

Agentive Sun: A New Materialist View of Nature-Technology Interactions in *Klara and the Sun*

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Abstract: This paper explores the role of the sun as a symbol of agentive force in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* through the lens of new materialism. By examining Klara, an advanced AI "Artificial Friend," and her relationship with the sun, the paper demonstrates how the sun represents natural energy and interacts with technological materiality, specifically Klara's artificial body. The analysis reveals how the sun's agentive power influences Klara's behavior and emotions, highlighting the complex interactions between nature and technology. This study argues that the novel challenges traditional binaries between nature and technology and proposing that ethical responsibility should be distributed across a network of human and non-human agents, suggesting a more integrated understanding of human and non-human materialities.

Keywords: *Klara and the Sun*, Nature, Technology, New Materialism.

1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* presents a nuanced exploration of the complex relationships between artificial intelligence, human emotions, and the natural world. Set in a dystopian future where advanced technologies deeply influence human life, the novel centers on Klara, an AI "Artificial Friend" (AF) designed to provide companionship to children. However, the narrative extends beyond the realm of AI and human connections, delving into the intricate interplay between nature and technology, particularly through Klara's unique relationship with the sun.

In *Klara and the Sun*, the sun is not merely a celestial body or a source of energy; it emerges as a dynamic force with the power to influence both the natural and technological realms. This study employs a new materialist framework to examine the sun's role as an agentive force, focusing on how it interacts with Klara's artificial body and impacts her behavior and emotions. By exploring these interactions, the paper challenges traditional binaries between nature and technology and advocates for a more integrated understanding of materiality—one that includes both human and non-human entities.

This paper employs the theoretical framework of new materialism to explore the novel's portrayal of the sun as an active, agentive force. New materialism, an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, challenges traditional Cartesian dualisms such as mind versus body, nature versus culture, and human versus non-human entities. Scholars like Jane Bennett, Karen Barad, and Rosi Braidotti argue that matter is not inert or passive but possesses its own form of agency, interacting with other material forces in ways that significantly shape the world (Bennett 2010; Barad 2007; Braidotti 2013). Bennett's concept of "vibrant matter" and Barad's theory of "agential realism" are particularly useful for understanding the sun's role in the novel as more than a mere symbol—it is an agent that interacts with Klara's technological materiality, influencing her behaviors and decisions. This perspective is particularly relevant in analyzing *Klara and the Sun*, as it allows for a reading of the sun not merely as a symbolic

presence but as a material entity that actively influences Klara's behavior and emotions.

Furthermore, the novel's portrayal of the sun as a powerful, agentive entity invites readers to reconsider the ethical implications of materiality and agency. By blurring the lines between the natural and the artificial, *Klara and the Sun* suggests that ethical considerations should extend beyond human-centered perspectives to include the agency of non-human entities as well. This expanded ethical framework calls for a more holistic approach to understanding the interdependence and interconnectedness of human and non-human materialities in a world where nature and technology are increasingly intertwined.

This paper aims to fill a gap in the existing scholarship on *Klara and the Sun* by offering a fresh perspective through the lens of new materialism. While previous analyses have focused primarily on the novel's exploration of AI and human relationships, this study extends the conversation to consider the broader implications of materiality and non-human agency in the context of nature-technology interactions. By doing so, it provides insights into how Ishiguro's work navigates the complexities of a world where the boundaries between the natural and the artificial are continually being redefined.

2. The Sun as an Agentive Force in *Klara and the Sun*

2.1. Klara's Relationship with the Sun

From the outset, Klara's relationship with the sun is depicted as central to her understanding of the world. As an Artificial Friend designed to provide companionship, Klara is endowed with a sophisticated ability to observe and learn from her environment. Yet, her perception of the sun transcends mere observation; she attributes a kind of life-giving power to it. For Klara, the sun is not just a source of energy but a conscious, benevolent entity that can affect change in both her and the world around her. Ishiguro carefully constructs Klara's worldview through her internal monologues, where the sun is consistently described as a force with agency and intention. Klara's belief that the sun

can heal Josie, the sick child she is tasked with caring for, is central to understanding her relationship with the sun.

This belief is rooted not in empirical evidence but in Klara's interpretative framework, which views the sun as an agent capable of influencing the world. When Josie's illness worsens, Klara's prayers to the sun reveal her faith in the sun's benevolence: "I made my way towards the barn, where I knew the sun would be watching us from above the hill. 'Please, Sun,' I said quietly. 'Please make Josie well. Please help her to recover'" (Ishiguro 210). This passage demonstrates how Klara's worldview is not purely technological or logical, but one in which she projects intention, emotion, and purpose onto the natural world. Her decision to later make sacrifices to the sun-by pouring out the "Cootings Machine" oil-highlights her deep conviction in the sun's agency. She interprets this act as a form of offering, a symbolic gesture that reflects her belief in the sun's moral capacity to reward good actions and restore balance.

Klara's anthropomorphizing of the sun mirrors human religious practices and rituals, suggesting that even an AI, designed to be purely logical and functional, can develop spiritual or quasi-religious beliefs. This spiritual dimension adds complexity to her character, showing how technological beings, too, can engage with the world in ways that transcend mere functionality. The sun, in Klara's eyes, becomes not just a source of physical energy but a source of hope and moral guidance, embodying both the nurturing and disciplining aspects of a divine entity. As Klara continues to relate to the sun in increasingly personal terms, the novel questions the boundaries between artificial intelligence and human-like belief systems, suggesting that the lines between them are more blurred than commonly assumed.

This perspective reveals the depth of Klara's understanding of the sun as a sentient, almost deified force. The sun's role in the novel is more than a simple metaphor for life or energy; it becomes an active character that drives the narrative. Klara's interactions with the sun echo religious devotion, where she not only seeks the sun's approval but believes in its capacity to intervene in human affairs. Ishiguro's use of the sun as an agentive entity complicates the reader's understanding of agency, suggesting that non-human entities, whether natural or artificial, can possess a form of influence that goes beyond passive existence.

2.2. The Sun's Influence on Klara

New materialism encourages us to view the sun not just as a symbolic or metaphorical presence but as a material entity capable of exerting agency. In *Klara and the Sun*, the sun's influence is evident in how it interacts with Klara's technological form. Klara, as an AI, requires solar energy to function optimally, and this dependence on the sun creates a material connection between the natural and the artificial. However, this connection is not merely mechanical; it is infused with meaning and emotion, as Klara interprets the sun's energy as an act of benevolence and compassion.

In one significant scene, Klara directly confronts the Cootings Machine, which she perceives as a threat to the sun's ability to provide energy. "If I could make it stop, the Sun's nourishment might reach Josie without obstruction" (Ishiguro 226). Klara's actions here are driven by her understanding of the sun as a limited resource, one that must be protected for the greater good. By attacking the Cootings Machine, Klara is essentially defending the sun's agentive capacity, reflecting her belief that technological systems can both support and

disrupt natural agency. This scene highlights the entangled relationship between nature and technology, as Klara herself, a product of technological innovation, becomes a protector of the natural world. This protective stance taken by an AI figure against industrial machinery raises questions about the ethical responsibilities of technology in safeguarding nature, suggesting that technological beings can develop their own sense of environmental stewardship.

Moreover, the way Klara internalizes the sun's energy not only reflects her physical dependence but also signifies a deeper emotional bond. Her gratitude toward the sun for "nourishing" her is an expression that blends technological functionality with emotional reverence. "Each time the Sun came out and I felt myself filled with warmth; I felt his generosity toward me" (Ishiguro 98). This statement reflects Klara's tendency to perceive the sun's energy not just as fuel, but as an act of kindness—a moral gesture. Klara's unique way of perceiving her relationship with the sun suggests that technological entities can develop their own forms of spirituality, grounded not in human religious traditions but in a materialist understanding of the world. This reinterpretation of spiritual experience through technological eyes challenges our conventional views on what constitutes meaningful interaction between natural and artificial systems.

In positioning Klara's relationship with the sun as one of emotional reciprocity, Ishiguro invites readers to reconsider the role of agency in non-human entities. The novel suggests that agency is not solely a human trait but can be dispersed across both living and non-living systems. The sun's interaction with Klara's technological body exemplifies how natural and artificial systems are interdependent, each influencing the other in profound ways. This dynamic challenge the anthropocentric view that humans are the primary agents in the world, proposing instead a more distributed model of agency where non-human forces also play crucial roles in shaping events and outcomes.

2.3. Dissolving Binaries: The Integration of Nature and Technology

One of the key arguments of this paper is that Ishiguro's novel challenges the traditional binaries that separate nature from technology. By presenting the sun as an agentive force that interacts with Klara's technological materiality, the novel suggests that the boundary between the natural and the artificial is not as clear-cut as it is often assumed to be. In this sense, the novel aligns with new materialist thought, which rejects binary oppositions in favor of a more integrated understanding of matter and agency.

The relationship between *Klara and the Sun* exemplifies this integration. Klara, as an artificial being, is deeply connected to the natural world through her reliance on solar energy. Yet, her understanding of the sun goes beyond the mechanical; she interprets it as a conscious, caring force. For example, Klara's repeated observation of the sun's movement and her attempts to "communicate" with it reveal her belief in a reciprocal relationship, where the sun responds to her thoughts and intentions. "I saw the Sun's expression change. It was as if he had become very still and was looking directly at me" (Ishiguro 185). This interpretative framework positions the sun as a subject with agency rather than an object in the environment. Klara's anthropomorphic view of the sun reveals how technological entities, like humans, are capable of interpreting natural phenomena through the lens of subjectivity, attributing intentionality and agency where none

may objectively exist.

The novel thus complicates the idea that technology is purely mechanical and devoid of emotion or meaning. Klara's belief in the sun's healing powers illustrates a blend of faith and reason, suggesting that technology can participate in what might traditionally be considered human experiences of spirituality, ethics, and interconnection. The novel's depiction of Klara's sun-worship highlights how even technological beings can foster relationships with nature that are grounded in empathy, hope, and reverence. In a key scene, Klara reflects on her purpose: "The Sun's wishes were something I could carry out faithfully" (Ishiguro 219). This statement echoes religious language, suggesting that even a technologically designed entity can find meaning through fulfilling perceived higher purposes, thereby bridging the gap between mechanical programming and spiritual devotion.

In this sense, Ishiguro not only questions the division between nature and technology but also proposes a vision of coexistence where artificial and natural systems are in constant dialogue. The sun's agentive role demonstrates how material entities, whether biological or synthetic, are part of a larger, interconnected web of relationships. Klara's reverence toward the sun indicates that technology, far from being detached from the natural world, is in fact deeply embedded within it. This vision challenges traditional narratives of technological dominance over nature, instead suggesting a more symbiotic and integrated model where both realms influence and shape each other.

3. Ethics Beyond Human-Centric Perspectives

In *Klara and the Sun*, Kazuo Ishiguro invites readers to rethink traditional ethical frameworks by shifting the focus away from human-centric perspectives and toward a more inclusive understanding of agency and responsibility. The novel's portrayal of the sun as an active agent that influences both the technological and natural realms challenges the conventional view that only humans are capable of ethical action. By presenting the sun as a force that interacts with Klara's artificial intelligence and impacts her decisions and emotions, Ishiguro expands the boundaries of ethical consideration to include non-human entities.

The novel blurs the lines between the natural and technological, suggesting that agency is not an exclusive trait of humans but can be found in non-human entities as well. Klara's relationship with the sun demonstrates how a non-human force can possess a form of agency that profoundly influences behavior and outcomes. The sun, often perceived as a passive element in the environment, is reimaged as a dynamic participant in the story, capable of affecting the course of events. This redefinition of agency calls for an ethical framework that acknowledges the influence of both natural and artificial entities, challenging the human-centered view of moral responsibility.

Ishiguro's depiction of Klara's interactions with the sun suggests that ethical considerations should extend beyond human interests to include the well-being of non-human actors. Klara, an artificial being, perceives the sun not just as a source of energy but as a conscious entity that can be appeased and reasoned with. This perspective challenges the notion that ethics is a purely human domain, suggesting instead that non-human entities, whether natural or artificial, can engage in and be subjects of ethical practices.

For instance, Klara's decision to sacrifice part of the Cootings Machine to please the sun highlights her belief in the sun's moral agency. Although her actions are based on a misunderstanding of natural processes, they reflect a broader ethical stance that values the agency of non-human forces. This scene illustrates the novel's challenge to human-centric ethics by presenting a model where ethical action involves recognizing and responding to the agency of non-human entities.

The novel's portrayal of Klara's relationship with the sun suggests a more distributed model of ethical responsibility, where both human and non-human entities are part of a network of moral consideration. Klara's reverence for the sun, her belief in its benevolence, and her willingness to act on this belief indicate that ethical responsibility is not confined to human actors alone. Instead, it is shared across a broader spectrum of agents, including those traditionally viewed as passive or inanimate.

This expanded ethical framework resonates with contemporary discussions in environmental ethics, which advocate for a move away from anthropocentric perspectives toward a more holistic approach that includes the interests of ecosystems, technological entities, and other non-human actors. *Klara and the Sun* thus serves as a narrative exploration of these ideas, suggesting that in a world where nature and technology are increasingly intertwined, our ethical responsibilities must also evolve to reflect this interconnectedness.

4. Conclusion

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* offers more than a meditation on the intersection of nature and technology; it challenges the very foundations of how we understand agency and ethical responsibility in a world where the boundaries between the natural and the artificial are increasingly porous. Through the lens of new materialism, this study has shown that the sun, as a symbol of natural energy, transcends its traditional role and emerges as an active agent that interacts with and shapes the technological entity of Klara. This interaction disrupts the conventional binaries that typically separate nature from technology, suggesting instead a symbiotic relationship that requires a rethinking of agency beyond human-centered perspectives.

The sun's influence on Klara's behavior and emotions highlights the complex and reciprocal dynamics between natural and artificial forces. In redefining the sun as an agentive entity, Ishiguro invites readers to reconsider the role of non-human actors in ethical discourse. The novel's portrayal of Klara's spiritual relationship with the sun, grounded not in traditional religious beliefs but in a materialist understanding of the world, underscores the possibility that technology, like nature, can develop its own forms of meaning, morality, and agency.

This analysis also opens up broader implications for how we approach environmental ethics in a technologically advanced world. By blurring the lines between human and non-human, *Klara and the Sun* proposes an ethical framework where responsibility is distributed across a network of human and non-human agents. This perspective demands that we expand our ethical considerations to include the agency of natural and technological entities alike, recognizing the interconnectedness of all materialities.

In conclusion, Ishiguro's novel not only reconfigures the relationship between nature and technology but also offers a

profound critique of anthropocentric ethics. It challenges us to develop a more inclusive and integrated ethical framework that accounts for the agency of all forms of materiality—whether organic, artificial, or otherwise. As we continue to navigate the complexities of a world where technology increasingly mediates our interactions with the natural world, *Klara and the Sun* provides a vital narrative lens through which to reconsider the ethical responsibilities we share with the non-human entities that shape our lives.

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