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## From Orwell to Lowry: Why YA Was the Best Thing to Happen to Dystopia

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From Orwell to Lowry: Why YA Was the Best Thing to Happen to Dystopia

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2023



*Dedicated to my fourteen-year-old self, who needed these books like air*



*My deepest thanks to:*

*My father, for teaching me how and why to read*

*Matthew Mutter, for his invaluable guidance, patience, and kindness*

*Alex Benson, whose encouragement prevented many tears*

*Dorothy Albertini, whose support made it possible for be here at all*

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## Introduction

Beginning in the 1990s and persisting into the 2000s, the dystopian genre found unprecedented success within the YA market, with many novels receiving film adaptations that raked in millions of dollars. Young American readers consumed these stories with fervor, and I can vividly remember being one of them, finding delightful escapism within their pages. It took several years of study before a simple question arose: why did I and so many other young people want to escape into worlds that were *designed* to be unpleasant? What about these novels was so appealing to their young audience?

To find the answer, I needed to identify the moment in which the dystopian genre first expanded into the world of YA fiction, beginning in 1993 with Lois Lowry's *The Giver*. This novel marks the turning point in the genre, where young readers were exposed to dystopian worlds written about and for them for the first time. There are many sociological explanations that could be offered up as reasons for this shift, but these ideas are not my chief concern; I am more than happy to leave such pondering to those much more comfortable in that discipline than I. Rather, I would like to narrow my focus to the features of the genre that inherently lend themselves to YA literature, and approach this shift as specifically generic rather than broadly cultural.

While *The Giver* was identified as an exemplary source for the discussion of dystopian YA literature, there was still the issue of what to compare it to. I wanted to identify a work that was recognizable as definitive of the dystopian genre, allowing me to address the potential for YA that I argue has been dormant within the genre since its inception. It is undeniable that Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* fits the bill, both in immediate recognition and richness that

lends itself to robust analysis. The intersection of these two texts, when approached with the intention of careful comparison, is exemplary of the transformation of the genre from one solely intended for adult audiences to a robust subgenre of literature written for adolescent readers. For our purposes, I will be approaching *The Giver* as a standalone text rather than a part of a series, both for the sake of maintaining focus on the particular narratives of these particular characters.

What Jonas and Winston have in common as protagonists is that the driving force behind their actions is resistance, which is exemplary of many other works within the genre. The reader follows a protagonist through a horrific world, being exposed to it through the perspective of a citizen within it that does not agree with the actions or ideologies of the ruling power structure. The reader is given access to the internal world of the protagonist, through which they are given access to the details of the dystopian world. I will refer to both works as “narratives of dissent” when appropriate, to call attention to this feature of the dystopian protagonist and the ways in which the dystopian genre is shaped by resistance.

In my first chapter, I identify some notable and consistent features of the genre, specifically in relation to the power structures at play within the fictional worlds of these novels. With particular emphasis on the figure of the child, and what they represent in the context of their societies, we will explore the intentions behind the systems put in place by those in power. Some points of interest include the extreme management of the family and child-rearing, as well as the ways in which children are educated by the state. This is an exploration of the psychology of these power structures, and the intentions behind their actions as states that are totalitarian by definition. From here onward, I will refer to these totalitarian governments within the world of the dystopia as “the dystopian state,” a term which is intended to act as a sort of catch-all for

systems of power in any dystopian fiction, whether it be The Elders in *The Giver*, The Party in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, or others. It is important to note that these systems exist to a degree within our own world, and in discussion of the sources used to identify them we will take ideas about how power functions in our society and apply them to the societies depicted within these fictional worlds. We will give particular attention to the idea of time, both as a defining feature of the child's role, as well as a reality that the dystopian state often struggles against. The role of memory, in this sense, is as both a tool and a threat, which we will carefully consider in the broader context of the ways in which the dystopian state harnesses or avoids it.

In the second chapter, we will turn our attention to the utopian imagination as the source of dystopian worlds, as well as what is gained when the perspective of these narratives shifts from that of an adult protagonist to a child. For the sake of clarity, I will say that my use of the word "child" throughout our analysis is intended to refer to any person between infancy and adulthood, in order to attend to the wide age range of protagonists and readers. Through discussion of dystopia and its relationship with utopia, we will deepen our understanding of the dystopian genre as a whole, and what it intends to achieve through its narratives, regardless of the age of the protagonist or intended audience. Once we have an understanding of the generic goal, we will dive into how it is achieved through the transition to YA and the impact of literature on the child reader.

For the sake of establishing a common ground upon which our exploration can take place, I will take a moment to define the common terms that will be used throughout our analysis. Dystopia is defined by Merriam Webster as "an imagined world or society in which people lead wretched, dehumanized, fearful lives." While this definition is certainly true, it has a

few glaring limitations. The dystopian society is not only one filled with suffering, but one in which a small group holds the power to create this suffering and inflict it upon the citizens of this imagined world or society. For our discussion, the dystopian society cannot be separated from the dystopian state. Throughout the second chapter, the ways in which the dystopian state exercises this power and creates “wretched, dehumanized, and fearful lives” for its citizens are referred to using the word “injustice.”

Equally important is the definition of utopia, which is defined by Merriam Webster as “a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions.” A defining feature of utopia as a genre is the philosophical attempt to define “perfection” in a way that is applicable to all people who live within the society. I will use the term “utopian imagination” to refer to the thought process that takes place during the construction of these worlds in defining perfection as well as developing a utopian ideology. Our earliest example of the utopian imagination is Plato’s *Republic*, in which the features of a hypothetical utopia are established in incredible detail. The intrinsic tie between utopia and ideology is perfectly depicted through the attempt to create systems with the goal of establishing a society that adheres to the moral values of its creators. This is in direct contrast to the process of establishing a dystopian world, during which the moral inclinations of the author and their audience are intentionally disregarded for the sake of developing the most abhorrent world imaginable. Dystopia, in this way, is born of the utopian imagination, as the process of creation begins in the same place: creating an alternate world that is based in a core ideology and is defined by its adherence to said ideology, resulting in societies that explore the extremes of what human communities can become. We will approach

dystopia as a sort of perversion of the utopian imagination, or a use of the same tool for a different purpose.

I will here define the ideologies of both the Party and the Community with as much clarity and brevity as possible, in order to ensure a shared understanding of what exactly we are referencing when we discuss the ways in which ideologies are valued and enforced by the dystopian state.

In the case of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* we are given a hint as to the Party's oppressive ideology through multiple encounters with the "slogan," a list of phrases which are always capitalized within the text, and are encountered every day by members of the outer party such as Winston, our protagonist:

WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

Here we can identify three values that form the Party's core ideology. Firstly, the importance of war. Warfare is a constant reality for the citizens of Oceania, and is noted several times throughout the text, as there is always an enemy to be fought, though said enemy changes rather often between Eurasia and Eastasia. Through constant warfare, the Party encourages a nationalistic attitude, through which they are able to ensure the complete loyalty of their population. Secondly, the importance of slavery. A member of the Outer Party is expected to obey every command that is given to them, even ones that are as small as the physical jerks, an exercise routine that is performed by every member of the Outer Party every morning. Winston notes that members of the Outer Party are observed through the same telescreens used to

broadcast the instructions for the physical jerks, and that a failure to perform them is a sign of unorthodoxy. Under the threat of death, every order is to be obeyed without question. Lastly, the importance of ignorance. There is an expectation that a member of the Outer Party should only know enough information to perform their function in service of the Party, and no more. This is exemplified by the language of Newspeak, through which the English language is simplified with the intention of limiting the ability to think or communicate ideas that are outside of those endorsed by the Party. Through this slogan, we have identified the three key tenets of the Party's ideology: nationalism, obedience, and orthodoxy.

The core ideology of the Community in *The Giver* is different in that it is more ambiguous, likely because it was established long before the novel takes place. What we know of how and why the Community was first established is limited, but we are made aware that its founders acted in pursuit of what they call "sameness." Through methods such as genetic engineering and climate control, the Community has effectively become a place in which each individual and each day is the same. The purpose of sameness is creating a world that is painless, simple, and completely controlled. A citizen who lives within the Community will never experience pain, but will also never experience choice, a trade that was made by the founders and persists through an unknown number of generations. This ideology is not present within the conscious minds of the members of the community, but rather has shaped their everyday lives to such a degree that it is adhered to on instinct. This complete and unquestioning adherence to ideology is the ultimate goal of any dystopian state, and is only achieved in *The Giver* through the sheer expanse of time since the founding of the Community and the passing of ideology from one generation to the next through the indoctrination of its children.

Plato's Republic gives us an interesting insight into the role of the child within the utopian imagination, with concerns about the impact of culture on the beliefs and behaviors of the child. On the topic of stories involving immoral behaviors exhibited by the gods, it is decided that "such tales must cease, for fear that they sow a strong proclivity for badness in our young." (Plato, 391-e) Here, certain changes to the cultural world of the utopia must be made for the express purpose of influencing the young to live in adherence to its moral ideology. The word "badness" here holds two distinct meanings, one being moral correctness within the eyes of those in power, and the other being adherence to the expected behavior of a child. This secondary definition is not so much an issue of "morals" as it is an issue of "rules" with obedience being a core value that is also specifically addressed. In response to concerns about excess as it stands in opposition to the value of moderation, there is a stronger emphasis on the ideal of rule following and namely, obedience:

"And all the rest of the youthful insolence of private men to rulers that anyone has ever said in speech or in poem, are they fine things to say?"

"No, they are not fine"

"I don't suppose they're fit for the young to hear." (Plato, 390-a)

There are two notable ideas about youth that are expressed here, the first of which being that it is somehow intrinsically tied to insolence. This implies that young people, in particular, are difficult to control and in need of the most management in order to avoid this "youthful insolence" toward the leaders of the utopia. In editing and limiting the stories that the young are allowed to hear, the creators of the republic seek to avoid even the smallest *thought* of disobedience, a tactic we will see employed by both the Party and the Elders.

The second observation that we can take away from this quote is that the creators of the republic view the indoctrination of the young to be central to their society's construction. These are only two examples of this preoccupation with how forces within the society may influence the young to be either more or less likely to act in alignment with the creators' moral values.

It may be confusing that there has been a significant amount of our time invested in *The Republic*, when we have established that our primary texts will be *The Giver* and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, but I ask you to trust that these observations of the republic as the origin of the utopian imagination are central to our exploration of the dystopian genre. As we have previously noted, the dystopia is a product of the utopian imagination, and is thus tied to *The Republic*. When we look at just how central the idea of the child is to the development of Plato's hypothetical society, we can identify a root for the centrality of the child within subsequent utopian and dystopian texts. As we continue to explore the importance of the child within Lowry and Orwell's worlds, it is helpful to hold *The Republic* in our minds as an origin for not only the genre, but the features within it that ultimately contribute to the development of the dystopian YA genre over two-thousand years later.



## Chapter One: The Child and The Dystopian State

While the most obvious and arguably primary value of the child within dystopian societies is as future citizens, and thus future labor power, one cannot deny the potential of children within the state, as well as the many systems intended for their management. The child is but one actor in the larger unit of the family, a structure for which the state's control is particularly rigorous. The systems designed by the dystopian state to manage the familial unit, particularly children, are admissions of the potential danger posed by each and every child. With the assistance of philosophical and critical works, we will assess and identify the roles of children within the dystopian state, as well as the perception of them by their ruling governments. Firstly, we will consider the state's role in the formation of the family, and the ends they achieve through artificializing marriage and child-rearing.

Extending the power of the dystopian state into the personal matters of its citizens is a hallmark of the genre, and can be observed in Orwell's watchful telescreens and Lowry's seemingly omnipresent Elders. There is something primal, however, in a modern reader's response to the invasion of the formation of the family and the management of marriage. It is a management of human emotion- of love. Winston notes his suspected goals of the party in eliminating and altering these emotions:

There was a direct, intimate connection between chastity and political orthodoxy. For how could the fear, the hatred, and the lunatic credulity which the Party needed for its members be kept at the right pitch except by bottling down some powerful instinct and using it as a driving force? The sex impulse was dangerous to the Party, and the Party had

turned it to account. They had played a similar trick with the instinct of parenthood. The family could not actually be abolished and, indeed, people were encouraged to be fond of their children in almost the old-fashioned way. The children, on the other hand, were systematically turned against their parents and taught to spy on them and report their deviations. (Orwell, 134)

As noted, Winston accuses the Party of intentionally suppressing the sex instinct (used interchangeably with the word “love” rather often in the text) for the purpose of maintaining a population capable of the fervor and blind devotion required by their ideology. Moreover, he acknowledges the Party’s need for the family as well as describing the systems in place that interfere with it. The “instinct of parenthood” is turned to the party’s favor by allowing constant surveillance into the traditionally private space of the family, conducted by the children themselves. Winston here is suggesting that the parental instinct is, to an extent, beyond the Party’s control, but that the child is more easily manipulated. While the parent is encouraged to care for their child, the child is turned against them, and taught to direct their love and loyalty toward the party rather than toward their familial unit. The corruption of these relationships, both familial and romantic, are important parts of how the dystopian state maintains complete or near complete control over its citizens, but further still, these interferences are part of a larger motivation to induce a sort of “failure” within the relationships between members of the familial unit.

The results of such a failure are described by Edward Said in, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, in which he addresses the idea of developing identity through culture and the transition from relationships within the family to those outside of it. For the purposes of

discussing the dystopian state and its vested interest in the family, Said's most important observation is "The transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship [...] which is also a new system." (Said, 19) Said insists that the failure of filial- or familial relationships are in a way rectified by relationships formed within society through affiliation. In relation to the dystopian state, inducing a failure in these relationships encourages, or forces, members of the family to turn outward for a sense of belonging, and in the case of children, the development of an individual identity. Such belonging, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is to be found in acceptable and state sponsored organizations such as the Spies, the Junior Anti-sex League, and of course within one's job in service of the Party. The power generated by this dependence is not lost on Said, who adds, "We will find the deliberately explicit goal of using that new order to reinstate the vestiges of the kind of authority associated in the past with filiative order." (Said, 19) When the needs of the individual are met by affiliative rather than filiative relationships, there remains the essence- or the ghost of the filial that endows the leaders of the affilial group with a sort of power as well as a level of devotion and loyalty from their followers that would typically belong within the family.

The embodiment of this transition is of course Big Brother, whose face and presence has become a mythologized force within the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Goldstein's book is an exhaustive work authored by dissenting forces in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and is responsible for most of the knowledge that the reader receives about how the Party functions. This book makes the use that the Party has for Big Brother very clear, as he is "the guise in which the Party

chooses to exhibit itself to the world. His function is to act as a focusing point for love, fear, and reverence, emotions which are more easily felt toward an individual than toward an organization.” (Orwell, 209) When informed by Said’s insights, we can understand the symbol of Big Brother as not only a representation of the Party itself, but a tool that can be used by the Party to obtain the authority, loyalty, and trust that is undermined within the household by systems of their own design. Through his name alone, Big Brother imitates the family, specifically a figure of authority, situating the individual as a younger sibling. As noted in Goldstein’s writing, he serves as an individual who can induce the emotions one typically feels for an individual, then wield those emotions to serve the interests of the Party. In this way his function is rather subversive, posing as a member of the family, yet all the while acting as the eyes and ears of the party. As the slogan goes, “Big Brother is watching you.”

There are similar interferences committed within *The Giver*, where families are created entirely artificially. In this way, the Elders of the community are able to ensure that each child is raised from infancy in an environment that encourages their compliance with the values and ideology of the community. The rules of this systematic arrangement of individuals for child-rearing are ingrained within the minds of even the children themselves. Lowry writes, “‘Lily’ Mother reminded her, smiling, ‘you know the rules.’ Two children- one male, one female- to each family unit. It was clearly written in the rules.” (Lowry, 8) The knowledge of the artificial family here is embedded within Lily’s mind, and apparently the minds of all other citizens- regardless of age. As part of the artificial family structure, there is an intentional severing of the biological relationship between mother and child through the role of the Birthmother, one of the assignments given during the Ceremony of Twelve, in which children

receive their assignment, or which job they will be performing within the community. The assignment of Birthmother is one that is purely physical, comparable to the assignment of Laborer, in that the responsibility of the Birthmother is exactly exactly as her name implies, only to carry a child to term and give birth to it. After that, all nurturing and rearing is done by others, the child is simply the physical product created through her profession. Similarly, each adult is part of a family unit, having no choice in who their partner may be- and seemingly no desire to choose. The adults within the family unit are simply partners in the maintenance of the important resource that is the child, so that it may eventually function as a perfect citizen of the community.

The type of failure induced in the filial relationship here bears more complexity, bringing the formality and rigidity from the outside of the home and making it commonplace within the family. While there are certain rituals (such as sharing Feelings in the evening and dreams in the morning) that are reserved for interactions between members of the “family unit,” the interaction between them is governed by the same rules, principals- and yes, ideologies as the outside world. Even these rituals are governed by strict rules within the community, as Jonas is reminded:

“Do you love me?”

There was an awkward silence for a moment. Then Father gave a little chuckle.

“*Jonas*. You, of all people. Precision of language, *please!*”

“What do you mean?” Jonas asked. Amusement was not at all what he had anticipated.

“Your father means that you used a very generalized word, so meaningless that it has Become almost obsolete” (Lowry, 127)

Jonas' father, after hearing him use the word "love," is amused at the strangeness of the word within the bounds of their society. He cites the rules of the community within the home, rigidly enforcing the rules of the community even within the private space of the home, and blurring the demarcation between the two. In the process of enforcing the community's rules, parents are able to embed the "correct" thoughts, feelings, and behaviors into their children in a way that leads them to feel that these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are not only correct, but natural. In the case of words like "love" there is a particular ambiguity that is difficult to remove. When such a word is used during the sharing of feelings, it does not serve the purpose of the ritual, which is to communicate exactly what each member of the family unit is experiencing internally and to encourage emotional management, ultimately maintaining the citizen's ability to perform their purpose within the community. Love is unmanageable and difficult to understand, and thus within the world of the giver, it is considered meaningless. When the idea of familial love is reduced to nothing at all, it is easy for the ties between members of the family unit to be weakened until they only serve the purpose the community needs from them, effectively raising children into citizens that can function within the community.

After inducing this failure in the filial relationship, the dystopian state manipulates the urge to find belonging and support in the affilial sphere. By definition, the filial is involuntary, as it is a relationship in which the child has no choice. Meanwhile, the affilial is a powerful tool for developing identity precisely because it is a voluntary process. Within the Dystopian state, however, the affilial becomes compulsory; let us take, for instance, Orwell's Spies:

Nearly all children nowadays were horrible. What was worst of all was that by means of such organizations as the Spies they were systematically turned into ungovernable little

savages, and yet this produced in them no tendency whatever to rebel against the discipline of the Party. On the contrary, they adored the Party and everything connected with it. (Orwell, 25)

This organization achieves their goals in many ways, of course contributing to the failure of filial relationships, but also establishing loyalty to The Party as the only way to access affilial relationships and develop the self outside the familial sphere. The use of the word “systematically” here exhibits the careful and intentional conditioning that The Party is employing within the organization, as well as implying that most, or “nearly all,” children are part of The Spies. Julia notes her own work in a similar organization, “I do voluntary work three evenings a week for the Junior Anti-Sex League [...] I always look cheerful and I never shirk anything. Always yell with the crowd, that’s what I say. It’s the only way to be safe.” (Orwell 123) Julia’s explanation of her “voluntary work” tells us something important about The Spies in that while they may be framed as a voluntary organization, they are rather necessary proof of orthodoxy. According to Julia, it is not enough to simply obey The Party; one must display complete and utter loyalty to them and their ideology through these “voluntary” organizations to avoid rousing suspicion. If children were not part of the organization, it would likely be viewed as a sign of unorthodoxy within the family- a suspicion that a citizen of Oceania simply cannot afford.

Similarly, part of the educational system for children in *The Giver* is volunteer hours, in which they are expected to spend time performing tasks for different facilities within the community, such as The House of The Old. Jonas reflects on these hours with a sort of reverence. “The freedom to choose where to spend those hours seemed a wonderful luxury to

Jonas; other hours of the day were so carefully regulated.” (Lowry, 26) In this case, the community has pulled the wonderful trick of convincing Jonas and his fellow citizens that they have a sort of freedom by allowing them to choose which sort of labor they will perform during these assigned hours. It is telling that Jonas finds the volunteer hours to be the most flexible, as it further clarifies exactly how controlled the lives of the citizens are. Through this practice, as well as the pageantry of the Ceremony of Twelve, the affilial relationship that fills the void left by the filial is an illusion of freedom, in which children are told that they can spend a small amount of time doing whatever they wish, all the while being observed and assigned the labor that they will perform for the rest of their lives. Jonas notes that all other hours of the day are regimented, and said hours include those spent within his home, clarifying once again that the familial space that the reader may be familiar with is not the same within *The Giver*. It is not private, and it is not an exception to any of the rules of the community. The extension of these rules into the family unit is not only an attempt to induce failure in the filial relationship, it also makes the freedom of the volunteer hours all the more exciting.

But why expend the effort? What do The Party and The Elders stand to gain from carefully cultivating obedient citizens through strict management of a child’s development, when they so clearly have the power to simply make disobedient citizens disappear?

It is not only one citizen they are cultivating through these means, but rather a generation of citizens, all indoctrinated with their ideals, all viewing the world in the exact way that most benefits the dystopian state. In his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser details the requirements for the survival of a given economic system. “...the reproduction of labor power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same



time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order.”(Althusser, 132) The role of children within the dystopian state is as future citizens and thus future labor power, but simply creating enough children to replace their parents within the labor force is not enough. In order to reproduce the system from one generation to the next, the state must reproduce the culture around the system. As one generation full of orthodoxy and obedience ages, a new generation with the same gusto must replace them in order for the system to remain intact. In order to reproduce these conditions, the state relies on two tools, the Repressive State Apparatus (or RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). Althusser defines the RSA as the superstructure through which the state enacts violence to maintain the social order, while the ISA is the superstructure the state uses to disperse its ideology.

There are a plethora of examples of ISA's (insofar as they are useful to our understanding of the dystopian state) within Plato's Republic, which mirrors many of the superstructures used in both *The Giver* and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* to impart the ideologies of the state onto the citizens. Most notable is the idea of media control, which is discussed at length in book III, particularly in relation to stories of gods and heroes. In relation to the story of Achilles, “The dragging of Hector around Patroclus' tomb, the slaughter in the fire of the men captured alive: we'll deny that all this is truly told.” (Plato, 391-b) The active and conscious editing of Achilles' actions is reminiscent of the media editing that is carried out by Orwell's Ministry of Truth, and the lack of books in Lowry's community. In this way, the story of Achilles and similar heroic tales serve as ISAs, edited and occasionally completely deleted in order to remain in line with the ideology of the state. In addition to stories of heroes, there are also changes suggested to the religious beliefs of the citizens of the republic, describing an intention to dissuade poets from

“Attempt[ing] to persuade our youngsters that the gods produce evil, and that heroes are no better than human beings. For, as we were saying before, those things are neither holy nor true.” (Plato, 391-e) This is reminiscent of the idea of doublethink within *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, with the creators of the republic actively editing their cultural beliefs while at the same time asserting that these changes to the existing stories make them more true. In this case, the intention is to bring the will of the gods into alignment with the will of the leaders of the state, using religion as an ISA to promote the ideology of the state.

In both *The Giver* and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, religion is dealt with in a very different way. Rather than using religion as a moral justification for the control of the state over its citizens, it is completely eradicated. In the case of the Party, the intentions behind the abolition of religious institutions may be quickly explained away with the assumption that the existence of something more powerful than the Party itself is incompatible with its ideology. While such an assumption is perfectly reasonable, and likely true, there is another explanation which implies that the power held by religion as a superstructure is not simply given up, but is rather redirected. In this way, it may be compared with the repression of the sex instinct, in that the ideology of the Party requires the citizen to be in a constant state of rage, ensuring their willingness to suffer for the sake of defeating the enemy, whoever it may be for the moment.

This rage, and the way that it is encouraged and enforced is the Party’s use of religiosity. Let us take the example of the Two Minutes Hate, which Winston describes in vivid detail. The Hate is a mandatory ritual, during which there is an expectation of emotional frenzy. Just as all rituals within the Party are, The Hate and the gusto with which one performs the expected reaction to it, are used to indicate one’s orthodoxy and loyalty to the Party’s ideals. Even

Winston, who has made clear to the reader that he is a dissenting citizen, does not need to perform The Hate, but rather experiences it in earnest, “The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in.” (Orwell, 15) Here, the ritual of The Hate is described not only as enforced by the Party, but compulsory for even the most dissenting of its citizens. Winston’s ideological objections to the doctrines of the Party do not keep him from feeling a nearly instinctual rage at the image of its enemies. After these images, which are meant to induce the blind rage that Winston and the others around him are experiencing, Big Brother’s face appears, uttering some unidentifiable words of encouragement. Big Brother is the image that ends the horrible, rage-inducing onslaught, with the slogans of the Party appearing on screen- The Party is victorious, and its doctrine is final.

After the appearance of Big Brother, and the catharsis that follows, an unnamed woman seated near Winston collapses over a chair. “With a tremulous murmur that sounded like “My Savior!” she extended her arms toward the screen, Then, she buried her face in her hands. It was apparent that she was uttering a prayer.” (Orwell, 17) Even if a formal religious institution does not exist in Oceania, religiosity is still a tool used to evoke loyalty in its citizens. There are no “gods” being worshiped, but it is clear that Big Brother is a savior figure, representing all that is good and right as a protector of Oceania’s citizens. As the personification of the Party’s ideology, Big Brother is a figure that is able to collect the loyalty and love of the citizen and use it to the Party’s benefit. For the reader and the citizens of Oceania alike, his very being is shrouded in mystery, a face that is visible all around and yet one whose presence is never seen in person. He is only seen in recordings or in photographs, and Winston’s experiences give the reader a distinct

sense that these recordings and photographs could be fabricated. Making him an immortal figure, present everywhere and also nowhere. In every way imaginable, the religious impulse is harnessed and redirected, just like many other impulses, to the benefit of the party, obliging its citizens not only to have loyalty to its ideology, but to worship it.

Within the context of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, The Thought Police operates as an RSA through its ability to enact violence when a citizen violates the ideologies that it exists to protect, the most obvious example of this violence being their ability to “vaporize,” or simply remove the existence of a person in the same way that the Ministry of Truth destroys evidence of truths that are inconsistent with the truth that the Party creates. Meanwhile the Spies, the Junior Anti-Sex League, and even the image of Big Brother operate as ISAs, indoctrinating the citizens through means that are more subversive than violent. Both of these superstructures, while using very different means, secure the reproduction of the culture needed for the longevity of the dystopian state through the establishment of ideology and the power to enact violence upon citizens that diverge from it. The educational systems of dystopian states are the ISAs that train each generation of children to reliably perform as agents of the ideology of the state, ensuring that the structure of the state will remain intact. This is extremely visible in the community of *The Giver* in which children are assigned exactly the jobs required by the system at the given time, taking into account of course which child will be best suited for which position.

With each system put in place by the dystopian state to manage the creation and development of the child, there is buried an admission of need, a confession of the power held within the child as a figure of both threat and promise. This power is embedded in one universal truth of children: they are agents of the future. A child carries the future, with its complex web of

hopes and fears, as part of their very being, and through this they become a space where the present and the future collapse into one another. They are a mind that lives in the now, just as adults do, but will also live in the future in a way that the adults around them cannot. They are touchstones between two temporal spaces, and power structures that seek to make themselves a permanent fixture in the world must impress their ideology onto the child so that it may be carried from the present onward. In this way, children are the greatest tool through which the dystopian state can guarantee its longevity, but if handled incorrectly, they have the greatest potential to be its downfall.

In both *Nineteen Eighty-four* and *The Giver*, there is an attempt by the dystopian state to strip this power away from the child by denying the temporal realities of the past and future in order to maintain what Orwell calls an “endless present.” The intention of this denial is undoubtedly to smother any thoughts of progress and change within the citizen before they have even begun- revoking the very framework necessary for the formation of such ideas. This state of timelessness stretches the ideology and existence of the dystopian state across the expanse of reality, in which there is no true beginning and thus no true end to the world they have created. This act is directly mentioned in both works, but let us begin with Winston’s words in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

‘Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book has been rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street and building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And that process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right.’ (Orwell, 56)

As Winston reflects on the Party's control of the past, he notes the careful alteration of each and every piece of information that could serve as evidence against whatever is "true" at the time. When Oceania is at war with Eurasia, they have always been at war with Eurasia, etc. In this way, they own the past, and keep it in perfect alignment with the present, blurring the lines between them and maintaining the "endless present." The dystopian state of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; however, has existed only a short time in the grand scheme of things, and there are still-living citizens of Oceania who can somewhat recall a time before The Party, which is why this careful management of the past is so necessary for them. When it is the word of an old man against a mountain of "historical" evidence, it is clear which is to be believed. Domination of the past eliminates the threat of memory, but more on that later. First we must address the idea of the endless present in *The Giver*, in which the goals are the same but the mechanisms of control are very different.

The world Lowry has created is very different from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in a very important way. The Community seems to *itself* exist in a timeless void; not only is the past lost to the citizens of the community, but also to its leaders. All that remains is the core ideology of sameness, which is explained somewhat by the Giver himself:

'Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness. Before my time, before the previous time, back and back and back. We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with difference. We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others.' (Lowry, 95)

The past is just as lost on the elders of the community as it is on every other citizen, and this is why they have a need for the Receiver of memory, supplying the community with the wisdom

that is sometimes necessary to govern. The ideology of sameness necessitates a denial of the past just as it necessitates elimination of weather and biological difference, providing complete stability and security at the cost of certain human experiences.

### **The Function of Memory**

Within the world of *The Giver*, the function of memory is notably two-fold, as both a burden and a tool to be wielded by a selected member of the community, dubbed The Receiver of Memory. Jonas, our protagonist, is selected by the elders of his community to fill this role, and is thus given access to information that no other member of his community has both through memories as well as the ability to defy certain rules set forth for all other community members. Most striking however, is the magical property with which Lowry imbues memory within the world of *The Giver*. Jonas is noted to have the capacity to “see beyond,” which is essential for those chosen to be Receivers of Memory.

But what is “receiving” a memory? Unfortunately, the reader is given hardly any explanation, as the first memory that Jonas is given has little prelude. When Jonas inquires as to what The Giver is going to do, he receives minimal information. ““What are you going to do, sir?” he asked, hoping his voice didn't betray his nervousness. ‘I am going to transmit the memory of snow,’ the old man said, and placed his hands on Jonas’ bare back.” From this moment, we as readers are only able to glean a few small details about memory transmission, the first of which being that there is a Giver and a Receiver, one person who serves as a reserve of knowledge, and another who is tasked with absorbing it. It is also notable that memory transmission is a physical undertaking as well as a mental and supernatural one. There is a

necessity of physical touch between Giver and Receiver, and in that way there is a necessity of intimacy, without which the process of memory transmission cannot take place. This intimacy stands in stark contrast to the scenes that take place within Jonas' home between him and the members of his family unit. Because the emotional depth of other members of the community are so limited compared to his own, Jonas finds the meaningful connection with others, even his family, is impossible. There is only one person within the community who has the same understanding of what a meaningful relationship even consists of: The Giver. The experiences of emotion through the memories tie Jonas and The Giver together, and later the two of them develop a love and care for one another that is reminiscent of the memories of family that Jonas has received. There is also special attention paid to the giver's age, and thus the generational aspect of the process in which memory is *quite literally* handed down from one generation to the next.

While the Receiver of Memory is an honored figure within the community, The Giver details his role as an advisor to the committee of elders as such:

‘Only when they are faced with something that they have not experienced before. Then they call upon me to use the memories to advise them but it very seldom happens.

Sometimes I wish they'd ask for my wisdom more often- there are so many things I could tell them; things I wish they would change. Life here is so orderly, so predictable- so painless. It's what they have chosen.’ (Lowry, 103)

Here is our first explanation for the transmission of memory, and why it is seen as necessary by the Elders of the community. Wisdom is detailed here as something that one can only gain through experiencing the memories that the Receiver is charged with bearing. This position,



while holding tremendous honor, also comes with an emotional and mental burden. The Receiver of Memory may only share this wisdom when he is asked to, which is noted to be a very rare occurrence. At all other times, he is left only with the desire for change that he knows no other member of the community possesses. Without the memories of the past, there is no longing for anything outside of the present.

Memory within *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an inherent threat to the power of the Party, which seeks not only complete control, but a continuous present that ensures control stays in their hands. Winston is one of the many tools for this purpose through his position at the Ministry of Truth, which mostly consists of editing past documents to line up with the present purpose of the party. There are countless other members of the Outer Party employed for the same sort of work, though through the principals of cromestop and doublethink, they are able to forget the falsifications just as quickly as they committed them. Winston speaks to Julia on the erasure of the past:

‘History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right. I know, of course, that the past is falsified, but it would never be possible for me to prove it, even when I did the falsification myself. After the thing is done, no evidence ever remains. The only evidence is inside my own mind, and I don't know with any certainty that any other human being shares my memories. Just in that one instance, in my whole life, I did possess actual concrete evidence after the event - years after it.’

(Orwell, 156)

There is a powerlessness that Winston expresses here which is pervasive throughout the novel, both in a natural struggle against the passage of time, as well as his inner rebellion against the

Party. While Winston's memories differ from the past which is constructed, or "falsified," by the Party, he admits that he has no way of proving it. Memory is something that can only be held within a person, and cannot be shared in a way that makes it reliable proof against the past that the Party has created. The fallibility of memory, and its lack of utility is exactly what the work of the Ministry of Truth relies on.

Winston acknowledges that in order to make any claim with validity, external proof needs to be given, which the party has tactfully wiped out. He goes on, however, to describe the one solace that these memories have, that being the glass paperweight he purchased in the antique shop. These items, while bearing no text, are the last surviving pieces of the world that Winston is yearning for and even though they have survived, they do not provide the proof or evidence that he finds himself in need of. He instead seeks out an old prole man, who he presumes may have clearer memories of the old world than he himself has, but is rather disappointed with what he finds as it becomes clear that he will not get the answer he wants:

[...] when memory failed and written records were falsified- when that happened, the claim of the Party to have improved the conditions of human life had got to be accepted, because there did not exist, and never again could exist, any standard against which it could be tested (Orwell, 93)

This is the moment in which the narration of Winston's thoughts on the existence of memories prior to the party transitions to the past tense. He no longer believes that proof against the Party's claims remains in the world or within his grasp for comparison. The aforementioned powerlessness is finalized with this change in language, and his internally perceived solitude becomes cemented along with it. Winston's reported internal thoughts consistently designate him

as an outlier, and his observations about the old man's memory, the nature of things that he is able to recall, contribute to the chasm that he perceives between himself and those around him. The nature of the question that he chose to ask the old man also supports this individualistic mindset with which he approaches his internal rebellion. Did the Party make life better? It could be said that Winston was simplifying his question for the sake of speaking to a prole, but it is worth considering that this question is genuinely what he is seeking an answer to. His individual experience of life as a member of the Outer Party is unsatisfying to the point that he feels a need to confirm that life at one point or another was more bearable.

While he perceives himself to be the only one having these thoughts against the party, or willfully committing thoughtcrime to be precise, he takes note of the tools being used by the party to enable this automatic process of memory alteration in his peers, two of the most notable being memory holes and Newspeak. Our narrator offers a helpful description of the appearance and function of a memory hole:

In the walls of the cubicle there were three orifices. To the right of the speakwrite, a small pneumatic tube for written messages, to the left, a larger one for newspapers; and in the side wall, within easy reach of Winston's arm, a large oblong slit protected by a wire grating. This last was for the disposal of waste paper. Similar slits existed in thousands or tens of thousands throughout the building, not only in every room but at short intervals in every corridor. For some reason they were nicknamed memory holes. When one knew that any document was due for destruction, or even when one saw a scrap of waste paper lying about, it was an automatic action to lift the flap of the nearest memory hole and

drop it in, whereupon it would be whirled away on a current of warm air to the enormous furnaces which were hidden somewhere in the recesses of the building. (Orwell, 38)

The memory hole is described to us not only in appearance and function but also in a larger social context. They are as common as garbage cans and serve a similar, if more nefarious, purpose. It is noted that there are possibly tens of thousands of these memory holes throughout the Ministry of Truth, all serving the purpose of destroying any uncontrolled or unedited pieces of information. The name of these openings is introduced offhandedly, with the narrator, possibly through Winston's voice, simply saying "for some reason." The title of the memory hole is very utilitarian in nature, similar to many Newspeak words mentioned throughout the novel. Just as thoughtcrime is quite literally a crime committed within the mind, a memory hole is for the disposal of memory- an automatic physical action to accompany the internal process of rewriting one's perception. Interacting with a memory hole is itself an act of doublethink, as a user must carry out the physical task of disposing of whatever information may be on the piece of paper while simultaneously believing that it does not exist, as the paper itself has now been incinerated. With the destruction of these pieces of evidence, there is a destruction of the reliability of memory.

Lacking the tools to express memory eliminates the threat that those memories pose to the power structure, allowing the Party to continue to alter any real evidence of the past. Even aside from the external proof that Winston feels he needs for his own memory, the old Prole man lacks the ability to communicate memories with him effectively, leaving him without the information that he was hoping could be provided. This breakdown in communication is also central to the Party's struggle against memory, and they harness it using newspeak. The reader is

given a glimpse into the nature and purpose of newspeak through a conversation with Winston's friend Syme, who is working on the newest edition of the newspeak dictionary:

'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. Already, in the Eleventh Edition, we're not far from that point. But the process will still be continuing long after you and I are dead. Every year, fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller' (Orwell, 53).

Syme expresses that the intention behind Newspeak is the limiting of the human capability for thought as well as communication. There will be no words in which to express dissent toward the party, and with that there will be no threat posed by memory, as the ability to hold thoughts that oppose the Party's ideals will be erased along with the language one could use to communicate them. The destruction of language in the way that Syme describes it is an ongoing goal, and one which will not reach completion for several generations.

At the same time that newspeak is perfected, all people with any memories dating further back than the revolution are dying, and thus Oldpeak will die as well. When future generations are raised on a language in which there is no potential for rebellion, and the transmission of intergenerational knowledge is made impossible, the Party's power is complete. Up until this point, however, we have operated under the assumption that memory breeds rebellion, but one particular presence within the novel challenges that precedent: Julia.

“Winston had disliked her from the very first moment of seeing her. He knew the reason. It was because of the atmosphere of hockey-fields and cold baths and community hikes and general clean-mindedness which she managed to carry about with her. He disliked nearly all women, and especially the young and pretty ones. It was always the women, and above all the young ones, who were the most bigoted adherents of the Party, the swallows of slogans, the amateur spies and nosers-out of unorthodoxy.” (Orwell, 11)

Winston believes, upon first seeing Julia, that she is a symbol of everything he believes to be wrong with the world that The Party has created. In particular, Winston references community activities which he has previously shown disdain for, along with the Party approved state of “clean-mindedness” that he assumes she possesses. He dislikes not only Julia, but nearly all young and pretty women, as he believes them to be particularly loyal to the Party and its ideals. In reference to memory, the word “young” here is shorthand for someone without memories, as Julia and other people her age have no experience of a life before the Party. Young and pretty being tied together this way also gives us a hint as to the way that Winston perceives youth itself, as something to be simultaneously desired and disliked, particularly in women who are attractive to him while being completely uninterested in sex.. His immediate dislike for Julia, while described as a dislike for the Party’s ideals, truly boils down to an attraction to her. From this description, youth, while desirable, is spoiled by the doctrines of the Party.

And yet, these observations of Julia do not reflect the truth. The two of them begin a sexual relationship, seen by both of them as an act of rebellion from the very beginning. Despite her youth, Julia is shown to be radically against the doctrines of the Party, even if her reasons for rebelling differ from Winston’s:

“Life as she saw it was quite simple. You wanted a good time; “they,” meaning the Party, wanted to stop you having it; you broke the rules as best you could. She seemed to think it just as natural that “they” should want to rob you of your pleasures as that you should want to avoid being caught. She hated the Party, and said so in the crudest words, but she made no general criticism of it.” (Orwell, 132)

The rebelliousness within Julia is characterized as very differently from that which is seen in Winston, and though they both view themselves as adversaries of the Party, their understandings of the relationship they have with it are very different. Julia develops an intense dislike for the party even without memory of a world before its control, proving that such memories are not the only possible source for the development of dissent against the dystopian state. She stands in opposition to Winston’s hopeless view of a world without memory, in which all hope for the pursuit of action against the Party is lost when those who lived prior to its influence can no longer recall or share their memories. For Julia, rebellion against the party is rooted in youth, particularly the expression of its sexuality. Through her testimony, we are made aware that she has had sex with many other Outer Party members, implying that there is much more “unorthodox” behavior within the ranks of the party than we have been led to believe. Even without memory, there is a temptation to act against the control of the Party. It is worth considering that the instincts that lead to rebellion like Julia’s are a form of memory, though one that is very different from the individual memory that Winston is in pursuit of when he approaches the old Prole. Though they have attempted to alter the instincts of their citizens, such

as the sex instinct and the instinct of parenthood, the Party obviously struggles to gain complete control of these subconscious urges.

Though the Party has been able to alter the course of historical memory, they have not gained control over the biological memory that is built into the human body. Even if the individual does not remember what sex, marriage, and the family were before the party, the body does not forget the evolutionary imperative to reproduce, and to nurture the resulting children.

By comparison, the Community *has* gained control over the biological realities of the human body through rigorous genetic engineering, as well as a daily regimen of medications that physiologically represses the sex instinct. Just as the memories of a time before sameness are lost to the individuals living within the community, the biological memory carried within the body itself has been extinguished.



## **Chapter 2: The Utopian Imagination and The Narrative Perspective of The Child**

According to the Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature, there are two similar but distinct avenues through which the Utopian imagination is expanded and distorted to create societies that are at best unjust and at worst, downright nightmarish. The first, dystopia, is our chief concern, but there is a second that can offer some important insight: anti-utopia. The worlds in which dystopian and anti-utopian narratives take place can be easily conflated, as both are loosely defined by Gregory Claeys as worlds where “evil, or negative social or political developments, have the upper hand.” (Claeys, 107) While these settings are much the same, the intention behind their creation is what defines dystopia and anti-utopia as distinct genres, though both exist as forms of critique.

According to Peter Fitting in his essay, “Utopia, Dystopia, and Science Fiction,” anti-utopian literature is defined by a critique of utopianism itself, or the “very idea of imagining a better world.” (Fitting, 141) Dystopia, on the other hand, is defined by social critique, depicting a nightmarish future to assert a need for change in the present. While the dystopian and anti-utopian imagination may produce worlds that appear similar, Fitting asserts that they work in opposition to one another, with dystopia advocating for change and anti-utopia serving as a “defense of the status quo.” (Fitting, 141)

While his distinction is helpful, it would be a mistake to simply accept Fitting’s characterization of the anti-utopian genre as one that is inherently pessimistic, or a blatant mockery of the utopian imagination. One would also be mistaken in believing that the distinction between dystopia and anti-utopia makes them completely separate from one another. Rather, anti-utopia’s critique of utopianism is a form of social critique, not a mere jab at its existence in

the literary sphere. Real revolutions enacted with the goal of a utopian future have had massively injurious repercussions, complicated not only by *whose* utopia they were seeking to create, but also what injustices they were willing to commit in pursuit of it. With the definition of the utopia seated loftily above our reality, the anti-utopian genre pulls it down, measures it against our world, and shows us exactly what it looks like when flattened against our uneven ground. A utopia for who? What kind of power is needed to maintain such a world? These are questions that are worth asking in earnest; not just a mockery of the very idea of a utopia, but a true interrogation of its dimensions. Fitting's implication that anti-utopia is anti-progress comes with the assumption that all progress is made in pursuit of a utopian future, and that to deny the legitimacy of that goal is to devalue progress itself- upholding the status-quo.

I will offer a slightly different understanding of the two genres as they relate to one another, working in tandem rather than in opposition. We define dystopian literature as a reversal of the utopian formula, creating the worst possible future for the purposes of a social critique or cautionary tale. Anti-utopia is a reversal of the same formula, often creating a similar world, for the purpose of critiquing utopian thinking, not only within fictional worlds but also as a basis for real-world political action. With this understanding, the two are not quite separate. Rather, the goal of the anti-utopian narrative is in harmony with that of dystopia. A work can, and I argue often does, exist in both genres simultaneously.

With knowledge of the goals of genres that stem from the utopian imagination, we can refine our idea of dystopian literature, anchoring it in the present even as it situates itself in the future. By its nature, the dystopia is temporal, transmitting the fears and dangers of the present into the imagined future, and receiving back from it a cautionary narrative, meant to influence

the reader to avoid its actualization. As a result of the popularity and sheer cultural presence of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the word “Orwellian” exists in the popular imagination as an eerie shorthand for developments that bring us uncomfortably closer to its world becoming a reality. We acknowledge the dystopian possibility with explicit reference to the text that cautioned us against it, and in this way we are confirming at least partial accomplishment of this generic goal.

It is with this goal in mind that we return to the figure of the child. We have already discussed the temporal status of the child as an agent of the future, and this is something that they and the dystopian genre itself have in common. The difference is that the future cannot speak to us through the child, only we can speak to it. Just as the dystopian state reproduces itself through impressing its ideology onto children, so does our society, and literature is one of the tools through which our ideologies and culture are taught to future generations. This process is one which lends itself to the accomplishment of the generic dystopian goal, making the child its ideal reader. Through dystopian fiction, the child is shown a possible future, influenced by all of the fears of our present society, and is then charged with preventing its actualization. As an agent of the future, the child is able to carry the caution imparted on them by the dystopian narrative directly into the future that it intends to influence.

A wonderful example of a text that accomplishes the generic goals of both the dystopian and anti-utopian narrative is Ursula K. LeGuin’s “Those Who Walked Away From Omelas,” which describes a utopian society in every sense, somewhat following the blueprint established in Plato’s *Republic*. The people of Omelas live in an eternal happiness that is different from the fleeting feeling the reader may associate with the word. Youth is described here as cherished and safe for the children of Omelas, all but one, referred to as “The Child.” The Child, and

particularly its suffering, is the currency with which the people of Omelas buy the splendor of their world. It is not described exactly how the world will come crashing down in Omelas, but its citizens understand the necessity of the child's suffering to be a fact of life. The Child must live in squalor, unable to enjoy even the sunlight of the world that it sustains through its pain. It is never spoken to, and worse yet, has not always lived this way. "[...] The Child, who has not always lived in the tool room, and can remember sunlight and its mother's voice, sometimes speaks. 'I will be good' it says. 'Please let me out. I will be good!'" (LeGuin, 334) There is a very intentional use of the word "it" in describing The Child whenever it is mentioned, and this is indicative of the internal work that a citizen of Omelas must do in order to continue living in a world that necessitates this sort of suffering. The Child cannot be a "they" for the people of Omelas, all of whom know of its existence and predicament. Through the use of the word "it" the child becomes less than human, an idea that is resisted by a singular group: children.

Up until the point that they are made aware of the existence of The Child, a young citizen of Omelas is undoubtedly an other, someone who is not yet in the know about the nature of the world in which they live. This otherness designates their existence as a space which necessitates a dishonesty that we will henceforth refer to as the "noble lie." Becoming aware of the existence of The Child is an integrating event- a right of passage that symbolizes the end of their otherness and thus the end of their status as someone who needs to be lied to, or to be intentionally excluded from an understanding of the truth for the sake of upholding the ideals of the state. The Ceremony of Twelve in *The Giver* is another example of an integrating event, during which the child is ushered into adulthood through their job assignment. While the typical child's experience of otherness is ended through full integration into the adult workforce within the Community,

Jonas' assignment has the opposite effect. Rather than bringing him further into the Community, the assignment of Receiver of Memory is othering by definition. The Chief Elder describes the way in which this assignment differs from all others:

'The Receiver-in-training cannot be observed, cannot be modified. That is stated quite clearly in the rules He is to be alone, apart, while he is prepared by the current Receiver for the job which is the most honored within our community'

Alone? Apart? Jonas listened with increasing unease. (Lowry, 61)

Here, the otherness that comes with Jonas' assignment is not only perceived internally, but enforced by the community. All members of the community are made aware of the otherness that comes along with the assignment Jonas has just been given, and he is understandably uneasy at the idea that he is to be alone and apart after being raised within a society whose core ideology is making the individuals and environment within it exactly the same. Through the information that Jonas receives from the transmission of memory, he is made not only a social other, but begins to perceive himself as one as well, as he grows to understand realities of his world that others cannot access. While Jonas is othered through access to this restricted information, the child within Omelas has the opposite experience, gaining full citizenship and integration with their society through learning the truth.

Children in Omelas are educated about The Child somewhere between the ages of eight and twelve years old. It is perceived as normal, and a sort of right of passage, to experience rage and sadness at being confronted with the realities of their world, and what it relies upon. After this initial emotional response, however, comes a particular development of ideology- one which is described as nearly universal. This is the belief that The Child, while physically human, has

been deteriorated by its suffering to such an extent that it is unable to experience true joy. It is an animal, which may benefit from less neglectful treatment but, overall, is unable to experience humanity. The personhood of The Child is denied, the empathy of these children is perceived to be wasted on it, and they emerge from this internal struggle with a new view of their world.

“Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible injustice of reality, and to accept it.” This is the moment in which the view of the adult citizen and the view of the child (the “they” child, not the “it” child) become the same, and the children of Omelas are ushered into true citizenship through the internal development of this ideology. But, there are people who do not arrive at this conclusion, citizens of Omelas who cannot continue to live within its endless joy and splendor with the knowledge of The Child, and simply walk into an unknown world, away from their utopia. Most of those who leave are children, whose experience of learning about the child drives them to departure, though adults sometimes choose to depart as well.

Both “Those who Walked Away from Omelas” and *The Republic* give us glances into the intention that is involved in imagining the utopian or dystopian world, through allowing the reader to witness the creation of such a world as it occurs. LeGuin’s narrator begins in a sort of collaborative experiment with the reader, allowing their desires to shape the realities of Omelas, “Perhaps it would be best if you imagined it as your fancy bids, assuming it will rise to the occasion for certainly I cannot suit you all.” (LeGuin, 331) This makes clear that the details of Omelas are not as important as its status as a utopia, which is accomplished in whatever way the reader sees fit. The most important feature of LeGuin’s world is the perpetual state of bliss in which the citizens of Omelas live. This collaborative tone allows the reader room to move within

the narrative, shaping the world somewhat to their liking as the utopia is poured around them like wet cement. There is an abrupt shift, however, when the notion of The Child is addressed. This loose and somewhat friendly tone gives way to something almost sinister, “Do you believe? Do you accept the festival, the city, the joy? No? Then let me describe one more thing.” Our narrator rips control of the world from the reader, and the cement hardens instantly around them with the horrific and detailed description of the state in which The Child is forced to live, as well as the mental process required for the citizens of Omelas to justify it. This shift is a living example of the way in which the utopian imagination becomes the dystopian, with the power that can be harnessed to imagine a perfect world also being wielded to create one of severe injustice. Our narrator questions the reader, asking if they believe, though this raises the question: in what? Throughout the first descriptions of Omelas, there is a tension between the idea of the utopia, and the thoughts that the reader is presumed to have about it. The narrator attempts to convince the reader that Omelas truly is a utopia, and anticipates that they will doubt it. This is the moment in which LeGuin departs from the idea of utopia as a world in which suffering does not exist, for the sake of believability to her audience. Suffering, in this case, is a requirement for a fictional world being perceived as truthful or possible.

“The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas” can be approached for analysis as an anti-utopian work as well as a dystopian work, as both labels apply. Reading the text through one perspective, then the other, reveals a success in achieving the characteristic goals of both genres, as I will illustrate.

When approached through an anti-utopian perspective, or with the assumption of anti-utopian intention, LeGuin’s description of Omelas is meant to represent the common

denominator of all utopian societies: a world in which happiness is eternal, unspoiled natural beauty abounds, and the reader themselves is able to project their own idea of a perfect reality. This, of course, eliminates the pesky question of who exactly is defining the rules of the utopia, and maintains focus on the sheer perfection of the city itself. Because the city is described in these broad and sweeping terms, it is established as the purest expression of utopia, which LeGuin later uses to critique the utopian aspiration.

LeGuin anticipates the hesitance of the reader in accepting even the fictional existence of such a society, as well as the true appeal of a world so flawless. She spends the better part of five pages assuring them that the perfection of life within Omelas is experienced in a genuine way, while also imbuing the narrator with a sort of irreverent and accusatory tone directed at the society in which both they and the reader live. They describe themselves as well as the reader as having “a bad habit, encouraged by pedants and sophisticates, of considering happiness as something rather stupid.” (LeGuin, 330) The narrator here represents the voice of the utopian imagination, making clear that they exist in our real and contemporary world while also expressing extreme admiration for the citizens of Omelas. Bearing in mind that LeGuin is critiquing the utopian ideal, the abrupt shift in narration just before the introduction of The Child marks a shift from the utopian imagination as purely in pursuit of perfection to its willingness to inflict certain types of suffering and injustice in order to create or uphold such “ideal” societies.

The suffering of the child is effectively the cost of the perfection of Omelas, and is representative of the cost associated with the existence of any utopia. While there are some mystical elements present within the text, particularly in the vague terms used to describe the predicament of The Child, there is a strict enforcement of realism in that a “perfect” society



cannot be achieved without the existence of suffering. The willingness of the citizens of Omelas to accept the suffering of the child as a necessary sacrifice is where the true critique of the utopian ideal lies, as the cost of maintaining the utopian society violates the goal of creating a perfect world. As we have previously noted, this critique of utopia is not limited to the literary genre, but extends to a larger critique about the pursuit of utopia within the real world. The issue of The Child within “Those who Walk Away from Omelas” begs the question of what sacrifices a real society would allow in pursuit of their own utopian ideal.

A dystopian reading benefits from the characterization of Omelas as the perfect ideal in the same way that *The Giver* benefits from the idea of the lack of suffering that is provided by the ideology of sameness. Because the dystopian genre has the goal of creating an imagined society that could come to fruition if there is no change made to our own, it makes sense to include some positive aspects into the dystopian world to provide some sort of rationale as to why this world came to exist in the first place. In the pursuit of a society as perfect as Omelas, the sacrifice of a single child may seem, at least in a utilitarian sense, absolutely worth it.

But this pursuit, and the willingness of the citizens of Omelas to allow it to pass are what ultimately ends up defining Omelas as a dystopian, no matter how utopian it may appear. If I may, I would like to remind us of the definition of dystopia as a society in which people live “wretched, fearful, and dehumanized lives.” It is tempting to point to the masses that live in Omelas and object to the idea that the people within this society live lives that are quite the opposite. But we should ask, is The Child not a human? According to the ideology of Omelas, it is not, as the suffering it has faced has robbed it of its humanity to such a degree that it cannot be recovered. With our definition of a dystopia in mind, we can refute this ideology in that the act of

inflicting this suffering upon The Child in the first place is an act of dehumanization, meaning that the life of the child certainly meets all of these requirements, defining Omelas not as a utopia, but merely a gilded dystopia.

With the definition of Omelas as a dystopian society secure, the achievement of the dystopian generic goal still depends upon making social critique that brings attention to an injustice that exists within our society, and must be changed in order to avoid a dystopian future. There are many readings one could glean from the vague descriptions of Omelas and The Child's role as a sacrificial lamb, but I will offer one of the simplest.

Within western culture, there is a trend of constant and exponential progress, mostly in the creation of technology intended to make life easier and more convenient. This technology is used for an array of purposes, some of which being the improvement of standard of living and medical care. These advancements are designed to bring us closer to an ideal world that is easy to live in, with as little suffering and pain as possible, a goal that appears noble at first glance, but that blatantly ignores the cost. While technology and mass production makes life easier in the west, the people who do the physical labor of creating it live and work in conditions that we would consider unacceptable for ourselves. They, like The Child, suffer for the purpose of creating ideal conditions that they themselves are not able to enjoy. We are similar to the citizens of Omelas in that we are completely aware of the suffering that buys our conveniences, but accept it as a necessity because we understand that without this suffering we would lose access to the type of life that we have become accustomed to living. We understand that the suffering necessary for our access to an easy and relatively painless life must be paid by someone, and thus we are willing to sequester it in places and upon people that we will likely never see or meet,

similarly to the willingness of the people of Omelas to contain their suffering within one child, left out of sight in the dark and wretched basement.

This is of course a very simplified example of one of the many social realities that could be applied to “Those who Walk Away from Omelas,” insofar as it achieves the generic intention of dystopian literature. In this capacity, the text serves as a versatile allegory, critiquing the acceptance of suffering in pursuit of a more perfect society. What these two readings have in common is the observation of LeGuin’s success in pursuing the generic goals of anti-utopia and dystopia simultaneously. As opposed to Fitting’s implication that the dystopian and anti-utopian genres work in opposition to each other, a careful analysis of the society of Omelas provides a perfect example of the two working in tandem, with the anti-utopian sentiment contributing to the dystopian social critique. We can observe the development of both the utopian and dystopian features of this text through LeGuin’s use of metafictional elements, allowing the reader to witness the formation of Omelas as it takes shape.

Similarly to LeGuin’s collaborative approach to the creation of the utopian society, the reader is given full access to this act of creation within *The Republic*, in which there is particular emphasis placed on the capability to control the information that citizens have access to, in order to assure their behavior is appropriate according to the ideologies of their leadership. Here, the creation of the utopian society is dependent on encouragement of certain behaviors and discouragement of others, with particular methods for doing so listed plainly. To discourage excessive emotion and disobedience, examples of such things are to be removed from literature, with particular emphasis on their potential impact on the young. There is a desire to cultivate a

generation of soldiers that are more fearful of being defeated in battle and thus enslaved, rather than of death:

“What about this? Do you suppose anyone who believes Hades’ domain exists and is full of terror will be fearless in the face of death and choose death in battles above defeat and slavery ?”

“Not at all”

“Then concerning these tales too, it seems we must supervise those who undertake to tell them and ask them not simply to disparage Hades’ domain in such a way but rather to praise it, because what they say is neither true nor beneficial for men who are to be fighters” (Plato, 386-b)

There is an admission here of the power of stories in relation to the beliefs of the general public, with the implication that a change in the way that stories about death are told is the best way to shift the entire cultural ideology around death. This is the way in which the republic will be created, and likewise maintained. While Omelas is built around the desires of the reader, the republic is constructed to be a moral utopia, existing in perfect alignment with the moral code and beliefs of the creators. These are two examples of the way in which the utopian imagination functions in creating the worlds that narratives such as *The Giver* and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* take place. It is worth note that in both processes, there is particular attention paid to the young, with LeGuin’s insistence on the suffering of The Child and Plato’s continual return to the concern of “youngsters.”

An important feature of the child protagonist is their capability for change, as they are in a perpetual state of growth, discovering themselves as they discover the world around them. This

is not to imply that the adult protagonist is inherently static, only that the child is in a state of growth and change by definition. *The Giver*, as well as many other dystopian YA novels, falls into the category of a coming-of-age narrative, with a feature of the dystopian world being a ceremony to mark the protagonist's effective passage into adulthood. Taking Natov's observations about the child reader, and the role of literature as a sort of practice ground for the experience of fear into note, coming of age events such as *The Giver's* Ceremony of Twelve may serve a similar purpose- allowing the reader to engage with the idea of adulthood at a comfortable distance. In the context of the dystopian genre and its narratives of dissent, the development of the protagonist's moral self into a being capable of identifying and resisting the injustices present in their world models the development that it hopes to encourage in its readers. Jonas, for example, is only capable of this sort of development after his assignment as Receiver, which grants him access to information and privileges that he did not have before, and that others in his community are still without. The Ceremony of Twelve is not only the gateway between childhood and adulthood for Jonas, but an end to the naivety that the other citizens of the community live within. While others also gain knowledge and information that is relevant to their assignments, Jonas is charged with gaining wisdom to serve the community in the Giver's role.

### **Shifting Narrative Perspectives**

If we were to imagine the world built by LeGuin as a setting for a novel such as *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* or *The Giver*, the narrative perspective of the protagonist would create a very different outlook on Omelas and the existence of The Child. An adult protagonist begins the narrative with full knowledge of The Child and an understanding of the necessity of its suffering.

They have already gone through the internal work of confronting this paradox and grappling with its injustice. The reader is alone in their horror at this revelation, whatever form it may take. The child protagonist's perspective creates a very different narrative, one which revolves around the uncovering of the secrets of this world. The reader and the character experience a similar emotional response to the existence of The Child. If each of these protagonists were intended to depart from Omelas, their perspectives would create very different stories. LeGuin puts particular emphasis on the emotional nature of a child's initial response, citing tears and rage, while they arrive at logic with the acceptance of the injustice of their reality. An adult who departs from Omelas does so for a different reason, or at least arrives at the decision to do so in a different way, having lived up until that point with full knowledge of The Child. This separates these hypothetical novels into two categories, a "feeling narrative" and a "thinking narrative." Do these categories apply to *The Giver* and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*?

I would like to avoid, if possible, the simple classification of a novel intended for adult audiences as a "Thinking Narrative" simply due to it being written in a more complex way and thus portraying the protagonist's internal world as more thoughtful than that of a child. Of course, if this were the case, *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, with its complex web of memories and non-memories, endless jargon, and extensive worldbuilding would undoubtedly be classified as such. We would also be mistaken in categorizing stories with child protagonists as "feeling" narratives because we have a belief that children are somehow less capable of complex thought. Rather, I would like to determine the nature of the narrative through the motivation of the dissenting protagonist- what drives their actions in response to their world.

Winston is by no means an emotionless protagonist. His whirlwind affair with Julia, his rage toward The Party, his fear of the Thought Police, etc. These are all emotional responses to the world in which he lives, and they absolutely play an important role in the narrative. However, when we dissect his actions, we can arrive at what fuels him. Winston's dissent is not rooted in his emotional response to his world and its injustices, but rather in the *practices* of The Party. He stands in juxtaposition with Julia in this regard, as he obsesses over the lies The Party tells its citizens about the world, history, language, etc. Julia, on the other hand, takes issue mainly with The Party's interference with her desires, and cares less for the facts or lack thereof. Winston summarizes her beliefs as: "You wanted a good time; "they," meaning the Party, wanted to stop you having it." (Orwell, 132)

Jonas, similarly, is a very logical member of his society and, like the children of Omelas, believes his world to be a utopia. Unlike Winston, he is a fully indoctrinated member of his society, and thus his thoughts are dictated by the ideology of the community for the first half of the novel. But there is a massive shift at his discovery of the injustice of his own world, beginning with the existence of color, but later an understanding of the true nature of release.. There is betrayal built into this discovery, but at the core of his dissent is empathy. Even before this grand discovery that Jonas and the reader make together, there are smaller injustices that he takes note of, particularly on the subject of sameness. Climate control has stolen away hills and snow and the experience of sledding, artificial creation of family units has stolen away multigenerational connection and love, but these injustices are grappled with in conversation with the Giver, the only other citizen of the community who has the capacity to understand the discoveries that Jonas is making about his world through the memories he is being given. After

reflecting on the existence of color, and how it was done away with in the name of sameness, Jonas comes to the conclusion that abolition of color was an injustice.

“It isn't fair that nothing has color!”

“Not fair?” The Giver looked at Jonas curiously. “Explain what you mean.”

“Well...” Jonas had to stop and think it through. “If everything's the same, then there aren't any choices! I want to wake up in the morning and *decide* things! A blue tunic or a red one?” (Lowry, 98)

Here, Jonas is having an emotional reaction to what he perceives as an injustice. He has been made aware that everyone could see colors once upon a time, and it was decided that colors shouldn't be seen anymore. However, he doesn't stop with this emotional reaction. With the help of the Giver, he digs deeper into its origin- why does it feel unfair? Upon further thought, the feeling of injustice doesn't arise only out of a lack of color but instead a lack of choice. Something as simple as choosing which color to wear each day, or what toy a newchild such as Gabe would choose for himself is soon expanded into choices with more gravity. Choices that it could be unsafe to leave in the hands of the individual. Jonas notes:

“What if they were allowed to choose their own mate? And they chose *wrong*? Or what if” he went on, almost laughing at the absurdity, “they chose their own *jobs*?”

“Frightening, isn't it?” The Giver said.

Jonas chuckled. “Very frightening. I can't even imagine it. We really do have to protect people from wrong choices.”

“It's safer”

“Yes,” Jonas agreed. “Much safer.”



But when the conversation turned to other things, Jonas was left, still, with a feeling of frustration that he didn't understand. (Lowry, 99)

This paints Jonas' resistance as a "feeling narrative," one in which his emotional reaction to a perceived injustice can be explained away by lines of reasoning informed by the doctrine of the community. In the name of sameness, and the safety and security it offers the community, choice must logically be eradicated. And yet, there lingers the feeling of something unjust, a feeling that refuses to bow to reasoning, which characterizes the nature of the dissent that Jonas expresses. The Community encourages thought that is as emotionless as possible, an idea that is expressed through the name of the daily ritual of emotional regulation. The use of the word "feelings" is an intentional choice by Lowry to exhibit the attitude that the citizens of the community have toward emotion. The connotation of the word "feelings" leads the reader to understand the ritual as addressing experiences that are less complex and more surface level than the emotions that Jonas finds himself grappling with. In this way, Jonas' resistance, and thus the driving force behind the narrative is rebellion through emotion.

By comparison, the Party requires not only a limitation of thought in its citizens, but also an ability to experience and express extreme emotion on command. The Hate is an example of this ability, in which Winston's internal thoughts are still of a rebellious nature toward Big Brother and the Party, but he finds himself experiencing the expected swell of violent emotion regardless. While certain emotions are discouraged by the Party, such as love, the experience of rage is necessary to uphold its ideology. This situates the world of *The Giver* and the world of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* as opposites in this respect, with each dystopian state seeking to limit the ways in which their citizens can react to the world around them, but choosing opposite aspects

that benefit their ideologies. Through this logic, we can consider *The Giver* as a narrative of dissent through feeling, while *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* is a narrative of dissent through thinking.

Though Jonas has been fully indoctrinated by the community, the new injustices he discovers continue to elicit emotional reactions. The feeling of unfairness is only the beginning, as Jonas finds himself easily irritated by his classmates and family members, growing further apart from them with each new discovery he makes. What began as simple pity that they could not see colors like he could becomes genuine anger at their complacency, how comfortable they are able to be in their ignorance. Through receiving the memories of the past, Jonas is alienated from his peers; his fears and grievances having no place for discussion with anyone other than the Giver. His concerns about love are dismissed at the dinner table, his hints at the existence of color are completely missed by his friends, and he is left in an emotional solitude that strains his interpersonal relationships.

Roni Natov explores fear and its denial in reference to the child reader, noting that “Often for children the most frightening thing about fear is its denial in the family and in the general culture.” (Natov, 60) While Jonas attempts to align his new reality with that of his family, he finds that his new concerns fall on deaf ears, a feeling that Natov’s child reader will find familiar. Natov studies the treatment of this dismissal in Neil Gaiman’s *The Wolves in the Walls*, in which the young protagonist, Lucy, insists that there are wolves in the walls, only to be dismissed by her family. However, her fears are proven to be legitimate when the wolves romp through the house, and her family is forced to face the reality of her fears. Within this narrative, the fears of the child carry real consequences regardless of how illogical the existence of wolves in the walls may seem, both to the reader and Lily’s family. Through Lily’s vindication, the perceived binary

between fact and feeling is collapsed, and the fears of the child are legitimized through their actualization within the physical world. In conversation with her toy, a pig-puppet, Lily shares that she now hears elephants in the walls and her toy assures her that it is not her job to warn her family about them, implying that she will not be believed. Regardless of the previous actualization of Lily's fears, the immediate instinct of the adults around Lily is still to dismiss her observations as sheer imaginings. While the denial of her feelings and their ties to reality persist, the fact that she now knows the two are the same provides her with comfort. It is not her who is mistaken, it is the adults around her, and it will be eventually proven when elephants stampede down their hallway. This is applicable to Jonas' new understanding of his world, as to those within the community, the existence of color is just as absurd as apex predators galavanting behind the drywall. But the existence of color is not the gravest injustice that Jonas discovers, in fact it pales in comparison to the true nature of release.

While much of *The Giver* revolves around Jonas' discovery of his world, the reveal of release is one that holds true horror, both for Jonas and the reader. The Giver, in response to Jonas' wondering about release, the only way in which any citizen leaves the community, plays for him a recording of his father releasing a newchild. With painful slowness, Jonas' confusion at what his father is doing becomes a sickening shock. Memories of death he has received emerge again in his mind as he watches the child's little body spasm with something that he recognizes as death. Other members of the community do not understand death the way that Jonas and the Giver do because they have access to the past. Even Jonas' father doesn't realize the true nature of what he is doing, in the sense that the very concept of death as we understand it is completely foreign to him, as well as every other member of the community. The Giver reminds Jonas that

“They know *nothing*,” (Lowry, 153) and without the memories that Jonas has access to, the other members of the community have no understanding of the horror of release. They understand it to be unfortunate, one of their own being sent elsewhere, but not the violent act that Jonas, the Giver, and the reader know it to be.

The horror that comes with this realization mirrors the discovery of The Child in Omelas in a few ways, primarily that it is accompanied by a sense of betrayal. Jonas has heard about release his entire life. The release of newchildren, criminals, and the Old are regular topics at the dinner table, yet all the while there are people being put to death by the community. Similarly, when children in Omelas are taught about The Child, they are informed that the splendor of the world they've been living in is reliant on unspeakable suffering. Living as they have been, Jonas within the community and children within Omelas, is an act of compliance with this injustice that they are only now discovering. With all made clear, the children of Omelas either complete their own indoctrination, bringing themselves to the understanding that The Child is no longer human, or leave, and Jonas is faced with a similar choice. He can stay, as the Giver did, and continue to do his part for the good of the community. He could depart in the fashion the last receiver, Rosemary, did, requesting to be released himself. While Jonas has been able to discuss the injustices up until now with the Giver, his anger at the nature of release becomes too much to bear when his father tells him that Gabriel, the newchild his family has been helping look after, is scheduled to be released. Now, knowing what truly awaits Gabriel, Jonas must escape the community not only for his own moral reasons, but for the safety of the newchild he has grown to love. A reader would ultimately view Jonas' retreat as noble, fleeing his own comfortable life to save Gabriel, but what of the ones who leave Omelas?

LeGuin complicates this concept of a noble departure:

The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas. (LeGuin, 336)

Our narrator's knowledge seemingly ends at the limits of the city itself, and our insight within the minds of its citizens comes to an abrupt end as they depart. We are left to wonder what their plans are, or if there are any at all. There is a sense of evasiveness given to the act of departure by LeGuin's omission of the world outside the city; while they walk into oblivion, The Child continues to suffer. There is no grand rescue, like that of Gabriel the newchild, but rather a simple refusal to participate in society, walking alone away from the only definable society within their world. Is this foolish in the eyes of our narrator? Childish, even?

Echoes of this sort of refusal can be heard from Ivan in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which a divine state of future harmony at the cost of a single suffering child is a deal that he cannot accept:

"I want to remain with unrequited suffering. I'd rather remain with my unrequited suffering and my unquenched indignation, *even if I am wrong*. Besides, they have put too high a price on harmony; we can't afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore I hasten to return my ticket. And it is my duty, if only as an honest man, to return it as far ahead of time as possible." (Dostoevsky, 208).

Like a child leaving Omelas, Ivan refuses to enter a world that uses suffering as a sort of currency, not because he has a grand plan to create a better world elsewhere, but rather because to live within and benefit from such a world would be to contribute to this suffering. The citizen

who chooses to leave Omelas does so in this spirit, perhaps not actually knowing their physical destination, but their spiritual or moral one. Returning their ticket. The question of whether or not the act of “returning one’s ticket” is actually a noble or morally upstanding one is a question for the philosophically inclined I believe, but for our purposes, Ivan’s sentiment is useful because it expands upon the mental state of the citizen of Omelas who has become inaccessible to us. The decision to depart, made by an adult or child, is rooted in feeling, but it is not completely thoughtless.

While LeGuin gives us no access to the world outside Omelas, Lowry is a bit more generous with details after Jonas’ departure. The world outside the Community is one that he has very little knowledge about, only that there are other communities similar to his, but he chooses to take Gabriel and leave regardless. The danger of Gabriel’s release is immediate, and Jonas’ decision is not only based in his rage at the injustice of release, but preserving the life of the newchild. Even before Gabriel’s imminent release is brought to Jonas’ attention, he and the Giver make plans for his departure. Jonas leaves the community not only to preserve Gabriel’s life, but also to force change onto the community. Without a receiver like Jonas to hold the memories within the community, they will be released to the rest of its citizens, functionally destroying the sameness under which they have lived their lives. Everything that they have lacked, colors, pain, a past, all of it will be shared though Jonas’ absence. While he seeks an escape to elsewhere, the Giver supports his decision because of the change it will bring about within the community itself. While looking only at Jonas’ actions from the outside, one could be tempted to believe that taking off, unprepared, with Gabriel on a bicycle into the unknown

outside world is foolish and petulant, our access to his reasoning gives a much clearer view. While his dissent is rooted in feeling, it is not foolish- and is perhaps even noble.

What Jonas has in common with Lily, the child protagonist of *The Wolves in the Walls*, is this knowing, an understanding of the world around them that the adults in their lives lack. The function of this goes beyond a sort of dramatic irony, but serves an important role in the interaction between the novel and the reader, particularly the child reader. Natov further discusses the role of literature and fear in childhood:

Fears are an everyday and important part of our lives and stories. Whether they are real fears or fantasy monsters, they suggest the importance of talking about them and finding concrete ways of responding, especially for children. Obviously, some fears are difficult to pin down as they shift in shape and intensity and persist.” literature provides a way of approaching them at a safe distance. (Natov, 57)

For the young reader, whose discovery of their own world is still incomplete, the dystopian genre creates an extreme or dramatized reality in which injustice can be felt, explored, and responded to at a distance. The symbiotic relationship between the child reader and literature written for them is described by Natov: “The imagination can be treacherous, and children’s literature can address this paradoxical process of imagining for the child reader.” (Natov, 58) We have already established dystopian, utopian, and anti-utopian literature as belonging to the utopian imagination, asking the reader to explore a world very unlike their own, yet reflecting it in certain ways. The child, as an agent of the future, is asked by dystopian literature to imagine a future in which they could potentially live, one that is intentionally riddled with fear and injustice. Using the narrative perspective of the child allows the process of imagining to be

somewhat familiar to the reader, as the protagonist resides within the same social space as they occupy within their own environment.

For the dystopian novel, whose goal is dually critical and cautionary, the child reader is not only receiving a sort of “practice” in responding to injustice, but also a lesson on what injustice may look like when they encounter it in the future that the novel is hoping to impact. The dystopian genre, in this symbiotic relationship with the young reader, achieves its generic goal with stunning success when written for, and about, children.



### Conclusion:

At midnight on March 23rd, 2012, I took a seat in a theater with a VIP pass to the midnight showing of *The Hunger Games* on a lanyard around my neck and a mockingjay pin fastened to my shirt. I was thirteen years old, and was about to see an on-screen depiction of a book I had been reading and re-reading for months. I didn't realize it at the time, but the following two hours and twenty-two minutes were going to change my life. During a particularly difficult time in my life, these books had been my solace, and I have on good authority that I was not the only one. Something in these books spoke to people my age in a way that I still find difficult to describe, even after spending a year studying the relationship between dystopian literature and children. I later reflected on the massive success of these dystopian narratives, and found it absolutely uncanny that someone as young as I was would seek comfort in this genre of all places.

Even further back than my encounter with the Hunger Games series, the fascination with the dystopian novel had already begun. I first read *The Giver* at eight years old, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* at twelve. As I considered which texts to focus on for this project, I realized that while *The Hunger Games* was representative of an especially important and transformative moment in *my* life, it was not the key to answering my broader questions. Rather, I had to turn to Lowry to track the beginning of dystopian YA. It wasn't until I read Fitting's work that I understood the dystopian genre's intention as a critical and cautionary genre, as I had begun my work with the notion that dystopian literature appealed to the tendency within us to take interest in morbidity. The further I pushed into the idea of a "generic intention," the more I began to understand the necessity of addressing the connections between dystopian and utopian works. I

began with an aversion to discussing utopia at length, as I was completely immersed in the work of its exact opposite. What could addressing the utopian accomplish other than detracting from the focus of my work?

Fitting's understanding of the connections (and disconnections) between utopia, dystopia, and anti-utopia provided a foundation upon which I was able to define my own, and through this development it became very clear to me that I simply could not write about dystopia without discussing utopia as its other half. My suspicions that the two genres had two completely opposite origins was completely false, and instead their shared origin was revealed, much to my surprise.

The inclusion of *The Republic* was yet another area of doubt that took the discussion of the figure of the child in a new direction. The original intention of the project was to track the development of the dystopian genre, beginning with *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, but once the ties between the utopian and dystopian genres was clarified and strengthened, the timeline I was establishing was no longer only about the history of the dystopian genre, but rather the utopian imagination that ultimately created it. Orwell's work was not a logical starting point anymore if I was to fully engage with the idea of the utopian imagination. There was no better way, in my mind, to address the origins of this imaginative process than to grapple with it at its source. With the inclusion of *The Republic*, I felt that the authority of my claims about the importance of the figure of the child would be strengthened not only in the eyes of the reader, but also in my own understanding of how to move forward in proving it.

I have already discussed the rise of the dystopian YA genre, but I feel it is also appropriate to acknowledge its downfall in terms of popularity. After a rather long run in the

spotlight, (roughly up until 2016) the interest in dystopian narratives within the YA market suddenly disappeared. A further exploration of the genre within my work up to this point could attempt to address this drop off with special attention to what we already know about the child reader. I have my own theories about the possible causes of the abrupt end to the dystopian YA craze, which I think could do with more investigation.

The first theory involves the consequences that commercial success can have for certain genres, in that there is often a saturation of the market after a work has proven successful. It is possible that the genre's success was broken down into a formula, in which the dystopian worlds of these successful novels were replicated without fulfilling the compelling generic goal we have addressed. Without these important connections between the reader and the text, the narratives being produced may come across to the reader as hollow or disingenuous.

The second theory toys with the sociological idea of fatigue, in which exposure to injustice and action against it can lead to a mental state that simply does not allow the action to continue. One could hypothetically pair this concept with the generic goal of the dystopian novel as educating and cautioning the reader, encouraging them to avoid unjust futures, suggesting a sort of fatigue that comes from exposure to *fictional* worlds that are inherently unjust. These impressions are only initial ones, and serve more as starting points for discussion around the sudden decrease in the popularity of the dystopian YA novel.

On the topic of future work revolving around this subject, there are quite a few ideas about the genre that certainly contribute to an understanding of the differences between classic dystopian literature and its YA counterpart, but that I found myself unable to properly address within the project itself. I will share them here in hopes that they can contribute to the larger

discussion around these works. There is a distinct difference between *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* and *The Giver* in regards to the way in which they end. Lowry's ending is left intentionally ambiguous, with the future of Jonas and Gabriel left up to the reader's imagination. When asked whether the ending was intended to be optimistic, she expresses a sort of disappointment in the idea that a reader would interpret the ending as simply Jonas and Gabriel dying in the snow. She confirms that, in her view, the ending is "An optimistic ending, a happy ending, when that house is there with its lights on and music is playing." (Lowry, 5) The ending of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, on the other hand, is undoubtedly and inarguably negative. If the reader is supposed to *like* Winston, the way in which his story ends is essentially a heartbreaking surrender to the powerlessness that he spends the entire novel struggling against. As the genre develops into the YA phenomenon that we recognize, the ambiguous endings like that of *The Giver* give way to decidedly victorious endings, often resulting in the destruction of the oppressive dystopian state. The rise of the victorious ending accompanying the rapid increase in the genre's popularity is a trend worth discussion, especially when accompanied with an in-depth understanding of the interactions between such endings and the child reader.

As far as the likability of protagonists, I have found through discussion with other readers that my reactions to the characterization of both Jonas and Winston as protagonists is rather common, though not universal. I personally find myself feeling much more positively toward Jonas, as his actions and internal thoughts are often centered around empathy and care for others, while Winston is portrayed as much more invested in himself and the solitude he feels within his society. Personal preferences aside, there is something to be said for the opinion the reader develops of the protagonist throughout their encounter with a text. A protagonist that the reader

finds likable is easier to empathize with and project oneself upon them and thus into the narrative. Conversely, a protagonist that the reader does not find likable contributes a sort of discomfort to the experience, in which the reader is confronted with an internal dialogue that is in conflict with their own. Both of these experiences can serve the dystopian novel, though in different ways. The discomfort experienced through an unlikable protagonist can enhance the negative association with the dystopian world in which they live. This is the effect that Winston's internal life has on my reading experience, making *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* an *uncomfortable* reading experience in the best way possible. In the victorious narratives of the 2000s, there is the depiction of the protagonist as a hero, resisting and ultimately destroying the dystopian state. Through this role, it can be assumed that they are intended to be likable. Is there a connection between the development of YA and the likable protagonist? Is it more important for the young reader to be able to see themselves reflected in the hero of the story than it is for the adult reader? Is this connected to Said's ideas about the development of identity?

With my sudden understanding of the dystopian genre as inherently tied to our world through its cautionary nature, I couldn't help but reflect on the social realities that my favorite works within the genre were (or could be) critiquing. My new readings of these novels through the lens of identifying social critique led me to the idea that Orwell's depiction of Big Brother was meant as a not-so-subtle reference to Joseph Stalin. Luckily for me, I was able to pursue this particular curiosity within George Orwell's war-time diary, in which he recorded his thoughts on Stalin before *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* was published: "The most one can truly say about Stalin is that probably he is individually sincere, as his followers cannot be, for his endless changes of

front are at any rate his own decision. It is a case of ‘when Father turns, we all turn’” (Orwell, 355)

Here, Stalin’s similarities to Big Brother are nothing short of glaringly obvious. The scenes in which the allies and enemies of Oceania are switched without warning are mirrors of the sort of blind devotion that Orwell is critiquing here, with the citizens under the Party abandoning logic for the sake of loyalty to their leader. Additionally, there is a reference here to the idea of Stalin being referred to as “father,” an echo of the familial title taken on by Big Brother to strengthen his authority within the mind of the citizen. While this comparison captured my attention, I ultimately came to the conclusion that including it within the project may detract from the argument I intended to make about the role of the child, both as character and reader. However, for someone approaching these texts and the emergence of the dystopian YA genre through a more sociological or historical lens in order to identify the cultural reasons behind the dystopian YA phenomenon, Orwell’s diaries leading up to the publication of *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* would be an invaluable resource. Identifying the ways in which contemporary cultural and political realities influence the depiction of dystopian worlds throughout the history of the genre is certainly a worthwhile venture.

I must admit that this project is part of my personal vendetta against an elitist mindset within academia that pushes YA literature into the margins of critical study and analysis. I believe that this mindset is harmful to the discipline of literature as a whole, somewhat discarding a huge resource that is more than capable of contributing meaningful and insightful work to the field. I regret only being able to include a few pieces of Roni Natov’s work on the child reader and the child protagonist, as it is some of the most insightful work I have ever read

on the subject. The encounter between the reader and the text is at the core of what makes literature worth studying, and the encounters of child readers are valuable to our understanding of these key interactions.

Through exploration of the child's role in the utopian (and thus dystopian) imagination, I have developed a belief that the shift into YA was not only a transition that made sense when considering the inherent importance of the figure of the child. It was unavoidable, lying dormant within the genre itself until its potential was discovered. I decided on the title of this project as an acknowledgement of this belief, in protest against the idea that the shift to YA was somehow detrimental to the dystopian genre as a whole. The dystopian imagination instead comes to fruition when written for and about children.

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