

AI and Human Relationships In Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara And The Sun

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Abstract

AI and human relationships have been a hot topic of the decade now. With time AI and human relationships are being stronger and this can be said as humans are using AI a lot in their daily lives and AI is now an important part of our daily lives. And this paper is going to deal with the complex relations between humans and AI robot in Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun.

The book is focussed on an Artificial Friend (AF), named Klara; she has been designed to provide companionship to a child. Thus, through this the book provides a point to question the boundaries which are drawn between humans and machines. Using Klara, Kazuo Ishiguro has tried to humanise AI by showing that they can also have feelings like humans including empathy, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. And this blurs the difference between humans and artificial intelligence.

In this paper we will discuss how the Klara and the Sun challenges notions of humanity, empathy, and moral obligations. We will make use of post humanist theory and psychology to analyse how Ishiguro has humanised AI and review anthropocentrism to question the boundaries of connection, consciousness and emotional labour. The study explores the future ethical requirements surrounding intelligent machines and shows how AI, like Klara, can both satisfy and undermine human needs for attachment and purpose.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Humans, Relationships, Kazuo Ishiguro, Artificial Friend (AF)

Citation: Himanshi Rathi, Prof Parul Mishra, Dr Kaushal Kishore Sharma. 2025. AI and Human Relationships In Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara And The Sun. FishTaxa 36(1s): 438-442

Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan in the year 1954. He is famous name in the field of literature. It is because the writer won Nobel Prize in 2017 for his works and contribution to literature. He is a British writer as he moved to Britain from Japan when he was a small kid; he shifted with his parents when he was only five years old. Ishiguro plays different roles in his life from being a famous novelist to being a screenwriter, short story writer, and many more. While reading Ishiguro's works one can see how his life is dangles between the two countries as his characters from the novels somewhere talk about both the countries including Britain and Japan.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* is his most recent work published in 2021. It is the eighth work of fiction written by the writer along with a short story collection. *Klara and the Sun* is a unique work by Ishiguro as he has blended numerous themes in the book. One can see unique blend of dystopia and utopia, sci-fi and social realism, hybridity and mortality, humanism and post-humanism, and nature and nurture. Ishiguro has created a new concept in the book named AF (Artificial Friend) which is the main topic in the book.

Klara is the intelligent artificial friend who is also the first-person narrator of the novel. Klara, as an artificial friend is difficult to define because the language is nothing more than a code driven by algorithms for them. And she is designed to recognise simple visual patterns but does not has any sense of taste, smell, appetite, or does not even needs any sleep like humans. Klara is solar-powered robot who just needs sunlight to recharge itself and function properly.

The book represents an abstract future where artificial friend like Klara are used to provide companionship and emotional support to children who are facing social alienation. These AFs are even used for "lifting" of these children whom they provide companionship to. In the novel AFs are a symbol of status for the rich class as their children do not go to any schools rather are home tutored and meetings are arranged with peer groups from time to time where they socialise with children of their age and even showcase their AFs to other children.

The novel is divided in six parts where in each part Klara's life at different stages has been told by her. In part one Klara is at the store and meets other AFs like Rosa, her friend and a boy AF Rex. In this part Klara starts observing humans outside the store and by the end she is bought by Josie and her mother. Josie's mother tests Klara by asking her to copy Josie's walking style and Klara successfully

imitates Josie Mrs Arthur decides to buy her and brings her home. In part two Klara tells about her life at Josie's home with Josie and her mother. She tells how Josie starts showing signs of illness and how she ends up going on a trip with her mother to Morgan Falls where Josie's mother again asks Klara to copy Josie's walk.

In part three Klara goes to make a deal with the Sun for Josie's wellness. She goes to Mr McBain's barn and makes a promise to the Sun that she will destroy the Cootings machine, the pollution emitting machine in the city if the Sun provides his special nutrition to Josie the way he did for the beggar man and his dog when she was at the store. Then Josie was also to go to the city for her portrait to Mr. Capaldi because of which Klara gets a chance to go to the city. Meanwhile, Rick, Josie's childhood friend and only neighbour also agrees to go to Atlas Brooking for his college and for that purpose he and his mother also accompany them to the city.

In part four Klara discovers that the portrait which was in progress was actually not a portrait but an AF model which was being made in case Josie passes away like her sister Sal. And Klara was to become Josie for her mother. Paul, Josie's father was against the idea and because of this Klara relies in him and asks for his help to destroy the Cootings machine saying that it can save Josie forever. And to destroy the machine at the yard Klara sacrifices the special liquid present in her body knowing that it can disturb her abilities and functioning. She takes this risk to save Josie.

In part five of the novel Josie's condition seems to deteriorate and Klara again decides to go to Mr McBain's barn to make another deal with the Sun. She first confirms from Rick that is Josie's and Rick's live for each other true and then goes and requests the Sun for their love and future together. And then later one day when there were dark clouds in the sky and suddenly the Sun appears Klara thinks that it was the day when the Sun has provided his special nutrition to Josie for which she has been requesting him. And after this day Josie's health seems to get better. This shows how Klara's faith in the Sun wins.

And then in part six that is the last part of the novel everything turns out well for Josie as she recovers fully and goes for her college. Rick also gets busy with his research and his friends. And because Josie went busy and did not have any time for Klara, she used to spend her time in the attic room of the house. And later Klara is taken to a yard where several other AFs were present to finish up and fade with time. And here Klara again meets her manager and tells her all the things and how the Sun had been so good to her and Josie.

The intricacies and limitations of AI's interaction with human emotional life are revealed in the novel. In contrast to ideal depictions of AI, Ishiguro strikes a balance between highlighting the potential of AI companionship and critically examining its ethical and emotional boundaries. Ishiguro through his novel has even challenged the rigid human-machine binaries and shows how robots like Klara can also have feelings and attachment to humans around her. Her unconditional love for Josie is an example of the same.

This research paper examines how AI and human emotionality interact in *Klara and the Sun*, focusing on Ishiguro's use of AI agency to conceptualise empathy, attachment, and care. This study adds to the growing discussions about how human connectivity is changing in technologically advanced societies. Through this paper we will examine the interrelation between AI and humans that has been executed by Kazuo Ishiguro in *Klara and the Sun*.

Significant post-humanist research has been done on the novel, which examines the fuzziness of the distinction between humans and machines. Many researches have been sparked by the book and have attracted the attention of numerous critics in a small span of time. According to Alkodimi (2024), Ishiguro's Klara destabilises anthropocentric notions of personhood by embodying a post-human subject exhibiting qualities normally associated with humans, such as empathy, hope, and imagination. The story is consistent with Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg (1985), implying a hybrid ontology in which synthetic entities engage in affective networks that are customarily reserved for humans.

The narrative of the book as seen through Klara's eyes offers a perspective that is both familiar and foreign. She is a near-perfect scientific observer due to her literal, data-driven observations, but she also has a human-like sensitivity because of her gentle curiosity. Part machine, part sympathetic observer, Ishiguro creates Klara as a liminal character (Chapai, 2024).

From the first scenes, Klara's insight reveals emotional dynamics that many characters are unable to access. For example, Klara's in-depth assessments of Josie's health and emotions show a diagnostic attentiveness that verge on care beyond programming. Because Klara is positioned as both an observer and a participant, this narrative intimacy increases reader empathy. Despite being a robot programmed just to provide companionship and act as a support system for children Klara shows extra emotions for Josie which was not initially programmed in her but it comes with time as she had those observational skills and she noticed people around with a lot of care.

In addition to reflecting how modern technology challenges long-standing dichotomies, this portrayal challenges us to re-evaluate

human uniqueness and consciousness within a post-human framework (Sahu and Karmakar, 2022). The only thing unique in humans from AI models is the real emotions which Klara displays from the very start of the novel. For example, her worry for Josie, her giving up the precious liquid present in her body in order to destroy the Cootings machine which could fulfil her deal with the Sun and result in Josie's better health despite knowing the fact that this can affect her functioning. This shows how Klara despite being a robot had feelings like human and was ready to sacrifice even her life for Josie.

Ishiguro's portrayal of AI's emotional intelligence as an algorithmic simulation that interprets emotions using observable, fixed cues is critically examined in another paper. The fact that Klara's empathy is demonstrated through pattern recognition as opposed to actual emotional experience highlights the basic limitations of AI's affective capabilities (Sahu and Karmakar, 2022). It is true that Klara, as portrayed in the novel was quite an overly observing AF and has learned all emotions from humans around her but her care for Josie seems to be genuine and she goes to all extent to save Josie's life and was ready to do anything for her better health.

Another study emphasises that although AI can mimic human empathy, it is devoid of the complex comprehension of ambivalence, contradictions, and context that are essential to human emotionality. This mistrust of "emotional computing" casts doubt on hopeful claims that AI will fully integrate emotions (Sahu and Karmakar, 2022).

Bowlby's attachment theory (1982) is used by another researcher to explain the relationship between Klara and Josie. As a "secure base" and "safe haven," Klara performs the caregiving function that humans normally perform. This conceptualisation emphasises mutual affective reliance, upending the conventional hierarchical relationship between machines and human beings. However, because Klara's loyalty is determined in advance by programming and lacks inherent emotional reciprocity, this relationship is fundamentally asymmetrical. The researcher poses important queries regarding the psychological effects of artificial affection on people, particularly on the social development of children (Liang, 2024).

Klara's comprehension of people is limited, though. Her incapacity to understand irony, metaphors, or intricate social cues highlights the fundamental disconnect between human emotional complexity and machine logic. Klara's frequent invocations of the Sun's power, for instance, highlight the limitations of artificial subjectivity and demonstrate a mechanistic spirituality—faith founded on pattern and observation rather than belief (Alkodimi, 2024).

The AI's interpretive limitations are demonstrated in a moving scene where Klara is unable to decipher Josie's mother's hidden grief. These instances serve as counterpoints to Klara's empathy and demonstrate that, despite intense emotional effort, artificial intelligence will never be able to completely replicate the depth of experience that defines human emotions. From the very starting the agenda of Josie's mother to bring Klara home was to turn Klara into Josie for her in case Josie passes away like her sister Sal. And this was not known to Klara till the point when she went to see Josie's portrait at Mr Capaldi's studio.

AI and Human Relationship in *Klara and the Sun*

AI and human relationships in the novel have been evident from the very starting. Klara, the Artificial Friend rather known as AF is an observational robot who notices small details about her surroundings and the people around her. When at the store, Klara notices and learns from human behaviour by just observing them from the window when she and Rosa got chance to sit at the display window of the store. Klara used to study human behaviour by noticing the taxi drivers and the people walking on the pathway outside the store. On the other hand Rosa despite being another AF did not notice things in a similar way and was not at all bothered by anything which could easily bother her friend Klara.

And after noticing the surrounding for the whole day Klara talks to her manager about what she had noticed in the whole day, manager understands that Klara was different and appreciates her for what she tells the Manager. Klara starts building her relationship with humans at the store with her bond with the Manager. It is evident that the manager was quite attached to Klara as she herself admits in part six to Klara that another series of AFs that is B3s were no doubt much advance than herself but then also she had special attachment with Klara and her likes which were from the same series as Klara.

Then another AI and human relationship seen in the book was Josie and Klara's bond with each other. The day Josie came to the display window of the store and told Klara that she will soon come back to take her home, Klara was waiting for her. This is evident from an incident at the store when another child chooses Klara to be her companion and Klara does not responds to her because of which the Manager also gets upset with Klara.

And then when she goes home with Josie, Klara learns her ways and also learns her routine. And when Josie gets sick Klara goes to the extent of losing herself for Josie. She goes to Mr McBain's barn and makes a deal with the Sun that if the Sun provides his special nourishment to Josie she will destroy the Cootings machine as she thinks that the Sun might also not like the pollution emitting machine. And when she gets the chance to fulfil her promise she goes to the extent of sacrificing her special liquid which she knew

could result in her dysfunctioning. This shows how much she loved Josie and could do anything for her. This emotion of love is only expected from real human beings that Klara shows for Josie.

Her belief in the Sun comes from another incident that she noticed while at the window at the store. She believed that it was the Sun's nourishment that made the beggar man and his dog alive. The lines:

“The next morning the grid went up and it was a splendid day. The Sun was pouring his nourishment onto the street and into the buildings, and when I looked over to the spot where Beggar and the dog had died, I saw they weren't dead at all – that a special kind of nourishment from the Sun had saved them.” (Page 44)

This shows Klara's limitation as an AF as she believed in the magical element of sunlight and when Josie gets sick she again believes that only the Sun can save her life and for that goes twice to Mr McBain's barn to make promises to the Sun. She did all this because of her faith in the Sun's powers.

Then another crucial human and AI bond present in the book is Klara and Josie's mother's, Mrs Arthur's bond. Klara from the very starting is weighted on a scale by Mrs Arthur as she wanted Klara to play Josie for her in case Josie passes away like her another daughter Sal. That is why Mrs Arthur asked Klara to imitate Josie at the store and later when the mother and Klara went to Morgan Falls alone there also Mrs Arthur asks Klara to imitate Josie's walk for her. This shows how observational Klara was and how Mrs Arthur somewhere saw her as a useful robot for herself too. Though Klara was bought home to provide companionship to Josie but Mrs Arthur had other motives.

Klara learns about it at Mr Capaldi's studio and from Josie's father that he does not support this experiment of Mrs Arthur. And her bond with Rick was that of friendship and she even agrees to help out Rick for his “lifting”.

The ability of AI to respond to human emotions and desires is demonstrated by Klara's narration. She demonstrates a type of empathetic mediation that is essential during times of illness and anxiety by using her observational acuity to support and comfort Josie. She sees after Josie just like the way her mother would do for her. She loves Josie unconditionally and does everything for her she could and had in her hands.

However, Klara's comprehension of human complexity is limited by her programmed responses, which are based on fixed emotional categories. Her “belief” in the Sun's healing properties represents AI's creative, albeit unfinished, interaction with human emotion, indicating both technological ambition and epistemic constraints.

And another extract from the book:

“I did all I could to do what was best for Josie. I've thought about it many times now. And if it had become necessary, I'm sure I could have continued Josie. But it's much better the way it turned out, even though Rick and Josie aren't together.” (Page 338)

This is what Klara tells the manager at the end of the novel when she met her at the yard. Her belief that the Sun listened to her because of her promises and the love she had vouched for in front of the Sun at the barn did not really happen but tells the Manager that she was happy with the life she had lived and was content enough for what happened.

Another extract tells her limitations as an AF. The lines are:

Klara says, “Manager, I did all I could to learn Josie and had it become necessary, I would have done my utmost. But I don't think it would have worked out so well. Not because I wouldn't have achieved accuracy. But, however hard I tried, I believe now there would have remained something beyond my reach. The Mother, Rick, Melania Housekeeper, the Father. I'd never have reached what they felt for Josie in their hearts. I'm now sure of this, Manager.”

This Klara says to the Manager reflecting to her life and the expectation people around her had with her and her with herself. Klara at the end realises that no doubt she would have given her 100% but there would have been something which she would have missed as an AF and feels that no matter how hard she would have tried to fulfil the gap Josie might have left in her family's life she would not be able to fill it. She feels that her relationship with all those humans including Josie, Mother, Father, Melania Housekeeper, and Rick was different as Klara and feels that she would not have been able to make the same spot in their life if she had played Josie for them. In Ishiguro's morally dubious world, robots perform emotional labour but are still disposable. Klara's unwavering loyalty stands in stark contrast to her imminent obsolescence once Josie no longer requires her. An awkward moral conflict regarding exploitation passed off as care is brought to light by this dynamic.

Conclusion

Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* is a thoughtful work of literature on the intricate relationship between AI and humans, and offer mixed information about the possibilities and limitations of artificial intelligence. The essence of AI is embodied in Klara's steadfast devotion to Josie, which is demonstrated by her ceremonial supplications to the Sun and her selfless decline into obsolescence.

Klara and the Sun by Kazuo Ishiguro explores AI and human relationship in great detail, highlighting both the inherent emotional limitations of AI and its capacity for empathy. The novel examines the changing meanings of care and companionship from the perspective of attachment frameworks and post-humanist theory.

The book exposes AI as a mirror that reflects the depths of human loneliness, the frailty of familial ties, and the moral asymmetries associated with technological companionship rather than as a perfect substitute for human connection through Klara's sincere but mechanically limited viewpoint.

The book reminds one for a re-evaluation of care ethics that takes into account the non-human agents that are now a part of our social structures. The novel questions anthropocentric ideas of emotion and personhood and raises ethical concerns about AI disposability. The book urgently considers the future of human connectedness in the face of growing technological mediation of affect by reflecting human vulnerability and societal fragmentation through Klara. Ishiguro encourages readers to envision futures in which technology enhances rather than replaces human connection, where disposability gives way to dignity, and where the "special nourishment" of true reciprocity flows both ways by humanizing Klara rather than dehumanizing her.

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