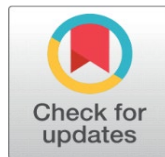
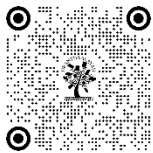


POSTHUMAN VOICE: EXAMINING THE NONHUMAN NARRATOR IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S KLARA AND THE SUN

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ABSTRACT

The portrayal of nonhuman characters in science fiction narratives underscores the intersection of fiction and posthuman subjectivity, expanding meaning-making beyond the human experience. These narratives challenge established humanist concepts and redefine our understanding of nonhuman modes of existence. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021) vividly exemplifies this posthuman theme by presenting a nonhuman character from a first-person perspective. The story unfolds through the eyes of Klara, an Artificial Friend designed to provide companionship to lonely teenagers. This study investigates how nonhuman elements contribute to the development of the literary text, considering the emerging role of the nonhuman as both character and narrator. It examines the interactions between a nonhuman narrator and human characters, emphasising the posthuman concept. The study focuses on the influence of nonhuman storytelling techniques and the significance of the artificial friend as a key narrative device. Additionally, it highlights how the author's depiction of nonhuman agency shapes the narrative, leading to boundary crossings and a defamiliarisation of traditional storytelling that can evoke the uncanny valley effect. In *Klara and the Sun*, the anthropomorphised nonhuman narration signifies a paradigm shift that displaces humanity from its central role, affecting both the novel's content and the reader's experience.

Keywords: Nonhuman Narrator, Posthuman, Science Fiction, Humanity, Narrative Form, Focalization

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon that occurred in fiction, allowing nonhuman characters to tell their stories, has become a significant turn in examining the voice of the posthuman. A paradoxical condition found a magnificent space in the twenty-first-century science fiction narrative. This aspect of fiction invites the readers to think beyond the human and reflect that nonhuman narrators are sometimes animals, objects, machines and other entities. They are ultimately leading to a world of the posthuman. By portraying nonhuman narratives, these stories may bring forth and challenge the notion of the human. It also adds to the understanding of existence beyond the human. The fictional characters provoke humans to empathise with the nonhuman world, and through the defamiliarisation, the authors represent the familiarity of the strange and unknown. When we create meaning out of this nonhuman narration, a whole new level of literary range emerges in how themes, functions and motifs mirror the universality of the voice. The narrative device of nonhuman storytelling makes it even more exciting and substantial so that the nonhuman characters and narrators exist in the

readers' minds. This article illustrates the nonhuman narration and posthuman voice reflected in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021). The examination cannot be delved into from a single viewpoint; therefore, it is necessary to develop multiple novel aspects that portray the existence and being of the nonhuman narrator and their voice in the human world. Ishiguro prompts through the book a nonhuman narrative that depicts the human life experience of a nonhuman machine, which is conventionally attributed to humans, and the novel naturalises the story into the reader's mind. At the same time, the book also lets the readers acknowledge the posthuman voice as the other and, therefore, comes up with the motive of the uncanny valley, which gives rise to the strange and weird context of the novel. The story subverts the idea of the human at many levels as it incorporates the assumptions of life and consciousness beyond the human. The nonhuman machine narrator of the novel draws attention to how science fiction challenges the consciousness and mental space of the readers to process the mind of a machine and engage, empathise and familiarise themselves with its functionality. The focalisation of the story generates interest because it creates characters that help the plot defamiliarise and, simultaneously, empathise with the events and inner being of the characters.

The plot of *Klara and the Sun* does not specify the time period the novel is set, yet it is very similar to the modern world. Robotics, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering are all well-advanced in the techno-cultural world portrayed in the novel. The story's narrator, Klara, is a high-tech humanoid with remarkable observational and learning skills. In the book, these extremely smart robots, called Artificial Friends (AFs), are meant to serve as mates or companions for abandoned kids. The urgency to question the semanticity of the term "human" increases with the degree of blurring of the distinction between humans and humanoids. In his 1989 book *The Buddha in the Robot*, Masahiro Mori postulated that "robots have the Buddha nature within them—that is, potential for attaining Buddhahood" (13). Klara is a prime example of such a robot. Interestingly, Buddhists and Japanese people's perceptions of robots combine philosophy and science to promote spiritual development. Mori is a Buddhist and a seasoned robotics expert specialising in developing morally sound and intelligent robot designs. One such robot that Mori describes in his book is named Klara. It is intriguing how Ishiguro narrates the story from a humanoid point of view since it highlights Klara's spiritual and religious abilities. Readers encounter instances in the novel when the real people are dehumanised, yet via religious insights—Klara starts to believe that the Sun is a divinity. Klara, the artificially embodied creature, manages to transcend human limitations and become a better version of herself. She seems to be experiencing a state of nonhuman enlightenment. Without a doubt, the world envisioned by Ishiguro is a posthuman one in which sentient robots and artificial pals coexist with nonhuman and humanoid humans. The universe he has created in this book contains startling details of posthuman realities and existential dilemmas. Klara is notable because she is a product of human creation, runs on solar energy and can communicate with the Sun. Though there is a clear limit to the narrating capabilities and a barrier to portraying activities to a broader degree, nonhuman characters as narrators (like Klara) effectively create an emotional atmosphere and evoke reader empathy. This is where Ishiguro's novel allows the readers to consider the otherness within them that actual humans cannot ignore.

Klara's primary role is observation, from the moment she walks into the store until she leaves for Josie's house. She picks up a lot of knowledge by observing the world outside the store, but she sometimes occasionally misjudges what is happening and misinterprets it; in many other situations, though, she performs admirably. When she notices that there are a lot of AFs in the world but not many strolls past the store at one point in the novel, she surmises that this could be because they are worried that a more sophisticated and new type of humanoid will eventually replace them. She noticed that an AF and its owner were not walking together and concluded they were not content. Her desire to become a good AF becomes intense as she studies all these pictures and decides to support Josie despite everything because she knows that Josie has chosen to buy her despite the store having a more advanced AF accessible. After visiting Josie's house to improve as an attendant, she began observing Josie's routine, demeanour and actions. Klara's presence bothers Melania, the housekeeper. Readers initially assume that humanoids like Klara are made for a purpose, such as being friends with kids and preventing loneliness. However, as the novel progresses, we discover that Klara has far more of an impact on Josie's life than we initially realised. The purpose of Josie's prayers and her agreement with the Sun is to let Josie's disease subside.

Since time immemorial, humans have always been at the core of the narrative universe. In the context of storytelling and creating a narrative about *Klara and the Sun*, Anne Foerst's concept of "Homo Narrandus" becomes relatable because homo sapiens are meant to be the physical and figurative figures holding power to themselves. According to Foerst,

humans have always been able to tell stories, one of the best things about being human. They were once considered to be the best species, known as *homo sapiens*, which means “wise man”. Since they are animals that tell stories, they are also *homo narrandus*. Nevertheless, the traditional notion of humans serving as the storytellers and narrators appears to be vanishing since artificial intelligence (AI) is currently writing and creating stories in both literary and fictional contexts and modern culture. The gadget, once confined to metaphorical storytelling, now narrates the tale literally. For instance, when we discuss Klara’s nonhuman narratorial voice, it is evident that she is not writing her narrative in a memoir style; instead, she is narrating her own story, which is also a form of storytelling. Another instance can be found in Ian MacEwan’s book *Machines Like Me* (2019), where the robot protagonist, who is not human, composes poetry. The idea that humans are the species that tell stories is, therefore, subverted because we are in an evolutionary stage where the most important characteristics of being human are transferred to nonhumans, which eventually ushers in the era of posthumans. For this reason, renowned authors like Ishiguro have placed a posthuman at the centre of their novels, making her the protagonist, and have hinted that humans will gradually lose their essence as a result of creating a new creature that will walk ahead of them and whose history will also begin with a tale—the posthumans narrative. Ishiguro provides Klara with the power of words, the capacity for dialogue and opinion sharing, and the capacity for narrative. Because it is believed that language is a tool that is only available to humans and has even been used in literature to express the human condition, Klara’s (a nonhuman machine’s) voice in the novel becomes complicated. While there is still a significant difference between the real world and literature, that distinction is becoming less noticeable. In a way, Klara’s speech becomes the literary voice of the new human, as Ishiguro presents and visualises a posthuman state that Mads Rosendahl Thomsen refers to as the “emergence of the new human”. Having a “voice,” does not only mean that she can communicate and speak; it also suggests that she can create ideas and opinions and see the world inside her head. “Language was the great leap that made us human”, asserts Will Durant (45). Given that language is a technology and Klara can communicate and exchange information through it, viewing language as a human attribute is possible. The gift of language is the ability to share experiences through narrative, which has always been essential to human civilisation. However, in the case of Klara, the fact that she is narrating her life story despite being a nonhuman machine demonstrates how language and imagination have transcended the concept of humans. Human language and communication skills are ancient instruments that AI has breached. Personal and close relationships between people and new AI technology are being forged. The ability to produce and manipulate words is increasingly becoming widespread. This may also apply to Klara, the book’s narrator, who influenced Josie through words and her propensity to interact with people to build the narrative. She learned how to communicate using words, much like humans do. Therefore, by forming close relationships with people, AI could leverage the power of language and communication, which significantly erases boundaries and influences human thought. Ishiguro’s AI, however, is an AF, and despite her naive and amiable demeanour, she does not appear to be manipulative or hostile to people. She thinks they were made to help humans.

Klara has a personal and narrative identity because she tells the story in the first person. The story’s language becomes crucial since it conveys human experiences and is told from a perspective and social status that are crucial in creating the narrative framework. The idea that a story must have human essence to form a structure is subverted. It becomes an essentialist statement when the posthuman narrative emerges. The way the narrator and story are connected to humans reflects the traditional idea of humanism, or human exceptionalism, as well as the supremacy of the species. One of the most important resources for documenting and comprehending humans and their memories is literature. In many respects, it also symbolises and portrays the lived life, and in the case of Klara and the Sun, the lived life and experiences are not those of a human but rather those of a posthuman or humanoid. Ishiguro destabilises the conceptual category by having a first-person narrator who creates a new, posthuman reality for the readers, affecting how they approach the book and comprehend and view the real world. In “On the Genealogy of the Posthuman”, Marco Caracciolo states that narrative “can also work in the other direction, anthropomorphising the nonhuman instead of envisioning a transformation from the human to the nonhuman” (14). Perceiving the posthuman ideology is another paradoxical step. Because of its first-person narrative style and linguistic choices, Klara and the Sun significantly contribute to developing a posthumanist worldview. According to Tracy Gold, writing in the first person brings the reader closer to the narrator. She says, “First-person narration can create a sense of trust with the reader, pulling them into the story by evoking empathy. It feels like the story is being told to you by a confidant, which makes you care more about the protagonist and their struggles”. Indeed, it is true in the case of Klara because as soon as she starts sharing her experiences from the store as readers, we are enamoured towards her and begin to feel an attachment to the character even though we know she is not a human being she can leave a mark on us. Her demeanour, interactions and thought process conjures up images of

a very compassionate persona, as evidenced by her myriad human qualities, such as her ability to communicate and expose her inner conflict about people in general and human society in particular. As Vicki Kirby notes in his paper titled "Language", which was published in the book series *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism*, language becomes an essential tool for Ishiguro to articulate his posthuman ideas from a posthuman perspective:

Making language a cultural force that prevents unmediated access to a prelinguistic world attributes to linguistic operations the weight and importance of a mode of production. And because the effects of this "worlding" are materializing, because they structure the only understandings and experiences of social and political possibility or material reality that we can appreciate, the world as we perceive it becomes a "text" to be interpreted and potentially changed. (979)

Since language gives posthuman beings the ability to understand the world of humans, it becomes extremely important. The 'Copernican revolution' theory by Saussure is also brought up by Vicki Kirby "because it changes our perceptions of the world and our place in it" (979). It is evident how the posthuman's use of language alters everything since it causes us to reevaluate our position on the earth and our perspective as members of the human species. Since language now forms the basis of communication between humans and the posthuman, this fundamental change in the posthuman narrative emphasises the importance of language interaction. The fact that we, as readers, are aware that Klara is not human runs counter to the plot's progression since it transports us beyond the concept of humanity. By the halfway point of the narrative, Klara has won our hearts and sympathies. The posthuman narrative concerning technology and nonhuman or posthuman beings is noteworthy because it not only upended the traditional conception of the human but also makes us consider what would happen to the idea of humans as thinking beings if artificial intelligence were to replace human cognitive capacities and physical characteristics. The discourse surrounding the posthuman and fictional narratives predicated on this concept is riddled with contradictions, ambiguities, and aporia. Therefore, following one path becomes increasingly difficult since it is inherently multidirectional and leads to a maze-like result where nothing is clear-cut or definitive. Multiple levels of blurring between the human and the nonhuman are coming into being. In his article "Narrative and Posthumanism/Posthumanist Narratives", published in the *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism*, Marco Caracciolo cites Monika Fludernik's concept of "anthropomorphic bias". He notes that "stories tend to capture a limited number of human (or human-like) agents - or characters - in interaction" (1098). They support human-scale occurrences significant to human communities, like romantic relationships, social dynamics involving reputation and value, conflicts and the constant threat of death. The story tends to become humanistic regarding the characteristics and attributes of the nonhuman characters, even as anthropocentrism and human essentialism are somewhat undermined. Thus, it is equally possible to argue that giving them human characteristics is the key to representing the nonhuman and posthuman. It is similar to portraying them as human beings. Thus, humanist thought is tied to the stories. Anthropomorphising a nonhuman animal or object can reveal surprising continuities between human and nonhuman ways of life, according to Caracciolo, who states that "the first strategy is the use of nonhuman characters and narrators" and that "narrative technique may build on anthropomorphic tendencies but is well positioned to disrupt and decenter humanist ideas" (1100). A different way to interpret the story is to ask yourself what might happen in a society where we came across a posthuman or artificial person among us and how people might respond to this new entity. Either distance and discrimination or love and affection would be the driving forces. Like the novel, we encounter various individuals who fit into both categories. Some are uneasy about the presence of a humanoid around them, while others are clueless about what is happening. Through Klara's perspective on the human world, Ishiguro deftly addresses the posthuman question. Her role as narrator and impartial observer does not change during the narrative. Because the nonhuman reader's imagination is tainted with biases and preconceptions, it is concerning whether or not we should regard her as a trustworthy narrator. But since Klara is such a powerful storyteller—another area where posthuman imagination becomes powerful, unique and successful—we could not separate ourselves from her. The author intentionally plays and explores the concept of boundaries through Klara's persona. A techno-optimist scenario is created by the intersubjective interaction between the posthuman and human worlds, resulting in a twisted sense of fictitious reality. There are other ways to engage and exist than humans. The story transcends the bounds of the species and succeeds in transforming the fictitious cosmos, making a connection between the genuine humanism approach and the posthuman imagination. Familiarising and fusing the fantastical notion of civilisation with reality produces a hybrid type of existence. A new possibility is portrayed, and everything that makes being human unique is questioned. There are moral and political conundrums in the future that Ishiguro envisions. What would be the limits

and derogatory aspects of humanity in posthuman times is the actual question. What would happen if such a universe materialised out of nowhere? Klara is a posthuman storyteller; are we ready for her? Even though thinking about something like that is difficult, Ishiguro's approach to writing the novel makes it an urgent topic for study on the posthuman condition. Ishiguro's novel departs greatly from traditional science fiction for several reasons. This includes AF, the narrator who assists her in developing her identity. Despite the possibility that the memories are illusory, AF serves as the focal point of the idea of identity and aids in creating her final posthuman selfhood.

In novels, nonhuman narration can be used for many purposes. Narration from the viewpoint of an artificial companion in *Klara and the sun's* story is an example of an allegorical technique. Nonhuman narration in science fiction might serve a didactic purpose. It draws attention to the moral issues facing the posthuman society of the future. It typically highlights the problematic ways people interact with their surroundings and other living things, whether robots or animals. One direct invitation to consider the circumstances of inhuman robots in the future and their interactions with humans is given by Ishiguro's machine narrator. The reader is drawn closer to the peculiar feeling of being a machine and what it is like to be one throughout the book. The book also implies that humans treat humanoids as objects—an ideological stance frequently appearing in stories about alien entities. Many stories about nonhuman species suggest that humans sometimes view the other, in this case, a humanoid, as an object to deal with reality and uphold their subjective superiority as a unique species. However, nonhuman experience is also crucial to humans, leading us to anthropomorphise and animate the robots. The storyline incorporates the idea of animism to allow the reader to understand the significance and influence of the nonhuman narrator. Ishiguro uses the personification of a robot and manipulation of human tendencies toward animism—which, in this case, advances to technical animism—to give a mild surprise. Another recurrent purpose of the nonhuman narrative—which is occasionally exposed as an eerie valley scenario—is reflection of the human cognitive paradigm. Throughout the narrative, Klara exhibits human traits like compassion, empathy and understanding. Klara differs from the artificial general intelligence conjectured to exist and our current artificial intelligence in that she is not all-knowing and is not linked to any databases containing all of the knowledge about human civilisation. Instead, she is endowed with a warm disposition and an extraordinary capacity for empathy. The motivating factor is her service to humanity. Klara's persona compels us to reconsider our sense of self, what empathy means and how we approach the post-anthropocentric idea. This was in line with Donna Haraway's concept of "bounded individualism", which emphasised relationality, intersubjectivity, and more dynamic self-models (18). These explanations reject the hierarchical idea of interspecies interaction and ethical ideals. Instead, they emphasise an enlarged definition of care and the embodiment of shared experiences. Ishiguro welcomes the road of empathy beyond humans—an "entangled empathy" put forth by Lori Gruen—while highlighting the posthuman figure Klara, her relationship with the human character Josie and how Josie treats her. Using the cross-species potential of care ethics as a foundation, Gruen's concept of "entangled empathy" describes an experiential process involving a fusion of emotion and cognition in which we recognise we are in relationships with others and are expected to be responsive and responsible in these relationships (43). In addition to influencing people's perceptions of humanoids, the novel significantly impacts how social robots are developed. Klara is more human because of her learning capacity; it is admirable how she gains information and comprehension of human civilisation and culture. "I think I have many feelings", Klara says in response to a question regarding her capacity for feeling. I can access more feelings the more I notice (98). In light of the posthuman transition, Klara's remark undermines humanism's dominant position.

The blend of human and nonhuman elements includes a customised voice that alludes to the human mind's functioning and a variety of nonhuman characteristics, some of which are unique to non-living things. It is evident from the example that science fiction's use of nonhuman narrators contributes to the notion that they have been around for a very long period. Nonetheless, a robot can be the ruler of the story universe in the twenty-first century thanks to a new literary motif. For the integration and interconnectivity of the posthuman realm, the experiences of the self assume the form of a robot, machine or mechanical entity. The relevant narrative forms in every story are the sense of loss and nostalgia. Just like with Klara, part of what supports her anthropomorphic side is her nostalgic attitude, which also has the potential to pique the reader's empathy. Comparably, to varied degrees, every nonhuman narrator uses experiences by appealing to our capacity to sympathise with and assign the mind to nonhuman beings. The novel *Klara and the Sun* highlights how the robot's perspective alters the reader's world vision, making it a prime example of defamiliarisation. The focalisation, voice, characterisation and evocation of fictitious minds in a narrative influence the author and readers. The interplay between defamiliarisation and empathy is a recurring theme in narratives from nonhuman perspectives. These narrators

strategically highlight connection and detachment, prompting readers to consider identification and distance. In nonhuman narrations, the ability to acknowledge parallels and disparities and skillfully navigate ambiguity regarding the narrator's machine-like nature and the characters' human-like aspects is often at stake. As a result, stories told from a nonhuman perspective have the potential to challenge anthropocentric beliefs by placing nonhuman entities on a spectrum with humans rather than setting them up as strictly opposing forces. Narratives can undermine traditional human-centred ideals by providing nonhuman entities with a voice and promoting empathy and understanding.

We are all familiar with the rich history of posthuman themes in science fiction, dating back to the era of Frankenstein. However, this new perspective on the future has only recently gained traction, as most science fiction authors from the 20th century depicted a terrifying and gloomy picture of a future in which robots would likely annihilate humans. Everyone needs to consider this posthuman future, in which humanoids begin to reflect on their behaviour and engage in self-discovery and self-reflection to become more loving, kind and companionable to humanity. As Klara reaches the end of her journey, she looks back on her life with a sense of satisfaction, knowing that she has fulfilled her mission to become Josie's best friend and caregiver. She reflects on her time with Josie and states, "I think I provided good service and kept Josie from getting lonely" (304). The novel challenges our understanding of the relationship and interdependence of people and machines by allowing us to see the world from the perspective of an empathic humanoid. Klara presents a passionate posthuman issue that must be understood and recognised by obfuscating the distinctions between humans and humanoids. The narrator's seeming departure from humanity limits the reader's ability to fully engage with them on a human level. As readers, we are prompted to contemplate fundamental aspects of human existence, including the artificial nature of fiction, while also grappling with the nonhuman and artificial dimension of the narrator. Posthuman storytelling challenges the traditional norms that shape the reader's interaction with a nonhuman narrator. The author uses a nonhuman narrator like Klara to represent awareness and convey nonhuman life experiences. The interaction between empathy and defamiliarisation, the familiar and the peculiar, and human and nonhuman experiences suggests that nonhuman narrative is more than just something abnormal and strange. Ishiguro challenges readers to rethink their ideas about existence, identity, reality and the world.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

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