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HUMANITY AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* AND KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *KLARA AND THE SUN*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the obligations that arise when human beings create life or manufacture companionship in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun. Through comparative close reading informed by Joan Tronto's ethics of care, it distinguishes the creature's demand to receive care from Klara's assignment to provide it. Attention to narrative mediation, unpaid assistance, bodily vulnerability, and proposed replacements reveals two different failures of responsibility. Shelley exposes the withdrawal of nurture from a dependent being; Ishiguro examines affection sustained within arrangements that make its provider expendable. The analysis also considers counterexamples, including Walton's decision to return and the genuine attachments surrounding Klara. These prevent a simple opposition between heartless humans and virtuous creations. The findings suggest that obedience, usefulness, and emotional reassurance are insufficient measures of ethical success. Read alongside contemporary guidance on human–AI interaction, the novels locate responsibility in continuing relationships, the distribution of burdens, and the capacity to question decisions made on another's behalf.

KEYWORDS: *Artificial Intelligence; Ethics of Care; Artificial Life; Relational Identity; Narrative Ethics; Responsibility.*

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INTRODUCTION

A created being's conduct is often treated as the decisive measure of the creator's achievement. *Frankenstein* unsettles that judgment by giving the rejected creature an account of his own development. *Klara and the Sun* unsettles it from a different direction: its artificial narrator's devotion does not secure an enduring place within the household she serves. Their comparison therefore requires attention to what happens after a being has been made and after its assigned task has been completed (Shelley, vol. 2, chs. 3–8; Ishiguro, pt. 6).

The historical and material differences remain important. Shelley's animated body is not a computer, and her novel supplies no account of modern machine learning. Ishiguro's Artificial Friend belongs to a speculative consumer economy. The comparison concerns the relationships that these inventions establish, rather than a continuous technical history. Its central argument is that responsibility fails through both exclusion and conditional inclusion: a being can be denied assistance, or welcomed because it absorbs responsibilities that others prefer to delegate. The analysis asks who defines need, who performs the work of meeting it, and whose future receives consideration once immediate human interests have been satisfied.

CRITICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

Tronto's account makes care a practical and political activity rather than an individual feeling. She distinguishes recognizing a need, assuming responsibility, undertaking the work, and attending to the recipient's response. These stages allow concern to be separated from adequate provision: noticing distress does not itself establish that suitable assistance follows (Tronto 106–08). Her insistence that care extends beyond an isolated pair also directs attention to institutions and resources (103). Applied here, this framework distinguishes the emotional intensity of a relationship from the fairness of the arrangement that sustains it.

The critical contexts of the novels illuminate different parts of that distinction. Anne K. Mellor connects Victor's failures to the separation of intellectual work from domestic affection and to a gendered division of responsibility (275). Santiago Mejia and Dominique Nikolaidis identify the ethical force of Ishiguro's unfamiliar narrative perspective, which allows readers to recognize ordinary assumptions within a speculative setting (303). These approaches support attention to both social organization and literary form. Neither a creator's stated intention nor a narrator's apparent innocence can settle the moral questions without scrutiny of particular actions.

The method is comparative close reading of selected encounters, decisions, and endings. It considers verbal judgments alongside bodily actions, compares what characters know with what readers can infer, and tests the main argument against moments of reciprocal affection or restraint. The inquiry is interpretive; it does not offer experimental evidence about machine consciousness or claim that fictional technologies predict actual systems. The relevant comparison is between structures of dependency, with differences in agency and social position retained throughout.

The primary texts are Shelley's 1818 version and Ishiguro's 2021 novel. The electronic editions consulted have no stable print pagination. Shelley is therefore cited by volume and chapter, and Ishiguro by part. Numbered citations identify pages in the critical books, articles, and policy report. This distinction avoids transferring page numbers between editions or treating the page count of a reflowed electronic file as printed pagination.

Three connected questions organize the discussion. How do the novels separate technical achievement from the provision of care? How do created beings participate in relationships whose terms have largely been established by others? What remains owed when an experiment is abandoned or a service is no longer required? These questions also limit the contemporary application. Fiction can disclose neglected interests and conflicting perspectives without determining whether a present-day machine possesses the kinds of experiences attributed to a literary character.

THE CREATURE: ASSISTANCE WITHOUT RECOGNITION

Victor's language at the moment of animation identifies a decisive confusion. He calls the successful awakening a "catastrophe," although the experiment has achieved its intended physical result (Shelley, vol. 1, ch. 4). The description substitutes an aesthetic verdict for attention to a newly dependent being. His earlier expectation that a new species would honour him establishes the asymmetry: he imagines gratitude flowing towards the maker before considering the maker's obligations (vol. 1, ch. 3). The ethical failure begins in this anticipated relationship. Recognition is expected as a reward for production, while nurture is absent from the imagined future.

The De Lacey episode offers a different education in responsibility. On discovering the family's poverty, the creature stops taking their food and gathers firewood for them (Shelley, vol. 2, ch. 4). His response involves revising an action after recognizing its cost to others. Assistance develops through attention to particular conditions rather than through

an abstract claim to superiority. His labour also creates a sharp distinction between benefit and acknowledgment. The household can receive what he contributes while remaining unaware of the contributor. Useful action alone does not establish membership in a community.

That distinction becomes explicit when the creature approaches the blind father. Conversation briefly allows his predicament to be heard without his appearance deciding its meaning. The returning family interrupts this fragile possibility, and Felix attacks him (Shelley, vol. 2, ch. 7). The scene does not prove that eloquence guarantees goodness. It demonstrates that a judgment formed before testimony can prevent ethical inquiry from beginning. Moreover, the creature's account reaches readers inside Victor's story, itself transmitted through Walton's letters. Readers must attend to a speaker whose access to an audience is controlled by others, without assuming that mediated testimony is either wholly transparent or worthless.

The later violence complicates any account of the creature as an uncomplicated moral victim. His killing of William and implication of Justine transfer his grievance to people who cannot answer it (Shelley, vol. 2, ch. 8). Recognition of abandonment explains the formation of resentment but does not justify these acts. Indeed, taking his reasoning seriously requires taking his choices seriously. His earlier restraint and practical generosity establish capacities that make revenge morally consequential. Responsibility remains distributed without becoming interchangeable: Victor answers for desertion and concealment, while the creature answers for deliberate harm. A relational reading preserves both claims instead of dissolving agency into suffering.

KLARA: DEVOTION, COMPETENCE, AND THE BURDEN OF CARE

Klara's position reverses the direction of dependency. She enters the household as a purchased companion expected to attend to Josie's needs. Yan's attachment-based reading emphasizes the reassurance and practical support that develop through their association (114–16). This perspective supplies an important qualification: the relationship cannot be dismissed as wholly counterfeit because it originates in a transaction. Purchased assistance can support genuine attachment. The ethical problem lies in deciding whether the existence of affection is being used to excuse the terms under which it is provided.

The difference between caring intention and reliable knowledge becomes visible in Klara's appeal to the Sun. Her effort to secure Josie's recovery has an emotional intelligibility without acquiring independent causal confirmation (Ishiguro, pts. 3–5). The narrative permits readers to respect the seriousness of her commitment while questioning the explanation through which she organizes it. This is a demanding form of ethical attention. Treating every belief as correct would sentimentalize Klara; treating her limited knowledge as evidence that her concern is meaningless would disregard the relationship. Concern, competence, and the actual effects of an intervention require separate judgments.

The extraction of fluid from Klara's body sharpens this issue. She accepts a possible impairment in order to pursue her plan; Paul explains risks and gives her an opportunity to stop (Ishiguro, pt. 4). These details matter because the episode is not simply an act of forcible sacrifice. Yet consent does not erase the question of how a person or being learns which costs count as acceptable. Klara evaluates possible damage chiefly through Josie's interests. The adults can regard that preference as admirable while allowing the burden to remain concentrated on her. A declared willingness to help therefore requires examination of available alternatives and the possibility of refusing without losing one's place.

Klara's restraint also shapes the reader's work. She seldom converts discomfort into accusation, so the absence of an explicit complaint cannot serve as a sufficient measure of fairness. Equally, criticism should not overwrite her preferences by assuming that she must secretly want a conventionally human life. Her narration produces an unresolved task: respect the value she finds in service while examining the narrow opportunities within which that value is expressed. The creature's angry demand and Klara's courteous accommodation thus require different kinds of listening. One risks being disqualified because he protests; the other risks being overlooked because she does not make protest central to her account.

DESIGNED ROLES AND THE LIMITS OF REPLACEMENT

The proposed female creature brings the politics of consent into Shelley's account of invention. Victor anticipates that she might reject an agreement made before her existence and destroys the unfinished body (Shelley, vol. 3, ch. 3). Mellor reads this episode through the threat of an independent female will (278–79). The problem belongs to both men's plans: the first creature seeks a companion whose attachment is assumed, while Victor imagines a new life primarily through the risks of its possible disobedience. Her capacity to choose appears before she can speak, but it appears as a difficulty to be eliminated.

Victor's concern about future violence cannot simply be dismissed. The first creature has already killed, and another creation would affect people outside their bargain. Nevertheless, his deliberation exposes a defective procedure. Two parties negotiate the function of a third without any means of revising that function in response to her own interests. His decision addresses danger by destroying the proposed being, while leaving unanswered the obligation to respond to the existing creature's isolation through any alternative. The episode distinguishes justified concern about consequences from the assumption that a maker may define every permissible form of relationship.

Capaldi's replacement project similarly treats a future identity as a role that another intelligence might perform. The plan asks Klara to reproduce Josie closely enough to sustain the mother's attachment (Ishiguro, pt. 4). Its ethical difficulty exceeds the question of behavioural accuracy. Josie's individuality, Klara's existing identity, and the mother's need to avoid another loss are different interests, yet the project promises to bring them under one technical solution. A convincing performance could satisfy an observer while obscuring whose continuity had actually been preserved. The promise of reassurance consequently cannot determine the legitimacy of the substitution.

Klara's retrospective judgment challenges the assumption that a loved person's significance is an internal collection of reproducible features. She locates it instead in the relations surrounding that person: "It was inside those who loved her" (Ishiguro, pt. 6). The sentence does not establish the existence of an immaterial soul or refute a scientific model of cognition. It changes the object of inquiry. A relationship has a shared history that cannot be supplied by accurate resemblance alone. The proposed substitutions in both novels thus reveal the limits of assigning identity from outside: neither companionship nor continuity follows automatically from creating a body capable of performing an expected role.

ENDINGS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AFTER USEFULNESS

Walton's return provides a counterexample to the idea that Shelley presents ambition as inevitably incapable of correction. He agrees to turn south when his crew demands protection from further danger, although his language remains resentful (Shelley, vol. 3, ch. 7). The decision is ethically significant without becoming a complete moral conversion. People who bear the risks obtain some authority over the undertaking. Unlike Victor's repeated movement from private resolve to

irreversible action, Walton allows opposition to alter the course of events. Accountability here has a practical form: an undertaking can be stopped before its leader is satisfied.

Ishiguro's ending places the reader before a quieter problem. Klara retains memories and preferences in the Yard; she receives a visit and declines an offer of relocation near other Artificial Friends (Ishiguro, pt. 6). These details resist describing her situation as absolute abandonment or assuming that company would necessarily improve it. Nevertheless, the completion of her role has removed her from the household's active future. Yan also recognizes the tension between beneficial attachment and eventual disposal (116–17). Klara's satisfaction should be heard, but it does not by itself establish the adequacy of the wider arrangements available to beings in her position.

A contemporary connection can be drawn without attributing Klara's inner life to actual systems. The 2024 NIST generative AI profile identifies overreliance and emotional entanglement among risks of human–AI interaction (Autio et al. 9). It also includes dependencies and emotional entanglement among considerations for decommissioning, and recommends communication about deactivation, alternatives, and support (17, 41). These provisions show that responsibility extends beyond producing acceptable outputs during ordinary use. The human relationships encouraged by a system may create consequences that persist when a provider changes or withdraws it.

The literary contribution is to make the distribution of those consequences available for judgment. Shelley directs attention to the interval between achievement and supervision; Ishiguro directs attention to the interval between completed service and continuing attachment. Neither novel supplies a ready-made regulatory rule. Their distinctive force lies in giving duration and perspective to interests that an immediate measure of success can omit. This supports an ethical requirement to plan for maintenance, refusal, revision, and ending. It does not require a settled claim about machine consciousness: duties towards affected human users and communities already warrant such planning, while the status of a fictional artificial subject remains a separate interpretive question.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The comparative analysis yields three principal findings. First, the direction of care changes the form of ethical vulnerability. The creature's claim is frustrated because others refuse to receive him as a dependent participant; Klara's participation is accepted largely through what she supplies. Exclusion and service-based inclusion therefore require different remedies. Admission alone is insufficient where continued acceptance depends on absorbing costs without an effective opportunity to contest them.

Second, performance and relationship remain distinct. Helpful action does not ensure recognition, obedient conduct does not prove fair treatment, and accurate imitation does not guarantee personal continuity. These distinctions emerge from the novels' treatment of anonymous assistance, bodily sacrifice, and proposed substitutes. Third, responsibility has a temporal dimension. It concerns preparation and intervention, but also the conditions under which an undertaking is revised, discontinued, or declared complete. Endings reveal obligations that a focus on creation or immediate benefit leaves unresolved.

These are interpretive results, not empirical generalizations about artificial intelligence. The comparison cannot establish what machines experience, measure the effects of companion technologies, or demonstrate that every commercial care relationship is exploitative. Its findings concern the ethical assumptions organized by the two narratives. In particular, the counterexamples of affection, consent, and Walton's retreat prevent vulnerability from being equated automatically with total powerlessness.

CONCLUSION

Read together, *Frankenstein* and *Klara and the Sun* complicate the expectation that a successful creation will vindicate the intentions behind it. The creator's achievement and the user's satisfaction remain partial accounts of what has occurred. Created beings occupy relationships whose terms can conceal unacknowledged dependency, unequal sacrifice, and conflicting interests. Giving them narrative attention changes the questions asked of those arrangements, even when their conduct remains troubling or their understanding incomplete.

Humanity in these novels can consequently be examined as a practice of answering for one's effects on others, rather than as a status that automatically guarantees ethical insight. Such accountability includes accepting unwelcome testimony, refusing to predetermine another's attachments, and allowing those exposed to danger to influence a decision. It also requires judgment after success, when usefulness no longer explains why a relationship should continue. The relevance of these novels to artificial intelligence lies in this sustained scrutiny of responsibility. They make care answerable to the lives and relationships it shapes, while preserving the difficulty of deciding what adequate care demands in each particular case.

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