

# The Reader



at Literary Leftovers Bookstore

Issue 7

July/August 2025

LETTER FROM THE PROPRIETRESS

## Artificial Intelligence & Literary Leftovers

Heather Erwin, proprietress

Every Tuesday at the shop is team meeting day. At meetings, we spend a lot of time dreaming into the future. Lately, the conversations have come around to the subject of AI, and what it could mean for our future, our business, and our community. You'll find this issue provides some insight into our thoughts about AI.

I expect AI to improve our computer system. For example, it could allow us to keep track of customers and their wishlist items, something we've implemented in the past but struggled to manage. AI could help us recognize when wishlist items are entered into inventory and streamline the process of alerting those customers who want them. We also expect AI to make overtures into bookselling basics like recommendations, but we truly believe that as human booksellers, we will always deliver the best experience in the shop.

Unfortunately, we've already experienced some of the negative consequences of AI in the publishing industry. Bafflingly, we've twice purchased books which we discovered were pirated copies of books mass-produced in India and sold through U.S.-based resellers. We suspect the creation and listing of these books is partially done with AI. They present an ethical and potentially legal problem for us (can we still sell these books?) as well as financial problems (if we cannot sell the books we buy, we have to try to get our shipment refunded or replaced; and we end up purchasing exclusively from more expensive book distributors that are at least reliable).

We approach AI with the goal of building a strong, healthy community, and we believe that human connection is the key. We will continue to bring people together for face-to-face interaction, with in-person events and activities. We will support and promote writers and creatives who do their work themselves, rather than outsourcing to AI. We urge you to take part in your local community, whether that's the bookstore or not. If you have ideas for us, please share them. (We're always looking for people who can lead workshops, classes, kids events, and other fun reading-adjacent activities.)

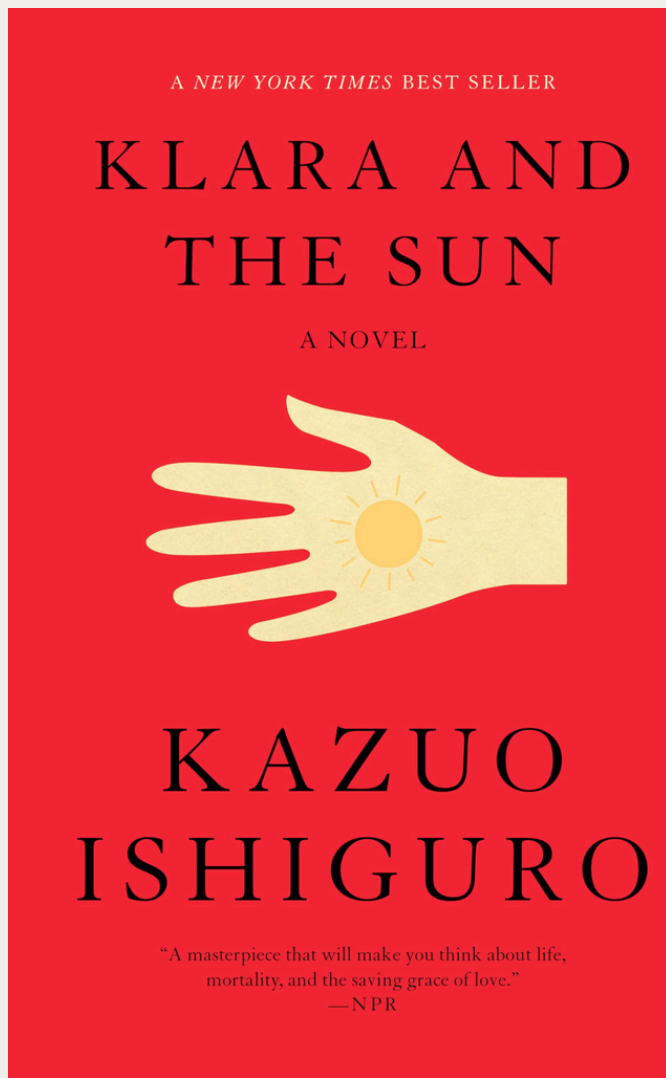
BOOKSTORE EVENTS

## Llamas at Literary Leftovers



At the very end of June, friend of the shop Trent (who placed Lucy with us all those years ago) brought five llamas to the shop—though only one of them was ever inside the shop at one time (llamas are large).

Quite a few people have asked, *Why* llamas at the bookstore? And the answer is simple: being around animals is good for children and adults alike. And we had some books about llamas. If you came out to enjoy this weird and wonderful time, thank you. We hope it was as memorable for you as it was for us. Watch our social pages and website for news of their next visit!



BOOKSELLER'S REVIEW

## *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro

reviewed by Eily McIlvain, bookseller

One of the earliest forms of religion is sun worship. Possibly the most famous example is the ancient Egyptians, but plenty of other cultures did it, too. We have always looked to light for direction. It's natural; the illumination and warmth from the sun makes our existence possible.

In Kazuo Ishiguro's speculative novel, *Klara and the Sun*, Klara is a solar-powered Artificial Friend (AF), a sentient, robotic companion for young children. She watches the sun from the shop where she is being sold. She has amicable relationships with the other AFs and Manager, a benevolent woman who watches over them. But Klara is unusually perceptive and curious for her kind. When she goes to live with a girl of her own in the countryside, she slowly gathers information about the world outside the shop, the world of AFs and humans, which is not exactly our world as we know it today.

Klara, who is powered partially by the sun, develops a personal, almost devotional relationship to it throughout the novel, a take on a robot's version of faith. Which looks very similar to our own. The book is quiet, but surprisingly suspenseful. There is a lot to discuss here about how we as humans live with technology, who we treat as sentient, who and what is above or below the numinous experiences of life and love, and what happens to all of us in the end.

I can't go into much more without ruining the suspense before you've had a fair chance to read it for yourself. This will be best suited for fans of speculative fiction, Japanese literature (though this novel is not in translation, it shares some of the sensibility you often find in translated Japanese literature), and tales of friendship. As robotics and artificial intelligence mature, it is more relevant than ever.

BOOKSELLER'S COLUMN

## Our Stories: AI & Literature

Eily McIlvain, bookseller

AI is an enormous subject, and I have finite space and time to tell you what I think about it, so I have to limit myself to what's most pressing and relevant to where we are, which is a bookshop (and I am a bookseller) so that means: AI and literature.

But first, I want to be certain we all know fundamentally what we're discussing:

AI (artificial intelligence) describes computation that achieves—or mimics—the independent, reasonable thought up to this point in history reserved for humans (and other animals, to an arguably lesser extent). There are different types of AI at work in different fields. *Machine learning* describes an algorithm that can be programmed to learn material, recognize patterns, and make decisions. *Neural network* AI mimics brain structure to recognize images and language input and is typically used in strategy games. *NLP (natural language processing)* is possibly the hottest topic right now. It can interpret and generate human language. It's used in chatbots like ChatGPT. (While AI is maturing, we still do not have sentient AI that truly thinks and feels on its own.)

Spines, a new Florida publishing company, has declared it will release eight thousand books in 2025 using AI. They are the first company of this type I've heard of, though I think we can expect to see more in the future (and there may be some I'm unaware of now), and I know that established publishing houses are also getting curious about how they can leverage AI to 'streamline' book editing and promoting.

I'm already dissatisfied with the editing that books currently receive. As the timeline between conception, drafting, and publication is contracted further and further in order to release more books per year, editing is neglected, and editors are discouraged from getting as deeply involved as they should be. Because I regularly edit, I regularly check editing rules on the internet, and I'm frequently confronted with wrong information via Google's persistent AI Overview feature. I'm not convinced that what publishing, and writers, need is more AI interference in the book industry, and I think enthusiasm for AI in this capacity emphasizes exactly what I would like to see corrected in the industry.

Forbes says that AI can assist with research, editing, and synthesizing information, but recognizes its inaccuracies, derivative nature, and underdevelopments present an increased need for thought leadership and human oversight to prevent misuse and undesirable results like plagiarism. I would like to see the book industry return to its human and creative roots. There is nothing wrong, I suppose, with wanting to sell books. There is nothing wrong with using AI to produce books, and selling them for people to read. But the category of AI-generated and AI-influenced books should be a separate one from human stories. And because as of yet, machines still cannot feel, and do not live, there should be no confusion: good stories come from the hearts and minds of people, and so enter into the hearts and minds of other people. One day, machines may join us. They may have thoughts and feelings like ours, and be our technological friends. Then, who knows what kind of stories and songs and programs of their own they will write. But until then, they should not—cannot—think our thoughts, or write our stories. Only we can do that.

# The Little Reader

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us..."*  
Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

## LETTER FROM THE CHILDREN'S EDITOR

### The AI Dilemma

Corrie Albertson, children's program manager

I was talking to a high school student about an assignment he was working on. It involved making a movie of sorts, and I told him how impressed I was, how I'd never been given homework that fun when I was in school. "Of course not," he replied, "you grew up in the age of paper." I think my jaw dropped. He was right of course: I did grow up in the age of paper. What I couldn't decide was if it was a bad thing or a good thing, a compliment or an insult. I'm still wondering.

Studies have shown that too much screen time isn't good for any of us, yet when it comes to education, it seems to be a tool we're not willing to live without. Every child is issued a Chromebook on the first day of school, and all communication for sports comes through an app called "sportsYou" on their cell phones.

These tools that are meant to connect have created a disconnect among our young people. And now, before we've even resolved the issue of too much screen time for our teenagers (an average of 4-7 hours a day), AI has arrived on the scene. This past school year, my son's teacher taught the class how to use ChatGPT. I was confused: I thought that kids were getting in trouble for having ChatGPT write their papers for them. So why were the teachers showing them how to use it? Turns out it's also a very useful tool for research. But will kids, or grownups for that matter, be able to navigate what is fact and fiction? What skills will fall to the wayside? The pendulum keeps swinging back and forth between the pros and cons. *Is it more helpful than harmful? Do the benefits outweigh the risks?* It really depends on who you talk to.

I heard that AI helped a mother and son diagnose a mystery illness after doctors failed to identify the problem for years. That's a pro. The biggest cons are largely coming from the creatives I know. It's one thing for technology to take over technical tasks, but to have AI take over art, design, and not just technical writing, but creative writing as well, has been a grievous thought. Will AI write the next great novel, or create famous artwork? What does this look like for our kids? How do we find our way forward with healthy balance? Will our kids endeavor to be creative beings if they don't feel like they can compete with a machine? *Is there a way for it to be a helpful tool for the creator without becoming the creator?*

I don't know, I wish I did, but right now seems to be a season of more questions than answers.

The challenge going forward will be to teach our children that being creative and creating isn't just about a perfect end product. There will always be someone or something better out there. It's about the process, about who they are and how they want to relate to those around them. We will be teaching them that they are an original. That there's only one of them in the whole wide world, and what they have to offer, even when messy and imperfect, is valuable.

I'd like to leave you with a portion of this letter written by Kurt Vonnegut.

## CHALLENGES

### The Vonnegut Sestet

"Write a six-line poem, about anything, but rhymed. No fair tennis without a net. Make it as good as you possibly can. But don't tell anybody what you're doing. Don't show it or recite it to anybody, not even your girlfriend or parents or whatever... Tear it up into teeny-weeny pieces, and discard them into widely separated trash receptacles. You will find that you have already been gloriously rewarded for your poem. You have experienced becoming, learned a lot more about what's inside you, and you have made your soul grow."

## CAREER INVESTIGATIONS

### Eily McIlvain, Reporter

Every Tuesday, Miss Corrie leads *Storytime with Corrie* from 11-11:30am, right after *Lego Club*. Once a month, *Storytime* hosts a special guest; a local professional or experienced enthusiast to talk to the children about their work and read a related story. In the past, this has included firefighters, floral designers, pilots, and more. In this issue, we present an interview with April's special guest and familiar bookseller, Eily McIlvain, a writer for *Greet: Battle Ground & Hockinson*, interviewed by Leo Patriquin, age 12.

#### What made you become a reporter?

I like to go out and find out about things for myself.

#### How did you start your job as a reporter?

When the magazine *Greet* found out that I was a writer, they asked me to write for them.

#### What type of things did you report on?

All kinds of things! Occupational therapy, recovery groups and dog rescues. The dog rescue was the article I'm most proud of.

#### What is your favorite part of being a reporter?

The actual writing, talking to people, having a story worth telling.

#### What's the hardest part of being a reporter?

The word count.

#### What kind of skills come in handy?

People skills, and of course writing skills.

#### Suggestions for young people who want to pursue this career?

Yes! You should read a lot, both fiction and nonfiction, and practice writing a lot.

*It was fun reporting on a reporter and learning more about her career!*

Leo Patriquin, 12

## YOUNG READER'S NOTES



*Spy x Family*  
written by Tatsuya Endo

*Spy x Family* is Griffin's (age 9) favorite book.

He likes it because it's like anime. He gives this book 5 stars and highly recommends it. He likes to read because it's fun!

## CHILDREN'S EVENTS

### Junior Summer Book Club

There's still time if you'd like to join our summer book club for ages 8-12. We just finished reading *Island of the Blue Dolphins* for the month of June, but are looking forward to reading *The World According to Humphrey* in July and *My Side of the Mountain* in August. There are still some books available for purchase in the store, but you are welcome to bring your own copy. As usual, all our kids clubs are free to the community, but we'd appreciate it if you'd sign up on our website so that we can be best prepared. We meet for about 30 minutes to discuss the book, eat snacks, and do some kind of book-adjacent activity (coloring, word search, etc.).

#### Thursday, July 17th at 3:00:

*The World According to Humphrey* by Betty G. Birney

#### Thursday, August 24th at 3:00:

*My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George

## CHILDREN'S EVENTS

### Summer Reading

Kids & adults! Come into the store to pick up your Summer Reading log. For every 10 books you read, you can earn prizes (for adults, we have a special bookmark and Lucy sticker). You still have July and August to participate!

## Schedule

#### LEGO CLUB

at 10am Tuesdays & 4pm Thursdays.

#### STORYTIME WITH CORRIE

at 11am Tuesdays, right after *Lego Club*.

#### SUMMER READING

starts June 1 and ends August 30

#### SUMMER J.V. BOOK CLUB

at 3-3:30pm Thursday, July 17  
at 3-3:30pm Thursday, August 21

*All children's programs are free.*

## Upcoming

#### BOTTLED BOOK CLUB at EMANAR CELLARS

July 10, 6pm, \$5  
August 14, 6pm, \$5

#### OVERSTACKED BOOK CLUB

July 24, 6pm at the shop, \$5  
August 28, 6pm at the shop, \$5

#### LOCAL AUTHOR PANEL

August 21, 6pm at the shop, FREE

## Accepting submissions!

Tues.-Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-5  
813 W. Main St. #105, Battle Ground, WA.  
IG: @literary.leftovers  
literaryleftoversusedbooks@gmail.com  
thereaderatliteraryleftovers@gmail.com

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