

Room to Read Book Group April meeting  
***Klara and the Sun*** by Kazuo Ishiguru

Kazuo Ishiguru is a writer who exemplifies the long slow burn, with a spare detached style of writing. In this, his latest of eight novels, referred to by some as retro-science fiction, he writes in the first person of Klara, an AF, a solar-powered robot. He shuns the explicit but gradually leads the reader into Klara's world, first in the shop where she is to be sold, then to the home of the pubertal Josie, to whom she becomes her Artificial Friend. Josie is ill and, implicitly, one comes to understand that her illness is linked to the genetic enhancement procedure chosen by her mother ostensibly to confer advantages in an increasingly fragmented society. But I have already said too much. The reader who comes to this book will read many many pages before figuring this out. Its as if you are travelling a learning journey at the same pace as Klara.

The book is unsettling. Its main themes are: exploring what it means to be human. Wherein does the exclusive property reside? How exclusive is that property when robots can observe, learn, replicate?; loneliness, lack of intimacy, alienation in so called progressive high-tech ecologies; the decisions parents make for their children and why. One thing that didn't add up for me was that Klara's experiences of human interaction were very often hostile, unpleasant or aggressive, yet she seems not to have learned these ways of relating. Indeed the very opposite – her communications are discreet, measured and conciliatory. How can that be?

The book is frustrating, but as one member said "it stays with you" like an itch that you need to keep scratching. The adult characters are without exception objectionable, the landscape of the novel largely unattractive too. Its power lies in its capacity to *stay with you*.

We valued it highly as book group discussion material, giving it five stars. To recommend to others we gave it four.

Next meetings:

18 May	<b><i>Sad Little Men</i></b>	Richard Beard
15 June	<b><i>Red Dust Road</i></b>	Jackie Kaye
20 July	<b><i>Square Haunting</i></b>	Francesca Wade