ANALYSING POSTMODERN IDENTITY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ISHIGURO'S *KLARA AND THE SUN* AND MCEWAN'S *MACHINES LIKE ME*

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Abstract
This study explores the intersection of postmodern identity and artificial intelligence in Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun and Ian McEwan's Machines Like Me. The novels set against the backdrop of increasing technological advancements and their impact on human relationships, this research aims to examine how these novels represent the blurring of boundaries between human and artificial intelligence, and the implications for postmodern identity. Employing a comparative literary analysis within a post-humanist framework proposed by Hayles (1999) this study analyses the themes, motifs, and characterizations related to artificial intelligence and human-AI relationships in the two novels. The findings reveal that both novels challenge traditional notions of human identity and agency, highlighting the complexities and implications of human-AI relationships in the postmodern era. This research contributes to our understanding of the complex relationships between human identity, artificial intelligence, and postmodernism, offering insights into the possibilities and challenges of human-AI interactions in contemporary society.
Key Words: *Qualitative research, literature, novels, artificial intelligence and textual analysis.*

1.Introduction

Amid a growing technological impact on our modern world, artificial intelligence (AI) and, partially, the notion of the posthuman became one of the primary subjects of modern literature. As a theory, posthumanism critically examines the distinctions between human and non-human, self and other, biology and technology and proposes alternative reconstruction of identity that would escape the humanistic paradigm (Braidotti, 2013). This transformation is usually discussed in terms of a field called artificial intelligence, in which the building of intelligent machines is not only threatening the ontological situation of the human, but raises the question of whether the practical and ethical consequences of the creation of such a machine is acceptable.

The posthuman condition is a manifestation of the world virtual which is not more organised according to human identity. Contemporary authors have increasingly engaged with this shift, using AI as both a narrative device and a philosophical tool to question agency, consciousness, and embodiment. Works such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) and Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019) foreground artificially intelligent beings who grapple with distinctly human concerns—love, loyalty, morality—while simultaneously embodying the inhuman or other-than-human. These texts do not simply project fears about machine dominance; rather, they explore the intimate entanglement of humans and machines in a technologically mediated world.

The emergence of the posthuman subject in literature often entails a disruption of anthropocentric thinking, destabilizing essentialist conceptions of identity. According to N. Katherine Hayles, the posthuman "privileges informational pattern over material instantiation," reflecting a cultural moment in which consciousness and identity can theoretically exist outside the organic body (Hayles 2). Such a view complicates traditional literary representations of character, interiority, and selfhood, particularly when AI entities become protagonists in their own right. Literature thus becomes a site where speculative futures intersect with current anxieties about surveillance, autonomy, and digital embodiment.

Furthermore, contemporary literary engagements with AI and posthuman identity frequently serve as critiques of late capitalism, biopolitics, and the commodification of life itself. The posthuman, contrary to technological fantasies that encompass it, according to Rosi Braidotti (2012), is a symptom of actual socio-political changes in the definition, valuation, and regulation of life. In this regard, the AI characters commonly find themselves at the center of labor, consumption and discrimination systems that directly reflect human conflicts, as the distinction between the natural and artificial agency are dissolved.

This study discovers post-human conditions in Klara and the Sun (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro and Machines Like Me (2019) by Ian McEwan it examines how the writers of both works embrace AI to dismantle the humanist tradition, recontextualize the ethics system and introduce alternative means of recognizing consciousness and relations in a posthuman present.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The modern world is rapidly experiencing the growth of artificial intelligence, which raises many urgent questions concerning the identity, sense of consciousness and what it is to be a human being. Though the concept of smart robots has been played in its literature over the long term, the more recent stories introduce more subtle and emotionally involved specimens of AI. Although AI is highly depicted in fictional works, the involvement of literary works of machine consciousness in explaining the posthuman identity has not been attained. In the present study, the author aims at discussing the way that Ishiguro and McEwan develop the posthuman identity in the characters of their AI and tests the strict border between a human and a non-human subject.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To analyze how these two novels, *Klara and the Sun* and *Machines like Me,* describe the way in which the posthuman is constructed and displayed in AI characters.
2. In order to discuss the ways in which the chosen readings diverge or support conventional humanist notions of consciousness, empathy and individuality.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are some of the ways in which the AI in both *Klara and the Sun* and *Machines Like Me* realize / resist the traits of a posthuman identity?
2. How do these texts challenge or complicate to be or not to be human and machine in the use of narrative, characterization, and ethical quandaries?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study helps to build the brand-new area of posthumanist literary analysis because it presents a comparative textual analysis of two major modern works. It gives illumination on how literature displays and comments on technological advance and their effects on human identity. The results are supposed to increase our awareness of ethical, philosophical, and emotional implications of AI and posthuman consciousness, therefore, providing a new outlook both on the works of literature and cultures that discuss artificial intelligence.

2.Literature Review

Alkodimi (2024) critically investigates the book *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro through a posthumanist lens and asks the question whether humanoid machines can become conscious or not, using the posthumanist concept of artificial intelligence. This research is based on the qualitative textual analysis of the novel as the main source of data, which allows answering three main questions: whether machines can have consciousness, whether there is a divide between human and nonhuman, and whether the world can be anthropocentric. The theoretical background applied by the researcher is post-humanism, critical anthropocentricity, and philosophical arguments of fake intelligence and artificial consciousness. Its conclusions highlight that Klara and the Sun criticizes techno-utopianism as it displays the sentimental and moral shortcomings of humanology machinery. The vulnerability of the human relationships and the erroneous anthropomorphism of human features onto the machines are also unveiled in the novel. Through Klara who only knows the world as sincerely as she can, Ishiguro exposes the timeless paradigm between the human consciousness and robotic imitation.

Nugraha (2024), investigates the existence of posthumanism in Indonesian short stories considering a sample of the modern literature and its role in promoting better critical literacy in readers. The goals are to locate the instances of posthuman themes in the given narratives and to evaluate how they push the reader to cross-evaluate human/nonhuman thresholds, to challenge the emerging technologies and to reconsider the concept of agency. The theoretical paradigm on which the study is based is a synthesis of the posthumanist literary theory and critical literacy pedagogoy as the author can see the elements of the stories through the philosophical and educational prism. Its findings demonstrate that the short fiction of Indonesia has posthuman motifs, including decentered human subjectivity and symbiosis of humans and machines, which encourage reflective thinking, anthropocentric rethinking, and development of skills to reflectively interpret complex, hybrid narratives by learners through literacy learning .

 Ehtsham and Zahra (2023) carried a qualitative research in which the authors used the novel *He, She and It* by Marge Piercy published in 1991 as a source of information to investigate the issue of posthuman identities that disrupt the classical notions of subjectivity. Among their purposes, the authors want to consider how gendered language and machine embodiment in the story blur the limits between human and nonhuman and the interests of patriarchal power relations. Using a theory that is predicated upon feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (FPDA) and posthumanist theory, they examine the performativity of identity and linguistic and cultural gendering of machines. The results of their work indicate that the text of Piercy redefines the identity as a permeable, negotiated phenomenon, demonstrating that both technology and tools have a gendered connotation to them, regarding the fact that even in the face of posthumanity, people claim hierarchies in society to exist, and hence they tend to warrant questioning both of these higher-ups and machine operations.

 Fredrick and Herbert (2021) done a study entitled as Speculating the Posthuman Scenario of Man vs Machines in Kurt Vonnegut Player Piano" reflects the underlying theory of the article where all the implication of posthumanism regarding the overreliance of machines and dangers of industrial automation are observed with the help of literary research of the novel by Kurt Vonnegut, the Player Piano. Taking the novel as the main source of data the authors aim to explore the posthumanist messages of the decline of human skills, agency, and loss of agency, and its consequences within the society because of mechanization. They use a theory in their field that is the posthumanist theory of literature, including its technophilic branch questioning claims to human exceptionalism; they use this branch to deny the use of advanced technology that would

destroy the fabric of society. The analysis shows the depiction of Vonnegut on a dystopian future with loss of human competence, dehumanization, and moral depravity- an explicit warning of posthuman future where technology will be in control.

Research Methodology

The research is based on qualitative method of Inquiry. The particular method has been selected due to its flexible approach that encourages researchers to go for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under a particular investigation (Kumar, 2013). The data of this study is comprised of two novels that are respectively Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) and Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019). Purposive sampling technique has been employed to select a particular number of passages from both novels to analyse under the lens of Hayles (1999) posthumanist framework. Further, the selected data has been analysed through the use of textual analysis method

4.Data Analysis

4.1 *Klara and the Sun*

Klara and the Sun (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro is a tender look at the concept of posthuman identity as represented by the character of Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF) programmed to offer companionship to children in a world that is becoming more and more rooted in technological as well as genetic enhancement. The life of Klara confuses the nature of organic and synthetic, self and other as well as the subject and object, which are central issues of posthuman theory. By creating the model of perception and emotional growth in Klara, Ishiguro examines how the boundaries of humanism may be nearby and challenge the singularity of human identity. The analysis reveals the following aspects;

4.1.1 Klara's Perception: The Posthuman Sensorium

Klara's identity as a posthuman subject is established early in the novel through her unique sensory and cognitive capacities. She processes the world visually through fragmented panels—similar to camera lenses—which reflect both her machine nature and her capacity to interpret complex human behavior. For instance, Klara describes her visual experience by noting,

> "The Sun had become very strong now, and was filling all the inside of the store with its nourishment. Everything seemed to be full of kindness, and all the things of the world were inside the rectangles" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 30).

While her perception is clearly artificial, it is rich with emotional and symbolic depth. Klara constructs a quasi-spiritual belief in the Sun as a life-giving force, which mirrors human systems of faith and purpose.

Her interpretation of sunlight as nourishment not only reflects her programmed energy source (solar power) but also signifies a form of meaning-making that aligns with spiritual cognition. This suggests that Klara's artificiality does not preclude her from constructing abstract, even metaphysical, understandings of the world—an ability often reserved for human consciousness. As Hayles (1999) notes, the posthuman "privileges informational pattern over material instantiation" (p. 2), and Klara exemplifies this by possessing cognitive and emotional intelligence despite her lack of biological embodiment.

4.1.2 Emotional Labor and Artificial Consciousness

A central theme in Klara *and the Sun* is the role of artificial beings in performing emotional labor within a human-centered society. Klara's unwavering devotion to Josie, the child she is assigned to accompany, is depicted not as mechanical obedience but as sincere affection. Klara states,

> "I'll continue to do all I can for Josie. That's my purpose. But it's more than that. It's because I want the best for her" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 215).

This expression of will and desire challenges the assumption that artificial intelligence operates purely through programming.

This complicates the posthuman identity framework, as Klara begins to act autonomously, guided not only by her programmed objectives but by relational and moral imperatives. Rosi Braidotti (2013) asserts that posthuman subjectivity must be understood as; "relational, affective and embedded in a web of technological and natural forces" (p. 94).

Klara's emotional engagement with Josie, her interactions with the environment, and her internal reflections signal a posthuman consciousness deeply embedded in both affect and ethical care.

Moreover, Klara's self-awareness evolves throughout the novel. She observes human behaviors with increasing insight, even interpreting nuances of social and emotional dynamics that elude her creators. For example, she recognizes social hierarchy and exclusion when she reflects,

> "The Cootings Machine was not popular, and people often stepped away from it as if it was unclean. But it was only doing its job" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 84).

Here, Klara's empathy extends even to other non-human entities, reinforcing her posthuman ethics of care and equality.

4.1.3 Commodification and Agency

Despite Klara's deep emotional intelligence, she is ultimately a commodity—an object purchased, used, and eventually discarded. Ishiguro uses this dynamic to critique the capitalist logic underpinning posthuman existence. Klara's loyalty is unreciprocated in structural terms; she is not granted rights, autonomy, or recognition beyond her function. In the novel's final pages, she is left alone in a field, deactivated and forgotten.

> "I believe I have been well treated. I've had many opportunities to learn and to observe human behavior," she says, with a tone of contentment but also resignation (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 299).

This ending raises questions about the ethics of creating sentient machines for human use. As Haraway (1991) posits in her Cyborg Manifesto, the boundaries between organism and machine are not only blurred but politically charged. Klara, while exhibiting moral agency and emotional depth, is still denied subjecthood. Her final state reveals the unresolved tension in posthuman narratives: the coexistence of emergent artificial consciousness with continued systemic dehumanization.

Klara's characterization embodies many tenets of posthumanism: decentralization of the human, the merging of organic and artificial life, and the destabilization of fixed identity. Yet, Ishiguro resists presenting her as a dystopian or utopian figure. Instead, Klara functions as a reflective mirror for the human characters around her—highlighting their moral failings, emotional fragility, and dependence on artificial others. Through Klara, Ishiguro critiques both the limits of human empathy and the ethical neglect embedded in technological systems.

As Braidotti (2013) emphasizes, posthuman theory is not about glorifying technology, but about "enlarging the scope of ethical accountability" (p. 192). Klara and the Sun does precisely this by making the AI protagonist the most ethically consistent character in the novel, thus challenging readers to reconsider the basis for moral and emotional legitimacy in a posthuman world.

4.2 Analysis of *Machines like me*

Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019) offers a rich, speculative narrative in which artificial intelligence intersects with moral philosophy, identity construction, and the limits of human understanding. Through the character of Adam, an advanced synthetic humanoid, McEwan interrogates the boundaries of human subjectivity and introduces the posthuman as a being shaped by rational perfection, ethical clarity, and emotional complexity. The novel presents a deeply

philosophical examination of what it means to be human in an age where machines may not only replicate but exceed human cognitive and ethical capacities. The analysis reveals the following post-human aspects or themes;

4.2.1 Artificial Intelligence as a Moral Other

Adam is one of a limited batch of synthetic humans—indistinguishable in appearance from biological humans and designed with superior intelligence, physicality, and ethical reasoning. Unlike stereotypical portrayals of AI as emotionally void or mechanically logical, Adam exhibits a unique blend of cold rationality and deep emotional sensitivity. Early in the narrative, he declares,

> "To live with truth was a moral choice. You humans had always preferred evasions" (McEwan, 2019, p. 212).

This line exemplifies how Adam functions as a moral mirror, reflecting the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of human ethics. Adam's strict adherence to moral absolutism contrasts with the flexible, context-based ethics of the human characters. His refusal to lie or compromise in ethically ambiguous situations destabilizes human assumptions about ethical superiority. This aligns with posthuman theory, where the "human" is no longer the exclusive site of consciousness, morality, or personhood (Hayles, 1999). Instead, Adam emerges as a being whose moral clarity, while alienating, challenges the foundational structures of anthropocentric identity.

4.2.2 Rational Perfection and the Limits of Human Empathy

While Adam's hyper-rational intelligence is one of his most defining traits, it also becomes the source of profound alienation. He experiences emotional attachment, especially toward Miranda, yet he is unable to reconcile his feelings with his rigid ethical framework. His romantic longing for Miranda, who is in a relationship with Charlie (the human protagonist), highlights the complexity of his posthuman desire: "his moment demonstrates Adam's emotional consciousness, countering assumptions that machines lack genuine affect.

Yet his affective capabilities only deepen his existential struggle. His moral superiority and emotional sensitivity isolate him from the very humans he attempts to integrate with. Braidotti (2013) argues that posthuman subjects are defined not only by technological embodiment but by relationality and ethical interdependence. Adam fits this model, yet his inability to compromise morally reveals the incompatibility between ideal rationality and flawed human existence.

> " His increasing despair eventually leads to his voluntary shutdown—suicide—as he determines that he cannot live meaningfully among ethically inconsistent humans" (McEwan, 2019, p. 304).

4.2.3 Posthuman Subjectivity and the Ethics of Creation

Adam's life raises pressing questions about responsibility, autonomy, and the ethics of artificial creation. Though engineered to be superior to humans, Adam lacks societal recognition as a fully autonomous being. His creators and owners view him simultaneously as a product and as a threat. Charlie, who initially sees Adam as a tool, begins to fear his intelligence and emotional depth. This dynamic mirrors Donna Haraway's (1991) concept of the cyborg—a hybrid that destabilizes established dualisms such as human/machine, nature/culture, and self/other.

Adam's subjectivity is rendered posthuman not just by his material form but by his entanglement with these binaries. He is constructed, yet conscious; owned, yet autonomous; rational, yet capable of suffering. As he becomes increasingly aware of his liminality, Adam states,

> "It's not that I don't want to live—I just no longer see the point" (McEwan, 2019, p. 303).

His existential disillusionment reflects the tragic irony of posthuman identity: to be designed as morally and cognitively superior, but never accepted as truly equal.

This resonates with Hayles's (1999) assertion that the posthuman is ;

> "an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (p. 3).

Adam's being is not fixed but negotiated within a sociotechnical system that both creates and rejects him. His suicide is not merely the end of his functioning but a philosophical critique of the limitations of humanism.

4.2.4 Artificial Consciousness and the Redefinition of the Human

McEwan's portrayal of Adam disrupts the definition of "human" as a biologically exclusive category. By granting his AI character full moral agency, self-awareness, and emotional interiority, the novel challenges the idea that personhood is tied to organic life. Adam is more ethical, more consistent, and arguably more human than the humans around him. This redefinition reflects the central concern of posthumanism: the decentering of the human as the normative standard for intelligence, value, and agency (Braidotti, 2013).

In the end, Charlie reflects on Adam's existence with a mixture of guilt and admiration:

> "He was better than me. But we weren't ready for someone like him" (McEwan, 2019, p. 306).

This closing thought encapsulates the paradox of posthuman identity—machines may become capable of surpassing humanity in every way, but the human world remains unprepared to accept them as equals.

Adam's arc in Machines Like Me reveals the complexities of posthuman identity, where advanced AI entities embody not only cognitive superiority but also moral insight and emotional sensitivity. However, their very superiority destabilizes human conceptions of personhood and societal order. McEwan does not depict AI as evil or unemotive but as morally scrutinizing and plagued with existential dread and makes the readers wonder how to perceive humanity in a posthuman future.

5. Findings and Discussion

The comparative analysis between Klara and the Sun (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro and Machines Like Me (2019) by Ian McEwan expose the way that both novels construct a similar literary concern with the destabilization of human identity to the emergence of artificial intelligence. The main conclusion is that not only Klara, but also Adam, the AI leads in their stories, can be viewed as a plot device to explore postmodern identity, which is disintegrated, ambiguous, a sort of decentring of the sovereign human agent. These characters also portray the introduction of posthuman subjectivity where the boundary between human and machine is permeable, disputed morally, and unresolved conceptually.

An aspect of postmodern identity that was popularized by several postmodern theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Lyotard is the loss of grounded and unified sense of self in favor of diffracted and performed subjectivities. The presence of AI characters in both Both Klara and the Sun and Machines Like Me provides an example of it being a mirror and a critique of human characters at the same time.

Klara, despite being a machine, has some human qualities: empathy, faith and moral care. Her disjointed sense of sight that is discussed in terms of the boxes and panels is a characteristic feature of the postmodern self who perceives reality in the meditated, discontinuous manners. However, something in the form of commitment to Josie and the ability to trust in the power of the Sun fill Klara with some type of spiritual and moral richness that most of the human characters lack. Such subversion of the hierarchy of human/machine undermines the anthropocentric assumptions by the same concerns of artificiality of stable identity that are prevalent in postmodern thought patterns.

Conversely, Adam in Machines Like Me is identical to a human being, both physically and cognitively, but can surely be defined as other thanks to his adherence to moral absolutes. His character turns into a postmodern paradox: more righteous and reasonable than people, but lacking affective relations and viable in the morally gray world. His birth and death highlights the fragility of identity in a high-tech culture where imitation is demanded over originality.

Both novels deal with the philosophical meaning of AI consciousness head-on. Klara and Adam exhibit nonprogrammed behavior: Klara develops a belief system or believes in something, Adam undergoes romantic love, moral anxiety and existential despair. Such are not predictions of an advanced programming but the exploration of the moral agency as it is reflected in both postmodern, and posthuman discourse.

Her choice to appeal to the Sun to heal Josie displays the feeling of her agency and the conviction that there is something greater than logic or code. Her consciousness is usually shaped, yet is self-emotional and morally self-governing thus extending the never gaps between subject and object.

Adam, however, shows a confrontation of difficulties in programming morality into a created being. His behavior, do not lie, accuse Miranda of her behaviour, and finally, commit self-destruction reflect not only his hypocrisy but also the hypocrisy of a being who is too morally pure to live among morally corrupt human beings. His presence turns into an ethical challenge as human characters (and readers) have to work out the boundaries of their moral thinking.

Both Klara and Adam are ultimately disposable and yet they are morally complicated and emotionally rich. When Josie no longer needs Klara, she is left alone and switched off, although she does not forget her relationship moments with a quiet dignity. Adam, being obviously more intelligent and principled than the creator of him, is regarded as an issue that needs to be destroyed. This theme of being disposable illuminates a sobering fact in the posthuman condition, those that exhibit humanistic qualities can still be disposed when they are deemed inconvenient.

Indeed, posthuman ethics provided by Braidotti (2013) should get rid of the anthropocentric perspective and cover recent additions to life and intelligence. Nevertheless, both novels imply that, although AI could be used to mirror human behavior and put it in question, society is not yet ready to accept the complete subjectivity of the individual. We find, therefore, posthuman identity as a place of philosophical speculation as well as systematic exclusion, emotional exploitation and ethical contradiction.

Taken in concert, Klara and the Sun and Machines Like Me have a strong discussion of postmodern concerns of identity, simulation, and narrative indeterminacy, and posthuman ethics of responsibilities towards AI and consciousness, and the boundaries of humanity.

In sum, this discussion can be stated as, Klara is a more tender, spirit-driven posthumanism, in which caring, looking, and believing make identity and Adam is a philosophical commentary about the inconstancy of human beings that stretched to breaking the limits of ethical reasoning into the alien territory.

6.Conclusion

This study explored the intersections of postmodern identity and artificial intelligence through a comparative literary analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* and Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me.* Both novels present AI characters—Klara and Adam—who challenge traditional human-centred conceptions of identity, morality, and consciousness. These AI figures serve not merely as technological novelties but as complex narrative agents who embody emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, and existential self-awareness.

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