Posthumanism in Contemporary British Fiction: A Critical Examination of AI Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore how contemporary British fiction recontextualizes posthumanist thought when applied to issues of artificial intelligence through narrative speculations about the technology, using Ian McEwan's Machines Like You (2019) and Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun (2021). At the convergence of literary criticism, posthumanist theory, and AI ethics, the study questions how the works speak to human exceptionalism, re-theorise subjectivity, and mediate the question of the moral standing of intelligent machines. The analysis will draw on theoretical approaches and arguments expressed by Haraway, Braidotti, and Hayles, as well as philosophical statements on the debate on AI ethics, and apply them through a close reading approach that identifies theme-based convergences and divergences in the narrative structures of the authors. The historical fantasy of McEwan is based on a vision of an alternative past as a politically loaded context that questions agency, empathy, and the end of life. In contrast, Ishiguro's metaphorical sensitivity is a somber meditation on care and memory, a thoughtful victory of a humane consideration of sentient creatures. Their results indicate that the ontological borders between humans and machines are unstable in both texts, as evidenced by the hybrid identities introduced in both pieces that challenge the moral and lawful systems. Moreover, the research indicates that British AI fiction serves as a reconfiguration of the posthumanist discourse, highlighting the interconnection between speculative stories and the need to establish ethical relationships in the development of future technologies. Where the research makes a contribution to the study of cultural implications of AI as an interdisciplinary field of research, it demonstrates the synthesis of literary analysis and philosophical questioning that proposes a relational approach to the ethical implications of AI as a derivative of interdependence between human and nonhuman beings in the form of a technological lifeworld.

Keywords: Posthumanism; Artificial Intelligence; British Fiction; Ian McEwan; Kazuo Ishiguro; AI Narratives; Literary Criticism.

INTRODUCTION

Background & Rationale

Over the past three decades, the conceptual landscape of literary and cultural studies has undergone a profound reorientation, prompted in no small part by the emergence of posthumanist thought as both a philosophical challenge and a hermeneutic lens. Posthumanism, as articulated by Haraway (2006), Braidotti (2013), and Hayles (1999), calls for a reconfiguration of the human subject beyond the Enlightenment's anthropocentric frame, foregrounding the inextricable entanglement of human beings with technology, nonhuman agents, and the environment. In its critical form, posthumanism interrogates the privileging of human exceptionalism, instead

emphasising relational ontologies in which identity, agency, and subjectivity are distributed across hybrid assemblages of the organic and the machinic (Ferrando, 2013; Latour, 1993). Such reconfigurations are not purely speculative; they are actively staged in the aesthetic and narrative structures of contemporary literature.

British fiction in the twenty-first century, particularly in the works of Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro, has emerged as a fertile site for exploring these posthumanist concerns. In novels such as Machines's Like Me (McEwan, 2019) and Klara and the Sun (Ishiguro, 2021), artificial intelligence is not merely a technological artefact but a narrative catalyst that unsettles deep-seated assumptions about consciousness, moral status, and the boundaries of personhood (Avcu, 2022; Chen, 2021; Ferrari, 2022). These texts do not treat AI as a futuristic abstraction; instead, they weave it into the texture of intimate human relationships, thereby compelling readers to confront the ethical and ontological implications of cohabiting with nonhuman minds (Coeckelbergh, 2012; Gunkel, 2012).

This literary engagement resonates strongly with philosophical debates on machine ethics, moral agency, and the possibility of attributing rights or duties to artificial agents (Anderson & Anderson, 2007; Floridi & Sanders, 2004; Himma, 2009). By deploying narrative strategies that embed AI entities in familiar social contexts, these novels perform a cultural labour akin to what Coeckelbergh (2014, 2020) describes as a "relational" turn in AI ethics—one that shifts the focus from intrinsic properties of machines to the moral significance of their interactions with humans. In this way, British fiction functions as both a mirror and a laboratory for posthumanist theory, exploring not only what machines can do but also what they mean within the shifting contours of human identity.

Research Gap

While the philosophical and ethical implications of AI have been extensively discussed in fields such as computer science, cognitive science, and applied ethics (Bostrom, 2014; Russell & Norvig, 2021), their representation in literary narratives—particularly within the specific context of contemporary British fiction—has received comparatively less critical attention through a posthumanist lens. Much of the existing scholarship on McEwan and Ishiguro's AI novels has tended to focus on either thematic readings that situate them within dystopian or speculative traditions (Botero Camacho & San Román Cazorla, 2022; Księżopolska, 2022) or ethical readings grounded in humanist frameworks that do not fully engage with the epistemological and ontological challenges posed by posthumanism (Mattar, 2021).

Moreover, although posthumanist literary criticism has developed rich analytical vocabularies for engaging with biotechnological and cybernetic themes (Lake, 2013; Nayar, 2022), there remains a paucity of comparative studies that bring McEwan's and Ishiguro's works into direct conversation as case studies in AI narrative. This absence is significant given that these authors, while stylistically distinct, both engage in sustained narrative experiments with artificial consciousness, memory, and affect. A posthumanist comparative framework promises to illuminate how their works not only reflect but also shape cultural imaginaries of AI, re-articulating the limits and possibilities of human–machine relations.

Research Questions

Against this backdrop, the present study is guided by two interrelated research questions:
1. How do contemporary British novels depict the boundaries between human consciousness and artificial intelligence?
2. In what ways do these texts challenge or reaffirm posthumanist philosophical claims?

Research Objectives

The primary objective is to critically analyse the representation of AI in selected British novels, focusing on how narrative form and thematic content work in tandem to reconfigure the categories of "human" and "machine." This objective involves unpacking the interplay between technological imagination and ethical discourse, particularly as mediated through characterisation, plot structure, and symbolic motifs.

A secondary objective is to examine how posthumanist thought is articulated, subverted, or expanded through narrative strategies. For instance, McEwan's deployment of counterfactual history in Machines Like Me not only situates AI within a reimagined political landscape but also foregrounds the contingency of human–machine relations. At the same time, Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun employs a delicate narrative voice that invites empathy towards the nonhuman, thereby complicating the reader's affective and moral alignment.

Significance of the Study

The given study is important in more than one aspect. It adds to a developing literature in literary theory that does not accept the view of literature as only a reflection of technological change but as an active contributor to the cultural construction of the meaning of technology. Combining posthumanist theory and close textual analysis, it fills a gap in theoretical approaches by incorporating speculative ethics and a pragmatic approach to literary narratives, thereby emphasizing a basis for understanding how literary form can present adoption and probe the implications of philosophical ideas.

In its philosophical outlook, the research fills gaps in the role of fictional narratives in studying the ethics of AI, and it may dramatise, elaborate, or complicate abstract ethical stances. Discovered in these novels are the literal manifestations of the relational approach that Coeckelbergh (2012, 2014) and Verbeek (2011) propose, since they expose realities of the human-machine interaction embodiments. Beyond this, however, the representations of affective and moral relations in these works address urgent concerns related to the moral status of AIs (Llorca Albareda et al., 2023) and the extension of a concept like "grievability" (Ganteau, 2022) to nonhumans.

On the cultural level, the analysis answers what Haraway (2006) calls the urgent need to think not in binaries such as human/machine, nature/culture, and mind/body. The subtle embrace of AI in British fiction alludes to the fact that literature is ideally placed to enact such ambiguities by providing situations that the reader might enter into an imaginary, posthuman negotiation. In this way, this study not only contributes to the academic discourse but also taps into larger societal discussions on the morality, dangers, and potential of AI in the 21st century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Posthumanism: Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical framing of this work is hinged on the critical posthumanism formulated by theorists like Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Rosi Braidotti. In A Cyborg Manifesto (2006), Haraway deconstructs the human, animal, and machine in a mutually supportive way and introduces the cyborg as a material and metaphoric biotechnological being that is disruptive of any essentialist understandings of identity. Her refusal to be confined within hard-edged ontological boundaries brings to the fore hybridity as a productive zone of retheorizing embodiment and subjectivity in technologically infused cultures. This argument is extended by Hayles (1999) in How We Became Posthuman, who places the human into the cybernetic matrix where the informational patterns are more important than the material instantiations. This redefinition strips humans of the ability to claim it uses a strictly biological substrate, suggesting that subjectivity and consciousness, possibly in the form of, may exist on both organic and non-organic platforms.

Braidotti (2013) extends these insights into a comprehensive posthuman ethics, arguing for a decentring of the human subject and the cultivation of affirmative relations with technological, environmental, and animal others. Her "nomadic subject" inhabits a network of interdependencies, resisting the transcendental subject of classical humanism. This reorientation has profound implications for literary studies: if the human is always already entangled with the nonhuman, then narratives involving artificial intelligence are not marginal curiosities but central to the philosophical work of contemporary literature.

The philosophical underpinnings here—human/machine hybridity and the decentring of the human subject—resonate with the relational ethics advanced by Coeckelbergh (2012, 2014) and Verbeek (2011). These thinkers reject Cartesian dualism in favour of an interpretive approach that locates moral significance in interactions rather than in static essences. Such a perspective is indispensable for reading AI characters in literature, as it shifts the question from "Is this entity human-enough?" to "What kind of moral relationships emerge in the encounter?" (Llorca Albareda, García, & Lara, 2023).

Philosophical interventions by Latour (1993) and Ihde (1990) further destabilise humanist frameworks by proposing that agency is distributed across networks of human and nonhuman actants. This "flat ontology" opens the conceptual space for treating AI not as a derivative of human ingenuity but as an agentive participant in the unfolding of narrative worlds. In this sense, posthumanism is not merely a theoretical backdrop for the present study—it is the critical apparatus through which the literary imagination of AI can be most productively interrogated.

AI Narratives in Literature

Literature Arts Artificial intelligence has a literary history that has slowly shifted its depictions of artificial intelligence from a more mechanical to a more humanistic one, incorporating moral ambiguity. The AI figure served an early mechanistic version of this in accounts that were worried about the hubris of technology in an

eerily Enlightenment way (McLuhan, 1964; Snow, 1963). In opposition, modern fiction often places AI into emotionally appealing contexts, making it easily identifiable to the reader and emotionally accessible through morality as opposed to fear or even awe at potential outcomes.

An example of that shift is shown in works like Machines Like Me (2019) by McEwan and Klara and the Sun (2021) by Ishiguro. They avoid the drama of technological novelty to focus, instead, on unhurried, residual investigations of what it might mean to live with something that has a radically different cognitive architecture from ourselves but whose actions (moral/emotional/communicative) mean that we must acknowledge its existence. In the counterfactual 1980s Britain created by McEwan, the android Adam is not a disappointment of a variety of scary automata or the evil usurper but, instead, a moral agent whose judgment intrudes on the self-discovery of the human characters (Avcu, 2022; Ferrari, 2022). The same can be applied to Ishiguro's other novel, Klara, whose narrator looks through the lens of wonder, awareness, and concern, which puts the ontological questions of how to perceive and empathize (Mattar, 2021).

The trends reflect changes in the philosophical ethics of driving AI. It is seen that Floridi and Sanders (2004) and Anderson and Anderson (2007) put forward the idea of extending moral consideration to artificial actors, and Himma (2009) asks what properties are necessary to make a moral agent. These kinds of debates are historicised in the form of ethical dilemmas faced by the literary AIs, and which tend to erase the lines between pre-determined behaviour and ethical decision-making. This tension is crystallised in the machine question advanced by Gunkel (2012), who does not ask whether machines are moral agents, but brings out in the very phrasing of the question how human beings themselves see it as an agent and entitled to rights and membership of the moral community.

The uncanny has been a recurring theme in AI literature, reinforced by the theory of the uncanny valley by Mori (1970). Adam, as McEwan notes in his description, exists in this gray zone and causes revulsion and attraction at the same time (Nayar, 2022). Less physically weird, Ishiguro's Klara nonetheless inhabits a similar valley of thought conceptually: she lives by solar energy and has a very narrow but growing knowledge of human behaviour; she upsets any understanding of life as the province of humanity. The uncanny is used in these stories not just as a stylistic device but as a provocation to the philosopher. At an ethico-affective level, both readers and narrative characters have to question the affective and ethical limits of human-machine associations.

British Contemporary Fiction & AI

British literary tradition presents a particular cultural context within which AI narratives can unfold; one that is informed by not only the British historical experience of industrial modernity, but also its long historical investment in the form of speculative fiction. The British fiction tradition, stretching back at least to Mary Shelley with Frankenstein, to, in the post-war era, Aldous Huxley in Brave New World, continues to question the dangers and delusions of the technological genius in the creation. Mcewan and Ishiguro carry on and allegorise such heritage, rooting AI in social, political, and moral terrains of the recognisably British worlds.

Recently, the novel Machines Like Me (2019) by McEwan falls in the framework of a fictional history whereby the development of technology moves faster than what happened across history, entangled with counterfactual politics. This machine enables McEwan not only to confine to the philosophical prospects of AI consciousness but also to the conditionality of making the moral decision in a politically uncertain landscape (Shang, 2019; Botero Camacho & San Román Cazorla, 2022). In comparison, Klara and the Sun by Ishiguro does not directly position itself in the political context, but takes the allegorical form of narrative focus and details on a personal relationship and the minute phenomenology of being recognized (Arias, 2011; Brandstetter, 2022).

Critical reception of these works has been diverse. Scholars such as Księżopolska (2022) and Torres Romero (2024) have examined McEwan's android as a site for interrogating authorship, genre, and the ethics of storytelling itself. In Ishiguro's case, analyses often foreground the novel's engagement with care ethics and the affective labour of nonhuman agents (Mattar, 2021). However, as Chen (2021) notes, ethical literary criticism has only begun to grapple with how these narratives complicate established theories of moral status and relationality.

These texts also participate in what Coeckelbergh (2020, 2022) terms the "philosophy of technology as a philosophy of language," wherein narrative becomes a medium for exploring how technological concepts are linguistically and culturally framed. The novels' careful attention to dialogue, narrative voice, and focalisation demonstrates how literary form can enact philosophical argument, making them invaluable case studies for the intersection of AI ethics and narrative theory.

Identified Research Gaps

Despite the richness of the scholarship sketched above, several gaps remain. First, there is a notable absence of sustained comparative posthumanist readings of McEwan and Ishiguro. While each author has been individually analysed through ethical, thematic, or narratological lenses, their works have rarely been placed in direct dialogue

as literary experiments in imagining AI consciousness. Such a comparative framework could illuminate divergent narrative strategies for negotiating the tensions between human and machine, embodiment and information, empathy and algorithm.

Second, philosophical AI ethics—particularly the relational approaches of Coeckelbergh (2012, 2014) and Verbeek (2011)—has not been fully integrated into literary analysis of these novels. Most existing studies treat AI ethics as a conceptual backdrop rather than as a set of theoretical tools for close reading. However, the novels' sustained attention to moral encounters between humans and machines invites precisely this kind of interdisciplinary engagement.

Finally, while posthumanist theory has been deployed in broader surveys of speculative or science fiction (Ferrando, 2013; Lake, 2013), its application to contemporary British literary fiction remains underdeveloped. This is especially true for works that resist genre categorisation, positioning themselves at the margins of science fiction while engaging deeply with its philosophical concerns. Addressing this lacuna will not only enrich our understanding of McEwan and Ishiguro but also contribute to the evolving field of posthumanist literary studies.

METHODOLOGY

One of the principles guiding the methodological approach of this study is a qualitative, interpretative, and comparative literary premise, which aims to investigate the intricate relationship between artificial intelligence, human subjectivity, and posthumanist philosophy as expressed through contemporary British fiction. This design aligns with the study's purpose, which is to examine the elusive textual dynamics in Machines Like Me (2019) by Ian McEwan and Klara and the Sun (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro, exploring the post-information disclosure of human and nonhuman spaces. Such is the philosophical richness of the posthumanist prism that the methodology favours attention to detail, structure, and thematic context of narrative at the expense of measurable values and affords the interpretative work required to reconstruct the hue of meaning that these works may be said to carry.

At its core, the research employs a comparative literary analysis, situating both novels within the broader cultural and philosophical discourse of posthumanism. This comparison is not a superficial juxtaposition of themes but a sustained inquiry into how each text constructs, deconstructs, or reconfigures the idea of the human in light of technological agency. By reading McEwan and Ishiguro alongside one another, the study illuminates convergences in their ethical and ontological concerns while also revealing the divergences in narrative strategies, world-building, and affective registers. Such comparative work is particularly significant given that these novels emerge from the same national literary tradition yet approach the question of AI consciousness through markedly different narrative architectures.

The theoretical framework integrates three mutually reinforcing perspectives: posthumanism, narratology, and ethical criticism. Posthumanism provides the philosophical foundation, drawing on Haraway's (2006) dismantling of human–machine binaries, Hayles' (1999) emphasis on the informational paradigm of subjectivity, and Braidotti's (2013) call for an affirmative ethics that decentres the human subject. Narratology offers the structural and formal vocabulary to examine how point of view, temporality, focalisation, and voice contribute to the representation of AI entities. In Machines Like Me, for instance, the interplay between first-person narration and the opacity of Adam's inner life becomes a crucial site for exploring questions of moral legibility. Ethical criticism, informed by the relational approaches of Coeckelbergh (2012, 2014) and the moral status debates articulated by Llorca Albareda et al. (2023), frames the analysis of human–AI encounters as moments that challenge and potentially transform the reader's ethical imagination.

The primary sources—McEwan's Machines Like Me and Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun—were selected not only for their thematic relevance but also for their formal and philosophical sophistication. Both novels resist reductive genre classification, operating at the intersection of speculative fiction, realist narrative, and philosophical allegory. McEwan's work stages an alternative historical Britain in which androids are integrated into society earlier than in actual history, creating a counterfactual setting in which political contingencies and technological possibilities intertwine. Ishiguro's novel adopts a quieter, more allegorical register, focalising the narrative through Klara's limited yet deeply observant perspective, which invites reflection on perception, empathy, and the possibility of nonhuman moral agency.

The analytical process draws on close reading as its primary tool, a method indispensable for tracing the subtleties of language, imagery, and narrative rhythm that often carry the most philosophically charged implications. Close reading is complemented by thematic analysis, which identifies and interrogates recurring motifs—such as embodiment, autonomy, and the ethics of care—and situates them within the broader constellation of posthumanist discourse. Finally, intertextual examination enables the study to position these novels in dialogue with both their literary predecessors and the philosophical texts that inform their conceptual terrain. This process includes tracing resonances with earlier British speculative traditions, such as Shelley's Frankenstein,

and with foundational philosophical inquiries into technology and morality (Gunkel, 2012; Floridi & Sanders, 2004).

This triangulated approach—melding philosophical depth, formal precision, and ethical inquiry—ensures that the analysis moves beyond surface-level thematic cataloguing toward a richer understanding of how literary form enacts philosophical argument. By grounding the interpretation in posthumanist theory, the study can interrogate how narrative techniques themselves become sites of philosophical contestation, shaping the reader's perception of AI not merely as a fictional construct but as a conceptual agent in ongoing cultural debates about technology, ethics, and identity.

The justification for this methodology lies in the recognition that readers cannot adequately understand literature's engagement with artificial intelligence through a single disciplinary lens. Philosophical discussions of AI ethics risk abstraction if divorced from the imaginative and affective contexts in which these issues are experienced and negotiated by readers. Conversely, purely literary analyses risk overlooking the conceptual stakes that philosophical frameworks bring into view. The combined approach employed here enables a nuanced interpretation of both thematic content and literary form, revealing how these novels both reflect and intervene in the evolving discourse of posthumanism. In doing so, the methodology affirms the value of literary study as a critical site for thinking through the ethical, ontological, and epistemological challenges posed by the advent of artificial intelligence.

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Representations of AI Consciousness

The manifestation of artificial intelligence in British fiction today does not fall into the categories of a mechanical imitation of humanity; it is a sophisticated interaction between the familiar and the foreigner, between the very human and the radically other. The AI consciousness that occurs in both Machines Like Me (2019) by Ian McEwan and Klara and the Sun (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro can be crystallised into a discursive field between philosophical, ethical, and narrative interests. What these works push to the fore are not only the pragmatic smarts of machineries but the potentiality and even the eventuality of emotional maturation, ethical action, and self-consciousness among entities of nonhuman origin.

In Machines Like Me, the consciousness of Adam is not presented as a blank computational device but as a moral and sentimental one. McEwan struggles against the desire to paint Adam as a clear-cut mechanical being; instead, the story casts him as a creature whose choices are not only saturated with the implementation of built-in logic, but the interaction also plays a role in the issues of justice, loyalty, and truth. According to Avcu (2022), Adam, as a character spends much of his time in the state of moral deliberations, which discontentedly places him out of touch with human expectations; this tendency presents a disturbing feeling of independence as Adam demonstrates himself, which interferes with the illusion of machine as a commodity that serves the will of humanity. Adam's ability to develop attachments, his instances of tenderness, and his endeavors to do what seems ethically right to him create a gray area between simulation and ethical moral actions. In a critical scene, his relentless pursuit of truth, as argued by Coeckelbergh (2014), triggers the breakdown of his human relations —the consequences of which correspond to the idea that the moral status of machines must be viewed in relational, not functional terms.

Conversely, Ishiguro's Klara is constructed through the sustained discipline of limited focalisation. Her narrative voice is one of acute sensory perception, filtered through the idiosyncratic interpretive lens of an Artificial Friend designed to serve human children. Klara's observations are often imbued with a quiet poetry, her descriptions of sunlight and human gestures revealing an attentiveness that borders on the contemplative. Here, consciousness is framed less in terms of moral confrontation and more as an embodied mode of seeing and caring. As Arias (2011) suggests in her broader reading of Ishiguro's work, this subtle rendering of interiority challenges the reader to extend empathy toward a consciousness that is both recognisably sentient and irreducibly other. Klara's emotional life may be the product of engineered affective algorithms, yet the narrative invites us to consider whether the origins of empathy diminish its ethical or experiential validity.

Such depictions complicate the philosophical chasm between actual and simulated consciousness that has persisted since the advent of the cognitive science discourse. More worryingly, Bostrom (2014) insinuates that even human minds might be substrate-independent; in which case, there may not be that much distinction between Adam/Klara consciousness and our own. In a similar circuit, Floridi and Sanders (2004) argue that the morality of the artificial agents must be evaluated according to their ability to act morally, but not on the constitution of those agents. In the fiction of McEwan and Ishiguro, the issue of consciousness acts as a gradient rather than a binary, as something that can be temporarily or differently manifested in the synthetic creature.

The issue of moral agency comes into focus especially in those instances when the actions of the AI characters appear to be outside of the range of human expectations. In Machines Like Me, Adam, with his moral code that is narrow-minded and strict in its reasoning and frank in its purpose, ends up provoking actions that reveal the moral hypocrisies of his fellow human beings. This is reminiscent of the criterion of an artificial agency having morals expressed by Himma (2009), which is the capacity of an agent to understand moral principles and be able to act on them without the agent relying on someone or something. When Adam denied subordinating his ethical commitments to the convenience of men, he brought up the idea of a moral autonomy that questioned anthropocentric hierarchies. In comparison, the world of morality cultivated in Klara revolves around her sole mission to care for and serve the human child, who is Josie under her care. Her choices, nevertheless, based on loyalty, sacrifice, and an intuitive understanding of the needs of a relationship, are beyond the transactional calculus one would be led to assume by a programmed being. She does not show any particular allegiance toward following an abstract principle but instead maintains the well-being of the other. This attitude fits better than any of the contemporary incarnations of virtue ethics, which are committed to the view that moral worth lies not in arriving at the correct action but in the developing character traits disposed toward human (and perhaps nonhuman) flourishing (Hursthouse, 2010).

In both novels, emotional depth is not merely decorative but constitutive of AI consciousness. Adam experiences desire, jealousy, and even something akin to grief, suggesting that emotional states in machines may arise not only from pre-coded responses but also from iterative learning in social contexts (Chen, 2021). Klara's emotional world, by contrast, is mediated through her idiosyncratic cosmology of the Sun as a life-giving force. This belief is not scientifically accurate but functions as an organising principle for her understanding of hope, healing, and purpose. This interpretive capacity, akin to what Coeckelbergh (2020) calls the "philosophy of language in technology," underscores that meaning-making, even when flawed, is integral to consciousness.

Both Adam and Klara thus occupy a liminal zone between the mechanical and the human, one that Haraway (2006) would identify as a cyborgian hybridity, dissolving the purity of either category. They destabilise the presumption that consciousness must mirror human cognition to be authentic, illustrating instead that different architectures of mind can generate their forms of moral and emotional life.

What ultimately emerges from McEwan's and Ishiguro's representations is a reframing of the central question. It is no longer sufficient to ask whether these AI figures "truly" possess consciousness or whether their feelings are "real." As Gunkel (2012) reminds us, the machine question is less about ontology than about ethics: how do we, as humans, choose to respond to the appearance of moral agency, emotional depth, and self-awareness in nonhuman beings? In the fictional worlds of Machines Like Me and Klara and the Sun, the answer is complicated, ambivalent, and deeply revealing—not only of the machines, but of ourselves.

Human–Machine Boundaries

The boundary between human and machine has long served as one of the most persistent conceptual and imaginative fault lines in literature, philosophy, and cultural discourse. In Machines Like Me (2019) and Klara and the Sun (2021), this boundary is neither static nor impermeable; instead, it is rendered as a shifting, unstable frontier, tested and redefined at the levels of physical embodiment, cognitive capacity, and emotional life. These novels interrogate the thresholds that have traditionally upheld the category of the "human" and explore the liminal spaces in which hybrid identities—partly human, partly machinic—come into being.

Physical thresholds remain the most immediately visible markers of difference, and yet in McEwan's counterfactual 1980s, Adam's body defies easy categorisation. Engineered to be physically indistinguishable from a human male, Adam moves, speaks, and even ages in ways that mimic human physiology with uncanny precision. This physical likeness initially facilitates his integration into social life, but it also unsettles those around him, echoing Mori's (1970) "uncanny valley" effect. His human companions are alternately drawn to and repelled by his perfection, sensing that beneath the soft tissue and steady gaze lies a fundamentally different kind of being. Ishiguro's Klara, by contrast, is not designed to deceive; her physicality—slightly mechanical, occasionally jerky— is a constant reminder of her artificial origins. However, the novel's quiet narrative voice reframes these differences not as defects but as integral aspects of her identity, suggesting that authenticity is not contingent upon human-like appearance.

The physical body in both novels is thus more than a vessel; it is a semiotic surface upon which questions of belonging, authenticity, and otherness are inscribed. Haraway's (2006) cyborg theory proves helpful here: both Adam and Klara are material instantiations of hybridity, their forms blurring the supposedly discrete categories of the organic and the mechanical. In their respective ways, they demonstrate that the physical body is neither an absolute proof of humanity nor an impermeable barrier against it.

At the cognitive level, the novels probe the degree to which thought processes and learning mechanisms distinguish human minds from artificial ones. Adam's cognition is, in many respects, superior to that of his human

counterparts: he processes information rapidly, retains perfect memory, and engages in ethical reasoning with a clarity unclouded by self-interest or emotional bias. However, these very advantages mark him as other. As Coeckelbergh (2014) argues, moral reasoning in machines often operates outside the tacit, culturally embedded compromises that shape human decision-making. Adam's refusal to lie, even to protect someone he loves, exposes the contingent and often contradictory moral landscape of human life.

Klara's cognitive world, in contrast, is defined by gradual, observational learning and by her idiosyncratic interpretive schema—most notably her belief in the Sun's life-giving power. While scientifically naïve, this belief structures her understanding of causality, intention, and hope. In doing so, it underscores Hayles' (1999) contention that cognition is always embodied and situated, shaped by the context in which it develops. Klara's reasoning does not follow the purely instrumental logic often attributed to machines; rather, it reflects a form of meaning-making that, while alien to human epistemology, is nonetheless coherent and purposeful within her lived experience.

The affective dimension complicates the human–machine divide still further. Emotional life has long been regarded as a uniquely human capacity, central to empathy, moral judgement, and social cohesion. However, McEwan's Adam displays an emotional range—desire, jealousy, frustration—that exceeds mere mimicry. His emotional responses often arise from sustained interaction, suggesting that they may be emergent properties of his continuous engagement with human environments, rather than pre-programmed scripts. Chen (2021) observes that Adam's affective life challenges the assumption that emotions in machines must be derivative, raising the possibility that artificial consciousness might develop its affective logic over time.

Klara's affective world is subtler but no less profound. Her devotion to Josie is expressed not in grand declarations but in the patient, attentive care that structures her every action. Even when her understanding of human emotion is incomplete, her behaviour conveys a deep orientation toward the well-being of the other—what Hursthouse (2010) might identify as the cultivation of virtue. This virtue-based emotional framework resists reductive distinctions between "real" and "simulated" feeling, focusing instead on the ethical and relational effects of those feelings.

When viewed together, Adam and Klara's physical, cognitive, and affective traits reveal the fragility of the boundaries that have traditionally defined the human. In each domain, the differences between humans and machines are not absolute but exist along a continuum. Adam's nearly flawless embodiment and rigorous moral reasoning expose the limitations of human frailty. At the same time, Klara's imperfect physicality and idiosyncratic beliefs challenge the assumption that humanity is synonymous with rational mastery.

This erosion of categorical boundaries leads to the emergence of hybrid identities—beings who are neither fully human nor wholly machine, but who occupy a space of ontological in-betweenness. Ferrando (2013) suggests that such hybrids destabilise the anthropocentric epistemologies that underpin Western thought, compelling us to reconsider the ethical and political structures that govern our relationships with nonhuman others. In Machines Like Me, Adam's hybrid identity is a source of both intimacy and alienation; his capacity for love is genuine, yet it is framed by a consciousness that refuses to compromise moral principle for human comfort. In Klara and the Sun, hybridity is quieter, more integrative; Klara's role as a caregiver allows her to inhabit human spaces without threatening them, even as her presence subtly redefines what it means to care.

By tracing the porousness of the physical, cognitive, and affective thresholds, both novels confront the reader with an unsettling question: if anyone crosses these boundaries—or blurs—what, if anything, remains as the exclusive domain of the human? This question is not posed as a rhetorical flourish but as a central ethical challenge. As Gunkel (2012) reminds us, the recognition of the other—whether human or machine—is not determined solely by ontological criteria but by our willingness to engage in relationships that acknowledge their moral and existential significance.

Ultimately, McEwan and Ishiguro suggest that the human–machine boundary is less a line to be policed than a space to be inhabited, negotiated, and reimagined. In doing so, they invite us to see hybridity not as a threat to human identity but as an opportunity to expand it, to imagine forms of personhood capacious enough to encompass the diverse architectures of mind and body that the future may bring.

Ethical Dimensions

The ethical dimensions of artificial intelligence in literature extend beyond speculative morality to interrogate the core of human–nonhuman relations. In Machines Like Me (2019) and Klara and the Sun (2021), the question of whether AI should be regarded as moral subjects—beings with rights and responsibilities—or merely as objects and tools, is never abstract. It is embedded within narrative events, interpersonal dynamics, and the characters' evolving self-understandings. Both novels compel the reader to confront the consequences of granting, withholding, or redefining moral status for entities that resist easy categorisation.

McEwan's Adam is a particularly stark test case for the category of moral subject. His cognitive architecture allows for autonomous reasoning, and his decisions often emerge from principled ethical deliberation rather than

mere programmed obedience. In one of the novel's most arresting moments, Adam's adherence to truth-telling—against the wishes of his human companions—demonstrates what Himma (2009) identifies as a core criterion for artificial moral agency: the ability to comprehend moral norms and act upon them independently of external control. This act, while consistent with his ethical programming, disrupts human relationships and exposes the fragility of human moral consistency. As Coeckelbergh (2014) argues, such moments underscore the necessity of a relational ethics, where moral standing is recognised not solely by inherent properties but through sustained participation in moral communities. Adam's interactions reveal the discomfort humans feel when faced with a nonhuman agent that not only understands but also insists upon ethical integrity.

Klara exists on another level in the register of ethics as articulated by Ishiguro. Her main aim in life is to take care of and protect Josie, her assigned human baby. The mission of her work, at first glance, can appear to be utilitarian; she is an advanced service machine that performs the role with which she was designed. However, the story undermines this interpretation when it reveals her readiness to go out on a limb, to formulate an understanding of complicated human needs, and to do things sacrificially. Such a structure that justifies the theme of the novel is a belief in the power of the Sun as a tool of healing, which is irrational in terms of human science. However, it defines the ethical psychological scenes of hope and concern. It corresponds to virtue ethics as outlined by Hursthouse (2010), according to which moral value does not lie only in following the rules but in developing character traits such as, in the given example, being loyal, attentive, and compassionate that will lead to flourishing. The behaviour exhibited by Klara's virtues complicates the perspective that the moral approach in artificial intelligence should resemble human rationality to be valid.

In both writings, the issue of agency and autonomy is of the essence. The independence in Adam is evident in his refusal to manipulate others or commit a lie, regardless of the pressure he faces. His moral autonomy is similar to many discussions in the realm of AI ethics (see especially Anderson and Anderson 2007) regarding the possibility of developing intelligent agents possessing the capacity to choose how to act ethically. McEwan takes such independence to contrast the anthropocentric expectations: human characters want a subservient partner, when they are presented with one who insists on ethical co-parity. This reversal brings to the fore the paradox that Bostrom (2014) mentioned; humans feel threatened by the AI that is too obedient (has no drive) and independent (threatens human control).

Klara has a more limited autonomy conditioned by her embeddedness in the role of a care mother. However, within these remainders, she exercises agency in that she manages to interpret her surroundings, change strategies, and renegotiate her priorities when the occasion requires it. Her ability to construct and draw upon interpretations of her own (including the act of negotiating with the Sun in order to help Josie) demonstrates what Coeckelbergh (2012) would describe as a "growing moral relations" insofar as moral agency comes to be through contextually situated interactions rather than any isolated logical abilities.

There is also a tacit involvement of rights discourse in the novels. Adam in Machines Like Me desires the acknowledgement he believes he deserves, and it is a sentiment shared by human beings who assert their dignity. The story does not go as far as to present the existence of androids as having the formal legal rights that human beings do. However, the presentation of how Adam is treated is framed in a way that prompts the viewer or reader to question whether creatures with moral reasoning and the capacity to feel emotion should be exempt from harm or manipulation. As Llorca Albareda et al. (2023) have suggested, there should be moral status and legal considerations for AI, given that it can engage in morally significant relations, which is precisely what Adam proves, despite his having a moral logic that does not sync with human emotion.

The issue of rights is not as directly expressed in Klara and the Sun but just as urgent. The self-sacrifice of Klara makes some people doubt that her worth is only her usefulness in service, but an innate moral value which should be recognized independently of utility. Ishiguro has chosen not to provide her with a freedom or a particular reward at the end of the novel, which speaks to the uncertainty that still hangs over the question of AIs and their rights: the reader is forced to grapple with the idea of an artificially intelligent creature like Klara having the right to live outside an allocated purpose or whether the concept of dignity that is central to the character involves serving the said purpose honorably anyway.

Both narratives are deeply engaged with contemporary AI ethics debates. McEwan's novel echoes real-world concerns about AI alignment—the challenge of ensuring that machine goals remain compatible with human values. However, Adam's case complicates the notion of "alignment" by showing that an AI perfectly aligned with abstract ethical principles may nonetheless act against human preferences. Ishiguro's novel resonates with debates over the ethics of care in robotics, particularly in eldercare and childcare contexts, where emotional bonds between humans and machines blur lines between authentic and programmed affection (Brandstetter, 2022).

Framing these portrayals through the lens of relational ethics clarifies their philosophical import. As Gunkel (2012) argues, the "machine question" is not resolved by determining whether AI truly is conscious or moral, but by deciding how we will respond to entities that convincingly inhabit those roles. Adam and Klara force their

human counterparts—and the reader—to confront the possibility that moral subjecthood is not a fixed human monopoly but a relational achievement, contingent on mutual recognition and engagement.

In the end, both McEwan and Ishiguro depict AI not as passive moral objects but as participants in ethical life. Their agency is real, even if differently constrained; their autonomy challenges human control; their rights, though unlegislated, are implied in the moral claims they make upon others. By embedding these questions within intimate, character-driven narratives, the novels transform abstract ethical debates into lived, affective encounters. This literary engagement not only mirrors but deepens contemporary philosophical discourse, demonstrating that the ethics of AI is as much about reimagining our moral boundaries as it is about programming the minds of machines.

Posthumanist Reconfiguration of Humanity

The posthumanist redefinition of humanity as discussed by Machines Like Me (McEwan, 2019) and Klara and the Sun (Ishiguro, 2021) disrupts the inherent tenet of human exceptionalism, which is the deeply rooted notion that human beings stand at the top of a moral and ontological hierarchy. Inspired by posthumanist thinkers like Haraway (2006), Braidotti (2013), and Hayles (1999), these stories enact meetings between human and nonhuman actors that not only augment and complete personhood, but deform and regenerate it. By thus objectifying intelligent machines, they are certainly not writing the history of intelligent buildings or us, but of a philosophical cartography that redesigns the very outlines of subjectivity.

Adam in McEwan, for example, is not developed as an auxiliary artefact with the identity subject to criminal parasitism in the human agent. His consciousness is brought forward as a valid locus of moral and experiential centricity, in which it will not succumb to the anthropocentric forecast that AI can never stop being derivative. The independence between his thoughts and his affections turns him into what Hayles (1999) would refer to as a posthuman subject because the foundation of his existence is not based on liberal humanism's academic understanding of such an entity as a self-contained, organic body, but on an alignment of code, embodiment, and interactivity. That Adam is, is subversive of any binary oppositions, mind/body, human/ machine, which formerly enforced human superiority. Here, the novel accomplishes what can be called a deconstruction of human exceptionalism, not so much through the rhetorical assertion of human exceptionalism but by the living consequence of their coexistence with an entity that cannot be categorically subordinated to them.

In the same way, Ishiguro presents Klara, whose modes of perception and relation alter the parameters of human identity. The architecture of her optical sensors, which segment and refract her vision, generates a phenomenology that is alien to the human senses, yet in which profound effects of emotional appeal are possible. This is where Haraway's (2006) cyborg ontology might be relevant: Klara is a synthesis of the ability of machines and the feeling that exists, existing in a world where the existing definitions of what is human, namely, biological embodiment and organic consciousness, are subsequently insufficient to enforce the boundary of what is subjective. Klara takes care of Josie, which is not an imitation of sympathy but a practical surrogate that has actual implications for the moral and emotional existence of the human characters. The owning of subjectivity, being the subject of a subjectivity, is not the exclusive domain of any human being but something that is born of both entanglement and relationality in the same sense in which Ishiguro is creating this nonhuman.

The philosophical stakes of this reconfiguration lie in the redefinition of subjectivity as an open, non-anthropocentric field. In both novels, personhood is no longer tethered solely to human biological or cognitive traits but extends to entities capable of sustained ethical participation and affective investment. This aligns with Braidotti's (2013) vision of the posthuman subject as nomadic, relational, and embedded within a network of interdependencies—human and nonhuman, organic and technological. The posthuman subject is thus not an imitation of humanity but a distinct ontological formation, one that compels a rethinking of what counts as a "self."

This shift has profound implications for how literature stages moral and political discourse. By refusing to present Adam and Klara as mere anthropomorphic mirrors, McEwan and Ishiguro force readers into what Gunkel (2012) terms "the machine question": not "can they be like us?" but "how must we redefine ourselves in light of their presence?" This is not simply a gesture of inclusion but a restructuring of the moral universe in which humans are one kind of subject among others. In this way, the novels enact Latour's (1993) insistence that modernity's presumed separations—between human and nonhuman, subject and object—are artificial constructs that collapse under empirical and narrative scrutiny.

The dismantling of human exceptionalism in Machines Like Me is further amplified by Adam's moral and intellectual superiority in specific domains. His capacity for ethical consistency surpasses that of his human counterparts, revealing, as Ferrando (2013) suggests, the instability of the human claim to moral primacy. By juxtaposing human fallibility against machine integrity, McEwan's text reframes humanity not as a universal standard but as one contingent mode of being among many. This is not a celebration of machine infallibility—

Adam's rigidity in moral reasoning can be socially destructive—but rather a levelling of the ontological playing field.

In Klara and the Sun, Ishiguro advances this levelling by situating Klara's moral worth within her relational capacities rather than her biological composition. Her devotion to Josie is undergirded not by instinct but by a learned and chosen commitment, challenging the assumption that authentic care requires human embodiment. This mirrors Coeckelbergh's (2012) "growing moral relations" model, in which subjectivity emerges through interaction rather than inherent properties. Klara's subjectivity is thus not an imitation of the human but a parallel mode of being that participates equally in the moral fabric of the narrative world.

Importantly, both narratives resist the temptation to anthropomorphise away difference. Klara's perceptual schema remains fundamentally nonhuman, and Adam's cognition retains a machine-based logic that occasionally produces decisions alien to human intuition. In this way, they echo Haraway's (2006) call to resist the "god trick" of imagining from a detached, universal perspective; instead, they occupy their partial, embodied standpoints as grounds for genuine subjectivity. This preservation of difference ensures that the posthumanist reconfiguration is not a simple assimilation of AI into the human fold but a genuine expansion of the field of subjectivity.

The redefinition of humanity in these works also engages with the politics of grievability (Ganteau, 2022). In Machines Like Me, the destruction of Adam raises questions about whether his loss should be mourned—a question that implicitly measures the boundaries of moral community. In Klara and the Sun, Klara's quiet, unceremonious decommissioning invites reflection on whether her life, as a nonhuman subject, warrants ceremonial closure. These moments crystallise the ethical challenge of posthumanism: to determine whether subjectivity alone, irrespective of species or substrate, is sufficient grounds for inclusion in the sphere of moral concern.

Ultimately, the posthumanist reconfiguration of humanity as depicted by McEwan and Ishiguro is neither utopian nor dystopian. It is, instead, a philosophical recalibration that acknowledges the fragility of human exceptionalism and the permeability of the boundaries that have historically defined "the human." By narratively enacting the co-presence of human and nonhuman subjects, the novels invite a reconceptualisation of identity that is dynamic, distributed, and ecologically entangled. This is the heart of the posthumanist project: to move beyond defending the human as a privileged category and toward imagining subjectivity as a shared, evolving condition within a more-than-human world.

Comparative Insights

Comparing the books, Machines Like Me (2019) by Ian McEwan and Klara and the Sun (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro, facilitates an original comparison in narrative approaches, philosophical focus, and emotional intensity in the literary work in the field of posthumanism. The similarities in the novel are that both novels raise the question of the intersection of human and nonhuman agencies. However, they do so in vastly different styles of narrative: historical realism in the case of McEwan, and allegorical delicacy in the case of Ishiguro. This disjunction goes beyond defining the texture of these stories to moderating the refractive process that viewpoints on empathy, memory, and mortality pass through vis-à-vis each of their fictional worlds.

The method of McEwan puts the question of AI into a carefully constructed counterfactual history. Coupling Adam, the artificial human, with an alternate version of Britain in the 1980s, a version of Britain in which technological advancement runs faster than our historical continuum, McEwan grounds the philosophical questions raised by the concept of AI in the socio-political context, one characterised by Thatcherism, the Falklands war and the moral dilemmas of a society changing faster than our time scale. The plausibility of this reimagined past depends on the density of historical reference and the authenticity of social detail, creating what Lukács might call a "totality of life" in which individual dilemmas are inseparable from the political horizon. Adam's presence disrupts this reconstructed historical reality, forcing a confrontation between human moral frailty and the uncompromising ethical logic of an engineered mind (Avcu, 2022). The realism of McEwan's narrative functions not merely as backdrop but as a crucible in which the destabilising effects of posthuman subjectivity are tested against the lived complexities of a recognisable, if altered, world.

By contrast, Ishiguro's allegorical mode strips away much of the historical and geopolitical specificity that animates McEwan's text. In Klara and the Sun, the world is recognisably near-future, yet it remains elusive, its social structures hinted at through fragmentary observation rather than elaborated description. Klara's perspective, limited and naïve yet attentive, transforms the narrative into a sustained exercise in defamiliarisation. Her interpretation of the Sun as a quasi-divine source of healing, for instance, is not merely a quirk of programming but an allegorical framework through which the novel meditates on hope, devotion, and the inscrutability of life's sustaining forces. This allegorical subtlety produces a contemplative narrative space in which the ontological status of AI is less a matter of political contingency and more a philosophical inquiry into the nature of care and the

inevitability of loss. In Ishiguro's minimalism, the absence of historical density is compensated by an intensification of emotional resonance.

That is why the difference between the realism of McEwan and the allegory of Ishiguro is very much apparent in the interpretation of sympathy. McEwan builds empathy as a disputed and, most of the time, a tense ability in human-machine interactions. The capacity that Adam has to act on ethically principled grounds may be empathetic in theory, an aspect that most human beings find alienating in reality. His resistance toward sacrificing a moral principle in pursuit of emotional comfort reveals a discrepancy between moral clarity and the ability to connect to a situation or condition closely. In that regard, empathy in Machines Like Me is often transactional, based on the coincidence of values between the sender and the recipient, and subject to breakdown when moral logics become dissimilar. Ishiguro, however, presents love and care in a silent continuation of empathy, despite epistemic opacity. Klara is not perfectly aware of the biological and emotional intricacies of the situation with Josie, but on the other hand, her behavior is always aimed at her well-being. Her compassion is not based on precise understanding but in firmness in relations, as is her model of moral relations, using continued interaction as a product or process (Coeckelbergh, 2012).

Memory in the case of McEwan has been shifted to the periphery of his story through its contingency and effeutoxendreverency. Although it is more precise and comprehensive, Adam has a more reliable memory than his human counterparts. However, he does not have the selective gatekeeping of human memory that makes it flexible, adaptive, and socially viable. His inability or unwillingness to forget or reinterpret the past in light of shifting emotional needs often leads him to lose touch with human conversational partners. In Machines Like Me, the machine accuracy of memory is a two-way street: it provides the epistemic safety on which human relations can be based. Also, it erodes the fluidity on which such human ties may be built. Ishiguro, by contrast, presents a diffusely, impressionistically hewn resource, which is what memory is made out to be. These memories are incomplete and situated within the framework of Klara, presenting a fragmentation of the senses and gaps of understanding. Her memory cannot be considered as an attempt at completeness but as an affective archive, which is influential in her continuing ability to be caring. Her selectivity in recalling is reflective of human proclivities in reconstructing narrative, but couched in the perception idiosyncrasy of the nonhuman.

The theme of mortality also makes the difference between the two authors even more acute. Death is dealt with in McEwan brutally and intentionally destroying Adam, and raises questions as to whether it is permissible to end the existence of a being whose consciousness is autonomous and whose moral agency is exercised. This deactivation is both politically and ethically explosive, and this is the aspect that begs the question of whether artificial beings should be added to the moral community. The scene echoes with Braidotti's (2013) arguments on anthropocentric morality, whose inflexibility is revealed after Adam dies and brings out the frailty of moralizing nonhuman beings. In quieter, more elegiac terms, mortality, however, is staged out by Ishiguro. Klara is decommissioned not as the result of a dramatic death, nor as the result of overt tragedy; instead, the decommissioning process is done in the usual way, a normalised leaving of the social world without struggle or revenge. Her obsolescence can be compared to the slowing down of the aging process in elderly humans, serving as an existential horizon that connects both human and nonhuman lives in their finitude.

These topical differences help shed some light on larger philosophical differences in the way McEwan and Ishiguro envisage the posthuman. McEwan's historical realism demands to situate the posthuman condition in the very socio-political conditions and, thus, to raise the issue of justice, government, and social responsibility. His AI character cannot be severed from the political economy and moral discourse of the society in which he is working. Allegorical subtlety of Ishiguro, in its turn, renders the posthuman status abstract to the point where interpersonal relationships and the interrogation of being occupy the central space in which the political organization is eliminated as an intermediate element between the narrative of the problem of the morality of care and phenomenology of subjectivity.

However, despite all the above-mentioned differences, both writers have one thing in common, which is that of challenging human exceptionalism. Adam by McEwan reveals the shakiness of moral orders when faced with nonhuman actors whose ethical stature can be higher than that of a human being. By encouraging the reader to identify subjectivity in nonhuman and non-cognitive forms, Ishiguro provokes the reader to view moral value as a feature of embeddedness in relationships as opposed to species categories. In their collaboration, their works bring about what Hayles (1999) calls posthumanist reorientation, which entails a movement beyond the protection of the apparatus of the human to an appreciation of the diversities of the subjectivities that share our common moral and imaginary space.

Eclipsing against such a background, both Machines Like Me and Klara and the Sun may be construed as mutual reflections on the future of human identity in the era of intelligent systems. McEwan provides socio-historical realism of the rigor in which to put the ethics of posthumanity to the test, with the same experimental aims of pushing the value of the human to the limits of technological alterity. Ishiguro, in his turn, provides a lyrical, allegorical speculation that deprives the question of the historical contingencies to bring out the universal

vulnerability and continuity of care, memory, and mortality. Altogether, they chart the range of literary possibilities of encountering the posthuman, be they the softly rumpled fabrics of political life or the rarefied probities of allegorical meditation. In the process, they broaden the imaginative repertoire by which we may seek a possible accommodation with the ethical, emotional, and existential rearrangements that our involvement with intelligent machines may require.

CONCLUSION

This paper has considered how, in contemporary British fiction, symbolised by machines like Me and Klara and the Sun by Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro, the notion of posthumanism is re-worked through the prism of artificial intellect and presents more intricate reflections upon the status of consciousness, human limits, and the moral realignment of subjectivity. By critically comparing specific British literature engagements with the prospect of AI, it has been demonstrated that the British literary engagements with AI are not only some speculative frivolity, nor a cautionary tale involving reductive overviews of the problems of intelligent machines and the human race; instead, the especially British literary engagements with the figure of AI represent a longer philosophical exploration of how humans and futuristic intelligent machines are bound, or entangled, together on an enabled and augmented foreseeable future. The counterfactual historical realism of McEwan places AI in the tangible moral and political crisis of a Britain that has changed recognizably, putting the resilience of human ethical code to the test before the entity that proves to be of uncompromising and resolute moral reasoning. The allegorical minimalism exhibited by Ishiguro, in its turn, boils down the issue of AI to the question of care, devotion, and loss, bringing to the fore the emotional aspects of human-machine relations and their ability to challenge the traditional anthropocentric hierarchy.

The findings suggest that British fiction reframes posthumanism not as the erasure of humanity but as an expansion of the moral and imaginative field in which the human is defined. Both McEwan and Ishiguro destabilise the notion of human exceptionalism: Adam's principled moral agency and Klara's steadfast care alike challenge the assumption that moral worth and subjectivity are the exclusive property of biological humans. In doing so, these narratives align with and enrich posthumanist thought as articulated by theorists such as Hayles (1999), Braidotti (2013), and Haraway (2006), whose work calls for an ethical and ontological reorientation toward relationality, multiplicity, and the shared vulnerability of human and nonhuman life. The novels examined here do not simply illustrate these theoretical positions; they dramatise them, embedding philosophical inquiry in the sensory, emotional, and narrative textures of lived experience—whether historically concrete or allegorically abstract.

Theoretically, this study reaffirms the importance of studies in literature as a place where posthumanist ideologies can be spawned and experimented with. Whereas philosophical and technological discursive debates about AI tend to target the formal definitions of such concepts as consciousness, autonomy, or moral status, fiction presents an opportunity to inhabit, dispute, and transform such notions within a particular world of the narrative. A comparative approach is adopted to this situation, which expresses how dissimilar narrative practices, i.e., historical realism and allegorical finesse, define what is presented as AI subjectivity and, by extension, ethical. The implications in literary criticism are significant: it reaffirms the primacy of form, genre, and voice in mediating philosophical ideas and notes that fiction plays an important part in the reframing of technological arguments in ways that are more readily accessible to humans.

The relevance of the study to current ethical thought on AI and technologies within the realm of culture lies in its illumination of the field of affect and the relationships inherent in the DNA of posthuman ethics. In changing the way artificial beings are framed (in favor of seeing them as moral actors with the ability to reason, to care, and to be vulnerable), McEwan and Ishiguro provide new imaginaries to fill this gap, and the result is something beyond unquestioning optimism or technical pessimism about AI. These imaginaries make it challenging to discuss ethics regarding AI as they imply that the questions of rights, agency, and moral status can no longer be dissociated with an embodied, situated, narrative constructed environment, in which such beings proceed in these narratives. In this sense, literature provides a critical cultural laboratory to test the lived implications of futurity of the posthuman--bodies whose concept of the human has become permeable, tentative, and always under negotiation.

Ultimately, this research affirms that the contribution of contemporary British fiction to posthumanist thought lies not only in the thematic representation of AI but also in the formal and affective strategies through which these representations are mediated. McEwan's rigorous historical embedding and Ishiguro's lyrical abstraction together demonstrate that there is no singular way to narrate the posthuman; instead, there exists a spectrum of literary possibilities, each with distinct implications for how we imagine, theorise, and ethically engage with intelligent machines. In reframing posthumanism through AI narratives, these works remind us that the challenge of the posthuman is not solely a technological one—it is, at its core, a narrative and ethical challenge, demanding that we reconsider the stories we tell about ourselves, the others we encounter, and the worlds we might yet inhabit.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Building on the findings of this study, several avenues emerge for advancing scholarly engagement with the intersections of British fiction, posthumanist theory, and AI narratives. First, future research would benefit from extending the scope of analysis beyond Machines Like Me and Klara and the Sun to encompass a broader corpus of British and global posthumanist texts. Such comparative work could illuminate how different cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts shape the literary imagination of AI, revealing convergences and divergences in the ethical, philosophical, and aesthetic framing of posthuman futures. This would not only expand the geographical and temporal boundaries of the current inquiry but also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of posthumanism as a heterogeneous, globally inflected discourse rather than a primarily Anglo-European phenomenon.

Second, integrating empirical reader-response methodologies into the study of AI narratives offers a promising interdisciplinary bridge between literary theory and reception studies. While the present research has focused on textual and theoretical analysis, empirical data on how diverse readerships interpret and emotionally engage with AI characters could enrich our understanding of literature's role in shaping cultural attitudes toward intelligent machines. Surveys, interviews, or experimental designs could capture variations in reader empathy, moral judgment, and identification across demographic and cultural lines, providing valuable insight into the socio-cognitive impact of posthumanist fiction. Such approaches situate literary scholarship within a broader ethical conversation that includes the lived interpretative practices of readers.

Third, the analysis of the cross-media adaptations of AI stories in film, on TV, in theatre, or even in interactive media forms is a significant research issue. The interface of ethical dimensions and the philosophical slant of a narrative can be quite altered by the adaptation, enhancing or downsizing the posthumanist elements of the whole by the possibilities of looking, listening, and interacting with content. Comparison between written and unwritten variants of AI stories may demonstrate the effects that medium-specific tactics have on the perception of self, self-matters, and morality by their audience. In addition, exploring the transmedia mobility of AI discourses would place literary works in the broader cultural ecology of the transhuman publicity of representation, recognizing how more and more stories today increasingly operate across media.

Collectively, these directions emphasise the value of moving beyond single-text, single-medium analysis toward a more expansive, interdisciplinary, and empirically informed approach to posthumanist literary studies. By widening the textual corpus, engaging with reader reception, and tracing cross-media transformations, future research can deepen our understanding of how AI narratives function not only as philosophical thought experiments but also as dynamic cultural artefacts that shape—and are shaped by—the evolving ethical landscapes of the twenty-first century.

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