karasu, metamorphosis, posthuman, prey, speciesism*

Öz

Postmodern Türk yazar Bilge Karasu, insan merkezilik olarak da bilinen antroposantrizmin ve türçülüğün eleştirisini yaparak insan ve insan olmayan varlıklar arasındaki ilişkiyi sorunsallaştırır. Karasu, *Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi*'ndeki (2003) hikâyelerden biri olan "Avından El Alan"da birçok posthümanist kuramcı tarafından yeni öznelliklerin oluşması için gerekli görülen mimetik yanılsamayı altüst etmek amacıyla gerçeküstü ve doğal olmayan bir anlatı biçimine yer verir. Söz sanatlarıyla bezeli bir dil ve üstkurmaca öğelerle zenginleştirilmiş bir anlatım tekniği kullanarak türler arası hiyerarşinin karmaşıklığı, güç dinamikleri ve aşkın yeniden tanımlanması gibi konuları ele alır. Değişken hava koşullarının gerçeküstü bir zemine yerleştirilmesiyle kurgulanan hikâye, tüm varlıkların acizliğini ve birbirine bağımlılığını vurgulayarak insanın doğa üzerindeki üstünlüğünü sorgular. Başlangıçta balığı kendine külfet olarak gören balıkçının yolculuğu, bir yılanla arkadaşlık kurduğu çocukluk anısıyla paralellik göstererek, balıkçının balığın şefkat ve acı çekme yetisine sahip bir canlı olduğunun farkına varmasına yol açar. Balıkçının empati duygusu arttıkça hayvanın dilini anlama kapasitesi de artar ve bu durum, ikisi arasındaki birliktelikle doğacak olan fiziksel ve manevi dönüşümü mümkün kılar. İnsanın acımasızlığını ve insan olmayan hayvanlarla uyum içinde yaşama ihtimallerini irdeleyen hikâye, insan doğasını ustaca sorgular. Bu sebeple, insan ile insan olmayan hayvan arasındaki bütünleşmeyi betimleyen "Avından El Alan," insaniyetli olmanın, iç içe yaşam (bağılantısallık) görüşünün benimsenmesi ve ötekileştirilen hayvanla eşitliğe dayalı ilişkilerin kurulmasıyla gerçekleşeceğini öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Bilge Karasu, dönüşüm, posthuman, av, türçülük*

Introduction

Emerging as a critique of humanism, posthumanism represents a significant shift away from anthropocentric ideologies inherited from the Renaissance and earlier human traditions. This shift, in Salzani's view, is marked by a growing recognition of the interconnectedness between humans and non-humans, exemplified, among many other things, by what Franklin and Ritvo call the "animal turn" in literature (2017: 98). While humanism places humanity at the forefront of the universe, adhering to the notion of 'man as the measure of all things' in Protagorean philosophy, posthumanism emphasizes species dominance, thereby blurring

hierarchical divisions between humans and nonhumans (Braidotti, 2019). Posthumanists see this as the beginning of a crisis in the human condition and advocate a return to the animal, questioning the qualities typically attributed to human beings and the very essence of humanity. Influenced by this, Cary Wolf (2003), challenges traditional humanist views by highlighting the demonization of animals and the resulting limitations on pluralism. He argues for an ethical posthumanist approach that recognizes the diversity of life forms, arguing that animal rights should be seen as an integral part of human rights. Similarly, Donna Haraway, in her *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), explores the evolving relationship between humans and animals, especially dogs, emphasizing the transformative power of mutual communication and companionship. Haraway argues in favour of the nature-culture continuum. She rejects the binary oppositions between human/non-human while emphasizing the importance of interspecies relations. Likewise, rejecting anthropocentrism, Rosi Braidotti (2013), influenced by Spinoza's monist philosophy, extends this discourse by proposing a posthuman subjectivity grounded in vitalism and non-dualist principles. Braidotti advocates a relational understanding of self, nature and culture. In line with this posthumanist trend that advocates the rejection of the dichotomy between self/other, human/non-human, and the recognition of human interdependence with the material world, Bilge Karasu's "The Prey" embodies and advocates a posthumanist philosophy of man-animal interconnectedness.

Bilge Karasu's "The Prey" (2003) is a short story featuring a non-participant, ambivalent, omniscient, and potentially queer narrator who recounts a dream-like encounter between a fisherman and a stray hybrid fish—a new breed combining a grouper and a tuna fish¹—likely in the waters of the Marmara Sea, between the Istanbul coastline and the Princes' Islands. Throughout the narrative, the fisherman and the captured fish undergo a vague metamorphosis, blurring into a joint, amorphous man–fish or fish-man entity. Additionally, the narrator weaves in a series of surrealistic episodic tales about violent hunting scenes that, while seemingly unrelated to the main storyline, imbue the narrative with layers of significance. These tales are presented in a language and tone distinctly different from those surrounding the fisherman and his captured fish.

Within this discourse, the works of postmodern Turkish author Bilge Karasu offer a profound exploration of the complexities surrounding human-nonhuman relationships. In his collection of short stories, *The Garden of Departed Cats* (2003), Karasu questions the nature of human relations with other entities, particularly animals, creating a new consciousness towards the nonhuman as seen in the symbolic metamorphosis between human and animal in "The Prey." Through a portrayal of 'humanimal' encounters and interactions, Karasu dismantles the binary opposition between human and animal, advocating for species solidarity and ethical agendas. This paper argues that Karasu's use of metamorphosis in "The Prey" aims to break down the categorical distinctions between humans and nonhumans, highlighting a unity of species achieved through the acknowledgment of the animal Other as part of the human Self. The paper also contends that Karasu's conceptualization of love and his perception of moral consideration for animals are intended to raise awareness about humans' treatment of animals.

1. “The Prey” through academic lenses

Most of the scholarly readings we have examined about this short story take their cues from a variety of literary approaches such as structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. For instance, S. Sahin (2021) explores how “The Prey” both echoes and diverges from traditional fairy tales. By drawing on the features that Jameson identifies for romance, commonly found in fairy tales, the study illustrates the narrative components of these tales and highlights the evolution of the classical fairy tale into a contemporary narrative. Similarly, Gokmen’s analysis of the narrative elements in the tale primarily focuses on the structural innovations in “The Prey,” occasionally touching upon the semantic implications of these tales. For example, Gokmen (2016) describes the captured fish as a combination of two fish breeds (Orfoz and Orkinoz, i.e., grouper and tuna) without assigning any significance to this hybridity. However, such a hybrid creature can be seen as a manifestation of opposites: the grouper representing the beast with its stout body and large mouth, while the tuna symbolizes beauty with its sleek, streamlined body and agility. Gergöy (2018) provides a deconstructionist reading of the theme of human supremacy over animals in “The Prey.” He addresses the ethical issues of human-animal relations from a Derridean perspective, contending that Karasu not only experiments with and questions human-centrism in his fiction but also seems to construct utopian environments where he explores the possibilities of a more just life with animals. Gergöy argues, for instance, that the fisherman’s failure to make his friends see the fish, which is actually swallowing his arm, serves as a sign of humanity’s refusal to coexist with animals (2018: 21). This surreal event underscores the tension between human dominance and ethical responsibility, a theme echoed in the writings of Derrida and Carol Adams on human carnivorousness. Gedik (2018), another scholar, inspired by psychoanalysis, interprets the tale as a moment of hypoxia, where the fisherman’s state of mind is depicted as hovering between two worlds: life and death. In her paper, she posits that Karasu’s tale primarily focuses on the sea as a refuge for the fisherman’s multidimensional subjectivity. For Özüm (2013), “The Prey” revolves around the fisherman’s surreal fishing journey, which blurs the boundaries between the supernatural and reality. To her, interpreting the mythic bond between the fish and the fisherman in a realistic context unveils the inner conflicts, anxieties, and existential fears inherent in human existence. The sea, personified and laden with symbolic representations of life, death, and power, serves as a mirror, illuminating the intricate realities and complexities of life.

Most, if not all, scholarly analyses of “The Prey” focus primarily on the central narrative of the fisherman and the fish, with little attention paid to the various embedded stories within this overarching tale. When these narrative layers are examined collectively and given equal significance, “The Prey” transcends its individual components. Seen in the context of ecocritical posthumanist scholarship, the narrative becomes a fable illustrating the metaphorical eclipse of carnophallogocentrism. However, before delving into this ecocritical perspective, it is important to acknowledge that the story’s controversial interpretations stem largely from its unconventional narrative style rather than solely from its content. This underscores the importance of narrative style, which is just as crucial as the narrated content.

With this in mind, the following section provides a brief introduction to the unconventional narrative approach employed in “The Prey.”

2. Unnatural narratology and the nature of language

Karasu’s writing style rejects conventional narrativity steeped in ideas of absolute certainty. His writing, as seen clearly in “The Prey”, aims to challenge certainty, to dismantle entrenched structures of meaning, leaving readers bewildered and questioning, or inspiring them to continually seek change and reshape their surroundings. The story accommodates a range of interpretations due to a narrative style rich in figurative language and literary devices that enhance, distance and diversify meaning. The ambivalent narrator employs over 60 metaphors, similes, allusions, and aposiopeses, to alienate the narration and imbue the text with multiple layers of meaning. Indeed, aposiopeses are manifestations of what Prince (1988) describes as ‘disnarrated’. Additionally, the story utilizes an unnatural narrative technique lending fluidity and openness to various interpretational approaches beyond what a conventional narrative allows.

Narratology scholars such as Monika Fludernik (1996), Brian Richardson (2006), Jan Alber (2009), Dan Shen (2016) and others stipulate that posthumanist, among other postmodern, narratives employ different types of narrators like dead bodies, objects, electronic devices, robots, insects, animals and many other narrators that are not normally seen in conventional narrativity. Such narrativity aims at breaking the mimetic illusion considered by Richardson (2006) as one of the main aspects of unnatural narrative. “The Prey” breaks the mimetic illusion through its ambivalent narrator whose identity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and credibility remain subject to speculation. The voice of the narrator ironically dominates almost all the story with the exception of very brief encounters with the voices of the narrated, that is the fisherman and his fish, or the fish and his/her fisherman. The narrator most likely projects the whole narrative from the viewpoint of a mentally, spiritually, and perhaps physically estranged narrated who may never have a grasp of the objective reality as observed by a normal person. In the course of the narrative, we see the male narrated conversing with animals and imaginary bodies (his coffee house friends). This leads us to think about and question the nature of traditionally perceived objective reality.

Fludernik regards unnatural narrative as “the fabulous, the magical, and the supernatural besides the logically or cognitively impossible” (1996: 362). For Alber, “The term unnatural denotes physically impossible scenarios and events, that is, impossible by the known laws governing the physical world, as well as logically impossible ones, that is, impossible by accepted principles of logic” (2009: 80). “The Prey” is replete with the fabulous and magical, though not in a romantic or heroic sense. The fabulous and the impossible are again seen in the person of a narrated who converses in a universal language with a captured snake and fish. The narrated shows a fabulous capacity for communication with nature, snakes, animals, and the sea. The fisherman’s remarkable capacity lies in perceiving his surroundings not merely as disparate elements, but as interconnected entities, including himself, within a cohesive network. His aptitude for communication with other beings renders him a transpersonal figure.

3. The posthuman conundrum: Reconceptualizing human-nonhuman relationships

In this regard, “The Prey” navigates through multiple storylines, each challenging the notion of human supremacy. While the main storyline is about a fisherman’s interaction with a fish, the secondary stories in the narrative describe ancestors, mainly patriarchs chasing various animals such as “the deer, the leopard and the mountain goat” (Karasu, 2003: 9); a tale involving a snake interacting with a youth (Karasu, 2003: 12); events involving animal sacrifices (Karasu, 2003: 15); and an interwoven narrative involving the hunting of unicorns and the death of a patriarch chasing a deer with some vague metamorphosis of the deer into a youth (Karasu, 2003: 18). Although these narratives may seem different and remote from the main plotline, they are connected by the theme of humans as hunters and animals as prey. Though these sub-plot stories and events shed light on the predator-prey relationship in a complex way, problematizing the concepts of the hunter, the hunted and the sacrifice, “The Prey” begins, as Sahin (2021) suggests, in a fairytale-like ambiance using metafictional techniques to show nature’s active role against human domination and violence.

Notably, the narrator deliberates between a “sunny winter day” and a “day of snow” (Karasu, 2003: 7), highlighting nature’s impact on both humans and animals. This deliberation extends to the narrative’s setting, with the sea and its elements influencing the interactions between the fisherman and his prey: “If the events happened on the day of the blizzard, then the sea will exhaust both the fish and the fisherman” (Karasu, 2003: 9). The narrative’s use of the subjunctive mood injects a sense of uncertainty, mocking human arrogance in confronting the sublime forces embodied by the sea and the unknown.

“The Prey” delves into the concept of love, offering a redefinition that contrasts with its traditional interpretation of strong affection between living beings. The narrator’s perspective shifts, stating, “Love means—literally or figuratively—eating and nothing else” (Karasu, 2003: 7), presenting an ironic commentary on the nature of one’s relationship with one’s desires. This view of love as ‘eating’ serves to highlight humanity’s gluttonous tendencies, offering justification for the characters’ fervent pursuits within the sub-narratives. Furthermore, in “The Prey,” love extends beyond human boundaries to encompass the sea and the fish. Interestingly, the sea’s love is depicted as intense and all encompassing, drawing both fish and man into its eternal embrace. Conversely, the fish’s love is portrayed as evolving from friendship to something more passionate, “as the hours pass what is between” the fisherman and the fish “will be love, will turn into passion. It is already love, already turning into passion...” (Karasu, 2003: 12-13).

The sea exhibits a whimsical nature, as described, “now smiling on the fish now on the fisherman, now disappointing one now the other” (Karasu, 2003: 7), prompting the emergence of a connection between human and non-human entities driven by love. However, this connection reveals a contradiction within humanity, particularly evident in their treatment of animals depicted as mere commodities for food, entertainment, or sacrifice, as seen in the subplots of the ‘bey’, the ‘unicorn’, and the ‘ritual’. Within this context, the fisherman symbolizes humanity, depicted as self-centered and unable to grasp the language of nature. His focus solely on his own needs blinds him to the love offered by the sea. Despite nature’s

assistance during fishing trips, he fails to recognize the love extended to him, attributing success solely to his own “good fortune” and “skills” (Karasu, 2003: 8). This lack of acknowledgement stems from a communication barrier between species, initially leading the fisherman to view the sea merely as a means of “his livelihood” and eventual “death” (Karasu, 2003: 8). The sea, recognizing the fisherman’s ignorance, chooses to impart a lesson by guiding him to catch a unique fish, “a fish that is like no other fish he has known or caught” (Karasu, 2003: 9). This event marks the fisherman’s initial state of mind. A state of mind and readiness for hunting akin to those of his ancestors symbolized by the Bey and unicorn hunters. Yet, his subsequent interactions with the sea and the fish turn him into a different person and initiate him into a transformative journey into the true meaning of love.

Similarly, other sub-narratives parallel that of the fisherman’s. In “The Prey,” Gergöy identifies two contrasting yet interrelated storylines, the story of Bey and the fisherman, focusing on the Bey’s violence as the source of the fisherman’s transformation into a nature lover (2018: 17). Thus, the fisherman’s kinship with the world of the sea and animals becomes a substitute for the Bey’s aggression against nature. In contrast, the Bey epitomizes tyranny, displaying a merciless attitude towards animals, hunting them purely for sustenance and leisure. By juxtaposing the Bey, unicorn hunters and the patriarch of the clan alongside the fisherman, the author highlights both humanity’s destructive tendencies driven by a desire for dominance and the potential human capacity for change and transformation. This juxtaposition eventually emphasizes the fisherman’s spiritual evolution, transcending the dichotomy between nature and culture and opening avenues for harmony between human and non-human in a post-anthropocentric age. Building on Braidotti’s (2013) notions of the posthuman, this narrative presents a shift towards posthuman subjectivity closely intertwined with ‘others’. Notably, the relationship between the fisherman and the fish evolves into one of, in Haraway’s term “companion species” (2003: 15). As the fisherman becomes increasingly affectionate towards the fish, viewing it as an extension of himself, a transformative process unfolds in his personality and the narrative as well. Through this bond, symbolized by the fisherman’s arm in the mouth and belly of the fish, he grows able to perceive the voice of nature, marking a significant personal growth.

This transformation unfolds at various stages in the journey of the unification between man and nature. Initially, the narrator’s approach to the fisherman and the sea is skeptical, acknowledging that the fisherman “knows nothing” about it other than its “annihilations or the bends” (Karasu, 2003: 8). The sea is perceived as threatening, capricious, and manipulative, possessing the power to control both fish and man, as described by the narrator: “its myriad fingers sweep the fish and the fisherman, wherever it wishes” (Karasu, 2003: 7), sometimes favoring one over the other. Ironically, due to the fisherman’s ignorance about the sea, he finds himself ensnared by a unique fish, driven his way by the sea’s deliberation. The narrator delicately navigates the realm of interspecies relations, portraying the fish not as an assailant but as a guest or gift from the deep. The fish’s presence and its initial encounter with the fisherman are peaceful and inviting, contrasting sharply with the bloody confrontations between the Bey and his prey. The scene of hauling the fish into the boat is depicted as

positive and joyous, unlike the death that typically accompanies other hunters' pursuits. The fish, alive and with its mouth open, seems to request gentle handling, as portrayed by the narrator's quasi-humorous tone:

This immense, this magnificent fish, if it caught the hook, it probably wasn't because its palate was itching. When reeled in, the fish had its mouth open, as if to show where the hook tore through the skin, asking to be taken gently, unharmed. (Karasu, 2003: 10)

The language employed is vivid and rich, using adjectives like "immense" and "magnificent" to describe the fish, evoking feelings of awe, love, and admiration. Furthermore, the passage anthropomorphizes the fish, expressing its vulnerability and desire to be handled with care. Through such sensory imagery, Karasu not only shows the significance of the fish, but also succeeds in showing great reverence for the natural world. In contrast, the fourth part of "The Prey," a four-line, stanza-like paragraph in the printed copy, depicts the badly mutilated Bey's horse and a dead leopard:

This is not a fairy-tale horse. It lies on the ground mutilated. The Bey rests his weight on his lance and stares at the beast. The leopard's head is soaked in blood. How could he have loved this leopard? (Karasu, 2003: 10)

This 45-syllable section of the narrative evokes a tone of introspection and sadness. With phrases such as "disfigured," "drenched in blood," and "throwing his weight on his spear," Karasu's language draws a depressive picture of the scene. In the passage, the Bey, and by extension the ancestral patriarchs question the feelings and actions of the past, drawing the readers into the Bey's reflections on the bitter reality he faces.

In comparison, the encounter between the fisherman and the fish is likened to an encounter between lovers, imbued with a sense of magic. The fisherman's handling of the fish, wrapping his arm around it and gently removing the hook, reflects a deep connection and communication between the two beings. Unlike the dead and mutilated creatures in the Bey's story, the fish exudes happiness and communicativeness, illustrating the contrast in the nature of these encounters.

The moment the fisherman tries to remove the hook from the fish's mouth, the fish swallows his arm, raising questions about who catches whom in the story. Initially, the fisherman does not feel pain because the fish does not bite or tear off his arm. Instead, it simply "stared at him with one enormous eye" (Karasu, 2003: 11). It is noted that the fish does not want to hurt the fisherman; its gaze signifies a recognition of intimacy between the two distinct species. However, the fisherman's attempt to pull away from the fish is met with resistance. The more he tries to distance himself, the more the fish bites and digs its spikes and scales into his right arm in response to the man's metaphorical attempt to abandon the fish. His struggle to separate from the fish is instantly mocked by a distant observer, which can be interpreted as the sea anthropomorphized as "someone in the distance, somewhere deep in the water, teasing him, laughing at him" (Karasu, 2003: 11).

Though the fisherman begins to see the fish as a burden – "He can neither sail nor row, nor even walk among people" – unlike his ancestral patriarchs and Beys of the sub-narratives, he "cannot bring himself to kill the fish" (Karasu, 2003: 12). The fisherman's internal struggle

serves as a critique of humanism, highlighting how the supposedly ‘rational’ human often disregards the suffering of the ‘irrational’ animal, thereby hindering the establishment of genuine affection and problematizing human exceptionalism. As the fisherman realizes the fish’s refusal to leave, he relinquishes the struggle. He recollects a childhood memory, fostering a sense of identification with the animal. This initiates a physical and spiritual transformation in the fisherman, leading to a profound intertwining of their essences.

The fisherman’s recollection centers on an event from his childhood. As a young boy, he captures a snake by its neck. In the struggle, the snake’s swift movements cause the child’s wrist, hand, and arm to bleed. Upon releasing its neck, the snake departs without causing further harm, leading the child to interpret the moment as the start of a friendship. To the boy, they become ‘friends’ and ‘equals’, as they reciprocate treatment and punishment alike. This childhood memory serves as a pivotal moment, prompting the fisherman to reflect on his relationship with the fish in terms of equality, friendship, and, notably, love. After all, the fish, like the snake from his past memory, retaliates by causing his hand and arm to bleed while pulling “the line” and attempting to extract himself away from its swallowing his arm (Karasu, 2003: 10-11). Recognizing the subjectivity of another being, the fisherman realizes that the animal seeks affection just as he does. His newfound love for the fish is evident when he no longer perceives it as a burden; instead, he begins to cherish “this weight which was making his heart feel lighter” (Karasu, 2003: 15). However, this love brings about a conflict between life and death, between victimizer and victim, and between hunter and prey. For the fisherman, love and transformation must entail experiencing the “pain of being torn to pieces” (Karasu, 2003: 15).

Despite the inevitability of their final journey together, marked by the understanding that there is no turning back, the fisherman’s willingness to accompany the fish is a significant sign of the symbolic union between their species. Their connection leads to a metamorphosis, turning them into a chimeric being defying classification:

A man whose arm is the body of a fish; a fish whose mouth holds a human head; a man swallowed by a fish; a fish and a man coupling; a man who is a fish who is a man; a fish, a man, self-coupling... Endlessly. (Karasu, 2003: 16)

Their fusion signifies the completion of the fisherman’s physical transformation, while his spiritual growth evolves through doubt and questioning. Despite his uncertainty about continuing the journey into the unknown, his pride in the knowledge gained from their union prevails. Attempting to name their hybrid form demonstrates human arrogance, yet the fisherman’s failure to define it highlights his transitional state. This liminality challenges traditional species boundaries, allowing him “little by little, to understand the language of the fish” and, by extension, interpret the language of nature and find peace in death (Karasu, 2003: 15). In a dreamlike state, he yearns to share his revelation with friends, but their inability to see the fish on his arm reflects societal disregard for nonhuman life. Disillusioned, he realizes his former ignorance and accepts nature’s affection, recognizing it as ‘Love’. This spiritual growth enables him to embrace death, completing his metamorphosis. The story exposes human indifference through the fisherman’s transformation, underscoring the

irony of his friends' behavior, his ancestral patriarchs' cruelty, the murderers of the unicorn's treachery and leaving open the question of whether his demise stems from newfound love or guilt. Regardless, in light of Karasu's (2010) post-anthropocentric vision, it is likely to interpret the fisherman's journey as a strong denouncement of the inherited patriarchal and humanist norms in favour of a true humane approach to the world where every life on the planet matters.

Conclusion

Addressing the imbalance in human-animal relations in light of posthumanist critique of anthropocentrism, Karasu's "The Prey" tips the scale in favour of a more balanced understanding of the species hierarchy. His setting the story in changing weather conditions; his use of metafiction, substitution, intertextuality, abnormal narrativity and metamorphosis; his sub-narratives of violent deaths of the hunter and the hunted emphasize the powerlessness of humans and animals in the face of nature, thus questioning the superiority of the one over the other. Through the fishing/hunting metaphor, "The Prey" questions power relations between humans and nonhumans and eventually reverses the roles between the hunted and the hunter.

As the sea sends a misguided fish to the fisherman, accelerating their metamorphosis, the question of who is hunting whom increasingly grows at the center of the narrative. Though initially seeing the fish as a burden, the fisherman's journey of self-discovery parallels that of a childhood memory of encountering a snake leading to a deep realization of the fisherman's capacity for compassion and suffering. For the fisherman's physical and spiritual metamorphosis culminating in the union between him and his prey occurs as a result of his constant empathy and his gradual ability to comprehend the language of the animal thus challenging traditional notions of language as solely human. The fisherman's exchanges with the fish underscore Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty's (1973) posthumanist perspective, which views language as a property not exclusive to humans but inherent to the entire sensible world. With such dismantling of the dichotomy between human and animal, the narrative challenges the notion of a unique human essence. Through its exploration of human cruelty as seen in the sub-narratives and the possibility of living in harmony with nonhuman animals, the story invites reflection on the nature of humanity. By depicting a unification between human and nonhuman, "The Prey" prompts readers to reconsider their relationship with other inhabitants of the earth, ultimately suggesting that true humanity lies in transcending boundaries and fostering equality-based relationships with the animal other.

In essence, "The Prey" offers a profound meditation on the meaning of humanity, asserting that genuine humanity is found in embracing the interconnectedness of all life forms and fostering relationships based on empathy and equality. Through its narrative of metamorphosis and unity, Karasu's story challenges conventional notions of human exceptionalism, paving the way for a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of what it means to be human.

Endnotes

- 1 It is noteworthy that the translator of “The Prey” omitted naming the fish, as Karasu did in his original Turkish text. By merely referring to the object of the hunt as ‘fish’ without specifying its genus, as the original text does, the translator unwittingly risks misleading readers and obscuring textual significations.

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