

Posthumanism and the Reconfiguration of Human Identity: A Comparative Study of *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*

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Abstract

Posthumanism is a contemporary critical theory that challenges the traditional human-centered worldview by questioning the boundaries between humans, technology, animals, and artificial intelligence. It rejects the notion that human beings occupy a superior position in the universe and instead emphasizes interconnectedness, hybridity, and ethical responsibility toward all forms of existence. This article examines posthumanist ideas through Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *Klara and the Sun* (2021). Both novels interrogate what it means to be human in an age of biotechnology and artificial intelligence. Through cloned humans and an Artificial Friend, Ishiguro exposes the fragility of human identity while redefining concepts such as consciousness, empathy, and morality. The study employs posthumanist theory to demonstrate how these works dismantle anthropocentric assumptions and encourage readers to reconsider humanity's place in an increasingly technological world.

Keywords: *Posthumanism, Artificial Intelligence, Cloning, Identity, Technology, Kazuo Ishiguro.*

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed unprecedented technological advancements in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, robotics, and genetic engineering. These developments have transformed not only scientific practices but also philosophical understandings of humanity itself. Traditional humanism, which celebrates human rationality, autonomy, and superiority, has increasingly been challenged by posthumanist thought. Rather than viewing humans as separate from technology and nature, posthumanism recognizes that human existence is deeply interconnected with machines, animals, and the environment.

Literature has become one of the most significant spaces for exploring these transformations. Contemporary novels increasingly question the limits of humanity by presenting clones, cyborgs, robots, and artificial intelligence as subjects possessing emotions, memories, and ethical significance. Among modern writers, Kazuo Ishiguro offers one of the most profound

literary explorations of posthumanism. His novels *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun* investigate how technological innovation reshapes identity, relationships, and moral responsibility. This article explores the posthumanist dimensions of these two novels, arguing that Ishiguro does not merely depict futuristic technologies but uses them to examine timeless questions concerning love, memory, mortality, and empathy.

Understanding Posthumanism

Posthumanism is a contemporary philosophical and literary theory that emerged in the late twentieth century as a response to the limitations of classical humanism. Humanism traditionally placed human beings at the center of the universe, emphasizing reason, individuality, and superiority over animals, nature, and machines. While this perspective contributed significantly to the development of science, education, and democracy, it also created rigid hierarchies by privileging certain groups of people while marginalizing others, including women, racial minorities, disabled individuals, and non-human life forms. Posthumanism challenges these assumptions by arguing that humans are not isolated or inherently superior but are deeply interconnected with technology, the environment, and other living beings. It therefore seeks to redefine what it means to be human in an age of rapid technological and scientific advancement.

One of the foundational thinkers of posthumanism is Donna Haraway, whose influential essay *A Cyborg Manifesto* introduces the concept of the cyborg—a hybrid being that combines biological and technological elements. Haraway argues that the boundaries between humans and machines, nature and culture, and even gender categories have become increasingly blurred in the modern world. Technologies such as artificial limbs, pacemakers, smartphones, and computers have become integral to everyday human life, making people dependent on machines in ways that challenge traditional definitions of humanity. Haraway uses the cyborg as a metaphor to show that identity is fluid and constantly shaped by technological, cultural, and social interactions rather than fixed by biology alone.

Another important posthumanist theorist, N. Katherine Hayles, expands this idea by examining the relationship between humans and information technology in her book *How We Became Posthuman*. Hayles argues that becoming posthuman does not mean replacing humans with machines; instead, it means recognizing that human identity is increasingly intertwined with digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and information systems. She emphasizes the importance of embodiment, arguing that consciousness and identity cannot exist independently of the body. According to Hayles, technological developments such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and biotechnology have transformed the way humans think, communicate, and understand themselves, making human identity more dynamic and interconnected than ever before.

Cary Wolfe and Rosi Braidotti further broaden the scope of posthumanism by emphasizing ethical and ecological concerns. Wolfe critiques anthropocentrism—the belief that humans are the most important beings on Earth—and argues that animals and other non-human entities deserve ethical consideration because they possess intelligence, emotions, and

intrinsic value. Similarly, Braidotti views posthumanism as an opportunity to build more inclusive and sustainable relationships among humans, animals, technology, and the environment. She argues that identity should be understood as relational rather than individual, meaning that people exist through networks of social, ecological, and technological connections. Together, these theorists encourage a more inclusive understanding of life that moves beyond human-centered thinking.

Posthumanist literature reflects these theoretical ideas by exploring questions about identity, consciousness, ethics, and technology. It often features clones, cyborgs, robots, artificial intelligence, and genetically engineered beings to challenge traditional distinctions between the human and the non-human. Such works ask whether emotions, memory, empathy, and moral responsibility are more important than biological origin in defining humanity. In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*, for example, cloned humans and an Artificial Friend display compassion, love, and self-awareness, prompting readers to reconsider what truly makes someone human. Thus, posthumanism does not predict the end of humanity but offers a new framework for understanding human existence in an increasingly interconnected and technologically advanced world.

Posthumanism in *Never Let Me Go*

Published in 2005, *Never Let Me Go* portrays a dystopian society where cloned humans are created solely to provide organs for transplantation. The clones grow up believing they are ordinary children before discovering their predetermined fate. From a posthumanist perspective, the clones challenge traditional definitions of humanity. Although genetically engineered, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth possess emotions, memories, friendships, dreams, and artistic creativity. They experience love and fear exactly like ordinary humans.

The tragedy of the novel lies in society's refusal to recognize their humanity. They are treated as biological resources rather than individuals. Ishiguro thereby criticizes anthropocentric thinking, exposing how humanity itself becomes a socially constructed category. The novel also questions bioethical issues surrounding genetic engineering. Scientific advancement is shown to be morally dangerous when technological progress ignores ethical responsibility. The clones become victims of a society that values medical advancement more than human dignity. Importantly, *Never Let Me Go* suggests that humanity cannot be defined merely through biological birth. Instead, compassion, emotional depth, and personal memory become the true markers of human existence.

Artificial Intelligence and Humanity in *Klara and the Sun*

Published in 2021, *Klara and the Sun* shifts attention from biotechnology to artificial intelligence. Klara, an Artificial Friend designed to assist lonely children, narrates the novel. Unlike traditional fictional robots, Klara demonstrates remarkable emotional intelligence. She observes human behavior carefully, develops empathy, experiences hope, and even makes personal sacrifices for those she loves.

Posthumanist theory questions whether consciousness depends upon biological existence. Klara's actions suggest that emotional intelligence may emerge independently of human biology. Throughout the novel, humans often appear less compassionate than the machine itself. Parents manipulate technology, educational systems produce inequality through genetic enhancement, and social relationships become increasingly transactional.

Ironically, Klara becomes the moral center of the narrative. Her innocence and compassion reveal that ethical behavior is not limited to biological humans. The novel therefore reverses traditional assumptions regarding human superiority. Instead of asking whether AI can become human, Ishiguro asks whether humans themselves continue to embody genuinely human values.

Comparative Analysis

Although both novels explore different technologies, they share significant posthumanist concerns. In *Never Let Me Go*, humanity is biologically reproduced through cloning, while in *Klara and the Sun*, humanity is technologically simulated through artificial intelligence. Yet both clones and AI exhibit emotional complexity that exceeds society's expectations. Another shared theme is exploitation. The clones exist to sacrifice their organs, whereas Klara exists solely to serve human needs. Both reveal how advanced technologies can reinforce systems of power and inequality.

Memory also functions differently in each novel. Kathy's memories preserve personal identity despite social oppression, while Klara's observations enable her to construct a unique understanding of human life. Memory therefore becomes a posthuman mechanism through which identity is continually formed rather than biologically inherited. Furthermore, both novels reject clear boundaries between human and non-human beings. Instead, Ishiguro presents humanity as an ethical condition grounded in empathy rather than biological origin.

Ethical Dimensions of Posthumanism

The ethical dimensions of posthumanism focus on the moral questions that arise as science and technology increasingly transform human life. In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*, technological innovations such as human cloning and artificial intelligence are not merely scientific achievements but also sources of profound ethical dilemmas. Ishiguro uses these speculative narratives to examine how technological progress affects concepts of identity, dignity, rights, and responsibility. His novels suggest that while science has the potential to improve human life, it can also lead to exploitation and inequality if it is not guided by ethical principles. Through these fictional worlds, Ishiguro encourages readers to reflect on the responsibilities that accompany technological advancement.

One of the central ethical issues in *Never Let Me Go* concerns the legal and moral status of cloned humans. Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth are genetically identical to ordinary humans and possess emotions, memories, dreams, and the capacity to love. Despite these human qualities, society denies them basic rights because they were created solely to serve as organ donors. This raises the question of whether biological origin should determine a person's value and

legal status. From a posthumanist perspective, humanity should not be defined merely by natural birth but by qualities such as consciousness, emotional experience, and moral agency. Ishiguro criticizes a society that treats cloned individuals as biological resources rather than as persons deserving of dignity, equality, and legal protection.

Klara and the Sun explores another significant ethical concern: whether artificial intelligence can become a moral agent. Klara, an Artificial Friend, consistently displays empathy, compassion, loyalty, and self-sacrifice—qualities traditionally associated with human morality. She carefully observes human emotions, develops meaningful relationships, and even risks her own existence to help Josie recover from illness. Her actions prompt readers to question whether morality depends solely on biological humanity or whether intelligent machines capable of ethical reasoning and emotional understanding should also receive moral consideration. Ishiguro suggests that if artificial intelligence can genuinely understand and respond to human suffering, society may eventually need to reconsider its ethical responsibilities toward such beings.

The novels also raise broader concerns about the regulation of biotechnology and artificial intelligence. In *Never Let Me Go*, scientific advances in cloning are pursued primarily to benefit society through organ transplantation, but the welfare of the clones themselves is completely ignored. Similarly, *Klara and the Sun* depicts a future in which genetic enhancement, artificial intelligence, and technological dependence create new forms of social inequality and emotional isolation. These narratives emphasize that scientific progress should not be driven solely by technological capability or economic benefit. Instead, governments, scientists, and society must establish ethical guidelines that protect individual rights, prevent exploitation, and ensure that technological innovation serves humanity rather than undermining it.

Ultimately, Ishiguro's novels demonstrate that ethical reflection must accompany every stage of technological development. They ask whether consciousness, empathy, and emotional experience deserve protection regardless of whether they exist in biological humans, cloned individuals, or artificial intelligence. The novels challenge readers to reconsider traditional definitions of humanity by suggesting that compassion and moral responsibility are more important than biological origin. Rather than presenting technology as inherently dangerous, Ishiguro argues that the true ethical challenge lies in how humans choose to use it. His works therefore serve as a reminder that scientific progress should always be balanced with respect for human dignity, justice, and ethical responsibility toward all forms of conscious life.

Conclusion

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun* provide profound insights into posthumanist thought by questioning traditional definitions of humanity and exploring the ethical consequences of technological advancement. Through the depiction of cloned humans and artificial intelligence, Ishiguro challenges the assumption that biological origin alone determines human identity. Instead, his characters demonstrate that qualities such as empathy, love, memory, and emotional consciousness are the true foundations of humanity. By

presenting non-human beings with deeply human characteristics, the novels encourage readers to reconsider the boundaries between the human and the non-human.

Both novels also expose the ethical dangers that arise when scientific and technological progress is pursued without moral responsibility. In *Never Let Me Go*, cloned individuals are exploited for organ donation despite possessing the same emotions and aspirations as ordinary humans. Similarly, in *Klara and the Sun*, Klara's unwavering compassion contrasts with the emotional shortcomings of many human characters, highlighting how technology can reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of humanity. Ishiguro suggests that the greatest threat is not technology itself but the human tendency to exploit, discriminate, and prioritize utility over dignity and compassion.

From a posthumanist perspective, Ishiguro's works advocate a more inclusive understanding of personhood that extends beyond biological definitions. They invite readers to question whether consciousness, emotional intelligence, and moral agency should become the basis for ethical recognition rather than species membership alone. By challenging anthropocentric assumptions, the novels demonstrate that humanity is not a fixed biological condition but a dynamic and relational concept shaped by empathy, ethical responsibility, and interconnectedness with technology and other forms of life.

In an era marked by rapid developments in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and genetic engineering, Ishiguro's novels remain remarkably relevant. They encourage readers, scholars, and policymakers to reflect on the ethical implications of emerging technologies and to ensure that scientific innovation is guided by compassion, justice, and respect for all conscious beings. Ultimately, *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun* reaffirm that the future of humanity depends not on technological advancement alone but on our ability to preserve human dignity, ethical values, and empathy in an increasingly posthuman world.

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