

## Through the Working Class

Ecology and Society Investigated Through the Lens of Labour

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# Literary Representations of Human-Nonhuman Labour Collaborations

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**Abstract** The Anthropocene refers to a geological time interval triggered by the human activities on Earth, and proposes humans as geological forces changing the ecosystems irreversibly. However, human activities, such as industrialization, overpopulation, extreme consumption habits, and exploitation of natural resources put pressure on our planet's sustainability. Thus, these human induced stressors on the environment pose a threat for all biological species inhabiting the Earth, both human and nonhuman. Industrialization is one of the suggested starting points of the Anthropocene epoch. Taking industrialisation, which started to accelerate in the late eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries, and the transition from wood to fossil fuels like coal to meet the need for energy during the industrialization process as its primary focus, this article explores how the efforts of industrialisation effect socio-cultural life and the relations of human and nonhuman agents nearby. Portraying the entangled lives of the coal miners and their nonhuman helpers, miner mules, in a newly developing mining town in the Nineteenth century Turkey, Zonguldak, this study opens to discussion or consideration various issues related to the working class environmentalism and the nonhuman labour. For illustrative purposes, various literary texts written in this period, such as Turkish novelist Mehmet Şeyda's *Yanartaş* [The Burning Stone] and poems by Turkish poets like Orhan Veli Kanık and Rifat Ilgaz, will be referred.

**Keywords** Anthropocene. Working class environmentalism. Nonhuman labour. Coal mines. Miner mules. Zonguldak. Turkey.

The preliminary readings and researches on the starting point of the Anthropocene, and the events triggering such a huge, global-scale anthropogenic change in the geological timeline of the Earth, as the Anthropocene hypothesis suggests, necessitate putting certain periods and major turning points of human civilisation under the spotlight and examine them in a more detailed way. One of these turning points was the Industrial Revolution in which the growing need for more effective energy sources to meet the requirements of the rapid industrialisation in Europe in the Nineteenth century. Thus, with the radical change of global energy regimes towards a fossil-fuel-driven industrial production that it hosts, the Nineteenth century is proposed by many environmental historians and natural scientists, including Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, the Earth scientists who coined the term 'Anthropocene' in 2000 for the first time, and environmental historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, who underlined "the

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collision” of Earth geological history and humans’s social history, as the starting point of the Anthropocene. Especially Chakrabarty’s emphasis is on the “collective identity” (2009, 197-200) of humans as yet another biological species repositions humans in their nonhuman environments, and requires reconsidering the relationship of humans with their nonhuman environment. Thus, within the framework of labour, this study aims to explore the connections between human and nonhuman labour forces and their collaborative entanglements during the Nineteenth century industrialisation process, which is proposed as one the starting points of the Anthropocene.

The start of the Anthropocene epoch is still a controversial issue. Although the latest (2018), and unanimously agreed official report of “the Anthropocene Working Group”, which has been assigned in 2008 to make a thorough research on the validity of the Anthropocene hypothesis by The International Commission on Stratigraphy, which is the only authorised institution to officially confirm any geological change in the geological timeline of the Earth, like the entrance in the Anthropocene, marks the second half of the Twentieth century as the beginning of the Anthropocene due to the nuclear prints in the stratigraphic samples, there are also other views (“Media Note: Anthropocene Working Group” 2016). For the periodisation of the Anthropocene and the global-scale environmental transformations it entails, some scholars like environmental historian Dipesh Chakrabarty pinpoint earlier periods as the beginning of the Anthropocene as J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke propose a more recent date for the Anthropocene and mark the second half of the Twentieth century as a critical period for human-induced environmental transformations. Chakrabarty argues that anthropogenic environmental changes date further back when humans abandoned hunter-gatherer lifestyles for long-term settlements, and hence marks “the beginnings of agriculture, the founding of cities, the rise of religions” (2009, 208-9) as major turning points causing our planet to enter a new geological period. On the other hand, according to McNeill and Engelke, it is especially in “the post-Second-World-War period, especially from the 1950s onwards” (2014, 4) the volume and frequency of human intervention into the planetary biological cycles increased. Humans’ engagement with nuclear energy in the 50s and 60s led to nuclear prints of plutonium and uranium after the testing of nuclear warheads as well as nuclear bombings.

Despite various contesting views pointing to different historical periods as its beginning, the Nineteenth century still stands as an important period marking the beginning of human-induced environmental changes. The originators of the Anthropocene concept, Crutzen and Stoermer mark the 1800s, referring to James Watt’s improvements on the first steam engine in 1784, as the beginning of the Anthropocene, and argue that it is the modern technology that initiated the transformation of Earth-system be-

behaviour and changed environmental processes: “To assign a more specific date to the onset of the Anthropocene seems somewhat arbitrary, but we propose the latter part of the Eighteenth century, although we are aware that alternative proposals can be made” (Crutzen, Stoermer 2000, 17). Crutzen and Stoermer offer the term Anthropocene for the time interval dominated by human activities and indicate that the onset of the human ability to significantly shape the Earth’s environment became notable with the Industrial Revolution:

The Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt’s design of the steam engine in 1784. (Crutzen 2002, 23)

The invention of steam engine was ground breaking because it allowed carbon dioxide to be reintroduced into the present carbon cycle. By this way, it accelerated the increase in the atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations, and radically, maybe irreversibly, altered the atmospheric structure. So, in the late Eighteenth century, the use of coal that helped the British economy flourish, gradually triggered the fossil fuel use worldwide making coal replace biomass turn out to be the major requirement of the industrial pursuits in a very short time. Thus, the late Eighteenth century and the early Nineteenth centuries can be marked as crucial periods in which the global energy regime changed towards highly demanded fossil fuels like coal. Similar to Crutzen and Stoermer, as the period marking the beginning of contemporary environmental problems, environmental scholar Andreas Malm also blames industrialisation triggered by the invention steam engine, and the global capitalist aspirations that follow this crucial invention. Malm describes the fossil economy as “a socio-ecological structure, in which a certain economical process and a certain form of energy are welded together” (2016, 39). So, the close connection between economic processes and their long-term socio-economic consequences are undeniable. However, shadowed by capitalist aspirations, these possible negative outcomes have been neglected, and heavy industrialisation process rapidly spread all around Europe.

In parallel with the industrialisation in European countries, Nineteenth century was also a period of increasing industrial activities and the need for domestic energy sources in the Ottoman Empire, which will evolve into the Republic of Turkey in the following century. Zonguldak is one of the most important industrial cities in Turkey, which is socially, economically and geo-morphologically shaped by the discovery of coal reserves in the Nineteenth century and by the mining activities following this discovery. Thus, this paper spotlights on Zonguldak to discuss the role of collective

human activities, such as industrialisation and rapid industrial production as well as urbanisation, increase in population in and around the mining areas, through exemplary local accounts from the residents of Zonguldak. By this way, this paper aims to explore a global issue, environmental changes induced by anthropogenic industrial activities, through a local lens. I believe that, as Chakrabarty suggests, a historical 'collision' of the human history and the environmental history arguing that the stories of 'our human lives' need to be supplemented by the stories of 'our collective lives as a species' (2009, 49). Thus, I aim to explore the formation of the story of coal and the story of a city, Zonguldak, together.

Zonguldak is a small coastal city located in the Blacksea region of Turkey, and it hosts the first known, and the richest coal reserves in Turkey. Supposedly, the first samples of coal in Zonguldak were accidentally discovered by a local marine named Uzun Mehmet in November, 1829. Yet, the first establishments of private corporations supported by foreign capitals in the Zonguldak coalfields under Ottoman rule date back to 19 years after the first discovery of coal within Ottoman Empire's borders, and these coalfields began to be run by the state, later the Republic of Turkey, no sooner than 1937. After such a slow and chaotic beginning, coal is located at the heart of the life in Zonguldak turning this small coastal town gradually into the leading mining city in Turkey. The industrial transformation of Zonguldak was accelerated especially in the post-Second World War period.

To look back into years when the first discovery of coal in Turkey, one needs to examine the Nineteenth century Ottoman Empire. In the early Nineteenth century, first, the Ottoman Sultan Mahmut II, and then Sultan Abdulmajid II realised the increasing demand for fuel by the Ottoman Navy, especially in military ship-building yards, as well as by the newly established factories and workshops. At the beginning, this demand had been met by burning coal. In the absence of any known natural coal reserves within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, the huge amount of coal needed for domestic industrial and military uses was being imported from other European countries, such as Britain and France. Yet, these import activities were becoming more and more costly for the Ottoman Empire. So, in order to provide a domestic alternative, upon the advise of some farsighted senior mariners, Ottoman Sultan Mahmut II gives orders for a thorough investigation of possible coal reserves within national borders. However, the majority of the common people in the country had no clear idea of how coal looks like. Thus, taken the fact that they had a chance to see coal, which was burned in the boiler rooms of their ships, the first unofficial investigators of coal were the Ottoman mariners. They were recommended by their superiors to keep their eyes open for such possibly burning stones during their vocational leaves that they would spend in their hometowns. This idea actually worked, and it is supposed that

the first samples of coal in Zonguldak were discovered accidentally by a local marine named Uzun Mehmet in November of 1829 when he was on leave in his hometown, a village called Kestaneci located in Ereğli, the largest town of Zonguldak. The unofficial version of this story, narrates that Uzun Mehmet is granted “5,000 kurush” [Ottoman penny] by the Ottoman Sultan who is very pleased upon the news, hence gives orders for putting Uzun Mehmet on a “600 kurush salary per month” for life (Seyda 7). Yet, soon rumours about Uzun Mehmet’s discovery of a mysterious, burning stone and the Sultan’s favours he was rewarded with, began to be whispered in the dark streets of Istanbul. Unfortunately, these envious whisperers pave the way for the tragic end of Uzun Mehmet on his last night in Istanbul, just before setting out back home. It is said that at the night of his assassination, he was staying in an inn called *Leblebici Hanı*, and he was poisoned with help of a poisonous liquid secretly added into his coffee, and killed by some anonymous jealous haters from Zonguldak. Then, the assassins strangle him just to be sure of his death, and finally take the dead body of Uzun Mehmet out of the inn to be dumped in the middle of nowhere. From that day on, nobody sees Uzun Mehmet and unfortunately he has no chance to enjoy Sultan’s favours. But, the people of Zonguldak still remembers him and his contribution to their city with his precious discovery. Today, many places in Zonguldak, including public parks, schools, and streets, are named after him.

As the so-called tragic end of Uzun Mehmet foreshadows, novelties were not welcomed and accepted easily by the conservative fractions of the Nineteenth century Ottomans. Firstly and mostly, they were approached with suspicion. Thus, dealing with coal in Turkey, starting from its first discovery, to its extraction, distribution and with many other steps, has been a difficult and painful process for Zonguldak, and for Turkey. Maybe that is why, Turkish novelist Mehmet Seyda opens his autobiographical novel with these lines: “Numberless hatches, black and bloody, were opened under the ground, and on top of them Zonguldak was founded (September 2, 1937)”.<sup>1</sup> Thus, “the numberless [black and bloody] hatches” that Mehmet Seyda highlights should be treated both literal and metaphorical senses: as the outcomes of both fighting against prejudices as well as resisting the envious/hateful gazes and the physical conditions. Similarly, emphasising the physically and psychologically painful process of coal mining, another literary figure, one of the most well-known Turkish poets, Orhan Veli Kanık describes the condition of the miners of Zonguldak in his 1946 poem:

On a sunny day

1 Please note that all the translations from Turkish to English used in this article, including the novels, poems, and the secondary sources in Turkish belong to the Author unless another translator is cited.

We'll see the Blacksea  
From Balkaya to Kapuz<sup>2</sup>  
as blue,  
We know this city like the palms of our hands  
With the flowery gardens of EKI,<sup>3</sup>  
With its wagons carrying coal to the port; With its pale-faced people  
who flock into the streets in the hours at the end of the work day,  
The creeks of Zonguldak flow black,  
Not as black as a shame,  
But as black as coal,  
'Cos that's how one earns his bread after all?

In the following years and centuries, this painful process pays off, and the coal mines of Zonguldak play a vital role in the industrialisation process of the Ottoman Empire, and later on of Turkey. Today, the great amount of the known anthracite reserves, high quality hard coal reserves, of Turkey is located mostly in the Zonguldak basin in the Black Sea Region of Turkey. The national reserves both of the lignite and anthracite coals are held by the General Directorate of the Turkish Hard Coal Enterprises (TTK). According to the data for 2015, the total reserve of only the anthracite, also known as hard coal, reserve is 1 billion 309 million tons. Total coal production in Turkey increasingly reached to 77 million tons in 2014, and the responsibility of this production process is shared by private sector and predominantly by public sector. Turkey's hard coal production, in particular, is carried out by TTK in Zonguldak. TTK gave only a part of production to private sector (Demirkiran 2016, 36-8).

So, coal holds a vital position for the industrial development of Zonguldak and its evolving from a small coastal town, as it was before coal mining activities started, to a busy mining city afterwards. That is why, there can be found many references to coal in Turkish literature. In this respect, Turkish novelist Mehmet Seyda's *Yanartas* [trans. *The Burning Stone*], an autobiographical narrative describing these years, is one of the most important accounts about coal in Turkish literature. In *The Burning Stone*, changing lives of the people of Zonguldak, the formation of a working class in the area along with the discovery coal, and the reshaping of the city with its natural environment are narrated from the eye of a fictional character named Osman, representing Mehmet Seyda himself, who arrives in Zonguldak in 1937, and starts working in State-run Zonguldak Coalfields Corporation in its first years of establishment. The novel covers the years between 1937 and 1943 in Zonguldak. Along with the establishment of coal

2 The small port towns of Zonguldak.

3 Short for, Ereğli Coal Running Corp.

mining and the miners' class, the cityscape rapidly changes too. The steep mountains, thick woodland, and rocky beaches of Zonguldak begin to be invaded by industrial constructions, and reshaped in accordance with the rapidly increasing economic needs. Even the marketplace located in the downtown, which is one of the rare flat areas in the mountainous Zonguldak, is divided into two by a railway carrying coal from the mines at the outskirts first to coal washery (*lavor*) in the city centre and finally to the port on the coast to be loaded on the cargo ships to be transported elsewhere. In his essay "Mehmet Seyda'nın *Yanartaş* Romanında İşçi Sınıfı ve İşçi Kültürü," in which he analyses the treatment of the working class and the formation of the working class culture in Mehmet Seyda's *The Burning Stone*, sociologist Akın Bakioglu, who is mostly known for his studies on the problems of the working class, especially of the coal miners in Turkey, sees this forced parallelism and the closely knit structure of mining areas and local people's residences as an handicap and the inevitable outcome of the difficult geography of Zonguldak (2014, 115-116). In other words, due to geo-morphological conditions of the city, the borders of industrialised areas, coal mines, and the area of local habitation intersect making coal literally a part of everyday life.

The background atmosphere of *Yanartaş* [*The Burning Stone*] is filled with the sounds of excavation, transportation of coal, as well as the miners on strike, with the images of pieces of coal dropped out of the railway carriages and the gipsy children collecting them to burn at home, and the dark water from the coal washery, or "lavour" to borrow the French terminology which is still in use in Zonguldak, leaking into the streets and the creek running through the city, the voices of mules carrying the coal to the steep and narrow places unreachable by the vehicles as well as the mines present a realistic description of a city and its inhabitants in parallel with the production of coal. Though inactive now, the towers of the old coal washery still decorates the Zonguldak cityscape, and the train carrying coal to the port through the marketplace still has the priority of access over human and car trafficking even today. So, coal has been reshaping the cityscape of Zonguldak and the lives of its inhabitants since the Nineteenth century, and the history of Zonguldak can be read as the history of coal and coal miners in Turkey as well.

The changes entailing the increasing coal mining activities in Zonguldak and its surrounding can be categorised under three major headlines. The first category covers the demographic changes. When the coal was first discovered during the reign of Ottoman Sultan Abdulmajid II, the duty of running the mines in Ereğli basin was given to the Hazine-i Hassa, which a treasury reserved for the Sultan's private wealth and inner expenses, and also a supplementary treasury for the main treasury of the state, between 1848-1865. But in time, its financing was shadowed by rumours of corruption. Later on, between 1865-1909, this duty was transferred to the Otto-

man Navy, and mining activities were conducted by the marines. Between 1909 and 1920, the coal mines were state-run by the hand of the Administration of Trade, and after the 1920s, the running and administration of Zonguldak mines were passed to the Ministry of Finance. Yet, the major problem was to find qualified miners. In the absence of qualified Ottoman miners and engineering expertise, foreign miners from neighbouring countries such as Montenegro and Croatia, and engineers from France, Britain, and Russia were imported. In *Yanartas [The Burning Stone]*, Mehmet Seyda notes that during these days, with the need for labour force increased in time, coal was being extracted through quite primitive methods:

Coal was carried out of the galleries in the underground collieries in pannier baskets loaded either on the shoulders of human miners or miner mules. The second option was to carry the coal out through the wooden wagons moving on the wooden rails tracks. Then the coal was unloaded in the threshing fields and reloaded to the mules to be transported to the loading docks. (Seyda 1970, 45)

Among the demographic changes following the increasing coal mining activities were the structural improvements for the increased number of miners. With the declaration of the republican regime, and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, mines gained more importance. Laws regulating the work in the mines and the life around the mines passed rapidly. The first priority was establishing facilities for the non-local miners, such as residential houses, bath, heating, etc. Day by day, Zonguldak has become a popular city of employment taking mass migrations of miners from the neighbouring cities. In short time, this popularity led to the change of the cityscape and the architectural structure of Zonguldak.

The last, and maybe the inevitable, outcome following these developments was the use and abuse of local natural resources and the re-formation of the natural environment in accordance with the requirements of miners and mines. For example, the city was rapidly covered with a network of railways. This iron network was connecting the suburban countryside, in which the coal mines were located, to the urban ports where the extracted coal was loaded to cargo ships and transported to the other national ports. Moreover, the timber, which was needed inside the colliery to support the underground tunnels and to construct the wooden tracks carrying the coal out, was being provided by the thick forests covering the high mountains and steep hills surrounding Zonguldak. In addition, unfortunately the air of the city was rapidly contaminated by the coal dust that appear during the extracting process and by the sooth which remains hanging in the air after the burning process. In many literary and non-literary sources, the creeks nearby the coal mines are described as occasionally running blackish due to the coal washing process following

the extraction process. In *The Burning Stone*, Mehmet Seyda describes the local children playing outside by floating their paper ships in the dark human-made creek created by the water flowing out of the labour, coal washery towers located near the city centre.

So, along with these demographic, structural, and environmental changes triggered by the acceleration of coal mining activities in Zonguldak, the city metaphorically became an important national centre for the working class, hence initiated the formation of a working class culture and identity in Zonguldak. Employment of local labour force, immigrations from the neighbouring cities, construction of housing estates to accommodate the growing number of miners, and passing of legal regulations on the working conditions and hours in the mines are the first observable changes in this early period of coal mining in Zonguldak. Yet, for me, one of the most interesting part of the formation of a working class structure and culture in Zonguldak along with the discovery of rich coal reserves nearby is not only employment of human labour but also of the non-human labour; that is, the use of mules for the mining activities. Many mules, under local administration's protection, are recruited and recorded under the title of "miner mules", performing loading and unloading coal in and out of the underground mines, helping to rescue miners underground during possible explosions, etc., and this practice continued till 1980s. According to Bakioğlu, the use of mules in Zonguldak was also a direct result of the condition of mines in the 40s which offers very "little possibility for mechanization" (2014, 117) due to their geographical location. The steep, mountainous locations of the mining areas hosting the richest coal reserves were not easily accessible. Moreover, due to the length and narrowness of the tunnels inside the coal mines limiting any human movement inside and the difficulty of construction of any mechanical carriage system as well as the cost of such a mechanical construction under the economically challenging conditions in the country, miner mules were seen as the most practical and least costly alternative to mechanization in the mines.

Animal-powered carts, wagons, carriages, cabs, street-cars, and omnibuses filled the streets of the Nineteenth century (Hribal 2007, 104). So, in the Nineteenth century context, using mules in mining activities and inside the mines was not a rare practice, which was unique to Turkish coal mines. Carrying coal out of the mines through mules was a common practice in many European countries, like Britain and France for many years, and mules are continued to be used in the mines "in many countries such as the UK and the USA till the end of the 1990s" (Uzar Ozdemir 2017, 258). In her essay "Zonguldak'taki Madenci ve Çöpçü Katırlar", in which she explores the use of mules as miners and garbage collectors in Zonguldak, sociologist Figen Uzar Ozdemir states that some mules were brought to the mines when they are six months old and continue to work in the mines for 25-30 years till they are retired (259). Similar to Uzar

Ozdemir emphasising the length of a regular miner mule's employment, mining engineer Nadir Avsaroğlu emphasises the long working hours of the miner mules and he strikingly informs that sometimes the mules would "stay under the ground for 24 hours" (2017, 126).

The improvements in the mines and especially the facilities outside the mines start with the Law no. 2/14547 which passed in 15 October 1940 with the transfer of the state authority to run Zonguldak mines to EKI (Ereğli Coalmining Corporation). This improvements also included the working hours for miners, age limits for employment, extra facilities for the miner families such as meeting their social, educational, medical, residential needs, and so on. In *Yanartas* (The Burning Stone), Mehmet Seyda states that with the new legal regulations executed by the government in the early 40s, and expected to be effective in the state-run mines in Zonguldak, not only the miners' working space and its surrounding but also of the miner mules' were structurally re-organised. First, all the miner mules were taken under official record and given a nail number. Moreover, with a similar improvement in the work and social standards of the human miners, their nonhuman collaborators, the miner mules's life standards also changed. For example, special-designed stables for the miner mules were built underground. Above the ground, for them, special animal keepers, stablemen and vets were assigned to preserve their well-being. However, life in the coal mines was still extremely hard for the miner mules.

In his newspaper article published in the most prestigious local newspaper of Zonguldak; *Pusula*, in 12 May 2017, the Turkish journalist Yüksel Yıldırım underlines the contributions of the miner mules diligently:

These miner mule had served for many years in the coal mines run by public and private sector under the General Directory of TTK. Since the early 1980s, 40 recorded mules can be found having served in the coal mines located in Armutçuk, Amasra, Üzülmöz, Kozlu and Karadon as locomotives carrying coal-loaded wagons out, and the various necessary materials in, helping the manoeuvring of 4-6 ton-weight wagons. They also used in the rescue missions for the miners who are stuck underground after firedamp gas explosions as well as the cleaning afterwards. Mules were able to enter the narrow places where miners could not reach. Some of them are even injured during these missions. Eventually, [due to the harsh working conditions] most of these mules died either of bowel infection or muscle weakening.

Occasionally these miner mules attracted the attention of the national and local newspapers. For example, Avsaroğlu mentions about a news headline published in *Hurriyet*, a well-known and largely circulated national newspaper, headlined as "Miner Mules Support their Owners Financially" and dated with 22 September (2010, 129). The news is about a miner

mule working in a private coal mine located in Karadon area in Zonguldak as carrying coal outside the mines. The owner of the miner mule is also a miner named İlyas Alaca. Alaca describes his mule as his “best friend and colleague” (2010, 129), and he continues: “We descend to the underground, enter and exit the mine together. My mule carries out the coals loaded into a wagon inside the mine. Without my mule I could not perform such a heavy job by myself” (2010, 129). As it is seen in the abovementioned statements of İlyas Alaca, for the owner his mule was more than an asset, an object to be possessed, but like a family member. Jason Hribal cites some anecdotes from Ireland, England and Canada, underlining the emotional attachment that the mule owner/keeper and the developed for their mules after their collaboration:

Mike Scorback, a teamster from Thunder Bay, Canada, [narrates that] “there were some horses in camp with raw necks. Guys didn’t clean them. I used my own water to heal them with urine and I cured them in two weeks and stole oats from the barn boss to give the horses more blood.” [Because] “they were my chums, those horses.” The English miners at Denaby Coal Mine “used to send beer down t’pit for ‘em, for the ponies, as sort of medicine.” (Hridal 2007, 103)

Similarly, it is known that the keepers of the mules employed by Zonguldak municipality were naming the mules under their care as “Gaye” or “Kadife”, which are the names with anthropomorphic connotations (Uzar Özdemir 2017, 262). This clearly shows the emotional attachment of the miner to his nonhuman collaborator.

On the other hand, the news headline of *Hurriyet* published in 24 January 2001, was sadly declaring the death of the last miner mule in Armutçuk mines (Karadeniz Ereğli, Zonguldak). According to the details in the news, this last miner mule had been working as locomotive, literally, carrying coal-loaded wagons out of the underground mine, and died of bowel infection and muscle deformation after its 27 years of service in the Zonguldak coal mines. The same news took place in other news portals, too, like NTVMSNBC, with the statements of the authorities of TTK declaring the material value of this mule, which has been considered as the official property of the institution, as “110 million 923 thousand and 92 Turkish Liras” (2001). This mule was like the iconic symbol or mascot of the institution and its death is reported to cause deep sorrow among the miners. The mule was working under the ground for such a long time that, when it was taken above the ground, its eyes becoming extremely sensitive to sunlight were almost blind. This was the last time, a mule was settled underground stables under hundreds of metres.

Focusing on the pain observable in the eyes of the miner mule called “Alagöz” (Hazel Eyed), another well-known Turkish author Rıfat Ilgaz,

mentions the miner mules and their daily routine in one of his poems. The name of the miner mule described in Ilgaz's poem is "Alagöz". Here is the poem:

Alone  
Pulls the wagons Alagöz!  
Neither a horse nor a donkey,  
But the noble mule of the coal mine, Alagöz!  
Under the ground,  
It works for the sake of god  
Since from *Germinal*  
Works for the sake of a handful of barley  
[...]  
Enough with this light at the mouth of the mine,  
Twilight!  
Arriving a destination a thousand times and returning again..  
Enough! Let the sun rise,  
Neither for the sake of a handful of barley  
Nor for the sake of a bit of grass...  
(1987)

After 1988, the employment of mules in the mines was prohibited legally due to the increasing number of casualties in the employed miner mules' population as well as the decrease in the need to them thanks to mechanization. But today, mules are still employed by the local administration in Zonguldak as garbage collectors. Yet, considering the physical handicaps posed by the geographical structure of Zonguldak and its surrounding areas, as well as the lack of mechanization in the early coal mines, in the absence of miner mules, mining activities in Zonguldak's coal mines probably would not develop that soon. Moreover, considering the parallel improvements in the legal rights and the working conditions of both human and nonhuman labour forces, the working class identity built among the miners of Zonguldak owes a lot to the collaborative presence of their miner mules. In this respect, it can be argued that miner mules both accelerated the industrial production of coal in Zonguldak and contributed to the reclaiming of the miners' rights. So, in Zonguldak, nonhuman labour through their physical and emotional attachments with their human collaborators has remained an indispensable part of human labour for many years. Yet, in time, especially with the decreasing need for miner mules as a result of mechanization, and the use of technological advances in mining, human labour began to be prioritised over nonhuman labour. In this context, miner mules were just used, mostly abused, and treated merely as means of production. Thus, the exploitation of nonhuman labour by humans, as illustrated in the case of miner mules in Zonguldak, can also be read as just

another example of anthropocentrism, putting human well-being over the well-being of any nonhuman element of nature including the natural resources, plants and animals. In this respect, this anthropocentric tendency highlights the persistence of the ongoing reckless exploitation of natural resources for the sake of human needs.

In a nutshell, as Bakioğlu argues with “the autobiographical elements” in Mehmet Seyda’s novel *Yanartas*, its “nonfictional structure” (2014, 121) can be treated as a reliable documentary and “a realistic representation of the period it was produced” (2014, 121). In this respect, it gives the reader a reliable perspective on the working class-environment entanglements based on coal mining in Zonguldak as well as the human-nonhuman collaboration for the extraction of coal. The illustrative examples from the chosen literary works unfortunately prove the unequal distribution of power among the human and nonhuman elements. Not only the natural resources but also the nonhuman animals inhabiting this particular environment, Zonguldak, suffered under heavy exploitations of humans. The case of Zonguldak coal mines is not an exception, but just another example of a global situation in which human needs are prioritised over environmental sustainability.

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