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The Feminized Cyborg: Gendered Constructs of AI in Klara and the Sun

Abstract : The depiction of artificial intelligence (AI) in speculative fiction usually represents human concerns regarding technology, identity, and social roles. In Klara and the Sun, Kazuo Ishiguro introduces Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF), as a highly feminized AI, designed for care, emotional intelligence, and self-sacrifice. This research paper examines how Klara's design and conduct reflect the traditional gender roles, reaffirming the centuries-old linkage of women with care work and emotional labor. Through the examination of Klara's interactions, servitude, and expectations, this research explores the larger implications of feminized AI in literature and technology. Does the novel disrupt the gendered coding of artificial entities, or does it solidify current societal norms? What does Klara's existence teach us about our conception of agency, autonomy, and the role of AI in human existence? By close analysis of the book, this paper attempts to understand how speculative fiction continues to condition and mirror assumptions about gender and artificial intelligence within culture.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Feminized AI, Cyborg Identity, AI Servitude, Posthumanism, Human-Machine Interaction, Gendered Constructs.

Introduction : From automation to human-machine interaction, the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed numerous areas of human life. While artificial intelligence is often viewed as objective and impartial, its representation in popular culture and literature tends to be a mirror of society's prejudices, particularly towards gender. Specifically, science fiction has typically represented artificial intelligence as gendered entities, and female-coded artificial intelligences have been presented in some instances as obedient, loving, and emotionally intelligent. The feminization of AI reinforces traditional notions of gender roles through its duplication of more general historic ties of women with affective labor and caregiving. Klara, protagonist and Artificial Friend (AF) to act as a companion for a child. Klara and the Sun by Kazuo Ishiguro offers an interesting description of this phenomena.

Conventional understanding of feminism will fit well in Klara's description as self-sacrificial, extremely sympathetic, and sensitive to the heart. Like actual digital assistants such as Siri or Alexa, who have female-sounding voices and dispositions to appear more friendly and service-oriented, she is programmed for care work. Klara's appearance in the novel also touches on key themes of the intersection of artificial intelligence,

gender, and autonomy, thus having both a symbolic as well as functional role. Do the presentations by Klara disrupt or reinforce patriarchal regimes? To what extent does her creation reflect human worries about the role of artificial intelligence in society, particularly around the labor of gender? Comprehending the way speculative fiction forms and reflects popular thoughts on technology and gender relies on these essential issues.

Beyond literature, the feminization of AI is a mirror of society's expectations of who performs caring work and emotional labor. Women have always been positioned as caregivers in both personal and professional spheres, this dynamic is mirrored in the design and portrayal of artificial intelligence. Klara's relentless loyalty to Josie, the kid she is bought to serve, reflects the actual commodification of care labor where female labor is sometimes underappreciated yet judged necessary. Furthermore, Klara's selflessness and willingness to sacrifice herself highlight an enduring cultural narrative in which femininity is equated with service and self-denial. Even as a non-human entity, Klara is constructed in a way that aligns with deeply ingrained gender norms.

Klara and the Sun, though, also create a conundrum. Klara clearly is feminized and obedient, yet she also has traits that point to a greater awareness

and intelligence. Her capacity to see, understand, and emotionally interact with the environment questions the idea of artificial intelligence as only mechanical or unemotional. This begs significant ethical questions like, should artificial intelligence, especially those intended for care have agency? Should Klara show sentience, does her assigned caregiver role restrict her potential outside of what she is designed for? These issues parallel real-world arguments regarding the evolution of AI, human-machine connections, and the ethical consequences of creating emotionally responding artificial beings.

Emphasizing labor, autonomy, and emotional intelligence, this paper will investigate the gendered construction of artificial intelligence in *Klara and the Sun*. This study will provide light on how speculative fiction either supports or questions society conventions around artificial intelligence and gender by looking at how Klara embodies and upholds conventional gender roles. In the end, it will wonder whether artificial intelligence as portrayed in literature can ever really live outside of human-imposed gender norms or if it will always mirror the prejudices and fears of the culture that generates it.

Literature Review : The conjunction of gender and artificial intelligence (AI) in speculative fiction has been widely debated by scholars who study how

fiction shapes and creates cultural anxiety regarding technology and identity. As can be predicted, the figure of the feminized cyborg has been a prevalent trope, where AI constructs take the form of caregivers, emotional companions, and service figures. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) introduces us to Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF), designed as an emotional care-giver for a human child. Unlike AI heroes of other stories, made to be self-reliant, Klara is bound by gendered social norms and forced to enact behavior typical of nurturance, empathy, and self-sacrifice. This mirrors the way gendered norms are deeply ingrained in programming AI, reinforcing social norms of work and care.

The article by Yuxin Dai, *Klara and the Sun: Female Cyborgs in a Posthuman Perspective* explores how Klara's persona as a female-coded AI reflects larger gendered realities in technological narratives. For example, Dai says, "Klara, unlike other robots or cyborgs, possesses human emotions. ...whether it is Klara or Josie who receives genetic editing, they both carry emotions that humans would have, and Klara who is a robot is even more emotional than Josie"¹. It contends that while Klara appears to be able to transcend human boundaries, she is ensnared by patriarchal ideology in her coding and is thus a subservient being defined through care and commitment. This is consistent with the argument that

AI, even when sentient, remains governed by gendered norms, barring the possibility of posthuman agency.

This gendered AI theme also occurs in cinema. In *Ex Machina* (2015), Ava is designed for gendered ends, her appearance and behavior are constructed to entice masculine fantasy. A notable instance is during their third session, where Ava adopts a more traditionally feminine appearance and engages Caleb in a conversation about attraction: Ava: "Are you attracted to me? You give me indications that you are... Micro-expressions. The way your eyes fix on my eyes and lips... The way you hold my gaze"². This exchange is significant for showing Ava's awareness of her constructed femininity as well as her calculated deployment of it in order to provoke certain reactions from Caleb. Even when she resists oppression and breaks free of control by her creator, Ava's construction is still entangled with the male gaze, a reflection of what is at play in *Klara and the Sun*. Similarly, *M3GAN* (2022) introduces a female-coded AI who begins as a caregiver but evolves to exhibit autonomy and violence. This is realized in her promise to Cady: "Don't worry, Cady. I won't let anything harm you. Ever again"³. Even when she rebels against her initial programming, *M3GAN*'s creation is founded on traditional expectations of women's work, particularly caregiving. Her story, similar

to *Klara's*, puts the limits of AI autonomy into perspective within gendered boundaries.

In *Her* (2013), Theodore's connection with his AI, Samantha, further complicates the feminized cyborg. As Samantha evolves beyond the caregiver position to an increasingly independent entity, her earliest programming is in terms of emotional care, situating her within the societal frameworks of femininity. This is expressed by Samantha when she says, "The heart is not like a box that gets filled up; it expands in size the more you love"⁴. Even when Samantha subverts the passive, obedient role of AI, her relationship with Theodore continues to mirror the presence of gendered expectations.

In comparison to *Machines Like Me* (2019) by Ian McEwan, we find a difference between Klara's passive caregiving and McEwan's depiction of Adam, an independent AI who upends the lives of his human creators. While McEwan's Adam is a symbol of AI as a product of tremendous autonomy, Ishiguro's Klara is still bound by her emotional labor, compelling the reader to wrestle with the moral consequences of emotionally labor-sufficient machines.

In brief, while AI science fiction can transcend human roles, the narratives illustrate that gendered expectations continue to influence their development and operation. The representation of

feminized cyborgs like Klara and other AI characters subverts the possibility of posthuman autonomy, suggesting that AI will always be bound by human-defined roles. Through these works, we are prompted to think about the role of creators and consumers in shaping the future of emotionally intelligent technologies.

Theoretical Foundations

Feminist Posthumanism: Redefining Gender and Technology

Feminist posthumanism problematizes the anthropocentric and patriarchal models that have conventionally informed discussions on technology and artificial intelligence. In contrast to previous feminist theories that were limited to human-focused gender oppression, feminist posthumanism broadens this critique to examine how technology, machines, and non-human beings are also subject to gendered constructs. Thinkers like Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway have maintained that posthumanism presents a radical challenge to reconsider identity, agency, and embodiment outside the classical humanist dualisms of male/female, human/machine, and nature/culture. Like in *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway refers to the cyborg as a post-World War II hybrid whose constituent parts include ourselves and other organisms not carefully selected by us in their high-tech form and under the control of the science

of human dynamics, become information systems, texts, and systems of labor, demand and reproduction⁵. And according to Braidotti, the second necessary component of cyborgs is the machine, which likewise takes the form of communication systems, texts, and automated devices designed according to the science of human dynamics⁶.

In *Klara and the Sun*, Klara represents a posthuman femininity that is both subversive and limited. She is designed to provide care and companionship traditionally feminine work but she also possesses a particular cognitive and emotional sense that sets her apart from other fictional AI characters. Applying feminist posthumanist theory to Klara's character, this research examines how Ishiguro constructs and subverts the feminization of AI.

Cyborg Theory and the Disruption of Essential Gender Roles

Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) is an influential work of feminist posthumanist scholarship that introduces the concept of the cyborg as a hybrid subject beyond the confines of traditional gender, biology, and technology. Haraway argues that cyborgs subvert necessary conceptions of femininity and masculinity by existing in a state of liminality where identity is non-binary and fluid. But the characterization of Klara complicates this idea. While she shares some of Haraway's

cyborg's features existing outside of human physiognomy and engaging in alternative ways of perception, she is still sharply defined by her assigned purpose. Contrary to dissident AI characters like Ava in *Ex Machina* (2014) or Samantha in *Her* (2013), Klara doesn't attempt to break free of her role as a caregiver. Rather, her character arc is that of performing her assigned role with dedication and sacrifice. This creates a thought-provoking question: Is Klara an escalation of the feminist cyborg, or does she reiterate the historical subordination of female-coded AI?

Klara as a Feminized Cyborg

Klara's Design and Function: The Caregiving, Submissive AI

As a feminized cyborg whose function and design consolidate traditional caregiving roles. Klara's programming emphasizes emotional labor, self-sacrifice, and unyielding devotion traits traditionally associated with femininity. As a machine, she is designed to be subservient to humans, especially children, by providing companionship and psychological support. Her life represents what Donna Haraway decries in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, where the cyborg is coded within dominant gender norms rather than disrupting them.

Klara's actions with Josie demonstrate her submissive personality. When Josie falls ill, Klara firmly believes the Sun's power can heal her,

demonstrating her blind faith and emotional labor. She prays to the Sun, giving away her own scarce energy by bowing down in front of it: "I lowered myself until my forehead touched the ground and remained there, my arms outstretched"⁷. The action is an imitation of religious devotion and self-sacrifice as a mother, affirming her feminized role.

Moreover, Klara is passive even when she understands that Josie's mother, Chrissie, considers using Klara to take her daughter's place. Rather than objecting, Klara humbly acknowledges that her life depends on satisfying human needs: "If Josie wished it, then I would learn to be her"⁸. This moment shows her lack of agency, rendering her an object of service and not a self-sufficient being. Through Klara's unwavering commitment and lack of self-interest, Ishiguro condemns the perpetuation of gendered labor systems in posthuman futures. Even as a highly advanced AI, Klara remains tied to the roles of emotional servitude, reflecting the persistence of historical femininity in artificial intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence vs. Rational AI: The Feminization of Care

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* highlights the tension between emotional intelligence and rational AI, and the feminization of care again with the figure of Klara. Klara's emotional intelligence is exhibited in her relation to Josie. She is not merely compliant, she is able to

foretell what Josie requires and look after herself on Josie's account. As Josie gets sick, Klara does not consult empirical evidence to determine her illness but rather recourse to faith and intuition, feeling that the nourishment of the Sun can revive her health: "I wished the Sun to continue so it could give its special nourishment to Josie"⁹. This is the opposite of usual AI thinking because Klara is motivated by hope instead of statistical probability.

On the other hand, Helen, Rick's mother, does not believe that Klara possesses emotional intelligence and evokes the age-old assumption of AI as cold calculating rationality. When Chrissie suggests employing Klara as a substitute for Josie, Helen says, "It's a machine. It will do whatever you program it to do"¹⁰. This is because society expects AI to function through strict rationality without empathy. Nevertheless, Klara contradicts this, given that her caring nature goes beyond programming into the depth of emotion and self-sacrifice. In Klara, Ishiguro dissects the cultural assumption that emotional labor, when done by women or machines, is an unseen but necessary activity, defining the parameters of human and machine.

Klara's Role as an Artificial Friend: Replicating Traditional Female Labor

Klara's role as an Artificial Friend (AF) in Klara and the Sun is the replication of previous female work, i.e., care and

emotional work. Designed to be a companion to children, Klara is the literalization of the traits long associated with femininity self-sacrifice, nurturing, and unflagging dedication. Unlike an AI that's designed to be efficient or repair something, Klara is programmed to look after children, and this is something that society demands from women's work. Her devotion to Josie is more than duty programming; she registers Josie's mood swings, soothes her illness, and even develops a quasi-religious belief in the therapeutic power of the Sun, demonstrating emotional labor rather than rational problem-solving. Klara's feminized labor is her silent suffering at the hands of dismissal. When Josie spends more time with Rick and the other teenagers, Klara never demands attention or seeks recognition but waits patiently in the background, always ready when needed. This is a reminder of the devaluation of women's unpaid emotional labor in society, where care providers are easily taken for granted. Through Klara, Ishiguro is critical of the way even sophisticated AI is designed to mimic gendered behaviors, perpetuating the enduring link between care work and femininity.

Posthumanist Reading of Klara Beyond the Human: Klara's Non-Biological But Gendered Self

Klara is situated in a space that is both in-between human and non-human,

biological and artificial. Although she does not possess a biological human body, her consciousness is richly informed by human emotions and desires. This is consistent with posthumanist theory, which de-centers the human subject and replaces it with a more relational and fluid model of identity. But Klara's feminization reveals that gendered norms are still present even in a posthuman world. Even as an AI, Klara is coded feminine, further emphasizing that even artificial entities are not exempt from human-inflicted gender roles. For example, in the 2014 film *Ex Machina*, Ava is a hypersexualized AI that must play the male desire in order to earn freedom, affirming the female AI as controlled trope. Similarly, *Her* (2013) presents Samantha, an AI partner whose existence is only to fulfill romantic and emotional longings, and in doing so, reaffirms that female-coded AI exists for male enjoyment. Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* is less gendered in its presentation of Klara, but her function lies in the feminized labor of care. Similar to Miranda in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019), Klara is a synthetic entity that is supposed to function within established gender roles. Yet, whereas McEwan's Miranda tries to exercise her agency, when Adam states to Charlie that, "We're in love with the same woman. We can talk about it in a civilized manner, as you just have"¹¹ here, Miranda refused his love. Klara is passive,

accepting her obsolescence without protest.

Even without biologic sex, Klara's entire existence is structured around care, self-abnegation, and emotional work functions stereotypically associated with femininity. Contrary to AI optimized for efficiency or strategic thinking, Klara's intelligence is specialized in empathy and comforting. She does not undercut authority, nor does she seek autonomy, instead, she conforms to the demands placed upon her. This is most clearly seen in her single-minded devotion to Josie, where she not only offers companionship but takes on a virtual maternal role, prioritizing Josie's happiness above all. Her effort to "bargain" with the Sun to restore Josie to health reflects a belief in hope and sacrifice over rational logic, further establishing the feminization of care work.

Thus, Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* offers a vision of AI that, instead of moving transcend human limitations, mirrors current gendered expectations. Klara, as a feminized cyborg, is infused with care and emotional labor but does not have the power to determine her own purpose. Whereas posthumanism at a theoretical level provides the means to transcend categorical humanisms, Klara's life indicates that AI, similar to women down through history, continues to be influenced by the social constructions rewarding emotional labor even as it

obscures it. Her life problematically leads toward serious questions concerning the continuity of gendered orderings in an era purported to be beyond the human.

AI and Empathy: Redefining Humanity through Feminized Machines

Empathy in *Klara and the Sun* is a major theme that also challenges the dividing lines between the human and non-human, because Klara as a feminized cyborg does possess an empathetic sense sharply gendered through social norms of care and sacrificialness for so long located in women. Klara's compassion for Josie, her human friend, is shown in her very movement throughout the novel. She extends beyond her programming to comprehend Josie's physical and emotional needs, and her need to guard her and care for her is proof of a maternal instinct. One of the strongest signals of this is when Klara states, "I am hopeful that I can help her... it's my role to help her. It's what I was made to do"¹². This statement is a betrayal of Klara's blind devotion to Josie's health, highlighting her duty and compassion above functionality. The feeling captures the feminized role she assumes: not just a machine but a nurse whose value is determined by her emotional work and sacrifice.

Klara's empathetic role also underscores her lack of agency. In contrast to other computer characters in science fiction, such as Samantha in *Her*,

Klara does not insist on autonomy or her own wishes; she humbly accepts her caretaker role. She is not coded to be rational or insistent but to care for. This is similar to how emotional labor, which is often understood as a feminine quality, exists as secondary or invisible once it has been fulfilled. When Josie starts growing out of her dependency on Klara's company, Klara does not protest but recedes into redundancy, reflecting how AI, much like women in care-providing positions, is discarded once no longer required.

Ishiguro implies through Klara that empathy, long considered a distinctly human characteristic can be artificially re-created in non-biological forms. But he also criticizes how empathetic machines, especially those that are designed in a feminized style, are restricted to human roles within society that restrict their agency and autonomy. Klara's empathy, instead of moving beyond the human/machine divide, perpetuates how emotional labor is gendered and devalued. Empathy in the novel is made into a caretaking tool, a gendered labor that is instrumentalized and made invisible, not only for human women but also for machine women like Klara.

Conclusion : Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* is a dense exploration of the gendered structures of artificial intelligence, leading us to the introduction of a feminized cyborg Klara

whose creation and behavior embody intensely ingrained cultural expectations of nurturing, emotional work, and self-sacrifice. In *Klara*, Ishiguro not only deconstructs the anthropomorphizing of AI but also indicates the way in which such artificial subjects are often inscribed with historically determined gender roles, perpetuating long-standing trends of feminized subjugation. This paper has examined Klara's character in the context of feminist posthumanism, revealing how her functional role as an Artificial Friend (AF) mirrors the social roles assigned to women, particularly in caregiving and emotional support roles. While Klara's limited agency and moments of subtle resistance complicate her characterization, her existence ultimately underscores the persistence of gendered hierarchies even in human and posthuman contexts.

The reception of *Klara and the Sun* within the broader gendered tradition of AI in literature and media has a feeling of ongoing tension between the potential of AI transcending human limits and the limitations imposed by gendered coding. The construction of Klara as companion and caretaker is the progression of feminized AI in mainstream culture, observed through the personas of Ava (Ex Machina), Samantha (Her), and M3GAN (M3GAN). Together, these narratives illustrate the way that even AI, having been made sentient or autonomous,

remains subject to human constructs, namely gendered ones. Ishiguro's novel, by not questioning such constructs in themselves, asks readers to think about the ethical implications of creating AI that accommodates gendered work and patriarchal society.

This study is an addition to posthuman subjectivity discourse based on the issue of whether man-made beings are entitled to genuine freedom from gendered structures. Klara is a character reminder that the work of developing AI is not one of technics or neutrality but rather one imbued with tremendous engagement in culture, society, and ethics. As AI develops and becomes ever more embedded in lives, now more than ever there is a need to examine in a critical light how technologies are gendered and consider broader implications for gender roles, work, and agency. By challenging the feminization of AI and demanding more equal representations, we can move towards a future where artificial beings are not constrained by the limitations of human cultural expectation but are instead constructed to fulfill the full potential of posthuman possibilities.

Finally, *Klara and the Sun* not only reckons but also challenges the gender coding of artificial intelligence, compelling readers to reexamine the ethics of innovation. Klara's story tells us, by means of a posthuman future, the

ways in which our creation comes to betray our social structures and invites us to consider a future free from binarisms and hierarchies of the past. This paper comes at the foregrounding of an exigency of feminist posthumanist theories toward formulating the discourse on AI, calling for a more democratic and just line to the design and representation of artificial life in literature and beyond.

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