

## SYMBOLISM AND METAPHOR IN DEPICTING HUMAN-AI RELATIONSHIPS IN KLARA AND THE SUN

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### Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* explores the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and human emotions, using powerful symbols and metaphors to delve into themes of hope, fragility, and social alienation. The novel's central character, Klara, an AI, embodies innocence and emotional growth as she navigates human relationships and struggles to understand the complexities of human existence. Key symbols, such as the Sun, the store window, and the barn, illustrate the limitations and possibilities of AI while also highlighting the fragility of human life. By analyzing these symbols and metaphors, this paper examines how Ishiguro uses language and narrative style to convey deep insights into human nature and the boundaries between technology and emotion.

**Keywords:** *Klara and the Sun, Kazuo Ishiguro, artificial intelligence, human emotions, symbolism, metaphors, AI and humanity, literary analysis, narrative style, emotional growth.*

Kazuo Ishiguro, the Nobel Prize-winning author, is renowned for his ability to explore complex human emotions through simple yet profound storytelling. His novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021) continues this tradition by introducing a world where artificial intelligence is not just a machine, but a character with its own feelings and perceptions. The story follows Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF), who is designed to be a companion for a sick child named Josie. Despite her artificial nature, Klara begins to develop emotions and a deep understanding of human relationships. Through her, Ishiguro raises important questions about what it means to be human in a world increasingly influenced by technology.

In *Klara and the Sun*, Kazuo Ishiguro uses various symbols to explore deeper philosophical themes surrounding artificial intelligence, humanity, and the complex nature of emotions. The novel's primary symbols - the Sun, the store window, and the barn - serve as representations of Klara's journey from an artificial being to a character capable of emotional depth and understanding.

A. The Sun plays a central role in the story and acts as a powerful symbol of life, hope, and healing. For Klara, the Sun is a divine force that holds the power to cure

Josie's illness and nourish both body and spirit. Klara's belief in the Sun's healing power is a reflection of her growing understanding of the emotional bonds that connect humans. She believes that the Sun has the ability to provide Josie with the strength she needs to survive, saying, "Perhaps the Sun will see her and bring his special nourishment again" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 91). This quote shows Klara's faith in something beyond her immediate understanding, highlighting her willingness to place hope in the power of the natural world.

The Sun also symbolizes the divide between human and artificial experience. While Klara sees the Sun as a living, nurturing force, humans like Josie view it through a more scientific lens. For instance, Josie's mother tells Klara, "The Sun's not going to help her... It's not magic, Klara" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 125). This contrast between Klara's emotional attachment to the Sun and Josie's more logical perspective demonstrates the differences between AI and human understandings of the world. However, Klara's belief in the Sun's power reflects her own capacity for emotional growth, even as she remains an artificial being. The Sun also represents the larger theme of hope. As Klara watches the Sun rise each day, she gains new insights into human emotions and the potential for transformation. The Sun's warmth is not only physical but also metaphorical, as it reflects the emotional warmth that Klara wishes to provide Josie. The Sun thus becomes a symbol of the emotional sustenance that humans, and even AI, crave.

B. Another significant symbol in the novel is the store window. When Klara is first introduced, she is placed behind a store window, where she remains on display for potential buyers. The window acts as a barrier that physically separates Klara from the human world. She observes the people who pass by, yet cannot interact with them. She notes, "I watched the world outside, but I could not touch it" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 14). This quote encapsulates the feeling of isolation that Klara experiences as an AI, unable to fully engage with the world beyond her display. The store window is a symbol of separation — it represents Klara's initial understanding of the world as something distant and unreachable. However, once Klara is chosen by Josie, she is removed from the store window and enters Josie's life, beginning her emotional journey. This shift from being an observer to a participant in the human world is a key turning point for Klara, allowing her to develop a deeper understanding of human relationships. The window also represents the barrier between artificial intelligence and humanity. Klara's limited experience behind the window emphasizes her role as an outsider, and her initial inability to interact fully with humans reflects the inherent limitations of AI. However, the moment she is chosen and taken outside of the window marks her entry into the world of emotions, where she begins to navigate the complex realities of human connections.



C. The barn is another important symbol in the novel, representing a place of both isolation and emotional reflection. Later in the novel, when Josie's illness worsens, Klara retreats to the barn to reflect on her role in Josie's life and the possibility of her helping Josie recover. The barn serves as a space for emotional contemplation, where Klara faces moments of doubt and uncertainty. She says, "I wondered if I was helping, or whether I was making things worse" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 186). In these moments, Klara confronts the complexity of human emotions, realizing that her understanding of love and care may not be enough to resolve Josie's suffering.

The barn symbolizes a space of growth and reflection, where Klara begins to understand that emotions are not always logical or straightforward. The barn, like other parts of the novel, serves as a place where Klara comes to terms with the fragility of life and the unpredictable nature of human relationships. Her moments of confusion and doubt are key to her development, as she moves closer to understanding what it truly means to be human. Moreover, the barn is also a symbol of transformation. Just as Klara moves beyond the store window to enter Josie's world, the barn represents the next stage of her emotional evolution. The barn is where she processes her role as an AI in a human world, grappling with her limitations and her desire to help Josie. It is a place where Klara confronts her emotional vulnerabilities, recognizing that love and care are not always enough to change the course of fate.

Through these symbols — the Sun, the store window, and the barn — Ishiguro explores the boundaries between artificial intelligence and human emotions. Each symbol adds depth to Klara's character and highlights her growth as an individual capable of understanding and experiencing human emotions. By the end of the novel, these symbols combine to show that even an AI like Klara can possess a deep emotional understanding, offering a reflection on the complexity of life, love, and technology in the modern world.

In addition to the symbolism explored in the previous section, Klara and the Sun also features several metaphorical characters that contribute to the novel's exploration of human emotions, identity, and the complexities of artificial intelligence. These characters embody key themes such as fragility, empathy, and social exclusion. Through their interactions with Klara, these characters help illuminate the deeper meanings of the story and its exploration of humanity.

A. Klara herself functions as a powerful metaphor for reflection. As an AI, she lacks the typical human experiences that shape emotions and behaviors, but she is constantly learning from those around her. Klara's role as a mirror reflects her ability to observe and imitate human emotions, despite not fully understanding them at first. Her development throughout the novel is marked by her growing emotional intelligence, making her a symbol of the potential for artificial beings to acquire emotional depth. One of Klara's key traits is her ability to mirror human behavior. She

learns from observing others, reflecting their emotions, and then gradually forming her own understanding. She remarks, “I’m learning all the time, watching, listening, and trying to understand” (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 101). This quote encapsulates her journey of self-improvement and emotional awareness. Klara is constantly evolving, processing the emotions she witnesses and beginning to understand them in a way that goes beyond simple imitation. Klara’s status as a mirror is significant because it highlights her role as an observer, a learner, and, eventually, a participant in human emotions. In a sense, she reflects not only the world around her but also the complexities of human existence. By the end of the novel, Klara has moved from simply imitating human behaviors to truly understanding and embodying them in her own way

B. Another key metaphor in the novel is Josie, who represents the fragility of human life. As a sickly child, Josie’s delicate health and vulnerability serve as a constant reminder of the temporary nature of human existence. Throughout the novel, Klara is deeply concerned with Josie’s well-being, and much of Klara’s emotional development is tied to her desire to help Josie overcome her illness. Josie’s fragility extends beyond her physical health. She also embodies emotional vulnerability, something Klara begins to understand as she grows emotionally. At one point, Klara says, “Josie is like a flower... fragile, yet full of potential” (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 128). Klara’s analogy of Josie as a flower reflects her growing understanding of the complexities of human life. Josie is fragile, but she also represents the beauty and potential of humanity, something Klara comes to cherish deeply. In this way, Josie serves as a metaphor for the delicate nature of life itself. She reminds Klara that while human life is fragile, it is also precious. Klara’s care for Josie, her determination to help her, and her eventual realization of the limitations of her power to protect her all reflect the growing depth of Klara’s empathy and emotional understanding.

C. Rick, a key character in the novel, functions as a metaphor for social exclusion and the struggles of inequality. Unlike Josie, who is a genetically modified child with privileges, Rick is an outsider because he does not have the genetic enhancements that others do. As a result, Rick experiences a sense of alienation and is often treated as inferior by society. Rick’s character highlights the social inequalities that exist within the world of the novel. His position as an outsider allows the novel to explore themes of class division and the ways in which society determines the value of an individual based on genetic modifications. Klara observes Rick’s struggle, noting, “Rick always seemed like an outsider. He was different, but I never understood why” (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 134). This observation from Klara emphasizes her growing awareness of the social dynamics at play in the world around her. It is through characters like Rick that Klara begins to learn about the inequalities humans face, which shapes her understanding of human emotions and relationships. Rick’s status as the outsider also underscores the limitations of technology in determining a person’s worth. Despite his lack of genetic



modifications, Rick possesses qualities that make him an important and valuable individual. This serves as a critique of a society that values individuals based solely on their genetic enhancements, highlighting the unfairness and social struggles that arise from such divisions.

Through the metaphorical characters of Klara, Josie, and Rick, Ishiguro delves deeper into themes of human emotion, identity, and social inequality.

In *Klara and the Sun*, Kazuo Ishiguro carefully crafts the linguistic style of the narrative to emphasize the emotional development of Klara, the novel's Artificial Intelligence (AI) protagonist. The simplicity of Klara's language mirrors her initial lack of understanding about human emotions and experiences, which gradually evolves as she learns from the world around her. Her unique perspective as an AI provides an interesting lens through which readers can explore themes of human connection, empathy, and the struggle for meaning.

Klara's narration is characterized by clarity and simplicity, which is reflective of her innocence and the process of her learning. She is an observer who takes in details of the world around her but often lacks the deeper emotional insights that a human would naturally possess. Her language mirrors her cognitive development and serves as an important tool to communicate her internal state. Throughout the novel, Klara often begins sentences with phrases like "I noticed", "I observed", and "I was able to see" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 15). This repetitive structure not only emphasizes her growing awareness of her surroundings but also underscores her methodical approach to learning. Klara's reliance on these simple observations conveys a sense of gradual comprehension—she is not making grand statements about the world but rather processing it in small, digestible pieces. The repetition of such phrases throughout the novel highlights her evolving understanding of human emotions and social dynamics, which are often complex and elusive for her.

Her observational language also indicates a distance between her and the humans around her. While Klara observes closely, she often struggles to fully comprehend the emotional depth of what she sees. This gap in understanding is particularly evident when she attempts to interpret human actions, like Josie's behavior, or when she tries to understand the significance of the Sun in the lives of the characters. Her thoughts, expressed through simple declarative statements, signal her role as both an observer and learner in the human world. For example, when Klara reflects on the humans around her, she says, "I didn't understand what Josie meant when she smiled, but I could tell it was important" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 42). This statement illustrates her inability to fully grasp human emotions at that point in the story but also shows her desire to understand.

As the story progresses, Klara's language evolves to reflect her emotional growth. Early in the novel, her sentences are detached and objective, but as she

develops emotionally, she starts to use language that reflects her growing connection to the people around her. This shift can be seen in her descriptions of Josie, her human friend and the object of her deep affection. Klara's early observations of Josie are almost clinical, but over time, her language becomes imbued with more empathy. For example, when Klara first meets Josie, she describes her as a "thin, frail girl" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 37), but later, after spending more time with Josie, she describes her in warmer, more affectionate terms: "Josie was a flower I wished to protect" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 129). This development in her language marks a significant shift from being an outsider observing human behavior to actively caring for and connecting with the people around her. Klara's evolving emotional awareness is also reflected in her increasingly complex sentence structures. As she gains more experience and understanding, she begins to express her thoughts in more nuanced ways, often grappling with difficult concepts such as love, sacrifice, and death. Her reflections on Josie's illness are filled with growing emotional insight, for example: "I wished for the Sun to heal Josie. I wanted to be sure that no one was as fragile as she seemed" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 153). The language here demonstrates a deeper emotional connection and an attempt to make sense of human suffering, something Klara has learned through her experiences.

Another important aspect of the linguistic style in Klara and the Sun is the use of repetition. Klara often repeats phrases, not just to emphasize her growing understanding, but also to convey her inner struggle as she processes new emotions. For example, phrases like "I want to help" and "I am learning" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 110) are used repeatedly as Klara attempts to reconcile her role as a caretaker and her desire to learn more about the humans around her. This repetition indicates her desire for improvement and her constant search for meaning in her relationships, while also symbolizing the rhythmic nature of learning and emotional growth. Moreover, Klara's language frequently invokes symbolic imagery, especially regarding her understanding of the Sun. The Sun, as a central symbol in the novel, is consistently tied to hope, healing, and belief. Klara's use of language to describe the Sun is simple yet profound, reinforcing her reverence for it. For example, she often refers to the Sun as her "source of power," describing it as "the only thing in the world that can fix what's broken" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 111). This symbolism is reflective of Klara's need to believe in something greater than herself, a belief that grows stronger as she learns about human vulnerability and suffering.

Klara's narrative tone is another essential feature of the novel. Her voice is childlike and innocent, yet filled with profound emotional insight. While her understanding of the world is initially limited, her tone conveys an innocence that contrasts with the more complex emotional states of the human characters. This childlike innocence is particularly evident in her observations of the human condition, where she often expresses a sense of wonder or confusion at the emotions of others.



For instance, when she sees Josie struggling with her health, Klara states: “I didn’t know what to do. All I wanted was to take away the pain, but I didn’t know how” (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 158). This statement, while simple, reveals Klara’s internal conflict and her growing desire to care for Josie, despite her limited understanding of human suffering.

In conclusion, Klara and the Sun masterfully uses symbols and metaphors to explore profound questions about the nature of human emotions, identity, and the role of artificial intelligence in understanding these concepts. The Sun, the store window, and the barn serve as powerful symbols that enhance the novel’s thematic depth, while characters like Klara, Josie, and Rick represent different facets of the human experience. The simplicity of Klara’s language and her slow emotional development reflect her growth from a mere observer to a being capable of empathy and emotional understanding. In the end, Ishiguro invites the reader to reflect on the complexities of what it means to be human through the lens of AI. Klara and the Sun challenges our perceptions of intelligence, emotions, and the connections we make with one another—showing that even an artificial being, learning from the world around her, can come to understand the beauty and fragility of human life.

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