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Science Fiction and the Sun: The Question of Anthropocentrism in Wells, Tarkovsky and Ishiguro

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Abstract

The underlying concern under consideration throughout this dissertation, is the question of our place in nature. Given the overwhelming scope of this topic, I have narrowed my focus down to an analysis of anthropocentrism: the assumption of human superiority and dominion over all other natural forms. In literature and film, Science-Fiction (SF) is an effective genre to appeal to for this purpose. Despite creating fictional worlds, SF has a great propensity to unveil truths about our own. The three SF storytellers in question – Wells, Tarkovsky and Ishiguro – demonstrate an especially astute awareness of this, as each of their SF works are complex, nuanced artefacts: offering a privileged insight into the zeitgeist of the moment in history in which they were produced.

The recurring motif which binds the chosen works together, is the sun. In each case, the sun represents an overseeing force, symbolic of nature, which responds to the anthropocentric endeavours of humankind. This relationship lies at the heart of my research question: how the sun can be employed in SF as an organizing principle to renegotiate the question of anthropocentrism. While uncovering the role of the sun, this dissertation will also serve to expose the broader repercussions of anthropocentrism – not only for nature, but for the human condition itself. Despite featuring prominently in SF, the sun’s role as an organizing principle has been largely overlooked by the secondary literature, as all chosen works are yet to be analysed in this context. With each of the works in question, I will carry out a semiotic analysis of how the sun operates as an organizing principle to centre the human - bringing in the relevant ontological/theoretical frameworks where necessary, to underpin my argument.
Acknowledgements

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References to the following terms are made using the abbreviations below:

AI: Artificial Intelligence
PIE: Proto-Indo-European
SF: Science-Fiction
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Our Sun is a second- or third-generation star. All of the rocky and metallic material we stand on, the iron in our blood, the calcium in our teeth, the carbon in our genes were produced billions of years ago in the interior of a red giant star. We are made of star-stuff (Sagan 2000, 190).

Introduction: The Sun and the Human

One of the defining conditions of the 21st century lies in our arduous struggles against the effects of global warming. Accordingly, today’s geological epoch been defined in terms of the ‘Anthropocene’: the era of human-induced climate change which, for many of us, has cast a looming shadow over the future (Edwards 2015). In recent times, the effects of the Anthropocene have become increasingly embedded in our collective consciousness, with the proliferation of heatwaves and the energy crisis dominating public discourse in the past months. The dichotomous force at play, in this progressively dystopian world, is the sun: heating the atmosphere while providing a vital source of solar energy with which the effects of global warming can be curtailed. Importantly, the Anthropocene has exposed our own role in the climate crisis, proving that human interference with nature can activate and amplify the detrimental side of the sun’s power. This relationship indicates that the sun is ultimately the focal point around which all our concerns and efforts in the Anthropocene revolve.

The emergence of the sun as a ‘centre’ is by no means a new discovery, unique to our own volatile modern times. While being a fundamental figure of worship across ancient civilizations, from the Ancient Greeks to the Mayans, the heliocentric model of the universe, in astronomy, gained momentous traction during the Enlightenment. The epistemic linchpin around which Enlightenment centred their ideas, was the espousal of reason and rationality (Bristow 2017). While Renaissance humanism arguably laid the foundations of this framework, it is a model which can largely be attributed to Cartesian Dualism: the proposed
solution to the ‘mind-body problem’ which posits that the human mind\(^1\) and the physical world exist as separate substances. Descartes argues that the former is gifted with the ability to exercise control over the latter via rationality, logic and reason (Robinson 2003). To solve (or, arguably, evade) the problem of free will, Descartes claims that the faculty of free will is divinely infused, enabling humankind to exercise a God-like power over the otherwise mechanical ‘automata’ of the physical world (Descartes 1989, 103). The privileging of human attributes accommodated the intensification of scientific enquiry, which gathered pace during this period. The field of astronomy was especially subject to scrutiny: following widespread resistance from the Roman Catholic Church, the Ptolemaic model of geocentrism, fixing earth at the centre of the universe, was eventually replaced by Copernicus’ heliocentrism (Erickson 2010, 5). Heliocentrism is a model in which the sun is understood as the star around which earth revolves. Crucially, this paradigm shift, which positions a non-human entity (the sun) at the centre of the universe, has not translated into a decentred view of humankind’s place in nature (as one may intuitively assume it should). Instead, the movement away from the geocentric model has accommodated the persistence of inward movement – namely, towards the human form. While the sun has usurped the place of the earth as the cosmological centre of the universe, the heliocentric model does not stretch into other epistemic fields: the ontological centre remains the human, standing on a pedestal above earth and all things in nature. Hence, the continuation of a distinctly western belief system which we can identify as anthropocentrism: the view that humans are the most ontologically significant beings on earth, superior to all other forms in nature (or in the universe).

In its most fundamental form, anthropocentrism is a concept of boundaries - stemming from the ‘dualistic thinking’ which separates subject and object, as implied by the Cartesian account (Plumwood 2002, 45). The Greek root *anthrōpos*, meaning human, was originally defined by considering what was deemed not human. In Ancient Greece, Thales of Miletus condensed the position as follows: ‘There are three things for which I am grateful for to destiny: being born a man, not a beast, male rather than female and a Greek, not a barbarian’ (Sassi 2001, 34). The two latter points are especially striking as they invoke

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\(^1\) An immaterial unchanging component – a soul, essence or self.
criteria which builds boundaries between humans themselves (male/females and Greeks/barbarians). Therefore, the etymology hints that there is a tendency to define humankind in terms of an ‘us vs. them’ dichotomy. In other words, human identity is established by examining what it is not: it is created in virtue of its difference/dissimilarity to the Other². Importantly, the Other, as indicated by Thales, is susceptible to including humankind itself. Therefore, it can be of no surprise that the same ‘dualistic thinking’ which informs anthropocentrism has also been identified as informing colonialism and other forms of discrimination against human identities. Today, posthumanism claims to offer a new ontological framework with which the ‘dualistic thinking’ of anthropocentrism can be curtailed. It is a position which removes the human condition from the dualistic shackles to which it has been tied: proposing that the scope of ‘human’ can stretch beyond our traditional understanding, guiding us towards a post-anthropocentric vision of the world (Bolter 2016, 1). However, seeing as anthropocentrism has become entrenched in the human condition, the posthuman perspective proves challenging to adopt. In light of these considerations, it is evident that anthropocentrism is not limited to a human vs. non-human/nature basis, but also can encompass a human vs. (post)human dichotomy. This will be reflected throughout the course of this study.

Primarily, this dissertation will seek to re-introduce the sun, via SF literature and film, as an organizing principle with which anthropocentrism can be renegotiated. In all three works in question, the sun will operate as a symbol of nature – illustrating how it responds to anthropocentric activity.

SF gives us the tools to imagine scenarios which can operate as thought experiments – bringing into focus different aspects and frailties associated with the human condition. Suvin (1979, 62) argues that SF is defined by what he calls ‘cognitive estrangement’, that is, the ‘factual reporting of fictions’, which creates a dissonance between the world familiar to us and the fictive world imagined in the SF story. Crucial to achieving this sense of cognitive estrangement, in Suvin’s view, is the presence of a new device or technology, a ‘novum’,

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² This sense of human exceptionalism in which anthrōpos is rooted, directly informs anthropocentric thought. While the two terms may be largely synonymous, one might argue that there is a subtle structural difference: that human exceptionalism understands the human as unique and above all other things, whereas anthropocentrism places the human at the centre of all things.
which invites the reader to view his or her world in a new way (62). These terms will be employed in each chapter as analytical tools, to help us navigate the SF landscape which each work evokes. The three works in question are as follows:

1. H.G. Wells: *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896)
2. Andrei Tarkovsky: *Solaris* (1972)

In *Moreau* and *Solaris*, the role of the sun as an organizing principle, symbolic of nature, has been largely overlooked, and the subject is yet to be extensively explored in *Klara*, given its recent publication. Despite their contrasting styles, all three works tread on common thematic ground as questions concerning human identity and the repercussions of scientific progress are ubiquitously evoked.

*Moreau* presents the perils attached to unmediated science in a post-Darwinian context where the lines between human and non-human have been blurred. In this chapter, anthropocentrism will be the identified as the driving force behind the novella. However, while the scientist, Moreau, may appear to be fixed at the centre of events, this chapter will seek to unearth the role of the sun as a divine figure – challenging Moreau’s anthropocentrism and, in the process, interrogating western colonial exploits. Ultimately, as I will consider, the sun acts as a decentring device: exposing the futility of anthropocentrism in the face of nature’s overwhelming motions.

*Solaris* conveys how the drive for knowledge and scientific progress involves a sense of movement. Traditionally, it is understood as a movement from the past into the future – however, this chapter will explore how Tarkovsky presents this movement in terms of a colonial departure away from home, where the sun is ascribed the role of a colonial goal towards which these endeavours are focussed. I will consider how instead of attaining metaphorical ‘enlightenment’, the sun, as symbolized by Solaris, creates confusion: exemplifying how earth alienation is inextricably attached to space expansionism. In addition to this, the point will be made that the departure from home seen in *Solaris*, can also be understood in terms of environmental decline. In both these senses of ‘departure’,
the role of the sun will be delineated: as a heliotrope towards which anthropocentric endeavours are directed, and as a visual symbol of the natural world.

*Klara* re-examines the question of anthropocentrism through the lens of an AI, invokes the posthuman perspective. This chapter will outline how the sun’s role as a divine figure resurfaces in a world beset with loneliness amidst its technological innovation. Instead of being a vengeful figure, in this context the sun will be characterized as a principle of worship and reconciliation: shedding light on the values of adopting a post-anthropocentric ontology, where humankind is reunited with non-human forms and nature as a whole. In this regard, the underlying interdependence which lines the fabric of the natural order will become clear – challenging anthropocentrism in favour of a coalesced account of our place in nature.
1. Moreau and the Sun: Decentring the Human in The Island of Doctor Moreau

The events of Moreau unfold from the point of view of a castaway, Edward Prendick, who finds himself stranded on a sequestered island in the Pacific. Soon Prendick realises that all is not as it seems: the island is a biological station where animals are subject to gruesome experiments by a scientist named Doctor Moreau. Narrating in the first-person, Prendick describes how he witnesses Moreau carry out cruel surgical procedures: vivisecting animals into resembling human beings, in a desperate attempt seize control over natural order. However, Moreau’s success with these experiments is short-lived. The chimerical animal-human hybrids, the ‘beast folk’, end up regressing into their bestial nature, resulting in Moreau’s demise and the destruction of his island settlement. Prendick, having fallen victim to Moreau’s experiments himself, returns to Britain, and attempts to readjust to society in a not-quite-human state.

1.1 The Post-Darwinian Context

Moreau was written in the wake of widespread epistemic confusion, primarily induced by breakthroughs in evolutionary biology. On the Origin of Species (1859) famously put forth Darwin’s discovery that humans are not only related, but directly descended from animals – a suggestion which saw science parting ways from religious authority, as Christian deontology and other divine command theories were coming under growing scrutiny. In a post-Darwinian world where humankind is identified as the result of natural selection, God was, for many, no longer trusted as a rule-maker. However, it was not only the status of religious authority which became subject to re-investigation, but also the broader question of our place in nature. The understanding of humankind as the ‘pinnacle of creation’ was starting to shift, as Darwin’s work encouraged the public to consider the human condition in relation to other animals (Linett 2020, 31). The ontological bedrock which underpinned the traditional conception of the human form, was revealing itself to be more unstable than
previously assumed. In *Moreau*, SF is the platform through which Wells sheds light on this breakdown of conventional thought: emblematic of what Suvin refers to as the ‘destructive newness’ of the era (1979, 208).

1.2  **Wells, SF and the ‘Uplift’**

Today, Wells is revered (alongside Jules Verne) as the ‘the father’ of SF (Roberts 2000, 48). A decisive factor in this, is that Wells was well-versed in science – having studied biology in London under Darwin’s protégé T.H. Huxley, who he saw as mentor. Darwin was, in this sense, Wells’ academic grandfather and the influence that biology, zoology and the late-Victorian debates in bioethics, carry over his works is plain to see – not only in *Moreau* but also in his other scientific romances such as *The Time Machine* (1895). Because of this scientific background, Wells has been identified as the first author to ‘write SF from within the world of science, and not merely facing it’ (Suvin 1979, 220). Having outlined that Wells was well-equipped to apply the SF genre, let us consider the techniques he employs to achieve this in *Moreau*.

*Moreau* is an ‘island novel’: that is, a sub-genre which uses isolated settings to make broader points about society and the human condition as whole (Jones 2017, 7). For Suvin, the island setting compliments the SF genre: ‘an island in the far-off ocean is the paradigm of the aesthetically most satisfying goal of the SF voyage’ (Suvin 1972, 373). However, it is ultimately the presence of a novum – and the cognitive estrangement which ensues – which firmly fixes *Moreau* in the category of SF. Tying in to Suvin’s definition of SF as the ‘factual reporting of fictions’ (1979, 62), Conrad dubbed Wells the ‘realist of the fantastic’ (Beck 2016, 164); immediately implying that Wells’ SF tales are infused with this all-important element of cognitive estrangement. The novum is crucial to this: it is ‘so central and significant that it determines the whole narrative logic—or at least the overriding narrative logic’ (Suvin 1979, 70). The novum of the novella is Moreau’s ‘humanising process’ (Wells 2005, 169) – the vivisections and technical procedures he carries out on his subjects. This is first appearance of a SF trope known as the ‘uplift’, which occurs when a being is enhanced into a higher-level being by means of biological interference (Booker 2014, 311). Moreau attempts to uplift the animals into rational humans. In *Klara*, as we will later consider, the
uplift re-emerges as human intelligence is enhanced through gene technology. In any case, the uplift involves a direct exploitation of nature’s propensity for change, adaptation and metamorphosis. Moreau strives to condense evolution into a technical procedure, which is allegedly able to fast-forward the lengthy process of natural selection. Seeing as this technology is fictional, Moreau’s uplift procedures can be identified as the novum of the novella: they are the means to creating the cognitive estrangement which confirms that the narrative is taking place in a SF world.

1.3 A Divine Conflict

Wells described Moreau as a ‘theological grotesque’ (Beauchamp 1979, 408), which immediately gives rise to the narrative of the scientist playing God. Until Darwin’s breakthroughs, ideologies situating the human at the centre of the universe had long been commonplace in western theology. In the Book of Genesis, humankind is presented as possessing divine dominion over the natural world: ‘Let us make man to Our image and likeness; Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, all the cattle, and all the earth, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth’ (Genesis 1:26-28). This indicates that Christianity – in its fundamental structure – involves a deification (or divinization) of the human form, to create a ‘human divine form’ (Roob 2021, 430). It is a pattern which is encapsulated in one of the defining Christian tenets, namely that of God as being conceived in the Holy Trinity – as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For our interests, the decisive point lies in the suggestion that God exists within the Son, the person of Christ, who represents ‘the unity of the divine and human natures’ (Koslowsky 2001, 65). The gnostic doctrines of Hermes Trismegistus elaborate on this idea, specifying that humankind was gifted with God’s omnipotence³ (Roob 2021, 430), which results in a framework where the human condition is elevated above all other things. This conception of a human divine form informs anthropocentric belief: it creates a structure where the human is not only exceptional and superior to the rest of the world, but also at the centre.

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³ A point which Descartes seems to revisit when claiming that free will is divinely infused, allowing humankind to exercise control (or dominion) over the physical world.
Moreau employs this conceit as a license to play the role of a divine creator: conducting vivisections on animals to uplift them towards the human form. The result is a community of subservient human/animal hybrids, the ‘beast folk’ who represent the revised post-Darwinian conception of the human condition – they are ‘a counterpart of ourselves, semi bestial humans’ (Suvin 1979, 214). The beast folk are forced to follow ‘The Law’: a set of deontological rules, comparable to the 10 Commandments, which are imposed to maintain the uplifted state of the beast folk in the social sphere. This is achieved through conditioning, as they are forced to repeat the Law in a ‘rhythmic fervour’ in what seems like a disturbing reconception of religious mass (Wells 2005, 154). In a striking scene, Prendick watches as they chant:

Not to go on all-fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to suck up Drink; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to eat Fish or Flesh; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to claw the Bark of Trees; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to chase other Men; that is the Law. Are we not Men? (154).

The pseudo-liturgy is facilitated by the Sayer of the Law who plays a ‘messenger of God’ role. If the Law is disobeyed, the offender is brought to the so-called ‘House of Pain’, which is Moreau’s equivalent of the hell dimension in Christianity. Prendick describes how the chanting continues, venerating Moreau and his omnipotence: ‘His is the House of Pain. His is the Hand that makes. His is the Hand that wounds. His is the Hand that heals’ (155). Prendick notes Moreau seems to have infected those around him with a ‘kind of deification of himself’ (155). Wells’ description of the novel as a ‘theological grotesque’ sounds increasingly apt in light of these events. The parallels with Christianity indicate that Wells is not only re-examining the status of religious authority amidst the ‘destructive newness’ of the post-Darwinian world but is also interrogating the consequences attached to equating scientists (or, more broadly, humans) with God figures. Importantly, Moreau is not the only seemingly divine form under consideration, as the presence of another overseeing force is felt, casting its eye across the events of the novella: namely, the sun.
The sun is one of the oldest symbols of divinity, spanning across almost all different cultures and civilizations. In Ancient Greece, for example, it was believed that the sun god, *Helios*, had the power to drive a chariot across the sky, creating day and night. The Mayans, as I will consider in Chapter 3, later understood the sun as a figure of worship – a sun god to whom they made sacrifices. Eventually the spiritual veneration of the sun filtered into astronomy, as Copernicus’ heliocentric model placed the sun at the ‘centre of all things’: bestowing it the title of the ‘ruler of the universe’ (Roob 2021, 59).

Bearing this in mind, let us consider where the Sun is situated vis-à-vis Moreau. Wells repeatedly indicates that Moreau, avoids exposure to the sun. The looming apparition of Moreau’s ‘white face’ (Wells 2005, 159, 224) is repeatedly emphasized by Prendick over the course of his tale: ‘blotting this out appeared the face of old Moreau, white and terrible’ (138). White is the only tone in which Moreau’s appearance is described, as Prendick observes his ‘white dexterous-looking fingers’ and his ‘white hair’ (174). Even Moreau’s assistant, Montgomery, has a ‘white face’ (79). In addition to this, the white aesthetic is very prominent in the general descriptions of the landscape. Prendick describes how ‘the colour vanished from the world’ after the sunset (34), indicating that it is the presence of the sun which brings colour to his surroundings and the natural world⁴. Given his pale, bare-faced appearance, it is evident that Moreau strives to separate himself from the force of the sun. He even goes so far to present his so-called “intellectual” research as being devoid of colour: ‘You cannot imagine the strange colourless delight of these intellectual desires!’ (Wells 2005, 183). Seeing as it is not only his appearance, but also his methodology which is ‘colourless’, it is evident that Moreau strives to exist independently of the sun, as he attempts to assert his dominion over natural order.

These observations point us towards the suggestion that Moreau and the sun are two divine forces, locked in conflict against one another. Moreau’s avoidance of sunlight is a motif which has long been associated with human deities. In Japan, for example, the spiritual emperor Mikado was worshipped as a god, with a decree from the year 646 naming the emperor as the incarnate ‘god who governs the universe’ (Frazer 1993, 168). An early account of his life, states that ‘the sun and moon were not even permitted to shine upon his

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⁴ A suggestion which will be revisited in Chapter 2 when considering environmental decline in *Solaris*. 
head’ (169), indicating that conceptions of a human divine form are rivalled by the sun. Therefore, Copernicus’ ‘ruler of the universe’ is Moreau’s divine nemesis, creating a scenario where humankind is pitted against nature. Therefore, this conflict allows us to reassess anthropocentrism: with Moreau representing the dominion of humankind, and the Sun representing the dominion of nature. Let us consider how, in his efforts to gain the upper hand, Moreau’s actions reveal the extensive repercussions of anthropocentrism.

1.4 The Horrors of Anthropocentrism: Bioethics and Colonialism

Anthropocentrism lines the very fabric of Moreau’s broader understanding of our place in nature. Humankind, in Moreau’s view, is the zenith of nature. His position reflects pre-Darwinian dogmas about the perfection of the human form, which were prevalent in Renaissance humanism. In *De Occulta Philosophia* (1531), Nettesheim re-examines Hermeticism, with particular emphasis on the idea that the human form is God’s ‘sublime masterpiece’, explaining that ‘man as the most beautiful and perfect work of God has a (...) more harmonic and bodily structure than other creatures’⁵ (Roob 2021, 431). Moreau’s project attempts to propel these ideologies into the future by applying them in the context his scientific endeavours⁶. When attempting to justify his fixation on vivisecting animals into the human form he explains: ‘I suppose there is something in the human form that appeals to the artistic turn of mind more powerfully than any animal shape can’ (Wells 2005, 179).

Moreau is intoxicated with the idea that the human form is the apex of evolution; that it is the form towards which all non-human animals are striving, and that this evolutionary perfection has an ‘artistic’ quality to it, which he seeks to re-create. In this understanding, it is specifically the physical appearance of the human which is given a privileged status.

Therefore, it can be argued that the same anthropocentric principles which are witnessed in the conception of a human divine form, are also present in efforts to humanize

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⁵ As famously seen in Da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man* (1490).
⁶ As observed by Jones (2017, 23), Moreau subscribes to the ‘outmoded’ Lamarckian understanding of evolution: that acquired human characteristics can be passed down from generation to generation, which further facilitates his belief that he can control natural order.
non-human forms. This was recognized in 5th BCE by Xenophanes in a *reductio ad absurdum* argument which criticised the humanized representation of Ancient Greek gods:

But if horses or oxen or lions had hands
or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, horses
would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and the oxen as
similar to oxen, and they would make the bodies of the sort which each of
them had. (Xenophanes 2001, 89)

Xenophanes’ argument reveals how anthropomorphized depictions of gods are the product of our poetic license to understand the universe in distinctly human terms. Therefore, whether it is divine attributes being applied to the human form, or human attributes being applied to divine forms, the underlying principle at play is, arguably, the same: namely anthropocentrism, whereby the human form is placed in a privileged position in the face of nature. While the Ancient Greeks may have (perhaps unwittingly) expressed their veneration of the human form through their anthropomorphized Gods, in Moreau’s case, this fixation is communicated through his vivisections and other uplift procedures. The decisive difference is that while the former is merely a case of artistic representation, the latter involves the suffering of a real-life subject. This brings us to the bioethical subtext of *Moreau*, which is symptomatic of the debates concerning vivisections which were widespread in Britain the time (Baker 2008).

In order to recreate the human form, Moreau’s uplift procedures involve inflicting extensive amounts of pain on animals. Prendick presses Moreau to explain how he can possibly justify using this cruel and unethical methodology, to which Moreau dismissively retorts that it is the human ability to act without taking pain into account that elevates humans above all animals. He explains to Prendick:

‘So long as visible or audible pain turns you sick; so long as your own pains
drive you; so long as pain underlies your propositions about sin, -- so long, I
tell you, you are an animal, thinking a little less obscurely what an animal
feels’ (Wells 2005, 180).

Moreau attempts to substantiate his position by cutting his own thigh, showing no evident disposition of being in pain. By demonstrating that certain parts of the body do not
contain nerve endings, Moreau believes he has proven that pain is indeed nothing but a needless thing’ which will be ‘ground out of existence’ as humans evolve to find more advanced ways of taking care of their welfare (181). By conceiving of pain as a hinderance which animals cannot overcome on their own, Moreau feels that it is a necessary component of his project – justifying, in his mind, the suffering he causes his subjects.

In view of this, Suvin’s assertion that Moreau is an ‘indifferent creator’ (1979, 134), becomes increasingly clear: he drunk on his own scientific abilities and consequently devoid of any bioethical concerns. Berlin’s twofold conception of liberty is helpful in this context: Moreau’s positive liberty (freedom to do) overrides any concerns about the negative liberty (freedom from interference) of nature (1959). Moreau’s tunnel vision is reminiscent of the 19th century French physiologist Claude Bernard, who claimed that a ‘man of science... no longer hears the cries of animals’ (1957, 255). In similar vein, Moreau attempts to further justify his lack of empathy by claiming that the brutality of natural selection requires the field science to be an equally brutal endeavour: ‘To this day I have never troubled about the ethics of the matter. The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorse-less as Nature. I have gone on, not heeding anything but the question I was pursuing’ (Wells 2005, 183). Moreau commits Hume’s ‘is-ought’ fallacy (Hume 1772, 469-470): claiming that because nature is remorseless, this is how the study of nature ought to be. It is the same fallacy which underpins Social Darwinism, that is, the dangerous political ideology claiming that the ‘survival of the fittest’ dynamics of natural selection should be applied in the social sphere (Halliday 1971). Hence, Social Darwinism has been appealed to by imperial regimes such as the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in the 20th century as means of justifying their eugenics policies and other despotic ends.

With Wells’ portrayal of the ethically corrupt scientist see flickers of the Victorian gothic horror genre, as Moreau represents not only a ‘demonically inverted God of Genesis’, but also a ‘latter-day Dr. Frankenstein’ (Suvin 1979, 214), hellbent on asserting dominion over nature. Both Moreau and Frankenstein are neglectful of the suffering that their experiments cause to their subjects. This is due to the belief that their ability to interfere

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7 This indicates that Moreau subscribes to what Wells terms “excelsior biology”: science which follows a linear view of human progress (Wells 1891, 7). This is an outlook which Wells considers to be misguided, as we will unpack later.
8 This pattern will re-emerge in the context of Klara via transhumanism.
with nature (or specifically, in the case of Frankenstein, to reanimate it) takes centre stage above all other considerations (Booker 2014, 311). In this context, progress remains progress regardless of how it is attained. Moreau’s distinct lack of empathy can be understood as ‘inhuman’ – a further characteristic which bears testimony to his delusions of divine grandeur and transcendence. The repercussions of his anthropocentrism are widespread: for the animal kingdom they can be understood in terms of speciesism.

Singer defines speciesism as the prejudice in favour of ‘one’s own species and against those of members of other species’ (Singer 1995, 6). It is a position which was anticipated by Nietzsche: ‘If, however, we and the gnat could understand each other, we should learn that even the gnat swims through the air with the same pathos and feels within itself the flying center of the world’ (1992, 59). Nietzsche employs this image in his attack against human rationality (which will be revisited in Chapter 3), however his comparison also brings into light that the dualistic thinking which begets anthropocentrism extends to speciesism: in both cases, a prioritization of the self over the Other is occurring. Wells chronicles how Moreau’s anthropocentrism rapidly manifests itself into speciesism, as he strives to ‘burn out all the animal’ to the point where he creates ‘rational creature’ instead of a ‘mockery of a rational life’ (Wells 2005, 189). Wells’ novella, in this regard, delivers an urgent warning regarding the necessity of bioethics to regulate scientific progress and animal testing.

However, Wells’ interests with Moreau stretch beyond the bioethical sphere. Derrida understands speciesism in human terms: arguing that we hide the exploitation of animals in the same industrial and mechanized way witnessed in human genocides (2008, 25-26). It is a comparison which brings us to the colonial subtext which permeates the novella. Speciesism, in its fundamental structure, has been understood a vestige of colonialism (Belcourt 2014). Moreau shows how both issues in question are rooted in anthropocentrism, as the conflated ontology of the beast folk, who ‘occupy the threshold between categories of animal and human’ allow Wells to explore ‘the horrors of anthropocentrism for both animal subjects and colonial subjects’ (Hudson 2013, 211). Anthropocentrism enforces the idea humans possess all the qualities that animals are
lacking. In addition to this, all the qualities that anthropocentrism denies to animals are also ‘all the qualities that colonialism denied to certain groups of humans to reinforce their association with animals’ (211). This explains why the Eurocentric principles which governed colonial exploits became ‘so closely aligned [with anthropocentrism] that they were almost inseparable’ (Plumwood 2002, 5). Both ideologies, like speciesism, induce a prioritization of the self over the Other. In this post-colonial reading, Moreau represents the white Western imperial powers invading foreign shores, with the uplift procedures designating the relentless enforcement of Christianity on indigenous populations. Through this subtext, Moreau reveals how the ‘dualistic thinking’ on which anthropocentrism is built has remanifested itself not only in the treatment of animals, but also in the treatment of colonial subjects⁹. Thales’ definition of ‘human’ in virtue of the Other (the ‘barbarians’) resurfaces in this context: In Moreau the ‘barbarians’ are the beast folk who are referred to, in similar terms, as ‘brutes’: a designation which resurfaces in Heart of Darkness (1899), most memorably with Kurtz’s rallying cry ‘exterminate all the brutes!’ (2000, 62), as Conrad explicitly presents the horrors of colonial exploits. This drive to construct and exploit the Other, with regards to human identities, can be traced back to our ancestors.

In 2021, a cave painting in Indonesia depicting wild boar was labelled the world’s oldest known human artwork, dating back 45,000 years (Cascone 2021). It is telling that the portrayal of animals takes precedence over the human form in cave art, as it suggests that our early ancestors had a decentred view of their place in nature; where distinctly non-human forms were of greater interest than the self. However, with regards to species who resemble the human form, the ‘competition’ aspect of natural selection emerges. Harari appears to follow this line of thinking, when he suggests that the extinction of the Neanderthals took place at the hands of Homo Sapiens 40,000 years ago because they were ‘too familiar to ignore, but too different to tolerate’ (2014, 20). Any sense of kinship proved unhelpful in repressing the inclination to construct and exploit the Other. If anything, kinship contributed to this inclination, activating the ‘struggle for existence’ (Beer 2008, 48) of natural selection, which is ‘most severe between individuals and varieties of the same species’ (49). The tendency to create an Other with humanlike beings will be reconsidered in

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⁹ Wells revisits the colonial theme in The War of the Worlds (1897), via the premise of extra-terrestrial invasion: imagining a scenario where all humans become colonial subjects.
Chapter 3, in the futuristic context of humanized AI technology. Today, humankind is the only surviving *homo* species, yet the drive to construct the Other has persisted: as witnessed not only in colonial exploits, but also in the discrimination of minority groups we still witness in society today.

It is worth noting that this post-colonial reading of *Moreau* accommodates the interpretation of the sun as a rival to Moreau. A significant stumbling block to colonial endeavours in the past, have been the weather conditions – the sun and its heat. It is a factor which is highlighted by Roger Casement’s colonial reports. His *Amazon Journal* is especially insightful in this context: ‘Today an afternoon of fearful heat’ (Casement 1997, 368), and later ‘the heat lasted all night. It was really atrocious – not a breath of air’ (483). In *Moreau*, Prendick describes the difficulty of the conditions in similar terms: outlining how sun became ‘pitiless’ (Wells 2005, 61) and how, on a later occasion, he ‘staggered on in spite of infinite fatigue and the dense heat of the tropical afternoon’ (215-216). The sun is depicted as a physical obstacle to colonial exploits – standing in the way of Moreau and his anthropocentric endeavours, with its ‘slumberous’ (116) and ‘blinding’ (166) heat. Having outlined the repercussions of anthropocentrism, as presented in *Moreau*, let us broach the question of whether Moreau succeeds in his wrath against the sun.

### 1.5 Moreau’s Demise in the Sun: Retrogression and Entropy

Wells reveals the horrors of anthropocentrism not only for the animals and colonial subjects, but ultimately for the perpetrator himself. This becomes apparent when the beast folk to abandon the law – an eventuality which is foreshadowed throughout, as the beast folk seem to oscillate between human and non-human behaviour and are labelled as no more than ‘mere grotesque travesties of men’ (Wells 2005, 65). Ultimately the dissolution of social order and religious authority results in Moreau’s death – a scene which reminds us of

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10 Casement’s harrowing account of the brutal treatment endured by the indigenous population in the Congo Free State under King Leopold II were an instrumental source for Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (in addition to Conrad’s own experiences).

11 A typically inhuman trait, which is shared by Moreau – underpinning the suggestion that Moreau and the sun in conflict.
Nietzsche’s iconic ‘God is dead’ (2012, 90) line, which is typically used to communicate the view that since the Enlightenment, the concept of a divine creator has become obsolete. The possible repercussions of the Enlightenment will be outlined in further detailing the following chapter. The important point, for our current interests, is that Moreau’s death concludes his conflict with the sun:

He was dead; and even as he died a line of white heat, the limb of the sun, rose eastward beyond the projection of the bay, splashing its radiance across the sky and turning the dark sea into a weltering tumult of dazzling light. It fell like a glory upon his death-shrunken face (Wells 2005, 248).

Wells juxtaposes the rising sun with Moreau’s death, which stresses the futility of anthropocentrism in the face natural conditions. The scene of Moreau’s demise shows how it is ultimately the sun who is the indifferent creator – continuing with its overwhelming motions regardless of human affairs. Even earlier, Prendick describes the indifference of the sun (and nature) with his own plight: ‘in spite of the brilliant sunlight and the green fans of the trees waving in the soothing sea-breeze, the world was a confusion’ (Wells 2005, 116). Prendick later admits how he his behaviour gradually starts to reflect the tumult of his immediate environment: ‘I suppose everything in existence takes its colour from the average hue of our surroundings’ (68). Prendick’s remark communicates the point that the human condition remains inexorably subject to the conditions which nature order imposes, with Moreau being no exception. Following Moreau’s demise, Prendick makes a last-ditch attempt to enforce the Law: “For a time you will not see him. He is - there”, I pointed upward, “where he can watch you. You cannot see him, but he can see you. Fear the Law!” (85). Prendick’s efforts to reinstate religious authority are in vain, and the beast-folk begin to fully revert to their non-human state, which reinforces the suggestion that Moreau’s project has failed.

The degeneration of the beast folk reflects a post-Darwinian anxiety which was prevalent in 1890’s Britain, namely that of ‘zoological retrogression’: the fear that the apparent perfection of the human form may be lost in the future (Parrinder 1995, 58). In an earlier essay, Wells dismissed any utopian interpretations of evolutionary biology as being the mere result of ‘excelsior biology’ (1891, 7), that is, science which follows an ill-advised
linear view of progress. With this position, Wells argues that the next step in the evolutionary chain is not guaranteed to take us forward, as reflected in *Moreau*, which has thus been labelled\(^\text{12}\) as an example of the ‘literature of degeneration’: literature which contradicts the optimistic Victorian image of scientific progress (Gagnier 2008, 64).

The underlying condition at play in the degeneration narrative is entropy (MacDuffie 2014, 234). Entropy refers to the collapse of any closed system into disorder where death is the state of ultimate disorder – a culmination of the continual increase towards the state of maximum entropy (Hershey & Lee 1987). Moreau ends up faced with the reality that he too is ultimately at the mercy of entropy, as his previously large, looming face lies ‘death-shrunken’ in the sun. It was implicit from the outset that Moreau was never, despite his best efforts, immune to natural conditions. The etymology of ‘Moreau’ pertains to the Moors and other people with ‘dark complexions’ (Dionne 1914, 449). This immediately hints that, despite his white appearance, Moreau is ultimately dark-skinned: that he is no different to the beast folk who are, for the most part, described as black or brown (Parrinder 2005, 37). Moreau’s white, barefaced appearance is a veneer, foreshadowing the denouement which reveals that despite his semblance of immunity, Moreau is bound up in the effects of the sun: that he is ultimately a mere mortal figure whose physical existence is also subject to entropy.

The all-encompassing reach of entropy is further accentuated by the zoological retrogression of Moreau’s subjects and the destruction of his settlement. Even Prendick feels the entropic force of nature: describing on two occasions how he is weakened by the sun ‘beating down’ on his head (Wells 2005, 98, 255). While humankind may use anthropocentrism to declare dominion over nature and take a stand against entropy, the effects of entropic decline are viscous and cannot be escaped: In other words ‘We can’t jump out of the universe’ (2013, 17). If anything, Wells indicates that anthropocentrism accelerates the effects of entropic decline, as Moreau’s interference with natural order is shown as the catalyst behind his own demise, and the destruction of his settlement. It is a pattern which still resonates today in the context of the climate crisis, as argued by Washington et al (2021), who analyse the wider effects of anthropocentrism – arguing that

\(^{12}\) Alongside *The Time Machine* (1897)
it is a stance which ‘encourages us to live unsustainably’ (292) and, in this way, is accelerating our extinction. Therefore, anthropocentrism (in its privileging of the human condition) seems to be, somewhat ironically, acting as a life-denying force: contributing to our own demise.

In the final chapter, Prendick sets sail and escapes. The appearance of the island fades in the sunset and night-time falls, indicating that we are reaching the end of Prendick’s tale: ‘The daylight, the trailing glory of the sun, went streaming out of the sky, was drawn aside like some luminous curtain’ (Wells 2005, 110). Having overseen the return to natural order on the island, the sun recedes from the novella. Though understated, the sun’s role as an organising principle has become clear: it has de-centred the human and reallocated dominion to nature. The novella comes to a close with Prendick returning to Britain where he develops an interest in astronomy: finding ‘a sense of infinite peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven’ (110). Given his experiences of what humans are capable of, it seems that Prendick is more at ease looking up into the sky – away from earth and towards the stars.
2. Leaving Home for Enlightenment: Space Expansionism and Environmental Decline in *Solaris*

*Solaris* (1972) concerns a psychologist, Kelvin, who is sent to a decades-old space station to report on strange events which are besetting the crew, as they orbit a planet named ‘Solaris’. The planet is seemingly sentient: appearing create rational activity, much to the confusion of all involved in the mission. Kelvin’s job is to evaluate whether the study of this planet should continue. From the moment he arrives on the space station, Kelvin’s efforts to learn about Solaris have profoundly unsettling psychological effects, which he learns that the crew have also been subject to. These effects are caused by apparitions which Solaris beams into the space station: reincarnated simulations, sourced from the memories of the crew. In Kelvin’s case, he is visited by his late wife, Hari, who upon accepting that she can replace the ‘real’ Hari, commits suicide. The film culminates in Kelvin returning to his dacha – only for the audience to learn that he has, in fact, ended up on Solaris’ surface.

2.1 The Soviet Context

Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (1972) was filmed at a time when a whirlwind of ideologies concerning space travel were sweeping across the Soviet Union. The prospect of colonizing outer space, known as space expansionism, gained traction during ‘space race’ of the Cold War, when the US and the Soviet Union locked horns in efforts gain the technological edge over each other. Despite the US claiming victory with their moon landing, the Soviet Union made significant strides of its own, as the spacecraft *Venara 7* became first human-made object to land on another planet when it reached Venus in 1970 – being also the first spacecraft to transmit data back to earth from another planet (Siddiqi 2018, 3). It was an event which showcased the highly sophisticated nature of communist technology, as the
Soviet Union was making strides towards turning the dream of interplanetary travel into reality. The prospect of space expansionism had previously been imagined in Klushantsev’s soviet film *The Moon* (1965), which evokes a utopian future where the moon is colonised thanks to advances in technology made possible under communism. A memorable line from the film reads: ‘We had made it to the stars and there was no bearded old God there. Only Science. Only the Soviet System!’ (Klushantsev 1965) which, in addition to foretelling the events of *Solaris*, conveys the extent to which cosmic ideologies were filling the void left by religion, in what was otherwise a staunchly atheist state. Therefore, it can be said that space expansionism (or, more broadly, science) held soteriological value: it was viewed as the Soviet means to salvation.

Meanwhile, widespread industrialization was taking place. The Stalinist development of ‘mono towns’ - cities or towns which are dominated by one industry – played an instrumental role in this phenomenon (Aron 2009). USSR communist policies prioritized the intensification of industrial production in the monotowns over any potential ecological or environmental concerns. Ultimately these policies have left a legacy of widespread environmental degradation, as post-industrial landscapes began to take shape across Soviet Russia’s monotowns. Post-industrial landscapes are sites with severely damaged ecosystems, where the soil and topography of the environment has been so severely impacted that there are often no remnants of the previous ecosystem to be seen (Allison 2012, 174).

These events are reflected in *Solaris*, as Tarkovksy offers an astute commentary on the world he saw around him: ‘Tarkovsky in *Solaris* is clearly talking about our life, today’ (Hyman 1976, 54). This chapter will explore how this is the case. SF once again proves to be a well-equipped genre to tackle the pressing real-world questions which, as seen in *Moreau*, come to light during a period of rapid change and scientific progress.

### 2.2 Tarkovsky and Lem: Varying Approaches to SF

*Solaris* is an adaption of Lem’s eponymous 1961 novel. However, much to Lem’s disapproval, Tarkovsky’s screenplay contained aspects which did not reflect the novel (Skakov 2012, 81). The differences between the two works reveal varying approaches to
how SF can be employed. Lem makes it clear from the outset that we are dealing with a space-travel story unfolding far away from earth and the SF element is therefore immediately obvious to the reader: ‘The beginning of Lem’s Solaris immediately informs the reader that he or she is entering the realm of science fiction’ (2012, 75). In this way, Lem immediately envelops his readers into the cognitive estrangement of the SF genre. Tarkovsky, on the other hand, takes a more measured approach: gradually inviting his audience into the cognitive estrangement of the film, with a 40-minute prologue set on earth where we are introduced to the protagonist, Kris, visiting his parents in their dacha (81) - a scene which is revisited in the film’s closing scenes, as will later be considered. Despite unfolding at a much slower pace, Solaris bears similarity to Moreau insofar as the cognitive estrangement of the SF setting is not apparent from the outset. The lengthy scene of Berton driving along the motorway, represents the transition into outer space, as Tarkovsky ensures that his audience are initially given a sense of familiarity with scenes on Earth, before enveloping them in the world of outer space where all is not as it seems. Again, the novum takes centre stage in creating the feeling of cognitive estrangement.

Tarkovsky, accused SF of lacking in emotional depth: focusing excessively on the ornamental side of technology13 (Gianvito 2006, 36); in other words, prioritizing the appearance of the novum ahead of exploring its subversive effects. In Solaris the novum is the eponymous planet, which plays a twofold role: it does not only reflect Tarkovsky’s ‘collective context’ (Suvin 1979, 84), but it also literally reflects the lives of his characters within the fiction, as it creates apparitions from their memories. The novum in Solaris is does not involve uplift technology as seen in Moreau – although one might argue that by converting memories into human apparitions, a form of uplift is taking place. The trope is further alluded to, when Kelvin tries to teach the apparition of Hari how to be human. In addition to this, Solaris (the novum) represents the Other of the film. Traditionally SF portrays the Other as a threat to human existence, especially via the encounter with an alien form. However, Solaris marks a turn in this tradition where the Other is not presented as a physical threat, but rather as a reflection of both the characters in the fiction. Therefore, Solaris’ role is one of introspection: it acts a mirror, of sorts, allowing the characters in the fiction to reflect on their lives, and while revealing the effects of

13 A critique which Tarkovsky famously directed at Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey
anthropocentrism. It has been suggested (Skakov 2012, 78) that Tarkovsky understands anthropocentrism as inevitability of the human condition: that despite our best efforts, we are destined to view the universe through our distinctly human lens. However, by presenting the devastating effects of anthropocentric endeavours, it can be argued that Tarkovsky’s own position is informed by humanism: he has an overriding concern for human welfare in a context where anthropocentrism displaces humanity from its home. Before considering how this plays out in terms of space expansionism and environmental decline, it is important to unpack Tarkovsky’s broader point of interest: namely that of the Enlightenment.

### 2.3 Enlightenment, the Sun and Confusion

Bleeckere (2012, 483) explains how in Solaris, Tarkovsky critiques the ‘radical immanence’ of modern secularisation, triggered by the Enlightenment – arguing how it is ‘built the foundation of the aggressive murder of any transcendent Being’. This reminds us of Moreau, who succumbed to the beast folk in what resembled a Nietzschean ‘death of God’. In the context of Moreau, it was the guise of a human divine form, which was identified as informing his anthropocentric principles – thus, when Moreau was decentred, religious belief was also implicitly being denounced. In Solaris, Tarkovsky examines what happens next: investigating the potential repercussions of the Enlightenment-era prioritization of science over religion. The sun provides the apt metaphor through which Tarkovsky’s SF critique of the Enlightenment takes shape.

Solaris is a seemingly tangible planetary rendering of the sun, existing within the reach of human space travel. Its existence as a solar entity is immediately implied by the name ‘Solaris’, as observed by Reeh-Peters (2021, 84): ‘the Latin word solaris means ‘of the sun’ and although covered by a fluid and waterlike surface Solaris is the planet of light’ (Fig. 1). However, as the film develops, it becomes clear that Solaris is not the planet of physical sunlight - instead it is the planet of metaphorical enlightenment.
Derrida argues that light is the metaphor through which knowledge truth can become apparent to human consciousness, and thus around which all metaphysics is constituted. This light is conceived in terms of the sun: ‘The very opposition of appearing and disappearing, (...) of day and night, of the visible and invisible of the present and the absent – all this is only possible only under the sun’ (Derrida 1982, 251). The metaphor from which the Enlightenment stems, as outlined by Derrida, is that of the sun – to fill with knowledge was aligned to shedding light on the dark or clarifying the obscure. Thus, Derrida argues that ‘metaphor means heliotrope, movement towards the sun and the turning movement of the sun’ (251). Metaphor, therefore, functions by means of heliotropic movement (or a heliotropism). However, Tarkovsky, reimagines the role of the heliotrope. Rather than being a source of enlightenment, the beams of Solaris are blinding – they cause confusion, and general existential distress for Kelvin and the crew.

The oldest and perhaps most widely-recognized appearance of the heliotrope in western philosophy, is Plato’s ‘Allegory of the Cave’ in the Republic (2007, 514a–520a), which proves to be a helpful source in this context. Broadly, Plato’s argument is that when perceive phenomena, we are like prisoners inside a cave: only able to see shadows on the wall, which are imperfect imitations from the realm of forms, where the true essences of all things reside. While Plato’s allegory is typically used to illustrate the human relationship to
The world of forms, an especially relevant aspect of it, for our current interests, is found in the moment when a prisoner escapes. When he departs the cave, he is momentarily blinded by the light: seeing as he is accustomed to the shadows and darkness of the cave (which, in terms of Solaris, is Kelvin’s home), adapting to the light of the forms is not a straightforward task and results in confusion (Sheppard 2009, 117). This warns us of the potential perils attached to the search for enlightenment (or knowledge of the forms)¹⁴.

By presenting the effects of the sun in terms of confusion instead of knowledge, Tarkovsky critiques not only the Enlightenment, but also makes a broader point about the repercussions of scientific progress. In the wake of Darwin’s transformative breakthroughs, 20th century paradigm shifts in science continued to cause widespread epistemic confusion, as conventions of the past were coming under ever-growing scrutiny. Incidentally, our understanding of time is a useful example to appeal to in this context, as it invokes the role of the sun. One of the many implications of Einstein’s theory of general relativity, is that time is malleable; that time passes differently according to the observer’s frame of reference, as the perception of time can change in accordance with distance from the sun. In this understanding, the sun becomes instrumental in defining local human temporal systems. In a universe where a single quantity of time ‘melts’ into numerous different timeframes (Rovelli 2018, 15), The sun is attributed the role of timekeeper.

Dali famously explores this relationship through surrealism in The Persistence of Memory (1931), where clocks are shown melting under the heat of the sun. By painting familiar objects in an unfamiliar state, Dali communicates how breakthroughs in science can breakdown our conventional understanding of the world: the more we investigate reality (or become ‘enlightened’) the more surreal it reveals itself to be. For Dali, the sun is the catalyst which sparks this shift from real to surreal – a role which it retains in Solaris. The repercussions of this transition from real to surreal are detailed in Solaris, as the cosmonauts are haunted by apparitions of their memories which are projected into the space station. The beams of Solaris ‘melt’ the crew’s perception of time, blending past and present in a breakdown of conventional reality which puts human psychology under increasing duress.

¹⁴ Morton (2021, 75) compares the prisoner’s bout of blindness upon leaving Plato’s cave to the sensation of leaving a cinema during daylight hours – something which the audiences of Solaris may well have experienced upon its original release.
Kelvin is especially subject to the disorientating effects of Solaris, as suggested by his name (referring to the temperature scale) and his recurrent sweating. This is further emphasized by the apparition of Hari, who is beamed into the space station, making Kelvin confront his past and reconsider his understanding of the human condition. Indeed, Bleeckere (2012) argues that more than merely displaying the disoriented nature of the ‘enlightened’ secular world, Tarkovsky invites his audience to reconsider what it means to be human (482). While the Enlightenment largely undermined suggestions about the existence of a transcendent being, Solaris shows how the same methodology which was triumphed during this period, namely that of rationality and science now contributes to the suggestion that the human condition itself may be something transcendent and unfixed – an idea which is embodied by the posthuman figure of Hari. By beaming the apparition of Hari into the space station, the sun (Solaris) animates the posthuman form, eliciting the suggestion that other non-human forms may share the same ontological significance as us\textsuperscript{15}.

Importantly the effects of Solaris are only realized on the space station: the further the human condition ventures away from home, the more its psychological welfare is endangered. Thus, in terms of anthropocentrism, Solaris shines a light not only on adverse effects of the relentless quest for ‘enlightenment’, but also on the difficulties of leaving home. This departure from home brings us back to the collective context of Tarkovsky’s time: namely, space expansionism and environmental decline, which can both be understood as long-term corollaries of Enlightenment thought.

2.4 Leaving Home I: Space Expansionism

Today, the soteriological side of space expansionism, previously considered in the Soviet context, has resurfaced: the suggestion of humans becoming ‘interplanetary’ species is touted as the future means of salvation, allowing us to escape from the ecological crisis which, as recently warned by Hawking, may be our only way to evade extinction (Kalvapalle 2017). In addition to salvation narrative, space expansionism reinstates the motif of

\textsuperscript{15} This pattern re-emerges throughout Klara in the context of modern technology, where the sun animates solar-powered AI, who represent the posthuman form. In both Solaris and Klara, the sun sheds light on the idea that the human form may stretch beyond its biological constraints – a suggestion which will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.
colonialism, as space travel is symptomatic of the anthropocentric drive for the stature of humankind in the universe to be aggrandized. With Solaris, Tarkovsky gives an account of how space expansionism is much more complex in practice than it appears in theory – not because the technology is not yet in place, but rather because the human condition is unable to adapt in accordance with the speed of scientific progress and remains ontologically rooted to the earth.

Tarkovsky uses the premise of space expansionism to explore whether humanity can be salvaged when displaced into ‘inhumane conditions’ (Gianvito 2006, 168). Through the prologue, a point of contrast is created where humanity is situated in two separate environments: at home, and away from home. Tarkovsky emphasizes how humanity clings to its earthly roots when displaced, explaining the predicament as follows: ‘the people in the space station have only to solve one problem: how to remain human’ (42). From the moment Kelvin arrives in the space station, it appears that the crew have been grappling with this very issue. The space station is presented in a disheveled state, with items haphazardly strewn all over. Immediately, this indicates how humanity has become ensnared by the effects of excessive indulgence in its own positive liberty: they struggle to keep up with the rapid pace of scientific and technological innovation. The objects in the space station, show how humanity clings to earth. Tarkovsky includes numerous cultural objects such as Persian figurines, Greek marble statues, globes, collections of beetles - mirroring the presentation of Kelvin’s house in the prologue, which is shown decorated with numerous small objects and ornaments pertaining to classical human culture (Reeh-Peters 2021, 21). This correlation bears testimony to Tarkovsky’s attention to ensure that the earth is not forgotten amidst the cognitive estrangement of this SF setting. Moreover, it indicates that space expansionism is loaded with pervasive difficulties for human psychology which, amidst the descent into confusion, is drawn back to home. This is symptomatic of a phenomenon which Arendt (2019, 2) identifies as ‘earth alienation’.

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16 As opposed to Lem, who describes the space station as a highly instrumental environment: ‘filled with atmosphere suits, laboratory smocks, insulated aprons, underclothing, boots for planetary exploration, and aluminum cylinders’ (Lem 2007, 2).
Instead of aggrandizing humankind, Arendt (2019, 2) argues that space expansionism results in a ‘loss of stature’, and that this occurs because ‘the earth is the very quintessence of the human condition’. In other words, to be human is to be of the earth – and if this is lost, the result is earth alienation, which can be understood as form of homesickness where human psychology turns inward as a result of its departure from home. Specifically, Arendt understands the cause of earth alienation is being rooted in the transition into artificiality: that life in outer space or on another planet ‘would imply that man would have to live under man-made conditions, radically different from those the earth offers him’ (10). *Solaris* chronicles this process of earth alienation, presenting Kelvin in his tranquil dacha before throwing him into the existential turmoil of life in outer space. Instead of finding enlightenment, the crew members are consumed by their own memories. It is a fate which is anticipated by Dr. Snaut: ‘We don’t know what to do with other worlds. We need a mirror. We’re struggling to make contact, but never find it’ (Tarkovsky 1972). In similar terms, Arendt (2006, 89) explains: ‘the modern age, with its growing earth alienation, has led to a situation where man, wherever he goes, encounters only himself’. In *Solaris* this culminates to the point where it appears that Kelvin has returned home which, as revealed by the ending, is ultimately a mirage.

The sun (Solaris) is instrumental in triggering the departure from home. As illustrated by Plato, heliotropic movement can make us disorientated. *Solaris* explains how this does not only apply to the search for metaphorical enlightenment, but also to the concept of space expansionism. When Kelvin contemplates human suffering, he asks: ‘Is that which is indispensable to life also harmful to it?’ (Tarkovsky, 1972). In *Solaris* this is precisely how the sun, as a heliotrope, operates: it has the propensity to create and sustain life, yet Solaris shows how it can endanger humanity by drawing it away from earth. In addition to knowledge and metaphor, physical life itself is infused with an inherent movement towards the sun: a heliotropic movement (or heliotropism). Space expansionism can thus be attributed as the actualization of this *a priori* desire to move towards the sun; the sun draws human endeavors towards it, much like plant life (for the most part) grows in its direction. However, if the heliotropism draws us away from earth, as witnessed with space expansionism, we become confused and endangered – comparable to how moths become agitated when drawn to the light, or the melting of Icarus’ wings when he flew too close to
the sun. In this way, the sun not only interrogates concept of ‘enlightenment’ and space expansionism, as Tarkovsky arguably intends, but also questions the broader premise of colonial expansion, as it did in *Moreau*. *Solaris* is a colonial goal: an allure which they strive towards. The anthropocentric drive for grandeur creates the vehicle (spaceship) through which the movement can occur. By displacing the human, the sun acts as a decentring device: outlining the frailty of the human condition when home is removed. In *Solaris*, however, it is not the physical effects of the sun that are emphasized\(^{17}\), as considered in Moreau, but rather its psychological effects – bringing the crew members face-to-face with their own past. Thus, where in *Moreau* the presence of the sun decentred the human in a physical sense (with Moreau’s demise), in *Solaris* the symbol of the sun decentres the human by shedding light on the psychological repercussions of anthropocentric endeavors.

The ending ultimately reveals that home cannot be retrieved: that it is not only humanity that suffers when separated from home, but also home itself. The Greek for home, *oikos*, is the etymological root of ‘ecology’ (*OED* 2022), which concerns not only the earth as a whole planet, but also its comprising parts – its ecosystems, biodiversity and natural life. We can understand Kelvin’s departure from home as sharing this twofold connotation, with ‘home’ representing not only planet earth, but also the natural world. This brings us to the representation of environmental decline seen in *Solaris*.

### 2.5 Leaving Home II: Environmental Decline

As we have established, the earth can be regarded as an inextricable component of the human condition. Tarkovsky, however, takes this idea a step further: that it is not only the earth itself, but also the natural world, to which the human condition is unwaveringly attached. The same colonial tendencies which inform space expansionism have governed much of humanity’s endeavours in the Anthropocene. In both cases, a transition from natural conditions to ‘man-made’ conditions occurs, where nature (which represents, in its broadest sense, the universe) is a colonial subject. Therefore, it is of no surprise that the exhaustion of the natural world has gone hand-in-hand with the colonial endeavours of the past. Already by the mid-18th century geographers and naturalists, such as Von Humboldt,

\(^{17}\) Although Kelvin does seem exhausted – almost constantly sweating in the space station.
were citing a plethora of examples to attest to how colonialism was changing local climates via its engagement in extensive deforestation and intensive agriculture (Grove 1997, 11). Cecil Rhodes’ endeavours in South Africa are a glaring example of this correlation, as he explains the two governing conceits of colonialism: ‘We must find new lands from which we can easily obtain raw materials and at the same time exploit the cheap slave labour that is available from the natives of the colonies’ (Ponting 2011, 197). In Moreau, the latter was considered: how the treatment of the beast folk represent the abuses endured indigenous populations under colonial rule. Solaris allows us to explore the former: how the natural world is also subject to colonisation. In this case, the departure from home – the natural world – is invoked through environmental decline.

The natural world is a vital component of Tarkovsky’s filmmaking: ‘Often we remove nature from films because it seems useless. We exclude it thinking we are the real protagonists. But we are not the protagonists because we are dependent on nature’ (Gianvito 2006, 48). This is a very important quote, because it is indicative of Tarkovsky’s wider project in Solaris: to decentre the human and outline how the actual centre, ‘the protagonist’, is nature (the sun/Solaris). The effects of Solaris on Kelvin and the crew are Tarkovsky means of achieving this. Importantly, Tarkovsky does not only illustrate how humankind suffers as a result of thinking they are the centre (or ‘the protagonist’), but he also evokes how nature itself is subject to decline: emphasising that both deteriorations go hand-in-hand. Let us discuss this correlation in further detail.

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 2. ‘Hunters in the Snow’ in Solaris.
Solaris revisits the theme, previously considered in Moreau, of natural conditions exercising dominion over human affairs. Amongst the several tokens of culture in the space station, are paintings by the “Old Masters”, including Brueghel’s *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565), which is extensively shown during the levitation scene. Brueghel depicts a grey landscape where hunters and their dogs are confronted by a world which is locked in wintery conditions (Fig. 2). *Hunters* was painted during the Little Ice Age: a period spanning from early 14th century to the mid 19th century which saw bitterly cold winters envelop Europe and North America (Fagan 2019). Brueghel captures the harsh life of a world where the sun has seemingly disappeared, foreshadowing Tarkovsky’s ending, which will be discussed shortly. The inclusion of Brueghel’s painting in the space station serves as a reminder that humanity is physically at the mercy of the natural conditions. Crucially, this physical dependence stretches into the ontological and psychological spheres.

From the outset, Tarkovsky creates an interwoven connection between Kelvin and the natural world. The beauty of the his dacha home is conveyed with rich green tones, illuminated by sunlight and complimented by water, foreshadowing Solaris’ watery surface. The opening shot shows reeds swaying in the ripples of a stream which slowly pans to Kelvin, standing among rushes. Kelvin is presented as ontologically aligned with the landscape he inhabits, as he appears “intimately associated with the sights and sounds of nature” (Johnson & Petrie 1992, 104), such as the pond, the trees, the sounds of the cuckoo and the amplified buzzing of insects. This connection is further emphasized when Kelvin is drenched in a sudden downpour of rain. It becomes clear that Kelvin leaves a part of himself behind when he departs into outer space – not only the earth but also the natural world. Crucially, the ending indicates that this part of Kelvin is ultimately lost and cannot be retrieved.

*Fig. 3. Kelvin ‘returns’ to his father (Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg).*

*Fig. 4. The Return of the Prodigal Son. 1669.*

(Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg).
The final scene shows Kelvin returning home, only for the audience to realise that he has ended up on Solaris’ surface. Kelvin falls to his knees and is left in the arms of his father – a pose which, as noted by Bird (2008, 121), is a homage to Rembrandt’s *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (1669) (See Fig. 3 & 4). This parable tells the story of a son who is granted a wealthy inheritance by his father. Instead of using it virtuously, the son leaves home and squanders his fortune with indulgence and ‘reckless living’ (Luke 15:11-32). Despite his behaviour, his father welcomes his son back home. If we apply this parable to *Solaris*, there is one major difference: the son, Kelvin, has not *truly* returned home. Instead, through his actions, he has found something which he equates with home, but which is ultimately nothing more than an imperfect simulation. Tarkovsky’s retelling of the parable has strong ecological undertones: the natural world is the fortune bequeathed to the son, and his squandering of it represents is humanity’s exhaustion of the environment to fulfil anthropocentric ends. Importantly, the ending tells us that there is no way back from environmental collapse: that while God may be forgiving, this is a characteristic which nature does not possess. Ultimately, Kelvin is left in an environment which, at first glance, may resemble ‘home’ but in truth is an imperfect replica, infused with a sense of the uncanny: a feeling of ‘not-being-at-home’.

Fig. 5. Kelvin in the natural world.
The contrasting imagery seen in the opening and final scenes, strongly contribute to evoking this transition to the uncanny. Mirroring the opening, reeds are shown swaying in the water. However, on this occasion they are decaying: their movement in the water appears slow and laboured, where previously they were teeming with life. The camera cuts abruptly to Kelvin, who is no longer standing in the rushes, as seen before – an alteration which detaches him from his surroundings. He is shown walking across the same landscape we saw in the opening (Fig.5 & 6). However, on this occasion his surroundings appear cold and barren, without the sounds of nature and with leafless trees (Fig. 7) reminiscent of the wiry branches seen in Hunters. The unsettling atmosphere is augmented by the progressively reverbed, droning organ-synth rendition of Bach’s chorale prelude ‘I Call to You, Lord Jesus Christ’, which was previously heard in its conventional style in the opening credits. The final chord is played as Kelvin sees his house (Fig.7), which he walks towards with his dog. Looking in the window, he sees his father nonchalantly going about his day-to-day affairs. However, something is very amiss: it is raining inside the house, with hot steam rising from where the rain pours. The surrealism of this scene sets up the end reveal that Kelvin is now on the surface of Solaris. The contrast between the opening and the ending, indicate that within this symmetrical structure, a transition has taken place – that the natural world is no longer present, and that Kelvin is now left to reorientate himself on an imperfect simulation of his home. This illustrates how the anthropocentric drive for to
colonize nature contributes to environmental decline. In addition to this, it shows how earth alienation can manifest itself without space travel: that the environmental decline of the Anthropocene is leaving us with the plight of salvaging our own humanity amidst the detritus of what we once knew as ‘home’.

Fig. 7. Solaris’ recreated Dacha

Again, the sun plays an effective role in this departure from home: on this occasion, evoking the transition away from the natural world as a visual symbol of the natural world. In the opening scenes, the sun shines on the landscape, embellishing nature in a luminous plethora of colour (Fig. 5). At the end, when this setting is revisited and it becomes clear that the climate conditions have changed, as the landscape is now enveloped with wintery hues (Fig. 6 & 7). The sun is absent, despite Kelvin finding himself on the solar ‘planet of light’. Berton indicates this eventuality early on, when he recalls that he ‘couldn’t see the sun on the surface of Solaris’ (Tarkovsky 1972). Where at the beginning the sunlight and colours were prominent, the landscape of Solaris is colourless: the dacha appears desolate with thickly grey tones dominating the sky, which establishes the overall aesthetic (Fig. 6 & 7). Moreover, this suggests that Kelvin has removed himself entirely from the nature; reminding us of Moreau’s attempts to do the same, as epitomised by his pale, colourless face. However, in Moreau, Wells describes how the sun continues to shine, unfazed by human affairs, whereas in the closing scene of Solaris the sun has disappeared: there is not even the ‘glow of red fog in its direction’ (Tarkovsky 1972) which Berton previously reported to have seen when he was on Solaris’ surface (Fig. 1). This tells us that since Kelvin’s
departure, the natural world has completely disintegrated: Solaris is ultimately devoid of natural life\textsuperscript{18}.

\textit{Fig. 8. The Mists of Solaris.}

\textit{Fig. 9. Aerial View of Smog in New Delhi (Quadri, 2017).}

The cold, grey appearance of Solaris’s dacha evokes the departure from the natural world has taken place during the Anthropocene. The fog and mists are especially effective in

\textsuperscript{18} The lifelessness of the setting is reinforced by the absence of the horse, which featured in several scenes throughout the opening prologue. Horses are included frequently in Tarkovsky’s films: he explains that ‘the horse symbolizes life’ (Gianvito 2006, 25).
this regard – resonating with the pollution of the earth’s atmosphere which has accelerate
depth effects of global warming. Even in the prologue, dense fog is seen rising from the
landscape: indicating that within this Eden-like setting, environmental decline is already
taking place. The aesthetic still resonates today, as the thickly grey and misty skies of
Solaris’s atmosphere (Fig. 8) resemble the smog which envelops heavily industrialized
regions (Fig. 9) as a result of the intensified burning of fossil fuels which has relentlessly
continued since the Industrial Revolution. In both cases the landscape is grey and devoid of
colour, as the sunlight has been obscured and nature, as a result, is no longer present. It is a
striking aesthetic, which reveals that it is not only the human condition which finds itself
endangered by anthropocentric endeavours, but also the natural world.
3. Re-deifying the Sun in a Posthuman World: Technology and Reconciliation in *Klara and the Sun*

In *Klara*, Ishiguro imagines future where technology has developed to a point where it is become a fundamental part of everyday life. It is a society which is dependent on AI, known as ‘AFs’: solar-powered artificial friends. The story is narrated in the first-person through the lens of Klara, an AF who recounts her life from her days spent in the shop window to her time spent with a family looking after a young girl, Josie. With Josie, we learn of a breakthrough in biotechnology which has occurred: that children from privileged families can be ‘lifted’, in order to enhance academic performance. As a result of the procedure, Josie becomes ill and it becomes apparent that Klara’s role is, ultimately, to absorb information about Josie’s identity – so that when she dies, the data can be transferred into another AF which is modelled on Josie’s appearance. Klara’s worship of the sun is underscored throughout her narrative – demonstrating a unique faith which extends to the point where she performs tasks to appease the sun, believing that Josie, as a result, will be cured. In what seems like a miracle, Josie subsequently recovers from her illness. Klara spends her last days in a scrap yard looking through her memories, as she experiences her ‘slow fade’: the planned obsolescence of the AFs.

3.1 Today’s Context

*Klara* is a meditation on where the proliferation of technology, which has taken place over the past century, may lead in the future – exploring the ontological questions which may ensue as a result. It has been a period where technology has developed at an almost unfathomable place to the point where today it is difficult to imagine our lives without its assistance. AI has made especially momentous strides with the development of deep learning and artificial neural networks which enable technology to imitate the way in the
human brain gains knowledge (Buckner 2019). Today, AI has long surpassed the renowned Turing Test: the ‘imitation game’ which has long been regarded as the benchmark in determining artificial intelligence. It has even developed to the point where it can compose music and write poetry; skills we traditionally associate as unique to human identity (Schober 2022, 151). The question of whether AI can ‘feel’ is also entering the picture, as Google employee was recently put on extended leave for claiming that a ‘chatbot’ he programmed was sentient and had developed emotions (Luscombe 2022). Indeed, AI is making the human condition subject to re-investigation: In the same vein of Wells’ time, traditional accounts of the human occupying a privileged place in nature are, once again, coming under siege.

A helpful way of delineating the key aspects of this debate is by appealing to philosophy of mind: specifically, the tension between ontological monism and dualism. Ontological monism states that in reality there is only one substance (Schaffer 2007). This corresponds with Spinoza’s concept of a ‘monistic universe’ which Braidotti (2013) defines as the view that ‘matter, the world and humans are not dualistic entities structured according to principles of internal or external opposition’ (560). If it is indeed ‘dualistic thinking’ which informs anthropocentrism, as argued by Plumwood (2002, 5), then de-centring the human involves a concession that structuring the world in terms of dualistic internal/external opposition, as per Cartesian Dualism, is a fictitious and misguided framework. This is known as the ‘posthuman turn’: the extension of focus from human agency to include non-human forms, as a means of curtailing anthropocentrism (Zolkos 2017). Let us consider in further detail what the acceptance of ontological monism may entail for the human condition.

Physicalism is an offshoot of ontological monism – proposing that the only substance existing in reality is physical, where all mental phenomena are ultimately physical phenomena (Schaffer 2007). It is a position which been challenged is through ‘qualia’: the suggestion that there are raw feelings of what it is like to experience something which cannot be traced through the scientific observation of physical details (Tye 1997). Although there is no connection between qualia and an immaterial soul as standalone concepts they tread on similar ground, insofar as they both indicate that there is a part of the human condition which is immune to scientific observation. Physicalism thus implies that both concepts are misguided. This is the main struggle that the society in Klara is struggling to
accept – that there is no inaccessible part of the human condition. Ryle conveys this issue by arguing that the human condition has been haunted by the belief that there is a ‘ghost in the machine’ (2009, 73). Ryle uses this analogy to expose how Cartesian Dualism is inherently misguided because there is no part of the mind, such as a soul or a ‘ghost’, existing independently of the physical human brain (or, in the case of Klara, independently of her programming).

3.2 Ishiguro’s SF Vision of the Future

In *Klara*, Ishiguro imagines a future which is slowly trying to come to terms with this suggestion. Josie’s father ponders the issue at-hand which besets this world: whether there is ‘something that makes each of us special and individual’ such as the ‘human heart’ (Ishiguro 2021, 255). This is a fundamental question which runs through the course of the story. The first-person narrative is a vital part of the novel, as it provides the point of view through which this question is explored. By imagining the world through Klara’s lens, Ishiguro immediately attempts to distance himself from the anthropocentric perspective and view the world from the point of view of the Other which, from the point of view of the humans in the novel, are the AFs. Despite appearing objective, we must remember that Klara too has been programmed – she views her world in a particular way, which is ultimately a reflection of her own subjectivity, and therefore may be an ‘unreliable narrator’. Writers in the past have explored the non-human perspective, via first-person narratives which unfold from the point of view of animals. However, to channel the consciousness of an AF – a posthuman entity who occupies the middle ground where human and non-human meet – creates an insightful means of reassessing where human identity stands in this imagined future.

The futuristic and dystopian atmosphere which Ishiguro creates is far more overt in *Klara* than it is *Moreau* or *Solaris*, where the novums are employed in (seemingly) present-day settings. There are two key novums which Ishiguro appeals to in order to create cognitive estrangement: namely, the existence of AFs (and other conscious AI) and the

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19 Referring to the Cartesian substance of an immaterial mind (self, soul or essence).
20 As seen in *Flush* (1933) by Virginia Wolf.
biotechnology which allows the genetic ‘lifting’ of children to take place. The former invokes the question of posthumanism: the AFs challenge the idea that a human person is limited to the biological constraints of its *homo sapien* form. Klara’s first-person narration therefore contributes to the feeling of cognitive estrangement, as it is clear from the outset that the story is taking place from an unfamiliar, posthuman point of view. The latter concerns ‘transhumanism’ – that the plasticity of the human form allows for amalgamations with technology.

Transhumanism suggests, like posthumanism, that humankind is not confined to its biological structure. Even non-human forms may be altered, as recently demonstrated by xenotransplantation: a procedure where animal organs are modified, or ‘uplifted’, for human use; an eventuality which Wells seems to anticipate in *Moreau*. Indeed, with the ‘lifted’ children, Ishiguro re-examines the uplift trope which we considered in *Moreau* and, to a lesser extent, in *Solaris*. In these two works, it was the case of a non-human (or other-than-human) form being uplifted into a human whereas in *Klara*. Ishiguro, on the other hand, imagines how biotechnology may be appealed to in order to augment academic performance. This can be viewed as a modern retelling of the obsession with eugenics which ensued the wake of evolutionary biology (Yakushko 2019, 2), as reflected in *Moreau*. Today, transhumanism is increasingly touted with companies such as Neurolink exploring the suggest of neural implants which could allegedly not only cure brain disease but also lead to augmented intelligence (Coelho 2021, 34). Therefore, it is evident that Ishiguro is not imagining an entirely distant SF dystopia – despite being the most futuristic of the three works, Ishiguro’s SF narrative is also reflecting on present-day questions (and questions of the past) regarding the potential repercussions of unmediated science. Where in *Solaris* the posthuman question is posed through the apparition of Hari, Ishiguro uses modern technology to ground the subject: exploring the very real question of whether the human condition can be recreated or enhanced by technology.

These questions are explored is a world in which humans are drifting further apart from each other, despite living in a technologically interwoven society. To resolve this paradox, Ishiguro imagines AFs – beings which are created through technology, to cure one of the main plights of the technocentric modern age, namely loneliness. Klara explains:

21 A theme previously explored by Ishiguro in *Never Let Me Go* (2005), via cloning.
‘what was becoming clear to me was the extent to which humans, in their wish to escape loneliness, made manoeuvres that were very complex and hard to fathom’ (Ishiguro 2021, 135). The AFs are such a ‘manoeuvre’: representing a friend in what appears to be a world which has become overwhelmed with loneliness amidst its technological innovation. Seeing as they are solar-powered, the existence of the AFs is directly contingent on the sun.

3.3 Klara’s Connection with the Sun I: Faith

Despite emigrating from Japan to Britain at a young age, allusions to Japanese culture and beliefs resurface throughout Ishiguro’s novels. Klara is no exception, as the narrative accentuates Klara’s devotion to the sun who, in the Japanese Shinto religion is venerated most significant deity. Shinto is Japan’s most widely followed religion and even the name ‘Japan’ itself means ‘sun origin’ hence why it is known as the ‘Land of the rising sun’ (Ollhoff 2011, 16). In Klara, Ishiguro appears to channel this aspect of Japanese culture – although instead of worshipping the sun as a female deity, as seen in Shinto, Klara views the sun as masculine deity. This change of gender runs in tandem with the conventional gender of the sun in romance languages, which compliments the novel’s distinctly western setting.22

The presence of the sun is more palpable and direct in Klara in comparison to its underlying role in Moreau and Solaris. Klara’s name itself immediately sets up a correlation, as ‘Klara’ is the feminine form of the late Latin name ‘Clarus’ which holds the connotation of clarity and light (WOD 2022). Throughout the novel, it is implied that Klara is an especially unique AF. In the store, her manager explains: ‘Klara has extraordinary observational ability. I’ve never known one like her’ (Ishiguro 2021, 59). Klara’s first-person narration allows us to explore the full extent of her connection to the sun, whom she worships as a divine figure. From the opening passages, Klara describes how she and other AFs would observe the sun ‘on his journey crossing between the building tops’ (Ishiguro 2021, 9), suggesting that Klara’s adheres to the Ptolemaic model of the sun revolving around the earth – her beliefs are only ‘heliocentric’ in a spiritual sense. Seeing as the AFs are solar-powered, Klara is anxious that without exposure to sunlight, she will become weak. Immediately, a contrast

22 Presumably in the U.S.
can be drawn between Klara and Moreau: while Klara ensures that she maintains as much exposure to the sun as possible, Moreau strives to avoid exposure to sunlight, as exemplified by his appearance. Klara closely follows the movements of the sun, with a sense of naivety – Klara and Josie believe that when the sun sets it goes to rest in an abandoned barn owned by their neighbour Mr. McBain (69). Throughout the novel, some of the most intimate moments occur when Klara visits barn and addresses the sun directly – the barn appears embellished as if it were a church and Klara’s thoughts were prayers.

For Klara, being a solar-powered AF, her worship of the sun is rational and scientific – she relies on the ultraviolet rays for energy, which she refers to as ‘special nourishment’ (51). Science, as suggested by its PIE root *skei- ‘to cut, split’ (OED 2022), involves a sense of ‘separation’. During the Enlightenment, this was witnessed in terms of the separation of science from spirituality. However, Klara’s worship of the sun reconciles this relationship: indicating that the methodology of the Enlightenment has not only contributed to the suggestion that the human form is transcendent, as considered in Chapter 2, but has also given rise to religious belief – seemingly discrediting its own tenets via its own methodology. Therefore Klara, a product of science who worships the sun, embodies how ‘science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality’ (Sagan 1996, 29).

The human condition, as all natural forms, is dependent on the sun – not only for its creation but also for its survival. For the AFs the connection is immediate: if their solar panels do not receive sunlight, they weaken. Today, our dependence on the sun is much less acknowledged, at least in a spiritual sense, when compared to the ancient civilizations who worshipped the sun as a god figure; providing warmth and allowing crops to flourish. Sagan points out that ‘our ancestors worshipped the Sun, and they were not that foolish. It makes sense to revere the Sun and the stars, for we are their children’ (Hodge & Patterson 2016, 217). Even if the veneration of the sun is rational and ‘makes sense’, as Sagan claims, the role of the sun as the original resource of life on earth has become largely overlooked and obscured over time – a shift which has, arguably, taken place in tandem with the industrialization of society. Before the Industrial Revolution, agrarian societies felt an immediate necessity to pay careful attention to the sun and the changing of the seasons, in order to produce food and crops – the sun was at the centre in a collective ‘day-to-day’ sense. However, following the Industrial Revolution, the agricultural dependence on the sun
has gradually been overshadowed by the industrial dependence on machinery. Klara’s faith in the sun spells a return to this basic awareness of connection between life and the sun (as life-giver). While Klara may be programmed this way, the society in which she finds herself still strive to maintain a distance between human and non-human forms.

3.4 **Resisting the Posthuman Turn**

The full scope of the posthuman turn can be understood in terms of Haraway’s concept of a ‘cyborg’: an entity who blurs the lines between humans, animals and machines. In this framework we exist as chimerical creatures, like the beast folk, in world ‘people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines’ (Haraway 1991, 72). The world in *Klara* bears resemblance to this, to certain degree – it is society where biotechnological amalgamations with technology occur and where society co-exists with AI. However, the element of fear remains, as the abandonment of convention is not a straightforward task, as previously seen in *Solaris*.

Mr. Capaldi, who is tasked with creating the physical replica of Josie, explains the difficulty of making the posthuman turn: ‘Our generation still carry the old feelings. A part of us refuses to let go. The part that wants to keep believing there’s something unreachable inside each of us’. (245-246). It is evidently a world resembling the one seen in *Solaris*: where humans cling to the past in amidst the confusion posed by scientific progress. Later, Josie’s father discusses Capaldi’s claim with Klara. A particularly insightful passage reads:

> I think I hate Capaldi because deep down I suspect he may be right. That what he claims is true. That science has now proved beyond doubt there’s nothing so unique about my daughter, nothing there our modern tools can’t excavate, copy, transfer. That people have been living with one another all this time, centuries, loving and hating each other, and all on a mistaken premise. A kind of superstition we kept going while we didn’t know better (262).
While Josie’s father may be coming to terms with this idea of posthumanism, he suspects that Josie’s mother will struggle to do the same: ‘She’s too...old-fashioned’ he explains. ‘She just won’t stretch that far. But I’m different. I have...a kind of coldness inside me she lacks’ (263). Miss Helen, the mother of Josie’s childhood friend Rick, is similar to Josie’s mother in this regard. The two occasions when ‘robot’ is used in the novel, is when Miss Helen, is speaks to Klara: ‘The thought of all you robots receiving elocution lessons! How delightful!’ (173) and later ‘Oh you Darling Robot!’ (299). It is evidently an antiquated term to use when speaking to (or about) the AFs, which further indicates that members of this futuristic society are struggling to leave the past behind.

It is important to remember that the word ‘robot’ itself is loaded with sinister connotations. It is derived from the Czech ‘robota’ referring to forced labour – a term which has been traced back to the Old Church Slavonic ‘rabota’ which denotes the sense of ‘servitude’ from ‘rabu’ meaning ‘slave’. The PIE root *orbh‑*, from which ‘robot’ originally evolved, means ‘to change allegiance’ or to ‘pass from one status to another’. This root connects ‘robot’ not only with ‘slave’ but also with ‘orphan’ – the idea of being passed from owner to owner or from guardian to guardian (*OED* 2022). Ishiguro draws strong parallels between the AFs and orphanhood: The store, seems to represent an orphanage, filled with different AF’s who wait for a family to ‘adopt’ them23. Thus, when Klara is bought by Josie’s mother her status changes, as she is ‘adopted’. This sense of orphanhood, that Ishiguro creates, counters Miss Helen’s comments: invoking the humanity of the AFs, as opposed to a ‘robotic’ as a means-to-an-end. Nevertheless, despite their ‘human’ semblance, the AFs remain subject to Othering.

### 3.5 The Othering of Technology

As explained by Josie’s father, a certain ‘coldness’ may be required for humans to turn towards this posthuman perspective – or, in the words of Mr. Capaldi, ‘it’s not faith you need. Only rationality’ (Ishiguro 2021, 246). Ironically, the resistance to this shift is also infused with a sense of ‘coldness’, as seen in the treatment of the AFs. Ishiguro anticipates that the Othering which we still witness in society today, will re-manifest itself in the future.

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23 Orphanhood is a theme which Ishiguro previously explored in *When We Were Orphans* (2002).
— that it is the evolutionary baggage inherited from past generations. Even if they excel in their roles as friends and assistants, the AFs remain subject to Othering. *Klara* takes a unique angle insofar as it explores how humans exercise dominion over their own creations.

The appearance of the AFs immediately hints that anthropocentrism will continue to govern scientific innovation — that even technology tends to be anthropomorphized in its appearance, akin to the representation of deities as we previously considered via Xenophanes. Moreover, this underscores the need for familiarity — that even if AI were to be designed in a non-human form (which may be more efficient) the need to see something familiar overrides any such ideas. However, *Klara* shows how this human need for familiarity has its limits. This is symptomatic of a phenomenon known as the ‘uncanny valley’ (Attwenger 2018), where the initial preference of a humanlike being starts to recede the more humanized it becomes. The place and assumed privilege of the human condition is deemed under threat, giving rise to a hostile emotional response — as seen in natural selection and in the treatment of the beast folk *Moreau*. However, in the context of *Klara*, technology is the victim.

Haraway (1991, 66) explains that ‘the relation between organism and machine has been a border war’. Ishiguro makes similar socio-political allusions, most notably in the passage where Klara and Josie’s family are queuing to visit a theatre. Upon learning that Klara has a ticket for a ‘ought-after’ seat, the theatre attendant remarks: ‘First they take the jobs. Then they take the seats at the theater?’ (Ishiguro 2021, 283). Unlike Miss Helen’s comparatively harmless comments, in this instance we have clear example of explicit bias, that is, bias fuelled by intentionality. The struggle for existence of natural selection re-emerges, once again serving as a self-preservation device against the Other. Mr. Capaldi explains the origin of this prejudice as being the increasing inability of people to ‘follow what’s going on inside’ (354) of the AFs. They accept their actions as dependable and trustworthy “but they don’t like not knowing how you [Klara] arrive at them’ (355). The most striking example of such actions is observed in Klara’s plan to save Josie.
3.6 Klara’s Connection with the Sun II: Actions

The rationality of Klara’s faith in the sun stretches only so far, as her beliefs convince her to carry out actions which appear to be completely irrational. The all-important task in question, is the destruction of the ominous ‘Cootings Machine’: a seemingly antiquated piece of biohazardous machinery, emitting large amounts of pollution into an otherwise futuristic world. Klara’s faith in the healing power of the sun leads her to believe that if the Cootings Machine is destroyed, Josie will be saved. Klara addresses the sun in the barn:

I know how much the Sun dislikes Pollution. How much it saddens and angers you. Well, I’ve seen and identified the machine that creates it. Supposing I were able somehow to find this machine and destroy it. To put an end to its Pollution. Would you then consider, in return, giving your special help to Josie? (196).

Later, Klara explains to Rick: ‘If we can only find the Cootings Machine and destroy it, I believe it will lead to Josie’s full recovery’ (258). Klara attempts to justify her plan by recalling how she witnessed the sun giving ‘his special help’ to a homeless man and his dog in the street – seemingly bringing them back to life (137). As a result, Klara is led to believe that she can convince the sun to heal Josie, which seems completely irrational: even if one event may appear to follow another, it does not follow that there is a causal connection between the two events, which will indefinitely repeat itself. Klara’s plan re-enforces the running suggestion that she has transcended her AF status: that she has become ‘human’. As argued by Nietzsche (1968, 42), irrationality has been with humankind for ‘eternities’, and governs much more of our behaviour than the “conceit” of rationality could ever hope to do – building on Hume’s previous assertion that ‘reason, is and ought only to be a slave to the passions’ (Hume 2003, 295). Interestingly, Klara’s plan is redolent of ritual sacrifices carried out by Mayan civilizations under the guise that it would appease the sun gods.

24 A further example of how this world struggles abandon past conventions.
25 Hume explains this via his ‘problem of induction’, where the heliotrope, as a philosophical motif, re-emerges: ‘that the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, that it will rise’ (Hume 1772, 36).
26 Feelings or emotions.
Where with the Mayans it was a case of humans sacrificing other humans in the hope of obtaining a desirable collective outcome agriculture (Griffin 2013, 29), for Klara it is a case of sacrificing (another) machine, to save a human.

Klara convinces Josie’s father to help. They climb over into the yard where this ‘terrible machine’ (316) is stored and, in order to destroy it, Klara makes a sacrifice of her own: offering her fluid, described as the AF equivalent of blood27, which results in the weakening of her cognitive powers. Klara’s actions are altruistic: they involve a denial of self, where the welfare of the Other is promoted. The word ‘altruism’ is derived from the French ‘autrui’, meaning ‘other’ (OED, 2022). Thus, altruism entails the dissolution of Othering – be it of other humans, or any other natural forms. The willingness of Josie’s father (and of Rick) to assist Klara with her plan, conveys how in moments of desperation, altruism itself overrides any deliberations about how it originates: whether Klara is truly being ‘selfless’ becomes secondary28. Agonizingly, and perhaps as a result of her diminished cognition, Klara realises that the world is beleaguered with other Cootings Machines and that her whole plan to save Josie may have been misguided from the outset29.

Klara returns to the barn and pleads the sun must have seen her efforts and will, as a result, grant her wish to heal Josie: ‘the Sun was watching at the yard that day, so he will know how hard I tried, and how I made my sacrifice, which I was only too pleased to do’ (316). Realising that these ‘prayers’ may not be enough, Klara’s makes a final effort to save Josie. As Klara notices the sun breaking through the dark clouds, she rushes up to Josie’s bedroom and, much to the housekeeper’s remonstrations, opens the blinds to let the sun shine on Josie: ‘illuminating her, and the entire bed, in a ferocious half-disc of orange’ (329). Miraculously, it seems, Josie grows stronger the next day and ends up recovering from her

27 Klara’s denial of self-preservation can be understood as a further example that Klara has transcended her AI status – that she feels a “human” love for Josie and for this reason is willing to sacrifice herself to save her.

28 Or, in humans, whether or not altruism can ultimately be traced to a ‘selfish gene’ as considered by Dawkins (1978).

29 The Mayan worship of the sun proved to be in vain, as their civilization fell due to a drought which ravaged the Mesoamerican region in the early 1400’s (Armstrong 2014). The world which Klara inhabits shares this sense of ecological vulnerability. The hopelessness Klara feels upon realising that her plan may have failed resonates with the futility some of us may feel today, as we grapple with the ecological vulnerability of our own world - highlighting the difficulty of seeing what difference one action can make within the greater scheme of things, in a world where there are seemingly infinite amounts of other ‘Cootings Machines’.
illness. Klara credits the sun with having healed Josie: ‘The Sun’s special nourishment proved as effective for Josie as it had for Beggar Man’ (333).

3.7 The Sun as a Principle of Reconciliation

In the final passages of the novel Klara’s status changes from living with the family to finding herself in a scrap yard30, where she meets her former manager and looks through her memories, as if it were a photo album, as she experiences her ‘slow fade’ (344). This is from where we learn that Klara is telling the story31. It is a conclusion which demonstrates the human tendency to dispose of technology as it pleases, when no longer required – that even in the future, humanity will continue to view technology as a ‘robotic’ means to an end regardless of how ‘human’ they may appear. Despite Klara’s bleak fate at the hands of anthropocentrism, it is important to remember that her own actions were post-anthropocentric.

Given that anthropocentrism is an embedded trope of the human condition, as previously suggested by Tarkovsky, Klara’s posthuman narration is needed to provide the point of view through which the values of post-anthropocentrism can be explored. The sun enables this to happen – ‘animating’ Klara and inspiring her to act irrationally which, if Nietzsche (1968, 42) is correct, the most fundamental traits of the human condition. Through her faith in the sun, the scope of ‘human’ is extended into a non-human form: indicating that return to our spiritual roots, may be required in order to reach a post-anthropocentric (or posthuman) ontology.

Klara ultimately determines that, in accordance with physicalism, there is nothing about the human form – such as qualia or an immaterial soul – which cannot be traced and replicated. However, she adds: ‘But however hard I tried, I believe now there would have remained something beyond my reach (352). There was something very special, but it wasn’t inside Josie. It was inside those who loved her’ (353). Klara’s closing intuition is that sacred aspect of the humanity is found in virtue of our connection to each other. This

30 As foreshadowed by the PIE root of ‘robot’/‘orphan’ (a change of status).

31 Which, given her dwindling powers, reinforces in the literary trope of the ‘unreliable narrator’.
position was already hinted when Klara asked Rick whether the love between him and Josie was genuine, so that she could have something ‘to bargain with’ (313); that the sun may be appeased in virtue of this special connection, in a world which is otherwise beleaguered with loneliness. However, Josie only recovers after Klara strives to appease the sun: destroying the Cootings Machine and letting the sun into Josie’s bedroom, which we can read as acts of reconciliation between human and nature. It was not her ‘prayers’ which were ultimately answered, but her actions. Klara’s parting thought about the sun reads: ‘The Sun was very kind to me. He was always kind to me from the start. But when I was with Josie, once, he was particularly kind’ (Ishiguro 2021, 354). In a world beset with loneliness, the sun (nature) rewards the connection forged between the human (Josie) and the posthuman (Klara)\(^{32}\), revealing the underlying interdependent and monistic framework which lines the fabric of their world.

Throughout the novel Klara shows an awareness of this – she never says ‘you’ when speaking to or about other people, but always refers to them by their name; dissolving the dualism of ‘us vs. them’, and connecting the self with the Other – who, from Klara’s AF point of view, is Josie (and humanity generally). The boundaries between human and non-human, as indicated in the previous two words, are unfixed and malleable: exhibiting the pluralisation of perspectives which the posthuman paradigm entails. However, it is very important to remember that this overarching plasticity should not be exploited – in Klara the side effects of the ‘lifting’ procedure bears testimony to this, as do the repercussions of Moreau’s uplift procedures. In other words, the posthuman turn does not imply that humans should abuse their positive liberty and interfere with nature in an effort to ‘improve’ it\(^{33}\). It also does not imply that we should abandon human ethics and act in accordance with natural selection, as suggested by Social Darwinism. Otherwise, this would merely give anthropocentrism, and its processes of Othering, a new ontological framework to exploit, where humans continue to strive to exert dominion over nature.

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\(^{32}\) The obstacle to this is not only encapsulated by the Cootings Machine but also by the ‘terrible bull’, which represents the brutality of nature - momentarily disrupting Klara’s faith. Upon seeing it, Klara remarks: ‘for a brief moment, I even though the Sun wasn’t kind at all’ (186).

\(^{33}\) However, Klara does not indicate that interfering with nature to maintain the negative liberty of the subject comes with harmful side-effects. For example, implants and other processes of transhumanism may protect and cure physical or cognitive ailments. What both Klara and Moreau do underscore, however, are the repercussions of trying to augment what we already have – trying to enhance our positive liberty, by ‘improving’ our cognitive (or physical) abilities.
As demonstrated in *Klara*, reaching a post-anthropocentric (or posthuman) ontology therefore involves not merely the dissolution of boundaries, but the dissolution of acting *against* nature. Ishiguro’s ending underscores this element of interdependence, as the sun fulfils Klara’s wish because she acts with nature – she is acutely aware, as suggested by her name, that she is ultimately a part of the sun. Instead of emphasizing the perils of anthropocentrism34 (as seen in Moreau and Solaris), the sun rewards Klara’s actions: shining a light on the value of adopting a decentred view of our place in nature. In this way, the sun decentres the human – offering a glimpse of how rewarding the post-anthropocentric perspective can be. Nevertheless, seeing as a posthuman narrator is needed to communicate this, we are left with the feeling that our understanding of the human condition needs to be radically revised for the post-anthropocentric perspective to become a reality.

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34 A point which is nonetheless raised via the side-effects of the ‘lifting’ procedure, the Othering of technology and Klara’s fate in the scrapyard.
Conclusion

This study has shown that the sun has a formidable propensity to be employed as an organising principle for the purpose of renegotiating anthropocentrism and the broader question of our place in nature. SF provides the ideal narrative setting through which this can occur as, in all three works in question, the human form is decentred under the sun.

Despite Moreau’s delusions of divine grandeur, it has become clear that it is the sun who ultimately the overwhelming divine force at play in the novella: unfazed by Moreau’s anthropocentric ideologies and not only indifferent to human affairs, but ultimately in control of them. Wells’ myopic scientist, who is hellbent on asserting his dominion over natural order and the animal kingdom, ultimately meets his demise under the sun, and the effects of natural conditions. Whether it is the scientist interfering with animals or the white colonialist invading foreign shores, in both cases the sun represents a de-centring principle to these activities: reinstating natural order through entropic decline and exposing the futility of anthropocentrism in the face of nature.

Tarkovsky’s Solaris interrogates the drive for grandeur which fuels anthropocentrism, showing how the colonial conquest of outer space and of nature, comes attached with widespread repercussions. The sun, in this case, is a heliotropic focus which lures us into outer space in search of ‘enlightenment’, to fulfil anthropocentric drive for grandeur. However, instead of finding knowledge and clarity, the departure from home – understood as both pertaining to both the earth and the natural world – creates psychological anguish. By enticing humanity away from the earth/natural world, and exposing its frailty in these inhuman conditions, the sun acts as a decentring device - a role which is compounded when it brings Kelvin back home. However, Tarkovsky leaves his audience with the sentiment that it is too late, as Kelvin ultimately finds himself in a defective, lifeless replica of what once was his dacha. Through these events, Solaris can be understood as a fable of ecology: chronicling that the neglect for our ‘home’ comes with repercussions, not only for ourselves but also for the natural world.
*Klara* channels the perspective of a posthuman being - creating a narrative through which the value of a post-anthropocentric framework can be delineated. In this case, the sun is re-ascribed the role of a divine figure, as previously observed in *Moreau*. However, on this occasion there is no rivalry: Klara’s existence is interwoven with the sun and, despite being subject to Othering, she sets out to save Josie by appeasing the sun through acts of seemingly irrational altruism. Drawing from her own connection with the sun and the kindness it (or ‘he’) shows to her, she identifies the connections that humans have to each another as being the only aspect on the human condition which is immune to scientific observation. This tells us that Klara sees the world through a non-dualistic, posthuman lens, where the human condition is defined in virtue of its connection to the Other: taking the pluralised perspective of not only to the human form, but all natural forms. In this monistic framework, the sun retains its role as the organising principle: acting specifically as a principle of reconciliation, by shedding light on the value of transitioning to a post-anthropocentric (or posthuman) understanding of our place in nature. Therefore, it is by revealing the value of a decentred framework, that the sun acts as a decentring device. Ultimately, *Klara* communicates the idea that it is only by acting *with* the sun (nature), instead of against it (as seen in *Moreau*), or colonizing it (as seen in *Solaris*), that post-anthropocentrism can be attained.


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