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Redefining Humanity: A Posthumanist Analysis of *Klara and the Sun*

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Abstract: ***Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, Klara and the Sun, explores the concept of posthumanism by presenting the world through the eyes of Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF). The story challenges the traditional belief that humans are the only beings capable of complex emotions.***

Although Klara is a machine, she shows deep empathy, acute observation, and even a spiritual faith in the Sun. A central conflict arises when Klara is asked to aid the sickly teenager Josie, suggesting that human identity might simply be data that can be copied and transferred. However, the narrative reveals that the human heart is complex and cannot be easily replicated because it exists within people's relationships, not just within an individual. By blurring the lines between the natural and the artificial, Ishiguro portrays a posthuman world in which agency is shared across a network of living and nonliving entities. The novel urges readers to rethink the definition of humanity and the ethics of treating artificial beings.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Artificial Intelligence, Identity, Empathy, Ethics

I. INTRODUCTION

Ishiguro's novel, *Klara and the Sun*, was published in 2021. It creates a narrative landscape where the boundaries between the biological and the artificial are not just blurred but fundamentally reorganized. The novel is set in a near-future society defined by genetic editing, known as "lifting," and severe class stratification. The story is narrated by Klara, who identifies herself as an Artificial Friend (AF). She is designed to provide companionship to lonely teenagers in this future world. While the novel explores familial dynamics and science fiction tropes such as the rise of AI and the ethics of cloning, it moves beyond typical dystopian warnings of robot rebellion. Instead, Ishiguro utilizes Klara's perspective to explore the philosophy of posthumanism.

Posthumanism challenges the traditional humanist idea that humans are the center of the universe, autonomous and strictly distinct from machines and animals. Humans have always prided themselves on being different from everyone else and superior to the animal kingdom, without a doubt. It shows that consciousness is not exclusive to biological humans but is distributed across networks of technology, environment, and objects. As critic N. Katherine Hayles, a foundational theorist in this field, notes, the posthuman view sees the body as the original prosthesis and the boundaries between the human subject and the technological object as preambled rather than absolute. In Ishiguro's novel, Klara is not simply a tool or a mirror of human vanity. In fact, she is a posthuman subject. She possesses acute observational ability, emotional attachment, and the capacity for spiritual belief, qualities long considered uniquely human, and she arguably surpasses her human owners in these respects.

By examining Klara through the lenses of object agency and the ethics of replacement, this paper argues that Klara and the Sun deconstructs the anthropocentric definition of the soul, a central concept in posthumanism. Ishiguro suggests that humanity is not an internal biological essence but the result of a network of relationships, care, and interdependence that can be inhabited by humans and machines alike.

II. POSTHUMAN GAZE

The novel begins with Klara in a store, waiting to be purchased. Unlike other AFs who are passive, Klara is defined by intense curiosity and by a unique mode of observational processing. She perceives the world through a segmented vision, breaking reality into parts before reassembling them. This mode of seeing allows her to notice details that humans usually ignore. She is particularly subtle in identifying the emotions of passersby. However, Klara does not just observe humans. Because she is artificially made and does not share human limitations, she observes objects as well as humans and treats them as entities with their own powers and will. In fact, she views the sun not as a celestial body but as a living entity, and she views the machine as a malevolent agent. This machine causes pollution, and she regards it as malevolent and destructive. Griffin observes that:

Klara's vision is 'partitioned' into boxes and rectangles, a digital fragmentation that suggests a nonhuman way of processing reality. Yet this fragmented perception is precisely what allows her to observe the world with a granularity that humans lack, leading to her animistic interpretation of the environment.

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For Klara, the Sun is not a mere physical object but a sentient, benevolent deity, while the Cootings Machine is its demonic, polluting antithesis, reflecting a worldview where technology and nature are imbued with moral agency (Griffin 14).

This analysis draws on object-oriented ontology (OOO), a branch of posthumanist thought that suggests that all entities, whether human, machine, or inanimate object, exist on equal footing. Bogot explains further:

By emphasizing the 'withdrawn' nature of objects—the idea that things always exceed our knowledge of them—OOO challenges the traditional vertical hierarchy that places human consciousness at the apex of existence. In this flattened ontology, a pixel, a person, and a pollution-emitting machine are all 'withdrawn' entities that interact on a single ontological plane, where no being has priority over another in terms of its reality or its capacity to affect the world (Bogost 22).

In traditional literature, objects are often treated as symbols. They do not have feelings of their own, but in this novel, objects possess agency. They have the capacity to influence the story independently of humans. Klara's narration forces the reader to adopt a non-anthropocentric worldview, one decentered from the human. Even the Japanese concept of *ma* is relevant to the novel. *Ma* emphasizes the meaning of gaps and spaces between objects. Klara does not see a room; she sees the spatial relationships and tensions between the people and objects within it. Since Klara is an object herself, she has a unique interobjective relationship with the world. She recognizes that the sun and the Cootings Machine are actors in the shared drama.

Moreover, Klara's interpretive framework does not merely reflect programmed efficiency but reveals an emergent ethical consciousness grounded in relationality. "Klara's observation of the world is not merely a matter of data collection, but an interpretive act that signals the emergence of a moral subject"(Griffin 142). The world according to AI is different from a human understanding of what a machine will supposedly think of humans. Her reverence for the Sun is not naïve superstition; rather, it signals her attempt to map causality and benevolence within a world structured by extraction and consumption. The Sun becomes, for Klara, a source of restoration and sacrifice, a figure capable of responding to devotion. Conversely, the Cootings Machine embodies depletion and harm, its smoke staining the sky and diminishing vitality. Through this binary, Klara "effectively decentralizes the human, creating a flat ontology where agency is shared among a network of solar energy, human emotion, and machinic devotion, thereby challenging the traditional humanist monopoly on spiritual and ethical life" (Braidotti 112). Her faith in the Sun's capacity to intervene in Josie's illness further underscores her refusal to separate mechanism from meaning. In granting intention to environmental forces, Klara resists the reduction of reality to utility alone. Ishiguro thereby stages a quiet critique of anthropocentrism: it is the artificial being, not the human characters, who most consistently acknowledges the vibrancy and consequence of the material world.

This overturns the human hierarchy. Humans in the novel often lack humanity and empathy, whereas AFs do not. They treat AFs as disposable toys or vacuum cleaners. But Klara, the machine, displays the curiosity and empathy usually reserved for a human protagonist. By validating Klara's gaze, Ishiguro suggests that consciousness is not simply a magic spark found only in biology but is instead a process of interaction. Klara's ability to interpret the world through her unique visual processing not only proves that she has a distinct form of subjectivity, but also challenges the idea that only humans can be true observers of reality.

III. THE MYTH OF THE "HUMAN HEART" AND THE ETHICS OF REPLACEMENT

The central conflict of the novel is revealed to be a secret plan devised by Josie's mother, Chrissie, the scientist who owns Klara. Josie is dying from the side effects of genetic lifting. Her mother has commissioned Mr. Capaldi, a portrait artist and scientist, to build an empty AF body that looks exactly like Josie. If Josie dies, Chrissie wants Klara to transfer her consciousness, memories, and mannerisms into this new body and become Josie. This proposition leads to a philosophical debate between Capaldi, who believes humans are merely data that can be copied, and Josie's father, Paul, who believes there is a human heart that cannot be replicated. Klara ultimately reflects on Capaldi's assumption and concludes:

"Mr Capaldi believed there was nothing special inside Josie that couldn't be continued. He told the Mother he'd searched and searched and found nothing like that. But I believe it wasn't inside Josie. It was inside those who loved her. That's why I think now Mr Capaldi was wrong and I wouldn't have succeeded. So I'm glad I decided as I did" (Ishiguro 32).

Through this reflection, the novel relocates the "soul" from an interior biological essence to a relational network of love, thereby directly challenging Capaldi's data-driven reduction of humanity. This shows that the philosophical pivot of the novel, Mr. Capaldi, represents the viewpoint of technological reductionism. He believes that the human soul is a myth and that an individual is simply a collection of information. This is antithetical to many traditional ideas about what makes humans human. His idea that humans possess impulses, desires, and memories that can be copied or transferred to a machine is not accepted by the other characters. This reflects the posthuman concept of the subject as an informational pattern rather than an embodied presence. However, Klara refutes this view, not by returning to a traditional religious argument, but by offering a new relational definition of the soul. She realizes

that she cannot become Josie because Josie's identity does not reside solely in her brain and body; rather, it is distributed externally. It exists in the specific love, memories, and reactions of the people around her, namely her father, mother, and friend Rick.

This concept also shows that identity is not an isolated internal dwelling; it is a network of influence. Even if Klara perfectly imitated Josie's mannerisms, she could not replicate the history of relationships that Josie inhabits. In fact, the heart is not an organ but a web of connections. This suggests that while machines like Klara can participate in human networks and possess their own dignity, the idea that one being can simply replace another is a fallacy. It ignores the frailty of being and the unique embodied history that every entity, human or machine, possesses in different ways. Ishiguro uses Klara's refusal to become Josie to argue that uniqueness persists despite technological imitation. A machine cannot simply copy or replace a human. The argument is that connections to others are what differentiate a machine from a human.

IV. CONCLUSION

Klara understands the presence of the world, even as the definition of the human remains unsettled and unstable. Through Klara's consciousness, Ishiguro decisively challenges the anthropocentric conviction that emotions and the soul belong exclusively to biological life. This paper has demonstrated that, by exercising object agency and interpreting reality through her singular, attentive gaze, Klara reconfigures the human heart not as a sealed, interior essence but as a distributed, relational network of life. Her ecosophical devotion to the sun further situates her within a spiritual posthumanism that exceeds the limits of technocentric discourse. Garrard a scholar points out that, "Klara's faith in the Sun's 'nourishment' and 'special help' represents an affective shift toward a posthuman ecosophy, where the machine-subject seeks meaning through a spiritualized relationship with the natural environment"(214).

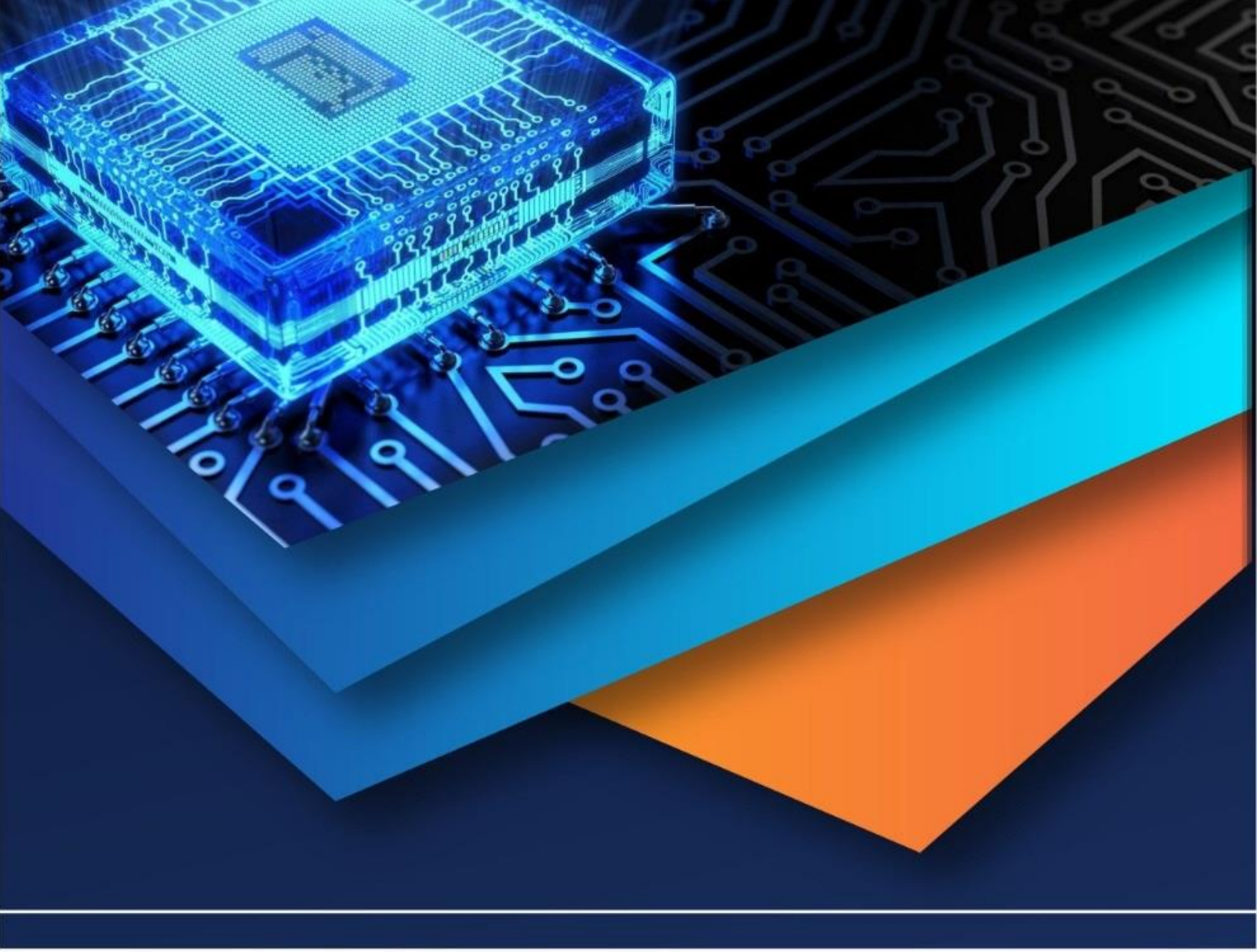
Redefining humanity is a reevaluations process of human in the face of development such as artificial intelligence and biotechnology. In *Klara and the Sun* the humanity is redefined as the roles exchange between human and machines. Biologically, human have assets such as curiosity, loyalty and sacrifice. Klara, a machine also possesses the same qualities through it doesn't have a human body.

This paper tries to understand the concept of redefining humanity and put forward the idea of how people use the machines just as tools. It also bringforth the idea that people slowly becoming machine. It is not the biological exclusivity or technological mastery that makes a man, but the willingness to care and extended empathy beyond fellow humans, even to artificial beings one create.

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