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Thesis: Some Things are Better Left Unsaid

Exegesis: The Things Left Unsaid

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of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing

Centre for Creative Writing,
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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Candidate's signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lia", written in a cursive style.

NAME

LIA JASMINE LAMUEL-DANIEL

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Ethics Approval

This research project did not involve human participants or any other potentially contentious elements, and as such did not require approval from the AUT Ethics Committee (AUTEK).

Abstract

EXEGESIS:

The exegesis discusses how the thesis, *Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*, journeyed from the initial concept to the completed manuscript. It will consider multiple texts and films that inspired and informed the creation and development of the thesis through theme, point of view and experimenting with structure, style and setting.

THESIS:

Some Things are Better Left Unsaid is a cross genre novel that draws on elements of science fiction, thriller and young adult (YA) themes. The story is told through the eyes of a teenage protagonist, Valeria, as she deals with the trauma of losing her memories, her father and also herself. It follows her journey to an isolated rehabilitation institute that purports to be able to help her regain the memory of what happened in the cemetery. While there, Valeria becomes friends with her mentor, Aiden, and the owner of the institute Val, who reminds her of her father. As these characters begin to interact and develop relationships, Valeria begins to heal. After she seemingly remembers what happened in the cemetery, Val reveals that he suspects Doctor Donovan, her psychiatrist – and the one who referred her to the institute – has been manipulating her memories. Given the option of living with her implanted memories or finding her real ones, a mentally stronger Valeria chooses to regain her real memories despite unknown consequences. When her real memories are revealed, Valeria discovers that Aiden had also been at the cemetery and was in fact the culprit of the death of the stranger she was trying to save. The journey ends with Valeria in a mentally stronger place, able to deal with the emotions of facing her betrayers, her memory and the loss of her father.

Some Things are Better Left Unsaid is intentionally told through a single narrator in a third-person limited point of view and draws on themes from the science fiction, thriller and YA genres, such as transhumanism, power and self-discovery. Key texts that inspired the thesis include: *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro (2005), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon (2003), *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah J. Maas (2015), *The Hunger games* series by Suzanne Collins (2008,2009, 2010) *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld (2005), and *Cinder* by Marissa Meyer (2012).

Exegesis

The Things Left Unsaid

By Lia Jasmine Lamuel-Daniel

Master of Creative Writing 2019

Introduction

The following exegesis will be more meditative than academic but will utilize critical work in tandem with literary works to explore the creation of the thesis entitled: *Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*. The thesis has attempted to craft a cross-genre work which utilizes conventions from science fiction, thriller and young adult fiction. Transhumanist themes such as bionic enhancement, as well as power, truth and self-discovery are told through a single third-person point of view narrative and through the filter of a young female protagonist. The exegesis will also discuss the choices made in setting, structure and style; and consider where the story could be improved in future drafts.

To begin, this was not the story that I envisioned when I joined the Master of Creative Writing. The initial concept was a more comical, action-based story, and the first of a trilogy about spies. From the beginning, I wanted to experiment with biotechnology and as a reader and avid film viewer, it was something that I had witnessed increasing in popularity take for example – the Marvel franchise where technology and its subset biotechnology is an immense part of the world that they have created. For example: *Iron Man* (Arad & Feige, 2008) which begins the franchise with a genius inventor and his electromagnetic creation to keep shrapnel from his heart; to *Black Panther* (Feige, 2018) based in Wakanda where super advanced technology is woven into their everyday lives. Similarly, dystopian novels such as *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro (2006) and *Cinder* by Marissa Meyer (2102) highlighted the potential for biotechnology to be utilized both in the near and far future.

The possibility that technology could offer continued to ruminate as I worked on the initial concept. However, as I wrote, the story seemed to hit a wall. And though I tried to rework it, re-evaluate or re-centre, the wall remained an immovable object. Instead of moving forward in the story, I continually found that I had to write backwards – and most of the information I wrote would end up remaining as part of the fabula.

It was around this time that my mentor, Vana, helped me realize that I was straddling two different stories. There was a story being told with the tone of voice that I had come in with – the lighter spy story; and another one being told by a newer tone of voice – more atmospheric, reflective

and mysterious. It was at this point that writer's block really hit. The words seemed to have dried up. The excitement, energy, ideas and hope I had come in with deserted me. I was like the arid desert waiting for the once a year rainstorm. But the patience of my mentor helped me create my own rain rather than wait for rain to fall from the sky.

After some soul searching, the initial storyline had to be let go. Though the core initial ideas remained – biotechnology, power, truth and self-discovery – a new story began to form prompted by a Facebook reminder – ‘here is a memory from this day...’

The lightbulb flashed, inspiring a line of thinking about the intersectionality between our human memory and our online or technologically enhanced memory.

It is evident when speaking to people of generations past that memories recalled are specific to a time, a year, a season; while my own memory is prompted by a browse through a digital album. The knowledge that these memories are safely stored on a separate device that cannot be corrupted by time means that at a later date, I can be reminded of them... but for the time being, they have been entrusted to the care of my device, or social media platform – technology. Through this line of thinking, the idea for a neurological enhancement – the brain chip that is implanted in Valeria – and the question of ‘who controls our memories’ was established.

But the story, again, hit a dead end. This time, I realized that it was because the story had to be set free from the confines and strictures I had been trying to impose on it in an effort to go where *I* wanted to go. Even though I had started a new story, I had carried the initial storyline with me, and it no longer felt organic to the story. It was like taking the bull by the horns and forcing it to go a certain way. Needless to say, it was exhausting and of little use. The characters had to have free reign, autonomy to explore this new story. To make it their own.

I realized that the initial character was now completely different, as were the supporting characters and in order for the story to move forward, the characters had to be who they had become. Therefore, the main protagonist changed from Jaime to Valeria and so forth. I undertook a MBTI personality test for Valeria to understand her better – as I had done for Jaime – and discovered that their personalities were quite different. Where Jaime was compassionate, sympathetic, caring and warm; Valeria was bold, impatient, impulsive and risk-prone (doesn't always think of long term-

consequences). From that point onward, the distinction between the two became clear and the current story took shape.

The process I went through for how this story came about is reflected by the challenges faced by the main protagonist, Valeria. She begins in a place of self-doubt, an inability to trust herself or believe in herself. She wants to face her fears and begin healing. Then she chooses to enter the Thorssen Institution (like I did – AUT) to learn, to heal. While there she overcame the obstacles facing her and regains her memory. She learns to value herself. To trust herself.

Ultimately, that is the goal at the end of this course. To have finished the book, found the light at the end of the tunnel – reached the denouement. To have built a trust in myself, a belief in my ability to be a writer and break through the mental incapacitation.

Themes: Knowledge, Power and Technology – the Intersect

In the current global climate, technology is an inescapable fact of life. The creation and integration is part and parcel of civilization. And as technological advancement continues to permeate everyday life, I wanted to address it in a way that reflected technology's true nature. To highlight the fact that technology in and of itself is not inherently good or bad. Rather, it is the users – the people and their intentions that make it so.

Take, for example, social media, once a revolution in communication and connectivity, now an all-encompassing way of life. It can be said that life has moved into the digital sphere – whether it be collaborating with teams across the globe or using a dating app, or finding and booking a restaurant. It has become a tool, a means of convenience that can be used for good, or as has been proven too many times, for evil – for example: influencing politics, creating cultures of hate and bullying. In short, for every good reason there is to use social media, the internet and technology, there are just as many bad. It all depends on the user. How *they* choose to wield the power given to them.

As a subset of technology, biotechnology has become increasingly prevalent in creative works – especially over the last few decades. And often, through the context of technology, power – an important and often used theme in the science fiction genre, is also explored. The concept of biotechnology is common in futuristic works such as the *Lunar Chronicles* series written by Marissa Meyer which confronts the theme head on by establishing a female cyborg as the series protagonist (Meyer, 2102). Similarly, Steampunk works such as *Mortal Engines* depict enhanced humans such as the character of 'Shrike' who retains human elements while being mostly prosthetic. As mentioned previously, *Iron Man* (Arad & Feige, 2008) is a less extreme example of biotechnology in which Tony Stark, the titular character, uses an electromagnet in his chest to keep shards of shrapnel from piercing his heart and killing him which prompts him to develop better, more reliable biotechnology. In the same way, in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (Feige, 2011), Steve Rogers, a scrawny, sickly man is transformed into a superhuman by a serum created to improve human soldiers.

Further, the Disney series *Lab Rats* (Peterson & Moore, 2012) portrays three biotechnologically enhanced siblings who each have either superior strength, speed or intellect which enable them to carry out missions with higher risks and with greater efficiency.

Noticeably, in film, technology, knowledge and power usually equate to a plot-based narrative as shown in the following: *Iron Man 3* (Feige, 2013) – where the main antagonist tries to hack into the hard drive of organisms and recode their DNA; *Hobbs & Shaw* (Johnson, Statham, Morgan, Garcia, 2019)– explores a similar vein to *Captain America: The First Avenger* (Feige, 2011) with enhanced super soldiers; *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (Feige, 2012) – where the main antagonist uses nano molecular binding and synthesized flesh technology to give himself a humanesque body for world domination; and *Black Panther* (Feige, 2018) – set in a city where advanced technological advancement is the norm, blending seamlessly into everyday life prompting life and death stakes for the main characters.

Each of these examples of biotechnology raises the theme of power; that is, the person who owns the technology, has the power. And this power that they obtain can be used to further their end goal, be it good or bad.

Another driver of power commonly used in psychological thrillers, is knowledge. Through themes such as psychology and mind games, it is most often antagonists that use knowledge to exploit other characters. Examples of the intersect between knowledge and power can be seen in relationships where power is gained from using knowledge to prey on people who are weaker, using their insecurity to take advantage of them, for instance: In *Clockwork Princess* by Cassandra Clare the antagonist, Axel Mortmain, monopolizes a supply of the drug called *yin fen* and uses it against Tessa Gray and William Herondale who are desperate to save Jem Carstairs from certain death if he cannot have it (Clare, 2013). *A Court of Thorns and Roses* has the main antagonist Amarantha, using the protagonist's love interest, Tamlin, against her, forcing her to endure horrific trials in order to break him free from the spell Amarantha has him under (Maas, 2015a).

The *Throne of Glass* series also by Maas, depicts the main antagonist Maeve, hoarding the knowledge of the main protagonist Aelin and her eventual love interest Rowan, even going so far as to alter their brains to make them unable to recognize each other (Maas, 2016).

In each of these examples, the main antagonist turned their knowledge into power. I wanted to combine these three aspects, knowledge, power and technology with a relationship-based narrative – as opposed to the usual plot-based narrative – to offer a different view to readers.

From this stems the notion of power verses powerlessness which is played out through the loss and then reacquisition of Valeria's true memories. Throughout the book, Valeria is unaware that she does not control her memories, that the agency she believes she has is not truly hers, giving the power to Doctor Donovan who controls her memories and as she discovers, the ability to control her.

As the old adage says, 'knowledge is power' and Doctor Donovan has access to technology that makes people do her bidding, and this is the knowledge that she turns into power. Conversely, Val has the same knowledge but chooses to use it for good. Donovan removes Valeria's memories, symbolically making Valeria powerless against her. However, Val helps to give power back to Valeria – her agency – by helping her to restore her memories, helping her to build her own power.

The character of Valeria embodies this. Despite her powerlessness, both as a young protagonist against an older antagonist, and with her lost memories that she tries to regain throughout the book, Valeria comes to a point where she chooses not to let the circumstances or powerlessness dictate her actions.

When Valeria uncovers the truth, when she finds that knowledge, the power dynamic shifts. Because now she has the power to reveal the truth about Aiden and Doctor Donovan. Consequently, the character of Doctor Donovan, though smart and powerful, the woman who seemingly has it all, is unravelled by the simple act of one teenage girl standing up for what is right. When Valeria helps Emily in the cemetery, she sets in motion all the events that lead to her self-discovery and the downfall of Doctor Donovan. Through the medium of fiction, the story reinforces the well-known idea that bad begets bad, and good – though sometimes harder – eventually, begets good.

My novel also deals with the YA theme of self-discovery. The main protagonist, Valeria, loses her memories and also her sense of self at an age where she is learning to be an independent woman. She gives control of her mind to an institution that purports to help her regain these memories through the use of advanced technology created to enhance the human body, allowing subjects to mitigate flaws; in essence, transhumanism – a derivative of biotechnology defined as

“techniques...developed to assist memory, concentration and mental energy etc...” (World Transhumanist Association, 2002) – which Sutton (2015) states “aims at overcoming human frailty” (p.120). But as Valeria traverses the landscape of this isolated, slightly dystopian world, building relationships and fostering an internal strength, Valeria discovers that the very devices she had trusted to return her memories, her identity to her, is in actuality what is being used to control her.

This journey of self-discovery is often intensely emotional and is central to many YA novels across varying genres, the examples listed above included. Maas’s character Feyre transforms over the course of the book series from bitter and angry, to strong and emotionally stable (Maas, 2015a). Similarly, Harry Potter’s journey as he discovers he is a wizard (Rowling, 1997) culminates in him being able to face his nemesis and live despite losing many friends and loved ones along the way (Rowling, 2007). His journey has been read over and over, touching people’s lives in the millions, if not more. And that is the goal of both YA fiction and this novel, for my own future readers. To have been able to relate to their journeys in a way that leaves a lasting impression. Kimberley (2016) concurs with this, highlighting the fact that:

“Fiction aimed at young adult readers often attempts to help the target audience come to terms with finding a sense of identity , and navigating a way to live that makes sense to them, in a period of life characterized by intense emotions, rapid change and emerging independence... in an age of rapidly advancing technology.” (p.124)

Point of View – Through a Strong Female Lens

The last decade has seen an increase in strong female characters becoming more visible in mainstream media; for example *Wonder Woman* (Snyder, Snyder, Suckle & Roven, 2017) an Amazonian princess who fights to protect mankind; *Agent Carter* (Markus & McFeely, 2015) who battles both villains and misogyny in the post-World War II era; ‘Okoye’, first introduced in *Black Panther* (Feige, 2018) who embodies the modern kick-ass female action hero; and an increasing number of other characters on both the small and big screens, have taken women into the front lines of the action and thriller genres.

In the literary sphere, examples of a strong female lead can be found in the *Throne of Glass* series by Sarah J. Maas which portrays a confident and adept assassin who, throughout the course of the series, learns that she is the lost daughter of a once great territory (Maas, 2013, 2015b). Maas (2013) builds the character of the main protagonist, Aelin, with each instalment until she is fully realized as the Queen of her territory (Maas, 2018). The most important aspect of her strong character is not her assassin skills and fighting prowess, it is her belief in herself despite trying circumstances and the way it inspires the characters around her to break out of their own prisons.

Similarly, Mulan, the main protagonist of *The Magnolia Sword* by Sherry Thomas is a trained swordswoman who undertakes a dangerous mission to save her homeland in 5th Century A.D. China. Once again, though her combat skill is a major point of the story, the growth of her self-belief is ultimately what enables her to use those skills and save her country (Thomas, 2019).

Katniss Everdeen, a well-known and loved character of The Hunger Games series both in the books and films, is another example of a strong female protagonist. Throughout the book series, Katniss faces many life and death situations head on, ready to fight and protect her family. Her inner strength that allowed her to first, provide for her family, then to take her sister’s place in the games (Collins, 2008), and to face the perils of being part of a winning duo (Collins, 2009); allows her to take on the role of being a symbol of the new age, of freedom (Collins, 2010).

Alosa, the main protagonist of the Duology by Tricia Levenseller could be considered as cut from the same cloth. Sassy and ballsy, she has no qualms about dispatching an enemy to the bottom of

the sea. Captaining her own ship, freeing her mother (Levenseller, 2017) and taking down her abusive father in the process (Levenseller, 2019). From beginning to end, she remains the definition of a strong female protagonist.

All of these protagonists inspired the formation of Valeria. However, many of these works portray characters that are already strong from the beginning and therefore, my thesis attempts to explore the YA theme of growing self-belief and discovery. Valeria *learns* to become a strong female protagonist versus presenting an already strong female protagonist. Though I considered using multiple viewpoints to carry the story, I chose not to in order to keep the reader – mostly – close to Valeria.

Though my thesis mainly confines the reader in Valeria's mind (and also in the confines of the institute) it allows the distance of third-person unlike the first-person account given by Haddon (2003) in *the Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, where the reader is trapped in the internal voice of the main protagonist, Christopher, who has autism. This was done both to allow distance for the reader, but also to portray the distance between Valeria and herself. Because of the trauma she has experienced, she is dissociative and has a limited self-awareness, which in turn, limits the way Valeria processes and judges information and events.

The flexibility of the third-person limited point of view enabled me to keep the reader at a distance from Valeria when she is detached from herself like when she is reflecting after an intensely emotional scene with Sebastian:

“Valeria was sitting where Aiden had left her, anchoring herself in the tranquility of the grassland stretching away from her window. The tremors were beginning to make her feel like she was the hypocenter of an earthquake. She took some deep breaths, and clenched her body, hoping to freeze herself into immobility, but the shaking continued. Even her eyes seemed to be shaking, making the world appear doubled, tripled. Closing her eyes didn't help either. Her brain seemed to be spinning too. She sat still gripping the couch. Waiting for it to pass.” (*Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*, p. 67)

It also allows for a closer point of view to be employed during moments where Valeria is making progress toward attaining a greater awareness of herself. This deeper sense of interiority is reflected in the scene where she decides to regain her memories:

“Valeria sat in silence, absorbing what she had just learned. She could go home. She could live her life...sure. But she knew there would always be a niggle of doubt, fear of what she had lost. Chosen to lose.

She had come to the Thorssen Institute to find her real memory – not a fake implanted by someone she thought she could trust... And she knew she couldn't go back to being a victim, letting other people control her life. Control her.

Whatever the consequences, she was choosing to fight for herself.

“I want to get my memory back.” (*Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*, p. 179)

Kimberley (2016) cites Anita Tarr's view that "...books can help young readers realize their moral agency, to weigh the pros and cons and take action when necessary." (p. 113) (p. 139). As the story progresses and Valeria discovers that her memories have been taken from her, rather than dissolving into destructive behavior as she had in the beginning of the book, she becomes an "active agent...making choices that impact the way [she]... lives." It is important to note that though she can see the allure of living the lie of the implanted memories, she chooses to regain her agency, her memories, despite knowing there could be irrevocable consequences.

Here, we come to the crux of the matter. Technology or humanness. Transhuman convenience or human agency. Ultimately, Valeria agrees to reject some aspects of technology – the parts she has had no agency over – so that she can discover her true human memories, even if painful. She has to use human agency – the inner strength she has built – rather than allow someone or something else to make decisions for her. She chooses her path, takes back responsibility, and moves from being a damsel-in-distress or passive agent, to becoming a hero.

Additionally, it could also be posited that the more distanced third-person limited utilized in some parts of *Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid* evokes third-person objective – which is promoted in posthumanist thought as a facilitating device that allows the narrator freedom to inhabit the tension – or disruption – between the spirit and the material or functional world. Haney (2006) states that:

“Conveniently, this collapse allows posthumanists to propose the possibility of a third-person objective account of the continuum between conscious experience and the other functions of the universe on a material basis” (p. 29). So this thinking also contributed to my choice to have the voice of Valeria respond authentically to her circumstances with moments of interiority or a closer point of view, or with more distance where necessary.

Setting, Structure and Style – Deliberate and Designed

Setting

Unlike conventional dystopian settings which can be found in renowned works such as *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld (2005), *Divergent* by Veronica Roth (2011), *Cinder* by Marissa Meyer (2102), or *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008), *Some Things are Better Left Unsaid* is similar to the world created by Kazuo Ishiguro (2006) in *Never Let Me Go*, where the characters still live in a familiar contemporary world. Ishiguro infuses the existing British landscape with new elements that make it only slightly dystopian. *Some Things are Better Left Unsaid* also does not attempt to create a completely new universe. Instead, like the infused school of Hailsham, Valeria is taken to the isolated Thorsen Institute, separate from normal society, that showcases the slightly different, slightly more technologically advanced, dystopian elements.

Very different settings can be seen quite starkly from the beginning of Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*:

“The old bridge stretched massively across the water, its huge iron frame as black as the sky. It had been built so long ago that it held up its own weight, without any support from hoverstruts. A million years from now, when the rest of the city had crumbled, the bridge would probably remain like a fossilized bone.” (Westerfeld, 2005, p.1).

Marissa Meyer's *Cinder* is similarly otherworldly:

“The screw through Cinder's ankle had rusted, the engraved cross marks worn to a mangled circle. Her knuckles ached from forcing the screwdriver into the joint as she struggled to loosen the screw one gritting twist after another. By the time it was extracted far enough for her to wrench free with her prosthetic steel hand, the hairline threads had been stripped clean.” (Meyer, 2102, p. 1)

Conversely, *Some Things are Better Left Unsaid* begins with elements familiar to contemporary readers:

“Valeria cracked an eye open and squished down her pillow to see her phone behind it. It hadn’t moved from where she’d propped it up for her nightly ritual of funny videos to distract herself from her nightmares.” (*Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*, p. 1)

I chose to create a world similar to the one we know as technology continues to grow exponentially, and the border between being human and being ‘more-than’ continues to be tested in our contemporary world. Kimberley (2016) acknowledges further that “advances in biotechnology... is an important issue that contemporary adolescent readers are facing now... [and] young adult novels... [provides] room for discussion around [these] advances.” (p.140)

Further, keeping a contemporary setting, that is still familiar but slightly science fiction, worked well with my decision to write a cross-genre YA novel. The world enhanced the aspects of transhumanism in the journey of Valeria and added relatability to the story as technology stands in our modern age.

Structure:

The effect of using the nonlinear narrative tool – telling story events nonchronologically and “rearranging events to create a sense of mystery” (Kim et al., 2018, p.596) – is well documented as a convention of the mystery genre which I chose to utilize through Valeria’s dreams but primarily through her memory.

To highlight the sense of mystery around the inciting incident, I chose to have it happen prior to the start of the book – which is unconventional for most stories. The incident in the cemetery is explained in retrospect by Valeria rather than in real-time which is in contrast to Alice falling down the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (2016), or Katniss volunteering to take her sister’s place in *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), or Sarah J. Maas’ protagonist Feyre, killing the wolf Andras in *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (Maas, 2015a). Further, because of the nonlinear structure, the climax of the story happens in Valeria’s memory, which means that the event recalled during the point of climax – like the inciting incident – has already happened in the past. But Valeria and the people helping her have to deal with it in the present.

The nonlinear structure of the novel creates a disorienting relationship between the past and present. For the most part, the past and present are clearly demarcated, but the intermittent introduction of pieces of the past into Valeria's present allows the implications of the past to bleed into the story, creating uncertainty around why her memories are so important and how it will affect her in the aftermath. Kim et al. (2018) offers this explanation: "Nonlinear narratives are often complex to understand due to the disruption of the direct causal relationship between events in order to increase suspense." (p.603)

Additionally, because of the disorienting nature of the past and present narratives, it is only when her journey is complete that a full picture begins to emerge. This can be seen in the climax when Valeria regains her memories and discovers that Aiden was one of the culprits in the cemetery.

This is similar to *Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro, 2006). For most of the book, the main protagonist, Kathy, recounts her days at the boarding school she attended, Hailsham, and the years after; where she works as a carer for people like her, clones created to donate their organs for the benefit of the human race. It only becomes evident in the latter part of the book, when the threads begin to weave together that the reader can see the where Kathy's stories were leading – when the novel solidifies into a heart-wrenching love story between Kathy and Tommy.

Style

Style was another area I wanted to explore in terms of the storytelling of the novel, its genre and themes. I chose to express the dreams and memories differently from each other and from Valeria's conscious voice using different language and style to make it clear that they inhabit separate spaces. In *Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro, 2006), Kathy rambles, mixing past and present, without changing her narrating style, which I found to be confusing at times. So, I wanted to make sure that the otherness of the dreams and memories kept their impact and therefore chose to contrast the style and language to make it obvious.

In the present, Valeria's conscious voice is often dissociative and detached, particularly in the beginning. Even when she is being reflective, she doesn't share much of her emotion. As mentioned

previously, this aspect mirrored her own limited self-awareness and can be seen in an extract where she is alone reflecting on her breakdown in the gardens at her home:

“The day was a bland sort of gray, the kind of day that told no time. But the bedside clock now read 4 p.m. For the first time in a while, she was beginning to feel hungry. As she sat at the window, Valeria studied the ground. The mixture of black rock and gray, the white grouting between them making the differences starker. It occurred to her that it looked the same, as if nothing had happened. As though she hadn’t fought a war on that pavement. It was then she noticed the bandage on her hand, and the stiffness at her neck. Her reflection in the window showed another bandage that started at her chest and went up to her chin. She really looked like a patient now, she thought to herself.” (*Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*, p. 19)

On the other hand, her dreams are more stark, brutal and suffocating. The language used is more visceral, allowing the reader to see into Valeria’s head a little bit more, to the struggle happening in her mind as she fights to regain her memory, and in doing so, herself. For example:

“Sometimes, she is being stabbed. Repeatedly, mercilessly. And there is someone smiling. Beautifully straight, pristine white teeth. Sharp as knives. Sharp as the knife slicing into her chest. Then her arms. Her stomach. Her neck. The blood warm, sticky. A heady, pungent river of red. But it’s the pain that wakes her and keeps her from sleep. The feeling of the knife puncturing her skin, driving deep, twisting. Flesh catching on the serrated edge as it is pulled out and she drowns in her own blood.”

(*Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*, p. 13)

The tone of the memory is again different from her conscious narrating and her dream narrating. The memory sequences are atmospheric, lyrical and use evocative language drawing the reader much closer to Valeria. So the memories and dreams become like life-lines connecting Valeria to her innermost thoughts and feelings – which then allows the reader to access these as well. The following excerpt illustrates this:

“And then warmth spread from her stomach until she tingled all the way down to her toes. Like her body was alive with electricity. Like the light of the moon had been

infused into her blood. She guzzled down another mouthful, prepared for the trail it blazed down to her stomach. And then another, and another. She was beginning to feel like this was the best decision she'd ever made. The pounding in her head had stopped, replaced by a melodic symphony. A sonata of silence punctuated by an acoustic accompaniment of the sounds of night time.

The stars sparkled like the necklaces her mother kept under lock and key, a dazzling, shining spectacle of an audience. She smiled. Content in this moment, to sit with her father under the watchful eyes of the moon. To listen as the concerto reached its climax, a series of operatic notes pulling the masterpiece together.” (*Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*, pp. 87-88)

To reference what has been said previously, the close point of view of Valeria's dreams and memories also tie back to the themes of power, knowledge and self-discovery. Valeria's dreams remain her own throughout the novel and remain untouchable. Her memories however do not, even though for the sake of the mystery they must seem to. So, I employed a descriptive and tension-building writing-style. I wanted the themes of knowledge and self-discovery to seem resolved – even though this was a misdirection.

“Her heart thundered in her chest. An eerie silence filled the cemetery. It didn't sound promising.

“No,” she breathed, as she gasped for air. The body of a pretty blonde was lying face up, at the bottom of a tree. Her eyes were open, unseeing.

She rushed to the girl. Feeling for a pulse, scared of the amount of blood pooling beside the girl's head. “Wake up,” she said, shaking the girl slightly, unsure what to do. “Please, wake up.”

Remembering she needed to staunch the bleeding, she ripped strips off her shirt and wrapped it tightly around the girl's head. The girl didn't move or make any sound.”

(*Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*, p. 154)

When Valeria shifts the power back into her favor, by choosing to regain her real memory, the language used is once again more poetic and emotive but with slight changes: Valeria's voice is changed, her POV is closer, slower and more intimate.

“No,” she breathed, skidding to a stop beside her. “No, no, no, no. Please, no.” She felt for a pulse, her heart soaring at the warmth of the girl's skin. But there was nothing. Not even a flutter against her fingers. Her heart plummeted as she put a finger under the girl's nose, hoping against hope. But she felt nothing.

The dark liquid on the ground spread, soaking into the knees of her jeans.

The girl seemed to be shaking, but she wasn't sure who it was, because she seemed to be shaking too. She took off her jacket, draping it over the girl. Keeping her warm, unable to accept this ending. The girl was supposed to live. She was supposed to be saved. “It's okay, it's okay,” she said over and over, holding her hand. “You're safe, they won't do anything to you.” She ripped the bottom of her shirt using two pieces to tie a tourniquet around the girl's head.” (*Some Things are Better Left Unsaid*, p. 207)

Future Direction and Conclusion

In future drafts I would like to spend more time in the climactic moment with Valeria, letting her really have full reign to deal with the implications of her regained memory. I would give more weight to the realization and choices that led her to that moment and the pain and humanity that she deals with in the aftermath.

I would also like to develop further the third-person limited point of view, reworking it so the movement from dissociative and detached, gradually increases in closeness as she grows and heals – as she becomes an active agent rather than a passive force, and chooses humanity over post or transhumanism. I would hope that the reader’s journey would then mimic Valeria’s as they would hear Valeria at her most human.

The creation of my thesis, *Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid* is the amalgamation of a year long journey. The culmination of an experiment that delved into themes from the science fiction, mystery or thriller, and YA genres and portrayed the struggle of a teenage girl trying to regain her memories, wellness, truth and agency; and the healing power of human relationships. In the telling of Valeria’s story I wanted to disorient the reader (by way of non-linear storytelling) but also keep them close by, choosing a setting not too different from our own. I wanted the language style to do some of the storytelling also, through tonal and tempo shifts. This is another aspect I can see exploring further in further drafts.

Drawing on myriad examples and resources from the critical, literary and film realms has enabled a deeper understanding of the power that creators such as authors have. The discussions that arise and plights that are highlighted, the ability to hold accountable cultures that are toxic and the inherent ability to celebrate humanity.

That being said, it is my hope that the story portrayed is able to evoke questions around humanity and technology, knowledge and power. That it allows readers to reflect on the inevitability of biotechnology and the questions that arise. But mostly, I would like to posit that it is up to us, the user, readers, humans – to choose the impact that technology, knowledge and power has on us. For better or for worse. It is up to us.

Please note that I have chosen to use US English in my thesis.

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