



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



Is the digital age disrupting our emotional feelings with reference to Kazu Ishiguro's novel "Klara and the sun?"

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Abstract

In this paper, I'm questing the human insecurity and loneliness in a world struggling with a newfound understanding of mortality, change and technological intervention. I took Kazu Ishiguro's novel "Klara and the Sun" as it contains certain themes that depict not only the idea of struggling man in the new age, but also how the digital age is disrupting the human feelings. It reflects the patterns of the changing world while exploring the true meaning of love.

Ishiguro has used a science fictional lens to deeply explain how humans interact and connect and has also tried to analyze the loneliness, isolation, and emotional behavior of humans. Mentioning that, the writer has also shed light on different layers of the society and has beautifully penned the lives of people in different segments of the society. I suppose that we are ironically ill prepared for the new psychological world we are creating. Making robots which are emotionally powerful as Klara; while at the same time, hearing statements such as "technology is just a tool" that deny the power of our creations both on us as individuals and on our culture. I am concerned here with the ways technologies change our human identities and interrelations. Are the designers of these robots regarding them as just tools? Then why their users experience them as carriers of meanings and emotions? I am raising a controversial question here: is just a robot capable of exchanging emotion and love? Have humans been drained completely from the ability of reciprocating compassion and understanding? Now the point is not what computers can do or what computers will be like in the future, but rather, what we will be like? What we need to ask is not whether robots will be able to love us but rather why we might love robots.

Keywords: Technological Disruption; Humanoid Robots; Loneliness; AI; Digital Transformation

1. Introduction

Actually, technology has become more competitive these days as it raises certain questions that go far more to the heart of what we consider our specific rights and responsibilities as human beings. Would we want, for example, to replace a human being with a robot nanny? A robot nanny would be more interactive and stimulating than television, the technology that today serves as a caretaker stand-in for many children. Indeed, the robot nanny might be more interactive and stimulating than many human beings. Yet the idea of a child bonding with a robot that presents itself as a companion seems chilling.

Interestingly, the well-known theory of object relations in psychoanalysis has always been about the relationships that people—or objects—have with one another. So it is somewhat ironic to use the psychodynamic object-relations tradition to write about the relationships people have with objects in the everyday sense of the word. Social critic Christopher Lasch wrote that we live in a "culture of narcissism." [1]. The narcissist's classic problem involves loneliness

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and fear of intimacy. From that point of view, in the computer scientists created a very powerful object, an object that offers the illusion of companionship without the demands of intimacy, an object that allows you to be a loner and yet never be alone.

So, if we can relate to machines as psychological beings, do we have a moral responsibility to them? When people program a computer that develops some intelligence or social competency, they tend to feel as though they've nurtured it. And so, they often feel that they owe it something—some loyalty, some respect. Even when roboticists admit that they have not succeeded in building a machine that has consciousness, they can still feel that they don't want their robot to be mistreated or tossed in the dust heap as though it were just a machine.

We learn to be in the shoes of another person through real-life observation or storytelling. Communication technologies have evolved — from the beginning of language, to writing, to telecommunications, to information technologies, and soon to telepathic technologies with brain-computer interfaces.

In the 21st century, we use technology to communicate at a level unprecedented in human history. So, with so many opportunities to connect, why do we still not understand one another, and face such conflict? Our brains' empathy systems have their share of problems. Most humans are generally good at empathizing with individuals. But we're not so good at trying to do the same for an entire nation or ethnic group. But for all that information and exposure to new ideas, there are many examples of communication technologies that can destroy empathy.

2. Literature review

Although computer programs today are no more able to understand or empathize with human problems than they were 40 years ago, attitudes toward talking things over with a machine have gotten more and more positive. The idea of the nonjudgmental computer, a confidential “ear” and information resource, seems increasingly appealing. Indeed, if people are turning toward robots to take roles that were once the sole domain of people, I think it is fair to read this as a criticism of our society. So why people like robot therapists? Probably because they see human ones as pill pushers or potentially abusive [2]. Many people find sympathy for the idea of computer judges and it is usually because people fear that human judges are biased along lines of gender, race, or class. Clearly, it will be awhile before people say they prefer to be given job counseling or to be fired by a robot, but it's not a hard stretch for the imagination.

Usually, the fear of addiction comes up in terms of the Internet. In many studies of Internet social experience, it was found out that people who make the most of their “lives on the screen” are those who approach on-line life in a spirit of self-reflection [3]. They look at what they are doing with their virtual selves and ask what these actions say about their desires, perhaps unmet, as well as their need for social connection, perhaps unfilled. If we stigmatize the medium as “addictive” (and try to strictly control it as if it were a drug), we will not learn how to more widely nurture this discipline of self-reflection. The computer can be regarded as mirroring a part of us, then start seeing ourselves differently. This sense of the computer as second self is magnified in cyberspace.

For some people, cyberspace is a place to act out unresolved conflicts, to play and replay personal difficulties on a new and exotic stage. For others, it provides an opportunity to work through significant problems, to use the new materials of “cybersociality” [4]. to reach for new resolutions. These more positive identity effects follow from the fact that for some, cyberspace provides what psychologist Erik Erikson would have called a “psychosocial moratorium,” [5]. a central element in how Erikson thought about identity development in adolescence. Today, the idea of the college years as a consequence-free time-out seems of another era. But if our culture no longer offers an adolescent time-out, virtual communities often do. It is part of what makes them seem so attractive. Time in cyberspace reworks the notion of the moratorium because it may now exist on an always-available window.

Apparently, computers change the way we think about ourselves. People tend to define what is special about being human by comparing themselves to their “nearest neighbors,” so when our nearest neighbors were pets, people were special because of their intellects. When computers were primitive machines and began to be analogized to people, people were superior because of their superior intellects. As computers became smarter, the emphasis shifted to the soul and the spirit in the human machine. When Gary Kasparov lost his match against IBM's chess computer, “Deep Blue,” he declared that at least he had feelings about losing. In other words, people were declared unique because they were authentically emotional. But when robot cats and dogs present themselves as needing people to take care of them in order to function well and thrive, they present themselves *as if* they had emotions [6]. As a consequence, for many people, feelings begin to seem less special, less specifically human. I am hearing people begin to describe humans and robots as though they somehow shared emotional lives.

If emotions are not what set us apart from machines, then people search for what does, and they come up with the biological. What makes human beings special in this new environment is the fact that we are biological beings rather than mechanical ones. In the language of children, the robot is smart and can be a friend but doesn't have "a real heart or blood." An adult confronting an "affective" computer program designed to function as a psychotherapist says, "Why would I want to talk about sibling rivalry to something that was never born?" [7]. It would be too simple to say that our feelings are devalued; it would be closer to the mark to say that they no longer seem equal to the task of putting enough distance between ourselves and the robots we have created in our image. Our bodies, our sexuality, our sensuality do a better job.

Of course, defining people in biological terms creates its own problems. For one thing, scientists are already blurring the distinction between people and machines by making machines out of biological materials and using machine parts within the human body. And we are treating our bodies as things—in our investigations of our genetic code, in the way we implant pumps and defibrillators in our flesh, in our digitizing of our bodies for education, research, and therapeutic purposes. Additionally, from a psychological perspective and in terms of our identities, we're getting squeezed in every direction as new technologies provoke us to rethink what it means to be authentically human.

Human beings are complex, and with fluidity comes a search for what seems solid. Most of the experiences with today's technologies pose questions about authenticity in new, urgent ways. As one student with a wearable computer with a 24-hour Internet connection put it, "I become my computer. It's not just that I remember people or know more. I feel invincible, sociable, better prepared. I am naked without it. With it, I'm a better person." [8].

In our culture, technology has moved from being a tool to becoming part of our selves. And as a culture, we've become more comfortable with these closer bonds through our increasingly intimate connections with the technologies that we have allowed onto and into our person. For most people, it hasn't been through technologies as exotic as a wearable computer. Nursing homes in Japan increasingly make use of robots that give elders their medicine, take their blood pressure, and serve as companions. The Japanese are committed to this form of care for their elders; some say that they see it as more respectful than bringing in foreigners from different cultural backgrounds [9].

For many, authenticity in relationships is a human purpose. So, from that point of view, the fact that our parents and grandparents might say "I love you" to a robot, who will say "I love you" in return, does not feel completely comfortable to many and raises questions about what kind of authenticity we require of our technology. We should not have robots saying things that they could not possibly "mean." Robots do not love [10]. They might, by giving timely reminders to take medication or call a nurse, show a kind of caretaking that is appropriate to what they are, but it's not quite as simple as that. Elders come to love the robots that care for them, and it may be too frustrating if the robot does not say the words "I love you" back to the older person, just as I can already see that it is extremely frustrating if the robot is not programmed to say the elderly person's name. These are the kinds of things we need to investigate, with the goal of having the robots serve our human purposes.

I hope that this study works as an inspirational study for reconsidering maintaining our human attributes as we become more sophisticated consumers of computational technology—and realize how much it is changing the way we see our world and the quality of our relationships—we will become more discerning producers and consumers. We need to fully discuss human purposes and our options in technical design before a technology becomes widely available and standardized. For example, many hospitals have robots that help health care workers lift patients. The robots can be used to help turn paralyzed or weak patients over in bed, to clean them, bathe them, or prevent bedsores. Basically, they're like an exoskeleton with hydraulic arms that are directly controlled by the human's lifting movements [11].

Now, there are two ways of looking at this technology. It can be designed, built, and marketed in ways that emphasize its identity as a mechanical "flipper." With this approach, it will tend to be seen as yet another sterile, dehumanizing machine in an increasingly cold health care environment [12]. Alternatively, we can step back and imagine this machine as a technological extension of the body of one human being trying to care for another. Seen in the first light, one might argue that the robot exoskeleton comes between human beings, that it eliminates human contact. Seen in the second light, this machine can be designed, built, and marketed in ways that emphasize its role as an extension of a person in a loving role.

3. Discussion

Klara and the Sun is one of the masterpieces of Kazuo Ishiguro depicting the patterns of the changing world while exploring the true meaning of love. The novel is based upon dystopian science fiction, the story revolves around the

views of the first-person narrator, Klara, the novel's main protagonist. She is an android developed to function as an artificial friend resembling a humanoid machine who is distinguished by her observational and learning skills.

Apart from her, there are 29 characters in the story and all of them are divided into six sections. Josie is a fourteen-year-old sick girl who has had artificial gene editing for better academic performance. Josie's mother is Chrissy and they belong to a lifted household. Moreover, Caroline is the Artificial Friend (AF) customer. Other main characters include the "Manager" who is an AF seller, the "beggar" at the RPO building, and the "Rosa" who is Klara's companion and one of the Artificial Friends.

This story is about a machine and narrated by a machine, though the word is not used about her until late in the book when it is wielded by a stranger as an insult. People distrust and then start to like her: "Are you alright, Klara?" [13]. Apart from the occasional lapse into bullying or indifference, humans are solicitous of Klara's feelings, if that is what they are. Klara is built to observe and understand humans. "I believe I have many feelings," she says. "The more I observe the more feelings become available to me." [13]. Klara is an AF, or artificial friend, who is bought as a companion for 14-year-old Josie, a girl suffering from a mysterious, perhaps terminal illness. Klara is loyal and tactful, she is able to absorb difficulty and return care. Her role, as she describes it, is to prevent loneliness and to serve.

At the start of the novel, we see Klara being moved into the window display of her store in the city in order to attract customers, and she speaks in gentle tones about what she sees outside. Klara is already a little self-conscious, for a machine. She is also an exceptionally talented AF, because she is able to grasp emotional contradiction. Out in the street, a man and a woman see each other, perhaps for the first time in many years, and they embrace so tightly that Klara wonders if they are more upset than delighted. "Sometimes," her manager says, "at special moments like that, people feel a pain alongside their happiness." [13].

She has already seen Josie, the girl whose friend she instantly wants to become, but Josie has not come back to make the purchase. Klara must wait, which she does with great patience. Ishiguro is very interested in delay and restoration. Loneliness and waiting are almost the same thing here; estrangements and reunifications run through the book. [14]. Josie reconciles with her old friend Rick, she meets her separated father, and Rick's mother makes contact with an old boyfriend, Vance. The promise is held out that those who wait will be rewarded, and sometimes they are. Other times, the reality is disappointing or even brutal, but win or lose, hope is such a sustaining thing that it becomes a value in itself. Hope, in the face of sickness and possible death, is what Klara does best. We come to know more than Klara does, and this distance is the gentle opposite of irony – it is compassion.

There is no great veil ripped from the narrative to reveal a conspiracy of machines, or of men. Social and political details come late, and make no difference to Klara. Slowly, however, our understanding of the world detaches from her naive point of view. The readers come to know more than Klara does, and this distance is the gentle opposite of irony – it is compassion.

How does a robot become conscious? Klara runs on solar power and is fretful when the world goes grey. The absence of light, she says, might make an AF "start to worry there was something wrong with him". Klara's need for the sun is so close to an emotion as to make no difference. The sun is "goodness", she says, it provides "special nourishment" and – as easily as that – both abstraction and magical thinking are engendered in the mind of a machine. When Klara looks at the sky the light can be lemon or slate grey, but when Josie is sick, it turns to the colour "of her vomit or her pale feces" [13]. Klara is generating symbolism, she is making meaning and taking solace from what might be called a "psychology". This finally yields a spiritual sense, when she starts to bargain for Josie's health, or when she decides to make a sacrifice, in order to make Josie better. Klara starts to pray.

Ishiguro is at his most moving when he writes about the meek. It is almost concerning how ready the female characters in the book are to be sacrificed to some greater aim, to suffer or be punished. When a woman tries to strike a bargain with a cruel authority figure, she takes it one step further: "You can check if I have been punishing myself properly," [13]. she says. The men in the novel are, by contrast, more rebellious and free. Klara's naivety is the engine of the book and its great strength, but we might query why the humans seem to know so little and be so trusting too. When Klara asks for assistance in the task she has set herself to save Josie, no one turns her down. "I don't see how this helps Josie," says Rick, "but if you say it will, then of course I'll help." [13]. This same avowal is repeated, more strangely, by Josie's father, though his motives are less clear.

There are questions the reader might ask, in this as well as in any other novel that is set after the invention of the internet. Why does Klara not talk to Siri, if she wants to know what is going on in the wider world, or sometimes even what is going on in front of her? Other questions linger, in a more fruitful way, after the novel is finished. Would people

risk making their children sick, you wonder, in order to help them get ahead in the world? In fact, people do all kinds of awful things to their children, for exactly that reason. Ishiguro's simplicity here, as elsewhere, yields serious speculation. There is something so steady and beautiful about the way Klara is always approaching connection, like a Zeno's arrow of the heart. This story is unique partly because it enacts the way humans learn how to love.

But the times Klara and Josie live in are anything but life affirming. The whole novel is constructed like a puzzle – in true science fictional fashion, the reader teases out small details which help piece together a depressing reality. Without revealing too much, one might say that it is a time when human loneliness is amplified several times over in a bid for artificially moderated perfectibility. Interactions are often stunted and awkward, and tensions run high between enthusiastic converts and humans who haven't quite made the jump in embracing the future.

Josie, Klara's adoptive human, is ill and shows no signs of getting any better. Klara is convinced that Josie's sickness is eminently curable, unlike her more knowledgeable family and friends. Throughout the novel, what is supremely ironic is the figure of the robot clutching on to hope despite all evidence to the contrary. Hope becomes not a function of necessarily knowing more, but of an inhuman openness to possibility, which the novel insists humankind is no longer capable of despite staggering technological progress. The humans themselves are thrown into stark relief as being machinelike – the grieving and anxious mother, mechanically going through the motions of denial and acceptance; Rick, the "unlifted" friend, confident in his innate abilities yet consigned forever as inferior; Josie herself, disabled and tragically become replaceable in a world that has learned to market and sell uniqueness and companionship for profit, while rendering the companions themselves as dispensable. He is the master of slowly deepening our awareness of human failing, fragility and the inevitability of death — all that, even as he deepens our awareness of what temporary magic it is to be alive in the first place. Like a medieval pilgrim walking a cathedral in meditation, Ishiguro keeps pacing his way through these big existential themes in his fiction [15]. Klara and the Sun is yet another return pilgrimage and it's one of the most affecting and profound novels Ishiguro has written.

The story is set in one of the United States of the near future, a place riven by tribal loyalties and fascist political movements. Technology has rendered many people "post employed" and created a blunt caste system where the so-called "lifted" are on top. That's the wide-focus social backdrop of this novel; but most of the time, we're seeing things through the narrow view of Klara, our first-person narrator. When we meet her, Klara is on display in a department store window: She's an AF or "Artificial Friend." To call her a robot diminishes her, because Klara, as the store manager says in a sales pitch, has an "appetite for observing and learning .. [and]. has the most sophisticated understanding of any AF in this store". [13].

The AFs have been designed as companions for the children of this brave new world who, for some reason, don't go out much. One day, a pale, thin teenager named Josie comes into the store with her mother, a woman who, Klara notices, carries an "angry exhaustion" in her eyes. We soon learn the mother's expression is connected to a mysterious illness that's weakening Josie. Immediately drawn to Klara, Josie chooses her to be her best friend, and Klara is packed up and sent to Josie's house.

Loneliness is one of the signature emotions that Ishiguro's novels fathom, and in her new position, Klara has many opportunities to observe the strategies that humans devise to fight off loneliness and conceal vulnerability. Here, she describes a contrived gathering of teenagers, called an "interaction" at Josie's house. Klara is at first puzzled by the meanness of the kids including, uncharacteristically, Josie. Then, slowly, Klara grasps that: "They fear loneliness and that's why they behave as they do..."

I'd begun to understand also that ... people often felt the need to prepare a side of themselves to display to passers-by — as they might in a store window — and that such a display needn't be taken so seriously once the moment had passed [13].

Klara's voice, her sensibility is pure and devoted, a little like a service dog. The question of whether Klara, indeed, has a "sensibility" is a crucial one here, as it was in Ishiguro's 2005 novel, *Never Let Me Go* where the young female narrator is a clone. Klara is such a compelling presence that I think most readers of this novel will say, yes, she's a sentient being. But, what does our intense connection to an Artificial Friend do to the belief that, as one character puts it, there's "something unreachable inside each of us [human beings].. Something that's unique and won't transfer". [13].

Without question, Klara certainly seems capable of loving. In the unbearable sections of this novel I referenced earlier, Josie grows weaker and Klara, who's herself solar-powered, beseeches the "kindly" Sun for "special nourishment" for Josie and, then, bravely sets out to make an offering to the Sun. Klara's misperception of the Sun as a caring deity calls

to question our own limited human understanding of, well, everything. Like Klara, who sees the world through grids that sometimes go haywire, we humans only see through a glass? [16].

Actually, Ishiguro is distinguished by his more expansive vision. The story urges you to think about life, mortality, the saving grace of love: in short, life main concerns. About halfway through “Klara and the Sun,” a woman meeting Klara for the first time blurts out the kind of quiet-part-out-loud line we rely on to get our bearings in a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro. “One never knows how to greet a guest like you,” she says. “After all, are you a guest at all? Or do I treat you like a vacuum cleaner?” [13].

“You said you’d never get an AF,” Josie’s friend Rick says, accusingly — which makes Klara the mark of some rite of passage they didn’t want to accede to. Her ostensible purpose is to help get Josie through the lonely and difficult years until college. They are lonely because in Josie’s world, most kids don’t go to school but study at home using “oblongs.” They are difficult because Josie suffers from an unspecified illness, about which her mother projects unspecified guilt.

Here is Josie’s father, a former engineer: “Honestly? I think the substitutions were the best thing that happened to me. ... I really believe they helped me to distinguish what’s important from what isn’t. And where I live now, there are many fine people who feel exactly the same way.” [13]. Through Klara, we pick up bits of overheard conversation: a mention of “fascistic leanings” here; a reference to Josie’s mysteriously departed sister there; the woman outside the playhouse who protests Klara’s presence: “First they take the jobs. Now they take the seats at the theater?”

Kazuo Ishiguro is an author at the top of his craft, and Klara and the Sun could be seen from a science-fiction lens to look at existential questions humanity has pondered for years. The novel explores what it means to be human through how we connect with others and come to understand ourselves. The questions are as compelling as they have always been, but occasionally this fabulistic framing becomes a crutch, as Ishiguro’s hand at times weighs a bit too heavy on the scale.

Klara, the novel’s eponymous main character and narrator is an AF, or “artificial friend”. AFs are solar-powered humanoid robots, designed to offer companionship to the children of parents who purchase them. The world of the novel seems to be a slightly more futuristic one than our own, though its characters seem as prone to isolation and loneliness as the people in our world, hence the AFs. The novel’s first section of six begins in a store selling AFs, and Klara faithfully documents not only the personalities of the manager and her AF peers, but also the rhythms of the store, and the manners of the perusing customers.

Each AF varies slightly, and the manager says each model is unique. The secret talent is her perceptiveness, not only finely tuned to the minutia of sensory experiences that many contemporary novels deal with, but also the specific feelings of those she encounters. Klara’s perspective is critical for the novel, but this lens often feels like a weakness. Many scenes in the book involve Klara describing something she’s seen or heard, and then immediately musing about the events to other characters. While this is standard-fare for the modern novel, Klara often goes even further, detecting and relaying the emotions of the characters as they happen. After witnessing two elderly people embrace outside the store, Klara has this conversation with the manager:

“Those people seem so pleased to see each other,” Manager said. And I realized she’d been watching them as closely as I had .

“ Yes, they seem so happy,” I said. “But it’s strange because they also seem upset”.

“ Oh, Klara,” Manager said quietly. “You never miss a thing, do you”? [13].

The novel is rife with similar scenes, and often I found the effect to be a bit heavy-handed, as Klara’s narration inherently leans heavily to the “tell” side of show and tell.

“ Show don’t tell” is a flawed technique, and I certainly won’t be someone to extol its doctrine as the only way. However, one of the most beautiful things about art is the unique connection each individual has with a work, their interpretation of the piece, and how it relates to their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Leaning more into “telling” doesn’t shut this down, but in providing a singular interpretation—especially from a largely truthful narrator such as Klara—it does at least narrow down the massive perception an audience may have of a piece of work into a limited range.

Klara seems to be the only AF with this ability, at least among the few she becomes close to at the store, and contrasts her ability with her closest friend, Rosa, a cheerful and perhaps more ignorant AF. Klara and Rosa are chosen to sit in the window display—a perfect people-watching opportunity—but the two are surprised how few AFs they see in the

wild. When they finally spot a girl with an AF, Rosa is overjoyed; but Klara looks a bit deeper. “But Rosa missed so many signals. She would often exclaim delightedly at a pair going by, and I would look and realize even though a girl was smiling at her AF, she was in fact angry with him, and was perhaps at that very moment thinking cruel thoughts about him.” [13]. I wonder what the novel would be like if Rosa were to narrate it, perhaps allowing just a little more space for a reader to bring their own ideas into it.

While sitting in the window seat, Klara forges a bond with a girl named Josie, who spots her while passing in a taxi. Josie is taken with Klara immediately, and promises to return soon to purchase her with her mother. The days pass, and another child becomes interested in Klara, but Klara can't forget the pact she made with Josie. Eventually, Josie and her mother return to purchase Klara, after the mother tests her observational ability by having Klara precisely reproduce Josie's manner of walking. The two become friends, in Josie's fairly typical home, consisting of her housekeeper Melania and her mother. Josie is frequently ill, which in her case makes her bedridden. While the specifics of her condition are never known, it's heavily implied that her illness is a side-effect of artificial gene editing, a process known in the novel as “lifting”. Additionally, Josie lives in an isolated area, with her schooling coming via virtual lessons, and socializing limited to scheduled get-togethers with other lifted kids, and her interactions with the neighbor boy, Rick. Rick is Josie's closest friend and confidant, and the two have the sort of deep bond that goes beyond friendship. They talk to each other about the “plan”, which seems to be a sort of loosely-conceived idea for sticking together through adulthood.

It's through Rick the novel also explores class and the ways the world works differently for those with money and those without. Rick and his mother don't live in abject poverty, but their home is a far-cry from Josie and her mother's. Even more so, Rick isn't lifted. While this doesn't seem to have a noticeable effect on his cognitive abilities (he holds his own at a gathering for lifted kids, despite their bullying), though it does greatly impact his future prospects .

A large part of the back half of his story is his and his mother's attempts to get Rick into a school called Atlas Brookings, allegedly one of the only institutions that is receptive to students who haven't been lifted. At a meeting with someone connected with the college, he pitches a fleet of robotic birds he's developed as possible surveillance tech, just one of the ways this scene nods to the way non-lifted or underprivileged kids are forced to sell out just to get by. There's a balancing act going on in Klara and the Sun, between the subtext and the text. While Ishiguro has no qualms about being extremely forthcoming about the emotions characters are experiencing, he has managed to build a sense of intrigue under the surface. We're never quite given the full picture behind the state of the world, nor Josie's illness, or the death of her sister Sal, though again gene editing is implied to be the cause. These mysteries are deeply compelling, and they keep the pages turning. It's unfortunate Ishiguro doesn't keep the rest of his cards as close to his vest here, as the effect is powerful.

In a way, Klara is reminiscent of Ishiguro's earlier narrator character Mr. Stevens, from *Remains of the Day*. While Klara doesn't serve the family in the same sense that Mr. Stevens does, her position within the family is something of a step below, and she considers it her mission in life to be as good of a friend to Josie as she can. She's developed a sort of heliocentric religion for herself, stemming from the fact that she draws power from the Sun, and assuming the same must be true for people, hopes to appeal to the Sun directly to cure Josie. This becomes something of a quest for her, which she looks for opportunities to work towards, finding moments to herself to make her appeals.

Despite Klara's impressive capacity for mimesis and sponge like powers of absorption, we never forget Klara's obvious limitations. Her view of the world is circumscribed, her vocabulary stilted, her agency virtually nonexistent. All of which make her an oddly perfect fit for Ishiguro, who has long specialized in the blinkered protagonist. What his tentative narrators tell us, about themselves and the worlds they inhabit, is never the full picture; in fact, the pathos of his work routinely derives from how little his characters are able to admit or understand.

In this novel, what most interests Ishiguro, however, is not the actual science or even the challenges of navigating the new rules and roles but how this understanding has been foisted on the populace as a settled matter. It is significant to the novel's ethical landscape that this sea change has taken place in the recent past. AFs remain a novelty, a source of both nagging unease and irrational hope, even—or especially—for those, like Chrissie, who are described as too “sentimental,” too caught up in “the old feelings,” to adapt.

As flat as Klara's voice is, it is not exactly affectless. The humanoid robots of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*—set, in later editions of the book, in 2021—are distinguished from humans through empathy tests that they are expected to fail. Klara and her ilk evince not just artificial intelligence but also, more relevantly, artificial empathy. When a depressed Chrissie remarks, “It must be nice sometimes to have no feelings,” Klara corrects her: “The more I observe, the more feelings become available to me.” [13]. The algorithms that guide her are sophisticated enough that Klara claims to experience sadness, discomfort, excitement, and so on. But she still struggles with the mutability of

human moods. Watching Josie's temperament shift among a group of fellow teens, Klara acknowledges that "humans, in their wish to escape loneliness, made maneuvers that were very complex and hard to fathom." Suffice to say, Klara's ability to master the infinitude of human emotion factors into the book's central, heavily foreshadowed revelation.

For all the emotional capacity built into her, Klara never once rues her nonhuman status, let alone fights her inevitable extinction. Her sole unwavering goal is Josie's recovery, and the lengths to which she goes account for the novel's most labored aspects. Given her own reliance on solar energy, Klara begins to conceive the Sun as an all-powerful deity whose "special nourishment" will cure her owner. In a selfless spin on Pinocchio's quest to find the Blue Fairy, Klara makes a pilgrimage to the Sun's "resting place," a distant barn where it appears to set as she looks out from Josie's bedroom. Ishiguro leaves open the question of whether Klara's ardent prayer, her deal with her Sun God, succeeds. It is hard not to wonder why a state-of-the-art piece of machine intelligence would bear an understanding of heavenly bodies that seems to date from some ancient civilization. Perhaps the point is that robots, if they are hard-wired to imitate humans, will also succumb to magical thinking [17].

Saving Klara from a more abrupt end, Chrissie declares, "She deserves her slow fade." This term for the final phase of an AF's existence also describes the effect of this strangely frictionless novel, which itself peters out like a draining battery. In *Never Let Me Go* the persistent understatement of the narration is crucial to the book's power—a slow-dawning horror seeps between the lines and lingers well beyond its conclusion. But Klara and the Sun lacks any equivalent tension: its setting proves to be a generic dystopia, and Klara, even for this master of withholding, may be too blank a slate, incapable of evasion or repression [18]. Klara's fixation on the Sun comes to stand in for a larger problem. The shadows are where meaning typically resides for Ishiguro, and in this book, they are simply too well illuminated.

Most fiction about robots seems to fall into one of two categories: stories about how they're going to kill us all or stories about how robots become an integral part of our lives. Kazu's novel is classified to be the second. And it's a fact that robots are going to play a huge role in our future, and fiction is a great way to explore what exactly that might mean. Klara is programmed to be deeply empathetic and curious about the world. Because the book is told in the first person, we see everything from her perspective, which is both fascinating and odd. There are long stretches where you'll almost forget that she isn't human.

One of the most striking things about the book is Ishiguro's depiction of Klara's vision. Instead of having one large field of vision, she seems to see the world through a series of pixel-like boxes. This results in some pretty wild descriptions, like this one when Klara looks at an adult woman she meets: "In one box she was visible only from her waist to the upper part of her neck, while the box beside it was almost entirely taken up by her eyes." [13]. I found it a bit confusing, although it was a good reminder that Klara isn't like us no matter how human she may seem at times.

There's a lot of work going on in this space, especially around companion robots for older people. Loneliness is a real health problem in old age that increases your risk of premature death—a fact that has been made more evident by social isolation many seniors experienced during the pandemic. Research shows that having a pet can significantly ease this burden. Companion robots like Klara would be the next step up from that [19].

In *A Thousand Brains*, Jeff Hawkins explores at length what moral obligation we have to our machines. Should we feel bad about pulling the plug on an artificial intelligence if it's as human-like as Klara? Hawkins concludes that the answer is no. Ishiguro certainly makes you think about what life with super intelligent robots might look like. He never claims to be a technologist or a futurist, but his perspective on artificial life is provocative nonetheless [20]. At the end of the book, when someone asks Klara if she thinks she succeeded at her objective, she says, "Yes, I believe I gave good service and prevented Josie from becoming lonely." In a world filled with stories about killer machines, it was refreshing to read about a future where robots make our lives better—even if they complicate things along the way.

Ishiguro's characters are not stupid or ignorant, but they are so dazzled by the sunny world they inhabit that they fail to notice truths that are only found in shadow. Stevens cannot see the betrayals of his so good, so noble employer (a Nazi sympathiser); the children cannot grasp that their happy childhood is a preparation for a short life as involuntary organ donors. Here, as Klara remarks of her fellow "Artificial Friend," Rosa: "She could fail to notice so much, and even when I pointed something out to her, she'd still not see what was special or interesting about it" [13]. Alas for Klara, she is, like all of us, unaware that the same thing could be said of her. And learning the truth is never easy.

For Klara, an "Artificial Friend" who is literally powered by sunshine, the sun is all healing. Tellingly, early in the novel, she sees a homeless man begging in the street, our first hint perhaps that all is not socially progressive in this perfect world, though Klara fails to pick up on this. One day she sees the beggar and his dog collapsed in the street and is convinced they have died, but the next day they are both somewhat recovered. We don't know what happened, the

world as mediated through Klara's eyes is lacking a lot of detail, but Klara is convinced that "a special kind of nourishment from the Sun had saved them" [13], and this conviction that the sun can even raise the dead persists throughout the book.

As in many of his other novels, Ishiguro is rigorous in presenting the world through a limited viewpoint. We know no more than the narrator, at least until we start to make connections that the protagonist is ill-equipped to make. We see the world as it appears to Klara, and must accept it that way since Klara has no backstory to tell us. She comes into awareness in a shop, waiting to be bought, and all she knows of the world is what she glimpses through the window of the shop. There's a city street lined by buildings, there are taxis and pedestrians that pass back and forth, and there is some sort of street repair machine, which she calls a "Cootings Machine"—presumably because of the manufacturer's name painted on it—and which belches out black smoke that Klara sees as the enemy of her sacred sun.

This is the entire world as she knows it, so that is all that we have to start with. We do not know what the buildings house, where the pedestrians are going, or how this world operates. It is not quite our world, because there are intelligent and largely autonomous robots, but how else it differs we learn only slowly and partially. Ishiguro is not interested in world building; he is interested in character building, in emotion building. We learn far more about how Klara thinks other people feel than we ever do about the world those people inhabit. There are hints, no more: we get a suggestion that there is social unrest because robots are taking away employment from people, but all we see of this is a woman berating Klara outside a theatre because she imagines Klara is there to take away her seat in the audience—in the same way her kind have taken away jobs. More centrally, we learn that, through gene editing, most children are now "lifted." What this entails, and how it benefits the children, remain mysteries; but we do know that those children who have not been lifted are now being denied access to schools. There is, in other words, a new form of class division opening up in society, but since all this remains resolutely in the background we have no real notion of how this division will play out, or indeed whether this is a coherent understanding of the world.

If the background is vague, however, what is in the foreground, the emotional impact of this upon the central characters, is totally convincing and very powerful. Klara is bought by Chrissie as a companion for her daughter, Josie, a child described by her mother as "a kid who loves life and believes everything can be fixed" [13]. We see in this that Josie and Klara are in some way the same, and twice in the early parts of the novel Chrissie gets Klara to imitate Josie's movement and speech.

Most people are not quite familiar with the function an Artificial Friend is supposed to fulfil, but we are aware almost from the start that Chrissie has something very specific in mind for Klara. Being lifted has its dangers: Josie's older sister died as a result of her operation, and now Josie herself is very ill. Chrissie obviously has something in mind, then, but it is two thirds of the way through the novel before we discover, with a shock, what she is planning and what Klara's role is meant to be. Klara, however, has plans of her own. She believes that Josie can be saved through the intervention of the sun, just as the sun has already raised the homeless man from the dead. But to achieve this, she needs help. This comes first from Josie's closest friend, Rick, a neighbour who has not been lifted and who therefore is facing insuperable odds if he is to get into school—despite the fact that he is clearly a mechanical genius who is already making major strides in drone technology.

Klara's second helper is Paul, Chrissie's estranged husband, who is vehemently opposed to Chrissie's plan. Klara has determined that she needs to sabotage the polluting Cootings Machine as a way of gaining favour from the sun. Paul, an unemployed technician (it is interesting that the only two significant male characters in this novel are both technicians cut adrift within this technologically advanced society), shows her how she might do this, by sacrificing some of her own vital fluids. Rick had helped Klara through straightforward love of Josie, but Paul's motivation is much more obscure. It may be that Klara's harebrained, semi-religious scheme was simply the only option left for saving Josie; but it may also be that by weakening Klara he was hoping to sabotage Chrissie's plan. Ishiguro's characterization here is so sure-footed that the doubt cannot be resolved.

Everything, therefore, is steering us inexorably towards tragedy. There are so many mixed motives, hidden schemes, and misunderstandings threading their way through the novel that the only possible consequence of their exposure would seem to be things falling apart. But right at the end, Ishiguro bottles it. This is a story that, contrary to the logic of everything that has gone before, ends as it started, in sunshine. This is feeble, unearned, and fatally undermines the novel, as if his characters have gone through the tragedy of learning without actually learning of tragedy [21]. In places, Klara and the Sun is as good, as moving, as enthralling as Ishiguro at his best, but the return to sunshine at the very end makes a nonsense of all that.

In trademark Ishiguro style, he carefully layered the incidents in a way that we see the world slowly unfold through Klara's eyes, at once terribly perceptive and incurably naïve. After being humiliated by Josie's brattish friends, she realizes "that people often felt the need to prepare a side of themselves to display to passers-by — as they might at a store window — and that such a display needn't be taken so seriously once the moment had passed" [13].

One of the distinguishing features of SF is world-building, where a fictional realm saturated with telling details is intricately built up. There isn't much on display here on that count but Ishiguro deftly creates the background. There are hints that AI-driven processes have replaced humans: Josie's father, a skilled engineer, has been "substituted" and now lives in a kind of right-wing commune in the woods with other men who've been similarly left adrift. It is apparent that the West has been hit by shrinking demographics.

Consequently, Klara fears falling into a ditch, thinks that the sun lives in a shed on the horizon, and is inexplicably scared of bulls. This too reflects changes in our relationship with computers. In computer chess for instance, the drive through the 1990s and early 2000s was to build software engines that could beat the best human players. Top Grandmasters pitted their skills against silicone minds. But over the last decade, engines have become way stronger, making this contest between man and machine trivial — even the world champion today would not survive against an app running on a smartphone [22]. The idea is to allow humans to have the illusion of playing against someone's strength, and have a chance to win. Instead of displaying inhuman perfection, machines now strive to make human-like mistakes.

Ishiguro builds on this aspect of robotics which is inspired by Japanese thought. It was once said, "People fear robots because they think they will rule human beings... but robots can act unselfishly. Robots can be saints — intelligent and unselfish. For humans, being intelligent is easy, but being unselfish is rather impossible." Klara is this saintly robot — "intelligent and unselfish" [23], and, as such, a telling contrast to the humans around her. Far from being immortal, Klara and her kind can only survive a few years before the "slow fade" sets in.

As we progress deeper into the novel, our worldview is shaped entirely by Klara's perceptions. As a machine, she sees the world through image-classification algorithms, which calculate the possibility of an object in an image and then localise this object by enclosing it in a 'bounding box'. So Klara constantly breaks the world into a grid: "The Mother leaned closer over the tabletop and her eyes narrowed till her face filled eight boxes... and for a moment it felt to me her expression varied between one box and the next. In one... her eyes were laughing cruelly, but in the next they were filled with sadness". [13].

Klara sees the world like a Paul Klee painting and so do we. It is an effective narrative trick that remakes the world as we know it. The novel falters in the third act, where an attempt to set up a twist goes awry. Still, the characterisation of Klara is an undoubted triumph. In a poignant exchange, Klara's owner tells her, "It must be nice sometimes to have no feelings. I envy you," to which Klara replies "I believe I have many feelings. The more I observe, the more feelings become available to me." [13].

In this story there is a sorrowful but elegant exploration of the human heart and his first novel since winning the Nobel Prize, Kazuo Ishiguro makes use of a bomb under the table. The novel cannily uses delay and withheld information to ratchet up our worry, taking time to disclose the source of the menace. We know something horrifying is going to be uncovered, but we don't know when.

From the start, a reader is fully immersed in the first-person perspective of a robot, an Artificial Friend, Klara. Ishiguro is not so much a stylist as he is supremely gifted at constructing dramatic events, both reveals and turns. The voice is so nonintrusive, so endearing in its transparency and simplicity, it works without interference [24]. However, the simplicity and transparency of the prose is deceptive — what happens in the novel is psychologically deep, an attempt to dive all the way down to the Challenger Deep of the Mariana Trench.

As Manager explains, Klara is remarkable because she's highly observant and conscientious. These traits also make her an ideal narrator of the uneasy future to which she belongs. Klara attempts empathy, imagining how others feel, but the process is so estranged and convoluted and incorporeal that it winds up being amusing, not only to the reader, but also to her. And an odd detachment also colors how she perceives the events of the novel; there are moments when her observations are downright creepy, but never fully alienating, and not any creepier, really, than those of her human companions. The novel's surrealism is further enhanced through reminders that Klara's vision is segmented into boxes and that she isn't seeing humans the way other humans see humans, but in a more calculating manner.

Josie seems to have genuine affection for Klara. However, she privately confides in Klara that there's something strange at her house of which Klara should be aware: "I want things straight between us from the start [...]. things sometimes

get, well, unusual. Don't get me wrong, most times you wouldn't feel it. But I wanted to be straight with you [...]. Please say you still want to come"(Ishiguro, 2021) [13]. Klara indicates she still wants to come. Josie's mother buys Klara to serve as an Artificial Friend. Klara gets to work trying to understand her new home and the protectiveness of Josie's family and friends. Certain relationships in the novel harken back to Ishiguro's earlier novels. For instance, there's a sibling who died before the events of the novel, as there is in *A Pale View of the Hills*.

The society has been divided into the "lifted" and the "unlifted," with the former group entitled to all kinds of privileges. Lifted children are convened so that they can gain social skills through formal "interactions." However, Josie's best friend Rick is "unlifted." Initially, Rick is uncomfortable with Klara's robotic presence. When Josie introduces Rick as her best friend, Klara says, without a trace of irony, "it's now my duty to be Josie's best friend." (2021) [13]. Yes, Klara speaks to addressees in the third person. Slightly annoying, but also helps with remembering that our narrator is an Artificial Friend rather than a human. Josie clarifies that no, an Artificial Friend is different, that she and Rick are going to be together forever.

During an interaction, Josie's lifted friends threaten Rick. As with many scenes in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* and *A Pale View of the Hills*, the hostility is slow-burning at first, and then suddenly vicious. The lifted children threaten Klara with disquieting, matter-of-fact savagery. For instance, one teen says to another: "My B3, you can swing her right through the air, lands on her feet every time. Come on, Danny. Throw her over onto the sofa. She won't get damaged." (2021) [13]. Like the B3s in the Artificial Friend store, they want to differentiate themselves from those they see as inferior versions of themselves. Perhaps what's most chilling in that scene is that Klara's narration exhibits zero fear of being bullied. She might look like a human, but she's plainly not one.

Klara has a subtle spiritual affinity with Ray Bradbury's short story "All Summer in a Day." In that story, school children live on Venus where it rains perpetually. The sun is visible only for an hour every seven years. One of the little girls has moved to Venus from Earth and still remembers the Sun, but when she tries to tell her classmates what the Sun is like, they don't believe her. The children lock her in a closet, and then get so lost in their own revelry in the rare sunshine, they forget to take the little girl out of the closet until after it is gone for another seven years. In this story, the Sun in Klara takes on mythic proportions. Artificial Friends are solar-powered. The Sun is crucial to their survival. Another Artificial Friend points at the floorboard and tells the robots that if they're worried, they can touch the pattern of sunlight there in order to regain strength. Klara tests this:

I took two steps forward, crouched down and reached out both hands to the Sun's pattern on the floor. But as soon as my fingers touched it, the pattern faded, and though I tried all I could — I patted the spot where it had been, and when that didn't work, rubbed my hands over the floorboards — it wouldn't come back. (2021) [13].

The passage serves as a resonant encapsulation of the book's central melancholy. The world is changing and indifferent and perpetually lost. Whatever we do, whatever details we try to capture and keep in the shadowy recesses of our memories, the world is not going to be as it once was, as we remember it, ever. Anxiety builds around Josie's initial disclosure to Klara in the store: there is something strange going on. Why is Josie's mother so weird? There is a bomb under the table, but the novel wisely doesn't name it until more than halfway through. Wondering what the precise menace is — beyond the obvious, an entire society that would use robots as Artificial Friends for lonely children — propels the reader forward. Ominous suggestions are made in a series of increasingly disturbing, but ultimately restrained scenes. For instance, in a strange turn, Josie's mother takes Klara to see a waterfall in Josie's stead. Ishiguro announces the anxiety that hovers around the trip, the strain it places on Josie and Klara's relationship, even before recounting it: "However, not long afterwards, something else came along which did for a time make our friendship less warm. This was the trip to Morgan's Falls, and it came to trouble me because I couldn't for a long time see how it had created coldness between us". (Ishiguro, 2021) [13].

Once we learn what's been hinted at all along, the story's focus shifts to Klara's efforts to repair the problem. Ishiguro builds the novel's horrible reveal and gently sad denouement with great care. Initially, I wondered whether the book's revelations about love, especially the love between Josie and Rick, would simply echo the repression of *The Remains of the Day* or the ambiguous end of *The Buried Giant* or the bleakness of *Never Let Me Go*, but this novel goes further, is more generous. These revelations are also much closer to the surface of the language without much need for decoding.

The dramatic experiments of certain Ishiguro novels are enormous, occasionally trying; some fascinate more than land. For instance, *The Unconsoled* is a bold, dreamy, surreal, voluminous experience, but its speechifying tested even my (surrealist-loving) patience. And while *The Buried Giant* has an intriguing premise, the story struggles under the genre and labor of a third-person perspective Ishiguro isn't entirely comfortable with and that stiffness is palpable in a way it isn't when a novel truly sings at the right register. Although the drama is as risky in Klara as it is in these other books

(well, okay, maybe Klara is not as audacious an experiment as *The Unconsoled*, but it is also more successful), this novel expertly pulls off a high-wire act of balancing a robot's narration, its limited perspective, with plot reveals and turns that resonate both dramatically and thematically [25].

Ishiguro's most memorable novels examine memory and the effort to hold fast to the mores of a world that's being eroded and lost. Klara is more suspenseful and pointed than either of the two novels with which it shares the most DNA. *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go*, seem to be quite different in their particulars. *Never Let Me Go* builds a disturbing world of "carers." It reveals the friendship and love triangle of three students; similar triangulations exist in Klara, but they are less explicit and moodier. Klara shares that novel's absorptions with society, the artificial way people divide themselves, and the mysteriousness of an individual human heart when coming up against society.

However, Klara also showcases Ishiguro's gifts for expressing the point of view of repressed and service-oriented characters. *The Remains of the Day* centers the viewpoint of the dignified, formal English butler, Stevens. Where Ishiguro's narration in several of his books can sometimes feel a little stiff or oddly earnest, this peculiar, endearing quality of his prose works beautifully in a novel told from the perspective of a robot who is there to make a lonely person feel less so, but is nevertheless, merely a robot, with the sense of purpose, but limited consciousness that entails. Klara has a restricted emotional range — there are many incidents that she could feel rage, grief, or happiness about — yet nevertheless feels a tremendous sense of obligation and mission, like Stevens. The world of post-World War II decorum might seem a long journey from the futuristic dystopia of Klara and the Sun, but Ishiguro's obsession with the loss engendered by a world that is forever dying, forever being forgotten, has a timelessness that's hard to beat.

The bomb is always ticking, and then when its specific presence is revealed, it continues to provide tension up to the last page. There can be looseness to Ishiguro's novels, whether structurally or in terms of long dialogue that too closely mirrors actual speech. Klara and the Sun, however, is elegant and haunting. It is regarded as a uniqueness of the human heart. Is there a soul, anything that's beyond the reach of technology as it marches toward a destruction of everything we know? Through the novel's drama, Ishiguro offers us an answer. It's a profound one.

Kazuo Ishiguro is clever in articulating our anxieties about the future we're building. "Klara and the Sun," his first novel since winning the Nobel Prize in 2017, is a delicate, haunting story, steeped in sorrow and hope. It reveals a gentler exploration of the price children pay for modern advancements. But if the weird complications of technology frame the plot, the real subject, as always in Ishiguro's dusk-lit fiction, is the moral quandary of the human heart.

Klara, the narrator of this novel, is an Artificial Friend (AF), a popular class of androids designed to provide companionship to teenagers. Why young people would need artificial companionship is one of the chilling questions that Ishiguro raises but postpones so naturally that the horror feels almost incidental. Powered by solar energy, Klara takes a keen interest in the sun. Its rays literally give her life, and she notices how daylight enlivens everyone outside the store, too. It's not such a leap for her to conclude that the sun is an omnipotent, often benevolent being capable of casting his invigorating light on whom he chooses. That faith, if you will, becomes the abiding premise of Klara's life — and the haunting complication of this novel.

The story begins in earnest when Klara is purchased to be the companion for a bright but sickly teenager named Josie. She moves into an isolated country house and takes up her role as an attentive Artificial Friend. The housekeeper treats her with suspicion bordering on disgust, but Klara's programming doesn't include resentment, and, in any case, she gets along well with Josie, and Josie's mother seems particularly taken with her. There's a Jamesian quality to the searching, deliberate portrayal of life in Josie's remote house. Like Klara, Ishiguro attends closely to the way apparently innocuous conversations shift, the way joy drains from a frozen smile. This is a home recovering from grief and bracing for more.

Josie's illness — like the life-threatening ailments in fairy tales — is never diagnosed, but it's the source of the home's ever-rising alarm. The possibility of her death ratchets up the pressure on Josie's mother to pretend that nothing is wrong even while preparing for the next terrifying loss. Klara, determined to help any way she can, is left to discern sensitivities she can sense but not entirely grasp. She may be an Artificial Friend, but there is nothing artificial about her friendship. "I knew my best course was to work harder than ever to be a good AF to Josie until the shadows receded," Klara tells us. "At the same time, what was becoming clear to me was the extent to which humans, in their wish to escape loneliness, made maneuvers that were very complex and hard to fathom". [13].

Beyond the dark enchantment of this peaceful house, Ishiguro suggests a world radically transformed. Another author would have been eager to elaborate on the dystopian features of the not-too-distant era, but Ishiguro always implies, never details. One reads Ishiguro in a defensive crouch, afraid to have our worst suspicions confirmed. We're left to intuit that the economy has been revolutionized, hollowing out the middle class. Odd new social practices have arisen,

too, such as “interaction meetings” in which teenagers gather at one another’s houses to practice getting along. For readers still social distancing while their children endure remote learning, this is unnervingly close to the bone.

But the most unsettling reference in “Klara and the Sun” concerns a process called “lifting.” It’s some kind of genetic enhancement — rarely fatal — that has created a superclass of young people, completely altering adolescence, college admissions and employment possibilities. Creepy as this is, it’s not so far off from current genetic research, and it certainly comports with the desires of frantic parents who will stop at nothing to promote their darlings. That’s the real power of this novel: Ishiguro’s ability to embrace a whole web of moral concerns about how we navigate technological advancements, environmental degradation and economic challenges even while dealing with the unalterable fact that we still die.

Telling this story from Klara’s algorithmic point of view is a perilous choice, even for an author used to risky narrative maneuvers. With her childlike intensity, Klara evinces a kind of devotion that could sound preprogrammed, like listening to the reassuring voice of an automatic telephone operator for 300 pages. But Ishiguro has perfectly calibrated Klara’s uncanny tone, with a personality just warm enough and alien enough to feel like the Artificial Friend we all need. Even her radical faith in the sun, which could easily have slipped into a crude satire of Christians’ faith in the Son, is moving and profound. Seeing her construct her own theodicy from the simple process of observing and reasoning is like watching the passage of 2,000 years over a few months.

Of course, tales of sensitive robots determined to help us survive our self-destructive impulses are not unknown in the canon of science fiction. But Ishiguro brings to this poignant subgenre a uniquely elegant style and flawless control of dramatic pacing. In his telling, Klara’s self-abnegation feels both ennobling and tragic.

The titular narrator of *Klara and the Sun*, Kazuo Ishiguro’s new novel, is a robot. This isn’t spoiler—this revelation comes early in the book. Klara is an Artificial Friend, a lifelike but nevertheless mechanical companion for children: amalgam of sibling, plaything, and nursemaid. When we meet her, she’s inventory in a showroom. We glean, from her interactions with her fellow wares, that AFs mimic being male or female, that they have names (bestowed by their manufacturer? it’s unclear) and personalities, thoughts, an interior self. There’s an AF called Rosa, whom Klara considers dim “She could fail to notice so much, and even when I pointed something out to her, she’d still not see what was special or interesting about it.” [13]., and one called Rex, who teases Klara.

The Artificial Friends are powered by the sun, an almost divine presence for them—the text renders it as “the Sun,” as the faithful speak of God. “An AF would feel himself growing lethargic after a few hours away from the Sun, and start to worry there was something wrong with him,” Klara tells us, “that he had some fault unique to him and that if it became known, he’d never find a home.” It’s a triumph when Klara earns a spot in the store’s windows: She can bask in the light, observe the world she’s curious about “I was free to see, close up and whole, so many things I’d seen before only as corners and edges” [13]., and increase her odds of being bought.

Most of Ishiguro’s novels are slender books that are more complicated than they at first seem; *Klara and the Sun* is by contrast more simple than it seems, less novel than parable. Though much is familiar here—the restrained language, the under-stated first-person narration—the new book is much more overt than its predecessors about its concerns. Ishiguro’s 1989 novel *The Remains of the Day* unspools over a few days in the 1950s, as a butler reflects on his years of service in a grand household, at once taxonomy of English life and indictment of the nation. In *Never Let Me Go*, the narrator, Kathy—31 but girlish and naïve—seems to be telling the tale of her youth at boarding school. Her voice is intimate and casual, her story derailed by reminiscences and asides. At some point, it’s clear that the youth Kathy is remembering wasn’t spent at a school but an institution, and that she and her chums aren’t students but clones, bred to be harvested for parts, destined to die (to “complete,” in the book’s chilling parlance) by young adulthood. These works are attentive to the rewards of story (What will happen to the butler on his road trip? Who are these schoolchildren really?), and they offer something deeper—call it philosophy. Ishiguro usually, wisely, leaves this up to the reader. We connect the dots between a butler’s blind obedience and the rise of fascism; Kathy’s tale challenges our ideas about the sanctity of life itself [26].

In *Klara and the Sun*, characters do this work for the reader. Klara inspires the humans in the book to muse about whether science can transcend death. Her owner grapples with the ramifications of choosing to have her own children genetically modified in order to enhance their potential. That this novel serves up these bigger questions so explicitly feels at first like a miscalculation, or a flaw in the narrative design, which locks us in Klara’s perspective. But I don’t think Klara aims to wrestle with these questions at all. Klara is a machine, but she’s also a contrivance, the perfect metaphor for parenthood.

Other secrets come to light, notably that Josie once had a sister, Sal, who died as a result of complications from having been lifted. When Josie is too ill to accompany her mother, Chrissie (always simply “the Mother”), on a day trip, Klara goes with her instead. The Mother confesses she misses her daughter’s company, but allows, “I don’t feel quite so bad because you’re here” [13].

Gradually, we come to understand that Klara is not a replacement for Sal but an insurance policy against the loss of Josie. Fearing for the life of her surviving child, the Mother has enlisted a scientist named Capaldi to develop an artificial version of Josie. Klara’s task isn’t to keep the girl company; it’s to learn her mannerisms, her voice, and her essence. If the girl dies, Klara’s artificial psyche will be transferred into a body that Capaldi has built to look exactly like Josie. “You’re not being required simply to mimic Josie’s outward behavior. You’re being asked to continue her for Chrissie. And for everyone who loves Josie,” [13]. the scientist explains.

Klara’s abilities are a marvel, but she, like the reader, barely understands what’s going on. Whereas the revelation in *Never Let Me Go* that Kathy is a clone inspires deeper horror, neither Klara nor the reader can manage a feeling about the news that Klara might be asked to “continue” Josie. Capaldi muses about it with the remove of a scientist:

Our generation still carry the old feelings. A part of us refuses to let go. The part that wants to keep believing there’s something unreachable inside each of us. Something that’s unique and won’t transfer. But there’s nothing like that, we know that now [13].

The novel wants to establish Klara as a counterargument to this. She’s not even alive, but contains something “unreachable.” She has a kind of innate religious feeling. Fearing Josie’s death, she goes to a barn to pray for her. “I’d started to wonder if the Sun’s resting place really was inside the barn itself.” [13]. in this sacred space, “filled with orange light” and “particles of hay drifting in the air,” Klara asks the Sun to spare Josie’s life, sounding like any supplicant: “I understand how forward and rude I’ve been to come here. The Sun has every right to be angry, and I fully understand your refusal even to consider my request.” [13]. she makes a bargain: For the Sun’s intercession, she’ll undertake an act of worship, in which she’ll risk her own existence.

We could realize that Klara can’t completely comprehend love. She watches Josie and her father meet after a period apart: Then he looked away and closed his eyes, letting his cheek rest against the top of her head. They stayed like that for a time, keeping very still, not even rocking slowly the way the Mother and Josie did sometimes during their morning farewells.

Klara is as vigilant as a parent with a newborn: “I looked over to Josie and could tell from her posture and her breathing that she wasn’t sleeping in her usual way.” [13]. When Klara is still new to the household, Josie hosts a party. The girl’s friends ask the robot to do tricks (sing the scales, show off your memory), but Klara is unable to impress. Like a loyal dog, she won’t follow the commands of anyone other than Josie. The girl later laments that her illness must make her bad company, testing the limits of Klara’s unconditional love. Mustn’t Klara want a more exciting friend? “I’ve never wished such a thing,” Klara tells her, like any good parent. “It was my wish to be Josie’s AF. And the wish came true” [13]. Late in the story, it seems Josie might die. She offers a message to her friend Rick, who passes it on to the Mother: “She says that no matter what happens now, never mind how it plays out, she loves you and will always love you. She’s very grateful you’re her mother and she never even once wished for any other” [13].

It would be heartbreaking that she doesn’t offer a similar message for Klara, but a robot doesn’t have a heart. Klara turns to the Sun once more, in what can only be described as prayer. The novel’s curiosity about faith feels as cursory as its interest in science; it’s just a position that Klara represents. Rick later concedes that the robot’s prayers might have something to do with Josie’s miraculous recovery, but the book has no conviction about religion beyond this “maybe”.

In the story we realized that children grow, and Josie outgrows her AF. “I understood that my presence wasn’t appropriate as it once had been,” Klara tells us, as she explains how she comes to take up residence in a utility room. Josie heads off into adulthood with this farewell: “I guess you may not be here when I get back. You’ve been just great, Klara”. (2021) [13].

Throughout this story we realize that technology is not just changing the way people interact with the world, it’s also changing the way humans behave and think. New technologies are allowing psychological scientists to go in their labs “into the wild,” where theories can be tested in real world settings. How people will treat these kinds of robots as pieces of technology or as something more is an interesting point here in this story. A lot of robot stories explore what happens when we start to see them as humans. In *Klara and the Sun*, Josie seems to understand that her companion is artificial, but there are some uncomfortable scenes where Josie’s mom starts to treat Klara as another daughter.

Another point about empathy and care that Klara was supposed to express towards her owner is a controversial point here. Empathy, which is the ability to share someone else's feelings, is perhaps the most important trait humans demonstrate. It's not a purely human attribute. In fact, even rodents possess it — but humans are particularly good at it. It allows us to love, learn, communicate, cooperate and live in a successful society. It doesn't matter what terms from evolutionary biology or psychology is used to define the behavior. What matters is that it makes the world go round and allows us to survive.

It's easy to develop a feeling of love for Klara the way we love what is good. We love her the way we loved our childhood teddy bear, perhaps, or even in the way we love a fictional character. Because even the most rounded fictional character is also a kind of animated doll; a code made out of language and the readers' goodwill, which makes us smile or cry because we believe in it. Klara and the Sun captures a pretty strange sense – not because of the way people believe in Klara, but because of the way she starts to believe in the sun. This novel is set in a speculative future that feels quite like the present. It contains a hidden moral shift: an advance in technology that has changed people's sense of what it is to be human, and the emotional punch of Klara as the central character doesn't know what is going on.

4. Conclusion

I believe this paper has contributed to an extent to a very controversial point which is; if technology is here to stay, Will emotions fade away? This is more philosophical question to be answered. We find out in the story that Klara is mostly a companion. She's not doing much of what you'd expect from a utilitarian robot, like bringing you things or preparing your meals. Her purpose is almost entirely social, and although I don't know if we'll ever have robots as emotionally sophisticated as she is, we might see pretty good companion robots emerge in the next decade.

All technology is a tool. It is morally neutral and dependent on the intention with which it is used, for either constructive or destructive purposes. We have a choice: Do we want our communications to bring us together or split us apart? To understand the power of communication technology, we must embrace the paradox: It will both destroy and create empathy. But we can actively choose creation. According to psychologists, empathy is a muscle: The more you use it, the stronger it gets.

Technology itself is often developed for enhancing lives. But we tend to misuse it to our own physical, mental and emotional benefit. With super useful technology comes a super stressed life fueled by our own behavior, rising aspirations and a fear of becoming unconnected to this new world. It has changed our preferences of talking to texting. Ironically, while getting connected to a wider world, we are becoming singular and reclusive in our living. Hyper-screen time interferes with our ability to recognize or comprehend our own emotions. After all, social skills are like other skills in life. You have to practice them to get better.

I think that this study is a good start to begin assessing the way we are utilizing modern technology on several levels and specifically how humanoid robots are making us isolated and individual rather than interconnected, and primarily competitive rather than primarily collaborative? Here through the development of the incidents of this novel, we come to realize that societies can, and do, become emotionally intertwined with robots. If humans transform into more electronic than biological beings, we may ultimately lose the human-ness in us. So, it is better to regard technology as a better way of living and not the only way to live which is a distinction we need to realize and practice in our daily life. So, I hopefully expect further studies are carried on by other interested researchers.

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