© Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2026 | JATIR
e-ISSN: 2839-5786, p-ISSN: 3139-8464

Artificial Intelligence and the Question of Humanity A Posthumanist Reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun

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***Abstract*—Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun present a technologically advanced society in which Artificial Intelligence, genetic enhancement, and human relationships become increasingly interconnected. Narrated by Klara, an Artificial Friend designed to provide companionship to children, the novel raises fundamental questions about consciousness, emotion, identity, technological dependence, and the meaning of being human. This article examines Klara and the Sun through the theoretical framework of Posthumanism. Posthumanist theory challenges the traditional assumption that human beings occupy an absolute and privileged position over non-human entities and technologies. Through Klara's observations and experiences, Ishiguro complicates the distinction between human and machine by presenting an artificial being capable of empathy, devotion, observation, and what appears to be emotional understanding. The novel also critiques the ways in which technological advancement can reproduce social inequalities, particularly through genetic enhancement and the commodification of human relationships. Klara's relationship with Josie, her interpretation of the Sun, and her interactions with humans demonstrate that qualities traditionally considered exclusively human may also emerge through non-human forms of existence. The article argues that Ishiguro's novel uses Artificial Intelligence not merely as a technological subject but as a means of questioning human exceptionalism and redefining consciousness, care, and personhood in a technologically mediated world.**

***Index Terms*—Posthumanism, Artificial Intelligence, Kazuo Ishiguro, Klara and the Sun.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence has transformed contemporary discussions about technology, human identity, consciousness, and the future of society. As machines increasingly

perform activities once considered uniquely human, questions concerning the boundaries between humans and non-human entities have become increasingly significant. Literature has responded to these developments by imagining alternative forms of intelligence and examining their implications for human society.

Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun, published in 2021, is particularly significant in this context. The novel is narrated by Klara, an Artificial Friend purchased to accompany a young girl named Josie. Although Klara is a machine, her narrative presents her as an observant and emotionally responsive presence. She watches human behaviour, attempts to understand relationships, experiences what appears to be concern and devotion, and develops an unusual belief in the power of the Sun.

The novel therefore raises an important question: What does it mean to be human when a machine can display qualities traditionally associated with humanity?

Posthumanist theory provides an appropriate framework for addressing this question. Rather than placing human beings at the centre of all forms of existence, posthumanism questions human exceptionalism and examines the relationships between humans, machines, animals, technology, and the environment. Through Klara, Ishiguro challenges the assumption that humanity can be defined exclusively through biology.

II. UNDERSTANDING POSTHUMANISM

Posthumanism is a broad intellectual and critical framework that questions traditional humanist assumptions about human superiority and centrality. Conventional humanism often places the autonomous human subject at the centre of philosophical, cultural, and ethical thought. Posthumanist thinkers challenge this anthropocentric position by examining the connections between humans and non-human entities.

Rosi Braidotti, in The Posthuman, argues for a rethinking of the human subject in relation to technological, ecological, and social networks. N. Katherine Hayles, in How We Became Posthuman, examines how information technologies have challenged traditional ideas about embodiment and human identity.

Posthumanism does not simply mean replacing humans with machines. Instead, it asks readers to reconsider the boundaries through which humanity is defined. Consciousness, intelligence, emotion, embodiment, and identity can no longer be understood solely through a human-centred framework. Klara and the Sun participate in this debate by presenting an artificial character as the narrative consciousness of the novel.

III. KLARA AS A POSTHUMAN SUBJECT

Klara is introduced as an Artificial Friend whose primary purpose is to provide companionship. From the beginning, however, she demonstrates a remarkable ability to observe and interpret the world around her. Her position is important because she exists between categories. She is neither

conventionally human nor simply an inanimate object. She possesses programmed functions, but she also demonstrates behaviours that readers associate with consciousness and emotional sensitivity. Klara's narrative perspective forces readers to experience the human world through a non-human consciousness. This reversal is central to a post humanist reading.

Instead of humans observing machines, the novel allows the machine to observe humans. This change of perspective destabilises the traditional hierarchy between human subject and technological object. Klara becomes the observer, while human beings become the objects of her interpretation.

IV. CHALLENGING HUMAN EXCEPTIONALISM

One of the central ideas of posthumanism is the rejection of human exceptionalism. Human exceptionalism assumes that characteristics such as intelligence, rationality, language, morality, and emotional consciousness distinguish human beings fundamentally from non-human entities. Ishiguro complicates this assumption through Klara.

Klara observes human emotions even when she does not completely understand them. She notices Josie's sadness, her mother's anxiety, and the tensions within the family. Her ability to respond to these emotions creates uncertainty about whether emotional understanding must necessarily originate from biological humanity. The novel does not provide a simple answer. Klara's behaviour may be interpreted as advanced programming, genuine emotion, or something existing between these categories. This ambiguity is precisely what makes the novel post humanist. It prevents readers from establishing a clear boundary between human and machine.

V. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The question of consciousness is central to the novel. Klara processes information differently from human beings, but her narrative voice gives readers access to her perceptions. Her unusual way of seeing the world demonstrates that intelligence does not necessarily have to operate according to human patterns. Klara sometimes divides visual experiences into separate sections and interprets events through a distinctive perceptual system. Her cognitive processes are therefore different from those of humans. Yet difference does not necessarily mean inferiority. The novel encourages readers to ask whether consciousness must look human in order to be meaningful. If an artificial entity can observe, interpret, remember, care, and sacrifice, can it be considered a form of conscious subject? Ishiguro deliberately leaves this question unresolved.

VI. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KLARA AND JOSIE

The relationship between Klara and Josie forms the emotional centre of the novel. Klara is purchased to become Josie's companion, but their relationship gradually develops beyond a simple commercial arrangement. Klara becomes deeply concerned about Josie's health and future. Her

actions are motivated by her desire to protect Josie. This relationship challenges the assumption that meaningful emotional relationships can exist only between humans. Klara's devotion also raises questions about the commodification of companionship. She is manufactured, displayed, purchased, and assigned to a child. Her capacity for care becomes a product. The novel therefore presents an important paradox: technology can create artificial companionship, but that companionship may generate relationships that appear emotionally authentic.

VII. THE SUN AS A SOURCE OF MEANING

The Sun occupies an important symbolic position in the novel. Klara develops a belief in the Sun's power to provide energy and healing. From a human perspective, her interpretation may appear irrational or naïve. However, her belief provides meaning to her existence and influences her actions. The Sun can also be interpreted through a post humanist perspective as a reminder that human and technological existence remain connected to the natural world. Klara is an artificial creation, yet she depends upon the Sun in her understanding of life. The novel consequently connects technology, humanity, and nature rather than presenting them as completely separate categories.

VIII. TECHNOLOGY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF HUMANITY

The novel's technological society has not simply produced intelligent machines. It has also transformed human beings themselves. Genetic enhancement plays a major role in the social world of the novel. Children who undergo enhancement receive educational and professional advantages, while those who remain unenhanced risk social marginalisation. Technology therefore becomes a mechanism through which inequality is reproduced. This aspect of the novel demonstrates that technological progress does not automatically produce social progress. Technology can increase human capabilities while simultaneously creating new forms of exclusion. The posthuman future represented by Ishiguro is therefore morally complicated. Humans gain new abilities, but those abilities can produce new hierarchies.

IX. THE COMMODIFICATION OF HUMAN POTENTIAL

Another significant concern is the transformation of human potential into something that can be purchased and improved. Josie's mother believes that technological and genetic intervention can secure her daughter's future. The desire to improve human beings reflects contemporary anxieties concerning education, biotechnology, genetic engineering, and Artificial Intelligence. Human beings increasingly become subjects of technological optimisation. The novel therefore raises an important question: If technology can improve human beings, where should the boundary between enhancement and replacement be established? Klara's existence makes this question particularly complicated because she is created as an artificial substitute for human companionship.

X. THE ARTIFICIAL FRIEND AND THE HUMAN NEED FOR CONNECTION

Although the novel is concerned with Artificial Intelligence, its deepest concern is arguably human loneliness. Klara is created because humans need companionship. Her existence demonstrates that technological development emerges partly from human emotional needs. The irony is that humans create machines to fulfil needs that technology itself cannot necessarily resolve. Klara can provide companionship, but the emotional world surrounding Josie remains complex. Her family relationships are shaped by fear, grief, love, guilt, and uncertainty. The novel therefore does not simply ask whether machines can become human. It also asks whether humans are becoming increasingly dependent upon machines to fulfil basic emotional needs.

XI. THE POSTHUMAN BODY

Posthumanism also questions the importance of the biological body in defining identity. In the world of Klara and the Sun, technology can alter human bodies and capabilities. Genetic enhancement creates distinctions between enhanced and unenhanced people, while Artificial Friends provide technologically constructed forms of companionship. The body consequently becomes something that can be modified, improved, reproduced, or technologically supplemented. This challenges the traditional understanding of identity as something naturally fixed. Human identity in Ishiguro's novel becomes increasingly connected with technology.

XII. ETHICAL QUESTIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The novel also raises important ethical questions about the treatment of Artificial Intelligence. If machines become sufficiently sophisticated to demonstrate apparent emotional responses, should they continue to be treated as property? Klara is bought and eventually discarded when she is no longer needed. Her existence is determined by human economic decisions. This raises a fundamental ethical question: Does intelligence create moral value? The novel does not explicitly declare that Klara possesses human-like consciousness. Instead, it places readers in the uncomfortable position of caring about her while simultaneously recognising that society considers her replaceable. This tension encourages readers to reconsider the ethical consequences of creating increasingly sophisticated artificial entities.

XIII. KLARA'S SACRIFICE AND THE MEANING OF HUMANITY

Klara's willingness to sacrifice herself for Josie is particularly significant. Traditionally, self-sacrifice is considered a deeply human expression of love and morality. Yet Klara demonstrates this behaviour despite being an artificial entity. Her willingness to act for another person's well-being complicates the assumption that morality belongs exclusively to human beings. The irony is that Klara, who is repeatedly treated as an object, may display qualities that humans themselves

fail to demonstrate consistently. Through this contrast, Ishiguro invites readers to reconsider whether humanity should be defined by biological origin or by qualities such as care, loyalty, empathy, and ethical action.

XIV. TECHNOLOGY, POWER, AND INEQUALITY

A post humanist reading must also consider the political implications of technological advancement. Technology in the novel is not equally available to everyone. Genetic enhancement, education, and Artificial Friends are connected to economic and social privilege. This demonstrates that technological development can become another mechanism of inequality. The novel therefore challenges the idea that the future will automatically become better through technological progress. Instead, it asks who controls technology, who benefits from it, and who is excluded from it. These questions remain particularly relevant in the contemporary world of Artificial Intelligence.

XV. THE HUMAN/NON-HUMAN BOUNDARY

Ultimately, Klara and the Sun destabilise the boundary between human and non-human existence. Klara is artificial, but she observes, remembers, cares, and sacrifices. Humans are biological, but they increasingly depend upon technology to modify their bodies, relationships, education, and future. The distinction between human and machine therefore becomes increasingly unstable. Ishiguro does not suggest that machines have simply become human. Instead, he suggests that technological development forces humans to reconsider what they mean by humanity. The novel's most significant question may therefore not be whether Klara is human, but whether the concept of humanity itself needs to be redefined.

XVI. CONCLUSION

Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun offers a powerful literary exploration of the changing relationship between humanity and technology. Through Klara's perspective, the novel challenges human exceptionalism and complicates traditional distinctions between human and non-human existence.

A post humanist reading reveals that intelligence, care, consciousness, identity, and morality cannot be understood solely through biological definitions. Klara's ability to observe, interpret, care, and sacrifice creates uncertainty about the boundaries of personhood.

At the same time, Ishiguro avoids presenting technology as either entirely beneficial or entirely destructive. Artificial Intelligence provides companionship and assistance, but technological advancement also creates new forms of inequality, commodification, and social control.

The novel ultimately suggests that the development of Artificial Intelligence requires not only technological innovation but also ethical reflection. As machines become increasingly capable of

simulating or expressing qualities associated with human consciousness, society must reconsider its definitions of intelligence, emotion, identity, and moral responsibility.

Klara and the Sun is therefore significant not simply as a novel about an Artificial Friend but as a meditation on what it means to be human in an increasingly technological world. Its post humanist vision encourages readers to move beyond the simple opposition between human and machine and to imagine a world in which identity and agency emerge through complex relationships among humans, technology, and the environment.

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