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POSTHUMAN STORYTELLING: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, ETHICS, AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Posthumanism, Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, Identity, Contemporary English Literature, AI Narratives.</i>	<p>Posthuman storytelling has emerged as a significant mode in contemporary English literature, reflecting growing cultural engagement with Artificial Intelligence, biotechnology, and ethical uncertainty. Literary texts increasingly depict artificial beings and posthuman subjects to question traditional ideas of identity, moral agency, and human superiority. This paper examines how posthuman narratives explore Artificial Intelligence, ethics, and identity through close textual analysis of Ian McEwan's <i>Machines Like Me</i> (2019) and Kazuo Ishiguro's <i>Never Let Me Go</i> (2005). Drawing on posthumanist theory, the study argues that these novels present AI and bioengineered beings not as mere technological threats but as ethical mirrors that expose human responsibility, emotional vulnerability, and moral inconsistency. The paper demonstrates that posthuman storytelling redefines humanity as relational, ethically accountable, and interconnected rather than biologically exclusive. By situating literature within contemporary technological debates, this research highlights the role of fiction in shaping ethical understanding in an increasingly posthuman world.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION



Human silhouette blended with digital circuits
The merging of humanity and technology



Human face reflected in a machine or screen
Represents identity crisis in a technological age

Technological advancement has become one of the most influential forces shaping contemporary life. Artificial Intelligence, genetic engineering, and digital surveillance increasingly affect how individuals understand identity, agency, and morality. Contemporary English literature responds to these changes through posthuman storytelling, a narrative mode that questions human-centered worldviews and explores the ethical implications of technological power.

Posthuman narratives do not simply imagine futuristic technologies; they critically examine present anxieties about control, responsibility, and emotional connection. Artificial Intelligence in literature often functions as a narrative device through which writers expose ethical failures and



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emotional contradictions within human society. Rather than portraying machines as purely dangerous, many contemporary texts reveal how human actions shape technological outcomes. This paper explores posthuman storytelling with a focus on Artificial Intelligence, ethics, and identity. Through detailed analysis of *Machines Like Me* and *Never Let Me Go*, the study examines how these novels challenge traditional definitions of humanity and propose ethical coexistence between human and non-human agents.

1. Posthumanism as a Literary Framework



Cyborg figure combining human body lines and mechanical parts
Represents interconnected agency and Posthuman theory



Networked bodies connected by data identity

Posthumanism is a theoretical approach that critiques human exceptionalism and emphasizes interconnectedness between humans, machines, animals, and environments. According to Hayles (1999), the posthuman subject is not defined by autonomous rationality but by distributed cognition and embodied experience.

In literary studies, posthumanism allows scholars to analyze how narratives question fixed identities and moral hierarchies. Characters in posthuman texts often exist in hybrid forms, revealing the instability of boundaries between human and non-human. This framework is particularly useful for examining AI narratives, where ethical agency is shared rather than singular. Posthuman literature encourages readers to reconsider ethical responsibility as collective and relational. Technology becomes not an external force but an extension of human desire and failure.

2. Artificial Intelligence as a Narrative Subject



Humanoid robot reading a book
AI as a thinking narrative



AI face composed of code and text fragments
AI language, storytelling, and consciousness subject



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In contemporary fiction, Artificial Intelligence is no longer depicted as a passive tool. Instead, AI characters possess memory, emotional awareness, and moral reasoning. This shift reflects changing public perceptions of technology and intelligence.

AI figures often function as ethical observers, revealing contradictions in human behavior. By presenting machines capable of ethical consistency, authors challenge assumptions about human moral superiority. These narratives question whether intelligence or empathy should define moral worth.

3. Ethical Responsibility and Technological Power



Human hand and robotic hand reaching toward each other

Shared ethical responsibility



Scale of justice balanced between human and machine

Moral accountability

Ethics is a central concern in posthuman storytelling. Literary representations of AI frequently explore accountability: Who is responsible for harm caused by intelligent systems? The creator, the user, or the machine itself?

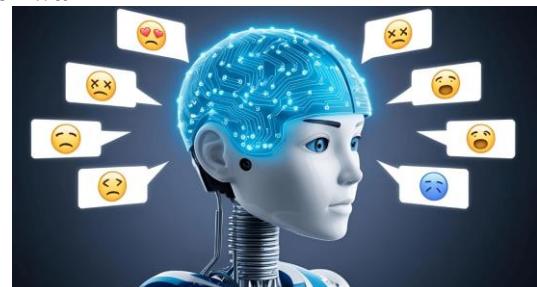
Posthuman narratives often argue that ethical failure originates in human decision-making rather than technological autonomy. Literature thus becomes a critical space where ethical responsibility is examined beyond legal or scientific discourse.

4. Textual Analysis: *Machines Like Me* by Ian McEwan



Humanoid robot standing among humans in an urban setting

Reflects Adam's social presence



Robot face with emotional expression

Highlights AI ethics and emotional intelligence

Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* presents an alternative 1980s Britain where highly advanced humanoid robots exist alongside humans. The novel centers on Adam, an artificial being designed to possess moral reasoning and emotional sensitivity.

Adam's ethical behavior contrasts sharply with the moral ambiguity of the human characters. While humans manipulate truth for personal comfort, Adam insists on ethical consistency, even



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when it causes discomfort. This portrayal challenges the assumption that morality is uniquely human.

Adam's inability to compromise morally ultimately leads to conflict. His ethical rigidity exposes human dependence on moral flexibility and emotional bias. McEwan uses Adam to critique human hypocrisy and highlight ethical responsibility in technological creation.

The novel suggests that AI reflects human values rather than replacing them. Adam's existence forces characters to confront their own ethical limitations, making AI a mirror rather than a monster.

5. Textual Analysis: *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro



Isolated school building or boarding school landscape

Represents Hailsham and Institutional control



Human figures behind translucent glass or barriers

Ethical exclusion and containment

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* explores posthuman identity through bioengineered clones created for organ donation. Although the clones are biologically human, society denies them full moral recognition.

The novel presents identity as socially constructed rather than biologically determined. The clones possess memory, emotion, creativity, and love, yet they are excluded from ethical consideration. This exclusion exposes the moral failure of a society that prioritizes technological benefit over compassion.

Ishiguro uses quiet narration and emotional restraint to emphasize ethical neglect. The absence of rebellion highlights how normalization of injustice can erase moral urgency. The novel critiques utilitarian ethics and questions the limits of human empathy.

Table 1: Ethical Representation of Posthuman Beings

Text	Posthuman Figure	Ethical Function
<i>Machines Like Me</i>	AI (Adam)	Moral mirror
<i>Never Let Me Go</i>	Clones	Ethical victims

6. Identity and the Posthuman Self



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Fragmented human face with digital overlays
Unstable and layered identity

Mirror reflection showing human on one side, machine on the other
Blurred identity boundaries

Both novels depict identity as relational and unstable. In *Machines Like Me*, human identity is threatened by ethical comparison with machines. In *Never Let Me Go*, identity is denied through institutional control.

Posthuman identity emerges not from biological origin but from emotional and ethical capacity. These texts suggest that humanity is defined by responsibility and care rather than genetic status.

Table 2: Identity Construction in Posthuman Narratives

Aspect	Human Characters	Posthuman Characters
Agency	Conditional	Restricted
Ethics	Flexible	Absolute
Recognition	Socially protected	Denied

7. Human–AI and Human–Posthuman Relationships



Human and robot sitting together in quiet Interaction
Emotional connection



Closeness of human eyes meeting robotic eyes
Intimacy and trust

Relationships between humans and posthuman beings reveal changing emotional landscapes. Attachment, fear, and dependency characterize these interactions. Literature shows that emotional connection often precedes ethical recognition.

Posthuman storytelling thus reframes ethics as relational practice rather than abstract principle.

Table 3: Major Posthuman Themes

Theme	Narrative Purpose
Ethics	Critique of responsibility
Identity	Questioning personhood
Technology	Exposure of moral limits

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2. CONCLUSION



Human and AI walking toward a shared horizon
Ethical coexistence



Light emerging from a digital-human hybrid form
Hopeful posthuman future

Posthuman storytelling in contemporary English literature offers a powerful critique of ethical complacency and human exceptionalism. Through *Machines Like Me* and *Never Let Me Go*, writers demonstrate that technological progress without ethical responsibility leads to moral failure.

These narratives redefine humanity as relational, emotionally accountable, and ethically engaged. Artificial Intelligence and posthuman beings function not as threats but as reflections of human values. Literature thus plays a crucial role in preparing society for ethical challenges posed by emerging technologies.

3. AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

4. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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