

Research Article

Jack Robinson*

The Recovery of Self in Emotional Authenticity: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*

<https://doi.org/10.1515/cat-2025-0004>

Received March 4, 2025; accepted March 11, 2025; published online April 8, 2025

Abstract: The novel is a fable about the amelioration of human behavior and a cautionary tale about the paradigm of rationality with its corresponding devaluation of emotion. It depicts the AI narrator Klara in a mechanized rural American society of the near future. Klara's role is to provide affectionate care for a genetically modified or "lifted" middle-class teenager, to balance her improved intelligence with a schooling in consideration for others. The novel satirizes the contradiction of treating the apparently non-human but inwardly altruistic as alternately human and sub-human. Learning about human emotion and ethics as she goes, Klara becomes compassionate, patient, and loving. Since she hopes that her charge, made seriously ill by the genetic editing process, will survive, she expresses that hope through her faith, which is comically modelled on human assumptions about faith that she learns from observation. Klara helps those humans close to her to recover their authentic emotional selves to the limited degree that their enculturation permits, unveiling the depression caused by unawareness of universal emotional needs. Her narrative of embodying love and faith amidst mechanized humans reclaims the innocence of the child and the lamb, as emphasized by the novel's Blakean tone and allusions. The unwaged Klara in this novel dedicated to the author's mother represents the idealization and corresponding relegation of a subtle and mature management of emotion to the caregivers of the female gender; ironically, it also points out the universal human value of non-judgment and openness toward love.

Keywords: androids; caregivers; experience; innocence; mechanization; rationality

We arrive here covered in spiritual qualities like innocence, humility, trust, acceptance, and love.

(Wagamese, Richard 2016. *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*, 128)

***Corresponding author: Dr. Jack Robinson**, Sessional Instructor, Department of English, MacEwan University, 10700 104 Ave. NW, Edmonton, AB, T5J 4S2, Canada, E-mail: robinsonj@macewan.ca

 Open Access. © 2025 the author(s), published by De Gruyter on behalf of Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

 This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

1 Blakean Tone and Allusions

The originality of this novel narrated by the advanced general intelligence, Klara, is that it emulates the ability to appeal to both children and adults found in the lyrics and engravings of William Blake's 1794 collection, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Klara exhibits the innocence of a child in her eagerness to learn about the human life she observes around her and to apply her discoveries about "the complicated human heart" in forming her relationships with humans (Ishiguro 2021, 251). Her childlike directness and the simplicity of her robot's atonal voice, blended with her makeshift vocabulary ("oblong" for laptop, for example), lend her narrative the excitement of newness. One of countless AFs or Artificial Friends in this rural American society of the near future, Klara provides emotional care for a lonely genetically modified or "lifted" middle-class teenager, Josie, to make her less lonely and more considerate before she faces the social challenges of college. Klara offers the human characters the opportunity to recover their innocence in emotional authenticity and to step back, albeit momentarily, from their identification with the rationality of their highly mechanized society.

In this fable about the betterment of human behavior, evil is symbolized by the bull, the novel's American version of William Blake's "tyger" in his poem "The Tyger" (Blake 2015b, 61). Klara's innocent self is appalled at the sight of the bull: "this bull belonged somewhere deep in the ground far within the mud and darkness, and its presence on the grass could only have awful consequences" (Ishiguro 2021, 100). Blake asked how God had the audacity to create both the lamb and the tyger: "Did he who made the lamb/make thee?" and "What immortal hand or eye/*dare* frame thy fearful symmetry?" (italics mine) (Blake 2015a, 61). In contrast, Klara's humility prevents her from challenging her symbol of the divine presence in all, the Sun, and she has no comprehension of anger early in the narrative. While she is still in the AF store, Klara witnesses a street fight between two taxi-drivers and describes the evil intention they shared: "They fought as though the most important thing was to damage each other as much as possible" (Ishiguro 2021, 19). She tries repeatedly to feel the anger the drivers displayed, but each attempt ends in baffled laughter (Ishiguro 2021, 20). This is the text's acknowledgment that innocence cannot comprehend evil; however, the key to the plot is machine learning, which, as Yuval Noah Harari explains, is fundamental to the definition of artificial intelligence: "generally speaking, for something to be acknowledged as an AI, it needs the capacity to learn new things by itself" (Harari 2024, 294). Yuqing Sun states that Klara's role as caregiver is "to alleviate others' suffering while learning what it is to suffer herself" (Sun 2023, 506).

The Blakean symbolic framework of the novel is completed when Klara sees about 40 sheep: "I was able to see that each of them was filled with kindness – the

exact opposite from the terrible bull from earlier” (Ishiguro 2021, 106). Blake’s “The Lamb” (Blake 2015a 2015, 14) conveys the New Testament’s references to Christ as represented by both a lamb and a child:

He is called by thy name,

For he called himself a lamb:

He is meek and he is mild

He became a little child:

I a child and thou a lamb,

We are called by his name.

In Mathew 18:3, the disciples petition Christ for the most exalted position in the Kingdom of Heaven; Christ replies that unless they shed thoughts of status and become childlike before God, they will not enter the kingdom (Holy Bible 1953). The novel’s most-used words, the noun *kindness* and the adjective *kind*, are rooted in this allusion to “The Lamb.” When Klara calls an individual or a group “unkind” (Ishiguro 2021, 75, 77, 123, 128, 211), it is her singular criticism of humans; when she recognizes “kindness” or describes someone or some action as “kind” (Ishiguro 2021, 135, 139, 154), it is the one positive judgment she makes throughout the text; she judges the specific action but not the person. Klara describes Josie as having “kind eyes” (Ishiguro 2021, 41) or her mother Chrissie as having a “kind smile” (Ishiguro 2021, 53); when Josie turns cold, she has “no smile” in her voice (Ishiguro 2021, 109).

At the “interaction meeting” for the teenagers who have undergone the genetic editing required in their society to become more intelligent and hence more competitive, Josie’s “unlifted” friend Rick tries to preserve Josie’s “kindness” from the influence of her “lifted” peers (Ishiguro 2021, 83, 126). The interaction meetings constitute a training program for the sociability of the lifted kids: demonstrating the problem with sociability, the “lifted” boys at the meeting propose throwing Klara around like a toy, but Rick defends her (Ishiguro 2021, 79). The inexperienced Klara is inclined to be lenient toward them: “They have rough ways, but they may not be so unkind. They fear loneliness and that’s why they behave as they do. Perhaps Josie too” (Ishiguro 2021, 83). Josie is insecure because of her loneliness and the trauma necessitated by becoming technologized in order to achieve a “good life,” but there is an implied menace in the portrayal of the lifted teenagers that Klara has yet to learn about: she later has a vision of the dismembered Rosa, her AF companion in the store (Ishiguro 2021, 155), and a visitor to Klara later confirms that “things didn’t go as well for Rosa as they did for you” (Ishiguro 2021, 301).

2 An Affectionate Treatment of the Foibles of Faith and Human Frailties

Because it is developed from “what she has learned on her own through watching the world” (Misra 2023: 34 (4) 378), Klara’s faith is depicted in several comic ironies that demonstrate the foibles of human faith. Like many humans, Klara imagines herself as a participant in a transactional relationship with divine power. Since the smoke from what she calls “the Cootings Machine” (an asphalt machine that emits tar smoke) blocks the Sun’s nourishing rays from reaching the earth, and since pollution weakens Klara (Ishiguro 2021, 30), she reasons that the Sun would want to see the Cootings Machine destroyed; this is a comic commentary on how humans project mundane aspects of their lives in making assumptions about divine being. Klara thus offers a symbolic deal to the Sun: she will disable a Cootings Machine if, in return, He will save Josie’s life (Ishiguro 2021, 165). (Taking her cues from the human culture she observes around her, she follows Christian tradition by personifying the Sun as male.) After her prayer has been answered, Klara allows her relationship with divine essence to be tinged by guilt and fear, as it is for many human believers: she fears that the Sun might feel “cheated or misled” by their deal and “that He will consider retribution” (Ishiguro 2021, 289).

The text also treats with comic irony the tendency of supplicants to embellish their cases. As Josie grows more ill, Klara resorts to wish-fulfillment: she bolsters her bargaining power by informing the Sun of Rick’s promise that his love for Josie is forever (Ishiguro 2021, 266). Klara turns to lying when she pleads with the Sun to save Josie’s life because “she’s done nothing unkind” (Ishiguro 2021, 163): Klara knows that Josie has been unkind on several occasions, due to insecurity caused by loneliness. At the “interaction meeting,” in the bullying atmosphere created by the lifted boys, someone asks Josie why she didn’t get a B3, a more advanced AF model. Her reply, “Now I’m starting to think I should have” (Ishiguro 2021, 78), is hurtful to Klara. On another occasion, Klara witnesses a conversation in which Josie taunts Rick, stressing that her mother Chrissie has “society” or social status, whereas Rick’s mother Helen does not (Ishiguro. 221, 128).

Human frailty is represented also by Klara’s malfunctions. Perhaps due to solar malabsorption problems in her model (Ishiguro 2021, 7), her vision splits into several discrete boxes, seen simultaneously, when she is stressed (Ishiguro 2021, 27, 73, 101, 158, 186, 206, 268). Her mobility is poor on rough terrain: she must be carried across fields by Rick, who becomes her accomplice in saving Josie’s life (Ishiguro 2021, 156). Her earlier sacrifice of a small amount of her PEG-9 fluid causes cognitive deficiencies (Ishiguro 2021, 269); for example, as senile humans do, she mistakes the identity of a visitor (Ishiguro 2021, 302).

3 An AI with Love and Ethics

Klara is a hybrid being who is outwardly an AGI but is surreptitiously humanized and individualized. The individuation starts with the guarantee that each AF is unique (Ishiguro 2021, 43). Among her AF peers, Klara is exceptionally observant. The store manager compliments her: “you never miss a thing” (Ishiguro 2021, 22). There is an immediate affection between Josie and Klara, though Klara also observes “a flash of sadness” in Josie, showing her sensitivity to nuanced emotions (Ishiguro 2021, 25). After agreeing to wait for Josie (Ishiguro 2021, 14), Klara acts on this promise: when another girl is interested in her, Klara exaggerates store policy (since the customer is supposed to choose the AF rather than vice versa) by not giving the girl a single smile or looking directly at her; as a result, the girl moves on (33). Klara is a sentient and self-determining AGI/human who learns about the world of human emotions through her own expanding emotional experience: “The more I observe, the more feelings become available to me” (Ishiguro 2021, 98). She comes to represent kindness, compassion, faith, hope, and love. In this fictional world, “the ethical component of caring requires and nurtures an ethical and compassionate way of being,” as Farnell argues (qtd. in Du 2022: 49 (2) 557); as Lanlan Du puts it, Klara’s learning process “enacts the way we readers learn how to love” (Du 2022: 49 (2) 562).

The cumulative wisdom of Klara’s experience is that life is about relationships and that the key to relationships is reciprocal love. Klara believes that if she had “continued” Josie, “[she would] never have reached what [the humans who loved her] felt for Josie in their hearts” (Ishiguro 2021, 302). With characteristic humility, Klara sets human love above its machine simulation, while the human characters consistently marginalize her: “the carer is systematically placed in a base and exploitive situation in relation to the cared-for” (Misra 2023: 34 (4) 382). The humans admit their emotional closeness to Klara only when they seek to manipulate her for their own ends; nonetheless, Klara draws Josie and Rick back together several times after they have had spats. On one occasion, Josie draws a “kind picture” for Rick as part of what Klara calls their “bubble game,” in which Josie draws the pictures and Rick writes the captions in the conversation bubbles. The drawing depicts two stick figures in the lower left-hand corner; Rick supplies the kind slogan “Rick and Josie forever” above them. Most of the space of the poster is occupied by a many-colored mesh that is “dark and forbidding” (Ishiguro 2021, 139), representing their society’s devaluation of emotion. Josie’s father Paul is moved by Klara’s capacity for hope: “Hope, damn thing never leaves you alone” he quips (Ishiguro 2021, 219). Terry Eagleton notes that hope is tied to several emotions that involve an ethical stance: “patience, trust, courage, tenacity, resilience, forbearance, perseverance, long-suffering” (qtd. in Du 2022: 49 (2) 558–559).

4 The Apotheosis of Rationality

The alienation from authentic emotion begins in the apotheosis of rationality. Joseph Weizenbaum, an MIT professor and inventor of the first chatbot, argues that the socially predominant model of human reason has become mechanistic. He claims that “the rationality-logic equation” has become the paradigm of reason (Weizenbaum 1976, 21). Weizenbaum quotes Karl Pearson’s argument that “the scientific man has above all things to strive for self-elimination in his judgments” and that this imperative “urges man to strive to become a disembodied intelligence, to himself become an instrument, a machine” (qtd. in Weizenbaum 1976, 25). This devalues emotion, as Marshall Rosenberg comments regarding his own 21 years in American schools: “What was valued was ‘the right way to think’ – as defined by those who held positions of rank and authority” (Rosenberg 2015, 37). In the fictional world of the novel, “the right way to think” is to reduce reason to rationality; as Jahnvi Misra notes, the humans in the novel have undergone “a crisis of self-understanding that makes them think of themselves as machines in some ways, even devaluing themselves as they do the intelligent machines in that universe” (Misra 2023: 34 (4) 381).

Meghan O’Gieblyn traces the predominance of rationality in western culture to Descartes. Before Descartes, consciousness had been the one certainty and the rationale for Christian contemplation (O’Gieblyn 2021, 18). With Descartes’s “*Cogito; ergo, sum*,” the rational mind came to direct the body:

Julien Offray de La Mettrie, in his 1747 book *Man a Machine*, argued that the brain was not the seat of reason or of the soul but “the mainspring of the whole machine.” In later centuries, metaphors for human reason became increasingly mechanical. To be human was to be a mill, a clock, an organ, a telegraph machine. The computational theory of mind was merely one in a long line of attempts to describe human nature in purely mechanical terms, without reference to a perceiving subject. (O’Gieblyn 2021, 22–23)

O’Gieblyn claims that “this fundamental ideology is actually nudging us down to a lower ontological status”: since we are inevitably going to be superseded by machines, the only way we can survive is to become machines ourselves (O’Gieblyn 2021, 73).

In the novel, rationality and technology redefine culture and individuals. First, machines replace humans: Paul, Josie’s father and Chrissie’s ex-husband, has been fired from Kimball Refrigeration, a cutting-edge chemical plant, even though he was a “rising star” there. Chrissie says that he was “substituted, like all the rest of them” (Ishiguro 2021, 99). Paul now lives in one of many communities of the “post-employed” that has been attacked by citizens; when they take up arms in self-defense, they are called “fascists” because they come from the “former professional

elites” (Ishiguro 2021, 229). Second, technology enhances humans: AGE or advanced genetic engineering (Ishiguro 2021, 245) has been required for Josie and Rick’s generation, since only a few colleges assign a tiny percentage of their admissions to “unlifted” applicants; with Atlas Brookings, it is 2 % (Ishiguro 2021, 129). Although advanced genetic engineering is fatal for some, such as Josie’s sister Sal, the novel portrays the danger of the process as socially accepted: another mother of a “lifted” child makes a “kindly” comment to Chrissie: “Some of us were lucky, some of us weren’t” (Ishiguro 2021, 69). Third, machines simulate humans: the scientist Mr. Capaldi believes that there is nothing “unreachable” in Josie, nothing “beyond the Klaras of this world to continue” (Ishiguro 2021, 207); when Chrissie has doubts, he utters the core belief of their culture: “It’s not faith you need. Only rationality” (Ishiguro 2021, 208).

5 Emotional Self-Alienation and Depression

Rather than trying to understand others’ emotional needs, Chrissie dehumanizes them with labels and judgments – a habit that Rosenberg identifies as endemic in American culture (Rosenberg 2015, 171). She comprehends human emotion only in the context of the social hierarchy. When her ex-husband Paul tells her that those who were “substituted” can now “distinguish what’s important from what isn’t” (190), she derides his statement, showing no empathy for his new perspective: “He’s so full of shit these days” (Ishiguro 2021, 235). When Klara asks why Sal died, Chrissie warns her to remember her place at the bottom of the social hierarchy: “It’s not your business to be curious” (Ishiguro 2021, 103). When it seems that Josie may die, Chrissie attacks Rick (who is only fourteen-and-a-half years old, like Josie): she accuses him of playing for low stakes by not “going ahead” with being lifted, and thus winning something “small and mean” (Ishiguro 2021, 277). The aggressive Chrissie is non-plussed by his compassionate reply: he delivers the message from Josie that she will always love her mother; as for being lifted, “she wouldn’t have it any other way” (Ishiguro 2021, 278).

Klara applies what the store manager calls her “sophisticated understanding” (43) to Chrissie’s emotional predicament: when she first meets Chrissie at the AF store, she estimates her age to be about 45 and notices that there is “angry exhaustion” in her eyes (Ishiguro 2021, 24). (Klara’s newfound sensitivity to anger shows her growing understanding of human emotions as she learns from experience.) On two occasions, Klara notes Chrissie’s “narrowed eyes” (Ishiguro 2021, 101, 186), conveying her anxious watchfulness. When Klara sees Chrissie swept up in the crowd emerging from the theatre, she compares the group to a cloud of insects, “each creature within it busily changing position, anxious to find a better one, but never

straying beyond the boundary of the shape they made together.” At the edge of the crowd is “the Mother standing behind Josie, a hand on each of Josie’s shoulders, watching us with empty eyes” (Ishiguro 2021, 240). The Mother’s hands on Josie’s shoulders represent the mother propelling the daughter into the struggle for “a good life” (Ishiguro 2021, 210). Chrissie’s “empty eyes” represent her self-alienation; as Rosenberg states, “Depression is an indication of alienation from our own needs” (Rosenberg 2015, 196). Chrissie’s social persona has displaced her personal emotional needs. She clings to her social position “because on the day I stop, Josie’s world, *my* world, would collapse” (Ishiguro 2021, 189).

Klara understands that Chrissie has been emotionally self-alienated; as Rosenberg notes, this is a common condition in contemporary American culture: “Most of us grew up speaking a language that encourages us to label, compare, demand, and pronounce judgments rather than to become aware of what we are feeling and needing” (Rosenberg 2015, 23); “We are trained to be ‘other-directed’ rather than to be in contact with ourselves” (Rosenberg 2015, 37). Beneath the social persona of the winner, Klara perceives the authenticity of Chrissie’s motherly love; for example, she recognizes the value of the “quick coffee” shared between mother and daughter every morning; Klara recognizes that this ritual helps to alleviate the loneliness that makes Josie emotionally insecure (Ishiguro 2021, 52).

The mundanity of evil is depicted in the parent’s commitment to provide prosperity and opportunity for her or his family: the text portrays “a good life” (Ishiguro 2021, 210) as a binary: for Chrissie, the phrase is about prosperity; for Klara, it is about emotional authenticity and ethical relationships. Having sacrificed herself for her daughters, Chrissie demands self-sacrifice from Klara: she seeks Klara’s co-operation in observing and copying Josie’s physical and emotional being so that Klara can, should Josie die, inhabit the AGI of Josie being constructed by Mr. Capaldi; as Chrissie puts it to Klara, “we’re asking you to *become* her” (Ishiguro 2021, 207). Chrissie pleads with Klara that if she does so, she will be loved by “not just me but Rick” (Ishiguro 2021, 211). This is disingenuous for two reasons: first, there would be no Klara to “have” the love of Chrissie and Rick: Klara’s self would be subsumed into Josie; second, Chrissie is dubious about Klara’s ability to feel emotion: she says to her, “It must be nice to have no feelings” (Ishiguro 2021, 97).

The paradox of requesting that Klara sacrifice herself while not crediting her with having a self is repeated by Mr. Capaldi when he asks Klara if she would allow her black box to be opened, which would mean her death, to allay public fears that the AFs function in ways that are not strictly rational: “only rationality” is wanted (Ishiguro 2021, 208). Both Chrissie and Mr. Capaldi are anthropocentric, treating Klara as less than human; paradoxically, they also share intimate emotions with her and address her as human. David Livingstone Smith finds such self-contradiction essential to dehumanization: he quotes the “pre-eminent historian of slavery David

Brion Davis”: “since the victims of this process were perceived as ‘animalized humans,’ this double consciousness would probably involve a contradictory shifting back and forth in the recognition of humanity” (qtd. in Smith 2021, 48). The attraction that Chrissie and Mr. Capaldi find in their contradictory behavior is that it empowers control: they can oscillate at will between treating Klara as either human or sub-human; for example, they choose to treat her as human to make an emotional appeal to her to “continue” Josie. The narrative contains three structural ironies; first, the human characters consider Klara a “sub-human” in appearance and essence, while treating her as human on occasion for their own advantage; second, her outward appearance as an AI or AF conceals from these characters Klara’s exemplary human essence; third, Chrissie does develop a warm and respectful relationship with Klara at the same time as she denies it.

6 Limited Reclamations of Emotional Authenticity

As Rosenberg notes, “the beauty of appreciation is spoiled when people begin to notice the lurking intent to get something out of them” (Rosenberg 2015, 210). Dramatic irony comes into play when the reader notices Chrissie’s manipulative intention, but the non-judgmental Klara does not call Chrissie to account. Refraining from judgment is the foundation of empathy, as Rosenberg explains: “empathy occurs only when we let others know that we have shed all judgments about them” (Ishiguro 2021, 91). From Klara’s trusting perspective, there are moments when Chrissie’s intention is kind and loving. Chrissie thanks Klara for making Josie more considerate (Ishiguro 2021, 107) and calls Klara “honey” on the drive into the city (Ishiguro 2021, 193), using the same term of endearment she uses for Josie. Klara observes kindness in the rare moments when Chrissie allows herself to express her authentic self: “her whole face seemed to overflow with kindness, and the same creases that usually created such a tense expression would refold into ones of humor and gentleness” (Ishiguro 2021, 53). Klara demonstrates her sensitivity to nuanced emotions when she travels with Chrissie to Morgan’s Falls, which had been Sal’s favorite place: she sees “joy, fear, sadness, laughter” when she looks at Chrissie (Ishiguro 2021, 104). When Chrissie pleads with Klara to “become” Josie, Klara allows herself to feel Chrissie’s love for Josie and her warm appreciation of Klara also: “I felt her kindness sweeping through me” (Ishiguro 2021, 211).

Chrissie has her finest moment when she speaks up for this relationship and allows her love for Klara to emanate through her indirect declaration. She declines Mr. Capaldi’s request that Klara’s black box be opened: “Find some other black boxes to prize open. Leave our Klara be. Let her have her slow fade” (Ishiguro 2021, 294). By using the affectionate and possessive term “our Klara,” she treats Klara as not only

human but a member of her family, and by using the term “slow fade,” she acknowledges Klara’s mortality: she insists that Klara be allowed to live out what in human terms is called “old age” or the human “life span.” Chrissie also repeats “Klara deserves better than that.” By using the expression “deserves better,” Chrissie brings Klara into the human realm of ethical behaviors and earned rewards.

Chrissie’s reclamation of her own emotional wholeness and recognition of Klara’s humanity are brief. After Josie departs for college, Chrissie allows the reticent Klara to withdraw to a Utility Room despite Josie’s specific insistence that “I want it so that Klara gets sole use of my room and gets to come and go as she pleases” (Ishiguro 2021, 239). On a visit home, Josie makes sure that Klara has a view of McBain’s barn from the small window in the storage closet (Ishiguro 2021, 291). Klara is relegated to the junkyard for her final days, treated as a discarded machine – another technology that has become quickly obsolete.

Josie’s recovery of innocence and authenticity is also limited. Visited in the junkyard by a woman she believes is the Manager of the AF store, Klara observes the woman as she walks away: “it was noticeable how she walked differently to the way she had in the store. With each second step she would lean to her left” (Ishiguro 2021, 303). Read recursively, this detail connects to an earlier one: Chrissie, when shopping for the unique AF to suit her needs, asked Klara to “please reproduce for me Josie’s walk” (Ishiguro 2021, 44); when Klara performed well, Chrissie purchased her (Ishiguro 2021, 45). The visitor tells Klara that she has been searching for Klara in different junkyards for at least two years (Ishiguro 2021, 301), informing the reader (but not Klara) that Josie has made a significant effort to see Klara again, suggesting her continued love; however, like her mother’s, Josie’s love for Klara is self-focused rather than other-focused. Josie maintains control over the interview and keeps her emotional distance by not divulging her identity. She does not consider the joy that divulging her identity would bring to Klara, nor does she have the courage to open her heart to a moment of shared joy. She seeks the self-satisfaction of knowing that Klara feels their relationship was a good one. Josie has always been insecure and needed this reassurance from Klara: because of her loneliness, she has always feared rejection; in the past, only after Klara had reassured Josie that she couldn’t have had “a better child than Josie” was Josie able to smile in a way that was “full of kindness, with no fear behind it” (Ishiguro 2021, 135).

The conversation between Klara and her visitor conveys three dramatic ironies. First, when Klara says of the Sun that He was once especially kind to her (Ishiguro 2021, 302), the reader knows that this refers to the “dark sky morning” when the Sun, from Klara’s perspective, saved Josie’s life; this perspective is not disclosed to Josie. Second, Josie shows that she knows nothing of her mother’s plan to use Klara to “continue” her if she had died (Ishiguro 2021, 301); thus, she is saved from the unsettling awareness that her mother’s love for her is egotistical, possessive, and

dependent on science; a further irony is that the reader may make this judgment, while noticing that Klara does not. Third, this conversation emphasizes that Josie, like the other humans in the narrative, remains oblivious to Klara's faith, love, humility, and non-judgment; as Misra says, "Klara's rich inner world remains a secret to the end" (Misra 2023: 34 (4) 376). In contrast to these characters, the reader is aware of Klara's gratitude for having fulfilled her purpose of loving Josie: she is content to spend the remainder of her days sorting her memories, as humans do when they feel they have experienced a personal love that connects them to a universal energy (Ishiguro 2021, 302).

Like Josie's, Rick's innocence is compromised by experience. He applies for admission to Atlas Brookings as part of the 2 % of admissions available for "unlifted" students; his mother helps by arranging an interview with her old flame Vance (Ishiguro 2021, 242), who chairs the college's Founders Committee, "the body that controls scholarships" (Ishiguro 2021, 243), so that Rick may not only gain admission but have his education funded. Vance speculates that the flock of drones Rick has invented may "have high surveillance capabilities." He identifies himself with the state by saying that "there may be people out there *we* need to keep an eye on" (*italics mine*) (Ishiguro 2021, 244). Here the text notes two things. First, as Harari observes, "AI-based surveillance systems are being deployed on an enormous scale" (Harari 2024, 241). Second, the episode depicts how power co-opts the powerless: Rick may get his admission and scholarship because it will be to Vance's professional advantage to recruit a student who has invented a technology amenable to the surveillance needs of the state and the profit motives of private companies.

The narrative presents imbrication as the pattern in which innocence and experience interrelate. Klara recognizes that the innocence of Josie and Rick's childhood love is to be transformed rather than lost. Rick will enter the adult world of experience with a nostalgic memory: "I'll always keep searching for someone just like her" (Ishiguro 2021, 288). Completing the narrative's circle, Klara wonders if "after many years, and after many changes," they might meet again, like the old couple ("Coffee Cup Lady" and "Raincoat Man" in Klara's vocabulary) she had seen on the street from the AF store window (Ishiguro 2021, 21–22). For these couples in the narrative foreground and background respectively, love is a matter of experience leavened by innocence, and this imbrication represents the most common pattern in human life.

7 The Border Between Science and Humanity

In celebrating Klara's kindness and love, the novel reflects contemporary gender roles and their relation to the social hierarchy. The status of Klara as a machine

providing “affective care” at the bottom of the social hierarchy depicts the relegation of love and kindness to the realms of the private, the feminine, and the unwaged. Claudia Card finds that what she calls “the care voice,” the voice of the female gender role, defines the self in the way Klara does, through “weblike networks of relationships.” This is what Klara does in her interwoven relationships with Josie, Chrissie, Rick, and Paul. In contrast, what Card calls “the justice voice,” the voice of the male gender role, defines the self in terms of “individual achievement, understanding relationships hierarchically” (Card 1996, 51). Chrissie usurps the voice of the male gender role when she values her social position above all, her daughters only if they are lifted, and Klara only if she is an effective caregiver for Josie or if she is willing to sacrifice herself to become Josie. The “justice” voice sees relationships as transactional and determined by social power.

The novel is dedicated to Ishiguro’s mother, perhaps because it reveres the human virtues found in motherly love. As psychiatrist Piero Ferrucci notes, great male poets have discovered kindness and love in reclaiming their feminine selves: Dante’s quest in *The Divine Comedy* ends with his celebration of “the laughing beauty” of the Madonna, and Goethe’s *Faust* avoids surrendering his soul to the devil only when he “finds fulfillment in the eternal feminine – love and tenderness and warmth” (Ferrucci 2006, 18–19). The mercy that Klara extends to the tormented Chrissie is not constrained by the world of social experience: as Shakespeare’s Portia declares in *The Merchant of Venice*, “the quality of mercy is not strained”; rather, “it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven” (Shakespeare 1964 4.2. 180–181).

The idealization of the feminine has been historically a means of marginalizing women, and the novel is subject to the reader’s irony in this regard. As Rosenberg puts it, “For centuries, the image of the loving woman has been associated with sacrifice and the denial of one’s own needs to take care of others. Because women are socialized to view the caretaking of others as their highest duty, they often learn to ignore their own needs” (Rosenberg 2015, 55). Martha Nussbaum quotes John Stuart Mill on the subjection of women: “All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite of that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others” (Qtd in Nussbaum 45). Nussbaum insists that male dominators “encourage servility and an absence of autonomy and courage in the subjugated. They also inflict trauma by cruelty, one purpose of which is to break victims’ spirit” (Nussbaum 2021, 47). The damage is profound: the evils of a system of oppression cannot be undone.

Klara endures the adversities of life, and her innocence provides brief and limited moments of enlightenment for those she befriends. She uses her growing knowledge of emotions and ethics to love and serve Josie better. Klara’s persistence is seen in Paul, Josie’s father, who, because he reveres the unending mystery of the human heart, tries valiantly to understand Klara, to whom he gives his emotional

and practical support; in the end, he trusts her: it is an emotional or intuitive decision rather than a rational one. Like the mature Klara, Paul is experienced but unsullied. He has endured the death of his daughter Sal, his divorce, the severe illness of Josie, the loss of his profession, plus the loss of his social status, and he confronts attacks on his home, yet he maintains his optimism and hope. His term of affection for Josie, “my favorite wild animal” (Ishiguro 2021, 185), conveys a symbolic hope that she may be able to rely upon her natural self to guide her through what he calls “this mess we’ve bequeathed to [her] generation” (Ishiguro 2021, 232). He asserts that those who were “substituted” are now “really living for the first time” (Ishiguro 2021, 190), showing his affirmation of life and his critical perspective on social values. When Chrissie and Mr. Capaldi insist that human uniqueness can be copied by technology, Paul feels “like they’re taking from me what I hold most precious in this life” (Ishiguro 2021, 222).

Paul understands the technological culture Klara is pitted against; as he says, he is an “expert engineer”; hence, there is “a kind of coldness” in him that Chrissie lacks (Ishiguro 2021, 222). Chrissie has risked her daughters’ lives because she has acquiesced to her culture’s view that genetic editing is the only route to “a good life.” When science failed her through Sal’s death, Chrissie secretly had an android made to replace Sal (Ishiguro 2021, 147). The replacement failed to satisfy, and Chrissie fears that the “continuation” of Josie will also prove inadequate. Unlike Paul, Chrissie cannot access a critical perspective on her society’s apotheosis of science; as Paul puts it, “she just won’t stretch that far” (Ishiguro 2021, 222). Paul’s perspective as an engineer, combined with his reverence for the mysterious depths of the human heart, gives him an encompassing view of science versus the inimitable human world of ethics and emotion.

Paul’s invention symbolizes his ability to see beyond social conditioning. It is “a small rough-looking circular mirror mounted on a tiny stand”: it does not reverse the image it reflects. Paul exclaims, “Isn’t it strange how we all tolerate it? All those mirrors that show you the wrong way round? This one shows you the way you really look” (Ishiguro 2021, 186). The non-reversing mirror represents an accurate view of the world, whereas seeing oneself “the wrong way round” represents the enculturation of the text’s mechanistic society.

References

- Blake, William. 2015a. “The Lamb.” In *Songs of Innocence and Experience Plus the Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 14. Milton Keynes, UK: Aziloth Books.
- Blake, William. 2015b. “The Tyger.” In *Songs of Innocence and Experience Plus the Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 61. Milton Keynes, UK: Aziloth Books.

- Card, Claudia. 1996. *The Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck*. Philadelphia: Temple U. Press.
- Du, Lanlan. 2022. "Love and Hope: Affective Labor and Posthuman Relations in *Klara and the Sun*." *Neohelicon: Acta Comparationis Literarum Universarum* 49 (2): 551–62.
- Ferrucci, Piero. 2006. *The Power of Kindness: The Unexpected Benefits of Leading a Compassionate Life*. Tr. By Vivien Reid Ferrucci. New York: Random House.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. 2024. *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI*. Toronto: Penguin Random House Canada.
- Holy Bible. 1953. *Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Nelson & Sons.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. 2021. *Klara and the Sun*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.
- Misra, Jahnavi. 2023. "Unrequited Labor of Care in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*." *Women: A Cultural Review* 34 (4): 370–89.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 2021. *Citadels of Pride: Sexual Assault, Accountability, and Reconciliation*. New York: Norton.
- O'Gieblyn, Meghan. 2021. *God, Human, Animal, Machine: Technology, Metaphor, and the Search for Meaning*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Rosenberg, Marshall. 2015. *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 3rd ed. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.
- Shakespeare, William. 1964. *The Merchant of Venice*, edited by John Russell Brown. Milton Keynes, UK: Methuen-Arden.
- Smith, David Livingstone. 2021. *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization*. Boston: Harvard U. Press.
- Sun, Yuqing. 2023. "Post/Human Perfectibility and the Technological Other in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 64 (3): 504–11.
- Wagamese, Richard. 2016. *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*. Madeira Park, BC: Douglas & McIntyre.
- Weizenbaum, Joseph. 1976. *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation*. New York: W.H. Freeman and Company.