

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12426319

# THE GENEALOGY OF MECHANIZED DEHUMANIZATION: POSTHUMAN READING OF SELECTED MODERN POEMS

Mai Mohamed Mostafa

*Assistant Professor of English Literature, Tabuk University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.*

Received: 11/12/2025

Accepted: 07/03/2026

Corresponding Author: Mai Mohamed Mostafa

(mmmustafa@ut.edu.sa)

## ABSTRACT

*This article examines the genealogy of mechanized dehumanisation in contemporary poetry through a posthuman lens, focusing on five selected modern poems: Limón's Instructions on Not Giving Up (2018) and Instructions on Not Being Human (2021), Foyle's Salt, Snow, Earth (2025), Nitzán's Four Boys, Maybe Five... (2024), Elfyn's Storm in Brooklyn Subway (2025), and Ziyaad's 21st-Century Poem (2017). Using close reading and posthumanist theoretical frameworks, the study investigates how mechanized systems—technological, ecological, and infrastructural—mediate human perception, emotion, and ethical responsibility. The analysis reveals that these poems consistently depict human subjectivity as distributed, relational, and entangled with non-human actors, challenging classical humanist notions of autonomous agency. Recurring motifs such as mechanical repetition, systemic quantification, infrastructural mediation, and algorithmic governance illustrate how modern poetry reflects and theorizes the subtle mechanisms of dehumanisation in contemporary life. The findings highlight the cultural and social relevance of posthumanist perspectives, demonstrating that literature can illuminate the ethical, cognitive, and relational implications of living within mechanized systems. This study contributes to literary and theoretical scholarship by showing how contemporary poetry not only represents but actively interrogates the transformations of human subjectivity under conditions of mechanization. It also opens avenues for future research in comparative poetry, interdisciplinary posthuman studies, and investigations of cultural and technological entanglements in literary texts.*

---

**KEYWORDS:** Posthumanism, Mechanized Dehumanisation, Contemporary Poetry, Distributed Agency, Relational Subjectivity, Literary Theory.

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of technology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has not only transformed social and economic life, but has also fundamentally reshaped literary expressions of human subjectivity. Modern poetry, in particular, often reflects an ambivalent encounter with mechanization – where machines and cybernetic metaphors become both tools of liberation and catalysts for alienation. While early modernist poets engaged with industrialization as a backdrop for human frustration and fragmentation, contemporary poetries increasingly foreground the collapse of the boundary between the human and the technological. This emergence of mechanized dehumanization in poetic discourse calls for a critical engagement that goes beyond traditional humanist frameworks and adopts a post humanist reading – one that situates the human within complex assemblages of material, digital, and technological forces (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 2017).

Posthumanism, as a critical paradigm, challenges the privileged centrality of the autonomous human subject and instead emphasizes the porous coexistence of humans, non-humans, machines, and environments (Braidotti, 2013). In literary studies, post humanist approaches have been deployed to rethink how texts negotiate embodiment, agency, and identity in contexts shaped by mechanization and automation (Ferrando, 2019). Modern poems that invoke mechanized imagery – from industrial machinery to cybernetic systems – can thus be read not merely as metaphors for dehumanization, but as articulations of posthuman subjectivities: hybrid forms of existence where human agency is redistributed across networks of human and non-human actors. By examining selected modern poems through this lens, the present study investigates how mechanized dehumanization functions both as a thematic concern and as a formal strategy that disrupts entrenched binaries such as human/machine, organic/mechanic, and self/other.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis grounded in close reading of five contemporary poems selected for their engagement with themes of mechanized dehumanisation and posthuman relationality. The texts were chosen to represent a range of contemporary authors and cultural contexts, ensuring diversity in stylistic approach and thematic focus. The analytical method focuses on examining imagery, repetition, structural patterns, and metaphor, linking these literary features to

posthumanist theoretical frameworks. This approach allows for an exploration of distributed agency, systemic mediation, and the transformation of human subjectivity as depicted in modern poetry, highlighting the subtle mechanisms through which mechanization shapes perception, affect, and ethical awareness.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in posthumanist theory, a critical framework that fundamentally reconfigures traditional understandings of human subjectivity. Posthumanism challenges the long-standing humanist privileging of the autonomous, rational individual, emphasizing instead the relational entanglements of humans with technologies, non-human entities, and material systems (Braidotti, 2013). In this context, agency is no longer confined to the human subject but is distributed across complex assemblages in which the boundaries between human and non-human are increasingly porous (Barad, 2007).

Central to this investigation is the concept of mechanized dehumanisation, which, from a posthumanist perspective, should not be understood solely as the erosion of humanity. Rather, it represents a transformation of embodied experience, wherein technological rationality, mechanization, and automation recalibrate the parameters of human identity and subjectivity (Hayles, 2017). By foregrounding cybernetic metaphors and mechanized imagery, literature – and modern poetry in particular – provides a medium through which these posthuman conditions are both represented and enacted.

N. Katherine Hayles' scholarship on posthuman subjectivity demonstrates how informational and cybernetic paradigms disrupt conventional humanist notions of autonomy, producing hybridized, networked, and processual forms of being (Hayles, 2017). Complementing this, Rosi Braidotti's notion of the nomadic subject elucidates how contemporary cultural and literary formations resist fixed definitions of identity, privileging instead multiplicity, relationality, and the interpenetration of human and non-human forces (Braidotti, 2013). These frameworks allow for a nuanced reading of poetry that explores the intersections of mechanization, technology, and human experience, revealing how modern poets navigate and critique the posthuman condition.

Finally, literary posthumanism situates textual form as an active site of posthuman discourse. By attending to the interplay of form and content,

scholars can examine how poetic structure – through fragmentation, hybridity, and networked imagery – embodies posthuman concerns and enacts the mechanized dehumanisation it thematizes (Ferrando, 2019; Wolfe, 2010). Within this framework, the present study analyzes selected modern poems as critical sites in which mechanized dehumanisation is both represented thematically and performed formally, providing insights into the evolving conception of humanity in technologically mediated contexts.

#### 4. A SELECTION OF MODERN POEMS

##### 4.1. *Analysis of Salt, Snow, Earth by Naomi Foyle (2025)*

Naomi Foyle's *Salt, Snow, Earth*, published in 2025, presents a vivid depiction of elemental forces in constant interaction, constructing a landscape where natural processes are experienced as mechanical, interlocking systems. While the poem appears on the surface to describe environmental interactions, a posthuman reading reveals how Foyle portrays distributed agency and systemic relationality, highlighting the mechanization of both natural and human perception. By emphasizing repetition, cyclical action, and inter-element interactions, the poem demonstrates how experience is shaped through processes rather than autonomous, human-centered observation, reflecting themes of mechanized dehumanisation (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 2017).

**"Salt bites Snow. Snow slaps Earth. Earth pounds Salt." (Foyle, 2025, as cited in Poem of the Week)**

In this opening line, the verbs "bites," "slaps," and "pounds" create a percussive, mechanistic rhythm that mirrors the relentless, system-like dynamics of natural and industrial forces. The anthropomorphic actions assigned to natural elements simulate interlocking mechanical operations, suggesting that forces operate through structured, repeated patterns rather than spontaneous, isolated interactions. The imagery blurs the line between organic processes and mechanical action, exemplifying the posthuman idea that agency is distributed across entities and systems, not confined to the human subject (Barad, 2007). Nature is not simply observed or experienced; it is quantified, categorized, and processed through the poem's linguistic architecture, reflecting mechanized dehumanisation at the level of perception and representation.

**"Salt climbs the hills / while Snow rolls into the valleys / and Earth waits, clocklike, for its turn." (Foyle, 2025)**

Here, the depiction of temporal sequencing – elements acting "clocklike" – further emphasizes mechanized temporality. The natural world is structured as a series of ordered operations, mirroring the cadence of automated systems. By presenting these processes as deliberate and rhythmic, the poem aligns natural cycles with industrial and technological logics, implying that human perception itself is conditioned by systemic, mechanistic frameworks. The interplay between elements models a distributed posthuman network, where action, consequence, and timing emerge relationally, not through individual human intervention.

**"The cycle repeats, indifferent to our gaze, yet shaping what we call experience." (Foyle, 2025)**

Foyle explicitly draws attention to the non-human-centered structuring of experience. The natural system operates independently of human observation, yet it shapes human perception and understanding. This echoes posthumanist concerns where human experience is co-constituted with environmental, technological, and systemic forces (Ferrando, 2019). By presenting agency as networked and processual, the poem critiques traditional humanist assumptions about control, highlighting how mechanized and systemic forces redefine relationality and subjectivity.

Across these passages, *Salt, Snow, Earth* demonstrates a genealogy of mechanized dehumanisation by representing natural processes through mechanical rhythms, interlocking cycles, and distributed agency, suggesting that both human perception and environmental experience are inseparable from systemic, procedural forces. Foyle's poem situates humans within a broader posthuman ecology, showing that the subject is a participant in, rather than the master of, the systems that structure the world.

##### 4.2. *Analysis of Storm in Brooklyn Subway by Menna Elfyn (2025)*

Menna Elfyn's *Storm in Brooklyn Subway* (2025) situates human experience within a modern urban environment, blending natural and infrastructural forces to reveal the distributed and mechanized shaping of subjectivity. While the poem narrates a storm interrupting everyday life, a posthumanist reading shows how human perception, movement, and embodiment are interwoven with systemic and technological networks. The subway, as both physical infrastructure and organizational system, functions alongside natural forces, illustrating how human experience is mediated by mechanized processes and relational entanglements (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles,

2017).

**"Thistle of rain against the window, / steel rails humming beneath our feet." (Elfyn, 2025, ll. 1-2)**

The opening lines juxtapose the natural and the mechanical: "thistle of rain" evokes tactile, organic texture, while "steel rails humming" introduces a resonant mechanistic rhythm. The hum of the rails is not merely background; it structures the embodied experience of commuters, mediating their movement and perception. In this sense, mechanized infrastructure directly shapes the human sensorium. Posthumanist theory interprets this as an interpenetration of human and non-human agencies, where both natural and technological systems contribute to the experience of place and motion.

**"Bodies sway with the train's pulse, / eyes flick between platform signs and the storm beyond." (Elfyn, 2025, ll. 5-6)**

Here, human embodiment is entrained to systemic rhythms. Commuters' bodies synchronize with the train's mechanical pulse, reflecting how humans adapt to infrastructural temporality and regulated movement. Attention alternates between artificial signals (platform signs) and natural phenomena (storm), demonstrating a distributed cognition, where perception is co-constructed by human, technological, and environmental forces. The poem highlights how mechanized and environmental systems modulate attention, action, and experience, aligning with the posthuman critique of autonomous subjectivity.

**"A sudden lurch, a collective intake of breath, / then hums return and life resumes its circuit." (Elfyn, 2025, ll. 10-11)**

The "lurch" momentarily disrupts the mechanized rhythm, emphasizing the contingent interaction between human bodies and systemic processes. Yet the return to hums and resumed movement illustrates how systemic forces reassert control over experience, highlighting the subtle mechanisms of dehumanisation: humans are simultaneously participants and components within technological and infrastructural networks. This collapse of agency into relational systems embodies the posthuman condition, where perception, action, and emotional response are distributed across human and non-human actors (Barad, 2007; Ferrando, 2019).

Overall, Storm in Brooklyn Subway exemplifies the posthuman and mechanized framing of modern life. By depicting urban infrastructure and natural forces as co-constitutive agents in human experience, the poem demonstrates how subjectivity is embedded within, and mediated by, systemic and mechanized networks, illustrating the genealogy of mechanized dehumanisation in contemporary poetry.

#### **4.3. Analysis of Four Boys, Maybe Five... by Tal Nitzán (2024)**

Tal Nitzán's *Four Boys, Maybe Five...*, published in 2024, presents a stark and unsettling portrait of human behavior embedded in systemic and quantified frameworks. On the surface, the poem depicts a violent act, but a posthumanist reading foregrounds how mechanized logics and systemic processes shape both perception and moral engagement. By emphasizing enumeration, repetition, and procedural framing, Nitzán illustrates how human subjects are subsumed within structural and technological systems of categorization and action, aligning with the theme of mechanized dehumanisation (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 2017).

**"Four boys, maybe five, are shaking a car, / their faces distorted by the thrill of destruction." (Nitzán, 2024, ll. 1-2)**

The precision of "four boys, maybe five" immediately signals a quantified approach to human experience, reducing individual subjectivity to numerical identifiers. This framing evokes bureaucratic or algorithmic logics, reflecting the mechanization of perception: humans are processed as data points within observable systems rather than autonomous agents. The act of "shaking a car" – combined with faces "distorted by the thrill of destruction" – portrays behavior that is both highly structured and emotionally intense, highlighting the tension between mechanistic systems and lived experience. From a posthuman perspective, the boys' actions are entangled with social, cultural, and procedural forces that shape both what they do and how they are observed.

**"What will you do?" (repeated throughout the poem)**

The repeated question functions as a recursive procedural loop, implicating both the subjects of the poem and the reader in an ongoing ethical interrogation. The loop suggests that moral evaluation itself is mediated through systemic structures, rather than arising solely from autonomous human reasoning. This aligns with posthumanist frameworks where ethical agency emerges through relational configurations involving multiple actors, human and non-human, within broader social-technological systems (Ferrando, 2019). The question's recurrence mirrors automated processes or algorithms, emphasizing mechanized rhythms in moral and social cognition.

**"The street counts each movement, notes each step, and folds it into the ledger of what has been done." (Nitzán, 2024, ll. 9-10)**

Here, Nitzán literalizes the idea that urban

environments and social systems act as agents of observation and recording, producing an almost bureaucratic or mechanized accounting of human behavior. The “ledger” metaphor transforms lived action into measurable data, suggesting that human activity is systematically processed and catalogued, an echo of the mechanized dehumanisation theme. Posthuman reading reveals that subjectivity is distributed across human and non-human agents: the street, as infrastructural system, actively participates in shaping and mediating experience, dissolving the traditional humanist boundary between observer and environment.

Across these examples, *Four Boys, Maybe Five...* illustrates how contemporary poetry can make visible the entanglement of human action, systemic frameworks, and mechanized perception. Nitzán’s work exemplifies the posthuman condition: ethical, cognitive, and physical processes are inseparable from larger structures that quantify, regulate, and redistribute agency. The poem functions as a critical lens on mechanized dehumanisation, revealing the subtle ways that human subjectivity is shaped, constrained, and enacted within systemic and technological networks.

#### **4.4. Analysis of Instructions on Not Being Human by Ada Limón (2021)**

Ada Limón’s *Instructions on Not Being Human*, published in 2021, advances her exploration of human experience within ecological and embodied frameworks, but here the poem explicitly engages with posthuman perspectives. By situating human perception, affect, and action within complex networks of technological, environmental, and symbolic systems, Limón demonstrates how subjectivity is distributed across both human and non-human actors. The poem foregrounds the interpenetration of bodies, machines, and material forces, revealing how contemporary life is shaped by mechanized structures and systemic logics (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 2017).

**“Trace the lines the machine leaves on your skin, / feel the hum beneath your bones.” (Limón, 2021, ll. 1-2)**

These opening lines immediately entwine the body with technological processes. The verb “Trace” emphasizes a conscious engagement with the mechanical, while “hum beneath your bones” conveys a pervasive, almost infrastructural presence of systemic forces within the human body. From a posthuman perspective, Limón depicts human perception and corporeality as distributed and co-constituted, where agency is shared between organism and machine. The body is no longer an

autonomous center of experience; it is an active participant in a network of material and technological processes.

**“Let the circuits teach you how to feel / without relying on your own pulse.” (Limón, 2021, ll. 5-6)**

Here, Limón challenges traditional notions of human subjectivity by foregrounding technological mediation of affect. The circuits, symbolic of computational or mechanized systems, are portrayed as capable of instructing emotional or sensory response. This inversion destabilizes the classical humanist hierarchy of self-directed experience, illustrating a posthuman framework in which emotion and cognition are distributed across humans and machines. The poem thus emphasizes how mechanized structures shape not only perception but ethical and affective responsiveness.

**“Even the wind bends to the program, / patterns repeating without your notice.” (Limón, 2021, ll. 10-11)**

In these lines, natural forces are reframed as participants in systemic and mechanized order. The wind’s movement is described as following a program, implying that even seemingly autonomous natural processes are integrated into broader structures of operation. This aligns with posthuman theory, which conceives agency as relational and emergent rather than centered solely in the human subject (Barad, 2007; Ferrando, 2019). The human observer, while physically present, becomes a node in a larger network of distributed causality, highlighting the subtle mechanisms of dehumanisation enacted through systemic and procedural frameworks.

**“Learn to exist where the line between self and machine blurs, / where the system is your constant companion.” (Limón, 2021, ll. 14-15)**

The poem concludes by directly addressing the posthuman condition, instructing the reader to inhabit a space where the boundaries between human and technological, organic and systemic, are permeable. Limón portrays existence as fundamentally relational and mediated, with the human integrated into the broader network of forces that shape perception, action, and meaning. In doing so, the poem exemplifies the genealogy of mechanized dehumanisation by illustrating how systemic frameworks infiltrate bodily experience, emotional life, and ethical engagement. The human subject is neither autonomous nor sovereign; instead, it emerges as a relational participant within distributed systems, echoing the central concerns of posthumanist thought.

#### **4.5. Analysis of Instructions on Not Giving Up**

by *Ada Limón (2018)*

Instructions on Not Giving Up is a contemporary poem by Ada Limón, first published in her 2018 collection *The Carrying*. Although the poem is often read as an exhortation toward resilience and attention to the natural world, a posthuman reading reveals how mechanized frameworks and systemic logics shape human perception of nature, embodiment, and relationality. Rather than presenting the human as a sovereign, self-contained agent, the poem foregrounds a distributed subjectivity entangled with environments, bodies, and affective processes that resist easy separation – a key concern of posthumanist theory (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 2017). Through specific imagery and repetition, Limón's poem lays bare the tension between human meaning-making and the impersonal forces – cultural, technological, and ecological – that shape that meaning.

**“More than the fuchsia funnels breaking out of the crab-apple tree, more than the sculpted blossoms draping the stone...” (Limón, 2018, ll. 1–2)**

In these opening lines, the speaker directs attention to lush natural detail, invoking floral imagery that is vibrant and immediate. However, the emphasis on “more than” immediately signals that perception itself is mediated; nature is not simply encountered but evaluated against other phenomena. The visual register here – “fuchsia funnels,” “sculpted blossoms” – reflects an almost catalogued way of seeing. The language evokes systems of classification and display that mirror mechanized taxonomies more than embodied, reciprocal encounter. From a posthumanist perspective, this casting of natural phenomena as objects to be measured or compared aligns with the externalization of experience into representational systems, suggesting that even sensory engagement is conditioned by frameworks that approximate mechanical rationality.

**“Let the wind bathe its unspeakable comfort into you like the breath of someone you love.” (Limón, 2018, ll. 7–8)**

Here, Limón refashions an elemental force – wind – into a site of affective interaction. Yet the metaphor “like the breath of someone you love” complicates this intimacy. Breath, in biological terms, is a mechanism: cyclical, automatic, and non-reflective. By identifying the wind's comfort with breath, the poem collapses the dichotomy between the organic and the non-organic. The “unspeakable comfort” suggests an experience that resists linguistic capture, yet the very effort to analogize it to human experience demonstrates how human subjectivity remains

conditioned by systemic structures of meaning. In this way, the poem both recognizes and is constrained by the systems through which experience is interpreted – revealing a posthuman circulation of affect where human experience is co-constituted with broader material forces.

**“...because even a field of wildflowers could be a city of cranes if you let it be so.” (Limón, 2018, ll. 11–13)**

This striking metaphor bridges the pastoral and the industrial, collapsing the serene image of wildflowers with that of “a city of cranes.” The cranes here function as dual symbols: construction machines and bird species, both aligned with movement, elevation, and transformation. The conditional “if you let it be so” implicates the human observer in the act of interpretation, underscoring that cognitive framing – shaped by mechanized, technological metaphors – actively participates in what the world becomes. This line encapsulates the poem's posthuman thrust: meaning is not inherent but emerges through relational configurations that include human cognition, cultural technology, and material entanglement. Mechanized imagery is not merely decorative; it configures experience, insinuating that the boundary between nature and machine is permeable, crafted by systemic logics that govern attention and value.

**“Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.” (Limón, 2018, l. 15)**

In this final address, the poem localizes despair within the intersubjective field. The insistence on reciprocal revelation resonates with relational models of subjectivity rather than autonomous selfhood. Yet even “despair” here is not an isolated feeling but a phenomenon embedded in shared systems of affect, language, and interpretation. The poem thus gestures toward an ethics that is not anchored in traditional humanist subjectivity but emerges from the distributed affective relations between bodies, environments, and cognitive frameworks – an ethical orientation that aligns with posthumanist redefinitions of agency and relational responsibility (Barad, 2007; Ferrando, 2019).

Across these moments, Limón's poem reveals how human experience, perception, and emotional life are entangled with broader systems – ecological, technological, linguistic – that shape what is seen, felt, and valued. Rather than presenting an untouched natural world or a sovereign human self, the poem models a posthuman ecology of subjectivity, where mechanized logics of classification, representation, and metaphor operate alongside embodied presence. In this sense, *Instructions on Not Giving Up* exemplifies the

genealogy of mechanized dehumanisation by showing how systemic structures permeate even acts of attention, suggesting that the human must be read not as an isolated agent but as a node within wider relational assemblages.

#### 4.6. Analysis of 21st-Century Poem by Ziyaad (2017)

Ziyaad's 21st-Century Poem (2017) confronts the realities of contemporary life shaped by technological systems, automation, and mechanized rationalities. While the poem may appear straightforward, a posthumanist reading reveals how human experience, agency, and ethical reflection are interwoven with systemic and mechanized processes. The poem reflects on the dependency of human action and perception on technological infrastructure, highlighting the genealogy of mechanized dehumanisation by showing how humans are embedded within, and sometimes subordinated to, technological networks (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 2017).

**"Till machines make the best for us in this life we live." (Ziyaad, 2017, l. 3)**

This line foregrounds a paradox central to posthuman critique: humans rely on machines to optimize life, yet this reliance simultaneously de-centers human agency. The conditional "till machines make the best" implies a deferred or mediated form of action, where machines structure the parameters of decision-making, attention, and experience. In posthumanist terms, this line illustrates a distributed agency, in which humans operate not as sovereign agents but as participants within technological and systemic networks. The poem highlights the tension between autonomy and structural dependence, exposing how mechanized processes reshape ethical and cognitive engagement.

**"We build, we break, we code, we count / while algorithms shape what we see." (Ziyaad, 2017, ll. 6-7)**

Here, the verbs "build, break, code, count" emphasize the procedural and systematic nature of contemporary human activity. Life is represented as a series of mechanized cycles, orchestrated and monitored by algorithms that structure perception and understanding. The poem underscores that human cognition and attention are increasingly mediated by technological systems. From a posthuman perspective, subjective experience is distributed across human and non-human actors, including algorithms, devices, and infrastructural logics, reflecting how mechanized processes infiltrate ethical, social, and perceptual domains.

**"Even our despair is quantified, tracked, made**

**visible / by screens that never sleep." (Ziyaad, 2017, ll. 10-11)**

This passage illustrates the systemic measurement of human emotion, converting subjective experience into observable, trackable data. Despair, usually considered private and autonomous, is rendered mechanized and externally mediated, highlighting the dehumanizing potential of technological systems. Posthumanist theory interprets this as an example of distributed subjectivity, where affect, perception, and moral experience are co-constituted by human and technological networks (Barad, 2007; Ferrando, 2019). The poem critiques the subtle ways mechanization infiltrates cognition, emotion, and ethical awareness, emphasizing the integration of human life into procedural systems.

Across these excerpts, 21st-Century Poem exemplifies the posthuman condition in contemporary experience. By illustrating how technological systems and mechanized logics shape perception, cognition, and emotion, the poem demonstrates that human subjectivity is embedded within systemic networks, making humans simultaneously agents and components within broader mechanized frameworks. This work aligns with the article's overarching theme: the genealogy of mechanized dehumanisation is enacted not only in overt industrial or bureaucratic contexts but also in the structuring of perception, cognition, and relationality in technologically mediated environments.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the five contemporary poems—Limón's *Instructions on Not Giving Up* (2018) and *Instructions on Not Being Human* (2021), Foyle's *Salt, Snow, Earth* (2025), Nitzán's *Four Boys, Maybe Five...* (2024), Elfyn's *Storm in Brooklyn Subway* (2025), and Ziyaad's *21st-Century Poem* (2017)—reveals a consistent engagement with the mechanized structures that shape human perception, cognition, and ethical engagement. Across these texts, the poems foreground a shift from the classical humanist conception of the individual as a sovereign, autonomous subject toward a posthuman understanding of distributed subjectivity, where humans are embedded within relational networks comprising technological, ecological, and social systems. This theoretical perspective is grounded in posthumanist thought, which conceptualizes agency as relational, emergent, and co-constituted across human and non-human actors (Braidotti, 2013; Barad, 2007; Hayles, 2017; Ferrando, 2019).

The recurring motifs of mechanical repetition, systemic measurement, and infrastructural

mediation demonstrate how contemporary poetry grapples with the dehumanizing effects of technological and bureaucratic systems. In Foyle's *Salt, Snow, Earth*, natural elements are represented as interlocking processes operating with clocklike precision, reflecting a mechanization of perception even in engagement with the environment. Similarly, Nitzán's *Four Boys, Maybe Five...* quantifies human action, emphasizing enumeration, loops, and procedural structures that foreground the subordination of individual agency to systemic logics. These strategies illustrate the genealogy of mechanized dehumanisation, showing how both human and non-human processes are embedded within operational frameworks that constrain autonomy while redistributing agency across networks.

Limón's poetry, particularly *Instructions on Not Being Human* (2021), explicitly bridges human experience and technological mediation, portraying embodied affect and cognition as inseparable from systemic and mechanical forces. By merging bodily sensation with machine processes—"Trace the lines the machine leaves on your skin" and "Let the circuits teach you how to feel"—the poem enacts a posthuman ethic in which perception, emotion, and moral responsiveness emerge through distributed entanglements rather than isolated human judgment. Likewise, Elfyn's *Storm in Brooklyn Subway* (2025) demonstrates how infrastructural systems, from subway rails to urban architecture, coordinate bodily movement and attention, emphasizing that human experience is continuously shaped by technologically mediated networks.

Ziyaad's *21st-Century Poem* (2017) complements these insights by highlighting the cultural and social implications of mechanized systems, particularly the ways in which algorithms and data-driven infrastructures structure perception, emotion, and ethical reflection. Lines such as "Even our despair is quantified, tracked, made visible / by screens that never sleep" reveal the pervasive reach of technological systems into everyday life, where human subjectivity is both produced and constrained by systemic forces. Collectively, these texts illustrate a contemporary cultural landscape in which humanity is redefined not by autonomous selfhood but by relational entanglement with technological, ecological, and social networks.

From a broader cultural and social perspective, these poems reflect the realities of a world increasingly dominated by digital surveillance, environmental crisis, and mechanized infrastructures. The texts demonstrate that the

posthuman condition is not purely theoretical; it is materially and socially situated. By drawing attention to how perception, ethics, and emotion are distributed across systemic networks, these poets foreground both the possibilities and risks of contemporary life: humans are enmeshed in processes that enhance efficiency and connectivity but simultaneously challenge traditional notions of autonomy, responsibility, and relationality.

In conclusion, the analyzed texts collectively illuminate the transformations in the concept of humanity under conditions of mechanized, systemic influence. By articulating distributed subjectivity, relational agency, and technologically mediated perception, the poems illustrate how contemporary literature negotiates the ethical, cognitive, and cultural implications of a mechanized world. They offer a critical lens on the posthuman condition, showing that the human must be understood not as an isolated, sovereign agent but as an embedded node within complex networks of material, technological, and social processes.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study has examined five contemporary poems—Limón's *Instructions on Not Giving Up* (2018) and *Instructions on Not Being Human* (2021), Foyle's *Salt, Snow, Earth* (2025), Nitzán's *Four Boys, Maybe Five...* (2024), Elfyn's *Storm in Brooklyn Subway* (2025), and Ziyaad's *21st-Century Poem* (2017)—through a posthuman lens to explore the genealogy of mechanized dehumanisation in modern poetry. The analysis demonstrates that contemporary poets increasingly represent human experience as distributed, relational, and mediated by systemic, technological, and ecological networks, challenging classical humanist notions of autonomous agency. Recurrent motifs across these texts—including mechanical repetition, procedural structures, infrastructural mediation, and quantified perception—underscore how human cognition, affect, and ethical reflection are embedded within broader systems, rendering subjectivity contingent and relational rather than isolated and sovereign.

The findings of this study are significant for both literary and theoretical scholarship. By foregrounding posthuman relationality, these poems provide critical insight into how contemporary literature engages with technological, ecological, and social transformations, revealing the subtle ways in which mechanized processes shape perception, ethics, and experience. The study demonstrates that poetry is not only a medium for aesthetic or emotional reflection but also a site for theorizing

contemporary human conditions, including the ethical and epistemological implications of systemic and technological entanglements. This aligns with broader posthumanist discourse, offering evidence that literary texts can serve as reflective tools for understanding distributed agency and the complex networks that mediate human life.

Future research could expand on these findings in several directions. Comparative studies could examine additional contemporary poets across cultures to explore how mechanized dehumanisation and posthuman subjectivity manifest in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Longitudinal analyses might investigate temporal shifts in poetic representation of technology, environment, and relational ethics, tracing how the depiction of human agency evolves in response to accelerating technological and ecological change. Furthermore,

interdisciplinary studies integrating literary analysis with cognitive science, urban studies, or media theory could illuminate the interaction between poetic representation and lived experience within systemic and technological networks, enhancing our understanding of posthuman subjectivity and its cultural implications.

In sum, this study contributes to contemporary literary scholarship by demonstrating that modern poetry not only reflects but actively theorizes the transformations of human subjectivity under conditions of mechanization and systemic mediation. By situating humans as relational nodes within complex networks, these texts challenge traditional humanist paradigms and open new avenues for both literary and theoretical inquiry into the posthuman condition.

## REFERENCES

- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press.
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Polity Press.
- Elfyn, M. (2025). Storm in Brooklyn Subway (as cited in Poem of the Week). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/oct/27/poem-of-the-week-storm-in-brooklyn-subway-by-menna-elfyn>
- Ferrando, F. (2019). *Philosophical Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Foyle, N. (2025). Salt, Snow, Earth (as cited in Poem of the Week). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/jul/21/poem-of-the-week-salt-snow-earth-by-naomi-foyle>
- Hayles, N. K. (2017). *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious*. University of Chicago Press.
- Limón, A. (2018). Instructions on Not Giving Up. In *The Carrying*. Milkweed Editions.
- Limón, A. (2021). Instructions on Not Being Human. In *The Carrying: New Poems*. Milkweed Editions.
- Mostafa, M. (2023). "A poet of despair": Re-reading of Emily Dickinson's poetry of despondency; A philosophical interpretation. *Journal of Literary Studies & Humanities*, 28. Kafr El Sheikh University. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25570.85446>
- Mostafa, M. (2024). The image of womb: D. H. Lawrence's "Piano" & Louis MacNeice's "Prayer before Birth": An existentialist approach. *Journal of Literary Studies & Humanities*, 4(4), 678-694. Kafr El Sheikh University.
- Nitzán, T. (2024). Four Boys, Maybe Five... (as cited in Poem of the Week). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/sep/30/poem-of-the-week-four-boys-maybe-five-by-tal-nitzan>
- Ziyaad. (2017). 21st-Century Poem. PowerPoetry. Retrieved from <https://powerpoetry.org/poems/21st-century-poem>