

Human Interaction with Artificial Life in the Digital Age: Literary Representations and Contemporary Perspectives

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 08 Apr 2026; Received in revised form: 06 May 2026; Accepted: 11 May 2026; Available online: 14 May 2026</p> <p>©2026 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords – Artificial Life, Artificial Intelligence, Speculative Fiction, Human-Technology Interaction, Posthumanism, Ethics of Technology, Contemporary Literature.</p>	<p><i>The growing presence of artificial intelligence and advanced technologies has significantly shaped contemporary human life. From digital assistants and automated systems to emerging forms of artificial intelligence, people today interact with technology in ways that were once imagined only in speculative fiction. This paper explores how contemporary literature reflects and responds to these changing relationships between humans and artificial life. It focuses particularly on how speculative fiction portrays both the possibilities and the concerns surrounding technological advancement. Drawing on works such as <i>Never Let Me Go</i>, <i>Klara and the Sun</i>, and <i>Oryx and Crake</i>, this paper examines how artificial beings are represented within human society and how characters respond to their presence. In these narratives, artificial life appears in different forms, including clones, artificial companions, and genetically engineered beings. While some of these representations highlight the potential benefits of artificial life, such as companionship, assistance, and technological progress, others reveal deeper anxieties surrounding ethical responsibility, control, and the possible consequences of scientific experimentation. By connecting literary representations with contemporary experiences of technology, this paper argues that speculative fiction provides an important space for reflecting on society's hopes and fears about artificial life. These texts not only imagine future possibilities but also encourage readers to critically consider how humans interact with technology in the present. In this way, literature becomes a meaningful site for exploring the complex relationship between humanity, ethics, and technological innovation in the digital age.</i></p>

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of artificial life has gained significant relevance in the contemporary digital age, where rapid technological advancements continue to reshape human existence and interaction. Artificial life, understood as the simulation or creation of life-

like processes through computational or biotechnological means, extends beyond mechanical function to engage with questions of consciousness, emotion, and identity. Simultaneously, the digital age represents a period marked by the deep integration of technology into everyday life, transforming how

individuals communicate, think, and relate to one another. Within this evolving landscape, human beings actively adapt to and co-evolve with technological systems.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the emerging gap between the natural development of human cognition and its increasing mediation through digital environments. It explores how these transformations influence perception, relationships, and the formation of meaning in contemporary society. These concerns are further situated within the framework of speculative fiction, a literary mode that offers a critical space for imagining the consequences of technological advancement. As Margaret Atwood suggests, speculative fiction does not deal with the impossible, but rather with scenarios grounded in realities that could plausibly occur in the near future, making it especially relevant to discussions of artificial life.

While technological developments have enhanced global connectivity and access to knowledge, they have also generated significant concerns. The growing dependence on digital technologies, particularly among younger generations, raises questions about the decline of independent thought and the weakening of authentic human relationships. Increasing reliance on mediated communication can limit opportunities for meaningful interpersonal engagement and reshape cognitive processes. Moreover, the emergence of artificial entities capable of simulating emotional interaction challenges traditional understandings of connection, authenticity, and emotional fulfillment.

These developments highlight broader ethical concerns surrounding artificial life, including issues of control, agency, and responsibility. As humans continue to create and interact with increasingly sophisticated artificial systems, it becomes necessary to critically examine the implications of these relationships.

In this context, the present study contributes to ongoing discourse by analyzing selected literary texts that represent artificial beings and their interactions with humans. Through this analysis, the paper seeks to demonstrate how literature not only reflects technological change but also critically

engages with its impact on human identity and social relationships in the digital age.

II. ARTIFICIAL LIFE IN SPECULATIVE FICTION

Artificial life in literature can be understood as the representation of human-made or simulated beings that display biological, cognitive, or emotional qualities. In speculative fiction, these figures are not merely technological inventions but serve as important narrative tools through which writers explore questions of identity, consciousness, and the shifting relationship between humans and technology. As Margaret Atwood suggests, speculative fiction engages with “what if?” scenarios that remain within the realm of possibility, exploring alternative futures and societies that could plausibly emerge from existing conditions. This makes the genre especially relevant for examining artificial life in a near-future context.

Writers such as Kazuo Ishiguro use artificial beings not simply to imagine the future, but to reflect more deeply on human nature itself. These characters often blur the distinction between what is considered “natural” and “artificial,” prompting readers to question what truly defines a human being. In this sense, Judith Butler’s concept of *Performativity* becomes useful, as she argues that identity is not something fixed or innate but something formed through repeated actions and social practices. When artificial beings are taught to love, obey, or respond emotionally, it raises the question of whether human emotions are, to some extent, learned and performed rather than purely natural.

From a deconstructionist perspective, as developed by Jacques Derrida, the boundary between human and non-human becomes unstable. Derrida suggests that such binary oppositions are never fully secure and always depend on one another for meaning. In literary texts, artificial beings often embody both constructedness and emotional depth, thereby unsettling the idea that humanity is something fixed or clearly defined.

At the same time, these characters allow writers to explore human emotions in a more controlled and simplified way. Feelings such as love, loneliness, and devotion often appear more direct or

intensified in artificial beings, which, in turn, highlight the complexity and contradictions within human emotional life. Moreover, artificial life frequently reflects contemporary anxieties about the digital age, including technological dependence, emotional isolation, and weakening human relationships. Interestingly, artificial beings are sometimes portrayed as more consistent or emotionally reliable than humans, which subtly exposes human vulnerability and moral inconsistency.

III. REPRESENTATION OF ARTIFICIAL LIFE IN SELECTED TEXTS

A useful way to understand the representation of artificial life across *Oryx and Crake*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *Klara and the Sun* is to examine the shifting dynamics of creation, conditioning, and companionship. In *Oryx and Crake*, artificial life takes the form of the Crakers, who are fully engineered beings designed to replace what is seen as flawed humanity. Here, the relationship between humans and artificial life is clearly top-down, with Crake occupying a position of near-total authority, almost like a creator figure. Artificial life, in this sense, remains something distant something made and controlled.

In *Never Let Me Go*, however, the situation becomes more complex. The clones are biologically human, yet they are raised and conditioned to accept a fixed and limited existence as organ donors. Unlike the overt control in Atwood's novel, the power structure here feels quieter, almost normalised. Society does not openly justify what it is doing, but it does not resist either. There is a kind of emotional distancing that allows this system to continue. Artificial life here is not entirely "other," but it is also never fully accepted as human. This dynamic shifts again in *Klara and the Sun*, where artificial life becomes much more intimate. Klara, though clearly non-human, develops emotional awareness and forms close bonds with the people around her. What is interesting is that she is not only controlled or used, but also relied upon. Humans begin to depend on her emotionally, which complicates the usual idea of human superiority. The relationship starts to feel less hierarchical and more intertwined, even if the

imbalance of power still exists. Looking across these texts, there seems to be a progression from creating life, to controlling it, and then to emotionally depending on it. This also leads to a deeper question: who actually appears more "human"? In *Oryx and Crake*, human actions are often destructive and manipulative, while the Crakers are presented as relatively innocent. In *Never Let Me Go*, the clones show empathy, love, and loyalty, even though they are denied recognition. Similarly, in *Klara and the Sun*, Klara's quiet devotion often feels more genuine than human emotional responses. In this sense, artificial beings begin to perform "humanity" more convincingly than humans themselves. As Judith Butler suggests, identity can be seen as something performed rather than fixed, and these texts seem to support that idea. At the same time, the line between human and artificial becomes harder to define, which connects to Jacques Derrida's argument that such distinctions are never fully stable.

Finally, these representations raise important ethical concerns. In *Oryx and Crake*, the attempt to fully control and perfect life ends in destruction, suggesting the limits of human authority. *Never Let Me Go* presents a different kind of ethical problem, where injustice is quietly accepted rather than openly challenged. In *Klara and the Sun*, the issue becomes more complicated, as humans rely on artificial beings for emotional support while still maintaining control over them. Taken together, these texts suggest that as artificial life becomes more integrated into human existence, it does not necessarily lead to better ethical understanding; instead, it reveals certain weaknesses and uncertainties in human moral thinking.

IV. HUMAN RESPONSES AND EMOTIONAL DYNAMICS

The representation of artificial life in these texts naturally leads to a more complex question: how do humans actually respond to these beings on an emotional level? The answer is not straightforward. Human reactions tend to move between acceptance and unease, often existing somewhere in between rather than settling into a clear position. While artificial life is, in many cases, integrated into everyday structures, this integration does not necessarily mean that it is fully accepted. Instead,

there remains a quiet tension and awareness that these beings are both familiar and fundamentally different. This ambiguity becomes more visible when considering the emotional attachments that develop between humans and artificial beings. In *Klara and the Sun*, for instance, Klara is not treated merely as a functional object but becomes emotionally significant within the household. The bond that forms is gentle and, at times, deeply affecting, yet it is also marked by an underlying imbalance. Klara's care appears constant and unwavering, while human responses remain more uncertain and conditional. This raises an important question about the nature of such attachment: whether it reflects a genuine emotional connection or is, to some extent, shaped by projection and need. At the same time, these attachments are often closely tied to experiences of loneliness. Artificial companions seem to emerge most meaningfully in spaces where human connection is already fragile or lacking. Rather than replacing loneliness entirely, they tend to reorganize it. The presence of artificial life can make isolation feel less immediate, even more manageable, but it does not fully resolve the deeper absence of reciprocal human relationships. In this sense, artificial beings do not eliminate loneliness; they coexist with it, sometimes even making its presence less visible.

This dynamic gradually extends into a form of dependency. As artificial beings become more integrated into emotional life, humans begin to rely on them not only for assistance but also for stability and comfort. This reliance is not always explicit it develops slowly, almost unnoticed. The consistency and predictability of artificial companionship can appear reassuring, especially when contrasted with the uncertainty and complexity of human relationships. Over time, this may contribute to a subtle shift in which artificial interactions begin to replace more demanding, and often less controllable, human connections.

What emerges from this is a tension between comfort and illusion. Artificial life offers a kind of emotional safety in interactions that are structured, responsive, and largely free from conflict. However, this sense of comfort may also be constructed, grounded in systems that simulate rather than fully experience emotion. The connection feels real in the moment, yet it remains shaped by design and

limitation. As a result, the distinction between genuine emotional engagement and its imitation becomes increasingly difficult to define. Across these texts, human responses to artificial life are marked by this ongoing instability. Acceptance is never complete, attachment is never entirely secure, and comfort is often accompanied by uncertainty. These emotional dynamics suggest that as artificial life becomes more embedded in human experience, it does not simply transform relationships it complicates them, revealing both the desire for connection and the difficulty of sustaining it in an increasingly mediated world.

V. CONCLUSION

The exploration of artificial life in these texts ultimately reveals less about technology itself and more about the shifting nature of human experience. Through different forms, whether it is the controlled creation of the Crakers, the quiet suffering of the clones, or the emotional presence of Klara, these narratives bring forward questions that do not settle easily. They show that the relationship between humans and artificial beings is not simply about progress or innovation, but about how people choose to respond, adapt, and sometimes avoid confronting what they have created. Across these works, a pattern becomes visible. Artificial life is first imagined as something to be made and controlled, but gradually it becomes something that humans live with, depend on, and even form emotional connections with. This shift is not entirely comfortable. While there is a sense of advancement, there is also a subtle loss of clarity, of boundaries, and perhaps even of certain forms of human connection that are harder to maintain in increasingly mediated environments. At the same time, these texts do not present artificial life as entirely negative or threatening. In many instances, artificial beings appear more consistent, more attentive, and even more emotionally present than humans themselves. This contrast is not accidental. It reflects a deeper uncertainty about human nature its limitations, its contradictions, and its tendency to create systems it does not fully understand or take responsibility for. What makes these narratives particularly significant is that they do not offer clear answers. Instead, they leave behind a sense of unease and reflection. The future they suggest does not feel

distant; it feels close, already beginning in small and almost unnoticeable ways. In this sense, speculative fiction becomes less about imagining what is to come and more about paying attention to what is already changing. In the end, the question is not only whether artificial life can become more human, but whether humans can continue to recognise and preserve what it means to be human in the first place. And that is something these texts leave open perhaps deliberately without fully resolving it.

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