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Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and Political Consciousness in Youth

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Introduction:

Dystopian fiction explores the potential of certain ideological aspects in a present society to devolve into a state that is in some regard politically, socially, and/or economically detrimental to its citizens—either overtly or covertly. As rhetorical critics Bullen and Parsons argue, dystopian invention is “not a vision of a possible future, but an interrogation of the present” (128). The issues deliberated in the imaginary futuristic setting of a dystopian text are then manifestations of concerns contemporary to the author’s creation of that dystopia. Dystopian fiction provides an imaginary space where the contingent future can be contemplated, where possible trajectories deriving from the uncertainties of the present can be followed to their hypothetical outcome.

Because children are the nascent embodiment of future popular culture, when dystopian narratives are written for the child or young adult audience, the subtext takes on a pedagogical quality. An inductive analysis of a work of children’s dystopian fiction reveals the concerns pervading the ideology of the adult subculture its author represents. Children’s literature is illustrative of the general adult attitude towards how certain litigious issues should be managed. Adolescent generations herald the impending ideological climate, and form the axis for the future condition of the world. Bullen and Parsons state that “in the popular imagination [children] are the impetus for social change” (127). Each generation is then burdened with both hopes that it will be the one that redeems the world and humanity’s suffering, and fears that it will increase the stagnancy of ideology because of apathy and conformity. The protagonists of most children’s dystopian fiction suggest a hopeful conception of the child-subject’s beneficial potential. As the young hero comes of age, he or she also attains autonomy and the daring to take political action that dissents from the status quo. Their agency enables them to stand in opposition to the authority and majority in their community and exercise democratic engagement. This empowered self-awareness allows them to take radical action to restore their society. In my rhetorical analysis I seek to discern the pedagogical interaction that Lowry facilitates between adult ideology and the adolescent audience and the model for political action against unethical government and society that the adult ideology endorses.

Lois Lowry’s dystopian children’s novel, *The Giver*, was published in the US in 1993. It is one of the most “challenged” (petitioned to be removed from a school library) novels in schools across the US (American Library Association). The cultural environment of the early 1990s was turbulent. The forefront of the decade witnessed the Gulf War, the culmination of South Africa under apartheid, and public access to the World Wide Web (The People

History). The 1990s was characterized by the continuing development of the Postmodern era, which embraced relativism and, as Fredric Jameson writes in his 1991 book, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, “a new depthlessness” (6). Literary critic Roberta Trites states that the young adult genre of literature “has emerged as an aspect of postmodernism... [and] depict[s] some postmodern tension between individuals and institutions” (Hintz 52). Lowry invokes this tension in her work, and narratively eulogizes the youth who develops his individuality in opposition to institutional and ideological control.

Literature Review

The concept of dystopia is best understood by exploring the concept of utopia from which it arose. The literal translation for “utopia” in Greek is “nowhere” (North 7). The term was first and most famously used in its traditional definition by Thomas More in his fictional work, *Utopia*, as the name of the imaginary island where his conception of the ideal commonwealth was located (7). The majority of utopian societies, including Thomas More’s, have their origins in the classical or Christian traditions (Kumar 19, 100). Plato’s *Republic*, Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, Virgil’s fourth *Eclogue*, and book one of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* are among the classical ancestors to the modern utopia. The Christian models of the Garden of Eden and Heaven are utopian in essence (Kumar 3, 5). Both scholarly and fantastical theories relating the political, social, and economic dimensions that would create a perfect society abound throughout history. Each instance of utopia has the claim to relevance in regard to the culture and time period in which it was imagined. George Orwell, an author of dystopia, commented that “the dream of a just society... seems to haunt the human imagination ineradicably and in all ages, whether it is called the Kingdom of Heaven or the classless society, or whether it is thought of as a Golden Age which once existed in the past and from which we have degenerated” (2).

The utopian narrative develops its form and content out of its contemporaneous reality (32). These theories, however, are by nature unfeasible in the real world. However, despite their impracticality, David Plath observes that “men everywhere seem addicted to visions of ideal otherness” (Kumar 19). Frederic Jameson hypothesizes that individuals cling to utopias out a dissatisfaction with some or many aspects of the present and a yearning for cultural change. He asserts that “[t]he utopian idea... keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is” (as quoted in Booker, “Dystopian Impulse” 3). The premises of utopian invention are rooted in the sociopolitical climate of the time period when it is composed and are deeply invested in the issues being debated. Jameson continues, stating, “a utopian notion of a desirable alternative future is necessary to empower meaningful political action in the present” (3). Whether intentionally or not, utopias contain some kind of subtextual commentary on the state of current society.

The Twentieth-Century Dystopia

The twentieth century dystopia as it is epitomized in literary works such as Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* indicate

a shift in the evaluation of the utopia as not merely improbable but undesirable. Dystopian invention began to signify a fear “that utopia *can* be attained, and that it will be a nightmare. It is not...that humans are too vicious or too stupid to create a perfect society, but that such an achievement would violate the restlessness and striving that are an essential part of the human spirit” (Kumar 102). Perfection is unnatural and thus utopia would somehow render humankind inhuman. Scholars attribute the flourishing dystopian genre in the twentieth century to the two occasions of gruesome, protracted world wars, witnessing the atrocities of totalitarian Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, and the horrors of nuclear holocaust (Booker, “Dystopian Impulse” 17). Observing the damaging effects of implementing the ideal communist model in the real-world society of the Soviet Union deterred any utopian experiments with communism. In fact, all utopian writing declined in concurrence with the increase in dystopian literature (Kumar 420). These weighty events were stark proof of the devastation that can result from unchallenged authority in any form. In effect, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia were the actualizations of theoretical dystopias; these realities “lend a poignancy and an urgency to the warnings of dystopian fiction” (20).

Many twentieth century dystopian novels portrayed the problems that would develop if socialism were to be applied to real, flawed humans always motivated by their own subconscious selfish desires (Kumar 133). George Orwell’s famous novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published in 1949 amidst the tense atmosphere that pervaded the beginning of the Cold War (289). The author drew directly from the examples of Soviet Union communism and German Nazism (307). The text expresses a cynicism with regard to not only the brand of socialism manifest in Stalinism but any socialist society—Orwell made his fiction a cautionary tale and a prophecy of what would come if individuals did nothing to participate in a political way to prevent society’s present trajectory from reaching its culmination (289, 295). His work is a satire of the kind of utopia Thomas More dreamed of, where egalitarianism would lead to prosperity and “all have an equal voice... and no distinctions of rank or privilege are recognized...[where] there is a community of work...[and all] have an obligation to labour...” (27). Orwell said of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: *Don’t let it happen. It depends on you*” (291).

Orwell’s achieved the desired impact of his dystopian work by portraying the relevant 1940s world in a deteriorated state. The fictional world was not unrecognizable, and the reminiscent setting formed a bridge to convey the urgency Orwell intended (296-297). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* exemplifies the principal dystopian literary technique of defamiliarization. “By focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematical social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable” (Booker, “Dystopian Literature” 3-4). Literary language, especially in fiction, makes ideology within that language apparent that would be covert in the discourse of the contemporary culture (16). Dystopian literature more than any other genre

imparts a realization of ideology by narratively unmasking and portraying how it violates individuals in a community. By demonstrating the potential damaging effects of applied utopian principles as an uncritical culture might conceive of them, dystopias stand as a critique of existing sociopolitical conditions. Dystopian fiction criticizes the ideologically endorsed social and political systems “through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions” (Booker, “Dystopian Literature” 3, Kumar 126).

Dystopia as Social Criticism

Dystopian literature resembles cultural criticism in that they both respond to the atmosphere of uncertainty and crisis of present society (Booker “Dystopian Literature” 4). “Literary works that critically examine both existing conditions and the potential abuses that might result from the institution of supposedly utopian alternatives can be seen as the epitome of literature in its role as social criticism” (3). Dystopian fiction’s emphasis on social and political critique makes the genre “more like the projects of social and cultural critics: Nietzsche, Freud...Foucault, Althusser, and many others” rather than escapist science fiction (4). Politics is an inherent aspect to the dystopian story since it is so integral to any conceptualization of a future society. Simultaneously, politics is arguably dystopian in nature because it is “the art of imagining and implementing or avoiding a certain future, while political processes easily turn uplifting futuristic expectations into dystopian threats” (Klaic 95).

Althusser posits that there is blurring of the boundary between dystopian fiction and social criticism (Booker, “Dystopian Literature” 16). Althusser brings this interaction between dystopias, politics, and society to bear in his theories about populaces being subject to an insidious ideology that escapes their perception. He discusses the antagonistic interaction between individual self-definition and popular society; this subject is frequently examined in dystopian literature (15). Foucault’s critiques of his society resonate with the subtextual social commentary in dystopian fiction, specifically the concepts of surveillance in the Panopticon model and the covert power of language in “the way we think, and...the way we *are* (23-26, 19). The similarities between the subtexts of dystopian literature and the analyses of these important scholars points to the value of the genre as social criticism.

Postmodernism

The social criticism to which both Althusser and Foucault’s theories and *The Giver* pertain is situated in Postmodernism—the ideological classification that accounts for the trends in late twentieth and early twenty-first century worldviews. Postmodernism emerges in dystopian literature in its concern with language as constitutive of reality and charged by ideology. The concept of constitutive communication as it is explored by Postmodern intellectuals “contend[s] that objects, events, processes can only exist for humans once they come under the linguistic sign; they are meaningless until they are conceptualized” (Thompson 2). Postmodernists distrust politics and community because of the gravity of their potential negative effects and the insidious way in

which those effects are generally achieved (Siebers 31). Additionally, Postmodernism and the characteristic dystopian literature engage with the theory of the "increasing subjection of humanity to...alienation and the loss of individuality...intertwined with a process of cultural decline" (Thompson 17). The dystopia inverts the Postmodern idea of utopia, "where community is based on the inclusion of differences, where different forms of talk are allowed to exist simultaneously, and where heterogeneity does not inspire conflict" (Siebers 20).

The Young Adult Subgenre

Dystopian fiction for young adults has a hopeful, optimistic quality. Because impressionable adolescents contain the potential for change as they mature and inherit the world, dystopian novels written for this audience "take an activist stance" that is oriented by the possibility of a better future (Klaic 140). These dystopias, while illuminating the perils of utopias gone wrong, still allow for an aspiration to a "good" utopia (Siebers 15). The social criticism is not discouraged by present circumstances but driven by a confidence that change can be achieved by a revolution in youth. There has been a flood of dystopian fiction for young adults in recent decades. This not only indicates an anxiety in the cultural climate but is also an auxiliary to the recent rise of the young adult subgenre in the Postmodern age.

"Young adult" is a relatively new distinction in literature, having only recently been recognized as its own discrete literary category. This is a result of the fact that adolescence as a stage of life preceding adulthood and separate from childhood is also a fairly new concept in Western culture (Howe & Strauss 74-76, Hunt 5). The entire juvenile stage of life as an expression of revolt, contesting the principles inherited from their upbringing and experimenting with new, personal philosophy (Trupe 189). Youth is situated in a difficult stage in life where the individual is locked in two divergent roles and conflicting needs as they seek independence and free expression while also holding on to the parental foundation that initiated the identity-forming process (Trupe 169). Books, especially popular fiction, are a significant means of adolescent self-identification (Zipes 4, Younger 46-7, 54). Literature helps readers to create meaning in their lives and in the world; it helps them to digest the complexities of life and to confront the problems they face (Berensmeyer 635). For this reason, dystopian novels written for children have a hopefulness that adult forms tend to lack.

In the young adult stage of life, individuals conclude the most impressionable period of their development and their beliefs and attitudes concretize (Drumheller 50). Tangled in the clamor of hormones, emotions, and change of adolescence, exists the nascent future cultural identity and ideology (Serazio 7, 4). Adults conceive of the adolescent as a construction on which they can project their ideologies and influence the course of the future. However, young adult dystopian fiction like Lowry's *The Giver* opens up paths for resisting the insidious cultural dogma and for developing individual agency in midst of the pressures of ideology.

Rhetorical Analysis

In *The Giver*, Lowry introduces her readers to a society of extreme order and uniformity. The community the narrative is set in appears initially to be utopian, or at least predominantly innocuous—a world that is "orderly, disciplined...where nothing was unexpected. Or inconvenient. Or unusual...without color, pain, or past" (Lowry 165). The citizens are peaceful and efficient, dedicated to preserving the idyllic community. Obvious signs of degeneration like greed, inequality, poverty, or violence are not present in the traditional sense. Lowry has stated that "the book really does seduce the reader early on because it sounds like a neat way to live" (Hendershot 309). In the first half of the novel, Lowry is intentional about depicting the community as, at a superficial level, a viable alternative to the traditional organization of western culture. However, the uneasy narrative atmosphere is perceptible from page one. The nearly twelve-year-old protagonist, Jonas, expresses his "apprehension," the object of his anxiety left ambiguous as he digresses to a story occurring a year earlier when he had felt the similar but more intense feeling of fear (Lowry 1). Lowry allows Jonas's trepidation to color the reader's perception of the narrator's concurrent descriptions of the quiet, disciplined community. Later in the chapter, the reason for Jonas's anxiety is revealed to be an approaching ceremony where everyone in his age group graduates to adulthood and receives their job assignments, which they will hold for the rest of their productive lives, from the "Committee of Elders" (15).

The uneasiness with which the author opens the story prompts the reader to be attentive to what may be amiss behind the external harmony. It provokes the reader to look beyond the collected exterior to the questionable factors by which that harmony is achieved. The incomplete observation imparted to the reader by the third-person-limited point-of-view obliges her to experience the community through the lens of Jonas's perfunctory acceptance but with an interpretive distance that allows the insidious nature of the community's operations to become apparent. This invites in the reader's perspective a suspicion that facilitates a critical reading of the sociopolitical environment of the dystopia and draws attention to its more covert detriments.

Adult Authority and Ideology:

When Jonas shares his nervousness about the Ceremony with his family, they reassure him that the Committee always acts in the best interest of the community; Jonas's family, as well as the rest of the public, gives the Committee their unconditional trust (16). Jonas's parents regard the governing body of Elders with pious respect. The tone of their language when speaking of the Committee is reverent and credulous. His mother tells him, "'I think [serving on the Committee]'s the most important job in our community'" (17). For the Elders, she contradicts the community-endorsed doctrine that every job is equally important in its contribution to society. She speaks of them as if they are infallible and omniscient. The Elders engage in constant, discreet observation of the community's children throughout their education in order to discern their appropriate vocation (15); they indicate at the Ceremony that they have knowledge of even the most minor events in each individual's life, such as when

Jonas crushed his finger in a door the previous year (62). Speakers installed in every room in the community both provide a sense that there is no area beyond the reach of surveillance. The residents accept these conditions as benign because they are taught to believe that this intrusive omnipresence allows the Elders to best serve the community. Jonas's parents exhibit this unwavering confidence in the community leadership.

Through the adult characters in the dystopia, excluding the Giver himself, the author criticizes their unquestioning acquiescence of community authority. The adults mistakenly attribute the Elders with infallibility. Lowry portrays children as having a greater opportunity to escape indoctrination, should their socialization be interrupted, because in their youth they have not yet become completely programmed by ideology. Jonas's mother comments, in reference to the pills that all citizens take from the onset of puberty to suppress sexuality, that "it becomes routine; after a while you won't even pay much attention to it" (38). Lowry uses the pill as shorthand for ideology's insidious oppression, both in the dystopia and metaphorically in the contemporary world. The concretization in *The Giver* of an abstraction like ideology into the form of a pill makes it easier to identify as a negative entity to be challenged.

In their passivity, the majority of the citizens surrender to the Committee complete agency over their lives and esteem them with indiscriminate faith. They remain unperturbed in their ignorance of what "Release"—which is actually lethal injection administered to the elderly, criminals, and certain infants "labeled Inadequate"—entails (42). The public is told that Release is merely discharging an individual from the community to "Elsewhere," which no one within the isolated community has knowledge of. Nor do they seek that knowledge: "'What happens when they make the actual release?'" Jonas asks an adult acquaintance; she shrugs and replies, "'I don't know. I don't think anybody does, except the committee...but you should have seen his look. Pure happiness'" (32). The woman displays indifferent acceptance of her ignorance and sees only what the Committee wants her to see. The narrative pedagogically instructs the adolescent audience to protest such apathetic approval of concealed instruments of oppression in a democratic society by revealing its control over adults—and especially parents—who adolescents normally trust to act responsibly.

In Lowry's narrative, the adults form a disempowered body that is hopelessly inculcated, their natural conscience expunged by lifelong conditioning. This leaves the adolescent protagonist and the young readers who journey with him to trust in themselves and appeal to their own reserves of initiative without the support of traditional adult figures. Lowry is promoting in youth an inwardly driven political action, as opposed to deferring action to adults endowed with authority by the same broken system that needs to be confronted. Due to the impressionability inherent to their inexperience, adolescents can be more readily converted to a doctrine than those older and more fixed in mindset; in the same attitude, adolescents possess a certain clarity and perspective in that inexperience. Young adult dystopian fiction provides the adolescent audience

with "the impression that they have the capacity to remake or revision society anew" while adults are too entrenched in ideology to be able to perceive the extent of its defects and amend it accordingly (Hintz 263).

Collective adherence to the rules implemented by the Committee is the only standard of morality in Lowry's dystopia. Without deliberate and insubordinate cultivation, the individual conscience does not exist apart from community directives. The law is the written manifestation of ideology; the meticulous rules literalize and make a caricature of convention in our contemporary society. The rules go as far as making bragging and rudeness criminal (27). Jonas, however, is shaken when he realizes that he is exempted from this rule, as well as the rule against lying, when he is assigned the privileged position of "Receiver of Memory" at the Ceremony (68). He also learns that other assignments are not only given permission to but required to lie. Moral practices such as apologies and their acceptance are prescript and expected immediately, and are thus ingenuine. The apology ritual is performed "automatically" and "indifferently" (89, 101). The translation of morality into institutional law makes it paradoxically amoral and political. In their compliance with the pedantic moral specificity of the community rules, the aspiration of ethics as a personal commitment to one's character is eclipsed.

The law mandates other actions that a healthy conscience would prompt, such as volunteerism. Jonas recounts a unique occasion when an "Eleven" who had not completed his required amount of volunteer hours was publicly abased. There was "a public announcement...and he would not...be given his Assignment...a disgrace that had clouded his entire future" (28). Disgrace, shame, and guilt are the oblique ways that the community's ideology is preserved. The reader witnesses the effect of these imposed sensations on Jonas. When the Chief Elder singles him out at the Ceremony, Jonas immediately asks himself, "*What [have I] done wrong?*" (58); he experiences "humiliation and terror" at the notion of his detachment from the rest of his group (59). Jonas has difficulty overcoming his "[fear] that he might disgrace himself" just as in the failure of the previous Twelve, Rosemary, who was selected to apprentice the current Receiver (80). Even in death, she is so reviled by the community that her name is "designated Not-to-Be-Spoken...the highest degree of disgrace" (67). However, the loss of honor in the community's terms because of disobedience is an achievement of independent agency. Lowry's narrative values this difficult nonconformity over public approval and certainly over popularity within an ideological collective; the narrative exhorts this perspective in the reader. Rosemary's name, while arbitrarily chosen for her by the Elders when she was taken from her Birthmother, becomes so rich in meaning that the community—which operates because of the lack of profound emotion—cannot contend with its associations.

Ideological Language

Lowry depicts the fixed meaning that the dystopian community's ideology assigns to language as a principal method that the existing power structure engages to control the residents. The random assigning of a name to an

infant that is beforehand referred to by the number indicating birth order is an analogy for the fixed and limited meanings that the Committee designates to language. It is also symbolic for the meaning that the collective dictates in an individual's identity, or, rather, lack thereof. Lowry shows ideology's authoritarian determination of language as having influence in the members of the community's self-definition: "Sometimes parents used [their child's original birth number] in irritation at a child's misbehavior, indicating that mischief made one unworthy of a name" (50). In *The Giver*, one's given name, which is in our culture valued as a surface designation of an individual's identity, is manipulated to promote ideology. The Giver emblematically challenges language's oppression by never divulging his given name and refusing to be acknowledged by the Committee's mandated identity. The narrative, in a pedagogical attitude, prompts the adolescent audience to examine normalized language for the instruments of oppression and invites them to challenge those norms. Jonas becomes a model for the reader as to what this dissent looks like.

Lowry makes the naming process representative of other language in Jonas's society that the hegemonic infrastructure exploits. Capitalized terms are often euphemisms that veil the controversial nature of the ideas they label. "Release" is used in place of "lethal injection" or even "exile"—which would still preserve the deception that the victims are merely departing the community—because the term connotes an aspect of mercy and benevolence on the part of the Committee. It reinforces the misperception that the Committee is entirely innocuous and magnanimous. Labeling those who are to be Released as "Inadequate" assigns the fault to the individual and not to the social system. The Elders also make the distinction between "Release" and "Loss," which qualifies the accidental death of a member of the community although in both situations an innocent life is ended and "they [haven't] done anything wrong" (44, 7). Even calling the community leadership a "Committee" encourages a more benign, less institutionalized conceptualization than "government," although in reality the community administration is virtually totalitarian. Defining sexuality as "Stirrings" implies that such natural developments are actually a trivial disturbance of harmony and nothing that merits close examination (54). Colloquially referring to individuals who are "uneducated or clumsy...[and] don't fit in" as "animals" exhibits how language dehumanizes the public and drafts it into prevailing ideology (54).

Lowry portrays Jonas acquiring autonomy as he gradually learns the realities behind the misleading terminology his community indulges. When the Giver imparts his memories to Jonas, he discovers the truth behind all of these terms. The effect of investigating the language normalized in the community is total disillusionment with everything he once knew about himself, his friends, and his whole society. Once the façade crumbles, he is overwrought at the automatic obedience and lack of moral conscience in the community. The author demonstrates to her audience that realizing difficult truths is necessary for "political and social awakening" (Hintz 255). The perverse social system has persisted for so long because the community determinedly avoids topics that are

"unsettling" or cause "discomfort" (20, 38). The narrator states early in the novel that in the community, it is "always better, less rude, to talk about things that [are] the same" (38). Jonas seeks to acquire an authentic language that subverts ideology. He obtains from the Giver's memories political consciousness and experiences to supply that subversive language with meaning. His political activism is a determination to create a world that is authentic and meaningful on his own terms. Jonas also seeks to expose in his community "the need for political action and the exercise of political will in a democratic society" (255). Jonas overcomes his despair that "he could change nothing" and takes radical action to induce the latent political consciousness in his peers. At this point, Jonas embodies the model that Lowry, as she is representative of adult culture in the contemporary US, envisions as most beneficial to our society's contingent future.

Agency and Nonconformity

Jonas's discovery of his agency is made heroic by the fact that his nonconformity continued despite being ostracized by his peers. The commitment to his newfound convictions is especially courageous because the community harshly stigmatizes those who step outside of ideology. The only alternative for people who feel as though they do not belong is to "apply for Elsewhere and be Released," which means death (48). Jonas expresses the fear that society planted in him of being separate from the group after he discovers the nature of his Assignment which disallows any socializing with his friends after training (69). Lowry continually uses the words "silence" and "awkward" to describe Jonas's interactions with both his friends and family after he begins to receive the memories that grant meaning to his existence (127, 134). The reader sympathizes with both Jonas's new worldview and with the feeling of being ostracized, and his resistance to pull of conformity in midst of his social isolation makes him even more heroic rather than an outcast in the reader's interpretation. Following one's individual sense of morality is portrayed as right and admirable instead of following ideology's conventions. Lowry is seeking to encourage this sort of steadfast heterodoxy in the youth culture in her narrative by allying Jonas and the reader. As Jonas realizes that the difficulty of nonconformity is worth an adherence to his moral and political conscience so does the reader accept this as mandatory to an authentic and politically responsible existence.

Young adult readers can easily identify with Jonas because Lowry creates him to be simultaneously an individual and an everyman. This empathy forms a bridge that enables the adolescent audience to relate to and identify with him, and thus accept the same revelations Jonas experiences about nonconformism, political duty, and the unethical ideology. The reader's relationship with Jonas allows her to project herself onto his role and receive the subtextual moral of Lowry's strategic narrative to apply it to her own practices. Because Jonas is more integrated in the community culture and unfamiliar at the start of the novel, the reader identifies and questions the protagonist's worldviews. However, the reader develops a connection to the character as the

story progresses and advocates for his freedom. Because Lowry makes Jonas so likeable and so available to identification, she can at once narratively impart Jonas with realization and encourage her audience to adopt the same attitudes. This is the primary method which Lowry invokes to facilitate a pedagogical interaction between the reader and the text.

The Giver's Role

While Lowry promotes subversive reaction to the adult culture of institutions and ideology, the role of the Giver as a catalyst to this reaction is a stipulation to adolescents' self-determination. The Giver is isolated as the only adult in the community who disagrees with the status quo. From Jonas's initiation into the role of the Receiver to the carrying out of their plan to unleash the memories upon the community, the Giver and the knowledge he imparts are the sources of Jonas's revelation. The Giver performs the role of mentor to both Jonas and the reader. He serves as Lowry's proxy—the voice of forgotten morality that calls for renewal of conscience. The Giver, who embodies the archetypal role of the "wise old man" (or "senex") in a pedagogical relationship to the protagonist, can be interpreted as either merely a trigger for adolescent self-realization or an insidious limitation upon self-realization as manipulative as the community's ideology (Jung 37). If the former is assumed, then the Giver serves merely as an invitation for Jonas to look to the past as resources for his own self-determined critical approach to the present objectionable circumstances of society. If the latter is the assumed, then the entire moral of the narrative is suspect—Lowry is then directing the reader's trust to the traditions of the past and fostering distrust of any experimentation with the pseudo-communist aspects characteristic of Jonas's community. In pointing to the past as the desirable solution to the oppression of the present, Lowry thus invalidates the principles behind such pseudo-communist practices rather than only the mishapen manner in which those practices are applied.

The text's advocacy for the independent agency of adolescents is colored by the Giver's role—if it were not for his intervention, Jonas would have continued to abide by the standards of the community. This presents an apparent contradiction to the text's campaign to urge young adults to gain autonomous thinking. In the end, Jonas, because he is young and resilient where the Giver is old and "weakened," is the one who has to shoulder the risk (Lowry 156). The Giver remains safely in the community where he will be looked to as an authority figure who can guide the masses toward understanding: "[the community] would not know what to do and would seek [the Giver's] advice. He would go to the Auditorium...he would stride to the stage and command their attention" (161). Jonas makes the greatest sacrifice by leaving the community, his friends, and everything he knows to risk his life in the wilderness while the Giver receives the glory as the savior of the shaken residents.

The Giver's influential role raises the question of the intention behind Lowry's promotion of adolescents protesting an unethical sociopolitical situation. However, the Giver tells Jonas, "having you here with me over the past year has made me realize that things must change" (154). Jonas represents

practical hope for a different future, so, in essence, he is the catalyst as much as the Giver for social change. While Jonas would likely not have experienced a revelation of political consciousness without the Giver, without Jonas, the Giver would never have considered a revolution as a realistic aspiration. Lowry promotes an adolescent agency informed by the past rather than only reacting to present circumstances. In young adults' striving for a better future, the text indicates that they must not only base their beliefs on the isolated present but must understand history in all its successes and failures. The text suggests that "we live in the past, and our only choice is between alternative pasts which might supply our mental furniture...If a society loses its history...that society [can] now have only a disembodied existence. It [will] have lost all those many things which made it itself" (Clark 13). History contains both the intentions and outcomes of the spectrum of liberating and oppressive sociopolitical principles; this knowledge explicates in sharp relief what is at stake and provides a greater authority of understanding from which to judge what is right and wrong in society. It also allows a more informed prediction of the trajectories resulting from certain decisions. In this model, youth are still the body with the power to act and transform an unethical society.

Conclusion

Through the development of a protagonist that the young adult audience can readily identify with, the text of *The Giver* and the adult subculture that Lowry's represents pedagogically imparts a model by which adolescents must critically approach the ideology promoted by authority figures; if that ideology is found to be faulty, adolescents must take a stand against it despite the likelihood that they will be misunderstood and thus alienated from that society. The text instructs that such alienation is noble and just, and that perseverance in this subversion—even if it is upheld alone—in and of itself is meaningful and can have a significant impact on society. The novel has an open ending, passing on a sense of duty in the reader to continue Jonas's legacy of political activism—for in real-world terms, Jonas can be reduced to a self-sacrificing, adolescent political activist. The narrative contests the fixed meanings that adults patronize and portrays them as largely incapable of doing anything but sustaining the established ideology. In this, Lowry counsels the young adult audience to be wary of the standards normalized by the institutionalized adult perspective and to resist depending on their judgment, which deteriorates rather than improves as they persist in an ideologically-driven society.

The Giver is the first popular novel that uses a dystopian story to didactically target the young adult audience and impart to them the subtextual message to rebel against the corrupt and oppressive aspects of contemporary society. This model has been recreated in many young adult dystopian works following the publication of Lowry's novel, such as *Feed* (2002), *The Uglies* (2005), and *The Hunger Games* (2008). The pedagogical interaction epitomized by *The Giver* has become standard to the genre. Lowry represents an adult perspective on how youth should counteract a culture that is regressing because of the self-protective ideology endorsed by institutions and their adult authority.

As a whole, the narrative empowers youth to seize their agency and seeks to free them to act in opposition to popular culture. The prerequisite to a moral and meaningful dissent, according to Lowry, is a consideration of the past. The young adult audience is acquainted with this model and persuaded to emulate it through the characters, plot, and dystopian narrative structure of *The Giver*.

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