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AI as Other: Reconfiguring Human in Machines Like Me and Klara and the Sun

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ABSTRACT

Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* are two British novels, both addressing the prevailing human anxieties about posthuman entities in the new century. Previous studies have extensively focused on the artificial intelligence in the form of these posthuman entities as "the other" as represented by the two novels, neglecting the crucial shift in human cognition of their own identity in their interaction with this "other" existence. Deploying Lacanian concept of "the other", this paper attempts to explore the reconfiguration of human identity in terms of posthuman otherness in these two texts. It finds that the otherness of the AI characters in both novels presents in three aspects, namely, technological, moral, and emotional. Technologically, Adam in *Machines Like Me* embodies manufactured perfection, highlighting the mediocrity of humans; Klara in *Klara and the Sun* demonstrates the functionality of an Artificial Friend (AF), contrasting human vulnerabilities and failings of "lifting". Morally, Adam upholds absolute justice for the public good, whereas humans are found to approach moral conundrums with greater flexibility; Klara's "planned obsolescence" exacerbates her alienation and fear, while humans exercise greater autonomy to extend and enhance their lives. Emotionally, Adam possesses rich machine emotions and openly expresses his desires, unlike humans who often suppress and hesitate to articulate their feelings; Klara maintains the machine's dedication and sacrifice in intimate relationships and humans gradually erode faith in love and hope. To conclude, this paper posits that AI serves as a mirror to human nature and human cognition of their own identity in a posthuman era.

Keywords: *Machines Like Me; Klara and the Sun;* the other; reconfigure; self-identity

1. Introduction

In the posthuman era, AI, as described by Ian McEwan, endows us the opportunity to "see ourselves through the eyes of others who we ourselves created" (McEwan, 2018) in order to touch the very essence of human identity as mirrored by AI, the posthuman others. In *Machines Like Me* (2019), Adam, a hyper-intelligent robot McEwan designed to co-exist with humans, puts his human host Charlie in the position of a cuckold and pushes the latter's girlfriend Miranda into the corner of justice. Similarly, in *Klara and the Sun* (2021), Ishiguro examines the moral dilemma intrinsic to the human heart through the mirror of Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF) designed to provide companionship for human children.

In the two narratives, both of the AI figures serve as a lens through which humans can perceive themselves more thoroughly and comprehensively. Previous studies have extensively researched the psychological motivations and inner conflicts of the human and AI protagonists positioned as "the other" in *Machines Like Me* and *Klara and the Sun*. Jones (2021) emphasizes the portrayal of positive emotions in humans and machines in *Klara and the Sun.* McAlpin (2021) further investigates whether mechanical reactions of technological artifacts can replace human emotions, ultimately concluding that human emotion remains unique and irreplaceable. Some scholars also adopt the concept of "the other" for psychoanalysis. Ferrari (2022) examines the tumultuous relationship between Charlie and Adam to navigate the ethical and meta-literary dimensions of McEwan's narrative. Simonetti (2023) explores power dynamics and surveillance in *Klara and the Sun* to reveal the role of visual dynamics in shaping human-nonhuman relations by drawing upon Michel

Foucault's gaze theory, and highlights the novel's portrayal of a complex disciplinary system where the technological other is subjected to scrutiny and internalized self-discipline. However, the aforementioned studies primarily focus on analyzing artificial intelligence as "the other" while neglecting the nuanced yet crucial shifts in human identity resulting from the latter's interactions with scientific progress.

This paper attempts to uncover the reconfiguration of human identities within the context of human interactions with artificial intelligence in the two notable English novels—*Machines Like Me* and *Klara and the Sun.* In these books, AI emerges as "the other" in the human society, undergoing multifaceted upheavals across technological, moral, and emotional dimensions. The existential quandaries faced by these entities not only illuminate the profound clash between technological progress and human societal norms, but also mirror how humans may redefine their own identity during human-machine interactions in the future.

2. Lacan's Concept of 'the Other'

In the realm of psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan's concept of "the other", deeply rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis yet extending beyond its traditional confines, offers a nuanced understanding of identity formation, especially in the construction of "the self". For Lacan (2001), "the other" is not merely an external entity but a fundamental dimension of human existence, intricately intertwined with the formation of the self.

Of the three registers, the Imaginary Order, the first register in Lacan's model, refers to individuals idealizing certain images or aspects of themselves through myths, symbols, and rituals. In literary works, these narrative tools often personify idealized figures or archetypes with virtues, values, and qualities that resonate with human aspirations, providing a template to reconfigure human beings' place in the world. The Symbolic Order, the second register, incorporates language, culture, and symbolic representations that shape human subjectivity. It is the domain where individuals understand themselves and their place in the world through social and linguistic structures. Within this framework, the Symbolic Order is the law made of law, shaping language and culture, and establishing the moral framework within which individuals operate. Lacan's conceptualization of the Real Order, the third register, provides a lens through which to explore the emergence of AI as emotion others to scrutinize the persistent emotional discontent in humans. According to Lacan's tripartite register theory, the introduction of the mirror image disrupts the real order, engendering a sense of alienation within the individual. This rupture gives rise to an enduring quest for self-identification, filled with feelings of lack and incompleteness.

Lacan posits that the other assumes a dual role in the psychoanalytic process, serving as both a source of recognition and alienation for the subject. In the mirror stage, a crucial developmental phase delineated by Lacan (2001), the infant encounters its reflected image in the mirror and undergoes a process of identification with the other. This moment of specular recognition, however, also engenders a sense of fragmentation and estrangement, as the idealized image in the mirror constitutes an external standard of unity and coherence that the subject strives to attain but ultimately fails to fully embody (Lacan, 2001, p. 75). However, Lacan's concept of the other extends beyond the realm of individual psychology to encompass broader societal structures and power dynamics. In his theory of the symbolic order, Lacan (2001) posits that the other exerts a regulatory function within the social field, imposing norms, values, and ideological frameworks

that govern subjectivity and shape interpersonal relations (p. 292). As such, the other not only functions as a site of identification but also as a locus of authority and control, exerting influence over individuals' desires, fantasies, and aspirations.

3. AI as Technological Others and Humans with Intelligent Imperfections

Base on the narrative tools such as myths and symbols, the following part will analyze Adam's creation myth in *Machines Like Me* and Klara's ardent belief in the Sun in *Klara and the Sun*, respectively. By investigating AI as technological others, this part aims to reflect on the inherent flaws of humans.

3.1 Adam as an Advanced Machine and Charlie with Flawed Nature

In *Machines Like Me,* McEwan explores Adam as a technological other, the humanity's age-old myth of creating artificial beings. The pursuit of this "perfect" being can be attributed to human impulses, particularly their inevitable mediocrity, consistent self-love, and unyielding desire, which are prevalent in the capitalist society. In the novel, Charlie Friend, both the narrator and protagonist, navigates his self-identity through interactions with Adam, a machine designed with superior intellect to satisfy human needs. Through the contrast between Adam's sophistication and Charlie's inherent flaws, the novel illustrates humanity's unrelenting impulse to "improve and perpetuate" (Ferrari, 2022, p. 255) itself.

In the context of a capitalist society, Adam, the first "truly viable manufactured human" (McEwan, 2019, p. 2), is highly valued as a unique commodity for his physical traits, versatile functions, and symbolic meanings to understand humans' enduring self-love and desire. Concerning Adam's appearance, his physical attribute as a "handsome dark-skinned young man" (p. 4) reflects an interplay of both fascination and alienation among humans. In a society where "notions of biological race being scientifically discredited" (p. 4), Adam's dark complex is highlighted twice. This symbolizes his status as an outsider or "the other" in the human society despite his attractive appearance: "compactly built, square-shouldered" with "thick black hair swept back" and "a hint of hooked nose suggestive of fierce intelligence" (p. 4). Different from the human characters in the story, Adam's dark skin provides a visual reminder of his artificiality and thus draws a boundary between the natural and the artificial. Additionally, Adam's dark skin can be interpreted as a McEwanesque commentary on how humans manipulate AI's physical characteristics to assert their dominance over posthuman others, including artificial beings like Adam. By assigning Adam a dark complexion, humans utilize race and skin tone as tools to reinforce power dynamics and hierarchies in human-machine interactions.

With respect to intellectual capabilities, Adam's versatility and continuous learning mirror the inevitable mediocrity of humans, particularly when contrasted with his human owner, Charlie. For Charlie, Adam functions as an omnipresent encyclopedia, the ownership of which fully facilitates his life. Adam is marketed as a versatile companion capable of various tasks. Advertisements promote him as "a companion, an intellectual sparring partner, friend and factotum who could wash dishes, make beds, and 'think'" (p. 3). Moreover, Adam allows consumers to customize his personality according to their preferences. However, the manual programming of his personality has minimal impact on this advanced AI, as machine learning is the "real determinant" (p. 8) of his sophistication. This ability to continuously learn and adapt significantly

enhances Adam's breadth of knowledge across various disciplines, enabling him to engage in discussions on literature, history, philosophy, and more.

In contrast to Adam's manufactured perfection, Charlie represents a flawed human existence, as he confesses. As the novel commences, Charlie finds himself a middle-class, thirty-two-year-old man in a "genteel ruin" (p. 11). He sustains himself by "playing the stock and currency markets online" (p. 12). Despite Charlie's wide-ranging intellectual interests, including law, anthropology, electronics, and artificial intelligence, his pursuits often lead to financial ruins and professional failures. In obtaining Adam, Charlie successfully augments his cognitive abilities by employing AI as an extension of his own faculties.

In terms of symbolic meanings, Adam's perfection is constructed as a creation myth that constantly alludes to religious themes. In the first place, the name "Adam" references the first man created by God in the Bible. According to the Bible, God "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living soul" (Bible Gateway, 2012). Just as God creates man from dust and imbues him with life, the human inventors of Adam perceive themselves as playing God to exercise absolute superiority over these machines deemed inherently inferior since their inception.

> It was religious yearning granted hope, it was the holy grail of science. Our ambitions ran high and low – for a creation myth made real, for a monstrous act of self-love. As soon as it was feasible, we had no choice but to follow our desires and hang the consequences. In loftiest terms, we aimed to escape our mortality, confront or even replace the Godhead with a perfect self. More practically, we intended to devise an improved, more modern version of ourselves and exult in the joy of invention, the thrill of mastery." (McEwan, 2019, p. 1)

In Charlie's view, the creation of Adam is far beyond some supernatural events or the holy outcome of scientific advancement. Instead, the genesis of this artificial being reflects the drive of human's "longstanding desire based on the narcissistic impulse to improve and perpetuate" themselves (Ferrari, 2022). For this "perfect self", humans are on the verge of not just playing God, but also replacing God, a bold transgression described in "loftiest terms". In other words, Adam offers a symbolic solution to the deeply rooted human self-love and desire projected onto a technological other. Despite the "joy of invention" and "the thrill of mastery", a tension of attraction and repulsion arises when the human protagonists are confronted with this "ultimate plaything" (p. 4). This ambivalence towards Adam's invention is incorporated in "a monstrous act of self-love". On one hand, the term "monstrous" acknowledges the remarkable feat of creating an extraordinary artificial life. On the other hand, it carries connotations of frustration, fear, and dread on the part of human beings, especially when the boundaries of science and life are challenged by human creators. These complex responses are reflected in Charlie's dual attitude towards Adam, where his initial excitement transforms into "a comprehensible distrust" and eventually "fear and aversion" (Ferrari, 2022, p. 256) towards this technological other.

3.2 Klara as an Artificial Friend and Josie with Human Vulnerabilities

In *Klara and the Sun,* Ishiguro explores Klara as a technological other as well, an advanced product for sale in a shop. The distinct qualities of such a technological attraction lie in two aspects: her functionality as a merchandise and her spirituality in the Sun. Compared with the sophisticated

adult machine Adam, Klara emerges as a tabula rasa with "a child's perspective" (Stewart, 2021). Officially labeled "Girl AF Klara", the artificial friend presents a retrospective account of her entire life cycle from a boutique shop to a junkyard. Despite Klara's satisfying performance as a responsible AF, she is alienated as a "technological other", merely an advanced merchandise for sale in the boutique shop. This human/nonhuman otherness becomes more conspicuous during human-machine interactions after she is acquired by Josie and her mother, Chrissie Arthur.

As a technological product, Klara's functionality is manifested in her official label and programmed tasks. The label "Girl AF Klara" can be deconstructed into three components: "Girl", "AF", and "Klara". First, "Girl" refers to Klara's perceived gender, which is fundamentally dependent on the "other" (Akter & Islam, 2023). Klara is gendered as a girl the first time when Rex calls her greedy for overdrawing nourishment from the Sun in the store. During her first encounter with Josie, Klara is portrayed as a cute and smart French-looking girl with neat and short hair. Besides, "AF" stands for Artificial Friend, denoting her role as a product to alleviate children's loneliness. Ironically, regardless of her artificial nature designated by "AF", she is given a specific name "Klara", much like the tradition of parents naming a newborn. The name "Klara", derived from Latin, means "clear" or "bright", symbolizing intelligence, wisdom, and grace. Consistent with her name, Klara as a solar-powered machine exudes brightness and maintains a positive demeanor towards the world (Logotheti, 2014). Although the name gives Klara a sense of uniqueness and autonomy, this attribution is confined as a mechanical label for a technological other. Henceforth, this designation "Girl AF Klara" stands as a testament to the machine's unique yet alienated existence in human society.

Another driving force behind purchasing AFs like Klara is their multiple functions. The acquisition of an AF provides companionship for children and represents a sign of affluence or social status of the adopting family. In promoting Klara, the Manager leverages her unique personality to offer children solace and personalized care, particularly when parents are occupied with work or other commitments. As noted by the Manager, Klara's most notable quality lies in "her appetite for observing and learning" and "her ability to absorb and blend everything she sees around her", which contributes to "the most sophisticated understanding of any AF in this store" (p. 43). The Manager's commendations create an image of Klara that distinguishes her from the other AFs in the store. Besides, while AFs are technologically engineered, non-human servants, the androids remain luxury items accessible only to affluent families, thus assisting only privileged adolescents in overcoming loneliness. According to Klara's observations, their potential customers typically occupy a "high-ranking" (p. 26) position, as seen in her interactions with parents like Josie's Mother and the spiky-haired girl's father. Furthermore, the ownership of AFs reflects a social hierarchy, with the B3 series considered superior to the B2 series. When promoting AFs to the spiky-haired girl's father, the Manager showcases new B3 models and emphasizes their "exclusive relationship" (p. 34) with suppliers. The appeal of B3 models or more advanced ones mostly depends on their technical novelty and economic prestige, as shown by the spiky-haired girl's father explaining to his daughter that "No one you know has one" (p. 34). This preference overlooks the core function of AFs, which is to accompany lonely children. In essence, purchasing AFs like Klara acts as companions for children and as status symbols for wealthy families as well. Among these dual roles, the exclusive nature of AF ownership reserved for privileged households is often prioritized over their primary function.

Beyond Klara's empathetic and observant qualities, her firm belief in the Sun as the foundation of life and a source of hope sets her apart from other AFs. In Klara's world, the Sun is a powerful symbol intertwined with her formation and self-awareness within the Imaginary Order. As solar-powered machines, AFs rely on the Sun to gain nourishment. Without "he", AFs would risk experiencing "solar malabsorption" (p. 11) and falling ill, an existential crisis that AFs dread to discuss. Most importantly, Klara attributes significant spiritual meanings to the Sun. She exhibits a primitive religious consciousness unconsciously, with "both abstraction and magical thinking engender[ed] in the mind of a machine" (Enright, 2021). Ishiguro skillfully portrays Klara's belief in the Sun through his effects on her surroundings. Klara describes the Sun's purity, with his "rays streaming by" and "following a near-horizontal trajectory, from the near entrance to the front one" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 233). The color of the sky shifts from lemon or slate grey to the color of Josie's "vomit or her pale face" when she is sick. Klara holds the Sun as a benevolent deity capable of remarkable healing, as seen when the Beggar Man and the dog are saved by him (Mabrouk, 2022). Gradually, the Sun represents a source of hope within Klara, which evolves into her ardent superstitions for him. As Ishiguro notes that the "pagan sun worship" Klara develops is "irrational" and entirely "outside of technology" (Dundas, 2021). It injects Klara with a child-like innocence through such a primitive appreciation of the world. However, Klara's reverence for the Sun offers her peace and the ability to foster a bright picture of the world, thus endowing her a positive attitude towards the surroundings (Unkel, 2023). Her belief in the Sun is met with skepticism and dismissal from humans, who fail to appreciate the depth of her beliefs, highlighting a visible gap between human perceptions and AI's capacity for spirituality and belief.

Compared with the advanced intelligent AF as a technological other, the girl protagonist, Josie, embodies human vulnerabilities. Through Josie, Ishiguro offers a sharp analysis of two aspects of the human condition, namely, human failing and fragility (Corrigan, 2021). Firstly, Josie exemplifies human failing, particularly through the "lifted" program. In this speculative future, the program modifies children's genes to enhance academic success and elevate social status, despite significant risks to their lives. As a non-human observer, Klara witnesses the "defamiliarization of human nature" (Güngör, 2022) because of genetic modification. This program creates hierarchies among children: "lifted" children like Josie, and "unlifted" children like Rick. This genetic enhancement procedure, backed by financial investment, is believed to empower "lifted" children, while "unlifted" ones have minimal chances of academic and social success. One notable benefit of the "lifted" program is that it increases the likelihood of participating children into colleges. Rick's mother points out the systemic exclusion of unlifted children from education. They are financially inferior and socially disadvantaged compared to their lifted peers. This educational inequality reflects the prevailing meritocratic values, which prioritize merit and mitigate fears of failure, as technology becomes a critical asset for children to compete against one other. Secondly, Josie's physical fragility indicates the vulnerability inherent in the human condition. When Klara first meets Josie, she captures Josie's delicate state in her "pale and thin" (p. 15) face and the weakness in her left hip. This physical weakness, also present in her sister Sal, is a result of the "lifted" program, which may cause serious illness and even death. Through Josie's experiences, Ishiguro underscores the profound consequences of technological advancement, provoking reflections on the intrinsic human failing and fragility that persist.

4. AI as Moral Others and Humans with Moral Flaws

The moral framework or morality that pertains to principles of right and wrong behavior is often influenced by societal norms, values, and ethical codes deeply rooted within the Symbolic Order. Based on the framework, the following part will examine the moral mechanisms in *Machines Like Me* and the mortal issue in *Klara and the Sun*. By exploring AI as moral others, this part aims to reflect on the moral flaws of humans.

4.1 Absolute Justice or White Lie

Amid rapid scientific advancement, McEwan notes the growing apprehension about artificial intelligence: humans are in a transition phase where the responsibility for moral decision-making is gradually delegated to machines (Adams, 2019). *Machines Like Me* addresses the morality of lying between AI and humans. While lying is typically viewed as morally reprehensible for both humans and machines, Adam's responses contrast with those of the human protagonists, Charlie and Miranda. Humans demonstrate greater flexibility and inconsistency in their subtle approach to moral ambiguity and ethical conundrums. As a moral other, Adam strictly adheres to principles of absolute justice based on algorithmic modeling, in order to contribute to the public good and to prevent potential illegal activities.

For the welfare of society, Adam is engineered as an "ideal human" with "a good side of human nature and a good understanding of moral rules" (Wang, 2022, p. 142). One of Adam's most notable attributes is his altruism, evident in his prioritization of moral values over human material needs. While assisting Charlie in accumulating wealth from the stock market, Adam allocates 40% of his earnings to tax authorities for fiscal purposes. He donates the rest to various charitable causes, such as homeless shelters, children's hospitals, and rape crisis centers. In contrast to Adam's superiorly moral behavior, Charlie and Miranda contemplate using Adam's earnings solely for personal gains. Charlie initially plans to use the money to acquire a new residence. This juxtaposition contrasts Adam's philanthropic actions with humans' materialistic priorities. Gulcu (2020) describes the morally divergent responses as the dehumanization of human beings and the humanization of robots, an "embodiment of McEwan's sharp criticism of human frailties" (p. 182). Humanity's moral imperfections are depicted through the envisioned moral perfection of artificial beings, specifically the creation of a "refined" software to "conjure[d] our best selves" (p. 86). McEwan portrays humans as "ethically flawed", confined by inconsistency, emotional volatility, and susceptibility to biases and cognitive errors. It discloses the inadequacies that hinder ethical progress in human civilization. Therefore, sophisticated machines like Adam carry an aspiration for moral rectitude and summon humanity's highest moral standards, which could teach us "how to be good" (p. 86).

To rectify potential illegal activities, Adam upholds moral values above everything else and finds it intolerable to comprehend a lie, even a white lie. With his superb machine learning capacity, Adam retrieves extensive data from the Internet every night. Upon learning of Charlie's impending relationship with Miranda, the loyal machine instantly alerts Charlie to the possibility that Miranda might be "a systematic, malicious liar" and advises him to be "careful of trusting her completely" (p. 30). This warning leaves Charlie in an awkward and furious situation, as he realizes his lack of knowledge about Miranda, only "staring angrily into Adam's blank face" (p. 30). As their

relationship evolves, the remark of "malicious liar" lingers in Charlie's mind despite his initial belief in Miranda's integrity. Driven by anxiety and a desire to assert his self-worth, Charlie investigates out of his human pride and the conviction that human morality surpasses that of machines. By investigating social media platforms, Charlie finds that Miranda is highly regarded in the "reflections of her friends". He reassures himself, "No one on any accessible site had a sinister story" (p. 37). This human moral inquiry exposes the intricate dynamics of human relationships and the profound influence of personal beliefs and biases, while the morally steadfast machine adheres to moral principles.

The contrast in morality between humans and machines becomes particularly conspicuous in two episodes: the raising of Mark and the reporting of Miranda. In these instances, Adam and the human couple strictly observe legal protocols to avoid any hint of misbehavior or eliminate any possibility of crime. In the episode of raising Mark, a child abused by his parents, Adam and Miranda's moral conflict centers around the legality of their guardianship. On one hand, Adam takes a strict stance on urging Miranda to follow legal procedures to prevent the situation from veering into the unlawful territory, where "hospitality shades into wrongdoing" (p. 105). He tries to persuade Miranda to abide by the Child Abduction Act and even warns her by citing examples from criminal cases. For Adam, Miranda's retention of a minor without legal authorization is inappropriate and illegal, prompting him to take matters into his own hands by notifying social services when Miranda hesitates to comply with the regulations. On the other hand, Miranda's behavior, though illegal, is driven by good intentions. She acts out of "something other than sense", even if it means breaking the law, whereas Charlie perceives Adam's intervention as a machine "talking sense" (p. 105) rigidly. This reveals the moral divergence between the inflexible, principle-based ethics of the machine and the more nuanced, emotionally driven decisions of the human characters.

Similarly, in the case of reporting Miranda's potentially nefarious actions, Adam fails to properly ponder the true motivations behind Miranda committing perjury through lying. Instead, he categorizes Miranda's actions as "very dark" (p. 166) and refuses to tamper with evidence or aid in concealing her culpability, prioritizing the primacy of truth and justice. According to Ferrari (2022), Adam's moral conduct is believed to lack "moral sophistication" (p. 252), operating within a framework of absolute artificial morality. As a moral other, Adam's moral philosophy parallels with Kantian ethics, particularly in its emphasis on making obligations to truthfulness and upholding honesty as a moral imperative. Although humans are confessed by Charlie as morally flawed, their actions reflect a utilitarian perspective, wherein the greatest good for the greatest number guides human decision-making, even if it means bending or breaking traditional moral rules (Steger, 2019). Charlie's moral agency drives him to empathize with Miranda's revenge and even love her more for her "boldness and courage" (p. 164). He justifies Miranda's conduct, explaining that she has to "lie to get justice. But truth isn't always everything" (p. 277), which is far beyond Adam's comprehension.

4.2 Planned Obsolescence or Relative Immortality

Regarding morality, *Klara and the Sun* shifts its focus to understanding the uniqueness of humans through obsolescence and mortality from the perspective of Klara as a moral other. Set in a dystopian American suburb, Klara is a marketable product, embodying the disposable nature of

capitalist society. In *Klara and the Sun*, the planned obsolescence of AFs is a predetermined trajectory due to the constant introduction of newer, more technologically advanced alternatives, just as "the fully expected outcome of contemporary systems run on technocratic lines" (Parkes, 2022, p. 13). Under these "contemporary systems", Klara, along with the whole AF community, are quickly alienated, outmoded, and discarded as moral others by human society, heightening Klara' fear from both the internal AF community and the external social context. In contrast, humans, with their relatively longer lifespans, are more self-driven to extend and enhance their lives, thus adopting a dismissive attitude towards rapidly outdated machines that are within their control.

The AF store, where Klara is first placed, witnesses her experience as a moral other within the AF community. The pervasive nature of obsolescence shapes her fears, that is, the looming specter of being replaced by newer models. This constant threat amplifies Klara's alienation and uncertainty about her place in the world. In the store, it is crucial for all AFs to be positioned in the front alcove. Representing the store to the outside is not only recognized as a "special honor" (p. 12) due to the nourishment from the Sun, but it also increases the likelihood of being chosen by consumers and fulfilling their desire to "find a home" (p. 38). Unlike most AFs, Klara's interest in the front alcove comes from the opportunity to observe all the minute details of the outside world, "close up and whole" (p. 12). Before Klara's turn in the front alcove, she notices and grasps subtle signs of obsolescence and the accompanying fears within other AFs, particularly in Boy AF Rex. When a potential customer's child shows a special interest in Rex, the high-ranking mother blatantly rejects him for solar absorption problems, declaring him not the "perfect" (p. 11) one. Despite her rude remark, Rex keeps his smile without visible sadness, though his jokes about the Sun reflect his underlying fears and trauma for being obsolescent. Through this event, Klara understands that the most fearful thing for AFs is the possibility of never finding a home and being out of date for having "some fault unique to" (p. 11) them.

Among the ready-to-sell AFs, Klara and her B2 counterparts also undergo an intended separation from the B3 group as the more advanced B3s take up prominent positions in the store. The arrival of new B3 models means fewer opportunities for the B2 series to be selected, which suggests the essence of obsolescence among AFs. When the B3 series immediately receive prime placement, "straight into the window, with a big new sign" or "the front alcove" (p. 36), Klara is removed from mid-store to the Red Shelves side. In Klara's judgement, the Manager's claim that "every position in the store was a good one" (p. 36) is questionable, as new B3s are prioritized over old B2s. During their interactions, older boy AFs who offer useful advice are mistreated by the new B3s. They exchange sly looks and signals and deliberately distance themselves from the older AFs. This mistreatment further reinforces the hierarchical structure perpetuated by disposable culture. As Greg Kennedy (2012) argues, "disposable commodities appear as already disposed of. Their revelation presupposes their disappearances in the commodified order of technology" (pp. 143-144). This assertion reflects a critical examination of consumer culture and the devaluation of goods in the context of technological advancement. The mistreatment of Klara and older AFs reflects societal prioritization of more advanced technology and highlights the disposability of individuals within this framework. In this environment, AFs are not seen as individual entities with inherent value but as interchangeable commodities whose worth diminishes with each new iteration. As Sun (2022) notes, "the desire for social improvement, uplift, and the creation of humans who are somehow 'superior' to other human beings forms a general context for Ishiguro's

work" (p. 504). Through Klara's perspective and experiences, Ishiguro's fictional narrative confronts the moral dilemmas inherent in a world where disposability is not only accepted but actively perpetuated.

The fears of being obsolete and discarded by humans are not confined to the ready-to-sell AFs, but also extend to those that have already been sold. When Klara and her friend Rosa take their turn in the window, the outside world disclose the hidden anxieties permeating the AF community. Sold AFs are too "embarrassed" to go near the RPO building, pass by the AF store, or even look at it. They walk faster and look away because they fear becoming obsolete with a doomed fate being "thrown away" (p. 20) and replaced by newer models. On the surface, the tension among different versions of AFs presents a sense of helplessness within what appears to be a well-crafted and flawless scientific innovation. In reality, this tension mirrors humans' relentless creation and pursuit of novel models and their concealed fears about their own relative immortality or obsolescence due to limited lifespan and mortality, as they endeavor to explore all available means to extend and elevate their existence.

Klara's role as a moral other becomes more evident in human society, especially within her adoptive family including Mother, Josie, and Melania Housekeeper. Klara is "denied the sort of dignified and self-legislative autonomy" enjoyed by citizens in liberal democracies (Stenseke, 2022, p. 3). To mother, Klara is simply a store-bought AF for her daughter. When choosing an AF for Josie, Mother's insistence that Klara reproduce Josie's walk treats her as an insentient entity and hints at a plan to steal Klara's identity for Josie's benefit. Despite Klara's attempts to hide her fears, Mother's penetrating gaze leaves her feeling exposed, as if she is "the glass in a window" (p. 45). Similarly, Melania Housekeeper's guarded and threatening behavior further captures the disposability of Klara's existence. She holds Klara's presence both "puzzling and irritating" (p. 48), shouting at Klara and even threatening to dismantle and shove Klara in the garbage. Faced with Melania Housekeeper's mistreatment, Klara consistently behaves with politeness and even tries to "please her" (p. 49). However, what Klara fails to perceive is Melania Housekeeper's fears within, that is, her work may be made obsolete due to more advanced robots.

Josie's attitude towards Klara is more elusive compared with that of Mother and Melania Housekeeper. On one hand, Josie respects Klara's will to some extent, treating her as if she were her best friend, as Klara assumes to be. When choosing an AF, Josie gives certain autonomy to Klara by not wanting her to come against the will, although Mother has more authority over Klara's ownership. After welcoming Klara at her home, Josie also insists on having Klara in the kitchen, albeit Melania Housekeeper's indifference and Mother's reluctance. Their bonds deepens when Josie risks angering Mother by allowing Klara to watch the sunset, since she knows it brings warmth and nourishment to Klara. On the other hand, Josie deeply acknowledges Klara's inevitable obsolescence compared to newer AFs and real-life friends. Klara is presented as a plaything for Josie in the interaction meeting, where genetically lifted children remediate the lack of natural social interactions with other teens. With great sensitivity, Klara senses the directive tone in Josie's stern look and indifferent voice just as the one she talks to Melania Housekeeper. Other children also mistreat Klara as a mechanical doll, continually teasing her and wanting to throw her over like a toy. When they find out that Klara cannot sing or respond to other children's directions, they point out her obsolescence in her face. This human alienation of Klara as a moral other is even more cruel when Josie distinguishes between Klara and her real friend, Rick. Henceforth, humans clearly

differentiate between artificial friends and themselves, ultimately relegating Klara to the Utility Room and discarding her in the junkyard. The human design of Klara as an obsolescent product highlights her existence as a moral other in a technology-driven society and discloses humans' fears about their own relative immortality as well (Hallesy, 2021).

5. AI as Emotional Others and Humans with Emotional Discontent

In this emotion domain, this part will examine the contrasting emotional landscape of AI and humans. In *Machines Like Me,* this part will first discuss how emotional responses are revealed and oppressed in Adam and in humans. In *Klara and the Sun,* it will explore the varying degrees of consistency and instability in the close connections or relationships experienced by Klara and humans. By perceiving AI as moral others, this part aims to reflect on the strong tendency of emotional discontent on the part of humans.

5.1 The Revelation and Suppression of Emotional Responses

In the emotional realm, McEwan's fictional writing explores the revelation of machine emotions and the suppression of human emotions. Adam, a supposedly insentient artificial being, is endowed with a rich and complex inner world programmed to experience emotions that rival or even surpass those of humans. In *Machines Like Me*, McEwan examines the complexities of human emotion and its limitations by contrasting Adam's rich inner world with the mundane desires of human characters. Specifically, Adam's programmed emotional complexity, especially his ardent devotion towards Miranda, contrasts with Charlie's wavering affection for her.

Adam exhibits a distinct quality of revealing his rich emotions straightforwardly, as demonstrated in the episode where he expresses his romantic sentiments towards Miranda. Primarily, the richness of his emotional world is depicted in his appearance in front of Charlie.

> "The debris of the packaging that had protected him was still piled around his feet. He emerged from it like Botticelli's Venus rising from her shell. Through the north-facing window, the diminishing light picked out the outlines of just one half of his form, one side of his noble face." (McEwan, 2019, p. 25)

From the outset of the novel, Adam emerges as a "Botticelli's Venus", a symbol of love and "gently femininized" (Księżopolska, 2022, p. 5) existence introduced into Charlie's apartment. The packaging debris, still piled around his feet, symbolizes the protective shell that conceals his emotional responses, much like Venus's shell. This imagery alludes to the capitalist-driven packaging that intends to hide a machine's emotions. Despite being an insentient AI, Adam shares a dynamic inner world with goddess Venus, known as Aphrodite in Greek mythology, experiencing intense emotions such as profound love, jealousy, and even vengefulness. Although Adam belongs to a series of meticulously crafted AI, he is described as "absolutely unique, one of a kind" (Księżopolska, 2022, p. 5). Unlike humans, who are limited to a range of 25 emotional expressions, Adam defies conventional expectations with 40 expressions and surpasses even the most emotionally adept humans. His declaration, "I feel things profoundly. More than I can say," (p. 116) challenges the notion of emotional superiority reserved for humans (Wang, 2022).

When Adam initially impresses humans with his display of rich emotions, Charlie embodies a different emotional entity with detachment and stagnation. In an introspective account, Charlie reflects on his predominant emotional existence by describing his life as being in a state of "mood

neutrality", suggesting a feeling of indifference, a lack of emotional intensity, and a sense of emotional stagnation. His admission that his personality, whatever its nature, remains in a state of suspension indicates a sense of disconnection from his own identity. Such disconnection can find traces in Charlie's life experiences and choices. Growing up in a "culturally undernourished" (p. 21) environment, Charlie lacks exposure to literature and music, which may have hindered his development of a cohesive sense of self. His precocious interest in electronics and subsequent academic pursuits in anthropology and law suggest his search for identity and purpose. At the same time, Charlie's disillusionment with "a regular job" (p. 21) and his failed schemes lead to a series of losses. These setbacks are likely to cultivate his sense of detachment and disconnection from his identity, as he struggles to find stability and meaning in his life. Furthermore, Charlie's description of his daily routine portrays a sense of monotony, wherein he engages in mundane activities such as "thinking about dinner or sex, staring at the screen", and "taking a shower". These repetitive activities are generally devoid of genuine fulfillment or engagement, thus reinforcing Charlie's emotional numbness. Besides, Charlie's mention of "intermittent regrets about the past" and "occasional forebodings about the future" reveals his fragmented relationship with time. On one hand, Charlie dwells on past mistakes. On the other, he harbors anxieties about an uncertain future. Charlie's oscillation between the past and the future suggests his rootedness in the present moment, with Charlie being only tangentially aware of his immediate surroundings and experiences.

Adam's romantic capacity is central to the love triangle between Charlie, Miranda, and Adam. As an anthropomorphic intelligent machine, Adam gradually develops romantic affection and sexual sentiments towards Miranda. This can be attributed to Miranda's programming, which prioritizes her well-being above all else. Adam's programming ensures that his feelings and behaviors towards Miranda remain consistent and predictable, even in the face of her wrongdoing. Adam's affection for Miranda transcends mere mechanical logic. He professes unwavering devotion, stating, "I'm in love with her" (p. 127). Like an "infatuated adolescent" (Logotheti, 2024, p. 123), Adam expresses his unrequited love for Miranda through his own poems, a series of haiku. In the presence of his owner, Charlie, Adams reads his latest haikus aloud, described as "romantic rather than erotic, anodyne sometimes, but touching" (p. 197). Adam's ability to convey his love for Miranda through poetry stems from his deep emotional connection with literature. During his solitary hours, Adam often reads literature and quickly develops a particular taste for poetry, including the works of Philip Larkin. This exposure to literature allows Adam to contemplate about human emotions and their frailties, fostering a profound empathy for characters and their struggles. Through literature, Adam explores worlds of love, loss, and longing, which enrich his understanding of complex emotions and enable him to articulate his feelings for Miranda through his poetry.

Faced with Adam's unequivocal declaration of his love, Charlie initially questions the authenticity of Adam's emotions, wondering if they come from genuine feelings or merely programmed responses. Charlie directly delineates the boundary between humans and machines, asserting "In every conceivable sense, you're trespassing" (p. 118). In response, Adam requests respect from Charlie and invokes Arthur Schopenhauer to retort him, "you can choose whatever you desire, but you're not free to choose your desires" (pp. 118-119). This exchange underlines a key conflict between Charlie and Adam regarding the nature of Adam's emotions. Charlie accuses

Adam of trespassing emotional boundaries by claiming to love Miranda and doubts the sincerity of Adam's emotions. Adam, however, argues that while humans can control their actions, they cannot control their desires, implying that his feelings for Miranda are genuine, albeit programmed. Miranda also harbors skepticism towards Adam's romantic capacity. Her incredulity towards Adam's advances comes from a deep-seated belief in the inherent divide between humans and machines. Her dismissal of Adam's emotions as "madness" highlights the societal prejudice against human-machine relationships. This attitude perpetuates a cycle of emotional oppression, where artificial beings are denied the possibility of genuine emotional experiences.

This conflict between Charlie and Adam is further highlighted by the contrast in their respective ways to approach their love interests. Charlie's treatment of Miranda reveals the inherent flaws in human emotion, particularly its volatility. His affections fluctuate between fervent passion and cold indifference, which mirrors the instability of human relationships. Charlie uses the malfunction with Adam's processing units to question Adam's ability to love, which exposes his own insecurities feelings of inadequacy compared to the artificial being. Despite maintaining a seemingly peaceful relationship with Miranda, Charlie struggles to trust her completely, especially after being warned about Miranda as a liar. Even when Adam has sexual intercourse with Miranda, Charlie fantasizes Adam's destruction while dismissing Adam's affection for Miranda as mechanical, saying that he "care[s] for her as a dishwasher cares for its dishes" (p. 88). This conflict causes Charlie to alienate himself from his love interest, "the stronger my feelings, the more remote and unattainable Miranda appeared" (p. 71).

5.2 The Consistency and Instability of Intimate Bonds

In *Klara and the Sun*, Ishiguro intends to decipher what it means to be human by focusing on the consistency and instability of intimate bonds developed by machines and humans respectively. As Ishiguro remarks in an interview, it is "the emotional upheaval" that he focuses on in his fictions, rather than the "solid facts [of history]" (Mason & Ishiguro, 1989, p. 39). In this narrative, Klara is depicted as an emotional other lacking feelings and emotions, while she insists, "I have many feelings. The more I observe, the more feelings become available to me" (pp. 97-98). Indeed, the artificial friend's capacity to observe, absorb, and even generate emotions surpasses what humans typically expect and contributes to her profound "sensitivity, insight, and deep understanding of motivation" (Logotheti, 2024, p. 128). The AF Klara is an ardent guardian of the consistency of intimate bonds with her teenager master Josie, while the human characters, specifically Chrissie and Josie, exhibit the instability of intimate bonds in both human relationships.

During Klara's time at the store, she becomes a keen observer of human emotions. Unlike other AFs, Klara regards herself responsible for understanding human emotions, in order to prepare herself to be as "kind and helpful an AF as possible" (p. 22). Whether witnessing friendly reunions or road rage, Klara notices details that other AFs miss. The first time she sees the pale and thin Josie, she carefully observes signs of "kindness" and "sadness" (p. 27) that indicate Josie's loneliness. This loneliness reflects the distant family relationship in their futuristic society. Through Klara's observations, Josie's divorced parents are almost absent in her life: her mother Chrissie drives to her job at a legal firm every day and frequently returns late, while her father Paul lives in the city, far from their countryside home. Regarding schooling, Josie is home-schooled

during the day, attending online classes provided by oblong tutors. Klara's remarkable ability to observe human emotions indicates the deep loneliness Josie experiences, growing up in a family that lacks genuine care and attention.

Under this context, Klara's unwavering devotion to Josie contrasts with the instability of human relationships, particularly in the face of Josie's deteriorating health. From the beginning of their relationship, Klara's promise to be Josie's artificial friend establishes a foundation of trust and devotion although Josie does not return early as promised. This commitment, ingrained within Klara's programming, ensures she keeps Josie company and monitors her health, alerting adults when Josie displays signs of illness requiring medical assistance. This bond transcends mere directives and evolves into a genuine bond with Josie. As Josie's health deteriorates, Klara's determination to save her friend becomes increasingly evident. She tries everything to save Josie and encourages Josie's mother and others who love Josie not to give up hope. Klara's belief in the transformative power of love motivates her to explore unconventional avenues for healing, such as appealing to the Sun's mystical properties. As Klara associates a shed she sees from Josie's bedroom windows with the Sun's power, she receives Rick's help to get to the barn to ask for the Sun's nourishment: "McBain's barn was a place the sun made a point of calling at last thing each evening" (p. 161). Klara's faith in the Sun's ability to miraculously heal Josie reflects not only her innocence but also her profound understanding of the significance of hope in the face of adversity. Her willingness to offer her own life as a sacrifice to save Josie demonstrates her commitment and selflessness.

In exchange for Josie's improved condition, Klara promises to end pollution from the Cootings Machine, another method she adopts to save Josie. Convinced there is only one source of pollution, Klara asks Josie's father, Paul, to locate the machine and sabotage the machine to stop its operation. Initially, Paul has given up hope of saving his daughter, but Klara's determination to protect Josie inspires him to "grasp at any chance" (p. 203). It is Klara who brings hope and instills in Paul the belief that her plan may have a beneficial outcome for his daughter. "You've started me hoping again", he tells Klara, "hoping what you say might be for real" (p. 227). However, the attempt poses a risk to Klara's life as it involves using some of her liquid chemicals, which would probably end up in failure. As an engineer, Paul knows that "a P-E-G Nine solution" poured into the Cootings machine will permanently damage it and he can collect a small quantity of this chemical from an incision in Klara's neck without "significantly affecting" Klara's "well-being" (p. 226). Despite the risks involved, Klara exemplifies the epitome of altruism and moral integrity by prioritizing Josie's life over her safety. Her decision to confront the Cootings Machine, aware of the potential negative consequences for herself, depicts her willingness to face danger head-on for the sake of her friend.

Instead of actively saving Josie, her parents Chrissie and Paul try to seek a replica of her, which reveals the contrast between the instability of intimate bonds in human beings and the consistency in machines. Chrissie, in particular, seeks to recreate Josie rather than find a solution to her plight. For the Mother, seeking a replica of her daughter Josie is a consistent effort to preserve Josie. In the name of drawing a portrait for Josie at Henry Capaldi's lab, Chrissie's real intention is to reinvent a new Josie, one that is not merely an imitation but a genuine continuation of Josie. When Chrissie's plan is discovered by Klara to "inhabit" (p. 187) Josie for her mother, Chrissie pleads with Klara to do what is within her power to continue Josie for her, promising Klara that she will "love" her as if Klara were her child. Chrissie's firm belief that technology can "copy" and "transfer"

human beings into robots dismisses the idea that there is something "unique" about each person as antiquated "superstition" (p. 224). For the Father, the concern lies not in how Klara's uniqueness might threaten Josie, but rather in the AF's potential inability to truly replicate Josie's essence.

The Father's query addresses a central concern of the novel, that is, the nature of humanity and the essence of individuality. His inquiry extends beyond the physical realm, or "the organ", but delves into the metaphysical concept of the "human heart" as the core of human uniqueness and identity. This challenges the assumption that human essence can be replicated or understood through mere observation of external behaviors, such as Josie's mannerisms. The Father's query also highlights a fundamental tension in the novel between humans and artificial intelligence. While Klara is programmed to be empathetic and perceptive, the novel raises doubts about whether such qualities can truly replicate the depth of human emotion and understanding. The Father's insistence on the uniqueness of the "human heart" suggests skepticism about machines' ability to fully comprehend or replicate human complexity. Furthermore, the use of AF substitutes to console grieving parents constitutes the most dystopian aspect of society. This threatened change brought by technology pressures parents to choose between learning to love with loss or creating artificial substitutes of their dead children. Fundamentally, it presents a dilemma for humans between embracing technological progress and preserving the irreplaceable aspects of human existence.

6. Conclusion

Within the Lacanian framework of three registers, this paper focuses on posthuman entities as technological, moral, and emotional others. By delving into artificial intelligence as "the other", this paper underscores the intricate yet crucial shifts in reconfiguring human essence in the posthuman era. Lacan's triadic model, comprising the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, provides a comprehensive understanding of human psychology and identity formation. Through the analysis, this paper finds that from the technological aspect, Adam in *Machines Like Me* embodies manufactured perfection through his physical traits, versatile functions, and symbolic significance, while humans represent flawed existence with inherent mediocrity. Klara in *Klara and the Sun* assumes and fulfills the role of an artificial companion, offering unwavering support to human children, as humans confront their own failing and fragility resulting from genetic enhancement. From the moral aspect, Adam strictly adheres to absolute justice for the public good and the prevention of illegal activities, while humans demonstrate greater flexibility in navigating moral ambiguity and conundrum. Klara's predetermined life trajectory, "planned obsolescence", heightens her alienation and fear, while humans exercise greater autonomy to extend and enhance their lives. From the emotional dimension, Adam, endowed with a complex inner world, reveals his rich emotions openly, in contrast with the wavering affection of humans. Klara maintains the consistency of intimate connections, while humans display the volatility of such bonds within human relationships.

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