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Redefining the Human: Critical Posthumanist Perspectives in Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* and Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*

İnsanı Yeniden Tanımlamak: Ishiguro'nun Klara ile Güneş'i ve Keyes'in Algernon'a Çiçekler'indeki Eleştirel Posthümanist Bakış Açıları

Leyla ADIGÜZEL^{a*}

^a Asst. Prof. Dr., Yüzüncü Yıl University, Department of English Language and Literature, Van / TÜRKİYE
ORCID: 0000-0003-3102-2053

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ÖZ

İnsanın, varlıklar hiyerarşisinde en üstün yeri işgal ettiği bir dünyada, giderek melez bir yapıya bürünmesi, bilim ve teknolojinin uygulanmasına dair karmaşık etik ve ahlaki soruları gündeme getirmektedir. Bu durum edebiyatta transhümanizm ve posthümanizmin daha yaygın kullanılmasına yol açmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara ve Güneş*'te (2021) insan merkezli transhümanist girişimler aracılığıyla yapay zekânın etik dışı kullanımına ve daha avantajlı bir nesil için insanları genetik olarak değiştirmenin potansiyel risklerine dikkat çeker. Yazar, yapay zekânın ilerlemesiyle değişen toplumsal dinamiklere dair derin kaygılarını dile getirirken, okuru insan ve yapay zekâyâ dair epistemik, ontolojik ve etik açıdan önemli sorularla yüzleştirir. Öte yandan, eserlerinde psikolojik ve etik temalar ile insanlık durumu ve insan potansiyelinin sınırlarını inceleyen Daniel Keyes, bilimkurgu romanı *Algernon'a Çiçekler*'de (1966) Ishiguro'ya benzer konulara dikkat çeker. Posthümanist felsefenin temelini oluşturan teknoloji ve insanlığın kesişimine dair soruları özellikle irdeleyen yazar, zihinsel engelli kahramanı üzerinden transhümanizmin ıskaladığı ahlaki ve etik ilkeleri ön plana çıkarır. Romanları eleştirel posthümanist bir perspektiften okuyan bu makale, yazarların insanın bilim ve teknolojiyle olan ilişkisi, diğer yaşam formlarıyla olan bağları ve insanı insan yapan özellikler hakkında farkındalık yaratma çabalarına odaklanmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, teknolojik ilerleme ve insan özünün potansiyel kaybıyla ilişkili etik ve ahlaki ikilemlere odaklanarak eleştirel bir post-hümanist bakış açısıyla iki romanın ortak yönlerine dikkat çekmektedir. Romanlar arasında yaklaşık altmış yıllık önemli zaman farkına rağmen çalışma, romanların bu temaları ele almadaki benzerlikleri tespit etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

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ABSTRACT

In a world where humans occupy the most superior place in the hierarchy of beings, the gradual transformation of humans into a hybrid structure raises complex ethical and moral questions regarding the application of science and technology. This leads to a greater prevalence of transhumanism and posthumanism in literature. In this vein, in *Klara and the Sun* (2021), Kazuo Ishiguro highlights the unethical use of artificial intelligence through human-centred transhumanist initiatives and the potential risks of genetically modifying humans for a more advantageous generation. The author indicates deep concerns about the changing social dynamics due to artificial intelligence advances while confronting the reader with pivotal epistemic, ontological, and ethical questions regarding human and artificial intelligence. On the other hand, Daniel Keyes, whose works explore psychological and ethical themes and the human condition and limits of human potential, draws attention to issues similar to Ishiguro's in his science fiction novel *Flowers for Algernon* (1966). Delicately examining questions about the intersection of technology and humanity, which form the basis of posthumanist philosophy, the author foregrounds the moral and ethical principles that transhumanism misses through his mentally disabled protagonist. Reading the novels from a critical posthumanist perspective, this article aims to focus on the authors' endeavour to raise awareness about humans' association with science and technology, their interconnectedness with other life forms, and the features that make humans human. The study draws attention to the common aspects of the two novels from a critical post-humanist perspective, focusing on the ethical and moral dilemmas associated with technological progress and the potential loss of human essence. Despite the significant time difference of around sixty years between the novels, this research aims to identify the similarities in their exploration of these themes.

* Sorumlu yazar/Corresponding author.
e-posta: leylaadgzl@yyu.edu.tr

Introduction

Posthumanism, which has recently become very popular in literature in the context of humanity's advances in science and technology and their transformation into a hybrid and cybernetic structure, is a school of thought that questions the definition of human. The term posthumanism was first used in Ihab Hassan's 1977 essay "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?" Using the mythological figure of Prometheus to point to the emergence of a posthuman culture, Hassan defines posthumanism as follows: "We need first to understand that the human form [...] may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism" (1977, p. 212). In this regard, the central concern of posthumanism is the question of what it means to be "human", a focus that is also emphasized by postmodernism. Posthumanism challenges traditional humanist dichotomies, such as "subject/object, human/machine, or science/culture" (Franssen, 2015, p. 2), and interrogates the human's autonomy. It also does not accept the human as a fully defined individual. Contrarily, it regards human as a kind of entity intertwined with the environment and technology, evolving together with other forms of life. In this vein, Katherine Hayles states that "there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" (1999, p. 3) in the posthuman view. Furthermore, she contends that under the framework of posthuman philosophy, the human body is posited as the original prosthesis, thus expanding the body or replacing it with other prostheses is a natural extension of a pre-existing process that predates our birth. Therefore, she asserts that the posthuman view organizes humans in a manner that aligns seamlessly with intelligent machines. (p. 3) Hayles introduces the concept of "material informational entity" into the literature, suggesting that the increasing fusion of humans with technology is giving rise to a posthuman state that blurs the traditional boundaries between human and machine, as well as physical and virtual realms. She, therefore, argues that this shift undermines traditional notions of what it means to be human and compels us to reconsider our relationship with technology and its impacts on society and culture.

Accordingly, Derrida provides a basis for posthumanism, in which there is an effort to upset the hierarchy of being via the method of deconstruction by pointing out how groundless this superiority is through the myth of Prometheus in his work *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008). He creates space for deconstructing the aforementioned humanist dilemmas, stating that:

[I]n the Genesis tale as much as in the myth of Prometheus [...] in order to make up for the forgetfulness or tardiness of Epimetheus, who had perfectly equipped all breeds of animal but left "man naked [gymnon]," without shoes, covering, or arms), it is paradoxically on the basis of a fault or failing in man that the latter will be made a subject who is master of nature and of the animal. From within the pit of that lack [...], man installs or claims in a single stroke his property [...] and his superiority over what is called animal life. (2008, p. 20)

Thus, Derrida examines the hierarchical relationship between humans and animals, tracing its origins to mythology. He deals with the distinction drawn between humans and many other species reduced to a single animal by rejecting the anthropocentric view.

Bruno Latour employs the metaphor of the mythological god Prometheus to critique humanism, as does Derrida. Emphasizing that Prometheus represents the humanist or "modernist" view, Latour advocates for a "cautious Prometheus". He contends that deconstruction alone is ineffective since the humanist dichotomies mentioned above never actually existed. Thus, he indicates a method for bringing "things together, including gods, non-humans, and mortals" (p. 13). Latour, renowned for his research on the interactions between

humans and non-human entities, plays a crucial role in advancing Actor-Network Theory. This theory highlights the active role played by both human and non-human players in social networks. Latour's theory posits that there is no clear delineation between the social, natural, and technological realms. Consequently, all entities, whether living or non-living, including people, technology, and inanimate objects, exist within a complex network of dynamic relationships. In that it is founded on relational thinking and challenges anthropocentric approaches, Actor-Network Theory exhibits some similarities to critical posthumanism. It challenges the privileged status of humans in relation to other beings and actors, while simultaneously emphasizing the significance of nature, technology, and other beings. It appears to be a significant theory in regard to the support of critical posthumanism, which serves as the foundation for the messages that both authors in this study endeavour to convey through their novels.

Similarly, Donna Haraway, in "A Cyborg Manifesto," considered the foundational text of cyberfeminism, employs the concept of the "cyborg" as a metaphor for the hybridity that manifests itself as the conventional boundaries between humans and machines, as well as between physical and non-physical entities, gradually disappear due to technological developments. Haraway asserts that the notion of "cyborg" offers a fresh perspective on identity and embodiment, serving as a potent symbol of resistance against oppressive forces, particularly those related to gender, racism, and class. The author's cyborg manifesto, written from a feminist standpoint, can also be interpreted as a critical examination of the close connection between technology and military and industrial objectives. Haraway offers a significant critique of how technology contributes to the continuation of militarization and power inequities, particularly concerning gender and race.

The concept of "the logic of the rhizome" by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari is an additional framework that might elucidate the posthumanist thought. This ecophilosophical idea also pertains to a kind of organization distinguished by its diversity, connectivity, and fluidity and is explained as "an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 1). Accordingly, it effectively elucidates posthumanism by highlighting its ability to question and disrupt existing norms and systems, while also promoting innovation, experimentation, and variety. In this vein, posthumanism challenges the notion of a rigid and hierarchical conception of humanity, instead affirming the flexibility and combination of identities and interactions. Posthumanism explores the concepts of identity and subjectivity, encompassing not only humans but also animals, technology, habitats, and other phenomena, much like the rhizome, which lacks a central point of origin or control. Posthumanism views both human and non-human entities as dispersed and interconnected. This viewpoint promotes a reassessment of human autonomy and acknowledgment of the impact and significance of nonhuman entities in shaping the world. Posthumanism surpasses conventional dichotomies and hierarchies by adopting rhizomatic reasoning, enabling a comprehensive comprehension of the intricate and ever-changing essence of being. This approach also indicates novel prospects for ethical and relational engagement with the world.

On the other hand, "an extreme edge of posthumanism" (Ağın, 2020, p. 56), transhumanism holds that humans should be allowed to use technology to alter and improve their cognitive and physical capabilities, extending their abilities and capacities beyond their current biological limitations. Simon Young addresses the issue comprehensively in the *Transhumanist Manifesto* and defines transhumanism as "the belief in overcoming human limitations through reason, science, and technology" (2006, p. 15). He states that human biological limitations and the tragic fate of mortality cause an innate desire and effort to evolve and improve their survival abilities. He assumes, "Humanity will take evolution out of the hands

of butterfingered nature into its own transhuman hands” (p. 38). Stock, who argues that a real human takes control just like Prometheus but also develops technologies to evolve, notes, “To forego the powerful technologies [...] would be as out of character for humanity as it would be to use them without concern for the dangers they pose” (2003, p. 2). Although transhumanism is sometimes substituted by posthumanism, it is a view closer to humanism. Based on human-centred ideas and some of the fundamental dichotomies, transhumanism has an unwavering faith in science and technology. Within this context, while transhumanism advocates for human-centred and technological optimism that aims to enhance human abilities and life through technological means, posthumanism aims to critically examine the relationship between technology and nature, question anthropocentrism, and blur the boundaries between humans and non-humans. Given these distinctions, it is evident that both methodologies present distinct perspectives on the future of humanity and technology. In this vein, according to Braidotti, transhumanism has the potential to sustain current power dynamics and disparities, resulting in the commercialization of human existence and the strengthening of social hierarchies. She promotes a posthumanist perspective that recognizes the intricacy of human existence and encourages diversity instead of attempting to surpass or substitute humans with technical progress. She underscores the significance of ethical considerations and social justice in discussions regarding the future of humanity and technology (Braidotti, 2013). Based on the available information, it is evident that in an order where not everyone has equal rights, individuals with financial, educational, familial, or professional disadvantages, as well as nature and non-human species, constitute the main concerns of the world shaped by Anthropos (Ağın, 2020, 27-28). Consequently, an interest in various forms of existence, both human and non-human, motivates critical posthumanism, whose *raison d'être* is ethical. It is the posthuman desire that is both the subject and object of critical posthumanism's critique. In this context, the focus is on examining issues from both an analytical, speculative, and creative perspective while emphasizing the pressing necessity to diversify and question Western normativity. Eventually, examining various concerns such as technological transformation and ethical dilemmas, body and identity issues, natural and artificial boundaries, global inequalities, and ecological concerns, critical posthumanism aims to rethink the future role and ethical responsibilities of humans and explore ways to sustain life in a posthuman world.

Kazuo Ishiguro, the Nobel Prize-winning British writer of Japanese origin, whose works have been translated into more than fifty languages, has made a name for himself in the literary community as a brave author with works in different genres. Generally questioning the human condition in his works, Ishiguro deals with the vulnerability of the human condition, the dynamics between the individual and society, loneliness, and the state of being created (Matthews & Groes, 2010, p. 79-90). In different stories of the author, it is seen that the ways of existence of different characters are similar. In this vein, in an interview about his first novel, *Klara and the Sun*, written in 2021 after receiving the Nobel Prize in 2017, he states that the starting point of his book is the science fiction novel *Never Let Me Go*. He remarks that he wants to write a response to the melancholic ending of the novel that affects the reader (Stewart, 2021). Humanoid Klara, the main protagonist of *Klara and the Sun*, who lives a limited and restricted life with a sense of duty and service, raises questions about the human condition. She is introduced to the reader as a non-human created to eliminate human deficiencies and serve them with a transhumanist purpose. However, it is understood that the author, shifting to a posthumanist discourse, endeavours to raise awareness and dreams of an order not based on a hierarchy. In the novel, he foregrounds unethical ways of using artificial intelligence to make human lives comfortable and the potential risks that can be caused by tampering with the genetics of humans for a more advantageous generation.

In a similar vein, American writer Daniel Keyes explores psychological and ethical themes in his works, exploring the human condition and the limits of human potential. In his books, he also challenges social norms and principles, exploring themes such as human nature, intelligence, ethics, and personal identity. The topics he discusses, such as social acceptance and exclusion, provide an opportunity for social critique. By employing the internal monologue technique, the author enables the reader to delve directly into the character's thoughts, facilitating a close observation of the character's growth and progression. Known for his science fiction novel *Flowers for Algernon* (1966), Keyes takes a posthumanist approach through the story of Charlie Gordon, a mentally disabled man who undergoes an experimental procedure to increase his intelligence, told from a sceptical perspective. The novel explores topics related to critical posthumanism, including anthropocentrism and intelligence, technological intervention and humanity, and identity and self. It delves deeply into humanity's relationship with technology and its individual, social, and ethical dimensions. Thus, when examined via a critical posthumanist lens, the novel prompts significant inquiries regarding the essence of humanity, its potentialities, and the ethical dilemmas that arise in the course of such transformations.

In light of all these expressions, the study seeks to analyse how the novels, despite their nearly six-decade gap, highlight shared concerns of critical posthumanism. These concerns include ethical dilemmas, inequality, loss of human identity, and social degradation caused by transhumanism's idealization of the human. Thus, when analysed from a critical posthumanist perspective, these novels offer a thorough examination that sheds light on the core discussions of posthumanist philosophy by questioning the nature of human existence, ethical boundaries, and the impact of technology on individual identity. In this vein, both novels prominently underscore the detrimental consequences of unregulated and morally questionable applications of artificial intelligence, as well as genetic changes and operations intended to produce more intelligent generations. These consequences include the erosion of human identity, the exacerbation of societal inequity, and the disruption of social order. In this regard, Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* explores the intersection between technology and humanity ironically through the protagonist, Klara, an artificial friend. The story offers a nuanced exploration of the notion of human within a society that is progressively advancing technologically. This statement raises questions about the fundamental nature of consciousness, the limitations of artificial intelligence, and the ethical implications of technologies that enhance human abilities. Similarly, Keyes's novel, *Flowers for Algernon*, explores ethical dilemmas surrounding the ramifications of tampering with human intelligence and the fundamental essence of being human. The novel prompts readers to contemplate the consequences of technological advancements on human identity and society. Ultimately, this study aims to examine the common ground between the two novels about the ethical and moral challenges related to the progress of technology and the potential erosion of human essence, using a critical posthumanist perspective.

Klara and the Sun

Klara and the Sun is a dystopian novel that questions the use of technology, science, and artificial intelligence in line with transhumanist goals and presents a speculative future. The novel "forces readers to confront important epistemic, ontological, and ethical questions about humans and machines" (Mejia and Nikolaidis, 2022, p. 305). In *Klara and the Sun*, Ishiguro revisits his grave concerns about the new society and changing social relations discussed in his novel *Never Let Me Go*. However, the author states that the starting point of *Klara and the Sun* is to dispel the pessimistic and dystopian atmosphere in *Never Let Me Go* and to end with hope. In this vein, *Never Let Me Go* is regarded as more dystopian because it delves into darker aspects of issues such as identity, autonomy, and the dehumanizing consequences of societal

structures. Miss Lucy's utterance, "Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do." (Ishiguro, 2010, p. 65) highlights the disturbing normalization of clones as mere resources for others, a core characteristic of dystopian settings where individuals are commodified and dehumanized. The story portrays a society that selectively develops and nurtures human clones exclusively for organ donation, a world that excessively reduces the value of human life to a mere commodity. The dehumanization observed is unsettling and indicative of a society that has accepted excessive inequality and the negation of individual worth as the norm. The emotional impact and tragic elements of *Never Let Me Go* stem from the characters' acknowledgment of their predetermined destiny and their endeavour to discover significance in a life intentionally destined for premature termination. *Klara and the Sun*, however, delves into the dynamic between Klara and human individuals, with a specific emphasis on themes of hope, love, and the capacity for establishing bonds across diverse life forms. Although the novel offers a bleak critique of a society willing to sacrifice ethics for health and longevity, it also focuses on individual relationships and philosophical reflection on human identity and AI ethics. In this regard, using the first-person narrator in almost all of his works, the author allows the reader to see the world from the point of view of an empathetic humanoid in this novel. Thus, the statement by (AF)Klara, "people feel a pain alongside their happiness" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 24), is highly striking with regards to describing humans to human. In *Klara and the Sun*, the author is explicitly preoccupied with the criticism of human endeavour to create a "lifted" class in society through a transhumanist purpose, which uses technology and science to improve human cognitive and physical abilities, eliminate diseases, and even ensure immortality. The novel's skeleton structure is the author's concern about how far the use of artificial intelligence can be carried forward in a modern world caused by the desire to create a superior race through gene modification. Thus, the author appears rather aligned with the argument that:

With the development of genetic engineering in the late 20th century, including developments in genetic screening, gene therapy and enhancement, and various reproductive technologies, public fear and hesitation has ensued, especially since the ethical and social implications of this new science are not completely known (Aultman, 2006, p. 35).

Ishiguro underscores the class distinction brought about by gene modification as an output of anthropocentric thought and the alarming aspects of using artificial intelligence in society, serving the same thought. In this vein, the author endeavours "to raise ontological and ethical questions about eugenics and abnormal biological human development" (Süt Güngör, 2022, p. 1526). He depicts the anthropocentric thought through Josie and Rick, who represent two classes in the society called "lifted" and "unlifted".

Representing the "lifted" section of society where gene modification is applied for a healthier, smarter, and longer life, Josie has some chronic diseases caused by the procedure. In the novel, it is also emphasised that another daughter of the family lost her life as a result of health complications arising from the same operation. Therefore, the family has serious concerns about losing Josie. Josie's privileged situation causes her to maintain her school life through a screen and have a very limited relationship with her peers. This anti-social and isolated state of life is reflected throughout the novel. Klara's inference, "Perhaps all humans are lonely" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 216), indicates the prevailing feeling of loneliness in the novel. Thus, Ishiguro takes a quizzical approach to the aspect of the transhumanist stance in the capitalist world order that leads societies to alienation, isolation, and despair. Within this frame, it is observed that the novel has a dark and dystopian tone, with the class system in which human's transhumanist endeavour divides its population into two. Within this frame, Haraway argues that identities like gender and class are "forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism" (1990, p. 155).

In a similar manner to Haraway's argument, Ishiguro aims to create a social consciousness that technology, supposedly intended to be neutral and used for the good of humanity, has acquired a discriminatory feature in the hands of capitalist power centres to serve different profit-oriented purposes. The author calls attention to the fact that the social discrimination created by the hierarchical order, which has always been argued throughout human history, has been carried even further in the modern capitalist world due to the transhumanist greed of the human. Nevertheless, in the novel, Rick is still hopeful in a society sharply divided by the capitalist system, as the one belonging to the disadvantaged group in many respects, especially regarding social status and educational rights. What Rick says to Klara, who thinks that the true love between him and Josie will overcome the sharp class distinction in their society, is rather poignant: "Josie and I grew up together and we're part of each other. And we've got our plan. So of course, our love is genuine and forever. And it won't make any difference to us who's been lifted and who hasn't. That's your answer, Klara, and there won't be any other" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 270).

However, throughout the novel, Rick's exclusion from meetings with Josie's "lifted" friends and the restriction of his educational rights indicate this discrimination. The following quote from the novel is an obvious illustration of the inequality in education:

Even though Rick was never lifted, there still remains one decent option for him. Atlas Brookings takes a small number of unlifted students. The only proper college that will still do so. They believe in the principle and thank heavens for that. Now there are only a few such places available each year, so naturally the competition is savage (p. 125).

Nevertheless, despite the ontologically and ethically problematic ways in which increasingly capitalist societies use science and technology, the author paves the way for hope through a posthumanist perspective, which adopts a new understanding of the world based on embracing inclusive and fundamental rights and freedoms. In a similar manner that "posthumanism distinctively situates itself against the anthropocentric ventures of sexism, racism, ableism, ageism, and speciesism [...]" (Ağın, 2020, p. 279), Ishiguro strives to warn humanity with an understanding that rejects the object-subject relationship and advocates the equality of all beings. In his novel, the author endeavours to warn human by creating awareness from the perspective of a humanoid who says, "They fought as if the most important thing was to harm each other as much as possible" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 21).

Ishiguro's concerns about the helplessness of the human condition, the dynamics between the individual and society, loneliness, and being created constitute the main issues of *Klara and the Sun*, as in his other works. However, it is evident that though representing the sickly and grey colour of urban life, Klara dissipates the gloomy atmosphere at the novel's end with the hope she raises and strengthens the author's hand in criticizing transhumanism through posthumanism. With a plain and robotic tone, Klara sees the world in pixels and lacks a holistic visual perception like a human. This disadvantage turns into the advantage of seeing the emotions scattered on the human face with their parts. Ishiguro carefully draws parallels with a machine that occasionally appears rather human. This enables readers to recognize the resemblance between Klara's cognitive processes and capabilities and their own perception, thought, and behaviour. Ishiguro's creation of Klara, a machine exhibiting numerous human-like features, establishes a dichotomy that enables examination of the parallels between her cognitive mechanisms and those of humans. The author's portrayal of Klara challenges the dichotomy between humans and machines by implying that qualities like perception, emotion, thought, self-awareness, and morality are not exclusive to humans. This investigation finally results in a more profound understanding of the essence of humanity, prompting inquiries on the future of artificial intelligence and the fundamental characteristics of consciousness. Nevertheless, the difficulty in positioning Klara is evident in the reaction of Rick's mother when

she first sees her: “One never knows how to greet a guest like you. After all, are you a guest at all? Or do I treat you like a vacuum cleaner? I suppose I did as much just now” (p. 123). Likened to a vacuum cleaner, Klara is also praised for her observation, empathy, intelligence, and ability to read emotions. Moreover, although she is equated with a vacuum cleaner, she is also expected to replace Josie. Thus, in a society dominated by human Klara is attributed conflicting tasks. Within this respect, *Klara and the Sun* also presents the unconditional sense of duty and the master-servant relationship in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* and *Remains of the Day*. In both novels, the author employs the theme of duty to examine the intricacies of human conduct within the confines of societal and individual limitations. Thus, the focus is on the personal sacrifices individuals make and the ethical issues they encounter. In this sense, as an artificial intelligence, Klara’s task is to make Josie’s life easier, to accompany and comrade her. Yet, equipping robots with human-like features and skills, humans have always been concerned about being taken over by them. A similar tone of apprehension prevails in the novel.

On the other hand, towards the novel’s end, Klara’s endeavour to get Josie healed with the help of the sun holds great significance as it symbolizes the immense power of nature and the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. Upon witnessing the curative influence of the sun at the beginning of the novel, Klara deduces that: “The Sun was pouring his nourishment onto the street and into the buildings, and when I looked over to the spot where Beggar man and the dog had died, I saw they weren’t dead at all – that a special kind of nourishment from the Sun had saved them” (p. 37). Solar-powered Klara believes that by dismantling the Cootings Machine, which she perceives as obstructing the sun due to its polluting emissions, she can please the sun. Within this frame, Ishiguro highlights ecological problems, one of the crucial concerns of our time, by critically examining anthropocentric ideologies through the use of a humanoid character. Thus, the author prompts the reader to consider a world that is both inclusive and sustainable by establishing a foundation for re-evaluating the connections between humans and nature, as well as humans and technology, using a perspective that aligns with the posthumanist conception of cognition. Critical posthumanism places significant emphasis on ecological concerns, which allows for a re-evaluation of humans’ ties with the environment and technology. Within this particular framework, Ishiguro’s novel *Klara and the Sun* reiterates the themes of natural preservation, sustainable practices, fair treatment of the environment, and the acknowledgment of the moral worth of non-human entities.

Similarly, the author wants to make the Anthropos confront the idea that they are hybrid beings that can only exist with those around them by giving up the thought of positioning themselves as subjects. The author parallels Rosi Braidotti, who repositions Anthropos as part of nature and advocates a way of thinking that values the life force instead of the human subject. Within this frame, Braidotti points to contemporary environmentalism as another valuable source of the reconfiguration of the posthuman subject. Advocating zoe-centred ethics, Braidotti takes the view of constructing an entirely new understanding of a non-unitary subject: a universal whole (Braidotti, 2013). Zoe-centred egalitarianism, which emphasizes the interconnectedness and inherent value of all forms of life, is, in fact, the ethical core of the critical posthuman turn. According to Braidotti, zoe-centered egalitarianism, which can be considered a response to the opportunist interspecies commodification of life, signifies opposition to “the violence and the hierarchical thinking that result from human arrogance and the assumption of transcendental human exceptionalism (2001, p. 86). Accordingly, Braidotti’s introduction of the concept of a non-unitary subject disrupts conventional notions of a stable, harmonious, and autonomous self. The proposal suggests a comprehensive and integrated interpretation of subjectivity “‘non-unitary’ – split, in-process, knotted, rhizomatic, transitional, nomadic” (Braidotti, 2014, p. 176).

Adopting similar thoughts, Ishiguro seeks to connect the dark side of transhumanism to the side of posthumanism that offers realistic alternative solutions with a very naive narrative. Thus, the author displays a critical perspective on the ethically problematic use of the humanoid Klara, which further supports the aforementioned arguments. Within this frame, Ishiguro also shares a perspective that supports Karen Barad's assertion that "we are part of the nature that we seek to understand" (2007, p. 247). Hence, the author offers profound insights on the inseparability of human from nature. He stresses the importance of approaching the connection between human and nature in a comprehensive and mutually dependent way, both from a scientific and ethical one. Hence, Ishiguro endorses Barad's concept that human acquiring knowledge about the world and the universe are inherently intertwined with these processes. Thus, the fact that Klara, a humanoid developed to befriend young people, is asked to replace a human raises question about critical conceptual and ethical problems related to human status and the use of artificial intelligence. Josie's mother's statement that "The new Josie won't be an imitation. She really will be Josie. A continuation of Josie" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 173) suggests that she had attempted and failed in a similar endeavour for her deceased daughter. At the novel's beginning, the mother's asking Klara to imitate Josie on her first entrance to the store indicates that Klara will be subjected to an unethical way of use. On the other hand, Klara's statement that the mother "called me 'Klara' so I knew I shouldn't attempt anymore to imitate Josie" (p. 92) reveals the problematic situation.

The basis of all these inferences about the novel is, primarily, Ishiguro's concern about the human emotions and states that make humans human. As in many other works, the author, in *Klara and The Sun*, endeavours to explain human to human. However, this time, he does it ironically through the humanoid Klara. The author maintains a cautious stance towards the transhumanist concept, which promotes the notion of enhancing human capabilities and lifetimes through technological means. Observing her environment in pixels, (AF) Klara's intricate cognitive processes and emotional abilities might be seen as a distinct manifestation of transhumanism's pursuit to develop intelligences that resemble or surpass human capabilities. The author's focus on modifying human genetics throughout the story also indicates a parallel interest in transhumanist objectives. Thus, Josie, a member of the "lifted" cohort, undergoes genetic modifications to enhance qualities such as IQ or health. Moreover, through the portrayal of Klara and Josie's relationship, the author showcases individuals' ability to establish emotional and social connections with artificial creatures. In addition, he highlights transhumanist concepts that examine the potential of technology to revolutionize the human condition. Ishiguro also explores the notion that transhumanism's ultimate objective, which involves the advancement or transformation of human consciousness into a digital medium, is indeed feasible. In this regard, the author raises philosophical questions about the nature of consciousness and the soul through Klara's own consciousness and her deep attachment to Josie. Consequently, Ishiguro focuses on the frightening dimension that transhumanist thought has come due to the position where the insatiable Anthropos positions himself. The author, from a critical posthumanist perspective, stresses the need for responsible development and use of AI technology, emphasizing the critical importance of setting rules, maintaining transparency, and establishing control mechanisms. Otherwise, as he particularly highlights in his work, this situation may lead to discrimination based on gender, race, or socio-economic status. In this regard, he also underlines the irreversible troublesome situations that may arise from human dependence on artificial intelligence in almost every aspect of life, from education to common human relations and the problematic use of technology. And finally, in his novel, in which he thoroughly examines the impact of technology on humanity and the moral, philosophical, and social aspects of these impacts, Ishiguro offers a critical posthumanist reading of Anthropos's transhumanist greed.

Flowers for Algernon

Originally published as a short story in 1959, “Flowers for Algernon,” considered a turning point in science fiction and disability literature, was expanded and published as a novel with the same title in 1966. Inspired by a special experience Keyes had with a mentally disabled student during his teaching years, the novel is organised in the form of progress reports of Charlie, a mentally disabled man who has undergone an experimental surgery. This operation, previously successfully performed on a laboratory rat named Algernon, is being tried on a human for the first time. This process, in which Charlie Gordon’s IQ is tripled over time, culminates in his realisation that the experiment gives him a temporary mental improvement but that he returns to his old condition. In the novel, exploring the human condition and limits of human potential through psychological and ethical themes, Keyes displays a critical posthumanist approach in *Flowers for Algernon* through the story of Charlie Gordon, told from a questioning perspective. The author explores the inquiries regarding the convergence of technology and science, which serve as the foundation of posthumanist ideology.

In *Flowers for Algernon*, Keyes provides a posthumanist assessment of transhumanist endeavours focused on human beings by using the character of Charlie. By questioning the traditional definition of the human, the author draws attention to the idea of embracing biologically, culturally, and technologically diverse forms of existence. He provides a basis for evaluating the place of people with disabilities in modern American society, thus the experience of disability and various bodily realities. The novel begins with a report that Charlie, a thirty-two-year-old employee at Donner’s Bakery, has an IQ of sixty-eight and inferior spelling skills. Charlie, who attends Mrs. Alice Kinnian’s literacy course on certain days of the week, is asked by Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss to write down his thoughts and feelings in a progress report: “Dr Strauss says I shoud rite down what I think and re- membir and evrey thing that happins to me from now on. I dont no why but he says its importint so they will see if they can use me. I hope they use me becaus Miss Kinnian says mabye they can make me smart. I want to be smart” (Keyes, 1989, p. 1). Experimenting with a method of developing intelligence in animals, Professor Nemur and Dr Strauss aim to find a human subject for the same experiment. Eager to overcome his intellectual disability and gain a respected stance in society, Charlie volunteers to be the human test subject in the experiment. Due to his lack of intelligence, Charlie’s behaviour outside the social norms causes him to be excluded, humiliated, and seen as “the other” by the members of society. In this respect, he is asked to keep these reports to publicise his mental state and place in society. As can be deduced from the quote above the first report is full of mistakes, indicating his quite limited writing skills.

He is also asked to compete against a mouse named Algernon, who has already undergone experimental surgery. However, he loses to the mouse every time in that experiment. Dr Nemur informs Charlie that they will perform an exploratory operation on him, yet he cannot guarantee that it will make him more intelligent and may even make him worse than he is now. However, Charlie is eager to beat Algernon in the maze race and eliminate his feeling of being an outcast in society. “Gimpy hollers at me all the time when I do something rong, but he reely likes me because hes my frend. Boy i f I get smart wont he be surprised” (p. 19) indicates the humiliation Charlie is exposed to at work and his efforts and eagerness to be accepted by the society. In the novel, Charlie’s greatest desire, “all my life I want to be smart” (p. 4), is often emphasised. Charlie’s aspiration to conform to the traditional definition of “human” brings to mind Braidotti’s view that Western humanism, which she finds problematic that “male, white, heterosexual, owning wives and children, urbanised, able-bodied, speaking a standard language, i.e. ‘Man’” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 36) definition of “human”. The above definition reveals the fact that socially privileged people define human according to certain characteristics, and those outside the group are regarded as non-human or less human. In this context, Charlie’s

intellectual “disability” constitutes an “obstacle” to his acceptance in society. Nevertheless, Braidotti endeavours to discover means of reconciling disparities on a shared foundation, not through a focus on human beings, but rather by challenging hierarchical thought and violence. Additionally, Charlie’s insistence on being smart is an indication that he can only establish his existence if he is smart enough. This situation can be linked to rationalism, which emphasizes that intelligence is the main distinguishing feature of a human being. It contends that defining a human being solely based on senses and experiences is inadequate. Thus, it bears a resemblance to Descartes’ famous statement, “I think, therefore I am” (*Cogito, ergo sum*) (1960) which serves as a fundamental tenet of modern philosophy and, however, in certain ways, limits our understanding of the self. It only defines the self as a thinking being, excluding other self-components such as senses, emotions, body, or unconscious processes. This limits the scope of the concept of the self and ignores other important aspects of human experience. Similarly, for Charlie to gain acceptance in society, his rational thought and reasoning must align with Descartes’ argument.

The first symbolic indication that the operation works on Charlie over time is when he beats Algernon in the maze race and starts the dough mixer in the bakery. Charlie starts to read adult books and becomes interested in many academic subjects. However, when a mentally disabled young man breaks a plate in a restaurant and everyone, including himself, laughs, it becomes a turning point for Charlie. Because Charlie, who identifies himself with this young man, realises how far away he has evolved from people, even though he has gained skills in many fields after the operation. He responds to the laughing people in a reproachful yet meaningful way: “[...] but for God’s sake, have some respect! He’s a human being! [...] How strange it is that people of honest feelings and sensibility, who would not take advantage of a man born without arms or legs or eyes-how such people think nothing of abusing a man born with low intelligence” (Keyes, 1989, p. 199). Realising that his friends at the bakery are tormenting him for fun is another critical turning point for him. Therefore, Charlie becomes aware of “that intelligence does not bring him any happiness and it merely provides people with social acceptance while too much of it is not positively perceived and welcomed by the society” (Çelikel, 2020, p. 87). When his mental disability is overcome, Charlie temporarily falls within the scope of the transhumanist idea of the human and discerns that only in this form can he be partially accepted by society. Keyes’ portrayal of his protagonist experiencing a temporary recovery allows the character to assess his psychological and sociological circumstances before and after. Therefore, the reader is also provided with a transitional space for comparing transhumanist and posthumanist thought through Charlie.

One of the remarkable points of the novel is when Charlie, taken to a scientific congress in Chicago with Algernon, feels that Professor Nemur treats him like a laboratory animal. The author subtly hints at posthumanism, a way of thinking against the class distinction created by humans and their domination over other beings through Charlie’s epiphany. Charlie and Algernon serve as conduits for the author to highlight the ethical and moral dilemmas that unregulated transhumanist endeavours can potentially generate, hence raising concerns about the infringement of both human and non-human rights.

Cary Wolfe, a posthumanist theorist who has carried out important work on animal rights, underscores the ethical significance of animal experiments from a critical perspective. Stating “with the aim of exposing how much they have been misunderstood and exploited, that does not mean we are not continuing to be humanist-and therefore, by definition, anthropocentric” (2010, p. 99), Wolfe argues that being posthumanist is only possible by subverting the privileged position of *Anthropos*. In this context, the character Algernon, the laboratory mouse subjected to the same experimental operation as Charlie, vividly highlights the ethical treatment of animals in the narrative. Charlie’s revelation

I was becoming irritated, and I could see that Algernon, upset by the smoke, the buzzing, the unaccustomed surroundings, was moving around in his cage nervously. I had the strangest compulsion to open his cage and let him out. It was an absurd thought-more of an itch than a thought-and I tried to ignore it (Keyes, 1989, p. 157).

holds significant value. It emphasizes a more extensive theme of vulnerability and exploitation, which mirrors the treatment of both Algernon and Charlie within the framework of experimentation. It illustrates the ethical dilemmas associated with using animals in scientific research.

Accordingly, Charlie's observations and thoughts about doctors can also be regarded as an ironic criticism of the functioning of science and medicine in the contemporary world. "No one really starts anything new, Mrs Nemur. Everyone builds on other men's failures. There is nothing really original in science. What each man contributes to the sum of knowledge is what counts" (p. 243). This quote is an indication of Keyes' subtle treatment of the fact that doctors use Charlie and Algernon to advance their careers, ethically bypassing human and animal rights. Dr Nemur claims that Charlie truly exists and gains his personality thanks to the experiment. In this manner, Charlie's descriptions of disabled people and Dr Nemur's claim that he did not exist as a person before the experiment are parallel. Therefore, Charlie's request to publish the unsuccessful results of the experiment on Algernon and himself can be seen as a manifesto for accepting disabled people and subjects as individuals in society. In this framework, the Adam and Eve metaphor used by the author at the novel's beginning foreshadows the fate awaiting Charlie. Nurse Hilda's comment that the doctors' experiment has exceeded ethical and moral boundaries refers to the story of Adam and Eve, punished for eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge:

she said mabey they got no rite to make me smart because i f god wantid me t o be smart he would have made me born that way. And what about Adem and Eev and the sin with the tree ofnowlege and eating the appel and the fall. And mabey ProfNemur and Dr Strauss was tampiring with things they got no rite t o tampir with (p. 16).

Like Adam and Eve in the sacred story, Charlie loses his innocence. Because he is incapable of thinking through the consequences, he seeks knowledge through unnatural means. The fact that Keyes returns his protagonist to his former self after giving him a chance to experience genius is significant in its ironic emphasis on the fact that he can no longer be the same. In this regard, Charlie challenges traditional notions of sanity, identity, and humanity, affirming critical posthumanist idea that questions the boundaries between human and non-human, and critiques humanism's emphasis on rationality, autonomy, and the fixed nature of human identity. Sanity is often equated with rationality, consistency in behaviour, and the ability to engage with society's norms. However, posthumanism suggests that intelligence and sanity are fluid qualities subject to technological intervention and transformation. Charlie's dramatic increase and subsequent decline in intelligence challenge the idea that sanity is a stable or inherent trait. His transformation shows that sanity is not just about cognitive capability but also one's relational and social existence. Additionally, identity is often defined in terms of a coherent, stable self closely tied to one's mental faculties. However, posthumanism challenges this by emphasizing that identity can be fluid, multiple, and contingent on both internal and external factors, including technological enhancements. Charlie's experience complicates the humanist notion of a stable identity by showing how technology can radically alter one's sense of self, leading to a fragmented identity that cannot be easily reconciled with traditional notions of sanity or personhood. The ethical implications of altering human cognition through technological means are also highlighted in *Flowers for Algernon*. Posthumanism challenges the notion that there is a singular, optimal way of being human, suggesting that sanity and identity are constructed and reconstructed through interactions with technology and society. Charlie's tragic fate serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of uncritically embracing

technological enhancement as a means to achieve a more “perfect” or “sane” existence. Charlie’s ironic interest in John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* refers to the fact that he has learned too much to return to his old self unchanged. Towards the end of the novel, Charlie raises the issue of the emotions that define human nature, which are overlooked by the transhumanist perspective on cognition within the context of ethical and moral principles:

Intelligence is one of the greatest human gifts. But all too often a search for knowledge drives out the search for love. This is something else I’ve discovered for myself very recently. I present it to you as a hypothesis: Intelligence without the ability to give and receive affection leads to mental and moral breakdown, to neurosis, and possibly even psychosis. And I say that the mind absorbed in and involved in itself as a self-centred end, to the exclusion of human relationships, can only lead to violence and pain (p. 249).

The increase in intelligence he has experienced has enabled him to analyse human, empathy, and human relations deeply. Charlie complains about the difficulties, such as isolation, emotional confusion, and social ostracization, that this tremendous development brings. He emphasises the importance of human values such as love, social bonds, and moral responsibility.

Tobin Siebers, known for his essential contributions to disability studies, highlights the fact that disability remains a missing element in social justice: “Disability offers a challenge to the representation of the body this is often said. Usually, it means that the disabled body provides insight into the fact that all bodies are socially constructed that social attitudes and institutions determine far greater than biological fact the representation of the body’s reality” (2001, p. 737). The troubled position of Charlie’s intellectual disability in society confirms Siebers’ argument that people with disabilities are often deprived of the status of being human. Siebers stresses bodily diversity, considering disability an individual condition within social and cultural contexts. While viewing disability as a natural part of human variation, he assesses it as the opposite of normativity, normalisation, and bodily perfection. He advocates the acceptance of different physical realities and abilities. As in Siebers’ argument, Charlie identifies himself as “exceptional” as a disadvantaged person in a system of unequal rights. He states that “exceptional” is “a democratic term used to avoid the damning labels of ‘gifted’ and ‘deprived’” (Keyes, 1989, p. 153). Charlie is consistently seen as “exceptional” in society at the novel’s beginning as a mentally disabled person, when he becomes a genius after the operation he undergoes, and when he returns to his initial self at the novel’s end. At first, his disadvantaged situation due to his mental retardation causes him to have difficulty in conforming to social norms and to be seen as “the other”. However, ironically, the increase in his intelligence also prevents him from adopting the norms of society. This situation pushes him into loneliness, exclusion, and search for meaning. Keyes opposes the positioning of Anthropos as the sole centre of nature and the universe in humanism, which is the indirect justification for colonisation, individualisation, and capitalism. The author resists the idea, defended by the humanist mentality, that human intelligence can understand everything. Thus, by utilizing the characters of Charlie and Algernon, the author critiques Anthropos for harming the environment by erecting a divide between themselves and other creatures. The author adopts the posthumanist philosophy, which includes moral and ethical values that transhumanism misses. He emphasises that transhumanism, the successor of humanism, may pose a moral threat to both human and other beings and the nature. Ultimately, he advocates for the posthumanist concept that examines the suffering and challenges that arise from the variations among humans and between humans and other beings, using a shared basis for comparison.

Conclusion

Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun* and Daniel Keyes’s *Flowers for Algernon* engage in a clear dialogue within the framework of critical posthumanism and reconceptualizing the

human condition. Both novels explore themes of enhancement, and the ethical implications of altering human cognition, challenging traditional humanist notions of identity, consciousness, and the boundaries of the “human.” Given that a posthuman figure questions conventional human traits and blurs the distinctions between humans and non-humans, organic and inorganic entities, and natural and manufactured elements, Klara, as an AI-driven robot and an “Artificial Friend,” represents a posthuman figure in that context. Through her interactions with people, she explores themes of consciousness, empathy, and the nature of humanity. While not a typical posthuman figure, Charlie’s transformation through an experimental surgery that dramatically increases his intelligence raises posthumanist questions about the ethics of human enhancement and the nature of identity as well. Josie, too, as a representation of a lifted class in Ishiguro’s novel exploring posthumanism, symbolizes a future in which the distinction between human and posthuman is indistinct. The genetic transformation Josie experiences and the potential replacement by an AI underscore posthumanist concepts, highlighting the profound philosophical questions about human existence in a technologically advanced society. In the two novels, Klara, Josie, and Charlie, characters who exist beyond the traditional boundaries of humanity, could be considered posthuman figures. They experience intelligence as a fluid and continuous quality, questioning the stability of human identity. Thus, the ethical implications of using technology to alter fundamental aspects of human identity are central to the narrative.

The analysis of the novels also reveals that they explore the ethical ramifications of pushing the boundaries of human existence. *Flowers for Algernon* raises ethical concerns about using humans as test subjects for potentially harmful augmentations. *Klara and the Sun* examines the themes of exploitation and the ethical implications of designing conscious beings for utilitarian purposes. Within this frame, Daniel Keyes investigates the boundaries of human potential and psychological and ethical topics in his novel and takes a stance against transhumanist thought in telling the story of Charlie Gordon, a mentally challenged man who experiences an experimental operation that temporarily increases his IQ. The novel deftly explores the themes of the connection between technology and humanity, which form the basis of the posthumanist ideology. Through Charlie, Keyes offers a posthumanist assessment of human-centred transhumanist initiatives. Similarly, Ishiguro provides a framework for assessing the status of unlifted individuals in contemporary culture, as well as their experiences with their diverse physical realities. In this vein, both novels raise awareness of the notion of accepting physiologically, culturally, and technologically different kinds of life by challenging the conventional definition of the human. They reject the humanist and rationalist viewpoint that humans’ minds and intelligence can propel them to a specific position in society, leaving sensory experience in the background. Therefore, they accuse Anthropos of treating individuals who do not fit into the traditional Western humanism’s definition of a human as objects, creating a barrier that separates them from other life forms through the characters of Charlie, Klara, Josie, and Josie’s unlifted friend Rick. The authors combine moral and ethical elements into the posthumanist philosophy, which transhumanism disregards. Ultimately, they advocate for the posthumanist viewpoint, which perceives the suffering and problems arising from the differentiation between human and disabled people, unlifted individuals, and other life forms stemming from a shared foundation. The novels provide the reader with confronting important epistemic, ontological, and ethical questions about human enhancement and artificial intelligence. Thus, we can read the novels as a prudent criticism of human attempts to establish a “lifted” class in society through science and technology, which aims to advance human physical and cognitive capacities.

Moreover, the authors generally explore the vulnerability of the human condition, the interplay between the individual and society, loneliness, identity, memory, and the process of creation in their novels. As a result of the enhancement process, Charlie experiences dissonance

between his previous self and his newly intellectual self, leading to an identity crisis. Klara finds solace in her recollections of her time with Josie, even as she confronts the inevitability of being outdated. Within this context, the novels advocate for a philosophy that rejects the ontological hierarchy imposed by the evolution of humans and nature, as well as the shifting dynamics of society. Thus, they clearly highlight and envision a non-hierarchical lifestyle where humans connect with other life forms from a critical posthumanist viewpoint. Consequently, both novels provide a critical analysis of classical humanism, emphasizing the negative emotional and ethical consequences of prioritizing rationality and cognitive supremacy. Additionally, they investigate the gradual disappearance of distinctions between humans and non-humans, as well as between organic and artificial entities, indicating that these classifications are becoming more uncertain in a posthuman society.

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