

What It Means to Be a Talking Object: Ishiguro's Use of AI Narration in *Klara and the Sun*

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ABSTRACT

Set in a dystopian version of the United States, Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* relies heavily on the narrative technique of de-familiarization. This sense becomes clear from the novel's opening passages, which take place in a store that displays Artificial Friends (a form of AI) for sale to the public. Since Ishiguro illustrates this setting from the vantage point of Klara, one of these Artificial Friends, the details divulged highlight much about Klara's nature as well as her precarious position in a landscape populated by humans, genetically altered humans, and Artificial Intelligence alike. Though this novel operates as a critique of humanity, it also sympathetically renders both humans and Artificial Intelligence, all while probing existential and ontological questions about what constitutes personhood and the self.

Keywords: Dystopian fiction, Narrative theory, Artificial Intelligence, Subjectivity, Agency, Sentience, Selfhood, Human rights, Posthumanism

Lo que significa ser un objeto parlante: el uso de Ishiguro de la narración de IA en *Klara and the Sun*

RESUMEN

Ambientada en una versión distópica de los Estados Unidos, *Klara and the Sun* de Ishiguro se basa en gran medida en la

técnica narrativa de la desfamiliarización. Este sentido queda claro en los pasajes iniciales de la novela, que tienen lugar en una tienda que exhibe Amigos artificiales (una forma de IA) para la venta al público. Dado que Ishiguro ilustra este escenario desde el punto de vista de Klara, uno de estos amigos artificiales, los detalles divulgados resaltan mucho sobre la naturaleza de Klara, así como su posición precaria en un paisaje poblado por humanos, humanos genéticamente alterados e inteligencia artificial por igual. Aunque esta novela opera como una crítica de la humanidad, también presenta con simpatía tanto a los humanos como a la Inteligencia Artificial, todo mientras investiga preguntas existenciales y ontológicas sobre lo que constituye la personalidad y el yo.

Palabras clave: Ficción distópica, teoría narrativa, inteligencia artificial, subjetividad, agencia, sensibilidad, individualidad, derechos humanos, poshumanismo

成为会说话的物体意味着什么：石黑一雄在《克拉拉与太阳》中对AI旁白的运用

摘要：以反乌托邦的美国为背景，石黑一雄的著作《克拉拉与太阳》大量依赖陌生化这一叙事技巧。这种感觉在小说的开篇段落就变得清晰，这些段落发生在一家展示人工朋友（人工智能的一种形式）并向公众出售的商店中。由于石黑一雄从克拉拉（人造朋友之一）的独特视角来阐述该背景，因此泄露的细节在很大程度上强调了克拉拉的本性，以及她在由人类、转基因人类和人工智能创造物等居住的环境中所处的危险境地。尽管这部小说对人性加以批判，但也同情地描绘了人类和人工智能，同时探讨了关于“什么构成人格和自我”的存在论和本体论问题。

关键词：反乌托邦小说，叙事理论，人工智能，主体性，能动性，感知能力（Sentience），自我，人权，后人类主义

A n emerging form of technology, Artificial Intelligence already exists in meaningful ways—this becomes clear when we consider the prevalence of chatbots, smart cars, and voice assistants (such as Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa)—and many argue that it is set to dramatically alter other aspects of our world, as well. As Ben Pring puts it, Artificial Intelligence is set to “revolutionize just about everything we can think of, in the way that technologies like the microscope changed medicine. In another generation, using non-AI infused technology will seem as barbaric as using leeches does today.” The kinds of radical shifts happening now, and those likely soon to take place, represent a paradigm shift, one that will push all of us to reassess our understanding of the world. In this sense, we are experiencing a cultural moment.

While it is not difficult to spot the fact that there are changes on the horizon, it is more challenging to gauge exactly what shape they might take. Nonetheless, popular culture (conceived broadly) and, in particular, science fiction narratives, dramatically render some of these many possibilities. A quick survey of their depictions in science fiction literature, television, and film, highlight the degree to which AIs get perpetually rewritten and recontextualized in the science fiction imaginary. In the many ways AIs get represented in science fiction, their emergence (and constant re-emergence) calls attention to timely concerns, including ongoing dialogue surrounding scientific research on Artificial Intelligence, de-

bates about the social impact of AIs, and the development of social policies concerning intelligent machines. Such reflection makes sense given how the proliferation of these texts coincides with recent technological pursuits related to machine learning. Besides these features, contemporary narratives about Artificial Intelligence also often function as allegories to discuss “Otherness.”

Exemplary of this trend is Kazuo Ishiguro’s 2021 *Klara and the Sun*, a dystopian science fiction novel which not only features a form of Artificial Intelligence, but one that is narrated from the perspective of a sentient machine. An “Artificial Friend,” Klara, the novel’s non-human storyteller, is one of several different AI models created to serve as companions for humans. So human-like in certain respects—and able to give voice to her experiences via first-person narration—Ishiguro’s Klara emerges in the text as a metaphor for Otherness and marginality. Yet her presence in the novel also raises additional questions, including the myriad ways sentient machines might impact human society. Moreover, her role as the novel’s narrator foregrounds other issues: For one, Klara’s ability to tell her own story complicates traditional understandings of agency and subjectivity. Additionally, her portrayal poses challenges to humanist principles about selfhood. Finally, the fact that readers are prompted to relate to a nonhuman such as Klara, de-centers humans from the central (and privileged) position they so-frequently occupy in fictional narratives.

AI NARRATION IN KLARA AND THE SUN

What further complicates Klara’s depiction in the novel is that, even as her presence belies traditional humanist principles about selfhood, her existence makes the case for extend-

ing those same principles to sentient machines. Opening the narrative in a store that displays Artificial Friends (or AFs), a version of Artificial Intelligence, for sale to the public, Ishiguro illustrates this setting from the vantage point of Klara, one of these AFs. These early scenes transport readers to a society that is technologically advanced. Yet as Klara's observations reveal, in this world, many of the problems we face today in the early 21st century—namely environmental woes, such as climate change and pollution, and class warfare—not only still exist but seem to have worsened beyond their current states.

As Isabelle Senechal emphasizes, Ishiguro creates a dystopian version of the “United States encumbered by surging social inequality, fascist terrorism, and controversial scientific advancements.” In what she terms a “bleak future,” many parents “opt in” their children for a risky genetic modification treatment called ‘lifting’ that boosts their social standing and academic prospects. ‘Lifted’ children follow a strict home education and socialization regimen. ‘Unlifted’ children are ostracized by their peers, essentially left to their own devices” (Senechal). Due to the book’s narrative construction, these features get rendered through the perspective of Klara. Besides these revelations, Klara’s watchful eye also picks up on the goings-on of day-to-day life. She observes “taxis as they slowed to let the crowd go over the crossing” and peering into the high-rise offices full of people “standing, sitting, moving around” (Ishiguro 9). She notices how people dress and act, spotting differences, for instance, between the “office workers” and the “Beggar man” she sees outside the storefront window (Ishiguro 19). In this respect, Klara’s perspective is also to capture details that a human narrator might overlook or take for granted (thus, Ishiguro relies on defamiliarization as part of his narrative style).

Klara also makes frequent mention of the sun, noticing the “Sun’s pattern” and observing when it is an especially “bright” day (Ishiguro 4). To a degree, Klara is attuned to this since she regards the sun as a source of energy. However, she views it also as a sort of deity (thus personifying the sun, a fact which is also evidenced in the way she always refers to the “Sun” as a proper noun). While her worship of the sun may be inspired, at least in part, by the fact that, as a solar-powered being, she relies on its light for “nourishment” (as she puts it)—a quality that she shares in common with the other models of AFs in the story—her reverence goes beyond what is common for AFs due to the fact that she later pleads with the sun to cure Josie (Ishiguro 4).

As these details highlight, Klara takes in much of her surroundings. Not only does her perspective tell us about her, but her vantage point shows what she sees as important. Thus, it works to offer insights into the kind of minutiae found in her world even as her narration brings into focus the science fictional elements of Ishiguro’s imaginary world. These include, most notably, the solar-powered sentient machines that exist in Ishiguro’s imaginary society and the many forms of advanced medicine and other futuristic technology described that is, for us, still the stuff of science fiction. Balanced with this sort of speculation there are other, more realistic descriptions of ordinary features found in contemporary life—elements that would belong in any industrial city, such as high-rise buildings and crowds of city-dwellers and workers. In this manner, Ishiguro depicts a society that shares certain similarities with our own but is more advanced technologically. Being a careful observer, Klara thus presents a picture of Ishiguro’s dystopian society which reveals both the contrasts and similarities between our world and the world she and Josie inhabit. Even so, because she is an Arti-

ficial Friend (a form of AI) and unaccustomed to the world of humans, there is also much that she does not know (her naivete and precarious position shine through).

As Swaminathan Bavetra and R. Ravi note in their article, “Hope, Faith, Love, Human and Humanoid: A Study of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun*,” *Klara and the Sun* “raises several pertinent questions about human beings” in the ways Ishiguro’s other novels do (295). Nonetheless, these concerns “gain poignancy, thanks to the fact that the human experience is narrated through the eyes of Klara, an artificial friend and a robot” (Bavetra and Ravi 295). Klara, being a keen observer and a quick learner, “is tuned well enough to become a good and genuine artificial friend. She walks into the life of Josie when Josie was fourteen and half years old and stays with her till Josie no longer required her” (Bavetra and Ravi 295). Indeed, as the human manager of the store where Klara first appears in the novel remarks on the fact that Klara seems particularly well-suited to serve as human’s companion. Moreover, the store manager was one of the first to notice that Klara had started to evolve sentience, a crucial observation given how the store manager bookends the narrative (since she appears in the novel’s opening as well as closing passages).

After the opening scenes from the urban storefront (where Klara is waiting to be selected by a human), the story spans the years Klara spends with an adolescent girl named Josie who chooses her as a companion. The story continues up until Josie leaves home for college and Klara gets sent away to have her “slow fade” in the “Yard,” a junkyard full of other deteriorating AFs, who are allowed to remain outside, and thus are exposed to the sun, receiving nourishment for as long as their systems will operate, and other discarded items (Ishig-

uro 294). In this manner, the novel gives voice to almost the entirety of Klara's existence.

It becomes clear, however, observant though she may be, what Klara sees as meaningful does not always turn out to be that important in the big picture. Edmund Gordon, who discusses Klara's vantage point in "Faith in the Bildungs-robot: A Tale of AI and a Diminished Yet Hopeful Humanity," goes as far as to suggest that the "limitations of the narrator's viewpoint are made obvious from the start." As he explains, the "smallness of her world, analogous in some ways to the sheltered situation of early childhood, is emphasized by her tendency to treat as proper nouns such local points of interest as 'Red Shelves,' 'Striped Sofa,' and 'Glass Display Trolley'" (Gordon). In this regard, Klara pushes readers to consider the limits of narrative, both as they relate to the fact that her perspective is that, not of a human, but of a sentient machine, and more generally (since narrative is a form of representation).

Even so, Klara's perspective works well to cast the familiar in a new light. As James Wood points out in "Kazuo Ishiguro Uses Artificial Intelligence to Reveal the Limits of Our Own," estrangement is "powerful when it puts the known world in doubt, when it makes the real truly strange." Yet as he clarifies, it is most effective "when it is *someone's* estrangement," and in much of Ishiguro's fiction, this sense comes through, whether it be because of "a resident alien, or a butler, or even a cloned human being doing so" (Wood). *Klara and the Sun* likewise provides a meaningful supply of this type of observation and reflection. In fact, her programming—which makes her naïve in certain regards—and her developing self-awareness vie with each other, a friction that becomes so apparent in the text as to characterize her worldview.

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In her role as a nonhuman storyteller, Klara also recounts much of Josie's story. Even though the novel is in many ways about Klara, much of the tension revolves around Josie's health issues—the doctors at one point seem to concern that Josie's is a hopeless case. Besides working as an important plot point—Klara takes it upon herself to not only care for Josie, but also to try to “save her” by devising an elaborate plan to convince the sun, who Klara reveres as a deity, to intervene on Josie's behalf—the mysterious ailments Josie suffers from also foreground concerns about the limits, ethical and otherwise, of tampering with human DNA. In the speculative future that Ishiguro imagines, Josie and many other children have been genetically modified (or “lifted,” as the process is referred to throughout the novel) for superior intelligence and academic ability; this genetic altering promises more opportunities for children like Klara and promotes their social capital, but it comes with the risk of adverse health effects. Josie is one of the unfortunate children for whom the process has negatively impacted her health.

In this manner, Ishiguro presents the practice of “lifting” as multi-faceted in the novel. Parents come across as feeling quite torn about the decision of whether to subject their offspring to the process. Those who do, like Josie's mother, who has already lost a child due to “lifting”—Josie's older sibling passed away as a result of the process- often second-guess the decision to risk their children's health in order to improve their chances for success in society. However, as the case of Josie's “unlifted” friend and neighbor Rick, a boy her own age, demonstrates, there are also real-world consequences for those who do not undergo the process. For Rick, not being lifted means that he faces discrimination and only has limited academic and career opportunities.

Significantly, these details get rendered from Klara's point of view. While Klara comes across as an unreliable narrator in some ways, in this situation, her understanding of the dynamic between the "lifted" and "unlifted" humans proves insightful. Moreover, Klara, as a nonhuman, views the process more objectively than her human counterparts. She can likewise report dispassionately about the ambivalence felt by many humans in this society. Klara's unflinching gaze can be seen, for instance, when she relays a tense exchange between Rick and Mrs. Arthur, Josie's mother:

'I was wondering if right now you might be feeling like you're the winner. Like maybe you've won.'

'I don't understand, Mrs. Arthur.'

'I've always treated you okay, haven't I, Rick? I hope I have.'

'You certainly have. You've always been very kind. And a great friend to my mother.'

'So, I'm now asking you. I am asking you, Rick, if you feel like you've come out the winner. Josie took the gamble. Okay; I shook the dice for her, but it was always going to be her, not me, who won or lost. She bet high, and if Dr. Ryan's right, she might soon be about to lose. But you, Rick, you played it safe. So that's why I am asking you. How does this feel to you just now? Do you really feel like a winner?' (Ishiguro 276)

Besides showing the resentment Josie's mother harbors, this scene proves pivotal since it exposes the great dilemma that parents face in Ishiguro's dystopian society: is it better to take the gamble and subject children to genetic altering, which will greatly improve their prospects, or is it better to play it

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“safe” and forego the process, even if it means severely diminished opportunities? The fact that Josie’s mother casts the choice in terms of winning and losing shows how much is at stake even as it highlights the divisive and highly competitive nature of their society.

In terms of narrative technique, this scene proves significant, as well. While Klara recounts this heated conversation in a straightforward manner, seemingly without passing judgment, her perspective nonetheless conveys how emotionally fraught the decision (to “lift” or not) can be. In this manner, Ishiguro relies on the dual dialectics of empathy and de-familiarization. He creates a scene that shows Josie’s mother experiencing deeply personal feelings about her decision—emotions clearly also bound up with hope for her daughter’s future, guilt for taking what she sees as a gamble, and fear over what that decision might cost them. Further complicating matters, the novel makes it clear that the process may be deemed necessary by some parents who have decided that they must take such a gamble considering that there are so few opportunities in Ishiguro’s fictional society and their offspring thus need this additional advantage in order to compete (for jobs, resources, and a place in society).

While, for Josie’s mother, this dilemma is intensely personal, the larger debate she references is connected to a broader platform of human experience. To be sure, her feelings illustrate a more-universal dilemma faced by others in Ishiguro’s speculative future—and it also emphasizes the divide in their society between those who have been genetically altered and those who have not. Moreover, Josie’s mother’s dilemma prompts questions for us about the direction we are heading in our own world, especially with respect to the limits (ethical and otherwise) of editing or manipulating human genes.

(POSTHUMAN) IDENTITY: TECHNOLOGY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN *KLARA AND THE SUN*

Connected to the decision to “lift,” the narrative foregrounds questions about identity. Namely, the novel pushes us to consider what effects technological changes—including so-called medical “advances”—might have on concepts such as selfhood, identity, and subjectivity. The process of “lifting,” as described in the novel, serves an example of what is referred to as enhancement technologies, that is, technologies designed to enhance human physical, cognitive, emotional and moral abilities (these can include implants, drugs, genetic modification, and/or interaction with machines, and they can bring about temporary and permanent effects).

As David DeGrazia emphasizes in “Enhancement Technologies and Human Identity,” there has been a tendency to put forth “two identity-related challenges to biotechnological enhancements: (1) the charge of inauthenticity and (2) the charge of violating inviolable core characteristics” (261). These concerns that DeGrazia calls attention to here serve as the precise dilemmas that emerge in *Klara and the Sun*, since the novel brings up debates about the nature of humanity (as well as the direction humanity is headed) by presenting a scenario wherein genetic engineering is widely practiced, but still controversial. Moreover, because the novel takes care to highlight the real divide between the “lifted” and the “unlifted” humans in their fictional society, the narrative also prompts a re-definition of what it means to be human. Since such a reassessment is already taking shape in our own society, *Klara and the Sun* provides a glimpse of changes that could happen soon, and the challenges that might come along with such changes.

Just as Philip Brey outlines in his article, “Human Enhance-

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ment and Personal Identity,” the “possibility of human enhancement requires a rethinking of the aims of medicine” (169). Enhancement brings with it many questions, chief among these being: should medical care be used simply to maintain health, or should technologies push the aim of medicine even further? Brey explains the dilemma thus:

The primary aim of medicine has always been the treatment of illness and disability. That is, medicine has traditionally been therapeutic: it has been concerned with restoring impaired human functions to a state of normality or health. Human enhancement aims to bring improvements to the human condition that move beyond a state of mere health. Part of the contemporary debate on human enhancement therefore concerns the question whether the traditional aims of medicine should be expanded to include human enhancement as one of its aims. (169)

Along with the development of medical technologies that augment humans, there are significant questions that arise regarding whether such alterations fundamentally change humans to the degree that they become posthuman (or something beyond human). This question, which has long appeared in discussions about the posthuman predicament that we will soon be (or already are) faced with, gets to the heart of the issue about what it means to be human, and the degree to which humans have been inextricably linked to their tools and technologies.

In this manner, the novel comes across as a decidedly posthuman text. As Victoria Flanagan emphasizes, “Posthumanism

uses technoscience as the impetus for a radical revaluation of human subjectivity” (1). Such a reassessment is necessary, because “being and experience have been changed by technological development” (Flanagan 15). Ishiguro’s engagement with this kind of reconsideration can be located in the passages that describe how advanced technologies have shaped the social order in *Klara and the Sun*.

In Ishiguro’s fictional society, these changes get represented most pointedly through characters like Josie and Klara. For Josie, the posthuman predicament applies since term posthuman can “indicate the condition of existing in a world that has been irreversibly altered by technology” (Flanagan 15). Josie undoubtedly exists in such a world since Ishiguro portrays her society as so technologically advanced that intelligent machines are part of the landscape and genetic engineering is practiced routinely on the human population. Of course, Josie herself has been subject to genetic modification (via the process of “lifting”). While she benefits from the procedure by being afforded more opportunities, it comes with a cost: her health. In this manner, Ishiguro presents the practice as multi-faceted. It is worth noting that since her mother made this decision for her, Josie was not an altogether willing participant in the process—thus further complicating the already difficult question of subjectivity.

In Klara’s case, posthuman concerns prove germane because, as an Artificial Friend, a sentient machine, she represents a form of being that has come along after the human. Hence, she is posthuman. In fact, with Klara, the possibility is explored if she might one day literally take the place of a human, since the novel dangles the prospect that she may one day serve as a replacement for Josie, thus bringing to the surface deep-seated fears that the self is not stable and fixed but

unstable and infinitely malleable. This issue gets cast as complicated in the novel due to the fact that specific “problems” with Klara’s particular model line have potentially led to certain AFs (like Klara) being designed to potentially achieve sentience (later models were developed who were supposedly more compliant and less able to adapt/evolve, thus making them less likely to achieve sentience). Moreover, this idea that Klara could become Josie also recalls Myra J. Seaman’s words of warning, that, in a “posthumanist world, this human is an endangered species” (246). Thus, the novel challenges the hold anthropocentrism has had on the way we view potential manifestations of subjectivity, phenomenology, reasoning, and cognition.

Interestingly, in *Klara and the Sun*, it is Josie’s mother who pushes Klara to consider the possibility of taking Josie’s place. Fearing Josie will pass away as her older child did, Mrs. Arthur envisions Josie “living on” in a way through Klara. She first brings up the subject when the two of them take a day-trip to a natural area near Morgan’s Falls, a waterfall. Josie was supposed to visit the area with them, but a sudden downturn in her health prohibited her from coming along. Mrs. Arthur proposes that they go on the excursion anyway, without Josie. After hiking, they take a moment’s rest. It is then that Mrs. Arthur instructs Klara to imitate Josie: “Since Josie isn’t here, I want you to be Josie. Just for a little while” (Ishiguro 104). When Klara complies, Josie’s mother is clearly impressed by the performance and implores her to carry on pretending to be Josie: “I want you to move. Do something. Don’t stop being Josie” (Ishiguro 104). Klara continues in her impression for a while, referring to Mrs. Arthur as “Mother” throughout the exchange (Ishiguro 105).

Afterwards, Mrs. Arthur is jolted by what has transpired; however, it is clear, however, that she is also intrigued. Her

reaction is apparent when Klara recounts how Josie's mother "didn't speak for the entire way back down to the car" (Ishiguro 105). Once they arrive at the vehicle, Mrs. Arthur invites Klara to "travel in the front," and tells her on the way home that she is "grateful" to her (Ishiguro 106). She also asks Klara to keep secret from Josie what happened, urging: "I think it's best we say nothing to Josie about this. Nothing about what you were doing up there. Imitating her. Josie might take it the wrong way" (Ishiguro 107).

Not a thing is ever mentioned to Josie about the incident, but it becomes clear that Mrs. Arthur has been fixating for some time on the idea of Klara taking Josie's place. When they visit an artist's studio where Josie has been sitting to have her portrait done (Josie having been led to believe that the sittings are simply so that the artist, Mr. Capaldi, can paint her likeness), Klara realizes that Mr. Capaldi, however, is making not a painting of Josie but rather a realistic AF body. Klara notes that how, in an upstairs room of the studio, she spies "Josie there, suspended in the air," and then, realizing that it is an AF model being built, describes how the "face was like that of the real Josie" (Ishiguro 201). Shortly thereafter, Capaldi and Mrs. Arthur question Klara about what she has seen: "'Okay,' the Mother said, and again I saw she was fearful rather than angry. 'Now tell us what you thought. Or, rather, tell us what you think you saw up there'" (Ishiguro 204). Klara relates: "I'd suspected for some time that Mr. Capaldi's portrait wasn't a picture or a sculpture, but an AF. I went in to confirm my speculation" (Ishiguro 204). That same day, Klara is given a test to gauge how well she knows Josie, and to see if she understands "how she makes her decisions and why she has her feelings" (Ishiguro 206). Klara believes the aim of all this is so she will be able to "train the Josie upstairs" to convincingly imitate the real Josie (Ishiguro 206). This passage

brings to light an interesting juxtaposition between Klara's understanding of what is transpiring and readers' impression of what is taking place. Klara, as narrator, does not display any sense of horror over this (she seems willing to comply), but reading might likely recoil at the suggestion that Josie can be so easily replaced (thus bringing to light fears about the self—namely that our concept of selfhood is problematic and unstable—as well as anxieties that AIs might replace humans).

Capaldi, however, quickly clarifies that the goal is not for her to train another AF to behave like Josie but rather that Klara herself will replace her: "Klara, we're not asking you to train the new Josie. We're asking you to *become* her. That Josie you saw up there, as you noticed, is empty. If the day comes—I hope it doesn't, but if it does—we want you to inhabit that Josie up there with everything you've learned" (Ishiguro 206–207). While Klara is taken aback, Capaldi reasons that Klara could "continue her" for the sake of Josie's mother (Ishiguro 207). This proposed scheme is not only significant in terms of the novel's plot, but also gets to the heart of the questions posed by *Klara and The Sun*: To what degree are individuals replaceable? Is there really such a thing as an essential self at all? These inquiries necessitate a re-examination of concepts of such as individualism, identity, and selfhood, ultimately suggesting that the idea of there being a true self is just an illusion.

The plan hatched by Josie's mother and Capaldi raises questions about identity and engages with debates about a concept referred to as "psychological continuity." The concept relates to notions of selfhood by delineating certain psychological criteria of personal identity. Psychological continuity assumes that there exist overlapping chains of direct psycho-

logical connections, such as those between beliefs, desires, intentions, experiential memories, and personality traits, and that these connections constitute personal identity. Most pointedly, the scenario proposed in *Klara and the Sun* puts forth a dilemma related to an ongoing debate between Psychological-continuity theorists, in particular the question of psychological connectedness. The question posed is this: If the contents of an individual's mind were to be transported or replicated (in some way)—assuming any of this is possible—and then later put into another being's mind, would that constitute a continuation of the same individual? Psychological-continuity scholars disagree on this issue. For instance, while Sydney Shoemaker, in both *Personal Identity* (1984) and "Self and Substance" (1997), seems to believe that it would represent the same person, Peter Unger disagrees. In *Identity, Consciousness, and Value* (1990), Unger argues that identity must also be physically based. Moreover, he asserts that contemporary philosophers have underrated the importance of physical continuity to identity and survival.

Additionally, by dangling the possibility that Josie might be replaced by Klara, Ishiguro blurs the line between human and machine. By envisioning a world populated by humans (many of whom have been genetically modified) who live alongside several different generations and models of AFs, Ishiguro further calls attention to the often-unstable boundaries between humans and machines. In this respect, he probes what a posthuman future might signal. Considering that Josie has been "lifted" and has arguably moved beyond the human condition, as it has traditionally been understood, and given Klara's obvious intelligence and awareness (not to mention her ability to reason and emphasize), which position her as a potential candidate for personhood, the novel's two main characters represent competing visions of posthu-

man subjectivity. In this respect, Ishiguro's characters probe traditional limits with respect to ontology, in a move that has come to characterize other of Ishiguro's fiction, given that he makes such a case in *Never Let Me Go*, his novel about human cloning.

THE SELF AND THE OTHER IN *KLARA AND THE SUN*

Besides troubling boundaries with respect to ontology, the novel also reveals instability surrounding long-taken-for-granted concepts such as the Self and the Other, as well as the supposed difference between the two. According to phenomenology, the term the Other—and the concept of the “Constitutive Other”—are used to identify the other human being. Traditionally understood as dissimilar to, and even opposite of, the Self, this concept developed in the psychoanalysis of Lacan (this explanation appears primarily in *Écrits*). Through a Lacanian lens, the Other is associated with the image outside oneself perceived and identified within the Mirror-stage.

Taken as a cumulative, constituting factor in the self-image of a person, this concept of Self governs traditional understandings about identity. In *Klara and the Sun*, particularly in the way that he portrays Klara, Ishiguro complicates the relationship between Self and the Other. Thus, an already fraught concern is made even more complex in Ishiguro's posthuman imaginary. Annalisa Quinn speaks to this dimension of the novel in “*Klara and the Sun Asks What It Means to Be Human*,” when she observes, “one of the distinct things about Klara’s speech is the way she addresses the people in her life indirectly (‘It is nice to meet Rick’), as if the space between ‘you’ and ‘I’ is unnavigable, shifting territory belonging only to people. The nature and size of that territory becomes the

novel's primary concern." To an extent, this chasm can be attributed to the way technology has pushed a reassessment of concepts such as Self and Other.

Indeed, as Isabel Millar highlights in "Black Mirror: From Lacan's Lathouse to Miller's Speaking Body" (2018), technology is "beginning to dramatically change the social bond." Millar thus references Lacan's concept of the social bond which, as he claims in *Encore*, "installs itself only by anchoring itself in the manner in which language situates itself and impresses itself, situates itself upon that which swarms, that is, the speaking being" (51). The idea of being a speaking being, which for so long helped humanity define itself, no longer sets humans apart in the way it was previously argued to, in part because the realm of language is (also) occupied by others. Consequently, uncertainty now surrounds these once taken-for-granted notions that helped humans understand themselves in relation to (and as unique from) Others. These notions are particularly challenged when considering intelligent machines and what they can do for, as Millar notes, "Artificial Intelligence," constitutes an "ambiguous object" that can disrupt the social bond. In this manner, *Klara and the Sun*, reflects as well as contributes to, ongoing debates about selfhood, particularly as these discussions either emphasize or complicate the (so-called) fundamental differences between Self and Other.

In effect, the dynamics present in the *Klara and the Sun* exemplify the argument that Lisa Zunshine makes about the degree to which literary studies and cognitive sciences can inform each other. In particular, Zunshine's view that there is a strong connection between the two fields, one that relies upon the phenomenon of "mind-reading," is suggested by the way Klara interacts with humans. To be sure, both Klara's suc-

cesses and failures when she attempts to “mind-read” underscore the degree to which this phenomenon is a crucial component of human interaction, even though humans take it for granted and thus do not usually interrogate what the practice entails or what the implications of “mind-reading” truly are.

The novel also leans on Klara to bring other timely and relevant issues about identity to the forefront. Her role in the novel—that is, how she functions and how others see her—raises questions about to what degree humans are replaceable, thus challenging humans’ supposedly unique position in this regard, as well. As Quinn explains it,

The Mother begins testing Klara to see if she can imitate Josie’s movements and speech patterns. As Josie sickens, she goes to have her ‘portrait’ done, but Klara discovers that the portrait is really a kind of wearable 3-D sculpture of Josie. Here, the reader wonders if Klara, offered the option of replacing the human she is supposed to protect, will take it. All that love and affection, a family life, a romantic life with Rick, Josie’s boyfriend. Robots can replace us in our working lives—can they replace us in our emotional lives, too?

Thus, as Quinn’s reading emphasizes, by dangling the possibility that Klara could serve a replacement for Josie, Ishiguro’s narrative provokes anxieties about AIs supplanting humanity while also casting humans’ uniqueness into doubt. At the same time, this proposition serves to test Klara, to see if such an arrangement would be something she could do, would want to do, or would see herself as benefitting from. Might Klara be tempted to slip into the role of Josie? Would

such an existence be seen as appealing to her? And, if so, do these desires reflect her wish to obey her human “family” or do they reflect her own desires?

Besides highlighting anxieties and calling attention to uncertainties surrounding whether machines might eventually displace humanity from its privileged position (a shift already taking place in the novel since humans, *en masse*, have lost their jobs to AIs and automation), the narrative also asks what these kinds of radical changes might mean for how humans see themselves. This line of questioning is central to the novel and shapes not only how humans treat AIs, but also how humans treat each other. Ishiguro approaches this concern, in part, by displaying another kind of friction between different groups: the tension that exists in the novel between the two castes of humans, those who have been “lifted” and those who have not. Thus, Ishiguro pushes the concept of the “haves” and the “have nots” to the extreme. By creating a dystopia where it is possible to augment humans via genetic engineering, Ishiguro probes who is most worthy of rights and opportunities.

Human rights, that is, the idea that humans are entitled to rights simply because we exist as human beings, are not universally granted. While many believe that universal rights are inherent to us all, an obvious challenge to the universality factor derives from the “cultural relativism” argument, which points out how cultural imperialism has long-influenced moral judgment. Those skeptical of the notion that human rights are universal also frequently emphasize that these rights are expressive of Western values, mores, and norms. Given that rights and values are defined and limited by cultural perceptions and since there is no universal culture, there are no universal human rights.

When Ishiguro brings this point to bear in *Klara and the Sun*, he does so alongside a broader examination of posthuman concerns and an in-depth consideration of nonhuman agency. In this sense, this novel offers an indirect critique of the political, cultural, and social factors that make some individuals more deserving of consideration than others. Ishiguro also probes the nature of humanity and the many social and technological forces that shape how we see ourselves.

INFLUENCE AND INTERTEXTUALITY

In these respects, Ishiguro's narrative demonstrates overlapping tendencies with other popular stories about non-humans. The novel connects broadly to these kinds of stories since they all feature objects that have achieved varying degrees of subjectivity and agency. Thus, predicaments like Klara's get dramatically depicted in these narratives. It is easy, for instance, to draw comparisons between *Klara and the Sun* and classic children's books such as Margery Williams Bianco's *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1922) and Don Freeman's *Corduroy* (1968). Likewise, there are striking similarities between Ishiguro's novel and popular movies such as Disney-Pixar's *Toy Story* film series (1995-2019) and Steven Spielberg's *AI* (2001), a film based on the short story, "Supertoys Last All Summer Long" (1969) by Brian Aldiss.

These shared tendencies have been noted by the novel's reviewers. Writing for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Anita Felicelli connects the desire Ishiguro's Artificial Friends have to be chosen by children to the yearning of toys, as they have sometimes been depicted in fictional narratives. Referring to the words of caution spoken by the manager of the store where Klara is on display, she asserts that the "warning about children is reminiscent of the poignancy we're accustomed

to in *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the *Toy Story* series, and other similar work about the toys of childhood” (Felicelli). However, Felicelli clarifies that, while “the Velveteen Rabbit longs to be ‘real’ and that longing drives the story, gives it emotional heft, Klara only seeks to do right by the family that buys her. There are no explicit longings beyond the sense of duty to be a good friend and to understand the mechanics of her relationships” (Felicelli).

Instead of the *Velveteen Rabbit*, Jones likens Klara to the stuffed bear in Don Freeman’s classic children’s book, *Corduroy* (1968), observing about Klara that she “has come to act as companion for 14-year-old Josie. Like that childhood stalwart Corduroy, she’d been sitting in a store, hoping to be chosen by the right child.” While *Corduroy* has been touted as being like *The Velveteen Rabbit*, since both are children’s books which concern stuffed animals wanting affection, these stories also have a key difference: the rabbit in *The Velveteen Rabbit* also desires to be real, while *Corduroy* wishes only to be played with and loved.

Aspects of storylines within installments of Pixar’s animated *Toy Story* film series connect broadly to Klara’s situation, as well. They also display overlapping thematic concerns that bear discussion. Notably, Klara, like the toys in *Toy Story*, represents a form of being as well as purchased property. Klara, just like the toys in the Pixar franchise, was designed for a child; however, in her case, she was created to serve as a companion (not just as a toy) to a human child. Klara’s adventures relate directly to Josie (her human) much like the toys’ escapades in the *Toy Story* franchise relate to Andy and Bonnie (and the other human children depicted) in those movies. Moreover, like the toys in the *Toy Story* series (who care for and want the love of their children), Klara’s foremost

goal seems to be to care for Josie—she even goes on a mission to find the Sun to try to convince it (she sees the Sun as a deity of sorts) to cure Josie of her health ailments. Wanting to help the girl is a fundamental part of her being—indeed, as Senecahl puts it, Klara’s “duty to assist Josie’ is an innate part of her digital makeup.” In this respect, Klara represents a form of benevolent posthumanism insofar as her motives are to both care for and make life more comfortable for Josie.

Even so, Klara seems to have exceeded her original programming in the lengths she will go for Josie. This can be seen especially in how she hatches the plan to seek the help of the sun. Her recognition of the sun as important makes considerable sense given that she is a solar-powered AF; nonetheless, by displaying a religious instinct, Klara demonstrates that she has evolved from her original programming. From an anthropological perspective, spiritual beliefs often get characterized as the inevitable consequence of (human) evolution. By a similar token, it could be argued that Klara has likewise progressed. Moreover, her quasi-religious behavior pushes her closer to being human (and likewise makes her a clear candidate for personhood) since religious beliefs help to differentiate humans from other kinds of beings. As Pascal Boyer notes in his book, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (2001), the impetus “for religious beliefs and behaviors is to be found in the way all human minds work.” What matters, according to Boyer to, is that these “properties of minds” “can found in all members of our species with normal brains.” Thus, these religious impulses are part of what makes us human—and they make Klara seem human-like.

Klara’s quest to save Josie seems to derive, in part, from her apparent religious beliefs. Nonetheless, by undertaking this

mission, she also demonstrates her subjectivity and agency since she takes it upon herself to go to extremes to help Josie. Of course, her desire to help Josie also traces back to her programming, since she was designed to care for and protect her human. In this manner, she recalls the toys from the *Toy Story* franchise, especially Woody, who claims (in *Toy Story 4*) that “being there for a child is the most noble thing a toy can do.” In her review of the 2019 film, Judy Gruen notes Woody’s loyalty and calls attention to what she sees as a “poignant theme in the film—the sense of purpose and joy that all the toys either feel—or desperately wish they could feel—by being loved and needed by a child.” Thus, in the regard, Josie reinforces cultural images of talking objects who demonstrate affinity for their human companions.

Klara’s fate—deteriorating in a landfill—hearkens back to a subplot of the *Toy Story* franchise and thus establishes another parallel between the two imaginary worlds. In contrast to many of the other toys that take center-stage in the Pixar series, Stinky Pete (also known as the Prospector) displays real mistrust of humans, and especially children, fearing that he will be used and then discarded as if he were junk. As one of the antagonists of the *Toy Story 2* (1999), he cautions the other toys about putting too much faith in children. While his latent to desire to be loved by a child remains evident, the knowledge of what (human) children can do instills real fear in him. Lewis Roberts locates Stinky Pete’s dilemma in his article, “‘It’s a Dangerous World out There for a Toy’: Identity Crisis and Commodity Culture in the *Toy Story* Movies,” where he explains that “Pete’s suppressed longing to have been sold to a child and taken out of the box to be played with has turned to bitterness” (419). Feeling betrayed, Pete now equates security with being away from humans. According to Roberts, for “him, safety now lies in his isolation from

the violence that he associates with the life of a plaything. ‘Children destroy toys!’ he warns Woody. ‘You’ll all be ruined, forgotten! Spending eternity rotting in some landfill!’” (419).

The similarities to the *Toy Story* movies continue. Both the *Toy Story* franchise and *Klara and the Sun* have characters named Rex. A plastic Tyrannosaurus Rex toy, Rex is a supporting character in the *Toy Story* franchise. Boy AF Rex is a minor character in *Klara and the Sun*. He teases Klara early in the narrative (during the time when both resided in the urban store that sold AFs), but his joking nature hides the insecurities he feels inside. In this respect, the Rex character in *Klara and the Sun* demonstrates some resemblance to a bear named Lotso, the main antagonist of *Toy Story 3*. Most notably, they share the desire to find a home with a child. Lotso—as revealed as part of his backstory in *Toy Story 3*—was abandoned by his owner, leaving him angry and resentful, though, of course, still hoping to find love and fulfillment by being claimed by a child. In *Klara and the Sun*, Boy AF Rex pines for a home, too, displaying something akin to desperation as he and the fellow AFs in the storefront compete to catch the eyes of passing children. Rosa, another AF, notices this quality about Rex and confides to Klara that she thinks he will soon be chosen. As Klara relates, “Rosa leaned over to me once to say, ‘Oh, he does look wonderful! He’s bound to find a home soon’” (Ishiguro 5). Of course, another key similarity is that the movies in the *Toy Story* franchise illustrate the theme of objects coming to life, which is a loose way to describe Klara’s situation in Ishiguro’s novel.

Narratives that feature objects that come to life (in one sense or another) is the subject of *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development* (1994)

by Lois R. Kuznets. As part of her larger investigation into what the transformation of a toy into a living being represents, she argues, “when inanimate objects become ‘live beings,’” they “embody human anxiety about what it means to be ‘real’—an independent subject or self rather than an object” (Kuznets 2). As Kuznets highlights, stories which dramatize such transformations call into question notions of selfhood even while troubling the (already unstable) line between object and subject. Her analysis additionally explores what dangers might lie in the transformation of a toy into a living being, hearkening to “the idea that the ‘Other’ is dangerous” (Kuznets 106). This danger, of course, taps into anxieties about selfhood since questioning the constitutive qualities of (potentially sentient) objects also raises difficult questions about (human) subjectivity.

While Kuznets focuses on the dangers that toys-come-to-life might pose (either by being dangerous themselves or by taking their children on adventures that could prove risky), Roberts examines the risks and anxieties once-inanimate objects themselves face by/through their transformations. As part of his discussion about the *Toy Story* franchise, he posits that “toys such as Sheriff Woody and Buzz Lightyear experience a series of identity crises” (Roberts 418). These predicaments result from the uncertainties “toys such as Sheriff Woody and Buzz Lightyear experience as they struggle with the contradictions inherent in their lives as things” (Roberts 418).

Dilemmas such as these can be observed throughout the series. Indeed, all the “toys in the *Toy Story* movies are simultaneously inanimate objects and animate subjects, mass-produced things that also possess individual consciousness. Their existential crises are located within this slippage between the toy object and the character” (Roberts 419). Such

uncertainty derives, in part, from “the fluctuating identities of toys as both beings and property,” a feature which can be seen throughout the series (Roberts 418). While his observations center specifically on the *Toy Story* franchise, Roberts nonetheless acknowledges that “Pixar’s *Toy Story* movies join a long tradition of children’s fiction in exploring the nature of identity through the animation of the inanimate” (418). Tellingly, the same concerns which propel these plots and mark their cultural significance also emerge in Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun*.

Klara and the Sun also shares features in common with Steven Spielberg’s 2001 film, *AI: Artificial Intelligence*. Besides the fact that both have storylines featuring intelligent machines whose existence poses provocative questions about ethics and agency, Klara bears some resemblance to David (played by a young Haley Joel Osment), the AI in the film. Speaking of the two, Hooper admits that “Klara’s outlook reminds me of Haley Joel Osment’s character,” explaining that Osment “plays a robot boy programmed to be capable of love. Klara is programmed to be a friend, and when she is selected by Josie, her function simply becomes that of ‘friend to Josie.’ Klara’s own desires are only hinted at. She is a conscious being, but her artificiality means she is treated differently, and discriminated against, by humans.” Thus, as Hooper’s remarks underscore, both texts engage with difficult ontological questions by/through the portrayal of these characters while raising ethical stakes with the treatment of posthuman beings (such as David and Klara).

As these comparisons underscore, *Klara and the Sun* clearly shares tendencies with other works. Nonetheless, it is notoriously difficult to distinguish definitively between echoes and allusions. Still, as is the case with many novels, there is no

doubt that *Klara and the Sun* coexists as part of a network of associations with other creative works and thus displays intertextual relationships. The novel also dramatizes the cultural anxieties that influence so much of contemporary fiction. This can be seen principally in the way that Ishiguro foregrounds concerns about identity and the effects new technologies have on society.

Texts, of course, frequently mirror and borrow from each other since authors often deliberately (and directly) refer to other works in attempts to use allusion to generate related understanding in their own works. However, what comes across as allusion is sometimes authors just gravitating toward exploring the same concerns as their counterparts, an understandable practice given that authors are subject to many of the same cultural influences their contemporaries are—and therefore would likewise react to, and reflect upon, the same milieu.

KLARA AND THE SUN: THE QUESTION OF “ALMOST MINDS”

Besides the more general ways that Ishiguro uses his narrative to respond to social concerns, the novel also represents an important cultural artefact in the way that its narrator and protagonist displays a specific dilemma referred to the concept of “almost minds.” As Haraway reasons in *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (1989), “children, artificial intelligence (AI) computer programs, and nonhuman primates all here embody ‘almost minds’” (376). These categories of beings share the fact that they all display aspirationally human cognition yet are seen as only provisionally deserving of ethical treatment. In this manner, they probe puzzling questions related to “who or

what has fully human status,” ultimately highlighting how the “boundaries among and within machines, animals, and humans are exceedingly permeable” (Haraway 376). Tied to these concerns are questions about what Haraway terms the “techno-bio-politics of difference” (376).

Thus, the notion of “almost minds” helps to explain Klara’s particular dilemma. While she is human-like in so many ways, she is not afforded the same rights as humans in her society. Her situation is emblematic of a larger practice and calls attention to real-world scenarios wherein certain categories of beings are recognized as different. In other words, by giving sustained attention to the impasse Klara faces, the novel also alludes to, even while re-framing, real-world scenarios that prove likewise problematic.

In “Robot Visions” (2014) Claudia Castañeda and Lucy Suchman address Haraway’s notion of “almost minds,” arguing that the “resonating figures of primate, child, and robot in contemporary technoscientific” bear examination due to the “claims about nature—and in particular human nature” that can be made by fictional representations of robots (315). With respect to the many fictional portrayals that follow this trend, they ask: “What kinds of bodies are being imagined, and what limits and possibilities does the robot embody in turn?” (Castañeda and Suchman 315). Perhaps, as Maya Indira Ganesh, who also weighs in on Haraway’s discussion of “almost minds,” suggests, by using the “phrase ‘almost-minds,’ Haraway is reminding us of the history of some people—‘natives,’ ‘slaves,’ women, among others—not having complete human status because they were not believed to have ‘full’ minds” (“The Difference that Difference Makes”).

Klara and the Sun calls attention to those who have been labeled different (and thus not seen as fully human) in our own

world, past and present. Besides hearkening to past and current articulations of difference and how they get used to enable and justify discrimination, the novel is forward-looking and functions also a fable about human rights in a posthuman world. These questions remain pertinent since, as William Lombardo notes in “Losing Ourselves,” we “moderns seem precariously unsure of what it means to be human.” As he argues:

We have shaken off the old hierarchy of living creatures—with humans at the top of the natural world and the bottom of the supernatural—and have replaced it with the notion that what truly sets us apart from the rest of nature is our superior intelligence, or having a mind at all. What is left of our dignity consists in this: we are thinking beings. But the prospect of truly humanlike artificial intelligence, even if it is for now only a pipe dream, rattles that foundation. If our intelligence is all that defines us, who are we when AI matches it? (Lombardo)

The cumulative effect of this reordering is that humanity must re-think not only our place in the world, but what it means to be human, as well.

In *Klara and the Sun*, humans are an endangered species. Between environmental catastrophes, terrorism, and the highly competitive labor market, the extinction of *homo sapiens sapiens*—as the category has traditionally been understood—seems imminent in Ishiguro’s imaginary. The direction that Ishiguro’s fictional society is headed portends fundamental changes on the horizon for any who remain, due in large part to the technological developments in Artificial Intelligence,

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automation, and human gene editing. These changes, which have already necessitated a reconsideration of what it means to be human, promise to radically alter humankind.

NARRATIVE LIMITS: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A “TALKING OBJECT”

Ishiguro’s tale about what it means to be human, a narrative written amidst a radically re-imagining of the concept, is not narrated from a human viewpoint. Rather, Ishiguro selects an Artificial Friend, a sentient AI, as his narrator, thus relying on the “classic science fiction trope of the innocent android,” with her “narrative gaze restricted to partial glimpses” (Power). Consequently, the “sense that Klara makes of her experiences is not, of course, the sense that we are able to make from them, as we read; instead, we’re compelled to piece together from Klara’s observations a heartbreakingly mosaic of human experiences: hope, need, love, loss, growth.” Klara’s partial view of the novel’s events underscores her nature and world-view even as her perspective pushes readers to assemble a coherent story from her observations. Besides demonstrating Ishiguro’s reliance on techniques such as estrangement and de-familiarization, the limits of Klara’s narrative serve another function: they remind us of our own. Like Klara, there is only so much we can see and make sense of. Nonetheless, we continue to contemplate our place in the world in a manner quite like Klara.

Ishiguro chooses to conclude this narrative by showing Klara’s existence waning in the “Yard,” a junkyard where she has been sent to wait until her cell fully powers down (294). Unable to move any longer, Klara exists at this point as a “talking object,” able to speak to passersby even as she continues to recount her the narrative for the novel’s read-

ers. In this manner, she spends her remaining time looking back on the years she spent with Josie and contemplating her existence. While this setting (a junkyard) and her contemplation prove significant since they underscore previously established themes in the novel, this final glimpse at Klara resonates due to what is revealed about her, even in her twilight.

As Richard J. Wallace surmises in the book, *Artificial Intelligence/ Human Intelligence: An Indissoluble Nexus*, “one thing people can do that seems outside the realm of computability is that they can contemplate existence” (298). For Wallace, this small act separates human from machine, since he says he has “no idea how this could be achieved by a computer program” (though he does clarify that his “present work is concerned with what AI systems can do,” rather than speculation) (Wallace 298). Arbitrary though this watermark may be, Klara has surpassed it in the way she ponders her place in the world in the twilight moments of her life, even while her care and concern for Josie persists.

By telling this story—an account of what it means to be human—through the lens of an intelligent machine who also must contemplate her own place in the world, Ishiguro pushes the limits in terms of narrative. He also prompts debates about Klara’s place in the world. In this manner, Ishiguro’s novel fits into the posthuman paradigm, for, as William Lewis notes, the “posthuman paradigm calls into question the ontological basis of subjectivity and position and, by questioning what it means to be a subject in our technologically mediated world, we must also question what it means to engage with(in) that world” (Lewis 8).

While these concerns relate directly to Klara’s predicament, they also highlight the broader and ongoing reassessment of concepts such as agency, subjectivity, and personhood.

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While such kinds of reconsideration have been prompted by, and reflected in, science fiction literature, there are real world concerns that these lines of enquiry (foregrounded in the science fiction imaginary) address. Thus, literary works like *Klara and the Sun* operate as part of an ongoing dialogue about what it means to be human, what it means to be Other, and how these already unstable categories have become even more uncertain in the 21st century.

Images such as those present in Ishiguro's science fiction novel suggest what the future could hold and, in this respect, they tap into cultural anxieties. Not only do they reveal fears surrounding societal change and concerns about humanity being replaced or rendered obsolete, but they show how the kinds of reassessments these ideas engender can be uncomfortable. However, science fiction is often prescient, and that may well also be the case for science fictional representations of Artificial Intelligence.

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