



## SUBMISSION AND REPRESSION IN A DYSTOPIA: AN ALTHUSSERIAN READING OF THE GIVER

Li-Feng Lee<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Foreign Languages, National Formosa University

### Abstract

Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, a 1994 Newbery Medal winner, is a highly acclaimed dystopian novel for young adults. Due to its canonical status, much scholarly work has focused on its themes and genre conventions. However, this paper aims to offer another perspective on how individuals are controlled in the novel's society by adopting Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs). By reading *The Giver* through an Althusserian lens of ideology, I try to lay bare the mechanism of how individuals are constituted as subjects who freely accept their submission to the ruling ideology. I argue that individuals are just bearers of positions in the social system and that individuals are constituted as subjects who accept the ruling ideology as natural, true, and normal. Through the protagonist's reflections on and resistance to the society he lives in, Lois Lowry offers a critique of the seemingly ideal but oppressive society in the novel.

### Keywords

YA dystopia, *The Giver*, Althusser, ideology, ISAs

Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, a 1994 Newbery Medal winner, is a dystopian novel for young adults. According to Malo-Juvera and Hill's (2020) survey, it is ranked in the top ten on the list for the most frequently taught and read young adult (YA) texts in middle school, high school, and college. In addition, they pointed out that *The Giver* is "not only at the center of the YA canon but is also recognized as a seminal YA dystopian novel" (p. 11). Similarly, Macaluso et al. (2020) also argued that *The Giver* "broke ground as the original YA dystopia—the one that started it all" (p. 19).

As a work in the broader dystopian tradition, *The Giver* "critiques social norms and behaviors in order to serve as a warning for the type of society that could develop should nothing change" (Macaluso et al., 2020, p. 19). Critics have accordingly situated their interpretations of *The Giver* in the context of dystopian genre conventions, exploring its themes and characteristics, or identifying its distinguishing features that help to pave the way to establish the subgenre of YA dystopia (e.g., Hintz, 2002; Virtanen, 2012). However, not much work has gone beyond the genre expectations to further employ critical theories in analyzing how the individuals are controlled and restrained in the seemingly perfect but oppressive society in the novel. Some examples are Latham (2004), Virtanen (2012), and Macaluso et al. (2020). Latham (2004) analyzed *The Giver* through a Foucauldian lens of power and suggested "the conflict between the power of the individual and the power structures of a totalitarian society" (p. 135). Similarly, Virtanen (2012) utilized Foucault's four techniques of discipline as her theoretical framework to analyze how individuals and society are controlled in *The Giver*'s dystopian society through the destruction of private self and the obliteration of collective historical memory. On the other hand, Macaluso et al. (2020) borrowed Erving Goffman's theory of total institutions and reframed the dystopian world of *The Giver* as "institution." They analyzed how Jonas's community "shapes and regulates his sense of self on a practical and psychological level" (p. 25), and they finally concluded with a call for "an openness to deep bonds of interpersonal communication" as an antidote to a dystopian reality (p. 21).

To offer another perspective on how individuals act or function in *The Giver*'s society and how individuals are controlled by the oppressive society, I adopt Marxism, especially Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), as my theoretical framework. By reading *The Giver* through an Althusserian lens of ideology, I try to lay bare the mechanism of how individuals are constituted as subjects who freely accept their submission to the ruling ideology. I argue that Lois Lowry portrays in *The Giver* a utopian/dystopian society where individuals are just "bearers" of positions in the social system and where individuals are constituted as subjects who accept the ruling ideology as natural, true, and normal. Through the protagonist's reflections on and

resistance to the society he lives in, Lois Lowry offers a critique of the seemingly ideal but oppressive futuristic society in *The Giver*.

### The Giver as a YA Dystopia

At the beginning of the story, the 12-year-old protagonist, Jonas, feels apprehensive about the upcoming Ceremony of Twelve, at which he and his peer groupmates will be assigned their lifelong jobs. Through his perspective, we see his daily life in the near-perfect, utopian-like community. In the community, everyone is taken good care of, and their life is strictly planned, observed, and controlled. Inhabitants are assigned jobs, houses, spouses, and children by the Committee of Elders, who control everyone and everything. They make rules for all aspects of life, including something as trivial as how to park a bike, how to wear a jacket, or how to tie a hair ribbon. People are under surveillance, and those who break the rules are subject to punishment, ranging from public chastisement to death. In addition, there are also all kinds of rituals and ceremonies for different occasions, for example, the morning ritual of telling dreams and the evening ritual of sharing feelings. Just like other community members, Jonas accepts and follows all the rules and customs unquestioningly. However, after Jonas gets assigned the job as the Receiver and receives memories of the past from the Giver, he realizes that “release” actually means mercy killing, and he can’t accept murdering babies or old people as a routine practice in the community. Jonas begins to question the conditions people live in. He becomes angry with his groupmates because they are satisfied with their lives; he is angry at himself because he cannot change that for them. Finally, he plans to escape to Elsewhere, in the hope of bringing about a change to the community. However, before he carries out the plan, he learns that Gabriel, the infant who has been staying with Jonas’s family, is going to be released. To save Gabriel, he takes him and escapes the community by riding a bike to Elsewhere. The ending is ambiguous as it is unclear whether Jonas can make it or not.

As a YA dystopian novel, *The Giver* embodies the characteristics found in classic dystopian fiction but differs from the dystopian tradition in its inclusion of hope and agency. According to Hintz (2002), YA dystopias include such elements as “a rigorously planned society, charismatic leaders or masterminds, control of reproductive freedom, and the prioritization of collective well-being over the fate of the individual,” and something unique in a YA dystopia is that the adolescent protagonist’s growth is combined with the political action to change the society (p. 254). Virtanen (2012) also described some features of the dystopian tradition, including totalitarian collectivism, the falsification of history and memory, the constant threat of punishment or death, and individuals’ lack of awareness of the oppression. Moreover, as Virtanen (2012) added, YA dystopian fiction substitutes the despair present in classic dystopian fiction with hope (and thus the happy or ambiguous endings) and gives the adolescent protagonist agency for action and change. In short, as a seminal YA dystopian novel, *The Giver* contains all these characteristics, as my literary analysis in this paper will also show.

### Theoretical Framework

Marxism, in its diverse forms, grounds its theory on Marx and Engels’ three central claims: First, the evolving human history is determined by the changing mode of production and the resulting class structures; second, human history is a record of class struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed; third, human consciousness is constituted by ideologies, that is, the beliefs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and explaining reality (Padley, 2006, pp. 147-148). The latter two claims are especially pertinent in this paper. For Marx, individuals are not free agents, but bearers of positions in the social system. In Marx’s words, “It is not consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (quoted in Selden et al., 1997, p. 88).

#### *Althusser’s Ideology*

For Althusser, what we commonly call ideologies, or “world outlooks,” such as religious ideology, ethical ideology, legal ideology, and political ideology, are largely imaginary and do not correspond to reality. In his influential essay on “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser (2004) develops a theory of ideology in general that illuminates the mechanism of the functioning of ideology. He advances two theses on the nature of ideology: “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,” and “Ideology has a material existence” (pp. 1300-1301). For the first thesis, what is represented in ideology is not individuals’ real conditions of existence, but rather their *imaginary* relations to those conditions of existence. In its necessarily imaginary distortion, all ideology is the falsified representation of the real world. To put it in Marxist language, what is represented in ideology is not the real social relations (i.e., the relations of production and class relations) that govern the existence of individuals. Ideology is an imaginary relation to real relations, and this imaginary relation is endowed with a material existence, which leads to Althusser’s second thesis.

By his second thesis, Althusser (2004) means that “an ideology always exists in an institutional apparatus of the state and its practices, and this existence is material” (p. 1301). What happens to individuals who live in a

determinate (religious, ethical, legal, etc.) ideological representation of the world? Individuals behave according to the ideas that they have, in their consciousness, freely chosen as subjects. That is to say, subjects act according to their ideas and thereby inscribe their own ideas as a free subject in the actions of their material practices. On the one hand, ideas are inscribed in the actions of practices governed by rituals defined by an ideological apparatus from which the ideas of the subjects derive. On the other hand, ideology permeates the ideological apparatus, prescribing all its material practices and material rituals.

### **Interpellation**

Regarding the mechanism of how ideology functions in constituting individuals as subjects, Althusser (2004) advances his central thesis that “Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects” (p.1302). That is to say, ideology acts or functions in such a way that it transforms individuals into subjects by *interpellating* or hailing the individual. Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects; meanwhile, individuals recognize themselves as subjects and constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition in everyday life. This ideological recognition is *speculary*, which means that all ideology is of a mirror structure. Therefore, ideology exists only when ideology interpellates or hails individuals as subjects, and individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects. That is why Althusser (2004) states that “The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing” and that “the category of the subject is constitutive of ideology, which only exists by constituting concrete subjects as subjects” (p. 1304).

The effect of interpellation is that the interpellated individuals as subjects impose “obviousness” on the rituals of everyday life, all of which they accept freely as natural, true, and normal. As individuals are always-already interpellated as subjects, they practice the rituals of ideological recognition naturally and spontaneously. The mirror structure of ideology thus ensures “the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right” (Althusser, 2004, p. 1306).

In addition to the effect of “obviousness,” the functioning of ideology through interpellation also ensures subjects’ subjection to the Subject. According to Althusser (2004), *subject* is a term that entails double meanings: (1) “a free subjectivity, a center of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions”; and (2) “a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission” (p. 1306). The effect produced by interpellation thus reflects an ambiguity: a free subject that freely accepts its subjection. In Althusser’s (2004) words, “*the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e., in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection*” (p. 1307, emphasis original). That is to say, subjects make gestures and actions of their subjection “all by themselves,” and recognize the existing state of affairs as so and true.

### **ISAs and RSA**

In most cases, good subjects “work all by themselves” by ideology, which is realized in the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), whereas bad subjects may provoke the intervention of the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). While there is one Repressive State Apparatus, there are plural Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 2001). Althusser (2001) regards the following institutions as ISAs: the religious ISA, the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio, television, etc.), the cultural ISA (literature, the Arts, sports, etc.), and so on. In Marxist theory, the State Apparatus (SA) includes the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, and so on, all of which constitute what Althusser (2001) calls the RSA. While ISAs function predominantly by ideology and secondarily by repression, RSA functions predominantly by repression and secondarily by ideology. RSA belongs entirely to the public domain, whereas most ISAs are part of the private domain.

The ideology by which the diverse ISAs function is always unified beneath the ruling ideology, which Althusser (2001) defines as the ideology of “the ruling class.” If the ruling class holds State power and controls the RSA, we can assume that this same ruling class is active in the ISAs and thereby realizes its ruling ideology ultimately.

## **Reading The Giver**

*The Giver* is a good example to illustrate Marxists’ tenet that individuals are not free agents but “bearers’ of positions in the social system” (Selden, et al., 1997, p. 144). In the utopia/dystopia depicted in *The Giver*, people are defined by their social positions and functions, of which they have no choice. At first sight, the community in the novel is a utopia as it is well-planned, ordered, and disciplined; moreover, there is no hunger, no pain, and no war in this world. However, following Jonas’s development, we find later in the story that this is actually a dystopia—a world of no color, no love, no feelings, and no memories. In the community, everyone since birth is “learning to fit in, to standardize [their] behavior, to curb any impulse that might set [them] apart from the group” (pp. 51-52). After the Ceremony of Twelve, everyone is given a life assignment by the Committee of Elders,

receives training, follows the rules for the work, and fulfills their function in the community. It is impossible that someone could not fit in because “the community was so meticulously ordered, the choices so carefully made” (p. 48). Although the Ceremony of Twelve is the time when the Elders acknowledge differences and emphasize individual personality and aptitude in their consideration of assignment, no one is a free agent because their positions and functions are determined by the Elders.

There are all kinds of job positions for the society to operate smoothly, though some are more honored than the others: Birthmother, Nurturer, Laborer, Doctor, Recreation Director, Caretaker of the Old, Receiver, etc. Birthmother is called “a job without honor” (p. 53), while the Receiver is “the job which is the most honored” in the community (p. 61). However, “Honor . . . is not the same as power” (p. 84). Even the most honored Receiver has no power to change anything, though he has nominally the most important job in the community. He also has to abide by the rules made by the Committee of Elders, and his function is to “hold memories” of the past, “hold all that pain,” and advise the Committee of Elders when called upon, though rarely (p. 111). The Receiver is actually a scapegoat who is selected to bear the pain and burden for the community. In terms of social classes, the Giver or Jonas, the new Receiver, is definitely not the one in power. Rather, it is the Committee of Elders who are “the ruling body” (p. 103). Since the Committee makes decisions for the society and makes the rules for everyone to follow, it is reasonable to say that they are the ruling class who have the state power at their disposal.

To achieve the aim of the ruling class to secure social relations and social order, the job training and distributing individuals for different positions is not enough; it needs to be done in the ideology of the ruling class. This ideology is realized by the installation of ISAs, and this ideology realizes itself in the ISAs to become the ruling ideology. Next, I will discuss how the ruling ideology functions, along with its ideological effects, in the novel’s society.

### **Functioning of Ideology and Its Effects**

According to Althusser (2004), ideology helps people make sense of the world, but ideology represents the *imaginary* relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. As discussed earlier, the functioning of ideological mirror recognition produces the effects of “obviousness” and the subjection of subjects to the Subject. As a result, people within the ideology accept it as common sense. That is to say, they live in ideology, and they live by ideology. In the novel, after Jonas receives the memories of past history, he realizes that what is normal in his community is not the truth. He feels angry that people are satisfied with the seemingly perfect but repressed society without questioning: “He found he was often angry . . . at his groupmates, that they were satisfied with their lives,” and he “was angry at himself, that he could not change that for them” (p. 99). However, few people can imagine a life other than the present one. In fact, how can people be capable of thinking otherwise if such a life has always been the way they live? When Jonas accuses his father of killing the smaller twin without feelings, the Giver reminds him that people, like his father, “can’t help it. *They know nothing.* . . It’s the way they live. It’s the life that was created for them” (p. 153, emphasis original). In the story, no one, except Jonas and the Giver, actually tries to resist or change their conditions of life. People in the community do what they are told to do, and “It’s always been this way” (p. 154). Due to the ideological effect of obviousness, people living within ideology do not know they are living within it. The Giver’s reflections on people’s reaction to the conditions of life thus illustrate such ideological effect and also explain why they have accepted the ruling ideology as natural, normal, and safe, and accordingly conform to the collective society.

In fact, ideology functions in such a way as to disguise the real relations in the society “by ensuring that subordinate classes believe they share the same interests as the ruling class” (Peck & Coyle, 1993, p. 146). In the novel, people choose an orderly, predictable, and painless life, at the cost of feelings, colors, love, and memories. The Giver tells Jonas, “Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness. Before my time, before the previous time, back and back and back” (p. 95). It is not given clearly in the story who “our people” here refers to, but it seems reasonable to assume that it is the ruling class, the Committee of Elders, who made the choice. They justify their choice to go to Sameness for the welfare of the whole society. As the Giver rationalizes, “We don’t dare to let people make choices of their own” because it is “definitely not safe . . . We really have to protect people from wrong choices” (p. 98). The Committee takes measures and enforces rules for the collective goal of Sameness. To achieve the goal, people have to relinquish many things. As the Giver explains, “We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of many things,” such as color and sunshine (p. 95). Many human qualities, including feelings, love, and memories, are also sacrificed.

In addition, to achieve the goal, the ruling class even forges beautiful lies. For example, “release” of the elderly or a newborn is actually a euphemism for mercy killing. Nobody, except the Committee, knows what happens when they make the actual release, and where exactly the released one goes. What people have learned is that the Ceremony of Release is “a wonderful celebration,” as they have seen “pure happiness” in the look of the one released, like Roberto (p. 32). Like other people in the community, Jonas used to assume that when Larissa, the old woman he took care of, was released, “[her] life Elsewhere would be quiet and serene as befit the Old” (p. 115). No wonder when he finds his father killing a newborn as a routine, he bursts out crying and can’t accept the truth.

### **Material Existence of Ideology in ISAs**

As Althusser (2004) states, ideology is realized in the material practices of the institutional state apparatuses, and all institutions play a part in the ideological formation of the human subject. In the novel, we can see how ISAs function in forming subjects through their practices and rituals every day. For instance, there are standard procedures in people's everyday life: the morning and evening rituals in the family, the learning of standard apology phrase and precision of language in school, and Ceremonies of various kinds or occasions (Loss, Naming, Release, etc.), and there are literally rules for all aspects of life (as in the Book of Rules), ranging from how to wear a hair ribbon to when to ride a bicycle to whether one can apply for a release. Indeed, every aspect of life is stipulated, orderly, and disciplined. In other words, all the practices of institutional rituals contribute to the ideological formation of subjects, making them become good subjects.

### **The Family ISA**

Two important ISAs in the novel are the family ISA and the educational ISA, both of which function primarily by ideology. Regarding the family ISA, there are family rituals every day: at the evening ritual, family members take turns telling their feelings about the events of the day, and at the morning ritual, they tell their dreams from the previous night. Through such rituals, parents inculcate in their children's consciousness the ruling ideology, which is reduced to ideas, beliefs, and values. For example, when Jonas expresses his apprehension about the Ceremony of Twelve and his Assignment at the evening ritual of telling feelings, his father assures him that the Committee of Elders, the leaders of the community, will select the right job for each Twelve according to their observation, and that the Committee take their responsibility so seriously that "There are very rarely disappointment" (p. 17). The assurance reveals that his father is living within the ruling ideology and accepts the social conditions as natural, that is, his subjection to the ruling ideology as a subject. In this way, through the practices of rituals in the family ISA, individuals are constructed or recruited as subjects.

Another example of the family ISA is the morning ritual of telling dreams when Jonas tells a dream about his sexual desire for Fiona. Although he feels uneasy, he has to tell it all as required by the Book of Rules. He describes his feeling as "the wanting," and "It was [his] first Stirrings" (p. 37). His mother comforts him and asks him to take pills each morning as the treatment for stirrings, just as his parents do until they enter the House of the Old. Jonas then understands an announcement that he heard every now and then by the Speaker but ignored: "ATTENTION. A REMINDER THAT STIRRINGS MUST BE REPORTED IN ORDER FOR TREATMENT TO TAKE PLACE" (p. 37). Finally, after reporting it in the ritual of dream-telling, "Jonas felt oddly proud to have joined those who took the pills" as he doesn't want to fall into the uncomfortable category of "being different" (pp. 38-39). Jonas's attitude toward the dream-telling and taking pills shows that he takes everything in life as inevitable and natural. When he feels "proud" to join his peers in the community and when he voluntarily follows the rules and commands (i.e., the Speaker and the pills) made and enforced by the ruling class, Jonas exemplifies that he as a subject submits to the commandments of the ruling ideology, and that, even more importantly, he as a subject accepts his subjection freely. In other words, when Jonas is inserted into practices governed by the family rituals, he recognizes that the existing state of affairs is really true, and he makes the gestures and actions of his subjection *all by himself*. In terms of ideological functioning, he is a good subject, working all by himself. This reflects the ideological effect of mirror recognition: Through the ritual practice, the individual is interpellated by the ruling ideology as a subject, and the subject not only recognizes the Subject but also recognizes himself as a subject subjected to the Subject. In Althusser's (2004) words, "There are no subjects except by and for their subjections" (p. 1307). That is why individuals living within an ideology freely accept their submission as natural.

### **The Educational ISA**

There are rituals in school for children to follow every day. For example, children start the day with the chanting of the morning anthem, "the patriotic hymn" (p. 3). They also need to learn the standard apology and response phrases and recite them if the occasion arises.

According to Althusser, "ideology is not just a set of ideas that shape our thinking, but the common sense we learn when we learn language, so that it makes us the subjects we are" (Peck & Coyle, 1993, p. 147). In the novel, precision of language is one of the most important tasks that school children need to learn because the "community can't function smoothly if people don't use precise language" (p. 127). For instance, when Asher says that he got "distracted" watching salmon, the instructor corrects him to use "distracted" instead. Additionally, in this community, people have no words to describe sunshine, a hill and snow, colors, or love, for all these things are beyond their experience. Because people use climate control and genetic engineering to attain Sameness, there are no such things as unpredictable weather or colors in their world. In other words, if there are no words for such things, such things do not exist. To give an even more obvious example, when the Giver transmits his favorite memory of Christmas to Jonas, Jonas "couldn't get the word for the whole feeling of it" because "[love] was a word and concept new to him" (p. 125). Later, when Jonas asks if his father loves him, his father, instead of answering the question, reminds him to mind his precision of language. His mother further explains, saying that Jonas "used a very generalized word, so meaningless that it's become almost obsolete" (p. 127). Instead, his mother

suggests that he ask, “Do you enjoy me?” while his father suggests that he ask, “Do you take pride in my accomplishments?” (p. 127). Jonas never needs to use the word *love* because he has never experienced love until the Giver transmits the memory of love to him. If Jonas doesn’t have the word, that means he doesn’t have the concept in his consciousness. Therefore, learning language is actually internalizing the ideology embedded within language.

### **The Legal ISA**

According to Althusser (2001), the “law” belongs both to the system of ISAs and to RSA. In the novel’s community, there are rules for all aspects of life, and they are stipulated in the Book of Rules. Some rules are unimportant and are easily ignored or broken. For example, the rule regarding the age for bicycles: “the children all received their bicycles at [the Creemony of] Nine, and they were not allowed to ride bicycles before then” (p. 13). However, “It was one of the few rules that was not taken seriously and was almost always broken” (p. 13). Some rules are minor and are punishable by gentle chastisement. There are rules regarding bragging and rudeness. For example, although Jonas is impressed by the things Benjamin has achieved, they have never talked about the achievements, for “There was never any comfortable way to mention or discuss one’s successes without breaking the rule against bragging . . . It was a minor rule, rather like rudeness, punishable only by gentle chastisement” (p. 27).

Those who break the minor rules will receive reminders and public reprimands from speakers, which are located throughout the community and even in the family dwellings. For example, when Jonas takes an apple home from the Recreation area, quite soon there is an announcement specifically directed at him, though his name is not mentioned. “No one mentioned it, not even his parents, because the public announcement had been sufficient to produce the appropriate remorse” (p. 23). So far the legal ISA has operated primarily by ideology because the public announcement is to provoke humiliation and remorse in the individual’s consciousness so that he will follow the rules all by himself. Although individuals are under watch and control through the speakers everywhere, the effect of the legal ISA is more on the psychological level than on physical constraint. Therefore, in the domain of minor rules, the legal ISA functions primarily by ideology, not by repression.

However, those who break important rules will be brought to justice and punished accordingly, and some of them will even be released. For instance, a repeat offender is brought before Jonas’s mother, who holds a prominent position at the Department of Justice. She talks about her “overwhelming feelings of frustration and anger” to see him again in the court (p. 8). “Someone who she hoped had been adequately and fairly punished, and who had been restored to his place” (p. 8). She feels guilt “that she hadn’t made a difference in his life,” and she also feels frightened because “there’s no third chance. The rules say that if there’s a third transgression, he simply has to be released” (p. 9). Such is a case of the severest infringement, and the punishment is physical constraint in prison or even a death sentence. As illustrated in this case, the legal ISA can also act by repression or by violence. Thus, the law belongs to both ISAs and RSA.

### **RSA**

Althusser’s RSA contains the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, and so on. RSA functions by repression and eventually by violence, so as to ensure the social order and the social relations. In the legal ISA example mentioned above, we have seen that when the legal ISA resorts to state power and involves the police, the court, and the prison, it can also function by repression and violence. In the community, release is the capital punishment, which is enforced strictly on bad citizens. Release is not a punishment only for two occasions: the release of the Old or a newborn. Otherwise, release is the severest punishment for those who do not fit in or who do not conform to the social order. For example, Gabriel, the baby Jonas’s father takes care of at the Nurturing Center, is granted by the Committee an additional year of nurturing before he is placed with his family unit, although “Normally such a newchild would be labeled inadequate and released from the community” (p. 42). If Gabriel were released, he “would have represented a real failure and sadness” (p. 43). At the end of the story, Gabriel is scheduled to be released because he still hasn’t learned to “fit in.” He is not up to the standard for living an orderly family life as preordained by the community. In other words, Gabriel is to be released because he is a failure who cannot function properly in the community.

Everyone in the community knows the rule of release, for “It says so in the rules. If you don’t fit in, you can apply for Elsewhere and be released” (p. 48). Another example of release happens to a Pilot-in-Training who “had misread his navigational instructions and made a wrong turn” (p. 2). When the Speaker voiced in an ironic tone that “NEEDLESS TO SAY, HE WILL BE RELEASED,” Jonas “had smiled a little, though he knew what a grim statement it had been. For a contributing citizen to be released from the community was a final decision, a terrible punishment, an overwhelming statement of failure” (p.2). It seems that people in the community deem release as the due price one needs to pay for even an error in their training.

The examples above show that a citizen could be released just because he does not fit in, because he breaks the rules three times, or because he fails in the training for his job. Thus, through the enforcement of the rule of release, RSA makes citizens totally submit to the ruling ideology by violence. In other words, release is the

measure that the ruling body takes to get rid of bad or disqualified citizens, under the pretense of maintaining the social order. Therefore, these examples demonstrate release as the concrete, physical forms of repression and violence that RSA takes.

### Conclusion

People in the community take release as an inevitable, integral part of their lives, and even children joke casually about release in their daily conversation. Jonas's father releases the lighter-weighted twin as a routine practice; Fiona, a Caretaker of the Old in training, is being "trained in the fine art of release" and becomes "very efficient at her work" (p. 153). They can't help it because it's what they are told to do; they can't help it because "Feelings are not part of the life [they have] learned" (p. 153). It is simply the way they live.

Can people break free from the repression and constraint imposed by the oppressive society? Rosemary's release and Jonas's escape from the community suggest the difficulty. Rosemary, the failed Receiver ten years ago, bravely chose to release herself because she could not live with the truth. Her own choice of release is actually an act of resistance. Before Jonas receives "the memories of the whole world" (p. 77), he has only "one-generation memories," just like everyone in the community (p. 93). Jonas used to think that "there was only us . . . there was only now," and he accepted the existing social order in the community because he knew nothing better (p. 78). In other words, he used to submit to the ruling ideology unquestioningly. However, once Jonas receives memories of past generations, he and the Giver become "the only ones who have feelings" and wisdom (p. 154). Thus, as the only ones who can see beyond, they are now capable of disrupting the status quo. As the Giver reflects, "having you here with me over the past year has made me realize that things must change. For years I have felt that they should, but it seemed so hopeless" (p. 155). The Giver and Jonas finally figure out a way to bring about the change: Jonas's role is to escape to Elsewhere, while the Giver's role is to stay. As the Giver explains, if he goes with Jonas, together they will "take away all the protection from the memories" and "the community will be left with no one to help them" (p. 156). Like Rosemary's release, Jonas's escape illustrates not only his resistance to the ruling ideology but also his action for change.

Finally, as the Receiver of Memories, Jonas is the device that the author uses to expose the gaps and contradictions within the prevailing ideology. The contradictory feelings accompanying the memories of past, as well as his reflections upon his own community, provide a critique of the orderly, disciplined life in this society. As the only ones who finally realize that things must change, can Jonas and the Giver really make a change? Can people really escape the ideology they live within? Is it possible to change the established sense of order in the society? The ambiguous ending of the novel implies both the difficulty and hopefulness:

Now he was [starving]. If he had stayed in the community, he would not be. It was as simple as that. Once he had yearned for choice. Then, when he had a choice, he had made the wrong one: the choice to leave. And now he was starving. But if he had stayed . . . (pp. 173-74, ellipsis original)

Through the medium of Jonas, one who is not in power but one who is capable of reflection and action, the author makes visible how social positions operate in a larger social system and how human understanding is constructed by ideology. Through representation, critique, and resistance of the futuristic society, Lois Lowry invites us to reflect upon our society and our position within it.

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