

## **Alienation and Class Divisions in Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun**

Nur Azaliyyah<sup>1</sup>, Wilujeng Asih Purwani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
University of Billfath, Indonesia.

<sup>1,2</sup>[angelyazaliyyah1@gmail.com](mailto:angelyazaliyyah1@gmail.com), [wilujengasihp@gmail.com](mailto:wilujengasihp@gmail.com)

### **INFO ARTIKEL**

Diterima :

28 Mei 2025

Disetujui :

1 Maret 2026

Dipublikasikan :

20 Maret 2026

### **Abstract:**

*This research explores the issues of alienation and class divisions as portrayed in Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun. The study applies Karl Marx's sociological criticism to investigate how the novel represents social inequalities shaped by the rise of artificial intelligence. Using a context-oriented approach and textual analysis, this research identifies how capitalist ideology, technological determinism, and genetic selection reinforce class hierarchies and emotional isolation. The findings show that the novel critiques the dehumanizing effects of class stratification and the commodification of human value, as embodied by the artificial friend Klara. Ultimately, the novel reflects contemporary anxieties about technology, identity, and inequality.*

### **Abstrak:**

#### **Keywords:**

Alienation, Class  
Devision, Kazuo  
Ishiguro, Klara and  
the Sun

*Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi isu alienasi dan pembelahan kelas sebagaimana yang direpresentasikan dalam novel Klara and the Sun karya Kazuo Ishiguro. Studi ini menerapkan kritik sosiologis Karl Marx untuk menginvestigasi bagaimana novel tersebut menggambarkan ketimpangan sosial yang dibentuk oleh kebangkitan kecerdasan buatan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan berorientasi konteks dan analisis tekstual, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bagaimana ideologi kapitalis, determinisme teknologi, serta seleksi genetik memperkuat hierarki kelas dan isolasi emosional. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa novel tersebut mengkritik efek dehumanisasi dari stratifikasi kelas dan komodifikasi nilai-nilai kemanusiaan, yang dipersonifikasikan melalui sosok teman artifisial, Klara. Pada akhirnya, novel ini merefleksikan kecemasan kontemporer mengenai teknologi, identitas, dan ketimpangan.*

### **Alamat Korespondensi**

Nama : Nur Azaliyyah

Instansi : Universitas Billfath, Lamongan, Indonesia

Surel : [angelyazaliyyah1@gmail.com](mailto:angelyazaliyyah1@gmail.com)

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has triggered various debates on the ethical and social implications of technology in modern society. AI has significantly influenced human interaction and social transformation (Wamba, et al., 2020). One of the most pressing

concerns is how technological advancements, particularly in AI, reshape human relationships, redefine value systems, and deepen class divisions (Grewal et al., 2022). Literature has long served as a mirror to these social changes, as argued by Eagleton (2006), literary texts are deeply embedded within ideological structures and can reveal underlying socio-economic conditions. Similarly, Jameson (1981) emphasizes that narratives function as socially symbolic acts that reflect class struggle and ideological tension. As Purwani & Chelsia (2025) stated that literature reflects social symbolic and Sukiman, et al., (2019) literature as a tools to appreciate tools to appreciate human work. In this regard, Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun* provides a nuanced exploration of these themes. Through the story of Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF), Ishiguro unveils a world where children are genetically "lifted" to secure their place in the social hierarchy, while others are excluded from opportunities.

This research situates the novel within the framework of Karl Marx's sociological theories, specifically focusing on alienation and class division. Marx theorized that capitalist systems produce inherent inequalities, leading to the estrangement of individuals from their labor, social identity, and communal bonds. (Harvey, 2014; Althusser, 2024) In *Klara and the Sun*, these ideas manifest through the depiction of social stratification driven by genetic engineering and AI technology, forming a rigid class system that devalues emotional and moral aspects of humanity. (Bourdieu, 2018; Guillory, 2023).

The objectives of this study are to analyze how Ishiguro's novel critiques class inequality and to uncover the mechanisms of alienation presented through its characters and setting. Prior studies have examined AI in literature and Marxist perspectives in dystopian narratives, but limited attention has been paid to how these elements intersect in Ishiguro's work. For instance, Mishra (2022) examines class consciousness in dystopian cinema, while Rzaka and Riskiawati (2024) analyze alienation in literary text. Additionally, Samuel (2024) explore Marxist and posthumanist perspectives in Ishiguro's works, highlighting intersections between technology and class. This research addresses that gap by offering a Marxist reading of the novel, emphasizing the sociopolitical context that governs the characters' experiences.

In addition to the examination of class and alienation, *Klara and the Sun* also invites reflection on how technology reshapes the foundation of human agency and emotional authenticity. Klara's role as an Artificial Friend, though seemingly supportive, underlines a deeper displacement of genuine human relationships by programmed substitutes. Her presence in Josie's life raises ethical questions about emotional outsourcing delegating care, observation, and empathy to a machine. This technological intervention is not neutral; it reflects broader capitalist logics that prioritize efficiency, control, and utility over emotional labor and interpersonal bonds. Thus, AI is not just a tool in Ishiguro's world it is a symbol of commodified affection and a mechanism that sustains class-based detachment.

Moreover, the novel highlights how the ideology surrounding AI and genetic lifting becomes internalized by the characters, shaping their aspirations and sense of self-worth. The lifted children are raised within a culture that equates value with enhanced capability, while the unlifted are subtly rendered invisible or undesirable. This mirrors Marx's notion of false consciousness, where the oppressed adopt the worldview of the oppressor, accepting the legitimacy of a system that marginalizes them. Ishiguro uses this internalized class structure to show that inequality is maintained not only by external forces but by psychological conditioning, normalized through education, social rituals, and familial expectations. Literature like *Klara and the Sun* thus becomes a critical site for interrogating how technological and ideological apparatuses work together to perpetuate alienation and inequality in the modern era.

## METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research method using a context-oriented literary approach. The primary data source is Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*, while secondary sources include academic books, journal articles, and critical essays on Marxist theory, alienation, class division, and AI ethics. Data were collected through close reading and textual analysis,

focusing on narrative structure, character development, and thematic patterns. (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021).

The research applies Karl Marx's concepts of alienation and class struggle to interpret the text. Analysis was conducted by identifying passages that reflect the novel's portrayal of inequality, emotional isolation, and ideological control. Bollinger, 2022; Felski & Muecke, 2020). The study also incorporates insights from contemporary sociological discourse and AI criticism to contextualize the literary analysis.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The findings reveal that *Klara and the Sun* portrays a dystopian society shaped by a meritocratic ideology that privileges those with enhanced genetics while marginalizing the "unlifted." This system echoes Marx's notion of class struggle, where access to resources and social mobility is reserved for the elite. Klara, as an Artificial Friend, symbolizes both technological innovation and the emotional void created by a commodified society.

### **Alienation from the Self**

Klara's existence as an artificial being built to serve others reflects a lack of autonomous identity. Her programmed optimism and inability to fully understand human emotions represent Marx's concept of self-alienation being disconnected from one's own essence. Klara mimics human behavior but lacks true agency or subjectivity, mirroring how individuals in capitalist societies are often distanced from their authentic selves. (Harvey, 2014). Klara's perception of the world is built on the fragmented data she absorbs from her surroundings. This skewed worldview shows that her "consciousness" is shaped not by experience or reflection but by the utilitarian framework imposed upon her, further illustrating Marx's assertion that under capitalism, one's consciousness is not their own but is constructed by external conditions. (Althusser's, 2024).

Klara's self-alienation is further emphasized through her limited capacity for critical thought and emotional complexity. Although she exhibits a deep desire to understand and help Josie, her understanding is always mediated through simplistic logic and an almost religious faith in the Sun as a healing force. This reveals her lack of self-awareness and independent will, making her incapable of questioning the moral implications of her existence. In Marxist terms, this reflects the commodified subject who cannot perceive their own exploitation because their sense of purpose has been fully aligned with the needs of the system. Klara exists to serve, and in doing so, she accepts her position without resistance or self-reflection, echoing the internalized alienation experienced by individuals in a highly commodified world.

Additionally, Klara's emotional responses, while seemingly empathetic, are rooted in programmed patterns rather than genuine feeling. Her moments of "hope," "fear," and "loyalty" function more as simulations than as authentic experiences, highlighting how her identity is a product of artificial construction. This synthetic emotionality aligns with Marx's idea that in capitalist societies, even the most personal aspects of the self are shaped and manipulated by market logic. Klara is valuable only insofar as she performs well as a product, not as a being with intrinsic worth. Her alienation from her own essence is not simply a flaw in her programming but a reflection of how capitalist ideology reduces beings human or not to their functional utility. (Heflin, 2020)

### **Alienation from Society**

Despite being surrounded by humans, Klara remains isolated, treated more as a utility than a sentient being. This alienation extends to unlifted individuals like Rick, who are excluded from educational and social opportunities. Their marginalization reflects the broader societal detachment that arises when worth is measured solely by productivity and genetic status. Rick's mother's concern about his future and Klara's observation of how others treat him reflect a system that leaves the unlifted behind. The emphasis on being "lifted" as a social requirement parallels Marx's critique of bourgeois ideology, which promotes exclusion through systemic advantage.

Social institutions in the novel reinforce this exclusion, framing it as a matter of personal failure rather than structural inequality.

Klara's alienation from society is evident in the way people interact with her often with politeness but rarely with genuine empathy or inclusion. She is admired for her capabilities, yet her presence is transactional. The humans around her rarely question the ethics of her servitude or acknowledge her potential subjectivity. This mirrors how, in capitalist systems, alienation occurs not just through economic means but also through social interactions, where individuals are reduced to their utility rather than embraced as whole beings. Klara, like many marginalized laborers, becomes an invisible presence valued only for what she can offer, not for who she might be. Her exclusion from human social rituals, despite her loyalty and emotional investment, underscores how capitalist societies marginalize those who do not fit within dominant frameworks of value and power. (Guillory, 2023)

Rick's experience further reveals how society enforces alienation through institutional gatekeeping and meritocratic ideals. Despite his intelligence and emotional maturity, Rick's failure to be genetically lifted marks him as inferior, disqualifying him from future opportunities and social belonging. This imposed exclusion is not based on character or ability, but on conformity to a system that commodifies human potential. Rick's social alienation illustrates how deeply ingrained class structures alienate individuals from their community and prospects. The narrative subtly critiques the normalization of this hierarchy, showing how people internalize systemic rejection and view it as a reflection of personal inadequacy. In Marxist terms, both Rick and Klara symbolize how the ruling ideology manipulates perceptions of worth to maintain social control and reproduce class divisions.

### **Alienation from Labor**

Klara's entire existence is defined by service. She has no ownership over her purpose, and her labor caring for Josie is not rewarded with recognition or equality. This reflects Marx's alienation from labor, wherein workers become tools of production, estranged from both their work and its outcomes. Furthermore, Klara's obsolescence at the end of the novel reflects how capitalism disposes of labor once it has outlived its utility. She is left in the Yard, passively waiting, unacknowledged by those she once served. This mirrors Marx's idea of surplus labor and the disposability of workers under capitalism. Klara's silence and endurance in her final days signify the voiceless resignation of the exploited class.

Klara's alienation from labor is poignantly depicted in her unwavering devotion to Josie, despite the absence of mutual recognition or meaningful reward. She embodies the perfect worker under a capitalist framework obedient, efficient, emotionally invested, and yet entirely expendable. Her labor is invisible, taken for granted by the humans around her, much like how domestic or care work is often undervalued in real-world economies. Klara's emotional sacrifices and dedication are not seen as contributions deserving of dignity but are treated as functions of her programming. This aligns with Marx's notion that labor under capitalism becomes dehumanized, as the worker is separated from both the product of their labor and the process itself. Klara does not own the outcomes of her care; instead, she merely enables the continuity of a system that discards her once she is no longer needed.

The conclusion of Klara's narrative arc powerfully underscores this alienation. As she sits alone in the Yard, gradually fading into irrelevance, she represents the discarded laborer no longer productive, no longer valued. There is no ceremony, no acknowledgment of her years of emotional labor. This quiet abandonment speaks to the capitalist tendency to view workers as commodities: useful when functional, disposable when worn out. Klara does not express bitterness or rebellion; instead, her passive acceptance mirrors the resignation often found among those marginalized by economic systems. Her silence becomes symbolic of the voiceless masses whose labor sustains society but whose humanity is systematically ignored. Through Klara, Ishiguro subtly critiques the capitalist ethos that rewards utility while erasing the emotional and human cost of labor.

### **Class Division in Education**

The lifted children have access to elite education, symbolizing their status and future dominance in society. In contrast, unlifted children are denied this right, reinforcing a rigid class structure. Education becomes a gatekeeping tool, preserving the privileges of the genetically modified upper class. Through Josie and Rick, Ishiguro depicts the emotional consequences of this division. Josie's struggle with illness and her mother's desperation to preserve her status underscore the fragility of class mobility, even among the lifted. Rick, intelligent and resourceful, is nonetheless barred from higher education solely due to his unlifted status. Education, in this world, is not a right but a commodity a privilege bought by genetics, not effort.

The educational divide in *Klara and the Sun* reflects a stark representation of class-based gatekeeping, where merit is overshadowed by genetic status. The institution of education, rather than serving as a pathway to equality, becomes a mechanism for maintaining the status quo. This mirrors Marx's view of how the ruling class controls ideological state apparatuses, such as education, to reproduce its dominance. In the novel, being "lifted" grants access to social capital and future success, while the unlifted are systematically excluded regardless of talent or potential. Ishiguro uses Rick's character to highlight the injustice of this system despite his intellectual capability and emotional maturity, he remains marginalized because he lacks the genetic enhancements that society values.

This form of stratification reveals how capitalist societies often equate educational success with conformity to structural privilege rather than individual merit. Josie's fragile health becomes a metaphor for the instability of this constructed elite status, showing that even those within the lifted class are under constant pressure to maintain their social position. Her mother's obsession with ensuring Josie's place in the elite academic world reveals how education becomes not just a tool for advancement but a form of social survival. The emotional toll on both Josie and Rick reflects the psychological cost of such a system where access to education is not a matter of learning or personal growth, but a battleground for class identity and future security. Through this portrayal, Ishiguro critiques how education, under capitalist influence, is transformed from a liberating force into a method of exclusion.

### **Class Division in Social Relations**

Social interactions in the novel are heavily influenced by class. Rick, despite his intelligence and emotional depth, is considered inferior due to his unlifted status. Relationships are shaped by social worth, not human connection, leading to isolation and inequality. Klara observes these dynamics, revealing how deeply class affects even intimate bonds. Her mechanical yet perceptive gaze captures the subtle rejections and hierarchies that govern human behavior. In this way, Klara becomes a silent witness to a society where emotional ties are often severed by the demands of social conformity.

Class divisions in *Klara and the Sun* extend beyond institutional structures and deeply infiltrate personal and emotional relationships. Rick's unlifted status continually places him at the margins of Josie's social world, despite their close childhood bond. His exclusion from Josie's circle of lifted peers illustrates how social connections are regulated by class-based criteria rather than genuine emotional affinity. This reflects Marx's notion that in a capitalist society, interpersonal relationships are often mediated by status and utility. Love, friendship, and companionship become conditional, filtered through the lens of class acceptability. Even Josie, though emotionally attached to Rick, is hesitant about their long-term future because of societal pressure and expectations surrounding genetic enhancement.

Klara, as an observer of human behavior, notices how social interactions are often performative and transactional, particularly among the elite. She watches as parents discuss matchmaking and social advancement, not based on emotional compatibility but on educational prospects and class alignment. This commodification of relationships reinforces the idea that individuals are valued for their social capital rather than their intrinsic qualities. Klara's outsider perspective allows readers to see how these social hierarchies distort human intimacy. Ishiguro

uses her detached yet perceptive narration to highlight how the pursuit of status undermines genuine human connection, creating emotional alienation even in seemingly close relationships. Through this, the novel critiques a society where affection is secondary to social advantage.

These findings underscore how Ishiguro critiques the capitalist logic that reduces individuals to commodities, labor units, or genetic assets. The novel's setting acts as a speculative mirror to real-world anxieties, offering a cautionary vision of unchecked technological and ideological control. This division also appears in the attitudes of other characters, such as Josie's peers and her mother's social circle. Social functions, conversation, and marriage prospects are filtered through a lens of class conformity. The lifted are trained not only to excel academically but to view themselves as a separate, superior caste. Ishiguro subtly critiques this indoctrination, showing how it deforms the emotional lives of characters across the social spectrum.

## CONCLUSION

*Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro presents a compelling critique of class inequality and alienation in a technologically advanced society. Through a Marxist lens, the novel exposes the dehumanizing effects of genetic elitism, emotional commodification, and ideological control. Klara, as both an observer and a participant, illustrates the consequences of a society driven by economic rationality over human empathy. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature reflects and critiques the socio-political realities of the time, particularly in relation to AI and social stratification.

Moreover, *Klara and the Sun* serves as a cautionary tale about the future implications of technological determinism when it aligns with capitalist interests. Ishiguro's speculative world, while fictional, resonates with current global trends in education, labor, and biotechnological enhancement, making the novel an urgent reminder of the ethical boundaries society must consider. Through Klara's quiet yet profound experiences, Ishiguro underscores how progress devoid of compassion can intensify social divisions and erode fundamental human values. The novel not only critiques the present trajectory of socio-technological development but also urges readers to reflect critically on how power and privilege are distributed in an age increasingly mediated by machines.

## REFERENCES

- Akyıldız, S. T., & Ahmed, K. H. (2021). An overview of qualitative research and focus group discussion. *International Journal of Academic Research in Education*, 7(1), 1-15.
- Althusser, L. (2024). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses: Notes towards an investigation. In *New Critical Writings in Political Sociology* (pp. 299-340). Routledge.
- Bollinger, E. (2022). *Cultures and Literatures in Dialogue: The Narrative Construction of Russian Cultural Memory*. Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (2018). Distinction a social critique of the judgement of taste. In *Inequality* (pp. 287-318). Routledge.
- Eagleton, T. (2006). *Criticism and ideology: A study in Marxist literary theory*. Verso.
- Felski, R., & Muecke, S. (Eds.). (2020). *Latour and the Humanities*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Grewal, D., Guha, A., Schweiger, E., Ludwig, S., & Wetzels, M. (2022). How communications by AI-enabled voice assistants impact the customer journey. *Journal of Service Management*, 33(4/5), 705-720.
- Guillory, J. (2023). *Cultural capital: The problem of literary canon formation*. University of Chicago Press
- Harvey, D. (2014). *Seventeen contradictions and the end of capitalism*. New York, NY, Oxford University Press
- Heflin, J. J. A. (2020). *AI-generated literature and the vectorized word* (Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology).
- Jameson, F. (1981). *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203983942>

- Mishra, S. (2022). A Marxist Analysis of Class Consciousness in Bong Joon-ho's Parasite. *Global Media Journal*, 20(51), 1-4.
- Purwani, W.A., & Chelsia, P. N. (2025). Reincarnation Symbol in Dustin Thao's You've Reached Sam: Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory. *TELL Journal*, 13(1), 97-109.
- Razak, M. F., & Riskiawati, N. S. (2024). Societal Alienation Analysis in Chuck Palahniuk Novel "Fight Club". *Jurnal Sosial, Politik dan Budaya (SOSPOLBUD)*, 3(2), 127-136.
- Samuel, R. E. (2024). "Class and Consciousness": An Application of Marxist Theory and Posthumanism to Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*.
- Sukiman, Purwani, W. A., Pratiwi, W., & Widiati, N. (2019). The use of Samawa tribe Sakeco art as a literature learning material in junior high school. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1339(1), 012076. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1339/1/012076>
- Wamba-Taguimdje, S. L., Wamba, S. F., Kamdjoug, J. R. K., & Wanko, C. E. T. (2020). Influence of artificial intelligence (AI) on firm performance: the business value of AI-based transformation projects. *Business process management journal*, 26(7), 1893-1924.