

**Heterosexual Romance, Gender Normativity and Organ Transplantation in *The Unit*  
and *Never Let Me Go***

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Medical and surgical practitioners insist that organ donation and transplantation are life-saving procedures, necessary for the survival of those on the brink of death. Transplant teams insist that biomedical technologies and pharmaceuticals are open to all and therefore separate from concerns around race, sexuality and gender hierarchies and inequalities.

However, contemporary literary representations of this biomedical intervention, especially Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit*, portray a bleak vision of its future state. Set in dystopian futuristic landscapes where the clinic controls who has the right to life and who has the right to save the lives of others, both novels capture a potential crisis in ethics. By creating a subcategory of the human, these novels represent how the human is currently being redefined through a gendered and racialised economic and nationalist lens, where only certain people belong and where only some contributions count.

In the context of such dystopian embodied landscapes, this paper explores how *Never Let Me Go* and *The Unit* weave intimate and intricate connections between normative gender and sexuality roles, colonial ideologies, transnational liberal economies and contemporary biomedical practices. The flesh is the site through, on and in which the state intervenes in order to save the lives of those who matter. Engaging with Judith Butler's and Margrit Shildrick's work on ethics and bodies, this paper argues that the heterosexual romance narrative is one possible way of rethinking contemporary bioethics. Heterosexual intimacy, which does not reinforce heteronormative nationalist demands, allows for both a reimagining of an ethics of the human and a forging of non-violent modes of coming together with others.