

Reframing Human-AI Relationships in *Klara and the Sun*

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Abstract:

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* explores the ethical and emotional implications of artificial intelligence on human relationships and social structures. Through Klara, Ishiguro examines the paradox of technological advancement, pursuing perfection at the cost of emotional authenticity. The novel questions whether technology can replicate human subjectivity or replace the experience of death with data replication. Through Klara's non-human perspective, the paper reveals how Ishiguro critiques the illusion of technology and reaffirms the significance of emotion and human differences.

Keywords:

Klara and The Sun, Artificial Intelligence, Human-Machine Representation

1. Introduction

Klara and the Sun is the eighth novel of Kazuo Ishiguro, a Nobel Prize winner in literature and a British writer. This work continues the torture of memory, identity and humanity in his previous works and reflects on scientific and technological civilization. That is, the extent to which the cloned organ donor is real, and whether a person has a soul with metaphysical attributes. In his new work, Kazuo Ishiguro explores the impact and consequences of the widespread application of AI robots on social organization structure and interpersonal relationships. The technology of contemporary society is captivating because it provides a convenient way to understand a complex network of power and control. (Jameson 79-80). Ishiguro discusses the potential risks of gene editing technology and the adverse effects of environmental degradation. The paper tries to explore the paradox of the human pursuit of technology. Whose consciousness has limitations, human beings or robots? When the technology develops to a particular stage, does it eliminate death?

2. Materials and Methods

Klara is the central character in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun*. The story has been described as both touching and spectacular. Klara is an artificial buddy, a robot with human-like features and a high degree of intelligent technology, developed to enable a child or young person to interact. At the novel's start, Klara is a

newly minted artificial intelligence working in a store that sells artificial friends on a busy street. She is learning to come to terms with her limited cognition in the world, and the virtual reality in which the narrator lives has been designed with attention to detail. Klara could tell a person's age and social status at a glance. Klara specializes in discerning and studying anything, regardless of her opinion. And Josie, a human being, lives with her mother after her parents' divorce, who took the gene "lifting" technology.

Klara is not just "a machine" who "has a complex psychological life and a rich subjective experience." The inhuman AF Klara narrates "the world through her eyes reveals" the forms of life [3]. Klara describes Josie's loneliness "that if she failed to join the mother for the quick coffee, there was the danger of loneliness creeping into her day, no matter what other events filled it" [6]. As a companion robot, Klara replaces the role of parents and friends absent from Josie's growing up. The emergence of AF robots in the market scale have proved the huge emotional emptiness of human beings in the future society, with a large number of lonely 'Josie' and hasty 'mothers.' The emergence of companion robot AF and the replacement of Josie with robots are human attempts to make up for emotional deficiencies by using technology. Klara is expected to replace Josie if she passes away.

The core story is Klara, an Artificial Friend designed to bond with and potentially replace human children. After the death of her eldest daughter Sal, the mother could not bear the blow of her daughter's death again, so she begs Klara, "if it comes again, there's going to be no other way for me to survive. I came through it with Sal, but I can't do it again. So I'm asking you, Klara. Do your best for me" [6]. The mother hopes that Klara will fill the emotional loss caused by her daughter's death, and tries to use robots to assume the dynamic function of the daughter's role in kinship through the continuation plan. In this seemingly complete human emotional connection, no matter which side, there must be the absence of the other side, and technology is responsible for filling the gap. It seems that human beings require technology to serve the emotional void.

However, does it work? Josie does not get along well with her mother, and deception and estrangement exist. The mother lies to Josie about the plan to extend her life and explains that she is just painting Josie's portrait. The mother could not reveal her vulnerability and fear to her daughter as she does to Klara, so Josie has no idea about her mother's moods under her calm appearance. A sort of kindness deepens the estrangement between the two generations, resulting in the inability to be frank between mother and daughter. Compared with the ease of living with Klara, the relationship between Josie and her mother is disharmonious. The mother questions the game, "which something awful like that happens." And Josie answers patiently for a while, "but before long the smile left her voice." Finally, Josie consistently repeats that it is "just a game she enjoyed, while the mother asked more and more questions about it and seemed to become angry" [6].

Josie intends to share her favorite game with her mother, but the death in the game touches her mother's most vulnerable nerve. Unable to control her emotions, the mother nervously asks Josie why she plays such a dangerous game. The description of Klara reveals the poor communication and the change of Josie's mentality from joy to loss. The lack of actual contact and honest expression keeps the tension between Josie and her mother. The mother never confesses her fear and pain to Josie. Josie doesn't understand why her mother suddenly becomes furious. Josie consents to such a

situation and makes no effort to find the reason for it from her mother. The words end here, and the feelings are not conveyed.

The fragile relationship between mother and Josie is just a microcosm of the human estrangement in the future society. Projecting emotional needs to machines makes it more challenging to obtain the ideal intimate relationship of human beings, and the connection between people becomes more fragile. In the future, when authenticity loses value, seeking emotional comfort from machines and using technology to compensate for emotional loss may temporarily escape the pain in genuine intimate relationships. The dependence on devices shows that the entanglement between humans and technology is inseparable, and technology has become an indispensable part of human society and the feedback loop of humans. Human beings seek help from technology out of their desire to control and a sense of security, but such a choice makes people lose more control of reality.

In addition, the accelerated development of technology has also changed people's traditional perception of time, space and location. Traditional contacts are no longer necessary. Josie's mother says, "for you and your generation, it's going to be pretty tough" [6]. On the one hand, it is attributed to the development of science and technology, which makes many communication activities no longer limited to physical space. For example, Josie receives education only by holding a rectangular plate through the screen. These "lifting" children have lost their individuality and become a group of homogeneous tool people. As undifferentiated beings, these children lose many valuable things, such as kindness, warmth, empathy, dedication, and respect for differences, precisely the characteristics of Klara and Rick. Apart from children, communication in the adult world is also weak. The novel is vague about the work of Josie's mother, only revealing that the mother is busy in her high-level office dress and agrees with gene upgrading technology. The chat tells that the symbol of class differentiation in this society is based on "lifting" or not. Josie's father, Paul, belongs to a mysterious community. Most of them are engineers who have lost their jobs because of technological development. These people seem to stand on the opposite side of technical worship, "to lead a decent and full life" [6].

Whether technology can make the dead return is another crucial issue for Ishiguro in *Klara and the Sun*. However, alternative technology also makes people question whether humans could be copied and replaced by machines and, more importantly, whether technology comprehensively deconstructs human emotion and consciousness. If death is the ultimate source of human suffering and fear, will people eliminate death when technology develops to a particular stage? As far as fiction is concerned, this image could become a reality. Mr. Capaldi, the chief executive scientist, says, "There's nothing there. Nothing inside Josie that's beyond the Klara of this world to continue" [6]. For Mr. Capaldi, Klara ideally learns and reproduces Josie to extend her life. Mr. Capaldi seeks "the perpetual progress, a never-ending movement toward the ever-distant goal of" immortality [4]. The human race is always looking for ways to improve and progress, constantly striving for the ever-elusive goal of perfection.

Klara's and Josie's journey to the city changes Klara's experience with Josie. The trip has multiple purposes, allowing Josie to meet her father, Paul, and visit a specialist who is planning a sketch. The tour is seen as a series of discoveries of different characters, which Klara recognizes as necessary and powerful. Even though Klara is sure she imitates Josie well as long as she watches and learns, Paul insists that there is more Klara needs to learn, not just "mannerisms" and "what's deeply inside

her”. Paul says “inside” refers to the heart, which is only an organ in the biological sense but also something that makes a person “special and individual”. Paul firmly believes in the existence of the human heart, which is also the key to determining whether Klara could successfully continue Josie. In Paul’s opinion, Klara’s learning and continuation of the human heart are far from enough by “impersonation” [6]. To Paul, Klara finds it hard to be a real Josie in this sense. In other words, the human heart has become a vital watershed between man and machine.

In continuing Josie’s task, Klara should copy not simply the appearance and behavior but the “inside” part, which is the heart. The question is, what is the heart of Josie? Where is the heart? In the in-depth communication with Paul, the possible answer is the irreplaceable feelings of all those who love Josie in their hearts. Josie’s father “hates Capaldi because he may be right” and “what he claims is true”. People used to live together and love each other because they believed each person is unique and cannot be replaced, but this is probably “a mistaken premise” (Ishiguro 187). The dramatic technology will “excavate, copy and transfer,” and it turns out that “there’s nothing so unique about” [6]. Thus, Mr. Capaldi believes technology can copy Josie and transfer her mind to an AF like Klara. Paul doubts the scientific assumption, but Capaldi may be right.

Paul thinks Josie’s mother is too old-fashioned to accept that no matter how eager she is to find a replacement for Josie, Klara is not good enough at imitating Josie. Paul concludes that Josie’s mother is unable to “stretch that far,” while he is “different” because he is “a kind of coldness inside” [6]. Is that the case? As early as in Capaldi’s studio, Josie’s mother accepts Capaldi’s view that there is nothing in Josie that Klara could not replace and even persuades Klara to continue Josie for herself [6]. Josie’s mother is not like Paul says. On the contrary, Josie’s father said he is somewhat cruel, but for replacing his daughter Josie with a machine, which he feels like “they’re taking from me what I hold most precious in this life” [6]. It is the father himself who is most unwilling to accept the use of machines to extend his daughter’s life. After all, his daughter is the most precious thing in his life.

In the novel, human beings cannot face death directly, so they turn to technology for help, making the dead return to the world of the living. This choice seems to circumvent pain and skillfully eliminate the threat of death with the help of external forces. However, it obliterates the value and significance of living as an independent individual. The return of the dead through machine substitution dispels and degrades individual subjectivity. No matter how deep and unforgiving love Josie’s mother chooses to use a machine, the fact is that a machine copies a living one. Klara is just a carrier or tool to carry the feelings of the living and is no longer the one with “inside” as before. At the same time, alternative technology makes people question whether human beings will be copied and replaced by machines, and whether technology can fully deconstruct human emotion and consciousness. The “Turing test” and the “Voight-Kampff test” are both ways of determining whether or not a machine is capable of thought and feeling. These tests raise ethical questions about how devices can be “distinguished from humans” [1]. The mystery of the human heart is a poetic metaphor for primitive obscurity, and the mourning of death is not simply resolved through data replication.

As the sun warms and energizes the street beggar, Klara hopes the sun will similarly pour out its unique energy to heal Josie’s illness. Klara believes that the sun has the power and knowledge to heal, and she has confidence that it will do so in its own time.

Klara has faith and hope, and she waits for Josie's recovery. Klara loves Josie and believes in the sun's magic, which gives her the strength to keep going. However, neither Josie's parents nor the housekeeper shares Klara's faith, and they do not think Josie will recover. Klara never gives up and focuses on winning the sun's attention through prayers. Klara makes it successful without a concrete description. At the end of Klara's life, she explains why she doesn't go to the store manager instead of Josie. No matter how hard Klara tries, it has "remained something beyond" [6] her reach. That is people around "for Josie in their hearts" [6]. According to Klara's explanation, she has the ability to be Josie and accurately imitates Josie. However, it's hard for Klara to get the caring for Josie from "The Mother, Rick, Melania Housekeeper, the father" [6]. This is the "inside" that she cannot replace. Klara added, "Mr. Capaldi believed there was nothing special inside Josie that couldn't be continued...but it wasn't inside Josie. It was inside those who loved her" (251). Klara believes that Mr. Capaldi makes mistakes. Mr. Capaldi thinks nothing special in Josie's heart could be replaced because of "the wrong place." This extraordinary thing is not in Josie's heart but inside the person who loves Josie. Klara knows she is unable to continue Josie, so she does her best to save Josie's life as a human friend while refusing the request to replace Josie.

In *Klara and the Sun*, humans create intelligent robots and become human companions. The narration of the inhuman character Klara explores "a thematic and stylistic vision of inhuman art to enable a very different kind of identification with the bare lives of others" [2]. The story illustrates "the elevation of surfaces as the locus of meaning, truth and empathy" [5]. As the novel shows, people pursue technology and hope to strengthen themselves with the help of technology to resist all the possibilities of vulnerability and loneliness. At the same time, the reality is different from the presupposition. Human beings eliminate death and require technology to "be free of risks, dangers, conflicts, and struggle" [4]. It dispels an independent individual's particularity and meaning, making human existence slide into the abyss of nothingness. The original intention of science is to support a better life for human beings and to realize human values with the assistance of technology. However, when human nature is tampered with by materials, emotion is blocked mechanically, and destiny is alienated by technology, people will become the means and objects to realize technology from the master of technology.

3. Conclusions

Human beings strive to control everything through technology and modify their life circumstances or transcend their inherent limitations. Ishiguro's goal in writing about robots is to understand human beings and address whether machines can replace humans in the era of artificial intelligence. In *Klara and the Sun*, Ishiguro asks: Can machines replace humans? Fundamentally, this is not a question for robots to answer, but rather humans should confront in the age of a digital world. Several scientific and ethical considerations should be taken into account when addressing this question. Through Klara's inhuman eyes, Ishiguro emphasizes his appeal to individual human values, which involve retaining feelings and accommodating individual differences.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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