

# Role Of ‘Artificial’ Hope At The Failure Of Medical Science : A Study Of Kazuo Ishiguro’s Klara And The Sun

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## Introduction

Since Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein* (1800), readers have always differentiated between the human and the perspective of the artificial (if it can afford one). The Protagonist, Adam’s engineered body is most probably the first of its kind that paved the way for a chain of science-fiction novels resulting in today’s genetically edited human children in *Klara and the Sun* (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro, the Nobel Laureate of 2017. He essentially started writing fiction around Japanese characters in about 1982, moved on to writing eurocentric works in about 1989. Only after 2000, Ishiguro has gravitated towards science fiction exploring plots around cloning and AI. In 2004, Ishiguro, had written *Never Let Me Go* (2005) an eerie novel about clones and human body harvesting where Kathy, a clone, takes up the role of a ‘carer’ and provides hope to the organ ‘donor’ clones. *Klara and the Sun* (KATS) an urban area in a fictitious city in the United States (a market for French goods) with a central capitalist power, where children are genetically ‘uplifted’ and are accompanied by AI enabled Artificial friends (AFs). A resistance group living on the periphery who do not conform to this model of the society. Ishiguro paints a speculative picture of a futuristic society of automated machines and artificial intelligence: the commonly used elements of the sci-fi genre by the DC and Marvel Universe in contemporary times.

In this parallel reality, the genetically engineered, home-schooled and children’s rich parents buy artificial friends (AFs) to accompany and intellectually improve and/or complement the former characteristics of the young children. Even after having humanistic attributes, these AFs are far from being humans. They are machines i.e. the creator and the creation are distinct. KATS is narrated by Klara, an AF (possibly a droid), comes in contact with human beings and narrates on the basis of observations about AF buyers and the other surrounding people. Klara notices and narrates that the first thing Mother tries to do is to make her a human-substitute for Josie, her daughter whose health is deteriorating rapidly after due to the process of gene editing that she has undergone. The ‘Mother’ instead of making time to care for her daughter has giving up hopes for Josie’s survival. Klara is the only one who keeps clinging to her hopes of Josie’s recovery, in striking contrast to the Josie’s mother. It will be an interesting study to try and interpret the reason behind such human behaviour and why Ishiguro brings up this possibility. After experimenting with the human mind and memory, Ishiguro turns to experimenting with optional-humans (NLMG) and human-like point-of-view with Klara. The difference lies with the grids in her view which measures the dimensions of the objects or spaces right in front of her. She calculates the spatial dimensions like any other AI camera in our mobile phones. The rationalisation of the situations Klara finds herself in also inflicts the narration with an alien frame of reference. Ishiguro is fond of putting his old characters in new settings and seeing how they

behave. Klara with a “K” is the extension of “Kathy” also with a “K”. In his previous works too he is found to have done the same thing, e.g. putting Ono from the Artist of the Floating World in the psychedelic journey of The Unconsoled.

Kathy, the protagonists of NLMG(2004) and KATS(2021) respectively, can be identified as the ‘other’, as they are – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination (Other/otherness) . It brings us to question what qualities that humans have that AF doesn’t? The way in which the Mother inspects Klara at the store , it appears to be an evaluation of Klara's ability to observe and to re-enact them. The underlying/ulterior motive involves evaluating Klara’s capability to notice and ‘perform’ as Josie when and if she dies. In the following excerpt from the text one finds the character of the Mother evaluating Klara’s observational and mimicking skills.

How would you say her voice was pitched? “Her conversational voice has a range between A-flat above middle C to C octave.” ‘Is that so?’ There was another silence, then the Mother said: ‘Last question. Klara. What did you notice about the way my daughter walks?’

‘There’s perhaps a weakness in her left hip. Also, her right shoulder has potential to give pain, so Josie walks in a way that will protect it from sudden motion or unnecessary impact.’ (KATS, 50)

Josie is a living human being and Klara is to be created as a verisimilitude of Josie. Klara would serve as a simulacrum if required (in case Josie dies) by catering to the Mother’s emotional requirement. Readers infer that the parents’ affinity for their children is dwindling between ‘upliftment’ or genetic editing and their health in that dystopian fictional world. It is an intriguing thought that even after losing Sal, her elder daughter, Mother has risked Josie's life by opting for gene-editing services to enhance Josie’s intellectual abilities. Josie’s mother is only one among the millions of customer cum guardians interested more in such upliftment than their children’s well-being, the crowd at the ‘Socialising Party’. It is quite intriguing to contemplate the reason behind such un-parental behaviour. Yet, Klara seems to ‘...pass no moral judgement on anything she observes, and some of the most disturbing features never take center stage in her narrative...’(Through New Eyes: Artificial Intelligence, Technological Unemployment, and Transhumanism in Kazuo Ishiguro’s Klara and the Sun Santiago Mejial · Dominique Nikolaidis,2022). Klara also notices Rick, a normal child who has not undergone the ‘genetic upliftment’, hence is in contrast to ‘genetically uplifted’ children. He lives in Josie’s neighbourhood, has created drone birds and plans to make a complete flock reflecting comparatively higher IQ/intelligence. Even then, he is struggling to get admission in a good college. This indicates a ‘class’ hierarchy between the uplifted and non-uplifted children, and it may act as a deciding factor when it comes to their employment/career. In this novel, very much like a Marxian model of the society, ‘upliftment’ is directly connected to success and money functioning as ‘base’. Everything else such as societal positioning, admission into higher education, etc functions as ‘superstructure’. Is such agitation for success a call for extreme capitalism for essential survival instinct?

Klara, unlike other usual droids R2-D2, Terminator robots, Robocop etc , has almost no pre-existing database of information which leaves klara with limited information. In this novel, such characterization suits the purpose as AFs are built to accompany teenagers, who are themselves in a learning stage. In his previous work Never Let me Go, he used a similar setting to discuss/explore the possibility of clones leading a human-like life. Ishiguro plots characters like Klara and Kathy by yoking together humanistic qualities, emotions, and aspirations with these non-human entities. Klara is skilled in making minute and precise observations, on which the Manager comments, “You never miss a thing, do you?”(KATS,25). Therefore, Klara is shown to develop something akin to human intuition by processing and analysing the observed information and estimating the possible result. When she was in the AF store, she had noticed the sun sending its ‘special nourishment’ to a beggar and his dog, which she presumed, brought them back to life. Klara is solar powered and she projects it on everything the sun rays touch. Later this idea is emphasised when Klara’s prediction about Josie’s recovery turns out to be true.

The fact that Josie does not recover that too after two ‘prayer-like’ sessions of Klara, leaves the readers (humans) at a point which does not make much sense and is definitely not a pattern in human history. Therefore, what does the human being have that the AF doesn’t? Acceptance as a part of the society can be considered in this

regard. Other than careful observation and implementation or mimicry, Klara's character is enabled with aspirations. Klara aspires to 'find a home'. This is reminiscent of Kathy in *Never Let Me Go* (2004). Josie promises Klara that she will return for Klara but the process gets delayed, Klara is disheartened and is afraid to be bought by some insensitive kid who might be abusive to Klara. In this phase, Klara is consoled by the store manager that it happens all the time that the AFs are not bought by the kid who promises to buy them. But still, Klara's visual receptors are scanning the streets, visible from the window of the AF store, for Josie, which shows there is a possibility of emotional bonding between man and machines. Klara also feels peer pressure when she is shifted to the window of the store as she has the responsibility to represent the store. Like humans, she also feels the impact of 'gaze' when humans and other AFs in the store see her doing the walk (of imitating Josie):

"So I started to walk. I realized that, as well as the Mother and of course Josie - the whole store was now watching and listening." (KATS,50)

Her observation skills teach her that, Sun makes 'patterns' with its rays nourishing humans, animals, and solar-powered machines. Occasionally, it bestows 'special nutrition' upon its dependents to revive them. Klara picks up this idea when she sees the beggar and his dog getting back to life. As Ishiguro has created Klara to be like humans, so Klara also gets a chance to show her intuition that Josie will be saved by the Sun with its 'special nutrition.' Klara has no justification or clarification, how will it happen? or why will it happen? Based on Klara's 'bound rational' or 'intuition': information processing and anticipating the desired outcome without being able to trace the logical explanation for it, that tells Klara predicts the prospects of Josie's survival. Klara displays human-like qualities: hope and faith holds on to when humans around her start losing it. Klara establishes faithfulness/loyalty towards Josie when she donates a significant portion of her brain-fluid (P-E-G Nine solution) to Mr. Paul, Josie's father who doesn't live with her, in an attempt to save the former. Klara from KATS Kathy from NLMG(2009). Even though Kathy aspires to live for a few more years, she is also dedicated to her purpose of serving humans by donating vital organs and meeting her demise.

Later in the novel, when the Mother and Klara visit the waterfall without Josie. When Klara and the Mother reach Morgan's Falls, a waterfall which was Josie's favourite place to visit, the Mother asks Klara to mimic Josie. The readers are led to the romanticised world view of a mother's longing which again appears like the Mother is missing her daughter but again it is an evaluation of the recent progress that Klara may have made in imitating Josie. This trip serves as a demo/trial of Klara being Josie for Mother, an initial taste of what might happen in the future.

Whereas, when Josie walks into the AF store her expectations remain unclear along with the reason behind choosing Klara. Klara's exotic appearance is referred to in this context: 'She was really cute, and really smart. Looked almost French? Short hair, quite dark, and all her clothes were dark too and she had the kindest eyes and she was so smart.' (KATS.47)

Despite the availability of upgraded models of AFs, Josie settles for an older version. Klara is a B2 of the fourth generation, the latest B3s are technically far superior to Klara. However, Klara has been attributed with precise observation and quick learning. The author shows this through comparing Klara with the other B2s i.e., Rosa, Boy AF Rex, etc.

This particular ability of Klara makes her fit for the underlying motive of the Mother as discussed before, which surfaces much later in the proceeding of the novel. During their visits to Mr Capaldi, it becomes that he is making a portrait of Josie with great precision and exactness. The purpose of which is to make it look like real Josie, which would serve as the hardware component, if required (in case she dies due to the 'upliftment'). Under these circumstances the prepared hardware will be complemented with the software of Klara. So, Klara will be the new Josie serving the emotional needs of the Mother. But this seemingly common mother-daughter relation is problematized by putting forward the idea of mother having affinity towards the idea of loving her daughter, rather than really loving her daughter.

The humans, including the Mother, feel a need to monitor what Klara sees? and how does she see it? As observation is the primary source of input in this machine. Although Klara's way of processing information resembles the human thought-process, the way Klara observes seems similar to the current day use of AI cameras, framed images processed together to generate the entire scene. They are visualised in boxes. The Readers get to know this when Klara is looking at the set up of the 'socialising party',

‘What was more, the room’s space had become divided into twenty-four-boxes– arranged in two tiers’ (KATS,80)

Klara often tries to estimate the number of available visual signals per box – a mechanical and geometrical world-view, distinct from the human’s way. Similarly, Klara recognises people by their age. Not having human parameters, Klara is free from the human concept of ‘identity’. Which brings us to the question: Does Klara differentiate between the ‘Self’ as a machine and the ‘Other’ as humans.

Klara, as a non-human protagonist, is different from the traditional robots depicted in works of Science Fiction. Klara is neither already filled with information nor does she have access to any database of information. To serve the purpose of being a companion to homeschooled teenagers, AFs are preloaded with limited information and are expected to learn with their human friends or owners. So, Klara is not always able to decode human gestures and emotions. Klara fails to understand the instruction/hint prompted by the Manager during the walk test ‘But she said nothing. Instead, meeting my gaze, she gave me the smallest of nods. (KATS,50). She also fails to recognize a particular behaviour between the taxi drivers when they were ‘all the time they were punching each other, they shouted out cruel words’. (KATS,21). Which later gets clarified during a conversation with Rosa(a fellow AF at the same store) that they were actually fighting.

During the socialising party, Ishiguro paints a disturbing picture of the abusive upcoming generation of the uplifted children towards their AFs, within the narrative space. They grab her by her arm, say, ‘Throw her over onto the sofa. She won’t get damaged.’ (KATS,87) as they throw their AFs to check if they land on their limbs, ask Klara to sing for their entertainment, etc. Such an attitude towards Klara makes readers think of some sort of harassment, but again does the concept of harassment apply to machines? Without directly demonstrating exploitative behaviour, readers may still wonder, can we think of bullying or molestation in the case of automated machinery as Klara doesn’t react to the above foresaid demands. So, without her reaction it is difficult to come to a conclusion or to give a declarative statement .

At the end of the novel, Klara is waiting for her end and is losing her functionality and consciousness lying on a scrapyard. At this stage Klara has no aspiration or hope, as refuses to accept help from the Manager to be placed at a better corner in the scrapyard. Klara lies in a half-dead-like condition, such hopelessness and futility echoes the of modern age literature. The scrapyard Eliot’s Prufrock who says,

“No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; Am an attendant lord...”

After witnessing and observing the humans with all their virtues and vices, Klara waits to meet her end with no opinions to give or comments to make because her character was developed for this purpose. Her function was to observe, to learn and may be to imitate but never to revert or react to the surroundings. Her role as a major source of hope for Josie’s recovery and survival is a supplement, made possible by ‘intuition’.

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