



THE EVOLUTION OF DYSTOPIAN CONSCIOUSNESS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GEORGE ORWELL'S *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR* AND KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *KLARA AND THE SUN*

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Abstract

Dystopian fiction has continually changed in response to the anxieties of its historical moment. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) represent two distinctive stages in this development. Orwell imagines dystopia primarily through totalitarian government, political surveillance, ideological manipulation, destruction of historical truth, and systematic suppression of individuality. Ishiguro, writing in the twenty-first century, presents a quieter but equally disturbing dystopian world shaped by artificial intelligence, genetic enhancement, social inequality, technological unemployment, competitive education, and emotional isolation. The present paper comparatively examines these novels to understand the evolution of dystopian consciousness from the fear of authoritarian political control to anxieties concerning technologically mediated existence. Winston Smith and Klara occupy radically different positions within their respective societies, yet both provide perspectives through which supposedly progressive social systems are exposed as mechanisms capable of diminishing human freedom and dignity. Orwell warns against a state that consciously destroys individual autonomy, whereas Ishiguro depicts individuals voluntarily participating in systems of technological competition that gradually redefine humanity itself. The comparison demonstrates that dystopian consciousness has not disappeared with changing political circumstances; rather, it has expanded from explicit political oppression to subtler forms of technological, economic, biological, and psychological control.

Keywords

Dystopia, Surveillance, Artificial Intelligence, Technology, Totalitarianism, Genetic Enhancement, Human Identity, George Orwell, Kazuo Ishiguro, etc..

Full Article

Introduction:

Dystopian literature develops from the fear that the social, political, scientific, or technological systems designed to organise human life may ultimately become instruments of domination. Such fiction generally constructs an imagined society in which certain tendencies of the writer's contemporary world have developed into disturbing extremes. The dystopian imagination is therefore simultaneously futuristic and historically grounded. It speculates about what may happen while critically examining what is already happening.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, published in 1949, emerged from the traumatic political environment of the first half of the twentieth century. Fascism, Stalinism, propaganda, censorship, world war, and expanding bureaucratic institutions created intense anxiety about the future of individual liberty. Orwell transforms these anxieties into Oceania, a totalitarian society in which the Party attempts to exercise authority not only over public behaviour but also over language, memory, history, emotion, and thought. Winston Smith's desire to preserve personal memory and objective truth therefore becomes an act of political rebellion.



More than seventy years later, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* presents a markedly different dystopian environment. The novel does not feature an omnipotent dictator comparable to Big Brother, nor does it construct a visibly terrorised society. Its dystopia emerges instead through normalised technological practices. Artificial Friends are purchased as companions for children; genetic modification or "lifting" determines educational opportunity; machines have replaced human workers; and families make extraordinary technological choices because they fear their children will lose social status. Ishiguro's future is disturbing precisely because its inhabitants rarely recognise it as dystopian.

This difference suggests an evolution in dystopian consciousness. Orwell's central question is how political power may destroy human freedom. Ishiguro's novel asks what may happen when technology, competition, artificial intelligence, and biological enhancement alter the very definition of the human. The movement from Orwell to Ishiguro thus indicates a shift from fear of the authoritarian state toward anxiety about systems that individuals themselves accept in pursuit of convenience, success, companionship, and social advantage.

Orwell's Political Dystopia: Surveillance and the Destruction of the Individual:

The world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is founded upon surveillance. Winston Smith lives under the constant possibility of observation through the telescreen. The Party's famous declaration, "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (Orwell 3), summarises the psychological structure of Oceania. Surveillance does not merely discover rebellion after it occurs; it forces citizens to regulate their behaviour before rebellion can become visible.

The result is the destruction of privacy. Winston understands that even facial expressions can potentially betray unacceptable thoughts. The Party therefore seeks to erase the distinction between public and private existence. An individual who cannot possess a private space eventually struggles to maintain a private identity.

Orwell connects surveillance with control over truth. Winston works at the Ministry of Truth, where historical records are continually rewritten. Events that contradict current Party policy disappear from newspapers and archives. Consequently, history ceases to function as collective memory and becomes a political product. Winston recognises the frightening implications of this process when he reflects that the past is altered while the alteration itself is forgotten (Orwell, 74).

The manipulation of historical truth leads to one of Orwell's most important observations about power: domination becomes complete when individuals lose the ability to compare official statements with independent evidence. The Party does not merely demand obedience. It attempts to determine what counts as reality.

Language becomes another instrument of this process. Newspeak progressively reduces vocabulary so that politically dangerous thoughts will become increasingly difficult to formulate. Syme enthusiastically explains the logic of destroying words because the eventual objective is to narrow the range of thought (Orwell, 51). Language, which ordinarily enables intellectual expression, is redesigned to restrict it.

Winston's rebellion is therefore fundamentally a defence of consciousness. His diary, his memories, his relationship with Julia, and his insistence that objective reality exists are different aspects of the same resistance. His famous conviction that freedom includes the freedom to affirm that two plus two equals four (Orwell, 81) represents the connection between truth and liberty. If political authority can force an individual to deny an elementary truth, the independent self has effectively been conquered.

***Klara and the Sun*: The Emergence of Technological Dystopia:**

Ishiguro's dystopian world operates through considerably different mechanisms. There is no identifiable Party controlling every citizen. Instead, technological systems have become embedded



in everyday social life. Klara herself represents this transformation. She is an Artificial Friend created to provide companionship to children. Yet the novel complicates the conventional distinction between human and machine because Klara displays remarkable observation, loyalty, curiosity, faith, and emotional commitment.

From the beginning, Klara studies human behaviour from the window of the store. Her limited but attentive perspective allows readers to observe society from outside ordinary human assumptions. She notices patterns of loneliness, competition, affection, fear, and exclusion that human characters often accept without question.

The presence of Artificial Friends suggests that technological advancement has not eliminated loneliness. On the contrary, society has become sufficiently fragmented that artificial companionship has developed into a commercial necessity. Klara is simultaneously companion and commodity. She possesses qualities that resemble emotional sensitivity, but she can still be purchased, owned, replaced, and eventually discarded.

The genetic enhancement of children represents an even more troubling aspect of Ishiguro's dystopia. Certain children are "lifted" in order to improve their intellectual abilities and educational prospects. The procedure creates a division between enhanced and unenhanced children. Rick, who has not been lifted, possesses intelligence and creativity, yet his future opportunities are restricted because institutions privilege genetically enhanced students.

Josie represents the human cost of this system. Her lifting has given her educational advantages but has also contributed to serious illness. The family has already experienced tragedy through the death of Sal, Josie's sister. Nevertheless, the pressure to participate in genetic enhancement is so powerful that parents continue to accept its dangers.

The dystopian structure is therefore maintained not primarily by political coercion but by social competition. Parents fear that refusing technological enhancement will disadvantage their children. The system reproduces itself because individual families make apparently rational choices within an unequal social structure.

From the Telescreen to Artificial Intelligence:

The comparison between Orwell and Ishiguro reveals a major transformation in the literary imagination of technology. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, technology belongs primarily to the state. The telescreen observes citizens, microphones capture conversations, and administrative machinery enables the continuous rewriting of history. Technology strengthens an already authoritarian political system.

In *Klara and the Sun*, by contrast, technology enters the intimate spaces of family and identity. Klara is not an obvious instrument of political surveillance. She is invited into the home because she promises friendship and emotional support. Genetic technology is similarly accepted because it promises educational success.

This contrast marks an important development in dystopian consciousness. Orwell imagines people being controlled through technologies imposed upon them. Ishiguro imagines people willingly integrating potentially dehumanising technologies into their lives.

The most unsettling example occurs in the plan devised in case Josie dies. Klara is expected not simply to resemble Josie but potentially to continue her existence by learning her behaviour with extraordinary precision. Mr. Capaldi's project assumes that human individuality may ultimately be reproducible if enough information about a person can be captured.

This raises a question more existential than Orwell's political concern: can human identity be converted into information? If behaviour, speech, memory, and personality can be technologically reproduced, does an irreducible human self remain?



Klara gradually arrives at an alternative understanding. Her experiences suggest that the uniqueness of an individual may not exist as an isolated substance hidden inside that person. It may instead emerge through relationships—through how others love, remember, and respond to that individual. Ishiguro thereby moves dystopian fiction toward posthuman questions concerning consciousness, artificial intelligence, emotional authenticity, and the boundaries of personhood.

Social Hierarchy and Manufactured Inequality:

Both novels portray societies organised through rigid inequality. Oceania is divided among the Inner Party, Outer Party, and proles. Although Party ideology appears collectivist, genuine power remains concentrated within a small ruling group. Winston gradually understands that political hierarchy survives because the Party is interested ultimately in power itself rather than the welfare of citizens.

Ishiguro's hierarchy is less explicit but equally significant. The distinction between lifted and unlifted children creates a technologically manufactured class system. Educational access is increasingly linked to biological enhancement. Rick consequently experiences exclusion not because he lacks intelligence but because his body has not undergone the procedure that society increasingly regards as necessary.

The comparison reveals a shift from ideological hierarchy to techno-meritocratic hierarchy. Orwell's ruling class openly controls resources and information. Ishiguro's society presents inequality as though it were the natural consequence of individual choice, talent, or technological advancement. This makes Ishiguro's dystopia particularly relevant to contemporary anxieties because discrimination can survive without an obvious dictator.

Technological unemployment further intensifies this anxiety. Some adults have been "substituted," indicating that machines have displaced human labour. The word itself is revealing: a person is not simply unemployed but replaced. Human economic value is measured against technological efficiency.

Winston and Klara: Two Forms of Dystopian Consciousness:

Winston and Klara differ radically as protagonists. Winston is human and increasingly conscious of his oppression. Klara is artificial and initially accepts the structure of her world without rebellion. Nevertheless, both function as observers whose perspectives reveal contradictions within their societies.

Winston's consciousness is oppositional. He remembers fragments of a world that existed before complete Party domination and therefore suspects that another reality is possible. His tragedy lies in the fact that the state eventually breaks his resistance. His final acceptance of Big Brother demonstrates the terrifying possibility that political power can penetrate consciousness itself.

Klara's consciousness develops through observation rather than political resistance. She attempts to understand human beings and gradually demonstrates forms of devotion that frequently appear more humane than the behaviour of the humans surrounding her. Her willingness to sacrifice herself for Josie complicates any simple distinction between artificial mechanism and genuine emotional being.

The endings of the two novels consequently produce different forms of dystopian sadness. Winston survives biologically but loses the independent consciousness that once made resistance possible. Klara preserves her memories and emotional understanding but becomes technologically obsolete and is left in the Yard. Orwell imagines the destruction of human individuality by political power; Ishiguro imagines a non-human consciousness capable of devotion being discarded by a consumer society.

The Changing Meaning of Freedom:



Freedom in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is fundamentally political and intellectual. Winston wants the freedom to remember, love, think, speak, and recognise objective reality. The Party destroys each of these freedoms because independent consciousness threatens total power.

Freedom in *Klara and the Sun* is more ambiguous. Characters appear to possess considerable personal choice, yet their decisions are constrained by technological and social expectations. Josie's family can technically refuse lifting, but doing so may jeopardise her future. Rick remains unlifted, but he consequently confronts institutional barriers.

Ishiguro therefore suggests that unfreedom does not always require prohibition. A society can produce conformity by structuring choices so that one option appears necessary for success. This constitutes perhaps the most significant evolution from Orwell's dystopia to Ishiguro's. Orwell fears the command: you must obey. Ishiguro examines a world governed increasingly by the assumption: you are free to refuse, but you may not be able to afford the consequences.

Human Relationships as Resistance:

Despite their pessimism, both novels locate remnants of humanity in personal relationships. Winston's relationship with Julia initially gives him a private world beyond Party control. Their physical intimacy becomes politically meaningful because spontaneous desire contradicts the Party's attempt to regulate emotion.

Yet Orwell ultimately demonstrates the vulnerability of such relationships under extreme coercion. In Room 101, Winston betrays Julia when confronted with his greatest fear. The Party triumphs because it destroys loyalty between individuals and redirects emotional allegiance toward Big Brother.

Ishiguro treats relationality differently. Klara's devotion to Josie survives without institutional recognition or reward. Her behaviour suggests that care may possess value independently of biological origin. The irony is powerful: a technologically manufactured being becomes one of the novel's strongest representatives of loyalty, sacrifice, and faith.

Thus, while Orwell fears that oppressive systems can eliminate genuine human connection, Ishiguro asks whether human qualities might survive beyond the biological human. The dystopian tradition consequently develops from protecting human beings against political dehumanisation toward questioning what "human" itself means in an age of artificial intelligence.

Findings and Results:

The comparative study establishes that dystopian consciousness has undergone substantial transformation between the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Orwell's dystopian imagination is dominated by political centralisation, surveillance, propaganda, censorship, linguistic manipulation, and physical coercion. His primary fear concerns the destruction of the autonomous individual by an authoritarian state.

Ishiguro retains the dystopian concern with autonomy but relocates its sources. Artificial intelligence, genetic enhancement, technological unemployment, educational competition, consumer culture, and social isolation create forms of inequality that do not depend upon a visible dictatorship. Technological progress therefore becomes inseparable from ethical questions about who benefits, who is excluded, and what forms of humanity may disappear.

A second major finding concerns the evolution of control. Orwellian control is largely compulsory; Ishiguro's control is frequently participatory. Citizens of Oceania know that disobedience is dangerous. Families in Ishiguro's society often participate voluntarily in technological systems because participation appears necessary for social advancement.

Third, both novels demonstrate that dystopia ultimately concerns consciousness. Orwell investigates whether independent thought can survive systematic ideological manipulation. Ishiguro



asks whether human consciousness remains unique when artificial beings can observe, remember, reason, care, and apparently love.

Finally, both works demonstrate that technological progress cannot be evaluated independently from power. A telescreen, genetic enhancement, or artificial intelligence acquires dystopian significance not merely because it is technologically sophisticated but because of the social relationships in which it operates.

Conclusion:

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* provide two historically distinct but intellectually connected visions of dystopian society. Orwell responds to twentieth-century fears of totalitarian government by constructing a world where surveillance, propaganda, censorship, linguistic manipulation, and torture enable the state to invade the individual mind. Winston Smith's destruction demonstrates the vulnerability of personal truth when political power claims authority over reality itself.

Ishiguro's twenty-first-century dystopia is quieter and more ambiguous. His characters are not constantly ordered by a Big Brother figure. Instead, they inhabit a world in which artificial companionship, genetic enhancement, automation, and technological competition have become ordinary. The dangers emerge not from technology alone but from the social values governing its use. Human beings risk becoming commodities, workers become substitutable, children become biologically competitive projects, and artificial beings may display emotional qualities that society itself has begun to neglect.

The evolution from Orwell to Ishiguro consequently represents a movement from political dystopia to technological and post-human dystopia, without entirely abandoning the earlier concern with power. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* asks what happens when the state controls human thought. *Klara and the Sun* asks what happens when technological systems begin altering the conditions under which humanity understands intelligence, achievement, companionship, and identity.

The most important continuity between the novels is therefore their warning against surrendering human judgement to systems of power. Orwell warns against believing whatever authority declares to be true. Ishiguro warns against assuming that everything technologically possible is necessarily desirable. Read together, the novels demonstrate that dystopian consciousness evolves because the structures capable of limiting human freedom also evolve. The telescreen and the Artificial Friend belong to different historical imaginations, but both compel readers to examine the relationship between technology and power. The enduring function of dystopian literature is thus not merely to predict frightening futures but to make readers critically conscious of the values, institutions, and technologies through which such futures might gradually become normal.

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