When Kazuo Ishiguro’s sixth novel, *Never Let Me Go*, was published in 2005, it was extensively reviewed as one would expect of the work by an author whose previous oeuvre has been widely acclaimed and repeatedly nominated for literary prizes. The reviews all revealed – often gradually, in imitation of the novel’s style itself – that the central characters are human clones: ‘The shadowy backdrop in *Never Let Me Go* is genetic engineering and associated technologies’.¹ Some of the reviews had titles such as ‘Ishiguro imagines love among clones’, ‘Hello, Dolly’ – this, of course, in reference to the first sheep cloned at the University of Edinburgh in the UK, which endearingly was also called ‘Dolly’ – or ‘The downside of designer genes’.² Many critics puzzled over the novel’s genre, registering an affinity to science fiction, suggesting, for instance, that ‘[the novel] falls in the science fiction subgenre of alternative history’,³ but also arguing that it was not quite that: ‘On a cursory reading, Ishiguro’s novel could be seen simply as an unusual piece of nightmarish science fiction blended with an evocative reworking of the traditional boarding-school story’.⁴ And, in his review titled ‘Clone alone’, M. John Harrison stated: ‘Inevitably, it being set in an alternate Britain, in an alternate 1990s, this novel will be described as science fiction. But there’s no science here’.

This assertion is, in a sense, where my article starts. I am interested in Harrison’s view that ‘there’s no science here’ for it raises the question which I propose to explore in this article, how Harrison’s remark invites us to understand ‘science’ in this context, and by extension the further question, how science figures both in this particular novel and in contemporary culture more widely. In addressing these questions I take my cue from Susan Squier who argues via Bruno Latour’s methods for analysing science in action that we treat the relationship of literature and science as ‘an ensemble of social [I would also say, ’textual’] relations, a thick and busy trading zone of boundary crossing and relationship’.⁵ To begin with, I shall therefore very briefly sketch the context of actual scientific
developments in which *Never Let Me Go* emerged. I shall then discuss how one might understand Harrison’s claim that there is no science in *Never Let Me Go* and its underlying assumptions about the relationship between science and the cultural imaginary, before finally making a case – using Eugene Thacker’s distinction between the actualization mode of science fiction and the critical mode of science fiction\(^6\) – for the science that there is in *Never Let Me Go* and the ways in which one might think more generally about such science within contemporary culture.

*Never Let Me Go* (2005) was gestated (deliberate choice of word here), and appeared first during a period – the early 2000s – when cloning, and biotechnological developments and debates associated with these more generally, were high on the public agenda. For one thing, Ian Wilmut, the scientist who had engineered ‘world’s first cloned mammal’,\(^7\) the aforementioned Dolly the sheep, was in the process of moving to a medical research institute at Edinburgh University where he would, for the first time, ‘clone human embryos as part of his research into causes of motor neuron disease’. This permission, granted by HFEA, the British Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, was subject to much vociferous debate,\(^8\) a debate that dates back further in time than the publication of Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*.\(^9\) Mary Warnock’s famous report on the question of whether or not cloning for research and therapeutic purposes should be permitted, *A Question of Life*,\(^10\) which first appeared in 1984, and itself, of course, was the result of previous scientific developments in the field of human fertilisation, had already caused considerable public debate. It was, according to the president of the Institute on Biotechnology and the Human Future at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, when ‘the rot started’.\(^11\) Therapeutic cloning, that is cloning for the purposes of researching diseases as opposed to reproductive cloning in order to create specific kinds of babies (e.g. for the purposes of sex selection), was legalised in the UK in 2002. During 2004 the British media were dominated by the case of Zain Hashimi, a five-year old boy suffering from a genetic disorder, whose parents went to the courts in Britain in order to be granted permission to – as the newspapers put it – ‘create a saviour sibling’ through embryo selection so that that baby’s umbilical cord tissue could be used to cure Zain.\(^12\) The parents’ appeal was successful. In the same year a Korean scientist claimed to have cloned the first human embryos\(^13\) – his revelation, later shown to be false, prompted renewed public discussion about the desirability of human cloning.

Simultaneously there were debates – relevant to *Never Let Me Go* since its central characters are cloned for the purpose of later organ donation – about organ donation and its more sinister form, organ harvesting,\(^14\) as well as about ‘designer babies’ and ‘saviour siblings’, that is selective intervention in reproduction for the purposes of either creating a particular kind
of child – for instance to balance the gender distribution in the family by allowing a family with boys only to select among embryos for a girl – or in order to create a sibling whose genetic make-up would allow an older sibling to be cured from a particular disease via bone marrow transfer.

The last ten years or so have seen rapid developments in biotechnology and gene technology, suggesting ever advancing possibilities of moving towards new forms of (re)creation of organs, animals and potentially humans. The possibility of genetic modification in all its forms has led theorists of the so-called posthuman body to argue that ‘What comes after the human is not another stage of evolution but a difference in kind’. In parallel with these changes in scientific work, discourses such as legal ones, and institutions such as HFEA have arisen, designed to engage with that science both as scientific activity, and as meaning or as legally and ethically circumscribed practice. These seek to mediate between the activity that is science, and its implications and meanings, through a variety of regulatory frameworks. It is within this context that Never Let Me Go has to be understood, and the question of its scienticity or otherwise investigated.

Harrison’s assertion of the absence of science in Never Let Me Go is supported by Ishiguro’s own supposed lack of interest in this topic. As Nicholas Wroe writes:

Ishiguro, who undertook some basic research into biotechnology, says he never intended to write a mystery with [the central characters’] clone status as the revelation. ‘If information does trickle gradually it’s because the children themselves do not realize who they are. The reader is on a sort of parallel journey, but it is not a mystery story. My focus is elsewhere’.16

Statements like these by Ishiguro have led other writers such as Margaret Atwood, herself the author of related dystopian fictions,17 to argue à propos of the cloned children Never Let Me Go portrays: ‘All this is background. Ishiguro isn’t much interested in the practicalities of cloning and organ donation. (Which four organs, you may wonder? A liver, two kidneys, then the heart? . . .)’18 My concern here, however, is not so much with what the author himself intended but with, to use Catherine Belsey’s words, the readings and positions that the text offers and invites.19 For after all, it is in response to the text that Harrison states: ‘there is no science here’. I therefore want to explore now what kind of ‘science’ that statement envisages, and then to discuss what science there might be in Never Let Me Go in order to elucidate how science functions in the contemporary cultural imaginary.

Harrison contests the ‘science’ but not the ‘fiction’ element. He asks: ‘How are clones kept alive once they’ve begun “donating”?’; and argues
that ‘Ishiguro’s refusal to consider questions such as these forces his story into a pure rhetorical space’. Harrison’s assertion of the absence of science is thus tied to a sense of the supposed scientific implausibility of Ishiguro’s story in which a quasi-mimetic representation of science appears to be required: ‘Precisely how naturalistic is it supposed to be?’ he asks. Harrison has difficulty reconciling Ishiguro’s quasi-naturalistic representation of contemporary England as it emerges in its landscapes and the conventional tropes of realist fiction, with a Britain in the 1990s where human cloning is possible. In his eyes the scientific basis for such a narrative is missing.

But what would such a scientific basis look like? I shall outline three key elements that might make up such a scientific basis and discuss each one in turn. They are first, accuracy in the depiction of the state of scientific knowledge at the time of the production of the novel; secondly, the presentation of actual scientific intervention, the actualization in fiction of a scientifically plausible scenario; and thirdly, the use of scientific, ‘expert’ vocabulary. These form what I would describe as ‘acute science’ – as opposed to ‘science as effect’ or ‘mediated science’ to which I shall return below – in that they drive towards and aspire to a mimetic relation to science as a particular epistemic field and practice.

Judging Never Let Me Go in terms of its scienticity then might mean that one considers the extent to which it reflects (a) the scientifically possible at the time of the construction of the novel, both in terms of current practice and projected developments, and (b) the ethically permissible at that time. Within this two-fold framework human reproductive cloning was both possible and permissible in the UK at the time the novel was written, but only for therapeutic purposes, meaning in order to produce ‘stem cells that could provide tissues to replace damaged organs without the increased risk of immune rejection’. Organ donation and organ harvesting were also possible and permissible within certain set parameters, and, indeed, being undertaken both legally and illegally. Finally, fetal selection for therapeutic purposes was also possible and permissible as suggested in relation to Zain Hasmi’s case above. However, as Susan Squier has argued: ‘A gap exists between the range of medical practices (actual and hypothetical) known as reproductive technology, such as cloning and so on, and their representations. As material practices that have a low success rate, the potential for iatrogenic health damage, and a problematic relationship to a pronatalist culture and society, reproductive technology has been indicted ... as: unsuccessful, unsafe, unkind, unnecessary...’

In 2008 the manufacture of viable human clones remains contested as an ethical proposition and scientifically not achievable beyond a brief gestatory period. Moreover, cloning humans for organ harvesting purposes has
begun to recede into the background – if it ever was a scientific consider-
ation – as biotechnological developments have veered into new directions. Already in 1993 researchers had reported advances in tissue engineering in the *Scientific American*: ‘Promoting tissue and organ development via growth factors is obviously a considerable step forward. But it pales in com-
parison to the ultimate goal of the tissue engineer: the creation from scratch of whole neo-organs. Science fiction’s conception of pre-fabricated “spare parts” is slowly taking shape in the efforts to transplant cells directly to the body that will then develop into the proper bodily component’.24 That goal had come into view by April 2006 when Anthony Atala et al. reported in *The Lancet* that they had been able to make bladders for patients with end-stage bladder disease using ‘autologous engineered bladder tissues for reconstruction’.25 This engineering of organ tissue, albeit for a simple organ in biological terms, signalled the beginning of the actualiza-
tion of growing organ tissue and creating organ replacements from engin-
ered materials, thus entirely circumventing the need to rely on intact human bodies to yield complete organs for transplantation.

The point here is that as *Never Let Me Go* presented one version of how organ donation might occur – through raising human clones for that purpose – scientific developments were moving in another direction to create different forms of organ production. One could then argue that in its presentation of scientific developments regarding cloning, organ cre-
atation and organ transfer, *Never Let Me Go* reproduces the gap mentioned by Squier and referred to above, between biotechnological developments and their representations. That gap is in part a function of the fact that *Never Let Me Go* effectively coalesces a number of different but inter-
related biotechnological developments – cloning, organ harvesting, designer babies – into one set of fictional preoccupations, simultaneously condensing their diverse meanings into a particular critical perspective, as I shall discuss further below.

*Never Let Me Go* also does not focus on presenting detailed accounts of scientific interventions or procedures – there are no laboratories, men in white coats or other similar details that engage the reader in the scientific process as is increasingly common in, for instance, popular TV programs depicting forensic science or medicine, whether these be thrillers such as *CSI: Miami* or hospital series such as *Holby City*. *Never Let Me Go* does not engage with scienticity as actualization of scientific practice though, as I shall suggest below, the questions it raises are intimately connected with that practice, not as process but as effect.

Finally, *Never Let Me Go* does not, as is common in science fiction, make use of an invented, specialist vocabulary that references its own scienticity through words that connote expert knowledge and technicality, that establish significant changes in environment, scientific and/or
technological practice through neologisms designed to signify these changes. Ishiguro does not take that particular verbal path. Nonetheless, and as is usual in reviews of his work, all critics comment on his use of language. Peter Kemp, for instance, states: ‘Innocuous words – “carer”, “students”, “donations”, “complete” – take on sinister overtones . . . terminology such as “baffling”, “wasn’t clear” and “couldn’t fathom” casts a haze over events. Uncertainty signifiers – “maybe”, “somehow”, “perhaps” – work overtime . . . Attempts to establish facts terminate in culs-de-sac . . . ’. John Mullan argues that ‘Ishiguro has kept the narrator of Never Let Me Go, Kathy H., away from literary language . . . she is unsuspecting in her ready use of cliché . . . She begins sentences with “actually” . . . [but] does not exactly have an impoverished vocabulary’. The innocuous words used in the novel, the non-literariness of the narrator’s language, the novel’s ‘muted narration’ all point towards the ordinary language that Ishiguro employs in the making of his text which, some might argue, in consequence loses its scienticity. That view of science, however, assumes the ‘two cultures’ model discussed by C.P. Snow and Raymond Williams for instance, in which science and – to use a pejorative, homogenizing word – ‘non-science’ or culture assume and maintain their difference through, *inter alia*, the production of specialist vocabularies that serve to denote their respective domains, thus territorializing science as separate – because different – from non-science.

But this is the age of an increasing demand for ‘the public’s understanding of science’, and the democratization of science knowledge through the use of popular media to explain science to a lay populace. One might therefore want to ask the question at what point and for what purposes such specialist vocabulary is used, particularly and seemingly paradoxically perhaps, in view of the fact that Never Let Me Go does not employ such language. It is possible to interpret that absence of a specialist vocabulary in terms of Ishiguro’s ‘usual’ style of indirection and manufactured vagueness. However, a more productive reading for my purposes is to think about the relation between specialist scientific language and ordinary language. It is here that Barbara Duden’s work is pertinent. Duden is concerned to understand ‘what happens when scientific terms emigrate into ordinary language’. In an extremely interesting article on ‘The euro and the gene – perceived by a historian of the unborn’, Duden discusses the ways in which words such as ‘euro’ and ‘gene’ are used as ‘management tools to establish values, define needs, calculate and modulate risks’. She argues that ‘the gene’ as it is used in everyday language in particular has become a *Plastikwort*, an elastic term covering almost any human phenomenon that is in some way ‘hidden, secret, menacing and threatening’. As an agent or actor (‘the gene that does’) in the manufacture and cure of disease, dis-embedded from one frame – science – and re-embedded in
another – the everyday – the gene is able to ‘foster an epidemic of anxiety and engender the fear of unspeakably horrible diseases that lurk in one’s own body’ and to promise to ‘end all diseases, to overcome death, to live forever’. Duden argues that these effects of the migration of ‘the gene’ as a term from science into ordinary language mean that people, now understood and understanding themselves as ‘genetic texts’, sequences to be read off their DNA, become disincarnated and disembodied. They seemingly turn into the objects of a genetic destiny in which risk management through appropriate decision-making (which foetus to abort, which to gestate, for example) becomes the only option for individuals to whom such decisions signal the illusion of individual control and freedom when, in fact, they are making obligatory choices between programmed options. Duden is particularly vociferous about the fact that people in the everyday are often unaware of how language, specifically the use of scientific terms in the everyday, conditions their thinking about themselves and others. She highlights how the normalization or domestication of scientific language generates meanings in the everyday that bear no relation to the scientific meaning of the terms in question, and that those everyday meanings have effects that need to be understood and potentially, by implication, combated.

In *Never Let Me Go*, there is – seemingly – no import of scientific language. Instead, ordinary or everyday language is ‘made strange’ in order to hint at the scientific and medical context which permeates the narrative. Words and phrases such as ‘carer’, ‘donor’, ‘fourth donation’ and ‘her own kind’ all appear already on the first page, ‘carer’ and ‘donor’ repeatedly, to establish an apparently closed world narrated by Kathy H. Her measured account suggests the normalcy, the everydayness of what she describes. In Ishiguro’s novel, then, ‘ideas about difference . . . are enacted and disturbed, in the performance of technoscience’, through the alienation effect that the uncommon use of common words provokes. Difference here operates on a number of levels. It is, for instance, enacted in the difference between Kathy H., the other donors and carers and a never-specified ‘they’ (‘they want me to go on for another eight months’, for example) who act as absolute and absent authority figures. The latter can only, as is conventional in both science fiction and mythological narratives, be approached – if at all – via intermediaries, the so-called ‘guardians’ responsible for the upbringing and schooling of what the reader comes to understand are the clones, created to be used as organ donors once they have matured: ‘Your lives are set out for you. You’ll become adults, then before you’re old, before you’re even middle-aged, you’ll start to donate your vital organs. That’s what each of you was created to do’.

Difference is also enacted in the space created between the clones or donors or carers and ‘ordinary human being[s]’. ‘Ordinary human
beings’ inhabit a world removed from the clones who grow up in a boarding-school style environment, then become carers for others like themselves who are already donating and finally become donors in their own turn before ‘completing’, supposedly at the fourth donation. ‘Ordinary human beings’, people who are not part of the particular command-and-control structure which the clones inhabit, figure only as images: ‘actors you watch on your videos’, 40 individuals observed through plate-glass windows, 41 pictures in porn mags, 42 or in advertisements. They are the ‘unreal’ real that haunt the clones: ‘Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life’. 43 And just as the clones keep ‘an eye out for “possibles” – the people who might have been the models for’ them, so the reader, stung into attention through the alienation effect provoked by the uncommon use of common words, keeps an eye out for the differences and sameness that are at the heart of this novel.

From the beginning it is clear that the clones fulfil service functions first for each other, and later for ‘ordinary’ people in need of organ replacements. As such they undertake both productive and reproductive labour in that their organs constitute their extractable surplus value. Thus whilst their service ‘is exhausted in its performance’, 44 their organs survive in others’ bodies. The clones’ service function taps into ‘familiar configurations of social relations’, 45 and their associated power structures of service production and service reception, ‘leav[ing] intact the notion that social relations depend – necessarily and properly – on a service being, even on a service class of being’. 46 Through that very process questions are raised about difference and sameness. Are the clones another, indeed a lesser, class of being compared to those who receive their organs? Does that organ reception ‘contaminate’ the boundaries between those two groups, and are the clones in their service function human? In other words, do they represent a difference of degree or kind, or are they, in fact the same? And what does either that difference or sameness mean? Here we enter the realm of what I described as ‘mediated science’ above, where questions of meaning take precedence over questions of actualization.

Never Let Me Go takes on the perspective of the clones, rather than of their creators, in its presentation of technoscience, a trope common enough in such narratives, from Frankenstein onwards. No space is given over to the description of scientific process as such and for that reason ‘many questions are left unanswered. Who are the organs for? How can this method of harvesting be cost-effective? Why are organs not being grown from stem cells?’ asked an anonymous reviewer in The Economist. 47 Here I would like to invoke Eugene Thacker’s discussion of ‘The science fiction in technoscience’. Thacker describes science fiction as ‘a contemporary mode in which techniques of extrapolation and speculation are utilized in narrative
form, to construct near-future, far-future or fantastic worlds in which science, technology and society intersect’. Note that this description does not specify how that intersection operates or the relative weighting attached to any one of the three elements within a given narrative. Thacker characterizes extrapolation as ‘an imaginative extension of a present condition, usually into a future world that is “just around the corner” or even indistinguishable from the present (“the future is now”)’. In *Never Let Me Go*’s case, the extrapolation occurs into a near past. The salience of that near past is in part derived from the continuity of the scientific debates alluded to in the novel in the present. Peter Widdowson describes this as ‘novelists ... us[ing] fiction as history to explore how the scars of the past persist into the present’. It is one of the ways in which relationality is maintained through the text.

Thacker distinguishes between two types of science fiction. The first is the one that governs technoscience itself, in other words the science fiction which science creates in order to model the future. This is the projective ‘actualization’ of science. It ‘operates as a meta-level discourse for the promotion, justification, potential application and development of products and services for the biotech industry’. Thus the ‘genetic code of an individual subject’ feeds the technoscience-based science fiction extrapolation ‘in the technical capacity for “disease profiling” (where susceptibility to genetic disease is read from an individual’s genetic code)... It in turn ‘enables the biotech industry to create a narrative of a bioinformatically based, disease-free, corporate-managed future’. Thacker contrasts this version of science fiction, the science fiction intent on the ‘actualization’ of science, with a ‘critical science fiction’. He describes the latter as the science fiction of ‘potentialities’. Here the ‘primary intention is to comment upon, and intervene in, the “history of the present” in terms of its cultural and ethical dimensions.’

I want to suggest that Ishiguro creates such a critical science fiction with *Never Let Me Go*. Its function is not to actualize science in quasi-mimetic fashion but to comment critically on the history of the present. As such the novel, intertextually, is part of the same critical tradition as the work of Frederic Jameson and Donna Haraway. It challenges conceptions of difference as absolute categories and contests the ethical imperatives underlying the insistence on such absolute difference. Instead it argues, in ethical terms, that biotechnological developments generate differences in kind that are in fact differences in degree. The products of this process therefore warrant ethical consideration in the same way as human beings or companion species, as Haraway terms them.

At the heart of *Never Let Me Go* is the question of the relative status of the clones and of what it means to be human. *Never Let Me Go* raises the question of how we are meant to think of the clones – are they like us or
unlike us? The impulse to see them as ‘like us’ is realized through the experiment that is Hailsham, the boarding school where the clones are brought up. As one of the ‘guardians’ at that institution puts it: ‘We challenged the entire way the donations programme was being run. Most importantly, we demonstrated to the world that if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow up to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being. Before that, all clones – or students, as we preferred to call [them] – existed only to supply medical science . . . Shadowy objects in test tubes’. Here the renaming – students, instead of clones – functions to (re-)humanise the clones, to make them ‘like us’. Much of the narrative’s tension stems from this concern, the question of how much like us they actually are or can be made to be, and to what extent they are not. Eluned Summers-Bremner, for example, explores what she describes as ‘the clones’ compromised humanity through the ways in which they are associated with animality, as demonstrated for instance in their effect on one of the ‘guardians’, Madame, when they give her ‘the creeps’: ‘she saw and decided in a second what we were, because you could see her stiffen – as if a pair of large spiders was set to crawl towards her’. Summers-Bremner regards this animalisation of the clones as a means through which humans abreact the non-human and thereby their own mortality. The clones, destined to be killed off through or in the process of donating their vital organs, and reflective in their very existence of the fact that humans are prone to disease and mortality, remind the others in the novel of their ontology as mortal beings. They are in a sense ‘the living dead’ and as such need to be regarded as other, as non-human, if a fantasy of the human as that which lives is to be sustained. This is particularly important here because in the context of organ donation for example, the question of the point at which organs can and should be harvested and how that is done is critical. Does the body have to be already dead for such harvesting, as is frequently the case, and/or when is the body dead enough? In Never Let Me Go the successive organ harvesting process which gradually depletes the donors of their organs, turning them from the living to the dead by degrees, is described as staged. Once carers become donors, they in turn are provided with carers and spend their time in recovery centres until they have been exhausted through successive donations to the point of ‘completion’. The meaning of the word ‘completion’ is ominously never made clear. As Debbora Battaglia puts it: ‘The travesty of the human clone, that it can be reduced to a derelationalized unit of production in the service of commercial and/or political agendas, is the travesty of mistaking the value of the (nonagentive, reified) part for the contingent, relational (agentive) person. This is not dissimilar to the problem posed by the cultivation of transplantable organs.’
Such corporeal fetishism, as Donna Haraway calls it, materializes clones, that is it renders them bodies or merely material entities, and simultaneously dehumanizes them. But, as Eleni Papagaroufali has shown in an article on Greek organ and body donors, ‘body’ and ‘self’ are not as readily disentanglable as phrases such as ‘organ donation’ would suggest: ‘both donors . . . and recipients tend to personify extracted organs and to view them as carrying the deceased’s emotional, moral, and physical characteristics’. Similarly, in Never Let Me Go the bodies of the clones turn out to be more than the sums of their parts. Their guardians, suspicious of that possibility and desirous to prove it, encourage them to work creatively ‘because we thought it would reveal your souls. To put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all’. The guardians’ attempts to encourage the manifestation or materialization of the clones’ soul itself speaks to the fetishization of the material. As such it invokes the requirement of the visible material that haunts belief systems such as Christian religion in the figure of the doubting Thomas, for example. The irony of this is made evident when the clones appeal to an imagined humanity in the guardians in asking them to intercede with the unknown authorities to allow them to live a little longer because they have found love. To their and the reader’s horror, they have to find that there is no possibility of such an appeal. In Precarious Life, Judith Butler argues that ‘those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanized, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all’. The clones are not given the chance of representing themselves to those that decide their fate. Instead, their lives are set up to follow a techno-logic of foreclosure of opportunity, a circumscription of their potentialities through the prescription of their destiny — they will donate organs from a certain point in their lives and die in the process, at some stage of that process. This foreclosure of opportunity constructs them as objects rather than subjects, and seemingly forestalls the possibility of empathy. They are, within techno-logic, after all, merely their bodies.

However, ‘[i]nevitably’, as Battaglia argues, in cultural construction ‘the human artifact will escape the creator’s control and intentionally or otherwise defeat the creator’s program, even when this program is relatively benign or expressly therapeutic’. These are, in a sense, the unintended consequences that have come to haunt the contemporary cultural imaginary. In Never Let Me Go, ‘the copy becomes more human — that is he develops a greater capacity for intimacy and reciprocal commitment’ — than his creator. The clones, for instance, develop close bonds with and commitments to each other. These are enacted through their mutual caring relationships and the demonstration of their affective capacities in relation
to each other, but also through their desire to live, driven by those affective capacities. These capacities for intimacy and reciprocal commitment are, however, thwarted as it becomes clear that there is no interceding instance to which the clones can appeal for the prolongation of their lives. Hailsham, the emblem of that possibility as one of the few ‘humane’ rearing places for clones has, after all, been shut down, and the clones effectively cannot escape their fate of death through organ donation.

The process of death through successive organ donation itself and its details remain veiled and a source of speculation throughout the novel. Kathy H. states: ‘You’ll have heard the same talk. How maybe, after the fourth donation, even if you’ve technically completed, you’re still conscious in some sort of way; how then you find there are more donations, plenty of them, on the other side of that line; how there are no more recovery centres, no carers, no friends; how there’s nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off. It’s horror movie stuff, and most of the time people don’t want to think about it’.66 And this, precisely, is where a critical science fiction is located for the novel is designed to make us consider this very question of what we think is acceptable, ethically, humanly responsible behaviour towards those or that which we deem or designate potentially non-human.

Kathy’s musings recreate the Cartesian mind-body dualism that underpins the horror of her and the other clones’ fates more generally precisely because that dualism creates a space between the body as object and an observing, subjective consciousness: ‘there’s nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off’. Techno-logic requires the foreclosure of the possibility of such (self-)observation. The animation of a reflecting consciousness accompanying the deliberate gradual destruction of a bodily entity is what renders that process and its agents, figuring only as absent presences, inhuman. It is the horror of the body buried alive, the paralyzed but not fully anesthetized patient on the operating table, the soma mistaken for coma.

*Never Let Me Go* argues against the abjection of the body as body only, against the notion that the material is immaterial in the sense of worthless, not worthy of our consideration because beyond the grasp of a reflecting consciousness. Instead, it suggests that body and spirit are imbricated and that the material is not divorcible from its animating impulse. The idea of that animating impulse is tied to the notion of a desire for (self-)knowledge, understood as a networked structure of connection. Indeed, Battaglia makes the point that clones require an other, articulate continuity and connection by virtue of the fact that they are made from an original, Ishiguro’s ‘model’, to whom they actually ‘embod[y] the closest relation’.67 They thus ‘produce messy human relationships’.68 Clones articulate connection materially (hence their creation in the first instance) and, in
Never Let Me Go, affectively, through their at times surreptitious, at times open searches for their ‘models’, the people from whom they have been cloned. As such they manifest a desire for knowledge of their origin and for belonging that humanizes them, rendering them a companion species, in Donna Haraway’s terms, rather than an other on a different, hierarchized scale. They embody the relationality – to each other and to their companion species, ‘ordinary human being’ – which Judith Butler in Precarious Life and in Giving An Account of Oneself diagnoses as at the base of the fundamental interdependency which shapes human existence and which should therefore inform what she terms ‘ethical responsibility’ towards the other.

The novel’s suggestion that the clones – if they do not die in the early stages of the organ harvesting process – may be treated as mere matter that is gradually stripped of its material substance until that substance cannot sustain itself any longer or has no further use value, constitutes the horror that raises critical questions about the function biotechnological potentialities have in our lives and how we relate to these, in every sense of that word. Discussing pre-implantation diagnosis (of fetal abnormalities), Deborah Lynn Steinberg argues that quality of life is not determined, as the bio/logic narrative of pre-implantation diagnosis would have it, by the material realities of the body, but is mediated by social processes and cultural regimes of meaning. These processes and regimes emphasize the techno-logic of biotechnology that assigns a teleological structure to its productions – made for a purpose – that is belied by Ishiguro’s novel. The latter, instead, evokes a rather bleak vision of the dehumanized normalization of biotechnological opportunities. That normalization is realized through the use of ordinary language to convey the biotechnological state which the novel portrays. The absence of signifiers of ‘acute science’ – portraits of scientific procedure, specialist vocabulary, etc. – signals the breakdown of the boundaries between science and the everyday which is part of the contemporary cultural landscape. Science and the everyday are not discrete but intimately related and as such require engagement and a vigilance which we often reserve only for the extra-ordinary. Here the extra-ordinary has been made ordinary and the reader’s task is to develop a critical stance towards that ordinariness.

This insistence on the ordinary, on banality even, to invoke Hannah Arendt’s term, and on the need for a critical stance towards it, may be one reason why the novel does not stage the clones’ revolt and is thus melancholic. Tommy, one of the clones who as a child rages against his fate in inarticulate tantrums, is the only revolting angel here. The rest, to the dismay of many readers, do not rage against the dying of the light but, after attempting a reasoned request for stay of execution, submit to their fate. That compliance gestures towards another disposition in

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contemporary culture – that of witness, testimonial, confessional, passivity even, rather than intervention – towards which *Never Let Me Go* also invites us to adopt a (more) critical stance. The absence of redemption in *Never Let Me Go* and the compliance of the clones in their fate hails the ‘innocent bystander’ position, the observer function that has so haunted twentieth-century critiques of human relations at intimate and global levels.

*Never Let Me Go*, then, constitutes a form of critical science fiction that stands as a corrective to the science fiction of actualisation which constructs biotechnology as political and economic opportunity, and which divides biotechnology, as Lewis Wolpert does, between science which ‘produces ideas about how the world works’ and technology which results in ‘usable objects’ and therefore, according to Wolpert, ‘carries with it ethical issues’. Reliable scientific knowledge, he argues, ‘has no moral or ethical value’. Wolpert goes on to suggest that bio-moralists’ ‘obsession with the life of the embryo has deflected our attention away from the real issue, which is how the babies that are born are raised and nurtured. The ills in our society have nothing to do with assisting or preventing reproduction but are profoundly affected by how children are treated’. One might argue that this pro-nurture stance is partly what animates *Never Let Me Go*. But the novel asks not only about the conditions under which clones are reared; it also asks about the purposes to which the clones are put, their destiny. As Ishiguro suggested:

> having clones as central characters made it very easy to allude to some of the oldest questions in literature ... ‘What does it mean to be human?’ ‘What is a soul?’ ‘What is the purpose for which we’ve been created, and should we try to fulfil it?’ ... In our present era, novelists have struggled to find an appropriate vocabulary ... to discuss these questions ... 76

His answer, his clones, which evoke the connectivity that viewing them merely as ‘spare parts’ denies, aligns his stance to feminist critical science studies. Seeking to analyse posthuman bodies, feminist critical science studies locates posthumanity on a continuum of ‘messy relationships’ where the imbrication of different materialities and species denies the notion of a categorical other. Instead it demands an ethical engagement which recognizes the claims both of those materialities and species, and their relationalities. This is the task of a critical science fiction in which science animates the cultural imaginary to explore the meaning of the new biotechnologies in and for our lives and selves.

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Notes


9 I do not propose to outline that history here but much writing on the science fiction which deals with the creation by humans (usually presented as done by ‘mad’ or over-reaching scientists) of other human-like creatures by ‘unnatural’ (=non-hetero-procreative) means starts with Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus of 1818. For one example pertinent to the context of Never Let Me Go, see Michael Mulky, ‘Frankenstein and the debate over embryo research’, Science, Technology, and Human Values 21.2 (Spring 1996), pp. 157–176. Mulky here discusses the ways in which parliamentarians from different political quarters, in debating the parameters of permissible embryo research, drew directly and indirectly on the Frankenstein myth.

also Susan Squier, ‘Reproducing the posthuman body’, in Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds., pp. 113–132.


14 The practice of encouraging poor people from third world countries to provide organs such as kidneys against payment was the object both of media debates (e.g. Jonathan Watts, ‘China bans buying and selling of human organs’, The Guardian, 29 March 2006, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,329445217-108142,00.html, accessed 22 May 2006) and featured in films such Pretty Dirty Things (dir. Stephen Frears, Buena Vista, 2003).


17 The obvious ones are, of course, The Handmaid’s Tale (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986) and Oryx and Crake (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2003).


20 Of course all science is on one level mediated in that it is created as symbolic form. But by ‘mediated’ here I refer to a process of transformation that removes science from its lamination to procedure and shifts it into the realm of implication and effect.


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23 Although Squier made this comment in 1995, much of it continues to hold. Lewis Wolpert, Professor of Biology at University College London argued in 2002 that ‘I am against cloning as it carries a high risk of abnormalities.’ And on moving to the Queen’s medical research institute at Edinburgh University to undertake further research on cloning in 2005, Ian Wilmut, talking entirely in terms of human cloning for therapeutic purposes, suggested that little had happened in terms of advancing knowledge about nuclear transfer (transferring the nucleus of one cell into another) since the cloning of Dolly the sheep. See Susan Squier, ‘Reproducing the posthuman body: Ectogenetic fetus, surrogate mother, pregnant man’, in Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds. Posthuman Bodies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).


30 Duden, p. 5.


32 Ibid., p. 6.


35 Ibid, p. 15. See also Deborah Lynn Steinberg, Bodies in Glass: Genetics, Eugenics, Embryo Ethics (Manchester University Press, 1997) for a discussion of techno/logical determinism.
37 *Never Let Me Go*, p. 3.
38 Ibid., p. 73.
39 Ibid., p. 239.
40 Ibid., p. 73.
41 Ibid., p. 126.
42 Ibid., p. 165.
43 Ibid., p. 127.
46 Ibid., pp. 84–5.
48 Thacker, p. 156.
49 On 3 December 2007, as I wrote this text, the BBC reported a study carried out by Oxford University regarding illegal sex selective interventions in pregnancy, according to which UK Indian women travel to India to have sex-selected abortions of female foetuses, a practice which is illegal both in India and the UK. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7123753.html, accessed 4 December 2007.
51 Thacker, p. 157.
52 Ibid., p. 158.
54 In an interesting way, *Never Let Me Go* in this respect bears a certain similarity to other novels fictionalizing the notion of schools as potentially humanizing institutions for those that are ‘not like us’ such as Peter Høeg’s *Borderliners* (London: Harvill Press, 1994).
55 *Never Let Me Go*, p. 239.
61 *Never Let Me Go*, p. 238.
62 An interesting fictional example of this is John Fuller’s *Flying to Nowhere* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) in which a monk kills fellow monks and dissects them in an attempt to find (the seat of) their soul.


64 Battaglia, p. 497.

65 Ibid., p. 501.


67 Battaglia, p. 506.

68 Ibid., p. 507.


71 See Steinberg, p. 118.


73 In *The Guardian’s* bookclub John Mullan reported that ‘the issue of this failure to rebel has provoked the most animated questions and disputes.’ This, in fact became the basis for his article ‘Positive feedback’, *The Guardian*, 1 April 2006, at http://books.guardian.co.uk/bookclub/story/0,,1744265,00.html, accessed 22 May 2006.


75 This issue was interestingly explored in Caryl Churchill’s play *A Number* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002) which explores multiple clones’ relation to their ‘father’ and each other.


77 See, for example, Halberstam and Livingston, eds., op cit.