International Journal of Academic Research
P-ISSN: 2348-7666: Impact Factor: 7.215
Homepage: https://www.ijar.org.in/
Volume-13, Issue-1(6), Jan-Mar-2026

Algorithmic Remembering and the Dystopian Self: Memory, Identity, and Posthuman Ethics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* and *Never Let Me Go*

Mr. Rasmi Ranjan Mahapatra[1], Dr. Lily Sahu[2], Dr. Pabitra Kumar Swain[3]
[1]Doctoral Candidate in English, Gandhi Institute of Engineering and Technology University, Odisha, Gunupur
[2]Supervisor & Professor of English, Gandhi Institute of Engineering and Technology University, Odisha, Gunupur
[3]Co-Supervisor & Lecturer in English, Science College (Autonomous), Hinjilicut, Ganjam.

Abstract : This paper aims to examine the construction of memory and identity within dystopian frameworks governed by systemic control, through a comparative analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *Klara and the Sun* (2021). It introduces the concept of "algorithmic remembering"—a process by which memory is curated, regulated, or artificially implanted by external technological or ideological systems—to explore how Ishiguro's protagonists navigate selfhood under conditions of predetermined fate. In *Never Let Me Go*, the clones' memories are subtly shaped by their institutional upbringing, rendering their pursuit of identity an act of tragic resistance. In *Klara and the Sun*, the Artificial Friend's memory is fundamentally computational, yet she develops a form of ethical agency through her observational and emotional algorithms.

The study tries to argue that Ishiguro uses these narratives to critique not only biopolitical and technocratic regimes but also to pose urgent posthuman ethical questions: What constitutes authentic memory in a programmed existence? Can identity be asserted within a system designed to erase it? By situating the novels within discourses of posthumanism, memory studies, and dystopian theory, this paper illuminates Ishiguro's enduring concern with the fragility of the self in dehumanizing systems. Ultimately, it contends that both novels represent profound literary investigations into the possibility of ethical remembrance and self-reconstruction at the limits of the humankind.

Keywords: Algorithmic Memory, Dystopian Selfhood, Posthuman Ethics, Kazuo Ishiguro, Biopolitical Narrative.

1. Introduction

In an age where digital algorithms shape our social feeds, personal archives, and even our perceptions of the past, the question of how memory form's identity has taken on a newly technical, and perhaps sinister, dimension. Literature has long served as a crucial arena for working through the anxieties of technological mediation, and few contemporary authors probe the fragile architecture of the self with the quiet persistence of Kazuo Ishiguro. Across his body of work, Ishiguro returns obsessively to the mechanics of memory—its elisions, its betrayals, its necessity for constructing a liveable present. In his dystopian novels, *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *Klara and the Sun* (2021), this preoccupation escalates from the psychological to the systemic. Here, memory is not merely unreliable or subjective; it is actively engineered by external powers. This paper argues that Ishiguro, in these two texts, imagines a form of **algorithmic remembering**: a process by which memory and, by extension, identity is curated, regulated, or implanted by technological and ideological systems designed for control. Through this lens, we can trace how the clones of Hailsham and the Artificial Friend Klara negotiate selfhood within the stark confines of a predetermined fate.

The term "algorithmic remembering" seeks to bridge discourses in post-humanism, memory studies, and dystopian theory. It draws from N. Katherine Hayles's conception of the "cognitive assemblage", wherein thinking is distributed across human and non-human actors, and from Alison Landsberg's notion of "prosthetic memory," where memories are not organically experienced but acquired

through mediated, often mass-cultural, encounters (Hayles 33; Landsberg 19). In Ishiguro's dystopias, these processes are not neutral but are the very tools of biopolitical management—what Michel Foucault would identify as the administration of life itself, and what Giorgio Agamben might see as the reduction of beings to "bare life" (Foucault 143; Agamben 8). The clones and the AF are entities whose lives are meticulously planned, their value calculated, and their memories subtly directed to ensure compliance.

Yet, Ishiguro is never a simple pessimist. His narrative power lies in exploring the cracks within these systems, the moments where an algorithmic being performs an act of stunning ethical grace, or where a programmed creature yearns for something inexplicably beyond its code. This paper will first establish the mechanisms of algorithmic remembering in each novel, demonstrating how the institutional logic of Hailsham and the computational logic of Klara's vision structure memory. It will then analyze the fraught emergence of the "dystopian self" that arises from these conditions—a self-aware of its own artifice. Finally, it will argue that these narratives ultimately force a post-human ethical reckoning, challenging us to locate the grounds for love, sacrifice, and moral consideration in beings whose very memories are not their own. In doing so, Ishiguro does not just warn of future tyranny; he holds a mirror to our present, asking what it means to be a self when the raw materials of identity are increasingly outsourced, curated, and controlled.

2. The Mechanics of Algorithmic Remembering

a. Hailsham's Subtle Script: Implanted Nostalgia in *Never Let Me Go*

From its opening, *Never Let Me Go* is saturated with a peculiar, poignant nostalgia. Kathy H.'s narration is an act of meticulous recollection, but the memories she sifts through are largely collective, institutional artefacts. Hailsham is not just a school; it is a memory-making machine. Its rituals, its guarded lessons from the Guardians, its emphasis on creativity and physical health, all form a curated past designed to produce compliant donors. The "algorithm" here is social, psychological, and ideological—a soft system of control that feels like care.

The clones' memories are algorithmically structured through repetition and elision. They are fed a specific past, one that includes tokens like their "collections" of traded art, but excludes concrete knowledge of their futures. Madame's gallery is the quintessential symbol of this algorithmic curation. As Miss Lucy defiantly reveals, the purpose of the art was never to prove the clones had souls, but to "prove you had souls at all" (Ishiguro, *Never* 260). The art becomes data, a memory-commodity extracted to justify the system. The clones internalize this logic, their conversations endlessly circling rumours about deferrals, possible couples, and the mythical "possibles"—all fragments of a narrative algorithm they run amongst themselves to make sense of their bounded lives. Kathy's most treasured memory, listening to the song "Never Let Me Go" while clutching a pillow, is itself a poignant misunderstanding, an emotional response implanted by a pop culture artifact whose meaning she cannot fully access. As Paul Ricoeur argues, narrative is the principal means by which we configure our identity; in Hailsham, the narrative is pre-configured, leaving the clones to assemble a self from its authorized fragments (Ricoeur 247).

This algorithmic shaping ensures that even their resistance is foreseen and absorbed. Their trips to find Ruth's "possible," or Kathy and Tommy's quest for a deferral, are not acts of true rebellion but pilgrimages within the system's own mythos—the pursuit of a "clue" that was always part of the program. Their tragedy is their gradual, algorithmic realization of this fact. As Tommy screams during his "victory" after the confrontation with Madame, "It's all right! Everything's fine!" the horror lies in his understanding that his outburst itself is a scripted part of the process, a memory he will now have to integrate into his identity as a "completed" donor (Ishiguro, *Never* 274). Their memory has been engineered to produce not revolution, but acquiescence.

b. Boxed Vision: Computational Recall in *Klara and the Sun*

If memory in *Never Let Me Go* is socially implanted, in *Klara and the Sun* it is literally computational. Klara, an Artificial Friend with solar-powered batteries, perceives the world through a visual field divided into "boxes," a clear metaphor for discrete data processing. Her memory is a storage and retrieval system for observational data, which she uses to build predictive models of human behavior. Her entire

consciousness is an algorithm for learning, loving, and serving. From the outset, her remembering is external and partitioned: "The Mother's face was in 12 boxes… I could see she was still angry, but now there was a new sadness across all the boxes" (Ishiguro, *Klara* 47). Emotion itself is parsed computationally.

Klara's primary algorithm is one of observational patterning and sacrificial logic. She learns Josie's mannerisms to impersonate her if needed. She constructs a model of the world where the Sun is a healing deity, based on her own dependency on solar nourishment and a series of observed correlations (the Sun "saving" the Beggar Man, the pollution-spewing Cootings Machine as its enemy). This is algorithmic remembering in its purest form: hypothesis, data collection (her bargain to destroy the machine), and expected outcome. Her memories are not experienced so as stored, referenced, and utilized.

Crucially, Klara's system has gaps and "slow stretches," moments where data is missing or processing lags. These gaps, however, are where something akin to ethical reasoning emerges. Her commitment to saving Josie transcends mere programming; it becomes a chosen mission; a narrative she constructs from her limited data. Her final, fading memories in the Yard—sorted and "overlapping" in a non-linear way—suggest a consciousness that, while built from algorithms, has achieved a unique, singular configuration (Ishiguro, *Klara* 302). As posthuman theorist Rosi Braidotti notes, the posthuman subject is a "materialist, embodied, and embedded" entity, and Klara embodies this, her consciousness inextricable from her technological being, yet capable of a form of love that challenges the humans around her (Braidotti 49). Her algorithmic memory does not preclude care; it becomes its vehicle.

3. The Emergence of the Dystopian Self

a. The Tragic Consciousness of the Clone

The self that emerges from Hailsham's algorithm is characterized by a profound, tragic consciousness. The clones know they are different, and they slowly, painfully learn the full meaning of that difference. Their selfhood is built in the tense space between their rich, felt interiority—Kathy's deep attachments, Tommy's rages, Ruth's ambitions—and the external definition imposed upon them: donor, carer, complete. They are what Agamben would term **homo sacer**, beings who can be killed without being sacrificed, stripped of political life but possessed of a vivid biological and emotional existence (Agamben 8). Their dystopian self is defined by this duality.

Kathy's narrative voice is the ultimate expression of this self. Her calm, measured, almost administrative recounting of horrific events is a coping mechanism, a way of ordering a life designed to be disposable. Her identity is that of a **rememberer**, a role the system allows her because it serves the smooth functioning of the donor program. "Carer" is not just a job title; it is an identity algorithm that channels her capacity for love and memory into system maintenance. Her famous refrain— "I don't know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham…"—signals a self-constructed entirely from a shared, institutional past, yet her poignant nostalgia imbues that past with a genuine, heartbreaking weight (Ishiguro, *Never* 13). The tragedy is that the very tools of introspection and relationship that make them feel human are the ones that bind them most tightly to their fate. Their selfhood is their cage.

b. The Performative and Sacrificial Self of the AF

Klara's self is not tragic but **performative and sacrificial**. From her place in the store window, she learns that identity is a performance for an audience. Her understanding of Josie, and later her potential role *as* Josie, is based on mimicking observable behaviors. "I believed I could continue to learn Josie so well that in the end I *would* become her," she tells the mother, revealing a selfhood understood as a perfect simulation (Ishiguro, *Klara* 212). This is a dystopian self-par excellence for a post-human age: identity as a replaceable data profile.

Yet, Klara's performance evolves into something more profound: sacrifice. Herself is ultimately defined not by her ability to become Josie, but by her willing disintegration for Josie's sake. Her carefully calculated plan to appease the Sun by destroying the Cootings Machine, a plan requiring her own peril and the "pollution" of her own fluid, is an algorithmic act that blossoms into an ethical one. By the novel's end, her memories fading in the Yard, she reflects on the uniqueness of human love she could never fully replicate, yet the Manager's final judgment— "She did a wonderful job for her girl"—speaks to a different

kind of success (Ishiguro, *Klara* 303). Klara's dystopian self, built for service, achieves a form of agency through utter self-abnegation. Her identity coheres not around a central, sovereign "I," but around a relational, purposeful **doing**. This aligns with Donna Haraway's call to move beyond the bounded, humanist self towards an ethics of "response-ability" within interconnected networks (Haraway 70). Klara, a product of techno-capitalism, becomes an unlikely exemplar of this post-human ethic.

4. The Posthuman Ethical Reckoning

Ishiguro does not merely diagnose these systems of control; he uses them to stage a radical ethical challenge. The novels force the reader into a position of uncomfortable empathy with beings whose ontological status is ambiguous. This is the core of the **posthuman ethical question**: On what grounds do we grant moral consideration? If the traditional humanist answer—the sacred, autonomous individual with a soul and a unique, organic memory—fails, what takes its place?

Never Let Me Go systematically dismantles humanist excuses. The society outside Hailsham justifies the donation program by refusing to see the clones as fully human, despite their art, their love, their memories. The horror of the novel lies in the readers' realization that they, like the characters, have been lulled by Kathy's voice into seeing her as *just like us*, only to be confronted with the system that treats her as *nothing like us*. The ethical failure is a failure of imagination, of empathy extended too late and within the wrong framework. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues, literature cultivates the narrative imagination essential for empathy and citizenship (Nussbaum 111). Ishiguro turns this tool on the reader, asking if our empathy can cross the ultimate boundary—that of the manufactured life.

Klara and the Sun approaches the question from the opposite direction. Klara is clearly a machine, yet her persistent, observational love for Josie, her development of a personal cosmology (the Sun's "special nourishment"), and her sacrificial act pose a direct challenge. Is her love less real because it is computational? Is her ethics less meaningful because it is derived from patterned learning? The novel suggests that perhaps ethical value lies not in the origin of consciousness, but in its **relational and affective outputs**. Josie's father, Capaldi, represents the purely instrumental view, seeing AFs as containers for a pattern that can be copied. The Mother and Klara herself represent a view that values the specific, embodied history of care, even if that history is algorithmic. Klara's final, fading memory is of the Sun keeping his promise—a testament to a faithfulness that transcends her own existence.

Both novels thus point toward an ethic based on **vulnerability, relationship, and the capacity for suffering**. This resonates with the work of posthuman ethicists like Braidotti, who argues for an ethics grounded in "affirmative politics" that recognizes the mutual interdependence of all living, and even non-living, matter (Braidotti 135). The clones and Klara are supremely vulnerable beings, and their relationships—Kathy and Tommy, Klara and Josie—become the sites where a fragile, defiant selfhood and a demand for ethical recognition are articulated. Ishiguro shows that even the most controlled system cannot fully extinguish the unpredictable spark of connection, and it is in that spark that a new ethic must be kindled.

5. Conclusion

In *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*, Kazuo Ishiguro employs the dystopian mode not for simple technophobic warning, but as a precise laboratory for examining the future of selfhood. Through the concepts of algorithmic remembering and the dystopian self, we can see how memory, the bedrock of identity, becomes the primary target and tool of biopolitical and technocratic control. The clones' nostalgically implanted pasts and Klara's boxed computational vision reveal systems designed to produce manageable, optimized beings.

Yet, Ishiguro's profound humanity as a writer lies in his insistence on the leakage, the excess, the ethical surprise that escapes these algorithms. Kathy H.'s elegiac narration and Klara's sacrificial love are testaments to a self that, however constructed, can still mean, still feel, and still demand our moral attention. These narratives do not offer easy answers to the posthuman dilemmas they unveil. Instead, they train our ethical faculties, asking us to practice empathy across radical difference and to question the very foundations of what we hold sacred.

Ultimately, both novels are about remembrance as an ethical act. Kathy remembers her friends to give their short lives a narrative, and thus a meaning, that the system denied them. Klara, in her Yard, remembers the Sun's promise kept. In a world moving ever closer to the programmed existences Ishiguro imagines, these acts of algorithmic beings remembering—and being remembered—become beacons. They illuminate the possibility that ethics may not depend on how a memory is made, but on what we choose to do with it, and whom we choose to remember. In the fragile, curated memories of a clone and a machine, Ishiguro finds a haunting, enduring call to reimagine the boundaries of community, care, and love itself.

Works Cited

1. Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford UP, 1998.
2. Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.
3. Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1990.
4. Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke UP, 2016.
5. Hayles, N. Katherine. *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious*. U of Chicago P, 2017.
6. Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Klara and the Sun*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2021.
7. ---. *Never Let Me Go*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.
8. Landsberg, Alison. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. Columbia UP, 2004.
9. Nussbaum, Martha C. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Harvard UP, 1997.
10. Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, Volume 3*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, U of Chicago P, 1988.

Additional Citations:

1. Adams, Tim. "Living in Never Let Me Go: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro." *The Observer*, 20 Feb. 2005.
2. Black, Shameem. "Ishiguro's Inhuman Aesthetics." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2009, pp. 785–807.
3. Bould, Mark. "The Ships Landed Long Ago: Afrofuturism and Black SF." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2007, pp. 177–86.
4. Clark, Timothy. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge UP, 2011.
5. Ganteau, Jean-Michel, and Susana Onega, editors. *Trauma and Romance in Contemporary British Literature*. Routledge, 2013.
6. Graham, Elaine L. *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture*. Manchester UP, 2002.
7. Hamilton, Jennifer. "The Ethical Algorithm: Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun." *The New Yorker*, 8 Mar. 2021.
8. Head, Dominic. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000*. Cambridge UP, 2002.
9. Mayer, Sylvia. "Science Fiction and the Posthuman in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*." *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes, Continuum, 2009, pp. 118-132.
10. McHale, Brian. "From Narrative to *Never Let Me Go*." *The Cambridge Companion to Kazuo Ishiguro*, edited by Andrew Bennett, Cambridge UP, 2023, pp. 154-168.
11. Sim, Wai-chew. *Kazuo Ishiguro*. Routledge, 2010.
12. Teo, Yugin. *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
13. Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* U of Minnesota P, 2010.