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Conclusion

On 2 January 2019, PBS premiered a documentary on the life of Nobel Prize-winning geneticist and co-discoverer (with Francis Crick, Rosalind Franklin and Maurice Wilkins) of the structure of DNA – James Watson. In 2007, Watson, the one-time head of the Human Genome Project, had claimed in a newspaper interview that he was ‘inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa’ because ‘all our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours – whereas all the testing says not really.’¹ In the wake of his comments a number of his planned speaking engagements were cancelled, and his employers, the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in Long Island, suspended him as their Chancellor. In 2014 he auctioned off his Nobel medal, citing his ostracization from the scientific community as a result of his remarks on race as the reason. Asked by the interviewer of the 2019 PBS documentary whether his views on genetics, intelligence and race had changed, Watson replied, ‘No, not at all ... There’s a difference on the average between blacks and whites on IQ tests. I would say the difference is genetic.’² These comments led to him being stripped of the last of his honorary titles, the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory describing his comments as ‘unsubstantiated and reckless personal opinions,’ ‘reprehensible’ and ‘unsupported by science.’³

In many ways, Watson’s deterministic conception of genetics, his insistence on the separation of nature from nurture, is out-of-step with the latest scientific developments and thinking in his field, an old-fashioned view of the gene which parallels what biologist Joseph Graves claims is an old-fashioned understanding of race: writing in response to the PBS documentary, Graves argues that Watson’s views are a ‘product of his time,’ of the fact that he ‘was born into a rigidly segregated society. For much of his life, most biologists and anthropologists perpetuated the notion of race science,’ a background which leaves Watson unable to process more recent genetic findings that ‘socially-defined races do not correspond to the underlying genetic variation within our species.’⁴ While

Graves acknowledges the toxicity of Watson's views, and their contribution to racism in the United States, Graves implies that such genetic views of race are confined to an older generation of scientists as he presents contemporary genetics as having moved on from such ideas. It is true that Watson's extreme and overtly racist views have been widely condemned within the scientific community, a community which is now largely anti-racist in intent.⁵ However as the case studies in this book highlight, contemporary genetics cannot be characterized as a science which has entirely separated itself from racial or indeed sometimes racist ways of thinking. Not only have developments such as the Human Genome Diversity Project and BiDiL continued to promote racialized forms of categorization alongside the wider scientific denial of the genetic reality of race, but the rejection and attempted disruption of genetic conceptions of race, apparent in the African Eve hypothesis and the HGP, have, as is evident in the Graves's example here, often occurred through the scientific separation of the social from the genetic. Race is framed as a social problem while current genetic science is framed as distinct from that which went before. I have argued that these separations, while not overt expressions of racism of the kind espoused by Watson, have combined with the dismissal of the genetic reality of race to enable the recurrence of racial patterns of thinking and racist outcomes in a science which otherwise declares itself to be anti-racist. The anti-racist stance of contemporary genetics has occurred in the absence of a scientific consensus on what race is, and it is what Rob DeSalle and Ian Tattersall call the 'widespread confusion' that 'still exists about the nature of the evidence on which the human species is subdivided'⁶ which creates the void in which people like James Watson – a real-life Dr Sick – can promote genetic racism.

This book has argued for a new, literary intervention into these debates, premised on the fact that contemporary fictions refuse the biology/culture, science/society binaries that are still promoted by scientists and literary scholars alike. Rather than accepting one scientific stance over another, or endorsing some science as straightforwardly factually correct (as some literary scholars of race have done), the contemporary novels discussed in this book compel us never to lose sight of the ways in which all ideas about race are formed from complex entanglements across the biological and cultural realms. The novels demonstrate how literature itself is bound up, in different ways, in these racial biofictions, whether it be in the influence of Alex Haley's *Roots* on the creation of popular narratives of African ancestry in bioanthropology, or in the literary metaphors and language used by the scientific community as explored in *White Teeth* and *Apex Hides the Hurt*. In articulating how facts and fantasies of race

cannot be comprehended individually, how fiction and science share forms, methodologies, language and imagery, the novels offer a new understanding of race as biofictional, regardless of whether a particular racial idea or development is presented as anti-racist in formation and effect. What the novels offer at a moment when genetic science is widely understood to be anti-racist is an understanding of how this anti-racism is narratively constructed, of how the contemporary cogeneration of ideas about race across the boundaries of biology and culture means that the genetics of race is not impermeable to racism and that older racial thinking is always latent in the new. While Whitehead demonstrates this by evoking the absurd racist theories of nineteenth-century surgeon Samuel Cartwright as a precursor to pharmacogenetics' reliance on language to make race signify, Ishiguro and Rushdie evoke Darwinian and Lamarckian theories, respectively, as they imagine how earlier theories of biological similarity and change might continue to shape race's biofictional formations in the present.

In so doing, the novels resist the break with history emphasized in much contemporary genetic discourse, and instead encourage us to imagine how the continuities between bioscience past and present might not only result in the repetition of certain racial modes of thought, but might also offer an alternative to the certainties about race that genetic science attempts to assert. For by invoking the precedents for contemporary genetic ideas of race, and in so doing demonstrating how race has always been biofictional, the novels ultimately suggest that the meaning of race will never be fixed, that the biofictional nature of race means it will always be subject to change and revision as it is formed and reformed across the cultural, social and scientific spheres. Indeed, this is the suggestion of the book's final chapter; epigenetic science, in foregrounding how bodies are in a fluid, dynamic relationship with their environments, offers us a way of understanding the fluidity of race itself, which is made and re-made at the intersections of scientific fact and fiction, of the biological body and its environment (where the environment, as Butler and Rushdie demonstrate, is often shaped by the racist imaginaries of the dominant political culture). Understanding race in this way might, I argue, offer the opportunity for a renewed anti-racism in science and literary studies based on an understanding of the permeability, rather than fixity, of racialized bodies.

The global political climate in the final years of the 2010s makes it in some ways understandable that scientists have attempted to create a narrative around race which, despite (or perhaps because of) frequent interventions of the kind made by Watson, presents contemporary genetics as largely unified in its anti-racism and in its refusal of a biological basis for race. For we are living through

a moment at which scientific expertise and facts are being brought into question by conservative politicians in the United States and UK who have sought to win popularity and votes through degrading expert scientific knowledge and academic expertise.⁷ Partly in response to President Donald Trump's denial of the phenomena and effects of climate change and his apparent anti-vaccination stance among other positions, a worldwide March for Science was held in April 2017, 'inspired by a growing concern about the lack of science in policy' and calling for a 'science that upholds the common good, and for political leaders and policymakers to enact evidence-based policies in the public interest'.⁸ In the context of the political downplaying of the efficacy of science, and the questioning and misuse of scientific ideas by right-wing politicians and groups, it is unsurprising that scientists have sought to double down on the importance of scientific fact, and of science as an objective set of disciplinary procedures based strictly on verifiable evidence. When it comes to race, the global political climate has resulted in the increasing misuse of science for racist ends. As Andrea Morris, who worked on the film about James Watson, has pointed out, 'It's not an old story of an old guy with old views' but instead the correlation between race, genetics and intelligence which Watson postulates, 'feels very current'.⁹ Many scientists are concerned by the ways in which their work is being misused and misinterpreted by white supremacists, who increasingly draw on a variety of genetic technologies such as DNA ancestry tracing, and discuss scientific papers on far-right online forums as they search for scientific backing for their racist views.¹⁰ The situation has become of so much concern that in November 2018 the American Society of Human Genetics issued a statement denouncing attempts to link genetics and racial supremacy, affirming that 'genetics demonstrates that humans cannot be divided into biologically distinct subcategories'.¹¹

In this context the definite and definitive language used by geneticists who affirm the non-genetic basis of race is comprehensible, their insistence that science offers the final word on race a defence against those within science and without who are increasingly questioning this 'fact'. Literary scholars have adopted similar positions on the scientific facts of race. Not only have scholars of race largely accepted the anti-racist outlook of contemporary genetics, but on the relatively few occasions when literature and science scholarship has addressed the question of race in science, a comparable approach to science emerges: Sabine Sielke, for example, asks why 'curiously enough, while biology encourages us to "forget about" race, literary and cultural studies keep celebrating – and selling – ethnic difference. Was C.P. Snow right, after all, when he deemed the "literary intellectual" a racist while cheering the scientist

as truly liberal, envisioning a bright future?’¹² While she acknowledges that ‘matters are, of course, a bit more complicated’,¹³ here, it is literary studies, with its insistence on classifying writers according to race, indeed even in its emphasis on debating and discussing race, which, rather than science, is framed as responsible for the continuation of racial thinking within the academy.¹⁴ Yet it is in the very lack of attention given to black and minority ethnic writers within literature and science studies that we can discern the problems with both the avoidance of race as a subject of enquiry and with the critical belief that science has once and for all solved the problem of race, tempting as it might be to accept this as fact.

In interrogating the ‘facts’ of anti-racist science in this book, there is a danger that my own critical stance could be aligned with those who seek to undermine science, that in questioning the objectivity and neutrality of the anti-racist discourses of contemporary genetics and the literary critical acceptance of these discourses, my approach could be interpreted (although it certainly is not) as an endorsement of their opposite – a conception of race as grounded in the genes. This is a bind which Bruno Latour addresses in relation to climate change denial, one of the things which he argues has been made possible by postmodern forms of critique in the humanities, which in the 1990s could be characterized, he contends, by the argument that ‘facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language’.¹⁵ For Latour, and those he has inspired in literary studies, emphasizing a lack of scientific certainty has deleterious effects: the critical questioning of scientific truth becomes just another form of the kind of popularism from which conspiracy theories arise, no matter how much the latter deforms the former.¹⁶ The solution he proposes is to flip critique so that rather than questioning objectivity, the task is to reveal ‘the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the *illusion* of prejudices’.¹⁷ When it comes to race, this would mean the upholding of the incontrovertible fact that race is not genetic, in order to counter racist prejudice. In focusing on analysing science and scientists, humanities scholars may have chosen ‘the wrong enemies’ according to Latour, and the problem with critique is that ‘when we try to reconnect scientific objects with their aura, their crown, their web of associations, when we accompany them back to their gathering, we always appear to *weaken* them, not to *strengthen* their claim to reality’.¹⁸ The solution he proposes is for the critic to reposition herself as one who assembles and one who gathers together (rather than rips apart).¹⁹

The aim of this book has been not to destroy or break apart the scientific finding that race has no biological basis. I believe that racial categorizations,

divisions between 'black' and 'white', do not correlate to specific genetic markers and that there is more genetic diversity within populations demarcated by race than there is between them. This book is also driven by the desire for an anti-racist science and literary culture equipped with the tools to fight the falsehoods and stories about race being increasingly promoted by racist white supremacists. But it is precisely because of this anti-racist aim that I have been concerned to explore the political, cultural and scientific conditions which have made the apparent anti-racist stance of contemporary genetics possible. While such an analysis of the threads that make up this scientific position may appear to 'weaken' the reality that race is not genetic by uncovering the biofictional assemblages of which it is made, the consequence of not investigating the formation and effects of the anti-racist tenor of genetics is the reproduction of the very racism which this scientific stance seeks to avoid. From the apparently raceless clones of *Never Let Me Go*, to Marcus Chalfen's insistence that his genetic experimentation is post-racial in *White Teeth*, to the stereotypes of African and black people which emerge in *Roots* and which informed bioanthropological narratives on the unity of humankind, the contemporary novels in this book demonstrate how racial configurations emerge at moments when science appears to move beyond race. They show how the political post-racialism and colourblind ideologies which would deny the very existence of racism itself have gained strength from the scientific finding that race is not genetic, and explore what the consequences of this might be. Understanding how the anti-racist import of science has in fact been enabled and driven at times by a lack of concern about racism is essential if we are to move towards the alternative, anti-racist conceptions of race and racism put forward in the final chapter – an understanding of race as the biological impact of racist belief, as fiction made real through bodies' exposure to environments shaped by racist fantasies.

This book has proposed a methodology through which such configurations might be uncovered and analysed, a methodology which draws upon, rather than unthinkingly critiques, scientific ideas, in particular new post-genomic ideas about the permeability of bodies in relation to their (cultural) environments, environments which I have argued might be expanded in conception to include the fictional, the imaginary and the made-up. Yet this interdisciplinary approach has also had at its core a desire to seek out literary engagements with science, and intersections between science and fiction, which are otherwise overlooked by a field dominated by the analysis of literature written by white, Anglophone authors. While the racial backgrounds of the authors in this study has not been an organizing principle, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is in the

work of writers of colour that ideas about race and science emerge, and it is in their work that alternatives to the Latourian view of the world (steeped as it is in European philosophy) might be found. Creating an interdisciplinarity based upon exchange and openness between literary studies and bioscience is not enough; what this book calls for is a decolonized approach to literature and science, an approach that does not simply encompass the analysis of work by non-white writers, but demands that the forms of knowledge found within their works and beyond be brought to bear on the methodologies that scholars in this field employ. Calls for decolonized forms of knowledge – a knowledge which foregrounds the intellectual and critical work of non-European thinkers while acknowledging the racist roots of some canonical scholarship – currently abound in the academy, in both the sciences and the humanities. That these demands for ‘alternative facts’ have occurred at the same moment at which academic knowledge is being questioned and distorted by populist politicians and fascist groups has caused some confusion, and in some cases only added to academics’ sense that their work is under attack. Yet the two are quite different, and in the case of calls for a decolonized knowledge, I think that this movement might actually assist scholars interested in how the traditional boundaries of the humanities and science are being, and might be, reconfigured. For what the decolonization movement calls for—and where I believe that it might inform approaches to, and understanding of, the field of literature and science—is an analysis and acknowledgement of the critical role that classification plays in shaping knowledge: both literature and science scholars and decolonization scholars are concerned with the constitution of and relationships between disciplines, in how some knowledge is variously ordered and valued in relation to other forms of knowledge.²⁰ Interdisciplinarity itself emerged through ethnic studies, black studies and women’s studies in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s as a means of critiquing power in the face of disciplinary mechanisms that reproduced certain relations of power.²¹

Yet interdisciplinary research today, at least that concerned with the sciences and the humanities, has largely overlooked this fact, and as a result is still often shaped and determined by the very disciplinary structures that it is seeking to move beyond. The field of literature and science studies has arguably been built upon an approach which places canonical writers and works in conversation with science (which, conversely, is often lesser known or peripheral) and leaves the structures of English studies – including the prioritization of writers traditionally considered important or significant – intact.²² The works of black and minority ethnic writers are, it can be assumed, thought to be the province of

postcolonial scholars, as is the issue of race. Thus little attention has been given to the fact that English studies as a discipline as well as the publishing industry continue to categorize and classify literature based on modes of thought which have their origins in the biological (and therefore racial) sciences. Inspired by the organizational principles of biology, attempts were made in the nineteenth century (under the aegis of genre theory) to arrange literary texts in taxonomic order.²³ The legacy of such historical exchanges, Sielke argues, can be seen today in 'technical terms (such as origin, genus, genre, gender, reproduction and mimicry) and cultural practices (like classification and taxonomy) which both biology and literary studies employ to their own particular ends,'²⁴ literary and cultural studies having 'evolved some of their central questions and concerns, privileged theories, methods and concepts from a dialogue with the discourses of biology.'²⁵ The taxonomic patterns of literary studies have their roots in nineteenth-century biology which in turn, as I argued in the introduction, formed and shaped ideas about race through processes of exchange with the humanities at the height of imperialism. Thus while as Levine notes, 'despite the fact that many – if not most – of us practicing literary criticism have a distaste for nationalist and imperialist agendas, and understand literatures as transnational formations that include multiple languages and geographies,' nevertheless 'the institutional patterns of nineteenth and early twentieth century English departments persist.'²⁶ In this way the situation of contemporary literary studies appears much like that of anti-racist science – mine is a discipline whose practitioners profess to be anti-racist but have done too little to question the underpinning assumptions that organize scholarship. The academy, at least in the UK, remains preoccupied with how British writers of ethnic minority backgrounds can be described and classified, and it is the way that such writing and scholarship is often separated from English (read white) literature that has led scholars interested in interdisciplinarity to overlook how the work of writers of colour might inform approaches to literature and science.

This book is an attempt to re-think the boundaries between science and literary studies, but also the artificial divisions within literary studies itself, to demonstrate how engaging with the idea of race, and with writers who have examined the dimensions and afterlives of this concept, can transform understanding of the relations between science and literature. The novels examined in this book each, in different ways, offer biofictional understandings of race in the contemporary era which might begin to change and to challenge approaches to race in literature and science studies, literary studies more broadly and in genetic science. They show us how our disciplinary objects cannot be

neatly contained, how the co-production of race across scientific and fictional borders dissolves the classifications and distinctions between disciplines, practices and indeed racial groups that shape academic and public discourse. At a moment when the meanings of race in genetics are as contested and as fractured as ever, when institutions, political, social and educational, refuse to speak the language of race and racism, the racial formations represented in contemporary fiction offer a mode of comprehending the biofictional nature of race that speaks both to bioscience and to literary studies; a mode in which what is fact and what is fiction cannot be aligned with traditional disciplinary distinctions between science and literature.