

Anthony Toledo

Dr. Jennifer Brewington

English 203: World Literature

May 4, 2025

More Human Than Human: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*

In *Klara and the Sun*, Klara's characterization in the novel exemplifies the most altruistic qualities of humanity. All of the other main characters of the story are human, and Klara is the only leading character who is not, which is representative of how much humanity humans lack themselves at times. In a world of increasing technological advancement reaching new heights every day, the concept of humanity creating something that embodies our best qualities is something to strive towards. While the children exhibit expected traits of adolescence and growth, once early adulthood is reached they lose touch with their heartfelt ways of being, which is a common occurrence in modern society. Unlike the children, Klara remembers the people she interacted with and her experiences with them with reverence, those memories remaining as the everlasting comfort that keeps her company in the end. Their lives continue on, with new interactions and experiences, but Klara is left alone with nothing but the memories of her service and experiences. Her self-sacrifice was greater than anyone else's and this makes her more human than the humans in the story.

From early on in the story, we see that Klara expresses the desire to feel emotions. Even compared to the other AFs, she stood out as uniquely empathetic. From sitting in the store window, Klara began her exploration of emotions, seeking to not just mirror what she observed but to understand her observations. As Ishiguro writes about Klara's observations from the store

window, “Most of all – and this Rosa would never understand – I tried to feel in my own mind the anger the drivers had experienced” (20), the reader is able to see Klara’s depth and quest to understand human emotions. The store manager recognized Klara’s unique qualities, which is shown when she tells the Mother, “But if I had to emphasize just one, well, it would have to be her appetite for observing and learning” (43). These qualities exhibit the traits Klara possesses, traits beyond that of thinking and feeling, but genuine comprehension. Throughout the story Klara’s expressive interest in grasping human emotions is beyond any other character’s interest, as Cain writes “She’s confused but seeks clarity, and in this regard seems more authentic than the people around her” (para. 5).

Josie’s mother was preferential to empathy over cognition, as she told the store manager “I’ve heard these new B3s are very good with cognition and recall. But that sometimes they could be less empathetic” (40). The Mother even began to realize that AFs might offer perspectives she had not considered, and they might be more capable of understanding that humans at times. As Mother told Klara at the waterfall, “You’re an intelligent AF. Maybe you can see things the rest of us can’t. Maybe you’re right to be hopeful. Maybe you’re right” (108). This revelation shows how learning and interacting with one another has affected every individual involved. An AF that might replace Josie needed to be more empathetic than cognitive, traits that make someone more human.

Rick and Josie learn from one another, and Rick learns about self-sacrifice for Josie by Klara. In this way, from an early age, this sense of endearment guides their actions, thoughts, and behaviors. This plan initially didn’t involve Klara, until Rick and Klara both realized that this plan could be more successful with Klara involved. Klara also realized this and accepted that Rick and Josie’s plan was altruistic. Rick said, “Without the plan, she’s going to end up

becoming one of them” (83), referencing the secular, somewhat heartless ways of the other less self-conscious children. The childlike qualities Rick and Josie possess, those closer to the empathetic heart that adult maturation tends to wither away, are reinforced by Klara’s company and companioned guidance. Their acceptance of Klara is manifested by allowing her to be a part of their plan, a testament of trust. The children trust Klara with their dreams and future and Klara is not jealous but rejoices in her inclusion, highlighting how this AF embodies the best qualities of human emotional expression.

The drawings she shared with Rick became more “dark and forbidding” (139), as Klara described Josie’s drawing she was sent to give to Rick at his house. The bubble drawing Rick narrated from Josie stated, “The smart kids think I have no shape. But I do. I’m just keeping it hidden. Because who wants them to see?” (125). Klara realized that that “their bubble game was filled with danger, and it was what brought about the sudden end to Rick’s thirty-minute visits” (127). Eventually Klara’s fears came to fruition when Rick’s later narration spoke of Josie’s inability to do outdoor activity and that she preferred it that way because of her mother’s “courage” (132). Regarding this bubble game, Klara’s intuition and understanding predicted the outcome, one that was only alleviated by Klara’s later intervention. This is an example of Klara’s level of understanding of human emotions and the ways of the heart.

The status roles are clear to Josie when observing her mother and Rick’s mother. Josie believes in Rick’s capabilities and wants him to rise together with her, wherever they go, as she told Rick, “But you’re smarter than any of the other unlifteds” (129). Later on, after several visits to Josie’s house, Rick says Josie “pushed it to far” (140) and Josie’s mother says “Josie just says what she thinks. Doesn’t care if she says the wrong thing” (102). This portrays Josie as a brutally honest child, one that speaks her mind without a filter. Josie’s outspoken nature and insecurities

make Rick feel “trapped” (141) and eventually pushes him away, along with her expressiveness about ‘society’ and how Rick’s mother lacks that. Josie refers to their plan when speaking to Rick and states, “How’s it going to work if I’ve got society and you haven’t?” (129). The status roles of society have divided human society for as long as we know. This is something that Klara doesn’t reflect or even consider, being that these are somewhat heatless expressions of humanity. Klara’s understanding of Josie and Rick’s relationship are reflected in her actions, seeking Rick’s help to get to the barn for Josie’s well-being, allowing Rick to help her even when he and Josie are not on good terms. In this way, Klara gets Rick to focus on Josie’s prosperity over his own hurt feelings, a sacrifice later echoed by Klara’s reduced cognition to stop the Cootings Machine to keep her promise to the sun.

As Josie’s mother got to know Klara, she recognized the unique traits that first attracted her attention in the store. It took some time for this to occur, as Mother once told Klara, “It must be nice sometimes to have no feelings. I envy you” (97). After imitating Josie, as Mother requested in their time at the waterfall, Klara soon realized, “..what was becoming clear to me was the extent to which humans, in their wish to escape loneliness, made maneuvers that were complex and hard to fathom..” (114). As Mother began to understand Klara and Josie’s relationship more, and Klara’s capabilities, her doubts about Klara’s compassion withered away. Even knowing that Klara’s unique capacity to learn, observe, and even feel were those qualities she desired in an AF replacement for her daughter if she died, Mother realized that there is no true replacement Josie. As great as Klara was at everything, she could never be considered her daughter. When Josie lives, Klara’s presence cannot remain as a reminder of what Mother was once considering when she lost all sense of hope, which was restored in almost every way by Klara’s reflection of the light of the sun.

Klara's admiration and boundless hope for the sun's nourishment and capabilities is reflected by the way she acts, learns, and feels for her companions throughout the story. Cain writes, "Piece by piece, Klara absorbs the peculiarities of the human heart, not unlike the way she soaks up sunlight" (para. 6). Klara didn't recognize societal status roles or let that get in the way of her endless struggle to do what it takes to help Josie get better. Klara not only understood what sacrifice was, she taught those lessons to those around her. Rick later combines this with his understanding of the ways of the world, letting Josie go and live her new life without him. Their plan is altered but Rick's understanding of sacrifice and the ways of the heart, a comprehension he learned from Klara's actions, are unified with his understanding with the ways of the world and the roles of status.

The sun actually provides Klara's nourishment and her faith and hope in it is what becomes the catalyst of everyone else's optimism for Josie's recovery. None of them understand Klara's plan but in their hearts they all face the truth, they hope Josie will live. Klara's empathetic mastery recognizes this and does everything possible to make Josie's recovery a reality. If Klara were a selfish being she could have acted in a way that allowed for her to replace Josie after her death, which would have led to a life of her belonging to a family. Klara's deeper understanding of the heart allowed her to sacrifice that possibility and remain alone while everyone else continued living their lives. The once complex and difficult to understand sacrifices humans made to avoid loneliness became the embodiment of Klara's choice at the end, choosing loneliness for the greater good and accepting it as her everlasting companion. The store manager finally sees Klara and hears her testimony, sharing her sentiments about Klara's unique qualities she recognized from their time in the store. Klara expresses her heartfelt appreciation and honor of having successfully served Josie and her family, alleviating their suffering and

reflecting on all of the memories she has of the time they spent together. Those memories are enough for Klara and her sacrifice is a testimony of how she became more human than the humans she served.

Works Cited

Cain, Hamilton. “*Klara and the Sun*.” Harvard Review, 13 Apr. 2021,

www.harvardreview.org/book-review/klara-and-the-sun/.

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Klara and the Sun: A Novel*. 1st ed., Vintage International, Vintage Books, a

Division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022.