

Messengers from the Stars: On Science Fiction and Fantasy

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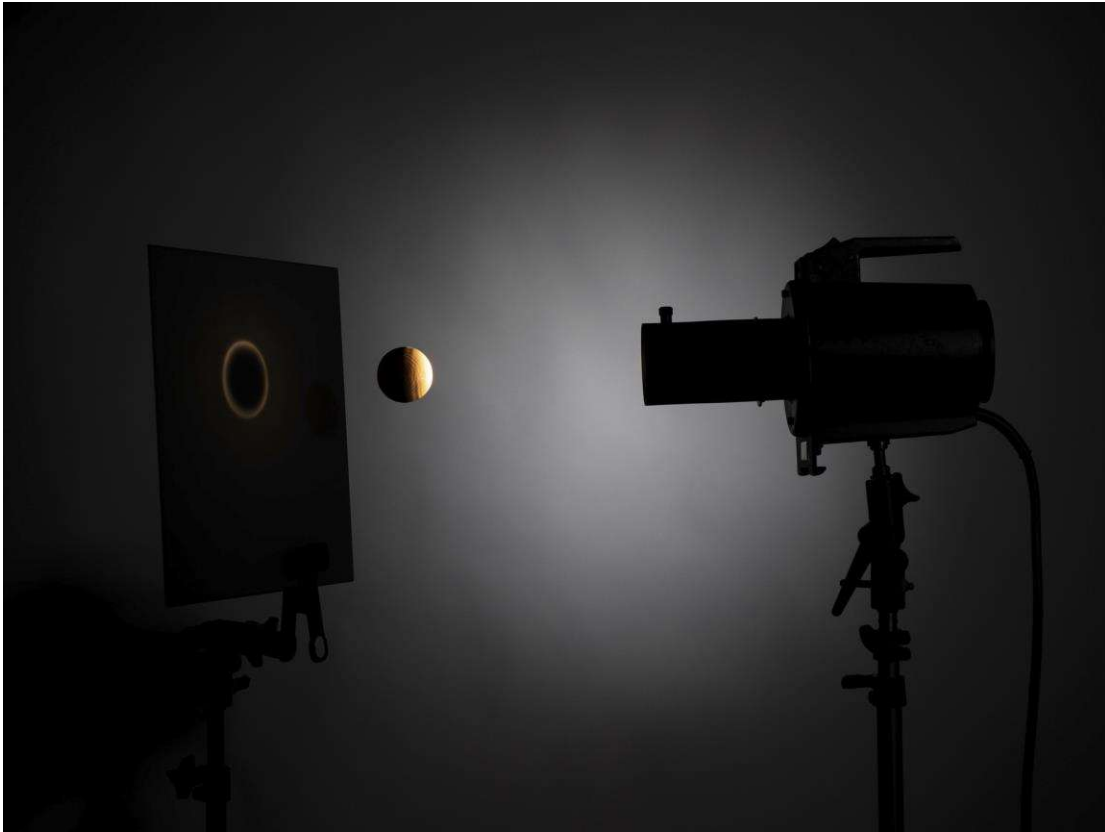


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Ecocritical Approach toward Ustopias: Divergent Attitudes towards Scientific Advancement in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun* and Emily Mandel’s *Station Eleven*

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Abstract | Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun* (2021) shows the world from a high-tech Artificial Friend’s perspective who discovers the miraculous nature of the sun and fights the pollution caused by technological advancements. In a contrasting manner, Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* (2014) is set twenty years after the breakout of the lethal “Georgia flu” and narrates the miseries of humankind in a clean world where the sun and stars can be seen more vividly than ever, but technological advancement and medicine have become elements of the past. While both novels are set in dystopian futures where humanity is threatened, their depicted dystopias are radically different. Their approaches towards technological advancements radically differ; however, the premonitions they carry, which are the collapse of humankind and irreversibly environmental damage in the future, is the same. Both works belonging to the genre of “ustopia,” a word coined by Margaret Atwood, express anxiety and hope in their subtle idiosyncratic ways despite their divergent attitudes towards science and technology.

This study aims to read these two novels comparatively from an ecocritical perspective and draw on psychoanalysis to illuminate the root of the expressed anxiety in these works. Moreover, the article shows how modern ustopias embrace hope for humankind's survival in times of crisis and delineate how it could be preserved by drawing on these two novels. In the end, the paper points out the ostensibly different ways of damage control proposed by ustopias that would keep humankind and humanity alive even in a post-apocalyptic world.

Keywords | Ustopia; pandemic literature; technology; social engineering; science fiction.



1. Introduction

Dystopian fiction delineates humankind's worst nightmares from different perspectives and mainly attempts to warn people about the threats hidden in different scientific, political, and social advancements. On the other hand, utopian fiction shows the perfection that human life could achieve by attending to a crisis and resolving the issues to create a world where nightmarish visions are overcome. To refer to utopian or dystopian works, Margaret Atwood, the author of several great literary works in the genres, coins the word "ustopia" in *Dire Cartographies* (2015) to refer to works that depict "the imagined perfect society and its opposite" (n.pg.). As she later states, she believes that there is "within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia" (n.pg.). Although ustopian fictional works do not necessarily carry the same admonitions or align with each other thematically, they share two communal elements: deeply rooted anxiety of disruption and genuine hope for circumvention of impending disastrous outcomes.

Humankind's environment is of great significance in ustopias regardless of their themes, settings, or different perspectives. This attention paid to the surroundings can be traced from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) to Ishiguro's latest novel, *Klara and the Sun* (2021). The fear of getting too attached to technological advancements, forgetting to live without them, and changing the natural orders as well as causing irreversible damage to the environment has been one of the most highlighted themes in ustopias; however, every premonition regarding the disastrous consequences of technological advancement carries a subtle fascination with technology in its heart and vice versa. Emily Mandel's *Station Eleven* post-pandemic world and Ishiguro's

Klara and the Sun depict societies where humankind's extinction is probable, and both narratives can be categorized as dystopias. While Ishiguro's novel is set in a high-tech world of lifted children and Cooings Machines, Emily Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) depicts the everyday hardships in a post-pandemic world after humankind lost all the technological advancements due to the death of seven billion people to the Georgia Flu. The contrast between the two narratives highlights the affinity between their fear of human extinction under two drastically different circumstances. Studying two narratives that show divergent attitudes towards technology while expressing the same anxieties shows how technological advancements could become as threatening as pandemics.

Kazuo Ishiguro's latest novel narrates the story of an atomized world from a high-tech robot's perspective. Klara, the robot, is an Artificial Friend (AF) that can only be purchased by high-rank people whose offspring could get lifted by genetic engineering and have robots as friends. Besides creating a new hierarchical order in society, the lifting process's side effects could put some children's health at risk. This new world has also deprived children of schools and provided them with manufactured AFs. The narrative repeatedly mentions the sun, introduces it as a source of clean power with healing effects, and even allows Klara to personify it by calling it "the Sun". The rivalry between the Cooings Machine as the primary source of air pollution and the Sun invites the reader to ecological consciousness by reminding them of the healing power of a nature that is being destroyed by manufactured technological advancements. However, since Klara is also a machine, technology is a double-edged sword rather than a foul destructive element. As stated by Fredrick Turner, "at its best, technology is for us an euphoric escape from nature; at its worst, a diabolical destruction of it" (Glotfelty and Fromm 45). Klara, the meticulous AF, can be regarded as the source of new hope for humanity because she is too naïve to be affected by the disruptions in society. While human society feels lost and hopeless, Klara sees excellent potential in humankind with her "unusual insight" and "observational abilities" (Ishiguro 268).

Taking a divergent path towards creating a dystopian vision, Emily Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) depicts a world devoid of technology twenty years after the outbreak of the Georgia Flu that eradicated the majority of the human population and pushed the remaining society into a struggle for survival without electricity, medicine, and technology. Many celebrated modern dystopias are built upon the theme of the

dangers of scientific and technological advancements and view “technology as either alien or brethren” (Glotfelty and Fromm 78). *Station Eleven*’s realistic attitude towards a world without technology reveals the contemporary irretrievable dependency on scientific advancements despite their negative impact. While most utopias regard technology and modern science as the sources of division and social atomization, *Station Eleven* shows how technology-driven societies fail to function without them. Away from the idealistic view that humankind could live on cleaner earth and go back to the pre-technology era if they lost their inventions, Mandel’s work shows how, even after twenty years of being deprived of them, recreating technology becomes necessary to find other communities and rebuild civilization. The work is thematically close to Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826), set in the twenty-first century, where an unknown lethal disease eliminates all people and makes all human efforts meaningless. This study reads *Klara and the Sun* and *Station Eleven* comparatively in the light of ecocriticism to later – by applying psychoanalysis – find the type and root of the expressed anxieties in them.

2. The Double-Edged Sword of Technology

Scientific advancements have been “a source of both hope and fear” in modern literary works since they provide humankind with “solutions that only generate new problems, as in the bioethical riddles spawned by genetic engineering” (Glotfelty and Fromm 79). Humankind lost the hardly gained trust in science that had developed throughout centuries upon encountering the aftermaths of the horrendous incidents of the twentieth century. Two World Wars, the Cold War, the outbreak of the Spanish flu, the drought of the Dust Bowl, the Great Chinese Famine, the Second Indochina War, and the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki shattered all the high hopes that had flourished as a result of trusting scientific advancements and civilized diplomacy. In the twentieth century, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse rode their unstoppable galloping horses, but in the end, there came no dramatic Apocalypse but only more miseries. It was proved that the world would not literally come to an end, even when pestilence, war, famine, and death were gathered; therefore, apocalyptic visions changed. By delving into scientific findings, humankind, the most self-centered species, realized that their extinction does not necessarily coincide with the end of the world; however, recognizing the probability of extinction fuelled a new fear that

revealed itself in various science fiction works. Genese Marie Sodikoff, in *The Anthropology of Extinction: Essays on Culture and Species Death* (2011), states:

The sixth extinction is neither abrupt nor spectacular. No smashing asteroids or giant volcanic eruptions. No global pandemics as yet. Only the slow, cumulative effects of greenhouse gases, rain forest depletion, and a brand of imperialism that extols the virtues of high mass consumption. (2)

When Sodikoff's book was published in 2011, the earth had not yet encountered the COVID-19 pandemic or the extreme heatwave of 2021 that increased the temperature in Antarctica to 18.3 celsius. Nevertheless, the probability of "the six extinction" seems much higher from our outlook in 2021. Although today's world's ecological crisis seems threatening, *Station Eleven's* post-apocalyptic vision shows how humankind could continue surviving on this planet, even after losing seven billion people, by staying rational and maintaining genuine hope.

As stated by Shane Hall, "climate change, pandemics, and terrorism all disrupt dominant social, economic, and political relations, and call into question the taken-for-granted boundaries that discipline populations" (Slovic et al. 135). The society in *Station Eleven* survives the pandemic despite the tremendous outbreak of the Georgia Flu but fails to function efficiently since the means of restoring order have been eliminated. Twenty years after the lethal virus outbreak, uninfected people continue to struggle to find a way to find other communities with which they can re-establish the pre-outbreak institutions and increase their chance of survival. Marco Caracciolo coins the term "negative strategy" to describe a novel concept in new utopias whose portrayal of the aftermath has shifted from apocalyptic visions to a more accurate depiction of humankind and humanity's situations in a world after a major disruption:

...the emphasis falls not on apocalypse as a plot device, but on its power to disrupt the protagonists' experience of reality—and particularly their sense of a sharp demarcation between human societies and nonhuman things and processes. This conceptual destabilization is an effect of what I call "negative strategies": the postworld emerges as the narrative negates (i.e., subtracts or pares down) some of the salient characteristics of the pre-world—features with which readers are familiar through their everyday reality. (223)

Caracciolo then draws on linguistics and the psychological effects of negation on the human mind to express that dystopias “evoke the post-world as a negation of the pre-world—a strategy that, as a matter of fact, affirms the pre-world while foregrounding its absence in affectively charged terms” (226). *Station Eleven* and *Klara and the Sun* both depict a world different from ours, to subtly mention the elements whose disappearance could affect human life. Despite being different in nature, pandemics and dependency on technology become the same threatening agents that could, as Caracciolo puts it, “disrupt” our world.

Reading these narratives brings us the critical inquiry regarding the depicted circumstances: Could their visions of the future be prevented in real life? As stated by Atwood, dystopias attempt to answer critical questions; “how badly have we messed up the planet? Can we dig ourselves out? What would a species-wide self-rescue effort look like if played out in actuality?” The twenty-first-century reader, aware of rapid climate changes and scientific advancements, feels close to the crisis yet cannot avert the crisis. Although the narratives depict fictional realities, their closeness to the twenty-first-century’s objective reality deepens the anxiety of the impending disruption in the reader’s mind.

Surprisingly, the premonition of technological advancement carries a subtle fascination with scientific discoveries and inventions that reveal the tremendous potentials of the human mind. Giving credit to Klara’s meticulous nature is appraising the human mind for creating an AF that would remind humans of their potential, regardless of their desperate situation caused by the irreversible damage they have done to nature and the environment. The nightmarish visions of technology can be traced back to the eighteenth century after the Industrial Revolution, when many workers felt their jobs were threatened by new modes of production that deployed technological advancements. The English Luddites of the late eighteenth century tended to stop any changes by breaking manufacturing equipment, and ever since the word Luddite has become a term to describe those opposing technological advancements and disagreeing with progress. As it can be inferred, the Luddism found in works such as *Klara and the Sun* and Richard K. Morgan’s cyberpunk novel, *Altered Carbon* (2002), is more a critique of class division rather than of technology itself. The works assume that the technological advancements must be distributed among individuals equally; otherwise, they would be harmful to human society as they excessively empower the rich and

weaken the poor. One of the major themes of Ishiguro's novel can be found in Mr. Arthur's idea, which states that "lifted or not, the genuine ability has to get noticed. Unless this world's *completely crazy* now" (Ishiguro 205). These works attempt to answer a critical question: What will the future look like if technological advancements become a means of socioeconomic stratification in the hands of dominant groups?

On the other hand, *Station Eleven* stands far away from Luddism and depicts a world devoid of technology with no antibiotics or chemotherapy. People live on a clean earth, not concerned with global warming or the greenhouse effect, and have equal chances of survival; however, their situation could still lead to the extinction of their species. While *Klara and the Sun* expresses worries about manufactured threats that could be aborted, *Station Eleven* narrates the aftermath of a breakout of a highly lethal virus that is by no means artificial. Mandel's novel goes one step further in showing the anxiety of disrupting the natural order and concentrates on the consequences of a major disruption regardless of its cause. Instead of inducing guilt to the twenty-first-century reader and rebuking them for their dependency on technology that would change the natural order, the narrative summons the power of the human mind to solve an inevitable issue. While some utopias evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of technology and try to propose methods to prevent a disaster, its anticipation in *Station Eleven* makes the readers face their worst nightmares and ponder on them to figure out modes of resilience that could guarantee survival in the face of any kind of life-threatening crisis on earth. Nevertheless, the narrative attempts to answer a critical question: what if the disruption occurs despite all our efforts?

On another level, in several post-extropianist narratives, such as *Klara and the Sun*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), and Richard K. Morgan's cyberpunk *Altered Carbon*, the criticism is not directed towards the technological advancement but its distribution among different classes and communities in society. While the works are not against transhumanism and genetic advancements, they reveal their controversial natures. Just as the indefinite lifespans in *Altered Carbon*, in Ishiguro's novel genetic lifting and purchasing AFs is not available to every family, and they both have consequences. Lucy Perry draws on "the worlds portrayed by Atwood and Houellebecq" to elaborate on "technophilia, technocracy and extropianism" (Adishesiah and Hildyard 166). She states that in their works, "technology consequently becomes a conceit – an extended metaphor for age and its attendant ills,

diminishments, disaffections and malaise” (Adiseshiah and Hildyard 169). Thus, technology in post-extropianist works could be regarded as a symbol of objects that can disrupt the natural order if deployed wrongly.

Furthermore, the concepts are also altered in *Station Eleven*’s post-pandemic world that has drifted back in time. The technology that was a source of pollution and threat in the pre-pandemic world of the narrative is now eliminated. Instead, technology has now become the only hope for the communities to find each other and reconstruct civilization by restoring orders. People in *Station Eleven* are different from those who created technological advancements in the first place because they are familiar with their threats and disadvantages but still choose to restore them. Kristen ponders Sartre’s famous statement that “hell is other people” and poses a question: “If hell is other people, what is a world with almost no people in it” (Mandel Ch.24)? The narrative shows how it would be impossible for the modern Man who has experienced technology to go back in time, indicating that scientific and technological advancements were inevitable and necessary for the populated earth. It is too late for the eight-billion human population to avert changes because, just as Miranda realizes her marriage is too damaged to be mended upon seeing Arthur and Elizabeth together, “it’s too late, and it’s been too late for a while” (Mandel Ch.15). It is too late for humankind to jettison technology after using it to increase lifespan, quality of life, and mass production and, as “the clarinet” realizes, the twenty-first-century human life is different for the seen cannot be unseen:

He’d trotted out his usual arguments, about how Shakespeare had lived in a plague-ridden society with no electricity and so did the Traveling Symphony. But look, she’d told him, the difference was that they’d seen electricity, they’d seen everything, they’d watched a civilization collapse, and Shakespeare hadn’t. (Mandel Ch.49)

Mandel ironically states that “the era of light pollution had come to an end” (Ch. 43), and later highlights the importance of electricity to express that eliminating technological advancements is not the answer to our issues. In Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), social engineering led to establishing a country that would not ply any scientific or technological advancements to cleanse the earth and bring back fertility.

Paradoxically, technology that has become a necessity for the long-term survival of our species harms and threatens our existence. While in *Klara and the Sun*, the pollution produced by the Cootings Machine is discussed, its purpose is never revealed to the readers. The readers are unaware of its significance and necessity, and they only know its pollution prevents sun rays from reaching the earth. What if this machine produces electricity or refines water in their world? However, *Station Eleven* bravely excludes itself from Neo-Luddistic dystopias that show technology as the most threatening factor to human existence by narrating the life before and after the era of technology and science from an objective perspective that shows human's irreversible dependency on the advancements achieved over the last few centuries. *Station Eleven* accepts the disruption and tries to see if this crisis can be managed. Nevertheless, both narratives express anxiety and worries about human life.

3. The Era of Anxiety

A man said to the universe:
“Sir, I exist!”
“However,” replied the universe,
“The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation.”

Before the Copernican Revolution church had convinced people to be the central figures in the world and humans believed themselves to be the sole sublime creature. Modern science and philosophy shattered the idea and proved that the human species were not prioritized from a naturalist point of view, and that nature's ultimate goal exceeded nurturing them. In ancient times, lethal catastrophic events were considered means of punishment, and fortunate natural events were regarded as divine blessings. However, science opened humans' eyes to the indifference of nature towards their species and showed how they were equal to other living parts of the natural system. When science gradually replaced previously established ideas, in Kohutian terms, human's *self object needs*, “internal needs, which must be at least partially met by another person” (Baker and Baker 2), were neglected. Humankind realized that neither rain's blessings nor the catastrophic thunders were reactions to them, and they simply happened for scientific reasons. The realization injured the species narcissistically; thus, technology became the primary means to control the negligent nature.

Subsequently, technological advancements impacted social orders as they changed the modes of production and provided humans with higher quality of life. In explaining the impact of technology on social changes, Lois Defleur draws on Rosenberg to point out Karl Marx's technological determinism and states that Marx "maintained, of course, that ultimately the dominant classes use technology for both ideological and economic ends" (406). The nightmarish use of nuclear physics and other scientific advancements, such as the chemicals used in chemical weapons in the twentieth century, strengthened this theory. Furthermore, the mishaps of the twentieth century ingrained in the human mind the anxiety of disruption, which in today's world is enhanced by rapid changes both in technology and in the environment.

One of the primary sources of anxiety in futuristic fictional works and ustopias is "disintegration anxiety", which is related to eco-anxiety. As stated by Heinz Kohut, "the disintegration anxiety is the anticipation of the breakup of the self" (104). The disintegration anxiety crawls upon the human mind when encountering the fact that the environment does not acknowledge their significance, and their existence is not prioritized. The realization that the world could continue to exist even if they cease to induces anxiety in the human mind. The fear of technological singularity, artificial intelligence's overpowerment of human life, manufactured technological advancements, or eradication by global pandemics and other natural catastrophes highlight the disintegration anxiety since their uniqueness and significance in the world are disregarded.

Eco-anxiety is one of the strongest communal elements in futuristic fiction, where the human condition on earth has deteriorated. This anxiety is camouflaged in various ways in different works; the fear of extinction in *Station Eleven* and *Klara and the Sun* is ultimately a concern over the deterioration of humankind's situation after Man has irreversibly altered the natural order. In one of the most informative articles on anxiety, "Uncertainty and Anticipation in Anxiety" (2013), Dan Grupe and Jack Nitschke differentiate uncertainty from unpredictability and later discuss how uncertainty "is inextricably linked to the phenomenological experience of anxiety arising from unpredictable future events" (489). All the ustopias, whether utopian or dystopian, are saturated with anxiety, and they either try to remind us of the destination our current path will take us or the potential we have to avoid disasters and make a better future.

In *Psychology and Climate Change* (2018), Susan Clayton and Christie Manning study the psychological impact of rapid climate changes on the human psyche. By drawing on abundant studies, they show how these changes induce anxiety and introduce three ways in which “planet wide processes” could affect the individual:

1. Direct impacts related to disasters and acute environmental disruptions
2. Indirect impacts as climate-related issues ripple through societies and cultures, and
3. Vicarious impacts as those distant or buffered from direct impacts experience psychological distress or vicarious trauma. (10.1)

In this regard, writing speculative climate fiction, which has already been impacted in the third way by anticipation, becomes a coping mechanism that deals with the disruption anxiety caused by an impending crisis. Climate fiction, as one of the “therapeutic activities associated with climate change,” becomes an effort “to adapt to changes and mental health impacts” (Clayton and Christie 10.7).

Paul Robbins and Sarah Moore coin the phrase “ecological anxiety disorder” to refer to the human mind’s reaction to the rapid deterioration in the ecosystem, leading to either anthropophobia or autophobia (3). They draw on Jacques Lacan to resolve these anxieties. They discuss how, according to Lacan, anxiety is replaced with fear when the sufferer focuses on a specific object and how this displacement becomes problematic since it concentrates “irrational energy” on “harmless or inevitable objects” rather than on “the unresolvable” (10). They continue to show the problematic nature of this displacement:

In this way, both the anthropobe and the autophobe have replaced the anxiety necessary to scientific inquiry, with phobia (of people or of the self) that is expressed in terms of their inability to explain or act effectively in the face of ecological concerns. The anthropobe despairs: ‘why can’t I convince the world to act before the ecology is impaired beyond recovery?’ Conversely, the autophobe asks, ‘who am I to impose my own vision of the world’s proper structure or function on science?’ (10)

Both of the phobias mentioned above can be found in the selected works in this article; however, *Station Eleven* acknowledges the “inevitable” condition, refrains from Luddism and addresses the anxiety produced from the fear of science’s failure in

controlling a virus's global outbreak. Neither technology nor humankind is blamed for the eradication of seven billion people during the pandemic. Instead, Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *Klara and the Sun* blame scientific advancements but fail to depict the world without the technological advancements they disapprove of and ignore the rewarding utilities of scientific advancements while unveiling their appalling side-effects. The inherent Luddism in Ishiguro's two celebrated novels replaces the anxiety produced by uncertainty with fear, just as mentioned in Robbins and Moore's article.

The anxiety found in the works of the genre resembles the anxiety felt while driving by Mr. X, one of the patients mentioned in Heinz Kohut's *The Restoration of the Self* (2012). Although there had been no problem, the patient recalled that he had started a trail of thoughts about running out of fuel and not getting any help while being on the road. Mr. X's "fantasy" had induced great anxiety in him as he had finally found himself "alone, helpless and powerless" in that scenario (204). However, he had suddenly remembered the stashed gasoline in the trunk and kept dreaming that he would use it to resolve the issues:

He dug into the heap and, by God!, here indeed was the old can – rusty, battered, dilapidated, yet still filled with gasoline – just what he had hope to find, what he needed. The daydream ended with his pouring the gasoline into the tank and driving off again. (204)

The uncertainties of the future induce anxiety in modern people, which pushes their minds to detail the most nightmarish visions of the future and enables creative minds to portray the consequences of today's technological efforts. Nevertheless, a rusty ancient box in our trunk contains one of the most essential elements for human life that has accompanied us since our creation. Hope, the only thing that remained in Pandora's box¹, is the sole remedy for the anxiety of modern humans.

4. The Remedy of Hope

Regardless of the various attitudes in utopias, hope is a common element that embellishes these works because, as stated by Atwood, "we're too hopeful a species"

¹ The expression "Pandora's box" refers to Hesiod's long didactic poem, *Works and Days* (700 BC) in which it is imagined that Pandora let all the evils of the world out but was fast enough to close the lid to preserve hope.

to capitulate to our fears and anxieties. *Klara and the Sun* is full of hope that despite the irretrievable damage humankind has caused to the earth, the everlasting nature never stops granting its healing power. Although Klara consciously decides to destroy the Cootings Machine, it must be noted that Klara is a manufactured artificial intelligence whose wisdom of choice is meant to remind humankind what a marvelous brain they have. When Klara tells Paul about destroying the Cootings Machine in order to help Josie by letting her be exposed to sun rays, he tells her: “Truth is, you’ve started me hoping again” (Ishiguro 202). To describe Klara in Fredrick Turner’s words, she shows “the optimism of the amateur” in her character “just like the flowers growing in the desolation of Mount St. Helens testify to what in human beings we would call a lunatic hopefulness” (Glotfelty and Fromm 45). In the end, Klara perishes, but there is no despair in losing her, and she is happy for she has accomplished her mission as an AF, which was to bring back the hope humankind had forgotten. While in many modern science fiction literary works, artificial intelligence is elevated to human level, in Ishiguro’s work, Klara is simply a high-tech robot that fails to replace Josie despite being able to mimic her; therefore, she is a reminder of the significance of the human mind. Klara’s solutions to the several issues raised throughout the novel show how the human mind can solve problems by maintaining hope as the most human element.

In an ecocritical study on *The Rime of the Modern Mariner* (2011), Pramod Nayar borrows from Donna Haraway to argue that “humans do not evolve outside of nature and lifeforms, they evolve with them,” and adds that “any hope of regeneration, redemption and rescue for the humans can only emerge from acknowledging this embedded, co-evolving nature of humanity” (Slovic et al. 29). As seen in *Station Eleven*, the expressed hope reveals a hankering for reconstructing civilization in an environment that has been cleansed for the last twenty years in the absence of technology and industry. The aide-memoire in *Klara and the Sun* is the intelligence of the human mind remembered when an AF indulges it. In *Station Eleven*, the invisible thread that binds the post-outbreak broke human to the modern-technology-addicted human is cultural achievements; therefore, history, literature, music, and paper books become means of retrieving modernism, modern science, and technological consciousness. Hope becomes vital in ustopias, “Because Survival is Insufficient” (Mandel Ch.11). As stated by Pieter Vermeulen, the novel “juxtaposes its sense of inevitable doom with a resolute hope in the persistence of human culture” (12).

Station Eleven delves deeper into the psychological impact of technology by showing how culture and technology are co-related. The Traveling Symphony used to perform modern plays at the beginning of the post-pandemic era, but later they started performing Shakespeare because it was demanded. While this indicates the perpetuity of Shakespeare, it also shows how taste and mentality vary with social changes. Modern plays responded to the modern era, so by losing all the technological advancements, *Station Eleven*'s new society is by no means considered modern since it has lost its modern institutions and order as well. Ironically, the motto on their lead caravan, "Because life is insufficient," belongs to *Star Trek*. Thus, shifting the performance to Shakespeare does not come from nostalgia but from the hope of restoring all technological achievements. *Station Eleven*'s humans try to cope with the loss of scientific and technological advancements temporarily; therefore, they must remind themselves that centuries ago their kind lived without them. Despite having experienced an era of invention and modern technology, people's actual life in the narrative is closer to the sixteenth-century lifestyle rather than that of the previous generation. Ironically, it is necessary for them to eradicate their pre-pandemic mentality and start thinking like those who lived in the pre-technological eras to regain their pre-pandemic status. This can be best witnessed in an ironic passage in the narrative about the Milky Way's glowing stars:

One of the great scientific questions of Galileo's time was whether the Milky Way was made up of individual stars. Impossible to imagine this ever having been in question in the age of electricity, but the night sky was a wash of light in Galileo's age, and it was a wash of light now. The era of light pollution had come to an end. The increasing brilliance meant the grid was failing, darkness pooling over the earth. (Ch.43)

Parallelizing Galileo's time with the current situation is witty as it shows how thoughts and scientific knowledge need to be accompanied by external objects and equipment to be useful.

Living in an era of rapid technological advancements and changes provides a rich background for futuristic novels. The twentieth century showed how catastrophic events could situate humankind in a fragile situation and destroy all the achievements and institutions they are proud to have created and developed over thousands of years.

While different utopias have different attitudes towards technology and science, they all have the element of hope in common to remind us that it is not human to live in despair. Uninformed optimism and false hope fail to help human progress, but in a time of distress and post-apocalypse, if we are as lucky and patient as Clark was, we might finally see the light again:

Kirsten looked, but at first she couldn't comprehend what she was seeing. She stepped back. "It isn't possible," she said.

"But there it is. Look again."

In the distance, pinpricks of light are arranged into a grid. There, plainly visible on the side of a hill some miles distant: a town, or a village, whose streets were lit up with electricity. (Mandel Ch.51)

Ironically, regaining electricity ingrains the seeds of hope in the hearts of people who were once criticizing technology. While admiring simpler times of the past, one must remember that many advantages of technological advancements were unknown to people and it is impossible for one who has enjoyed the benefits of electricity to go back to living in the darkness.

5. Conclusion

Today's world of pandemics, global warming, and other ecological crises allows the creative mind to imagine the most horrendous nightmarish scenarios and make efforts to prevent disasters and control damages in case they occur. While these fictional works written by various twenty-first-century authors vary in theme, perspective, and style, they embrace two human elements of anxiety and hope upon which defense mechanisms can be built. The disintegration anxiety, which devours modern minds and reminds people of their stance in the world, could lead to eco-anxiety once people realize nature's indifference towards *Homo Sapiens's* existence. The COVID-19 pandemic and 2021's heatwave are enough evidence that the dystopian visions found in *Station Eleven* and *Klara and the Sun* are probable to become real and affect our survival on earth.

Novels like *Klara and the Sun*, which express anthropophobia or autophobia, invite the human population to reconsider their actions on earth and prevent impending disastrous events by drawing attention to the importance of curbing environmental

damage and minimizing the changes made in the natural world. On the other hand, *Station Eleven*'s post-pandemic vision regards the dystopia as inevitable and makes the reader face the worst-case scenario and deal with it. While both these divergent perspectives induce anxiety, they also remind us of the only constant element accompanying human beings since their emergence on the earth: Hope. While not all Cootings Machines could be destroyed and humans are well-aware that part of the ecological crisis is irresolvable, even if the inevitable happens there is only one element safely protected, and that is what Kristen preserves in her heart by believing that hope must be restored because "survival is insufficient" (Mandel Ch.11).



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