Divergent Dystopias: An Analysis of Power Relations and Resistance in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*

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Abstract

The research, employing Michel Foucault's "The Subject and Power," aims to examine power relations and resistance in Lois Lowry's dystopian societies in *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*. Though the societies are portrayed in wildly diverging ways, scientifically advanced in *the Giver* and relatively primitive in *Gathering Blue*, both are governed by local oligarchies. Foucault's five points which are crucial to the concrete establishment of power relations: the system of differentiations, objectives, means of bringing power relations into being, forms of institutionalization and the degrees of rationalization are explored in these two young adult dystopias in order to illustrate power relations in the societies, the objectification which transforms individuals into subjects, and forms of resistance. In *The Giver*, the protagonist chooses to escape from the totalitarian society in which he lives while the protagonist in *Gathering Blue* decides to undermine the oppressive regime and negotiate her identity from within. Even though the regimes are not completely overthrown, the young recalcitrant protagonists inspire adolescent readers to stand up and fight for a better future.

Keywords: *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue*, Dystopia, Michel Foucault, The Subject and Power, Power Relations, Resistance

In *Messenger*, the third work in Lois Lowry's tetralogy[1], Matty, the eponymous messenger of the novel, ponders on the past of the Village's inhabitants, including his own. A number of them have come from elsewhere, "places with cruel governments, harsh punishments, desperate poverty, or false comforts" (Lowry, 2004, p. 28). Now that Matty has matured, he has learned that such communities are scattered across the known world. People suffer "[n]ot always from beatings and hungers, the way he ha[s]. But from ignorance. From *not knowing*. From being

kept from knowledge" (Lowry, 2004, p. 29). It seems that after the widespread destruction of most of civilization, communities have started anew and embarked on different trajectories of development in their rebuilding efforts. Lowry's series traverses three such post-apocalyptic communities, between which characters travel. These scenarios, though fictional, are not works of fantasy; rather, they are "a reasonable projection of existing trends but different from the world we live in" (Scholes, 1975, p. 72). Whereas *The Giver*, the first novel in the series, predicts the arrival of a new social order by extrapolating from advances currently made in the field of science and concern over conformity and violation of individual freedom, *Gathering Blue*, the second novel, contemplates the state's tight control over the artist while taking minimal effort to maintain calm and order in the rest of the community. Employing Michel Foucault's 1982 article "The Subject and Power," this paper proposes a comparative reading of the probable futures to examine power relations, tactics of power, and forms of resistance in a seemingly utopian society and an unequivocal dystopia. This paper argues that there is hope for changing society in Young Adult (YA) dystopias. The young protagonist can resist the objectification without using violence. The societies in *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* are governed by a small group of totalitarians who exercise both totalizing and individualizing forms of power. Though both states share the same purpose of exercising power—the survival of the community, they are different in their scope and focus. While the state in *The Giver* makes decisions on all matters in the community and in individuals' lives, the state in *Gathering Blu*e focuses more on honing the talents of individuals, to be specific, the artists, in order to serve the state. As for resistance, the protagonist in *The Giver* chooses to flee the authoritarian society in which he lives while the protagonist in *Gathering Blue* decides to subvert the oppressive regime and negotiate her identity from within. Even though the regimes are not completely overthrown, the young recalcitrant protagonists inspire adolescent readers to stand up and fight for a better future.

In their introduction to *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry (2003) set the critical parameters to be used in their own book:

> We use "utopia," … to signify a nonexistent society that is posited as significantly better than that of the reader. It strives toward perfection, has a delineated social system, and is described in reasonably specific detail. Dystopias are likewise precise descriptions of societies, ones in which the ideals for improvement have gone tragically amok. (p. 3)

The perceived need for the definitions arises from their awareness of the "conundrum" or the difficulty inherent in defining utopian writing and in keeping such slippery terms as utopia and dystopia apart. Despite its many aspirations and achievements, there lies in a utopia a latent threat that it can

degenerate into a dystopia, "a state that is in some regard politically, socially, and/or economically detrimental to its citizens—either overtly or covertly" (Roozeboom, 2017, p. 18). One may ask: at what point does the utopian need for communal cooperation for the sake of peace, harmony, and happiness become an impetus that coerces members of the society to sacrifice their individuality, creativity, and rights? Or, at what point does technology, for all the wonders it can work on our life, become instead a threat to the future of humanity? In other words, dystopias or societies that are considerably worse than our own can result from pushing or stretching a utopia past its reasonable limits. Perfection can be unnatural and humankind can be deprived of its humanity and become inhuman (Roozeboom, 2017, p. 20). Conversely, no matter how grim and wretched the conditions may be, not all dystopian literature is completely devoid of hope for utopian change. Hintz and Ostry (2003) maintain that the first half of the eighteenth century witnessed the coming together of utopian literature and children's and young adult literature as a powerful teaching tool. At the heart of this unique type of writing was an encounter with an imaginary better world which opens up new spaces for reflection and provokes young readers to train a critical eye on their own society. The reading experience can sensitize and can even unhinge them as they become more aware of crucial social, political, and moral issues. Frederic Jameson argues that utopias have disruptive powers that can leave readers in a state of "fruitful bewilderment" and "jar the mind into some heightened but unconceptualized consciousness of its own powers, functions, aims, and structural limits" (as cited in Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 4).

Hintz and Ostry (2003) have found that while "utopias predominate in children's literature, dystopias are far more common in young adult literature" (p. 9). A strikingly large number of contemporary literary works aimed at young adults deal with post-disaster and environmentally challenged scenarios (p. 12) probably as a response to deep-rooted fears and pressing contemporary concerns about the misuse of technology, the rise of artificial intelligence, accelerated global warming, overpopulation, and the desecration of the environment. Their findings have been affirmed by Kay Sambell (2003), who attributes a spike in the popularity of dystopian novels among young adult readers to increasing levels of apprehension, unease, and pessimism about the future in the last thirty years. The fictional society, whether neo-primitive or hyper-technological in nature, usually takes the form of a repressive and tyrannically controlled state (p. 163).

In utopian and dystopian writings for children and young adults, the protagonist is frequently a young adult whose expanding knowledge and consciousness and discovery of social ills is often a traumatic experience. Yet it also awakens his or her rebellious spirit and can also catapult him or her into the role of social architect, change agent, or even savior. His or her transformation, courage, hope for and vision of a better society have elevated the protagonist above the more skeptical adults, who fail to envision a possibility for change.

Along with the protagonist, young readers of these dystopian cautionary tales who are on the cusp of adulthood become acutely aware that in order to avert disaster, the social practices, ideologies, rules, laws, and institutions that are currently in place in their own society need to be reconsidered and radically revised. These young adults who in real life find themselves, more often than not, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, feel empowered upon realizing that youth possesses a transformative potential, that one of their own has brought about the "formation, survival, or reform of the society" (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 1).

Foucault's "new economy of power relations" outlined in "The Subject and Power" has proven to be a critical tool that sheds light on both the blatant abuse and the more insidious workings of power in a dystopia, even though he has been taken to task by critics for not distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable forms of power (Fraser, 1989, pp. 2-3). In his article, Foucault focuses on "the objectivizing of the subject" or the objectification which transforms individuals into subjects, by which he means both a being who is subjected to power relations and a being who is self-aware and capable of choosing how to act:

> There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (Foucault, 1982, p. 781)

Since he is mainly invested in discovering power relations which are to be found outside specific institutions of power, an analysis of the institution per se is not fully warranted. He argues that "one must analyze institutions from the standpoint of power relations, rather than vice versa" (Foucault, 1982, p. 791). Although Foucault does not entirely dismiss an inquiry that raises questions about what power is or where it originates, his research is driven more by a need to analyze power relations, to identify the means by which power is exercised and what happens as a result. Without power relations, a society is a mere abstraction. True to his call for a more empirical approach that will forge a bridge between theory and practice, he boldly claims that power exists only when it is exercised, when it is "an action brought to bear upon possible actions" or the conduct of others, either on their "existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future" (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). In short, it is an action that modifies other actions. He stresses that in a power relationship the party on whom power is exercised remains capable throughout of freely acting, of choosing from a possible field of responses and reactions to those forms of power.

The exercise of power or the attempt to modify other people's actions is constantly met with the refusal to be modified and to change one's views or behavior. In fact, this very refusal to submit to an exercise of power is a condition of a power relationship: ". . . there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight" (Foucault, 1982, p. 794). Even though Foucault seems to be claiming that all social relations are inevitably and simultaneously power relations and hence there is no escaping from the fields of power, his conceptualization of the subject of power that is free to choose from a range of actions offers a basis for hope even in the bleakest of circumstances. Foucault suggests that an examination of forms of resistance is also a good starting point since they act "as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used" (Foucault, 1982, p. 780). Moreover, Foucault's emphasis on what he calls "the antagonism of strategy" or forms of resistance meshes well with children's and Young Adult (YA) literature's insistence on human agency and possibility for change. In contrast to writers of traditional adult dystopias, whose dire scenarios ultimately do not leave much room for hope, those of young adult dystopias seek to pre-warn their readers and to urge them to take action to forestall a disastrous turn of events without paralyzing them and plunging them into total despair and a sense of powerlessness (Sambell, 2003, p. 164).

For our purposes here, we will rely mainly on what Foucault claims to be the five points that are crucial to the concrete establishment of power relations:

1. The system of differentiations based on various forms of differences among individuals (differences stipulated in the law; linguistic, economic, and cultural differences; disparities in status, know-how and competence)
2. The types of objectives pursued by those who exercise power
3. The means of bringing power relations into being
4. Forms of institutionalization
5. The degrees of rationalization as seen in how effective the instruments of power are in relation to their economic costs and in guaranteeing the desired outcome (Foucault, 1982, p. 792)

Both *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* present a negative view of the future of mankind through the portrayal of two totally different societies. Both stories are set after civilization is largely destroyed and survivors have to salvage what is left from the wreckage and start the process of rebuilding. The peaceful and tranquil community in *The Giver* initially seems to be utopian as everyone is equal and lives together in perfect harmony. It seems to have rid itself of gender discrimination and racial or class conflicts. However, as the story progresses,

the protagonist comes to realize that in this classless society that very harmony has been achieved at the expense of the richness of experience and personal freedom. In other words, the citizens have to sacrifice their "freedom to" to secure the "freedom from."[2] In an attempt to regiment citizen life, the state will not tolerate diversity or dissidence because they breed conflict. The death penalty, or "release" as they call it, is for those who are deviant or who violate social regulations. The totalitarian regime exerts much effort in imposing Sameness on its citizens; advances in biotechnology have allowed genetic traits to be manipulated to the extent that differences have been all but bred out. Whiteness predominates; with few exceptions, the residents have pale skin and dark eyes. The weather is invariably sunny and balmy because the climate is scientifically controlled. Basic necessities have been provided to all residents alike so they never have to worry about such exigencies of life as hunger, agony, and despair. The allure of material comfort and a sense of false security have desensitized them to the need for freedom. They are not aware that their life has been impoverished by the absence of music, color, emotion, and memory.

Unlike the community in *The Giver*, which has benefited from scientific advances, the one in *Gathering Blue* has relapsed into very primitive living conditions. Without help from those in power, the villagers have to fend for themselves and contribute to the common good as well. The disabled and the weak are deemed to be incompetent and hence must be exposed to death by being left in the "Field of Leaving," a wasteland. The society is clearly stratified as different groups have unequal access to resources and power. At the top of the hierarchy, the Council members who act like judges or governors and the artists whose special gifts set them apart from others enjoy a life of comfort and relative luxury complete with "tenders" who take care of their needs, abundant food and indoor plumbing. However, the artists are not totally free; they have to work for the Council of Guardians and are kept under its strict control. Next, the commoners, both male and female, have to perform their laborious tasks. At the base of the society are the inhabitants of The Fen who eke out an existence by bartering and pilfering. Moreover, confusion, squabbles and conflicts prevail in the society. Even in the family, there is no bond or affection between parents and children; the love and warmth shared by the protagonist and her mother is very much the exception, rather than the norm.

The discovery of the hidden state mechanisms makes the protagonists of both *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* start doubting the existing social systems or prevailing ideology created by the regime. Through their eyes, the young audience can see not only the conditions of the dystopian society but also how the power of the state attempts to take control over an individual. As Hintz and Ostry (2003) suggest,

> [i]ndeed, dystopia can act as a powerful metaphor for adolescence. In adolescence, authority appears oppressive, and perhaps no one feels more under surveillance than the average teenager. The teenager is on the brink of adulthood close enough to see its privileges but unable to enjoy them. The comforts of childhood fail to satisfy. The adolescent craves more power and control, and feels the limits on his or her freedom intensely. (pp. 9-10)

The dystopian societies portrayed in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* can illustrate Foucault's notion that power is not a static structure, but rather a dynamic relationship or a state of constant movement and that power relations always contain within them the capacity for struggle, resistance, change, and the overthrow of those power relations. In order to see how power works in these two novels, the five points essential for the concrete establishment of power relations suggested by Foucault—the types of objectives, forms of institutionalization, the system of differentiations, the means of bringing power relations into being, and the degrees of rationalization—must be thoroughly investigated, while acknowledging, like Foucault, that such mechanisms interpenetrate and overlap.

As for types of objectives, the Committee of Elders in *The Giver* is the governing body, who has statutory authority to make decisions on all matters in the community. The objective of the Committee, as it claims, is to ensure the survival and common good of the community chiefly by means of creating Sameness and peace. It eliminates differences that are potentially the sources of discord and conflict and makes sure that everyone abides by the rules, regulations and social etiquette. Moreover, in order to spare them from making bad choices that could result in complications and disruption of social order, the citizens have been taught to hand over that prerogative to the Committee, who will choose a career or even a spouse for them. It is clear that the Committee cannot afford to ignore the individuals, yet their individuality has to be "shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns" (Foucault, 1982, p. 783). In other words, the citizens have to be institutionalized.

In *The Giver* various forms of institutionalization are used to achieve the ultimate goals of the Committee—Sameness, peace, and social order. The process of institutionalization starts with the Nurturing Center where "newchildren" (Lowry, 1993, p. 14) are trained to "fit in," to mold their behavior and keep their impulses in check so that they will not stand out from the group. One infant, Gabriel, is scheduled to be released or put to death merely because he cannot sleep soundly through the night and his crying fits have inconvenienced the adults. As there are only 50 newchildren a year and the community is rather small in size, the Committee can monitor each child's progress with ease and modify their behavior accordingly. Once newchildren have made satisfactory progress, they will be placed with an artificial family;

parents and children do not have blood relations. In *The Giver*, the family and the school function as the arms of the state, disciplining their young wards and instilling in them consideration for others, civility, and unfailing courtesy. To help them avoid situations in which unease and friction may arise, standard apology and acceptance phrases have been drilled into them to the point that these automatic responses have lost their true meaning. It is considered rude to comment on someone else's peculiarity or to ignore the rules of etiquette. When a playmate from another community cuts in line at the play area, Lily, the protagonist Jonas's "assigned sister," compares the other child's behavior to that of "animals." In a society where animals no longer exist either in the home or in the wild, or have been reduced to children's comfort objects, the term is often used to describe an uneducated or clumsy person or a social misfit. The process of indoctrination of small children also involves the acquisition of precise language, without which, Jonas's mother claims, the community cannot function smoothly. However, the adoption of precise language entails a repudiation of emotion words such as love and, hence, a narrowing range of expression. It is no wonder that citizens are not allowed access to literary works whose powers reside in their ability to connote, to imply, and to evoke and whose meanings resist being pinned down. Graeme Wend-Walker (2013) argues that poetic imaginative language is barred precisely because of its disruptive potential (p. 147).

The Committee has to make sure that individuals are devoid of deep thoughts and strong feelings and have no secrets. At home, everyone is required to share their innermost feelings through a dream-sharing session in the family. Unconscious desires such as sexual urges manifest themselves in the form of dreams. For example, when Jonas tells his parents about his dream of a naked Fiona in the bathroom, he is given a pill to suppress sexual desire or "Stirrings." In "the taking of everything under its wing," the committee devises a number of institutionalizing practices which constitute "very complex systems endowed with multiple apparatuses" (Foucault, 1982, p.792).

The society in *The Giver* is a paradoxical one. While the Committee wants everyone to be alike in appearance, mannerisms and thoughts, it still uses the system of differentiations in classifying people into various groups according to their ages and job assignments. The state takes a keen interest in each individual starting at birth and closely observes his or her physical, mental, and emotional development in a peer group. The entire community has to attend the yearly Ceremony. Each newchild will be taken to the stage and given to a family unit which has asked for a child. Then, the ceremonies of Two, Three, Four and so on will be conducted in order until Twelve, which is considered the last stage of childhood. There are differentiations in each year. For example, girls have to wear long hair and have it tied with ribbons until Eight. The bicycle given at Nine is the emblem of moving away from family protection and entering the

community. The front-buttoned jacket is the sign of independence, a symbol of being grown up. When children reach full maturity, they have to separate from their parents and start their own family unit. As for the parents, they will share a house with other Childless Adults and stay there as long as they can work for the community. They will not be part of their children's life any more. When they get older and can no longer work, they will be sent to stay in the House of the Old, waiting to be released.

Family units are formed under the assignment of the Committee. People do not get married out of love. The Committee will consider the qualities of the prospective spouses and pair them together. At the beginning of the story, Jonas is not different from other characters in that he has blind faith in the proper management and decision-making abilities of the Committee of Elders: "The community was so meticulously ordered, the choices so carefully made" (Lowry, 1993, p. 61). The Matching of Spouses is given as proof:

> Even the Matching of Spouses was given such weighty consideration that sometimes an adult who applied to receive a spouse waited months or even *years* before a Match was approved and announced. All of the factors—disposition, energy level, intelligence, and interests—had to correspond and to interact perfectly. Jonas's mother, for example, had higher intelligence than his father; but his father had a calmer disposition. They balanced each other. (Lowry, 1993, p. 62)

Apart from compatible prospective spouses, the Committee also considers whether a new couple is ready to have their own children. They will have been monitored by the Committee for three years until the Committee is certain that they are qualified before giving them the first child per request. There is no bond between the birthmothers and their children since the newborn will be sent to the Nurturing Center. Since this rule is applied to every household, it would seem people in the community live equally under the same rules.

However, under the pretense of equality and sameness, prejudice against certain careers and responsibilities is inherent within the community. When Lily tells her mother that she wants to be a Birthmother because she thinks that newchildren are so lovely and she also learns from her friend, Natasha, that the Birthmothers are given wonderful meals and entertained with games and recreation while they are awaiting delivery, her mother firmly and sharply tells her to change her mind.[3] That high prestige comes with a well-respected career is evident when Jonas goes to take care of the old lady named Larissa, who tells him about the meaningless life of Edna, her friend who was recently "released," a term used for euthanasia in the story:

> . . . they tried to make her life sound meaningful . . . all lives *are* meaningful, I don't mean that they aren't. But *Edna*. My goodness. She was a Birthmother, and then she worked in Food Production for years, until she came here. She never even had a family unit." (Lowry, 1993, p. 40)

However, when Larissa talks about another friend of hers, Roberto, she exults in his meaningful life:

> But Roberto's life was wonderful . . . . He had been an instructor of Elevens—you know how important that is—and he'd been on the Planning Committee. And—goodness, I don't know how he found the time—he also raised two very successful children, and he was also the one who did the landscaping design for the Central Plaza. He didn't do the actual labor, of course. (Lowry, 1993, pp. 40-41)

It can be seen that sameness does not really exist in the community. People are reminded of the importance and honor of the jobs that they are assigned to.

At the age of twelve, when the children are old enough to become a citizen-in-training, the Committee of Elders deliberates on a career for them. They cannot choose what they want to do but have to follow what is chosen for them because, "[l]ike the Matching of Spouses and the Naming and Placement of newchildren, the Assignments were scrupulously thought through by the Committee of the Elders" (Lowry, 1993, p. 62). The Committee uses data collected from eleven years of observation on an individual's interests and after-school volunteer work as a criterion for the Assignments. For example, Madeline, who is interested in providing nourishment for the community is assigned to be "Fish Hatchery Attendant" (Lowry, 1993, p. 66).

In Jonas's case, the Committee has observed him and found that he does not show his distinct preference for any future career path since he enjoys volunteering at a variety of work units and he possesses qualities such as intelligence, integrity, courage, and wisdom, which make him a suitable candidate for the high status role in the society known as the Receiver. After being selected, Jonas is isolated from the other members in the community, including his family unit. He enjoys rare privileges; for instance, he does not have to work or share his dreams with his family unit. He is sent to be trained by the current Receiver, whom Jonas calls the Giver. He has to receive all the memories from the Giver in order to protect people from any kind of experience, whether painful or joyous. Ideally people in the community are expected to live with no deep feelings. However, after Jonas has learned about the cruelty of war in the memories, he is in torment but like other members in the society, he has been assigned by the Committee, so he has no choice. The process of

differentiation is ironically presented in the speech given by the Chief Elder at the Ceremony of Twelve about the differences of an individual:

> "This is the time" she began, looking directly at them, "when we acknowledge differences. You Elevens have spent all your years till now learning to fit in, to standardize your behavior, to curb any impulse that might set you apart from the group.
>
> "But today we honour your differences. They have determined your futures." (Lowry, 1993, p. 65)

In fact, people are still living in Sameness; they have merely been differentiated and transferred into a new sphere as seen in Jonas's mother's warning him of the preparation for adult life:

> "But it means . . . that you'll move into a new group. And each of your friends will. You'll no longer be spending your time with your group of Elevens. After the Ceremony of Twelve, you'll be with your Assignment group, with those in training. No more volunteer hours. No more recreation hours. So your friends will no longer be as close." (Lowry, 1993, p. 22)

Apart from that, they are still under the Committee's control. They have to "memorize the rules for their adult Assignments" (Lowry, 1993, p. 83). Even Jonas, honored as the new Receiver, still has rules to abide by. There are eight rules altogether. But two of the rules which seem to greatly disturb him are Rule NO. 4, which states that he cannot share his training with other people, including his parents, friends, and Elders and Rule NO. 8, which states that he can tell a lie. The last rule is surprising because lying is not accepted in the community.

Obviously, the Committee controls its citizens' life from the cradle to the grave. Themselves the product of the process of differentiation, whereby they have been nominated to a select circle of power, the Elders, in turn, exercise their power over the other citizens through the system of allocating people to particular units in society. This supports Foucault's claim that in power relations the system of differentiations itself is the fundamental requirement and the outcome of power: "[e]very relationship of power puts into operation differentiations which are at the same time its conditions and its results" (Foucault, 1982, p. 792).

In Foucault's explanation he includes the threat of arms, the effects of the word, all forms of disparities, means of control, and systems of surveillance as some of the means of bringing power relations into being (Foucault, 1982, p. 792). The Committee of Elders in *The Giver* has at its disposal multiple means

to exercise its power over the citizens. It uses advanced science, simple technology, denial of access to information, deception, and punishment to bring about the desired outcomes.

In this community, which thrives on Sameness and predictability, one of the aspirations is to purge itself of otherness. Advances in the field of genetic engineering have enabled them to do away with racial otherness; with few anomalous cases, the default traits are dark hair and dark eyes. Readers learn that the scientists have not yet been able to achieve a 100% success rate. Jonas's eyes and those of Gabriel and another five-year-old girl, for example, are blue. Apart from lighter eyes, Fiona's red hair is another feature which has eluded scientific control. However, people can hardly tell the difference between colors because there is no color in the community.

In addition to genetic modification, the Committee also uses medicine to suppress physical urges like sexual desire in its citizens. When they enter puberty, they have to take pills as "the treatment for Stirrings" (Lowry, 1993, p. 48). This daily intake of pills continues until their reproductive years are behind them and they are ready to enter the House of the Old. For Alison Nicole Roozeboom (2017) the fact that the pill has become so much a part of their routine that they do not pay much attention to it is a testament to "ideology's insidious oppression," of which the pill is a concrete embodiment (p. 24). However, Roozeboom's reading seems to overlook the particularly poignant use of the word stirring, which could refer to an initial sign of any strong emotion, including sexual urges. High passion, since it can incite people to action or can be a disruptive force in this quiet community, is something that needs to be nipped in the bud. It is best for the Committee if the citizens can experience only shallow feelings, which can be safely defused with the evening ritual of the telling of feelings. The Committee does not want them to have a rich inner life. In other words, it wants to flatten their emotional landscape as it has levelled the terrain in and around the community by removing peaks and filling up valleys. When Jonas stops taking the pills and has received memories from The Giver, he realizes that with those memories comes a new depth of feelings that are not at all like those the family analyzes every evening:

> But Lily had not felt anger, Jonas realized now. Shallow impatience and exasperation, that was all Lily had felt. He knew what anger was. Now he had, in the memories, experienced injustice and cruelty, and he had reacted with rage that welled up so passionately inside him that the thought of discussing it calmly at the evening meal was unthinkable. (Lowry, 1993, p. 165)

This is why the community needs the Receiver to be the repository of memories for them, to save them from being overwhelmed by intense emotions they

cannot deal with. Without memories and heightened emotions, they are apathetic, mild-mannered, and more malleable: The state's attempts to suppress the citizens' emotions and to impoverish their inner life make up what Foucault constitute calls "the objectivizing of the subject" (Foucault, 1982, p. 778).

The Committee routinely violates the sanctity of the citizen's privacy and rigorously monitors the citizens' behavior by using basic technology and surveillance methods. A loudspeaker is installed in every household for the purposes of giving orders and warnings, as well as for eavesdropping. Since there is no switch to turn off the machine, the state can spy on them 24 hours a day. Moreover, a major rule stipulates that except for those on official business, people are not allowed to wander around at night. They also lack knowledge about geography outside the community because they cannot venture out of the community without authorization. If anyone disobeys, they will be hunted down by search planes equipped with heat-seeking devices, which can be considered "threat of arms" (Foucault, 1982, p.792). "The whole world" is an alien concept for Jonas; "I thought there was only us. I thought there was only now" (Lowry, 1993, p. 98). He occasionally visits outlying communities on school trips, but those communities are as well-ordered as his own. The lack of privacy, the surveillance tactics, and the confinement bring to mind the life of a prison inmate. However, most people in the community do not feel that they are confined because they are used to it. Another example which best illustrates how the Committee strictly observes its people is when Jonas sees the red color of an apple but he does not know what it is, so he takes it home out of curiosity for further observation, forgetting that he is violating the recreation area rules. That evening, there is "the announcement that had singled him out without using his name, that had caused both his parents to glance meaningfully at the desk where the apple still lay" (Lowry, 1993, p. 30). Loudspeakers are used as a means of public castigation to make an individual and his or her family feel ashamed and guilty. Disgrace, shame, and guilt are some of the effective ways the community's dominant ideology is reinforced (Roozeboom, 2017, p. 25). The citizens then develop a habit of self-monitoring as a result of the constant awareness of the omnipresence of the eyes and ears of the state.

The residents do not need to read widely beyond what is related to their assigned tasks. The Committee knows that sources of information like books will open people's eyes and lead them to imagination and memories which can synthesize experiences, making it hard to control them. Therefore, the only information people can get is that about themselves. For example, if the residents are not certain about their age because they stop paying attention to age after twelve, they can check it in the Hall of Open Records (Lowry, 1993, p. 22). Access to books is limited to reference books that are indispensable in their daily life; the only books in the possession of each family unit are "a dictionary, and the thick community volume which contained descriptions of every office,

factory, building, and committee. And the Book of Rules" (Lowry, 1993, p. 94). Thus, Jonas is surprised to see thousands of books in the Giver's dwelling because he has never known that other kinds of books exist.

Deception is employed to control people. For instance, the public is told that "being released" means leaving this community to start living elsewhere for good. Only a select few, namely the Committee and the involved administrative staff, know its real meaning. Actually it is a death sentence reserved for misfits, serious or repeat offenders whose behavior is deemed incorrigible, and hence a threat to the welfare of the community. It also serves as a deterrent to any would-be offenders. At the beginning of the story, a pilot-in-training makes a wrong turn and flies over the community, scaring everybody in the community. The public is informed that the pilot will be released. Although they are aware that it is a terrible punishment and a shameful failure, they have been led to believe that he will be relocated to Elsewhere.

As the Receiver of Memory, Jonas can search for any kind of information he wants as the Giver tells him, "you can read the books; you'll have the memories. You have access to *everything*" (Lowry, 1993, p. 183). The access includes permission to enter "the Hall of Closed Records," where important secret information about the community including all private ceremonies like release ceremonies is kept. Through the visit to the Hall of Closed Records, Jonas learns what "release" means. He sees the murder of one of a pair of twins and he cannot bear the fact that the person who kills the less qualified baby is his own father. This triggers his resistance against the power of the Committee.

Apart from being used as a death penalty, release is a practice of euthanasia. When people get older and cannot work for the community, they will be sent to live in the House of the Old, waiting to be released. However, everyone, including the old, is deceived and no one suspects that the Committee is an inveterate liar. For instance, after Larissa tells Jonas about how wonderful Roberto's release ceremony was, Jonas asks her, "What happens when they make the actual release? Where exactly did Roberto go?" (Lowry, 1993, p. 41), Larissa cannot give him the answer, describing only the last scene that she sees:

> "I don't know. I don't think anybody does, except the committee. He just bowed to all of us and then walked, like they all do, through the special door in the Releasing Room. But you should have seen his look. Pure happiness, I'd call it." (Lowry, 1993, p. 41)

The last important criterion in the analysis is the degrees of rationalization. Foucault suggests that we have to determine how effective the instruments of power are in relation to their economic costs and guaranteeing the desired outcome (Foucault, 1982, p. 792). *The Giver* does not lend itself much to analysis of this issue. We do not know for sure the size of the community, but

we can safely assume that it is relatively small as the number of new births is strictly limited to 50 a year. The Committee once sought the Giver's advice as to whether they can increase the size of the population. Relying on his knowledge of the past and his store of memories, the Giver warned them that they would incur the risk of starvation. Given the small size of the community, the Committee has, to a large extent, been successful in using various instruments to inculcate the ideology, to create Sameness and promote peace and welfare in the community. By observing people and preventing them from having knowledge and memories, the Committee can control the community as it wishes.

Even though the power exercised by the Committee of Elders is pervasive, it does not mean that there can be no change in power relations. Escape or flight is always a possibility as Foucault contends:

> For, if it is true that at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, then there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. (Foucault, 1982, p. 794)

Surprisingly, the person who has "recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790) turns out to be Jonas who is well-adjusted. Rebecca Caro Noël Totaro (2003) suggests that instead of releasing him when they find that he possesses abnormality in his vision, "the Elders reward him to be a Receiver of Memory, receiving from the Giver all communal and individual images, colors, and emotions deemed unsafe for the average citizen" (p. 131). They hope that Jonas will be a container of memories and safeguard them but the plan backfires. The Committee has no other choice but to give Jonas permission to access knowledge and to have the Giver mentor him. Actually, these privileges can be regarded as inherent risks within the system because they can generate resistance which can imply that the system is not impregnable. The Giver's guidance gradually changes Jonas's views and perception of the community. Jonas tells the Giver what he has been taught by his instructors in science and technology about how the brain works. The Giver tells him that their knowledge is meaningless without the memories the Giver carries. Due to the nature of his training, Jonas finds himself isolated. He cannot discuss his new experiences with any of his family members or friends. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (2003) in their introduction *to Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* remark on the ways in which "the dystopian citizen moves from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance" (p. 5). It is hard for Jonas to come to terms with the community he lives in because of his more intense and heightened feelings generated by the

memories he receives from the Giver and the fact that he has stopped taking pills to suppress "Stirrings." Jonas learns about physical torment in the memory of a sled accident and the cruelty of warfare in which one of his arms is torn off. This makes him unable to play the cruel game of war in which the other children pretend to kill their enemies with imaginary weapons.

Also, Jonas learns what familial comfort and love is in memories. One memory involves a family gathering, with children, their parents and an older couple, who he later learns from the Giver are called "Grandparents." They are unwrapping packages on the floor and talking happily. This is totally in contrast to the artificial family that he has in the community. Jonas has had no idea about parents of parents before and all he has seen is the house where the elders stay waiting for release. Now Jonas is like a misfit as Totaro (2003) suggests, "He can no longer hope to fit back in. He sees and feels too painfully the inherent contradiction in the utopian—now dystopian—construction. He is no longer at home" (p. 131). The experiences from the memories allow him to formulate moral and meaningful dissent. His civic disobedience is not a mere form of stubbornness. Memories, whether they be positive or negative experiences, are synthesized into a coherent whole of knowledge about what life in the remote past has been and about how empty life in his own community is.

Moreover, memories bring about Jonas's moral outrage. He reckons that the community should have feelings and choices to make though it comes at a price. Jonas can come to knowledge of an individual's memory within a year of training to be the Receiver. This shows his higher transformation potential when comparing him to the Giver. Both of them possess a capacity for resistance, Jonas seeing beyond while the Giver hears beyond, but it is Jonas who tells the Giver that it is time to change the community. Young adult readers may identify themselves with Jonas, seeing the possibility and potential in themselves for future betterment of society.

Rosemary, the previous Receiver, is also another character whose wisdom and in-depth feeling accompanied with memories make her resist the power being imposed in the society. She used to be a well-adjusted girl before receiving memories. Though self-possessed, serene and intelligent, Rosemary is not resilient. After learning about hunger, poverty, terror and a memory of a child taken away from its parents, she cannot endure the pain. She goes to the Chief Elder and applies for release. However, Rosemary does not let anyone do the release for her. She insists on injecting herself. Her determination not to let the state make use of her body and mind is a form of resistance. The ultimate act of resistance is to terminate power relations; while Rosemary chooses death, Jonas decides to flee.

Jonas has to flee since he knows well that the Committee will release those who do not conform. Gabriel, who is considered deviant, is scheduled for release. Also, he learns from watching the tape in the Hall of Closed Records

that his father is the one who is going to release the little misfit by injecting a liquid into the newchild's scalp after which it falls limp. Thus, what expedites his escape is the immediate need to save Gabriel's life.

Jonas pleads with the Giver to run away with him, but the older man refuses to do so because "Memories are *forever*" (Lowry, 1993, p. 180) and he knows that if Jonas escapes, all the memories will come back and overwhelm the community and he will have to help them cope with the confusion and pain caused by those memories. The Giver also thanks Jonas for helping him realize that there is a chance to change the community and after he helps the community cope with the mayhem, he is going to join Rosemary, his deceased daughter.

A look at all the five important points has made it clear that power relations are rooted in the social fabric of the community where "they are superimposed, they cross, impose their own limits, sometimes cancel one another, sometimes reinforce one another" (Foucault, 1982, p. 793). These multiple power relations, even those found in the most intimate sphere of relationships such as a family, have fallen increasingly under state control. Moreover, what we have seen in *The Giver* reveals how power relations, relationships of communication, and objective capacities (what Foucault alternately calls objective capacities, finalized activities, or desired types of behavior), which overlap and support one another, are, in certain cases, regulated and carefully adjusted to one another as per a devised formula to form "a block of capacity-communication-power" (Foucault, 1982, pp. 786-787). The management of space, the enclosure, the process of differentiation, the rules, a system of discipline and punishment, surveillance, the organized activities, the regulated communications are present in varying degrees depending on their objectives in other "blocks" whether an educational or military institution, a monastery, or a penitentiary. According to Foucault, that this process of adjustment between capacity, communication, and power has been so effectively invigilated accounts for the success of the disciplining of modern societies.

Gathering Blue portrays a post-disaster community which has survived "the Ruin," the massive destruction caused by the "fiery explosions" of warfare (Lowry, 2000, p. 188). Unlike the scientifically advanced community in *The Giver*, this village seems to have lost most of its technological know-how and reverted to a state of primitiveness; with low standards of hygiene, a raging epidemic is a fact of life. The people depend for subsistence mostly on hunting and foraging in the forest, and, with no monetary system, they rely mostly on bartering and an exchange of skills and services. In these harsh circumstances, it is very much every man for himself. Fear is a constant part of their everyday life:

> Because of fear, they made shelter and found food and grew things. For the same reason, weapons were stored, waiting. There was fear of cold, of sickness and hunger. There was fear of beasts. (Lowry, 2000, p. 3)

Not surprisingly, Kira, who has been raised by a gentle and loving mother, is often distressed by the constant fighting, wailing, squabbling, bickering, envy, and casual cruelty she has witnessed. She is fully aware that this is the way of life in the village and children have been taught since an early age to grab and shove to get what they want. But for her twisted leg, she would have been taught that way and would behave no differently from the other people (Lowry, 2000, p. 224). The village is in dire need of blue, the color of sky, peace, and calm that has been missing from the ceremonial robe worn by the Singer since the art of dyeing this particular color has been lost to them; what remains are "only a few tiny spots of ancient blue, faded almost to white" (Lowry, 2000, p. 97).

To begin with types of objectives, in *Gathering Blue*, the village is governed by a local oligarchy called the Council of Guardians, consisting of twelve members, all of which are male. One of their duties is to maintain just enough law and order to keep this village together when fighting threatens to tear them apart; when disputes arise that could lead to death, the Guardians settle them by referring to the laws written in a heavy green volume. Even though the Council in *Gathering Blue* does not share the same zeal for Sameness and equality as the Committee in *The Giver*, it has the similar objectives of exercising its power to ensure the survival and a better future of the community.

As for forms of institutionalization, whereas religion is non-existent in *The Giver* and the residents do not seem to feel any particular yearning for spirituality, in *Gathering Blue*, all that is left of religion is an altar table, a cross, and a church. The people customarily bow to the cross, but its symbolic meaning is lost to them; they see it as the mysterious Worship-object that is "said to have had great power in the past" (Lowry, 2000, p. 27). The magnificent ancient church, once a place of worship and the only large structure that survived the apocalypse, has been turned into the Council Edifice, the seat of legal and political power.

The Edifice serves many functions in the community: the Guardians have an office and hold their meetings there; the artists have their own private quarters where they live and work under close supervision. Perhaps even more importantly, this is also where the villagers assemble for the annual Gathering held at the beginning of autumn. On a typical day, they are left to their own devices and make a commotion as they go about their business, but on this special day order and calm prevail and they become subdued and solemn. Jamison, one of the Guardians, makes it clear that the artists' creativity will be channeled into this ceremony. During one of their meetings when they discuss Kira's exquisite work on the robe that the Singer will be wearing during the ceremony, Kira can sense the weightiness of the matter and an urgency in his voice:

> This is the entire story of our world. We must keep it intact. More than intact. She saw that his hand had moved and was stroking the wide unadorned section of fabric, the section of the cloth that fell across the Singer's shoulders. "The future will be told here," he said. "Our world depends upon the telling." (Lowry, 2000, p. 83)

The scenes on the robe, which are reminiscent of those from the Bible, depict repeated cycles of building, disaster and destruction followed by rebuilding; with each new cycle the ruin grows worse and the rebuilding more difficult. On this rare occasion, the villagers, who are usually mired in the immediacy of their everyday life, are brought together at the Gathering to witness the literal and metaphorical unfolding of their shared past; the singing is accompanied by the viewing of the corresponding elaborate patterns on the robe. The scenes constitute the story of the people's "upheavals, failures, and mistakes, as well as the telling of new tries and hopes" (Lowry, 2000, p. 212). At various points in the novel Jamison reminds Kira that history will have to be kept intact and alive to remind the people of what happened and give them the courage to continue. Through the participation at the annual Gathering, these individuals become subjects, who are held together both by ideology and by interests, citizens who share the past and the present, and the same hope for a better future.

In the system of differentiations, the village is marked by clear dividing lines that are established based on physical wholeness and deformity, social status, gender, and age. Given the hardships and the constant threat of hunger and starvation, the people have no sympathy for those with physical and mental disadvantages who fail to contribute to the overall welfare of the community and can only be a burden. Villagers who become handicapped as a result of accidents or diseases or children who are born with a deformity are condemned to death. They will be cast out, taken to "the Field" by "draggers," to die of exposure. The Council condones the practice because it is in the community's best interests. When Kira was born with a crippled leg, she was spared only because her Grandfather was the chief Guardian. After her mother's death, Vandara, one of the villagers who covets Kira's plot of land, files a grievance with the Council citing Kira's worthlessness. Fortunately, Jamison is appointed to speak on her behalf. During the trial, she can convince the Council of her sewing and dyeing skills learned from her mother Katrina, who mends the sacred robe; thus, she is assigned to be the Threader responsible for repairing the Singer's robe and is given a new home in the Council Edifice. Meanwhile, Camilla, a weaver whose arm is broken in a clumsy fall and cannot be fixed, is cast out because she will not be able to weave or raise her young children. Unfortunately, she does not possess any special gift like Kira, so she will end up at the Field.

The people in this village are also divided along gender lines. Obviously, it is a patriarchal society, where "the separation of male and female was so great" (Lowry, 2000, p. 35). Unlike the community in *The Giver* in which a woman can rise to the top position of Chief Elder, here only males are eligible to hold office as a Guardian and enforce the law of the land, thereby exercising power over others. The other male prerogatives include hunting privileges and the right to education. Women are uneducated since it is against the law for them to learn to read and write (Lowry, 2000, p. 99). There is also a clear gender division of labor among the village population; only men go on a hunt while women grow vegetables, take care of children and weave cloth.

The name given to each individual will reflect his or her stage in life and thus constitutes a means of differentiation. Small children like Matt and young Jo have one-syllable names. Whenever they reach a milestone in life, an extra syllable will be added to lengthen their names. Kira and Thomas, the Carver, are of about the same age and their names grow longer when they reach adolescence. However, in the eyes of the law, teenagers are not yet entitled to all the basic rights extended to a citizen; they cannot, for example, defend themselves in a court of law. Those rights are reserved for adults with three-syllable names like Katrina, Kira's mother, Jamison, and Vandara, or those with four-syllable names who are advanced in years like Annabella, Kira's mentor in the art of dyeing. Except for Matt, children seem to be completely deprived of any real agency. If a parent becomes disabled or dies, the child is given away to another family for the benefit of the community. In fact, children are treated no better than domestic animals; tykes are left to play unsupervised in the dirt or are penned together with chickens inside a thorned fence with a total lack of concern for their safety. As is often the case, they are victims of physical and verbal abuse and the adults who mistreat them suffer no real consequences for it. Adults resort to violence even in their teaching; Matt tells Kira that he learned a hard lesson from his mother about the poisonous oleander; "[She] [s]lapped my head around so horrid hard I thought my neck would crack. It's how I learnt about the oleander" (Lowry, 2000, p. 45).

In terms of its class structure, the dystopian society in *Gathering Blue* provides a contrast to the self-professed classless community in *The Giver*. People are differentiated by social status into three groups: the elite, the commoners and the lowly inhabitants of the Fen. The elite consists of the Council members and the artists, who enjoy many privileges others can only dream about. The members of the Council are at the top of the social hierarchy; with the law in their hands they exercise power over others or, to use Foucault's theoretical framework, their actions are brought to bear on other people's possible actions and modify them. It is not surprising that Jamison fiercely coveted the position he now holds and made an attempt on the life of Kira's father, Christopher, who had been popular and likely to be chosen as one of the

Guardians before his disappearance. The artists live and work in relative isolation in the Edifice under the close supervision of the Council and are exempt from hard physical labor because their creativity and special artistic talents are considered an important tool in preserving history and telling the future. They can do what they want with their time as long as the quality of their assignments meets the Council's exacting standards.

The commoners live in a small dirt-floored cott with no window. They have no indoor plumbing and have to bathe and wash their clothes at the river. Both husband and wife have to work hard in order to survive. If there is no father to hunt for the family, they will have no meat to eat. The mother can only catch some fish, forage in the forest for food or pick vegetables in the garden. However, the inhabitants of the swampy Fen live in the most squalid and appalling conditions across the stream, where it is dark, "with the trees thick overhead, and festering with dampness and an odor of ill health" (Lowry, 2000, p. 177). These draggers and diggers and their families are distinguishable from other villagers by their filthy appearance, peculiar dialect and crude manners and are generally seen as the dregs of society. They are completely abandoned by the Council. They have to rely on their wits for survival. When Kira asks Matt's brother for Matt's whereabouts, he barters the information for her leather cord which she uses to tie up her hair.

Various means of bringing power relations into being employed by the Council to shape the conduct of the villagers include customs and laws, fear and lying, as well as murder and imprisonment. The activities in the village, a number of which are geared to the matter of survival, are regulated by the huge bell in the tower of the Council Edifice; "It told them when to begin work and when to stop, when to gather for meetings, when to prepare for a hunt, celebrate an event, or arm for dangers" (Lowry, 2000, p. 63). As is the custom here, the villagers are required to work and pull their weight. Since resources are scarce, they do not want to be saddled with the sick and the disabled. Thus, they have fallen into a disconcerting habit of monitoring each other for weaknesses and shortcomings. "The Way" of the village is no mere general practice; it is inextricably bound up with, and finds its reinforcement in, the written law. However, although it is not against the law to get rid of non-contributing members, the law stipulates, in very simple terms, that in case of a conflict "[i]f there is a death . . . the causer-of-death must die" (Lowry, 2000, pp. 19-20).

In addition to subjecting the villagers to legal forms of power, the Council concocts a lie about forest beasts to instill a terrible fear in the villagers, perhaps to prevent the population from dwindling as a result of migration. The village remains isolated from other villages since the people have been told not to wander into the dense and ominous forest. Anyone who dares to expose the Council's lie must be discredited and killed; Annabella incurs Jamison's anger and is subsequently murdered after she tells Kira that there are no dangerous

beasts. This blatant lie about fearsome beasts does not only serve the interests of the state; it is perpetrated for personal gain as well. After clubbing and knifing Christopher and leaving him for dead, Jamison testified that he saw him taken by beasts. If Jamison had been found guilty of murder, he would have received a death sentence.

In deploying these techniques of power and directing its attention toward the community as a whole, or what Foucault calls "the totality", the Council simultaneously hones in on individuals and exercises a totalizing form of power. Its control seems to be most concentrated in its relationship with the artists. Towards the end of the novel, Kira now realizes that she has been brought in to serve the state at the risk of losing her physical and creative freedom:

> The guardians with their stern faces had no creative power. But they had strength and cunning, and they found a way to steal and harness other people's powers for their own needs. They were forcing the children to describe the future they wanted, not the one that could be. (Lowry, 2000, p. 238)

In order to secure the future they envision, the Council develops "a formula of success," a pattern to be repeated with each discovery of new talent. They single out children who they believe possess artistic talents they can exploit and kill their parents. Young Thomas was told that both his parents were struck by lightning at the same time. He felt grateful that he was immediately rescued and became a ward of the state, instead of being given away to another family. Jo's mother dies of sickness and her father, it is claimed, is so grief-stricken that he stabs himself through the heart, an explanation that fails to completely convince Kira. In retrospect, Kira becomes suspicious about her own mother's death since a sudden, violent and isolated illness is highly unusual. Perhaps the only reason Katrina is kept alive until Kira's teenage years is that she can mend the robe and has taught her daughter to sew and thread.

Murdering the parents is an expedient way of bringing these child prodigies under state control. The children move into the Edifice and work exclusively for the state under the strict supervision of Jamison. Each of them is assigned different tasks in accordance with their gifts but all the tasks have the same objective—to preserve a memory of the past and determine the future the way the Council desires. Kira is assigned to repair the worn-out embroidery on the voluminous folds of the Singer's robe. The embroidered scenes are a crucial part of the performance because the Singer will point at the specific section of the robe which corresponds to the words in the Ruin Song. Kira is also expected to complete the robe by filling the vast expanse across the shoulders of the robe with visions of the future. Thomas's job is to repair the carvings on the staff designed to help the Singer find his place and to remind him of the sections in

the Song. Once he matures as an artist, the Council will tell him what to carve in the large empty space at the top of the staff. Jo is designated to be the Singer in the future. The young artists enjoy a life of relative luxury and freedom as long as they are attentive and meticulous in their work and obey the Council.

Like *The Giver*, there is not much room for analysis of the degrees of rationalization in *Gathering Blue*. People in the community have to struggle for their own survival. The Council does not take much concern about its citizens' welfare, especially those people living in the Fen. What the Council has to invest in is to provide shelter and food for the artists whose abilities are exploited in the Ruin Song Ceremony for the Council's complete control over its citizens.

Lowry suggests that the power of the state poses a threat to creativity and the almost-magical quality of the arts. Before her mother's death, Kira's threading was unlike anything her mother had ever seen:

> Now, without instruction or practice, without hesitancy, her fingers felt the way to twist and weave and stitch the special threads together to create designs rich and explosive with color. She did not understand how the knowledge had come to her. (Lowry, 2000, pp. 22-23)

As she was working on a small scrap of woven cloth during her mother's last days, Kira felt the needle was being pulled through the fabric "by the urgent, vibrating threads" (Lowry, 2000, p. 50). This special piece of fabric has a life of its own and can speak to her, answer her questions, quell her fears, and even warn her of danger. Unlike her own magical threadings, the work she does for the Council often leaves her tired. When Jamison tells her that he will explain to her later what he wants her to do with the large undecorated space on the robe, Kira searches in vain for the magic; "But there was only emptiness. There was a feeling of unfilled need" (Lowry, 2000, p. 129). Thomas also has a palm-sized piece of pinewood with intricate designs that "carved itself" when he was a tyke that speaks to him in the same way, but he seems to have lost most of that magical knowledge. Despite her young age, as the newly recruited Singer Little Jo's songs magically come to her and they are "full of knowledge," sometimes even of things that have not happened yet. Now that the Council has forced her to learn the Ruin Song, she is losing the joy of singing and complains of a debilitating headache. With their work being closely monitored and circumscribed, the three young artists have lost the joy of creativity they once felt when they were doing their original work.

If they show any sign of indolence or disobedience, they will be admonished and deprived of their freedom. When Kira tells Thomas that Jo is locked in her room all alone, he admits that he was locked up when he was really young because he did not want to work all the time. If an artist proves to be especially recalcitrant, the Council might take a more drastic measure as in

the case of the Singer. Revered as he might be by the whole village, he is held captive by the state. His misshapen feet, thickly scarred ankles and the festering skin make it clear that he has been bound with cuffs and chains over a long period of time.

Initially, Kira has been conscientious and obedient and there is no real cause for Jamison to tighten discipline. Even when not being monitored, she tries to observe the rule that forbids women to read and write. When Thomas writes down the lists of plants for her future reference, she dutifully averts her eyes so as not to learn the alphabet. However, Annabella's death and Jo's arrival, which happen at about the same time, awaken Kira to acts of resistance. Jamison arouses Kira's suspicion when he too readily discovers Annabella's body despite the fact that the woman lives an isolated life far from the village. She is also perplexed by how Jamison, who is her defender and has been nothing but kind and courteous to her, could lock up a little orphan and threaten her. Kira's sympathy for Jo prompts her to visit the crying tyke in secret to console her. After one such visit, it finally occurs her that although her door is not locked, her freedom has been compromised; mending the robe is not what she yearns to do. After a momentary lapse into despair, she is reanimated by the possibility that the artists can transform the miserable life in the village. She tries to persuade Thomas to use their creative powers toward that end but Thomas is too content with the status quo to even contemplate the idea, let alone act on it.

The discovery of the chained Singer's suffering and imprisonment, much to her horror, crystalizes Kira's understanding of the Council's conspiracy to harness the artists' creative powers for their own needs; "Recalling it now, Kira knew, suddenly and with clarity, what it all meant. It was so simple. . . . they were the artists who could create the future" (Lowry, 2000, p. 237). Like Jonas, whose presence and courage stir the Giver, an older and supposedly wiser adult who has been defeated by the system, to action, Kira will surpass her mother who only mended the Singer's robe as Katrina tells the Guardian who brings the Singer's robe to her for mending, "One day my daughter will be able to do this . . . She has a skill far greater than mine" (Lowry, 2000, p. 47). Even though Kira, Thomas, and Jo all possess rare and unique gifts with transformative potential, Lowry seems to imply that Kira's suffering has primed her for the position of change agent. Totaro (2003) argues that envisioning and inhabiting utopia requires "sustained courage, practical knowledge, and suffering" (p. 134). In Kira's case, being born with a right foot twisted inward that pulled the entire leg with it, infant Kira was about to be taken away to the Field, but her bright eyes and strong grip persuaded her mother to defy the village's custom of killing an imperfect newborn. As she was growing up, her kind loving mother taught Kira not only to sew but also to have self-esteem, to take pride in her pain and to know that pain has made her

stronger than those who have none (Lowry, 2000, p. 26). Her disability has also taught her a lesson in kindness and empathy.

In addition to showing quiet fortitude, emotional resilience, and moral strength, she seems to be more attuned to the insidious mechanisms of state power and the effects on the subjects. When she escapes being stoned to death and comes to live under the auspices of the state, she is simply astonished at her change of fortune and a new life of luxury she has never known. Yet as her friendship with Thomas develops and their conversations deepen, it becomes clear that he has been lulled into a feeling of complacency and that his arrival at such a young age may partly account for his docility, whereas Kira can more readily perceive that something is amiss about their circumstances. She is dismayed to hear that the knowledge in his fingers now comes to him only sometimes. Thomas, on the other hand, prioritizes what he calls "a good life," which simply means a job, better tools, and good food.

As Kira watches the newly planted woad, a plant used to make blue dye, that Matt and her father have brought her from his village yonder, she knows that these small living shoots will survive and that peace and calm, which the color blue represents, will change her community for the better. Wend-Walker (2013) perceives blueness as a recurring motif that links *The Giver* with *Gathering Blue*:

> As with Jonas's blue eyes in *The Giver*, blueness represents spiritual insight as a force of progressive change; by remaining and incorporating this blueness into her work as a weaver of social narratives, Kira hopes to inscribe a new and better future for her community. (p. 147)

Kira also realizes that in order for the transformation to materialize, she needs to decline her father's request that she go back with him to his peaceful Village, a community where the healthy, the wounded, the crippled, and the persecuted live in a spirit of goodwill and sharing and where she would be welcomed. Now that she has a bundle of blue threads and woad, she has opted to stay behind and, through her art, create a better future for her community.[4] The young protagonist's decision is an act of courage and perseverance, since it has been made despite the awareness that she is being held captive, that staying could jeopardize her creative freedom, and that a journey towards change can be a slow and arduous one. The last few lines of the novel offer a less ambiguous ending than what we have seen in *The Giver*. It signals the birth of hope in the form of the gathered blue thread quivering, "as if it had been given breath and was beginning to live" (Lowry, 2000, p. 241).

In conclusion, the dystopian communities in *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* portray the strength, penetration, and pervasiveness of state power. Various means of bringing power relations into being are used to serve the

objectives of the state — to keep people in line and to ensure the survival of the community. However, most YA literature stresses human agency and the possibility of change and this idea is in line with Foucault's suggestion that power relations are unstable and there is hope for change; thus, the society in YA dystopia can be turned into a better place by talented protagonists. Both Jonas who sees beyond and Kira who possesses magic hands in *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* respectively resist being objectivized by the state. Jonas escapes his oppressive regime to a new place whereas Kira decides to transform the society from within through her needlework. The empowerment of the adolescent protagonist offers young readers, though without extraordinary talents, a hope to exercise their power to change the world.

Notes

1. The tetralogy consists of *The Giver* (1993), *Gathering Blue* (2000), *Messenger* (2004), and *Son* (2012).

2. The two phrases are taken from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in which she addresses, among other things, the clash between the ideal of individual liberty and individual desire and that of social order. The difficulties in reconciling such conflicting demands are a central concern in much of dystopian fiction. For example, women in the Republic of Gilead are protected from harassment, rape, and commercialization of their bodies, yet they have no freedom to work and to choose a lover or spouse. Their bodies are no longer an instrument of pleasure and desire; instead they have been reduced to their reproductive functions. As Offred, the protagonist, muses: "I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will (Atwood, 2005, p. 83).

3. Even though the society operates on Sameness and does not seem to dwell on gender hierarchy, the assignment of Birthmother turns a specific group of women, namely those with strong viable bodies, into mere biological vessels. The assignment brings to mind the role of Handmaid forced on fertile women in the largely sterile society of Gilead, where an inability to reproduce threatens their survival. Offred sees herself as someone whose mission in life is purely biological: "We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. . . . We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices (Atwood, 2005, p. 146).

4. In *The Messenger*, the next novel in the series, the adolescent Matty, who is now a member in Christopher's Village, tells him about the changes in his old village brought about by Kira. Parents who were once abusive now take good care of their children. Moreover, when Matty is reunited with Kira, he is happy to learn that girls are now allowed to read, and that Kira has benefited from this change.

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