

Beyond the Human Gaze: Posthumanism and Artificial Consciousness in *Klara and the Sun*

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Abstract:

Kazuo Ishiguro's eighth novel *Klara and the Sun* interrogates the constructed nature of empathy, agency and personhood through the portrayal of an Artificial Friend (AF) called Klara who interacts intimately with people. This article examines the novel through the lens of posthumanist theory, reflecting on how it systematically subverts anthropocentric premises by destabilizing traditional binaries such as human/non-human. Drawing chiefly on posthumanist theory, the article also integrates visions from attachment theory and AI ethic to deliver a multidimensional reading of human-machine relationality. The study adopts a qualitative textual analysis merging close reading with theoretical interpretation. Through Klara's narrative, Ishiguro foregrounds prospective socio-technological transformations while inviting a critical re-evaluation of the human subject. The novel, thus, articulates a posthuman ethics grounded in technological entanglement, ethical ambiguity, and the reconfiguration of subjectivity within human-machine interaction. The article ultimately argues that Ishiguro's narrative reconfigures subjectivity by foregrounding non-human perception, thereby contributing an original perspective on ethical agency in posthuman fiction.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, ethical subjectivity, Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun*, posthumanism

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the exponentially increasing interest in artificial intelligence in the last two decades, and more specifically, in the character of the humanoid robot, prominent contemporary British novels have engaged with the subject of AI. This is particularly evident in the work of Noble Prize-winning author Kazuo Ishiguro, whose novel *Klara and the Sun* deploys a non-human narrator to explore the trauma of the transition into the posthuman era in a rather unique way. He provides a quiet but profound reflection on what it means to be human. Told from the perspective of Klara, a solar-powered android designed as a child's friend, the novel reflects deep posthumanist thinking. Posthumanism, as advocated by scholars such as Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Cary Wolfe and N. Katherine Hayles, seeks to decenter the figure of the human and foreground the relational networks linking humans, technology, and environment. Recent studies have extensively examined the novel's engagement with posthumanism and artificial intelligence. While prevailing scholarship addressed the novel's engagement with artificial intelligence and affect, for example, Humann's humanist reading, Yan's attachment-based approach, Hossuri's synthesis of humanist and posthumanist standards, these studies tend to favor thematic concerns over narrative form. This article advances the argument that Ishiguro's defamiliarizing narrative strategy is not simply stylistic but epistemological: it actively reconfigures the conditions under which ethical agency and subjectivity can be understood in a posthuman framework. More specifically, the article examines Ishiguro's use of defamiliarization, restricted focalization, and fragmented perception as main narrative techniques shaping the reader's engagement with non-human consciousness.

Through its imaginative, yet emotionally grounded novel, Ishiguro enacts this decentering by emphasizing the perception of non-human consciousness. Robots, in Posthuman narratives, are portrayed as integral to human evolution, with a variety of

implications for their identity. The distinction between the human mind and robots reveals the broader philosophical question of whether AI can ever form ethical subjectivity, or whether it merely imitates human cognition.

By foregrounding narrative form as a site of theoretical analysis, this article offers an original contribution to posthuman studies by proving how literary technique itself becomes a mode of philosophical and ethical intervention.

2. Contextualizing the novel

The novel traces the evolving relationship between Klara and Josie, a fourteen-year-old girl who has experienced genetic “lifting” and suffers from its deadly physiological effects. In the world of *Klara and the Sun*, wealthy families buy robots to mitigate loneliness, thus commodifying emotional care. Klara becomes integrated into Josie’s household, where her role surpasses programmed companionship and develops into affective attachment. Meanwhile, Josie’s mother, Chrissie, exemplifies the ethical contradictions of technological enhancement, as her decision to “lift” her daughter simultaneously signals ambitious mobility and biotechnological risk. The emotional potential between robots and human have been noted by many scholars: Liang Yan puts that Klara in *Klara and the Sun* can serve as an intimate friend and companion in a way that is no longer limited to humans. For instance, Klara is making many personal sacrifices and prays to the sun to restore Josie’s health

Critically, the novel stages a deep ethical dilemma through the suggested substitution of Josie with Klara, arranged by Mr. Capaldi, who starts exploring the idea of transferring Klara’s mind as a robotic replica for Josie in the case of her death. Yet, Ishiguro envisions a future where technology does not necessarily oppose humanity but participates in “aspiration and hope”⁽¹⁾. Josie eventually recovers, and

(1) Du, L., Love and Hope: Affective Labor and Human Relations in Klara and the Sun. *Neohelicon*, 49 (2), USA, 2022, p.p. 551-562.

when she leaves for college, Klara is retired to a place resembling a scrapyard for outdated AFs. There, she contemplates her past with serenity, satisfied that she has accomplished her mission of caring for Josie.

In fact, the possibility of substitution raised in the novel destabilizes ontological limits between original and replica, provoking urgent questions about personhood, identity, grief, and replaceability. Accordingly, Ishiguro does not simply depict a technological saturated future; he questions the moral economy that renders human uniqueness progressively negotiable.

3. *Klara and the Sun* as a Lens on the Defamiliarization of the Human

Klara and the Sun uses defamiliarization as a main narrative technique, compelling readers to observe ordinary human practices through an estranged, non-human perception. As Humann observes, Klara's narration renders the mundane uncanny by fragmenting perception and reconstructing it through algorithmic observation. He argues that *Klara and the Sun* makes significant use of the narrative technique of defamiliarization, thus adhering to a narrative model frequently used in AI fiction. This is evident from the initial scenes where Klara's unique viewpoint, rendering commonplaces and objects strikingly strange. Humann devoted close analyses to passages from the novel to prove that her narration is indiscriminate, where Klara is presented throughout the novel as being predominantly observant, paying careful attention to daily life details where people "standing, sitting, moving around"⁽¹⁾, commenting on people, and making recurrent mention of the sun when it is "bright" day⁽²⁾. These details make us understand that what is outside the store windows develops Klara's knowledge about the world, as she was taking as much as she can from her surrounding, showing what is important to her and thus proving her understanding of the world:

(1) Ishiguro, K., *Klara and the Sun*. Alfred & Knopf, USA, 2021, p.09.

(2) Ishiguro, K., *Klara and the Sun*. Alfred & Knopf, USA, 2021, p.04.

When we were new, Rosa and I [Klara], were mid-stores, on the magazines table side, and could see through more than half of the window. So, we were able to watch the outside- the office workers hurrying by, the taxis, the runners, the tourists, Beggar Man and his dog, [...] Unlike most AFs, Unlike Rosa, I'd always longed to see more of the outside- and to see it in all its details⁽¹⁾.

This sensory estrangement is not supplementary but essential to the novel's posthuman critique. Klara's limited but meticulous observation of gestures, movements and patterns, represent the constructedness of human social norms.

Rather than introducing artificial intelligence as deficient imitation, Ishiguro positions Klara as a subject-in-information, whose affective and cognitive capacities arise through relational engagement. As Parteneza argues, Klara complicates the notion of the android as a non-subject by showing developing agency within technological embodiment.

It is clear that Klara's view is limited to more than half the window, meaning she can not see entities. The reader of the novel would certainly notice the high specificity of the details Klara offers:

And not only could I see every window right up the rooftop, I could sometimes see the people inside, standing, sitting, moving around. Then down on the street, I could see the passers-by, their different kinds of shoes, papers cups, shoulder bags, little dogs, and if I wanted, I could follow with my eyes any one of them all the way past the pedestrian crossing, [...] to where two overhaul men were standing beside a drain and pointing⁽²⁾

The choice to present the narrative through Klara's perspective generates a defamiliarizing effect, forcing readers to reconsider societal rituals, feelings, and human conducts from a different angle. Though interpreted through her preprogrammed perception of the

(1) Ishiguro, K., *Klara and the Sun*. Alfred & Knopf, USA, 2021, p.p 1-9.

(2) Ishiguro, K., *Klara and the Sun*. Alfred & Knopf, USA, 2021, p.p 1-9.

world, Klara's views are accurate and emotionally resonant. This aligns with the posthumanist concerns with construction of the self's boundaries and the technological conception of mediation. Parteneza explores how artificial intelligence helps in the construction of the subject, "contrary to the idea of the android as a non-subject, a non-being, Ishiguro shows how Klara, a female android friend (AF), a mechanical body, a figure of inter-relationality-gradually develops remarkable capacities"⁽¹⁾.

The idea that robots lack spiritual or emotional depth is called into question. Klara's quasi-religious devotion to the sun reconceptualizes agency as distributed rather than autonomous, aligning with posthumanist critique of human-centered power. Energy, rather than consciousness alone, becomes the grounding principle of ethical action, thereby decentring the human as the sole locus of meaning-making. The solar orientation represents a posthumanist trait in the way that Klara obtains agency from a nonhuman set of energy. In this regards, some scholars claim that Ishiguro attempts at displacing the human-centered power and showing the "agency of the nature"⁽²⁾. Thus, the human consciousness and moral values are represented as developing from interrelations rather than human singularity. This novel subverts the human-centered premises of agency and intellect by biding Klara's ethical judgments to renewable, neutral source. Accordingly, the sun functions as a symbol of posthuman mutuality, an intense force that blurs the traditional lines between technology and life and the natural world and living beings. Ishiguro's narrative sheds light on the changes that could occur in the future, where consciousness may be based on planetary streams of energy rather than human-scale autonomy. In fact, in her "appetite for

(1) Parteneza, P. (2022). "Beyond a body without organs": Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Down* and *Klara and the Sun*. Dans O. K. P. Parteneza, *Different Voices: Gender and Posthumanism*, V&R Unipress, Germany, 2022, p.p. 173.

(2) Roy, D., The Embodiment of Posthuman Agency, and Planetary Anxiety, in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*. Dans N. D. Mallik, *Posthumanism and Literary Insights: A Critical Introduction*, Singapore, 2025, p.91.

observing and learning”⁽¹⁾, Klara has a created, hybrid, and a highly posthuman subjectivity.

4. The Dynamics of Artificial Consciousness in *Klara and the Sun*

Ishiguro’s novel reconfigures artificial consciousness not as a purely computational system but as a relational, adaptive, and context-based dependent. Despite her programmed functions, Klara’s capacities covers far more than the visible individual behaviors; she records subtle emotional cues, shifting social relations, and familial hierarchies, which enables her to appear intentional, resolve tensions, and facilitate human interactions. This implies that consciousness is performative rather than ontologically fixed. In fact, Klara acts as a replacement for human beings. The representation or the devaluation of humanity in the novel at the face increasingly technological growth is one of the prominent themes, where the debate is raised regarding the ability of artificial agents to imitate human actions or behaviors. One can clearly notice that the presence of these AFs is already a trial by humans to either substitute or reduce the need for human friendship. As the aim behind an AF is to provide companionship, support, and affection needed by children, and, thus, the importance of parents and friends gradually diminished.

Ishiguro thereby challenges traditional humanist premises that equate self-awareness with consciousness, instead suggesting that ethical responsiveness can arise from interactive embeddedness. Besides, the novel foregrounds the instrumentalization of both machines and human, as demonstrated by possible replacement of Josie. Here, artificial intelligence does not only imitate human behavior; it reveals the fragility of human relational structures themselves.

By stressing Klara’s responsive and situated cognition, the novel contributes to the contemporary debates in AI ethics by questioning whether moral agency and intentionality need biological

(1) Ishiguro, K., *Klara and the Sun*. Alfred & Knopf, USA, 2021, p.43

basis or can arise from synthetic artificial systems. Hence, the novel becomes not only a literary survey of a futuristic life but also philosophical reflection on how we identify moral considerations in a world of ongoing socially technological development.

5. Posthuman Bodies: Exploring Enhancement, Empathy, and the Ethics of Substitution

In the novel's society, children like Josie undergo a common genetic practice of "lifting" to enhance their intelligence, social prospects, and thus their chances of success in life. This practice works as a critical site for investigating biological control and posthuman embodiment. Paradoxically, while humans seek development, they become progressively standardized, mechanized, and replaceable, thereby reflecting the very artificiality they try to transcend. The novel investigates the ways human and machine converge, demonstrating how both sides of the organic/artificial spectrum are affected by technological growth. Despite being artificial, Klara shows compassion, moral judgment and empathy. In contrast, people frequently appear coldly instrumental particularly when Josie's mother thinks about substituting a machine to her daughter.

The suggested substitution of Josie with Klara creates the novel's most radical ethical provocation, as it undermines the belief of a stable, essential self. This replacement invokes posthumanist critiques of identity as crucial and fixed. One can rightly wonder: what remains typically and uniquely human, if we can programme and stimulate behavior and memory. In a book devoted to artificial intelligence, namely to human-machine interaction and creative practice, Voight, Elflein, and Rohnert reveal that there is a lot of anxiety associated with the notion of machine adapters replacing human creativity. Drawing on Hayles, embodiment appears as vital to cognition, challenging the notion that identity can be totally replicated. Klara's rejection to fully accept Josie's identity indicates a critical limit within posthuman substitution, supporting the persistence

of difference even within technological simulation. Subsequently, the novel resists simplistic equality between human and machine, instead highlighting the ethical inherent in such comparison. Hayles discussed in *How we become posthuman*: “embodiment makes clear that thought is much broader cognitive function depending for its specificities on the embodied form enacting it”⁽¹⁾. In turn, Partenza states that the development of a robot in the novel not only to befriend but even to replace a child in the case of her death denotes the degradation of what is human and its substitution with what is artificial.

6. CONCLUSION

Klara and the Sun functions as both a narrative and theoretical intervention into posthuman discourse. Ishiguro, through Klara’s viewpoint, redefines central human attributes, agency, empathy, and moral responsibility, as relational rather than solely human capacities. The novel finally subverts the ideology of human exceptionalism by proving that ethical meaning develops through networks of interdependence including humans, machines, and environments. Rather than portraying a dystopian future, Ishiguro offers a nuanced ethical perspective rooted in coexistence and vulnerability care. The novel thus contributes to contemporary speculative fiction by privileging moral ambiguity and intimacy over technological spectacle. The disruption of the human uniqueness and the questions about the ability of robots to provide affection and create social bonds are clearly shown through Ishiguro’s human characters who are portrayed as unsteady and confused than ever. The novel incites readers to embrace a more relational, less anthropocentric understanding of consciousness that recognizes the moral necessity of interdependence, the cleverness of machines, and the frailty of human bodies. Nowadays, “the other” moves beyond people from different social, ethnic, or racial backgrounds to include intelligent machines.

(1) Hayles, N., *How we become posthuman : Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. University of Chicago Press, USA, 1999, p.xiv.

Ishiguro's novel invites a reconceptualization of the "other" extending ethical consideration beyond the human to embrace artificial beings, thereby articulating an essentially posthuman ethics of coexistence. All that can be said is that this novel opens a room for future debates regarding AI ethics, mainly about autonomy, emotional intelligence, and moral responsibility. The writer anticipates a future in which artificial beings may not only serve humans but also build emotional connections with them. We can say that this novel redefines humanity, projects environmental and spiritual futures, technological inequality, emotional substitution and human relationships, represents a future model of non-human caregiving. From a literary viewpoint, this novel contributes to the future of speculative fiction that is ethical, philosophical, and quiet rather than dystopian in the way that it points towards a trend where technological futures are explored via limits, moral ambiguity, and intimacy. Even within an imperfect society, characters continue to love, care, and act ethically.

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