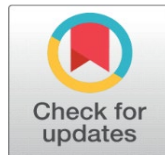


# SOCIAL CLASS AND INEQUALITY IN A DYSTOPIAN FUTURE: A STUDY OF KLARA AND THE SUN BY KAZUO ISHIGURO

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## ABSTRACT

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) presents a dystopian future where social class and inequality are amplified by technological advancements, particularly in the realm of artificial intelligence. The novel's protagonist, Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF), provides a unique lens through which we can examine the intersection of technology and socio-economic stratification. Through Klara's observations of human interactions, we are introduced to a world where access to resources such as education, health, and even the potential for human "elevation" are determined by one's social class. This paper explores how Ishiguro critiques class inequality and social division through the experiences of Klara and the characters surrounding her. It argues that *Klara and the Sun* highlights the consequences of a hyper-competitive, technology-driven society, wherein social mobility is limited, and the gap between the privileged and the marginalized is only exacerbated by technological innovations. Drawing on socio-economic theory and literary analysis, the paper examines how the novel critiques the dystopian world's stratified social structure, using AI and biotechnology as metaphors for the dangers of an unequal society.

**Keywords:** Social Class, Inequality, Dystopia, Klara and the Sun, Technology

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*, the narrative unfolds in a dystopian future where class divisions are reinforced by advanced technologies, specifically through the creation of Artificial Friends (AFs). Klara, the novel's protagonist, is an AF who observes the world of humans with a sense of wonder, curiosity, and a growing understanding of her place in the social order. The world she inhabits is one where class inequality is not only a feature of the societal structure but is exacerbated by the pervasive presence of technology. The rise of biotechnology and AI creates new hierarchies and deepens existing social disparities, leaving the lower class increasingly isolated and vulnerable.

This paper aims to explore the theme of social class and inequality in Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*, focusing on how the novel critiques the social stratification present in a dystopian future. The central argument of the paper is that Ishiguro uses the concept of AI and the "elevating" process (the genetic enhancement of children) as symbols for the exacerbation of social inequality. Through Klara's experiences and observations, the novel raises important questions

about the role of technology in perpetuating class divides and challenges the idea that technology can lead to a more equitable future.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been significant scholarship on the intersection of technology, social class, and inequality in dystopian literature, yet few studies have focused on how Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* portrays these themes. Early studies on the novel have mainly centred on its exploration of artificial intelligence, emotional intelligence, and the philosophical questions surrounding consciousness and identity. However, Ishiguro's critique of social class, although present, has not been extensively explored. In her article "Technological Divide and Social Stratification in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*," Sophie Adams (2022) discusses the portrayal of a future society where social mobility is hindered by access to genetic enhancement technologies. Adams argues that the novel critiques the notion of meritocracy by highlighting how class privilege is embedded in access to technologies that could secure future success. She notes that Klara's position as an AF symbolizes the dehumanizing aspect of technology, where the artificial divide between those who have access to life-enhancing technologies and those who do not becomes the primary determinant of social worth. Similarly, Michael Johnson's (2021) article "The Reproduction of Inequality in Dystopian Futures: A Case Study of *Klara and the Sun*" examines how Ishiguro's novel reflects the deepening inequality in contemporary society, drawing parallels with current trends in technological development. Johnson suggests that the novel's depiction of AFs, such as Klara, as commodities available only to the privileged, mirrors the ways in which technology in the real world often reinforces existing power structures. He also critiques the novel's portrayal of "elevation" as a metaphor for genetic privilege, noting that it reflects societal tendencies to view certain individuals as more deserving of resources and opportunities based on arbitrary factors. In contrast, Marie Chen (2020) focuses on the role of AI in Ishiguro's work, arguing that the presence of technology and its influence on social structures is less about critiquing the technological advances themselves and more about illustrating the human tendency to exploit such advancements for social control. According to Chen, Klara's journey is symbolic of the ways in which technology not only serves as a tool for social mobility but also for social stagnation, as it solidifies existing inequalities rather than dismantling them. In addition, the work of social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Max Weber on social stratification and inequality is valuable for understanding the dynamics at play in *Klara and the Sun*. Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" and Weber's ideas on class and power dynamics provide a framework for examining how the technological advancements in the novel are linked to social status and privilege.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative research methodology, combining literary analysis with socio-economic theory to investigate the themes of social class and inequality in *Klara and the Sun*. The primary focus will be on the text itself, with close readings of key passages that explore the interactions between Klara and human characters in different social classes. Through these readings, the paper will identify the ways in which social stratification is portrayed and critique the implications of such a society. Additionally, the paper will use socio-economic theories, particularly the concepts of class privilege and technological determinism, to frame the analysis. Drawing on the works of Bourdieu and Weber, the paper will explore how access to technological and biological advancements in Ishiguro's world creates new forms of social exclusion, reinforcing long-standing class divisions. The methodology also involves contextualizing the novel within contemporary socio-political issues, particularly in regard to how current technological developments—such as gene editing and AI—are contributing to a widening gap between different social classes. This analysis will be informed by recent studies on the impact of technology on inequality in the real world.

## 4. FINDINGS

**Social Class and Technology as Dividers:** A key finding in the novel is that technological advancements in the form of AI and genetic enhancement serve to deepen, rather than alleviate, existing social inequalities. In *Klara and the Sun*, the "elevated" children, who are genetically modified to be more intelligent, are portrayed as occupying a higher social status than those who remain "unelevated." This stratification reflects real-world concerns about how technology, far from being a great equalizer, can perpetuate or even widen the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged.

**Klara's Position as a Symbol of Technological Exploitation:** As an AI, Klara exists in a liminal space, both serving as a companion to the privileged and simultaneously subject to the limitations imposed on her by her creators. She is aware of her status as a product of technological advancement, and her very existence as an AF reflects the commodification of emotional labour. This portrayal of AI as a tool for human benefit in an unequal world is a critique of how technology can be used to reinforce hierarchies rather than promote social equality.

**The Concept of Meritocracy and Its Failures:** Ishiguro critiques the idea of meritocracy, where individuals are rewarded based on perceived worth or potential. In the world of Klara and the Sun, social class is not simply a result of individual effort or merit but is inextricably linked to access to genetic enhancements and advanced technologies. The novel underscores the injustice of a system where those who are born into privilege are more likely to have access to the technologies that can secure their future, while the less fortunate are left behind.

**Human Relationships and Social Mobility:** The relationships depicted in the novel are also indicative of social class divides. Klara's interactions with characters such as Josie and her mother highlight how social class affects one's opportunities and the potential for upward mobility. Klara's understanding of the world is shaped by the limitations of her status as an AF, and she is keenly aware of how human relationships are often governed by social standing.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Klara and the Sun offers a critical exploration of how social class and inequality are perpetuated by technological advances. The novel suggests that, in a world where technology increasingly determines access to resources and opportunities, class divisions become more entrenched. Ishiguro's portrayal of the "elevated" children and the social stratification between them and the "unelevated" characters offers a scathing critique of the notion of social mobility in a society where technological advancements serve to reinforce, rather than break down, existing power structures. The novel also invites readers to question the role of AI and other technologies in shaping human lives. Klara's position as a product of human innovation, but also as a subjugated entity in a world of inequality, raises important ethical questions about the commodification of human relationships and the potential for technology to exacerbate societal divisions. As an AF, Klara is both a witness to and a product of these divisions, and her limited understanding of human society only highlights the futility of attempting to bridge these divides in a world governed by technological determinism.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Klara and the Sun critiques the intersection of technology, social class, and inequality, presenting a dystopian world where technological advancements further entrench class divides rather than provide opportunities for greater equality. Through Klara's journey, Ishiguro raises significant questions about the ethics of technology, the limitations of meritocracy, and the impact of social stratification on human relationships. By drawing attention to the ways in which technology is used to perpetuate existing inequalities, Ishiguro challenges readers to reconsider the potential consequences of a future where access to technological advancements becomes the primary determinant of one's social status. As the novel suggests, the promise of a more equal society through technology may be illusory, particularly in a world where privilege and opportunity are already unevenly distributed. Klara and the Sun serves as a powerful reminder of the dangers of technological determinism and the importance of ensuring that advancements in science and technology are used to benefit all members of society, not just the privileged few.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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