

Klara and the Sun: Female Cyborgs in a Posthuman Perspective

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Abstract: *Klara and the Sun* is Kazuo Ishiguro's first full-length novel after winning the Nobel Prize. The novel chronicles the unique life of Klara, a girl AF (Artificial Friend), from her first point of view. The book is divided into three main sections: 1) regarding what she sees in the window; 2) her entry into Josie's life; 3) her tragic end after Josie goes off to college. This paper will analyze the relationships between the novel and posthuman feminism by means of textual analysis from three perspectives: posthuman and posthumanism, feminism in the absence of male characters in the novel, and the dilemmas and future directions faced by posthuman feminism. Therefore, this paper will explore posthumanism, the connection between feminism and fiction, and also the future direction of posthuman feminism. The main contribution of this paper is that it will broaden the scope of posthuman feminism in Kazuo Ishiguro's literary works.

Keywords: *Klara and the Sun*, Kazuo Ishiguro, Posthuman, Feminism

1. Introduction

Klara and the Sun, Nobel Prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro's first full-length novel since winning the prize, is said to be "a grim adult fairy tale". The book is a thought-provoking tale of post-humanity from the point of view of Klara, a female AF. In the story, Klara, born as a companion robot, longs for the sun and has human emotions. After making a pact with Josie, she eventually becomes her AF. But as Josie recovers later in the story, she meets her own tragic end. Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of The Day* won the Booker Prize, but then his style gradually shifted to science fiction, or to use the popular term of the day, a kind of soft science fiction. One of the more famous works in this category is *Never Let Me Go*. *Never Let Me Go* is about the issue of human cloning. Although it's not very similar to *Klara and the Sun*, it is a discussion of posthuman related issues in general, centered around the themes of love, humanity, and warmth, and ultimately gives his take on them. With the fervor of anthropomorphism fading, can humans still be the creatures that dominate the world? And can robots and cyborgs wrest the power of freedom from the humans who made them? These questions are worth pondering by every science fiction writer, and this article will analyze the answers brought by Kazuo Ishiguro from a posthuman, feminist-related perspective. *Klara and the Sun* chronicles the unique life of Klara, a girl AF, from her first point of view. The book is divided into three main sections, the first being what she sees in the window, the second her entry into Josie's life, and the last section being her tragic end after Josie goes off to college. This paper adopts text linguistics to analyze *Klara and the Sun* in conjunction with posthuman feminist theory. Therefore, this paper will look at

posthumanism, the connection between feminism and fiction, and also the future direction of posthuman feminism, wishing to broaden the scope of posthuman feminism in Kazuo Ishiguro's literary works.

2. Literature Review

When searching *Klara and the Sun*, there are about 5,600 articles on google scholar. Since the novel was published in 2021, the literature and books analyzing it are still in their infancy. In most of these essays, textual analyses are used to provide a close reading of the novel's content. It is rather interesting that, as a science fiction novel, there are only about 200 articles that can be retrieved that analyze this novel using posthuman theory. Most of this content discusses post-human emotions in the article. In her article *Pixel, Partition, Persona: Machine Vision and Face Recognition in Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun*, Dr. Tyne Daile Sumner of the University of Maryland mentions that that face recognition has emotional and representational dilemmas. The article provides a detailed analysis of AI's face recognition capabilities on a technical and textual level, and analyses AI's emotional problems from the perspective of its characters. Ultimately, she suggests that humans have always been concerned and uneasy about the status of AI and sentient machines, but Kazuo Ishiguro elicits an emotional response from his readers to the socio-technical acceptance and future possibilities of machine vision through his novels --- this act provokes them to think about the future possibilities of AI [1]. The nature of the relationship between human emotion and human-machine emotion is also addressed by Professors Yuqin Jiang and Péter Hajdu of Shenzhen University in their book *AI Emotion in Science Fiction: an Introduction*, where they conclude that the content of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels facilitates human and machines to a deeper level of emotional understanding [2].

Unlike the study of posthumanism, feminism has been in the spotlight for much longer and with much more fervor. In August 1910, the Second International Socialist Women's Congress adopted a resolution to make March 8 an international working women's holiday. Yet the promotion of this holiday is the result of a century-long struggle by women around the world. The history of the feminist movement, dating back to before the American Civil War. The first wave of feminism lasted 72 years, starting in 1848, during which time the Declaration of Sentiments articulated the equal rights of men and women and the rights that American feminists sought and fought for, namely, "the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," but the truth was far from perfect. But the manifesto also kicked off the feminist movement, which was epoch-making in both political and literary terms.

The second feminist movement took place during the 1930s-50s, a period in which the United States experienced a series of major event examples, such as the Great Depression, World War II, and McCarthyism. Women during this period campaigned for equal rights for women in politics, employment, promotion, education, women's health, maternity, abortion, and many other rights of interest to women. The famous French writer Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* was completed during this period. One of the key points of the book is that "one is not born a woman, but actually becomes one [3]." Beauvoir's writings played a large role in influencing Judith Butler, who would later make important contributions to the field of feminism. Butler addresses Beauvoir's ideas more than once in her noted feminist book *Gender Trouble*, and further gives her important point that women are not born as women but are the result of manipulation [4].

A third feminist movement has emerged since the 1980s. The third feminism aims to deconstruct the mainstream theories of the second wave of feminism to a certain extent. Specifically, it emphasizes that women's issues involve a variety of problems such as multiracialism, multiethnicity, multireligious beliefs, multinational customs, multiculturalism, multisexual orientation, and multivalues; advocates going beyond the original feminist frame of mind, and calls for the elimination of social gender roles and prejudices, and so on. This period saw the emergence of a large number of black women writers who used their own experiences to write the bloody history of women. Famous

black feminist Bell Hooks' work *Feminist Theory, from Margin to Center* refers to the inability of white women's feminist theories to encapsulate the diversity and complexity of women's experiences and the inability of white women to represent their interests [5]. It can be argued that the challenge of African American women to white mainstream feminism has greatly enriched feminist struggles by drawing the world's attention to the concerns of other feminists of color about race, as well as the concerns of women of all colors about class.

Overall, there are more studies on feminism, but there are other studies to be engaged related to *Klara and the Sun*. In particular, the analysis of the novel as it relates to feminism is temporarily vacant. This study will analyze the theories related to the novel, expanding the boundaries of feminism and deepening the scholarly understanding of *Klara and the Sun*.

3. Viewpoints

3.1. Posthuman and posthumanism

Since the Enlightenment, there has been a slow transition from a God-focused focus to a human-focused focus, a shift that philosophers have called anthroposophy, or anthropocentrism, essentially a doctrine that humans are the most central species on earth, if not in the universe. The triumph of this great movement intoxicated people and eventually led to the arrogance of subjectivity. From the ancient Greek "man is the measure of all things" to the Kantian "man is an end in himself", philosophers have been emphasizing the status of human subjectivity from time immemorial. However, in the current fast-paced technology, the status of human subjectivity has been shaken, from Nietzsche's "The Death of God" to Foucault's "The Death of Man" are the most famous theories in this category.

Klara and the Sun tells the story of a highly technologically advanced futuristic world where robots are used to keep humans company especially for children, as well as genetically edited children. But both works discuss anthropocentrism in a way that Kazuo Ishiguro is very good at. In *Klara and the Sun*, Klara, as an AF, is invented to be "companionable," and altruism is her basic attribute. As a very intelligent AF, Klara has many human-like qualities, such as having a name that a human woman would have, or looking French with short, sharp hair [6]. At the same time, Klara has extraordinary powers of observation, understanding, and empathy [6]. Before she went to Josie's house, when she was still on display in the mall, the manager complimented her, "Klara has extraordinary powers of observation. I've never seen anyone like her. [6]" Klara, unlike other robots or cyborgs, possesses human emotions. In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway refers to the cyborg as a post-World War II hybrid whose constituent parts include ourselves and other organisms not carefully selected by us in their high-tech form and under the control of the science of human dynamics, become information systems, texts, and systems of labor, demand and reproduction [7]. The second necessary component of cyborgs is the machine, which likewise takes the form of communication systems, texts, and automated devices designed according to the science of human dynamics [8]. But she never mentions that cyborgs have emotions. This is one of the main issues that many writers would explore in their stories and scholars in their discourses after the *Cyborg Manifesto* was presented. So, in this book, whether it is Klara or Josie who receives genetic editing, they both carry emotions that humans would have, and Klara who is a robot is even more emotional than Josie. There is an episode in the novel where the "enhanced" children need to go to a party to improve their social skills and emotions [6]. However, at such a party, the children's behavior and empathy are clearly inferior to Klara's.

Cyborgs and robbers are two significant topics in posthumanism. One could say that posthumanism is a rebuttal to the blind worship of reason and anthropocentric theories. In the twentieth century, various kinds of post-schools sprang up, and more and more people questioned human subjectivity [9]. With the rapid development of science and technology, posthumanism has

slowly evolved from robotics, animal studies, environmental studies and others. to cyborg studies and other perspectives that have challenged the notion of what a human being represents, deconstructing the concept of the body in the traditional biological sense [6]. Braidotti has a description in posthuman that she says, "This book proposes the posthuman condition as a key stage in our historical development, both interesting and fascinating, but also worrying because of issues of possible bias, abuse of rights, and the sustainability of certain basic premises [6]." Braidotti is not the only one who is concerned about the future of post-human development; Francis Fukuyama, in his book *Our Posthuman Future*, reveals the limitations of anthropocentrism and also expresses his concern about posthumanity. Because of the abuse of technology by humans, if Cyborgs develop emotions and desires that should belong to humans, shouldn't human set up a monitoring mechanism for Cyborgs early on to prevent them from developing a desire for power to rule and replace humans [9]? This is clearly not something that Fukuyama alone is thinking about, but also something that Kazuo Ishiguro discusses in his novel. Josie is sick due to gene editing, so Josie's mother buys Klara, and she asks her to imitate Josie's walk at their second meeting [6]. She puts Klara in the passenger's seat to go to the waterfall with her when Josie is sick, asks Klara to sit in Josie's way, and to talk to her [6]. In the second part of the story when Josie's condition worsens, Josie's mother negotiates with Klara to replace Josie in the family, but can she really replace Josie? The answer begins when Klara enters Josie's house, where the housekeeper rudely tells Klara not to follow her, where Rick's mother feels unsure whether to treat her as a guest or a Hoover, and when she meets Josie's father, who refuses to treat Klara as a member of the family, all of which reveals that Kazuo Ishiguro's answer to this question is no. Posthumans, no matter how much they resemble humans, can never replace them.

3.2. The Power of the Woman

The development of the feminist movement and critical theory in the modern era has been a constant source of renewal for our basic understanding of humanity. The questioning of male-centeredness and logocentrism has also made feminism an important force in the rethinking of traditional humanism [8]. Furthermore, the emergence of posthuman feminism has been composed of two main intellectual resources: on the one hand, feminist reflection on humanism; on the other hand, the questioning of anthropocentrism [10]. In recent years of feminist studies, the ideas of Judith Butler have been particularly important, and she has published several important feminist books, such as *Gender Trouble*, *Body that Matter*, *Gender as Performance*, and so on. In these theories, performativity is a very important concept. While many others have argued that gender is categorized into social and biological sex, Butler's *Gender Trouble* argues that gender is formed by performance [4].

Klara and the Sun has a large number of female characters, girl AF Klara, the manager of the AF shop, Josie, Josie's mum, the housekeeper at Josie's house, Rick's mum, and the girls on the social queue and their mothers. In a sense, this is a male-scarce novel. Throughout the book, apart from Rick, the only male characters are Josie's father and the artist who paints her portrait, but these two characters are also only minimally depicted. Since the author himself, Kazuo Ishiguro, is male, this is kind of a very interesting phenomenon. Throughout the history of human writing, most writers have been better at writing characters that align with their gender, or more specifically, their gender. Butler mentioned in *Gender Trouble* that human gender is manipulated, which means that our gender and sex do not necessarily coincide [4]. But it has to be admitted that Kazuo Ishiguro's portrayal of Klara is more than complete and that Klara has spent her life manipulating her gender to become a passable GIRL AF.

Klara as a robot would not theoretically have a gender, but due to technological advances, AF also has girls and boys. When compare robots and cyborgs to human beings, they will have an original gender from the factory, or it is also called their biological sex. Because of this sex, they are given

male or female names, such as Klara (a girl AF), and Rex (a boy AF), and from Klara's subsequent descriptions that AF's gender actually corresponds to the child they are supposed to be accompanying. In Klara's observation it is easy to find that when a human girl is accompanied by a boy AF, some incongruous behaviors occur between them [4]. This may be the incongruity AF creates in manipulating their gender.

But as far as the entire novel is concerned, male characters are definitely missing. From the moment Klara enters the shop, the manager is female, Josie and her mother are female, from the moment she arrives at Josie's house, the housekeeper is female, with the exception of Josie's best friend, Rick, and most of the children who have come to the party are surrounded by their mothers, who are also females. In terms of the construction of posthumans, they are meant to improve themselves through constant learning through observation and embodiment, how similar this behavior is to Butler's manipulative nature. Klara gradually becomes Josie by observing everything Josie does under her mother's watch, thus furthering this task of replacing Josie as her mother wishes her to do. As mentioned before, Josie replaces her sister, Moore, who died due to genetic modification. For many people, the rapid development of society and the constant choices of those around them can lead to some unwanted misperceptions of gender as they grow up, resulting in a social gender that is contrary to their own sex. But for Klara, she has almost no choice; the absence of males in this society leads to her only being an android with a female social gender, which leads to an increasing ineptitude in understanding Josie and her mother's behavioral patterns later on, which is clearly also her crisis as an android, a cyborg, and a posthuman.

But the lack of the man character may be a pioneering try of the author. In the long feminism movement, scholars' emphasis the importance of women and sexual minorities or other races people, which is as same as the situation in the novel that women are full of power.

3.3. Directions for the Development of Posthuman Feminism

The posthuman context and the theoretical production of the material turn in the contemporary world have brought about changes in conceptual connotations and horizons. It is important to continue to trace the theoretical genealogy of posthuman feminism, especially its relationship to poststructuralist feminism, ecofeminism, and Marxist feminism. However, posthuman theory, including the post-disciplinary issues raised by posthuman feminism, still has a lot to be explored. For example, does gender matter when it comes to cyborgs? Does gender affect the behavioral patterns of cyborgs? How do they react and make decisions in situations where their sex(es) and social gender(s) do not coincide?

From *Klara and the Sun*, the same-sex companionship is perhaps a more reasonable existence, and as Klara herself once mentioned, the incongruity that arises between human girls and boy AFs didn't really exist before her and Josie. But as is the case with all friendships between girls, Klara and Jessie fight and argue. And there will be some crises between Jessie, as a genetically modified Cyborg, and Rick, who has never been modified and with whom she has a pact. Rick, who has more delicate emotions than Josie because he has not been modified, is always worrying that Josie will leave him behind because of Klara's appearance, because of those so-called parties, and because of the forgotten of lot of things that they have promised each other. But Josie seems to be much more indifferent in terms of how these things are handled. From past social relationships that women are often supposed to be the one who is emotionally delicate and more sensitive to their feelings. But perhaps because Rick grew up with his mother, while Josie goes down the path of genetic alteration at her mother's insistence, this has led to some emotional deviations between the two of them. Later on, during their fights, even though Klara begins to try to understand what is wrong with them, and begins to empathize with Josie and Rick separately, it still does not stop Josie and Rick from drifting apart. Perhaps for posthumans, the ultimate destination with humans is to go their separate ways. Like when Josie goes off to college and Klara is abandoned in a dump [6].

In fact, by the time the story gets to this point, Klara's feelings for Josie are already very deep, and Klara's knowledge of human emotions can be said to be at an extreme, and one of the things she does that is very much in line with anthropocentrism. In order to restore the seriously ill Josie, she climbs to the top of the barn and sacrifices her precious solution to make an exchange with the sun, just so that the sun can bless her best friend Josie with the ability to get well [6]. But is it worthy to her to give up her mother's pleas, even to the point of hurting herself, to pray for the health of selfish, indifferent humans? Except this, Josie was not a human in her sense of the word, and she had not recognized that the Josie she'd known from the start had actually been a cyborg.

Women have always taken on a compassionate, warm role in this society, just like the sun, always appearing as mothers, daughters and so on, as if they were born with compassion and great love, but is this really the case? Cyborgs and robots, both of which are already free from human physical existence, are still required to have such a spirit of sacrifice because of the gender they have been given, and is this setting really okay? Kazuo Ishiguro gives his answer, but this topic is not over, and in the future, more works are expected to explore the post-human women can break through the human dilemma and make more possible choices emotionally.

4. Conclusions

To sum up, *Klara and the Sun* is a response by author Kazuo Ishiguro in borrowing the perspective of Klara, a robot or posthuman, around the topic of whether posthumans can replace humans and whether they can be harmful to humans. Klara, as a female AF, struggles with the hope that she can break out of her predicament and warm and serve Josie, the person she accompanies, with her special ability to empathize and understand. But human selfishness ultimately leads Josie and her mother to abandon Klara, who had done her best to hope to be Josie's best friend. Unlike the manager, who does not honor his word, and Josie's family, who have crossed the bridge, the post-human being is perhaps more compassionate than human and highlights her misery. Women and post-humans are the barriers to her identity that she can't break through, and the crisis of her life, but do the humans deserve to be treated with love and respect for what they've done? This is a topic for future generations to ponder.

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