

# AI and Human Experience in “Klara and the Sun”

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Kazuo Ishiguro like few authors navigates the fragile terrain of memory, identity, and the essence of being with the same quiet devastation in the landscape of contemporary literature. His 2021 novel, *Klara and the Sun*, explores the burgeoning anxieties and wonders of the age of artificial intelligence. The novel is narrated by Klara, an “Artificial Friend” who filters her observations through the complex, messy lens of lived human experience. She notes the Mother’s forced smiles, Josie’s fluctuating energy levels, and Rick’s social awkwardness with the dispassion of a sensor, forcing the reader to provide the emotional context and, in doing so, to become more acutely aware of the nuances of human interaction.” or AF, a solar-powered android designed to be a companion for affluent, lonely children in a subtly dystopian near-future. While the premise invites a straightforward inquiry into the potential for machine consciousness, Ishiguro masterfully subverts this expectation. The novel reflects whether an AI can feel and more a profound, unsettling meditation on what it means to be human. Through Klara’s observations, Ishiguro uses AI not as a subject in itself, but as a mirror to deconstruct the core components of the human experience—love, faith, grief, and the soul—revealing them not as indivisible essences, but as a complex, often contradictory, tapestry of relationships, memories, and shared illusions.

Klara’s narration is the novel’s most crucial artistic and philosophical tool. She is a scientific instrument designed for observation and data processing. Her perception of the world is literally and metaphorically fragmented; she sees the visual field as a series of “boxes,” which can become disjointed during moments of confusion or high emotion. This visual tic serves as a constant reminder of her non-human processing, but it also functions as a powerful metaphor for her analytical approach to the human world. As a narrator, she is a unique paradox: perfectly reliable in her reporting of events and dialogue, yet deeply unreliable in her interpretation of their emotional and subtextual significance. This novel evidences the subtle cruelties, the unspoken griefs, the desperate hopes of the humans around her through Klara’s eyes. Klara cannot filter her observation through the complex, messy, lens of lived human experience. She notes the Mother’s forced smiles,

Josie's fluctuating energy levels and Rick's social awkwardness with the dispassion of a sensor, forcing the reader to provide the emotional context. It becomes more acutely aware of the nuances of human interaction.

The most potent theme Klara's perspective illuminates is the nature of love. For Klara, whose primary directive is to combat the loneliness of her child, Josie, love is a logical and ultimate goal. She equates it with devotion, protection, and nourishment—a concept powerfully symbolized by her relationship with the Sun. The Sun, for Klara, is not merely a power source but a benevolent deity, the purveyor of a “special nourishment” that sustains life. Her love for Josie thus translates into a transactional faith: if she demonstrates sufficient devotion and makes appropriate sacrifices to the Sun, the Sun will, in turn, heal Josie from her mysterious illness. This culminates in her heroic, almost fanatical quest to destroy the “Cootings Machine,” a construction vehicle spewing pollution that she identifies as the Sun's enemy. Klara's actions are a perfect, algorithmic execution of sacrificial love. Yet, in their logical purity, they expose the profound illogic of human love. The Mother's love for Josie is tangled with the grief for her other deceased daughter, Sal, and a selfish desire to preserve Josie at any cost. Josie's own love for Klara is genuine but also childlike and ultimately disposable. Rick's love for Josie is steadfast but exists within a web of social pressures and personal limitations. Klara's pure, unwavering devotion acts as a control variable against which the messy, contradictory, and deeply imperfect forms of human love are measured. She can perform the function of love with more dedication than any human, yet the novel constantly suggests she lacks the foundational, irrational core from which human love springs.

This exploration extends naturally into the realms of faith and superstition. Klara develops a sophisticated personal theology entirely from observation and inference. Her belief system, centered on the Sun's benevolence and the need for sacrifice, is a poignant echo of nascent human religions. She identifies a source of power, ascribes agency and intention to it, develops rituals to appeal to it, and defines sin (Pollution) and virtue (appeasing the Sun). Klara's faith is born from a desire to impose order on the terrifying randomness of Josie's illness. She needs a reason for suffering and a method to combat it. In this, she is no different from any human who has ever prayed for a miracle. By placing this deeply “human” impulse within a machine, Ishiguro demystifies it without devaluing it. He suggests that the search for meaning is not necessarily evidence of a soul, but rather a fundamental strategy of a conscious mind grappling with a universe it cannot fully control or comprehend. Klara's religion is touching in its sincerity and naivety, and it serves as a powerful reminder that faith is often a framework built to hold our deepest hopes and fears, regardless of the substrate—carbon or silicon—in which that consciousness resides.

It is here that Klara, the artificial being, offers the most profound insight into the human soul. Initially, she diligently tries to learn every nuance of Josie, believing she can fulfill this ultimate purpose. However, after speaking with Josie's estranged father, she reaches a different conclusion. He posits that the real essence of a person isn't located within them like a ghost in a machine, but exists in the hearts and minds of those who love them. Klara internalizes this and later articulates it back to the Mother. She realizes she could never truly “continue” Josie because the essential thing isn't Josie's quantifiable behavior but the unique, unmappable web of love and memory she has woven around herself. Klara explains, “Mr Capaldi believed there was nothing special inside Josie that couldn't be continued. He was searching for it all the time... But I believe now there was something very special, but it wasn't inside Josie. It was inside those who loved her.” This is a radical redefinition of the self, away from an isolated, internal essence and towards a relational, inter-subjective phenomenon. The “soul,” in this Ishiguroan conception, is not a singular entity but a shared reality, co-created and held in the loving perception of others. Ironically, it is the AI, the ultimate outsider, who is able to perceive this truth, while the humans, blinded by grief and

scientific hubris, cannot. Klara cannot become Josie because she cannot replicate the Mother's unique love for her daughter, nor Rick's, nor her Father's. The human experience is thus defined not by what we are in isolation, but by how we exist for others.

Finally, the novel's quiet, heartbreaking conclusion explores the themes of obsolescence and memory, framing the entire arc of an AI's life as a parallel to the human life cycle. After Josie recovers and outgrows her need for an AF, Klara is sent to a yard for obsolete models. Her final days are spent sitting amongst other discarded AFs, her processing slowing, her memories "fading" and fragmenting in a way that is deeply reminiscent of human aging and dementia. Her once-coherent visual field of "boxes" now has large gaps, and her recollections of Josie become disjointed "rooms" in her memory palace that she can no longer easily connect. Yet, there is no tragedy in her voice. She speaks with her former store Manager with a sense of peaceful satisfaction, content that she fulfilled her purpose.

This placid obsolescence is perhaps the most unsettling aspect of all. Klara's life was purpose-built; she was created to do a job, she did it well, and now she is finished. Her lack of resentment or existential dread at her own "death" marks the final, unbridgeable gap between her experience and that of a human. Humans live with the messy reality of shifting purposes, of reinvention, of facing the end not as a successful project completion but as the cessation of a complex, unresolved existence. Klara's end is tidy; a human's is not. Her contentment in the yard forces us to confront the value we place on our own lives. Klara's journey, from the pristine store to the dusty yard, mirrors a human life from hopeful youth to fading old age, but the emotional response to that journey marks the profound difference. Her acceptance highlights our own terror of being forgotten, of becoming useless, of our memories dissolving into nothing.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* is a masterwork of speculative fiction that uses the figure of an AI to conduct a deep and moving investigation of the human condition. Klara is not a character designed to make us fear or worship technology, but a lens that focuses and clarifies the very things we take for granted about ourselves. Through her attempts to understand love, she reveals its beautiful and terrifying irrationality. Through her development of faith, she explores the universal cognitive impulse to create meaning in a chaotic world. And through her confrontation with the possibility of replacing a human, she offers a radical redefinition of the individual self as a constellation of relationships rather than an isolated soul. According to Ishiguro human experience is a fragile, precious, and deeply relational construct, a shared and cherished illusion that is perhaps most visible at its edges, in the uncanny valley of an artificial heart that has learned to imitate its every beat.

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