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Desire and Dehumanization in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*

Human desire is a natural and unavoidable part of being a man or woman. When our desires are ordered—that is, when they are oriented to our own good and the wellbeing of others—desire can push us to become virtuous. On the other hand, if our desires are disordered, they can influence us to be selfish and to mistreat others. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to discern what is a well-ordered desire and what is a disordered desire. Lois Lowry's 1993 novel *The Giver* addresses this problem because Lowry presents a society in which individuals have chosen to deal with the difficulty of this discernment by eliminating desire as much as possible. Many critics have written on this text, but one topic that not many have not commented on is the concept of desire within the novel. She presents a world in which the characters end up behaving more like robots than human beings, and it is my belief that one of the main reasons for this is because most of the characters lack passion or an ability to desire anything. The Community has given up passion for the sake of mutual benefit, afraid that the act of desiring something—or someone—will cause disharmony and disorder within the Community; however, it is actually this lack of desire that disorders and dehumanizes the citizens. The characters of Jonas and the Giver prove that it is *because of* human desire that ordered and virtuous choices can be made.

Before getting into a close reading and analysis of *The Giver*, I do want to emphasize the implications of making an ethical claim on this novel. This is important because Lowry herself claims that she did not write the book with a moral or ethical agenda. In an interview with Carrie Hintz and Eliane Ostry, the editors of *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, Lowry emphasizes that “[she does] not make political statements” (197). Even more importantly, Lowry states that she does not wish for her young readers to learn anything from her novels, but rather that they “learn to question” (199). It is indeed true that Lowry presents a world in her novel that is both scientifically impressive and yet morally disturbing. Through the lens of Jonas, the reader comes to understand the dark realities of this community and question the world he is living in. It is through Jonas gaining the memories that he is able to have the ability to question. Therefore, this propels the reader himself to perhaps ask the same questions of the modern society that *he* is living in. Through challenging authority and the world around us, we are able to think critically; this is what I think Lowry’s goal is in presenting the community of *The Giver*. That being said, the ethical argument I am presenting in this paper is my way of questioning the world of *The Giver* and, implicitly, the world around me. Lowry believes it is her job to present the society, and after that, it is up to her readers to decide. My decision is to question the concept of desire within the novel.

The Community presented in *The Giver* lacks the ability to desire anything at all because all the citizens are not given an opportunity to do so; consequently, the citizens actually do not even have the capacity to desire over time. The diminishment of desire starts from the time that the citizens are five years old. Everyone is required to describe their dreams to their family at the morning “Telling of Dreams.” Critic Rocío G. Davis proposes that the Community’s practice of

dream telling allows for systematic control of emotions; it is “a way for adults to gently regulate their children’s personal preferences, ideas, and feelings towards the common aim of community harmony” (54). When the Community is able to control emotions, they are more readily able to control desires as well. The most direct example of this is when Jonas tells his family about the dream of “wanting” he has about his friend Fiona. Clearly, Jonas’ dream is one of a budding sexual desire, but this poses as a problem because no one “falls in love” or experiences attraction in this Community. Spouses are assigned by the Elders, and children are not born naturally, but rather genetically manufactured and born through surrogacy. Then the children are given to couples when they “apply” for a child. In fact, it is presumed that sex does not exist in this society at all; therefore, the Community opts to have these sexual desires completely eliminated. Jonas’ mother tells him that his “Stirrings” have started and that he will need to take pills to get rid of them. Although Jonas found the dream pleasurable and even admits “that upon waking, he had wanted to feel the Stirrings again” (Lowry 39), he is required to take the pill every day in order to eradicate this natural yearning he feels towards his friend.

Sexual desire may be one of the most direct examples of the elimination of desire in the Community, but it is not the only one. Another example is when Jonas’ father brings baby Gabriel home in an attempt to improve his sleeping. The rule in Jonas’ Community is that each family unit has two children. In an attempt to regulate the emotions, and therefore the desires, of Joans’ family’s attachment to Gabriel, they are required “to sign a pledge that they would not become attached to this little temporary guest, and that they would relinquish him without protest or appeal when he was assigned to his own family unit at next year’s Ceremony” (42). These two examples—dream telling and contractual agreements—are obvious ways that emotions and

desires are regulated in the Community. There are, however, other less conspicuous ways that the Community uses to control the interiority of its citizens. One of the most important elements of the Community that keeps it subdued is the emphasis on precision of language. Every citizen is carefully trained to say what they mean. There are no uncertainties or disillusionments so as to not cause any tension between Community members. This makes sense because controversy can lead to passion, emotion, and in turn, desire. Critics C. Clark Triplett and John Jay Han describe this in their article “Unmasking the Deception: The Hermeneutic of Suspicion in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*” as a way for “emotional conversations [to be] discouraged” (117). In Jonas’ society there is nothing to stir up emotions or passions; there is no color, no choice, no love. The Community does this to ensure compliance and order because they believe that this will foster a more peaceful society.

Because of this systematic destruction of personal desire over time, the citizens of the Community soon become emotionless and desireless—making them seem almost subhuman. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle analyzes the different ways desire is manifested in men. He believes that ordering our desires well means practicing temperance. Aristotle refers to desires as “appetites” and writes about how we can become unvirtuous if we let our appetites overtake us beyond our rationality. He focuses on how an excess of desire can lead to detriment, but what he writes about in regards to a deficiency of desire is especially interesting when considering the society presented in *The Giver*:

People who fall short with regard to pleasures and delight in them less than they should are hardly found; for such insensibility is not human. Even the other animals distinguish

different kinds of food and enjoy some and not others; and if there is any one who finds nothing pleasant and nothing more attractive than anything else, he must be something quite different from a man; this sort of person has not received a name because he hardly occurs. (Book III, Chapter 11)

Aristotle believes it is impossible for man to have a deficiency of desire. If such a creature does exist, he argues, he should not be called a human. Even animals, it seems, do not have a deficiency of desire. Thus, according to the logic of Aristotle, these citizens of the Community would not be considered humans because they are certainly deficient in their desires. The philosophy of desire that the society presented in *The Giver* is not one where temperance is valued; rather, deficiency and suppression are valued for the sake of universal “peace.”

Lowry’s dystopian world as described in *The Giver* is strikingly similar to John Stuart Mill’s idea of utilitarianism, and it is especially interesting to compare Mill’s view of desire to the philosophy that the Community seems to adhere to as well. The society Lowry presents is peaceful, but no one is able to even understand what it means to have a passion or desire (except, of course, for the Giver and Jonas, which I will address later). Mill’s idea is that a society should function for the greatest amount of happiness for the largest number of people. He defines happiness as the absence of pain and the presence of pleasure. While the citizens in *The Giver* certainly do not value physical pleasure, they place the absence of pain at the crux of their philosophy. In order for this version of happiness to be accomplished, however, certain tendencies of man have to be relinquished at the expense of mutual flourishing. One of these tendencies that has to be eliminated is personal desire. For Mill, the perfect society is one where each man “would never [think of], or desire, any beneficial condition for himself” (46). It seems

like the Community in *The Giver* truly does embody this idea of never thinking of the benefit of himself. However, this is not to say that the characters never want *anything*—they just cannot want anything important. The distinction I am making here is between want and desire. For the purpose of this paper, I am defining desire as an intense yearning and passion. I am defining want as something trivial like personal preferences. And the characters certainly do have their own personal preferences. For example, Jonas claims he would rather not receive the assignment of Pilot at the Ceremony of Twelve (41), and Jonas' father says he was happy when he received Nurturer because that is what he wanted (16). However, the things that the characters want are relatively shallow. There is no real passion—no deep yearning, no desire. Everyone is very content with the Community, and there are no riots, protests, or debates. Everything is already given to them, so there is no need to really desire anything else. Not only that, with no emotion or connection to the past, the characters are not capable of fathoming anything beyond what is already in front of them. Jonas says this himself when he tells the Giver, "I thought there was only us. I thought that there was only now" (78). This Community seems to have reached a perfection of Mill's idea of utilitarianism. They readily comply to the expectations of the Community and do not contemplate or desire it any other way.

Through the characters of the Giver and Jonas, the reader is shown that there is an underlying dark reality to this philosophy because upon first glance, utilitarianism seems almost pleasant. There is no suffering, and it seems like citizens would become selfless and more humane because they no longer are thinking solely about themselves; however, this ends up actually making the Community cruel. Before continuing with utilitarianism, though, I do want to point out that I do not think John Stuart Mill would completely agree with the way the

Community of *The Giver* is set up. Mill opposed violence and advocated for limited government intervention, for example, so I do not necessarily think that Mill's opinions completely align with the society Lowry presents. That being said, a lot of the main points of his argument *do* seem to be embodied by the Community. Mill also claims that an action is moral insofar as it contributes to the benefit of the entire group, but what *is* good for the group? I think Mill contradicts himself by claiming the common good of the society is the absence of pain and presence of pleasure for the greatest amount of people, but yet he opposes violence. The society of *The Giver* also thinks that the common good is the absence of pain and the presence of pleasure (perhaps not physical pleasure, but the pleasure that living in a "peaceful" society of ignorance gives you), but they do not oppose violence because they often euthanize citizens for the sake of this "common good." The only way for the greatest amount of people to experience the absence of pain is through violence—I argue that violence is necessary for this society to function as fully utilitarian. It seems that the Community commits to Mill's ideas in a way that even Mill would not have agreed with, yet they seem to align to his main philosophy quite accurately. Jonas and the Giver—and presumably the reader—have a different view of the common good. The common good for Jonas and the Giver is ethicality and justice. They believe that the absence of pain and suffering is not worth the relinquishing of emotions, feelings, and desires, and they certainly do not think the absence of suffering is worth the execution of another human being. This is the main difference between Mill's, the Community's, and Jonas and the Giver's definitions of common good. Because this novel is told through Jonas' perspective, the reader is able to see the failures of Mill's idea of utilitarianism.

The Community may intensely regulate the interiority of its citizens, but the same cannot be done for the Giver and Jonas, who are the only characters in the novel that possess the ability to have emotions and the capacity to desire. This is because Jonas and the Giver are the only characters that inherit the memories of the past; in a very real sense, they are sacrificial lambs for the rest of the Community. They experience pain, suffering, and loss so that no one else has to bare that burden. When Jonas first meets the Giver, he is ignorant of the memories of the past. Jonas knows nothing of pain or true joy, and he seems pretty content with this. He does not desire or want anything else because he is ignorant that there even *is* anything else. As Jonas progresses through his training, though, he increasingly starts realizing how meaningless his life has been up until this point. Jonas sees that his life has a new depth: “Although he had through the memories learned about the pain of loss and loneliness, now he too gained an understanding of solitude and its joy” (122). For example, he begins to see color and understand what it means to be a real family. He even feels sorry for his fellow citizens because they do not experience the beauty that his life has begun to have: “He found that he was often angry, now; irrationally angry at his groupmates, that they were satisfied with their lives which had none of the vibrance his own was taking on” (99). Jonas begins to desire things—*real* things like passion, family, and justice. He particularly wants his family unit and childhood friends to be brought into this new world of feeling and emotion that he has just been let into.

While the other citizens in the novel seem to embody Aristotle's definition of “not human,” Jonas and the Giver gain temperance and rightly ordered desires and emotions as the novel progresses. This is especially exemplified through the way that Jonas and the Giver communicate with one another. As previously mentioned, precision of language is one of the

ways that the Community is able to intensely regulate the communication between the citizens. When citizens do something wrong or inappropriate, they all give the same line of apology. For example, when the Chief Elder skips Jonas in the Ceremony of Twelve, she says, "I have caused you anxiety [...] I apologize to my community" (59). Similarly, everyone responds with, "We accept your apology" (59). This formula of apology is universal for all Community members; however, the fact of the matter is that not all reconciliations can be universal. Because the apologies the Community members give to one another are all the same, there is a serious lack of genuinity within these moments of reconciliation. However, the way the Giver apologizes to Jonas is quite different from the automatic apologies that the Community members give to one another. One day, when Jonas comes in for training, the Giver is in immense suffering because a painful memory is torturing him, so Jonas asks the Giver to give him the memory so he can aid in taking some of the anguish. The Giver gives Jonas a brutal memory of war. At the end of the memory, the Giver apologizes for inflicting this pain on Jonas: "The Giver looked away, as if he could not bear to see what he had done to Jonas. 'Forgive me,' he said" (120). Even though the Giver knows that because of his duty and he has to give these horrific memories to Jonas, he still feels an intense guilt for having caused Jonas this pain.

This exchange between the Giver and Jonas is important for three reasons. First, the difference between the apologies the rest of the citizens give one another compared to the apology the Giver gives Jonas is startling. Unlike the Community members, the Giver is able to actually empathize with Jonas in a real and meaningful way that seems to be impossible with the other members of the Community. When the other Community members apologize to one another it is comparable to a toddler apologizing for hitting their brother or sister. Although

perhaps they know they did something wrong, they lack the ability to really understand the pain they inflicted on someone else, so their apology feels disingenuous. Second, this exchange is important is because Jonas makes a selfless choice to relieve the Giver of suffering, even though he knows full well that this will cause him unimaginable pain. This shows his development as an ethical human being. Jonas puts the wellbeing of someone else in front of his own; he is beginning to understand the meaning of sacrifice in this scene. Third, the Giver, even though he technically did not do anything wrong by giving Jonas this memory, still feels guilty for doing so, which shows how much he loves and cares about Jonas. Other characters in the novel (for example, Jonas' father which I will address later), perform unethical tasks without guilt because it is their "duty" in the Community. They also do not suffer guilt because they have no context as to what they are actually doing, and also because, again, they do not have the capacity to empathize. At this point in time, Jonas has had both beautiful and horrific memories of the past. He understands both pleasure and pain. So why then, would Jonas ever *desire* to have the memory of pain inflicted on him? This is because his desires are becoming ordered. Even though it will cause him pain, Jonas' love for the Giver drives him to make the selfless choice to bare that burden for him. This is a choice the rest of the Community, surely, would not be able to make because their goal is for "peace." By "peace," they mean convenience and the absence of pain, both of which are not exemplified by Jonas in this scene.

Because Jonas and the Giver become so much more ethically aware than the rest of the Community, this causes them an intense loneliness and even results in despair at some points.

This happens throughout the book; for example, when Jonas' friends are playing a war game, Jonas gets upset because he actually knows what war is and sees how this is cruel:

With his new, heightened feelings, he was overwhelmed by sadness at the way others had laughed and shouted, playing at war. But he knew that they could not understand why without the memories [...] And he could not give them those. Jonas knew with certainty that he could change nothing. (135)

The memories Jonas inherits influence all aspects of his life, which causes him to feel lonely. This is important because it is partly this desperation that eventually influences Jonas to take action against his Community. Critic Melissa Gross writes in her article "*The Giver and Shade's Children: Future Views of Child Abandonment and Murder*" about Jonas' realization of morality and how that affects the ways he makes decisions. The development of Jonas' conscience "isolates" Jonas from the rest of his community (109). Don Latham in his article, "Childhood Under Siege," also agrees that Jonas becomes distinct from his peers and this causes him "an acute sense of pain and loss" (11). Because of this pain, Latham argues, Jonas forms close relationships with the only two people who are emotionally available to him: the Giver and Gabriel. No one except these two understands Jonas because the rest of the Community is a society of "perpetual children" who do not understand the pain and suffering he is going through (11). The Giver understands because he is the one transferring the memories, and Gabriel understands because he suffers with Jonas at the end of the novel. It is these feelings of despair and loneliness that drive Jonas and the Giver to make the decision to finally change something within the Community.

Jonas and the Giver both realize that they are the only ones who are able to fully understand the world around them, and that makes them both lonely, but also passionate about wanting things to change. When Jonas finally understands what Release actually is—that is, euthanasia—he is utterly appalled and is brought to the brink of despair. His discontent for his current situation makes Jonas realize that he would rather be dead than continue living in the society he is in because he realizes its brutality. Graeme Wend-Walker writes about Jonas' adversity in his article "On the Possibility of Elsewhere: A Post Secular Reading of Lois Lowry's Giver Trilogy." He argues that Jonas is so secluded in his own community that it actually makes sense why he leaves it in the end because "[a] certain kind of death may be better than a certain kind of life" (149). Jonas and the Giver understand their unique situation, and the Giver especially is constantly reminding Jonas that "[he] and [Jonas] are the only ones who *have* feelings" (Lowry 154); therefore, they know that they cannot be angry with the Community members. Jonas and the Giver are aware they have a certain obligation to the Community; they are also aware that if Jonas leaves the confines of the Community, the memories he has inherited will be dispersed among the Community members. Although they know that their fellow citizens do not have the ability to really care about them in the same way they do, Jonas and the Giver still conclude that they cannot just leave their fellow citizens behind. Jonas considers just deserting them anyway, but he concludes that: "Of course they needed to care. It was the meaning of everything" (156). Feeling as though they have no other option, the Giver and Jonas devise a plan to change things. Despite how they know that giving these memories to the citizens will cause their Community members pain, they also know releasing the memories will free this

society of their cruelty and will allow them to experience joy and meaning. Jonas and the Giver deem this as more important than shielding them from the inevitable pain.

Before trying to develop my argument as to why I think the Giver and Jonas's decision is a good thing, I first want to offer a concession. I am not claiming that once this Community gains the capacity to desire and the ability to have emotions they will be completely resolved of all their barbarism and will live in peace. This is not only presumptuous, but entirely illogical. There are clearly some rational reasons why the Community is set up the way it is in *The Giver*. It seems that the main advantage to this society is that there is no pain. No one suffers hunger, thirst, or really even death in a sense. No one suffers grief or loss. No one is ostracized. There is no war or violence or discrimination. Choice is eliminated so that no one makes the wrong choice; therefore, no one will have to suffer the consequences of making a poor decision. When Jonas first starts receiving the memories, he sees the value in them, but he also seems to agree with his Community's decision to eliminate them. At the thought of giving citizens choice, Jonas says, "What if they were allowed to choose their own mate? And they chose *wrong*? [...] Very frightening. I can't even imagine it. We have to protect people from wrong choices" (99). The only way to prevent people from having a choice in this Community is by eliminating their capacity to desire. With no context of history or the past, the citizen's ability to yearn for anything else is completely eradicated. However, this is the sacrifice that this Community was willing to make. The Giver says this quite perfectly when he tells Jonas, "We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others" (95).

Therefore, I am not arguing that once the Community gains these memories back, they will be completely ethical and morally superior; rather, I am siding with Jonas and the Giver in arguing that anything would be better than the society they have created. Jonas himself, as he gains wisdom in inheriting the memories, comes to the realization that “if he stayed, his life was no longer worth living” (155). In fact, all three of the characters who have received the memories (Jonas, the Giver, and Rosemary) seem to think this way. The Giver tells Jonas that he has often thought of applying for Release: “I wish I could put in a request for it, sometimes. But I’m not permitted to do that until the new Receiver is trained” (139). Similarly, Rosemary (the previous “failed” Receiver) actually does apply for Release, and even injects the lethal poison into her vein herself (151). All three of the characters that gained the memories of the past contemplate suicide at one point or another; this is not *just* because of isolation and loneliness, although this does seem to be a factor, but also because they cannot handle knowing that the society they are living in is completely horrific. The fact is that humans *need* companionship and love; however, the citizens living within the Community are not really living as humans. Jonas and the Giver, however, are. In fact, along with the reader, Jonas and the Giver see the destructive and meaningless way that the people around them are living. Out of everyone, they know that allowing people to make choices results in serious consequences. At the same time, nevertheless, they are willing to risk this. This passion and love for their Community is what propels them to go about in changing the society as they know it.

This propelling effort to change the Community connects to philosopher David Hume, who believed that our passions (desires) are what motivate us to take action, not reason. Without the presence of pleasure or pain, which is what he argues are needed for desire, we simply will

not act because our reason is a “slave” to our actions (Section III). This claim is interesting because it explains why the Giver and Jonas are the only ones who want to seek to change the society. It is because they are the only characters who desire, and while the Elders of the Community presumably use reason to make decisions, without desires they do not take action to accomplish anything to improve the conditions of their society. It is obvious that the Community members know an immense amount of information. I argue this because their society is almost scientifically perfect; some examples are that a drop of medicine can relieve any minor injury or discomfort, a pill can completely get rid of sexual desire, and the weather is entirely regulated so that there are no natural disasters. Despite this supposed perfection, the Giver tells Jonas that the Community “know[s] nothing” and that “without the memories, it’s all meaningless” (105).

Although all of these technological advances seem good, the Community has no concept of what they are actually doing or sacrificing because they have no context without the memories.

Jonas’s father does not even know that when he injects a newborn twin with a lethal substance, they are not going to Elsewhere—they are dead. Without the memories, there is no wonder why none of the Community members do not want to change anything. They are miserably ignorant.

Jonas and the Giver are the only two in the novel who have this context through experiencing pain and pleasure, so according to Hume (whom I agree with), the only way for this society to change is through their efforts.

The fact that Jonas and the Giver take matters into their own hands by deciding to have Jonas leave the Community is a point of contention with many critics. Some think that this is an act of virtue, while others disagree and claim that this action is problematic. I argue that this shows that Jonas and the Giver’s desires are, in fact, both good and ordered. Critic Susan Louise

Stewart writes that it is ironic how the Giver and Jonas make the decision for all the citizens to gain the memories released back to the Community, yet they are trying to promote choice by making this a universal decision on behalf of everyone (24). Stewart even goes so far as to compare their decision to that of a “psychopath” (26). However, I argue that Jonas’ actions are far from psychopathic. He is not leaving the Community for personal gain, but rather because he desires the real wellbeing of the citizens. He wants them to live a life that is meaningful, with choice and dignity. That is what he desires consistently throughout his training. If he and the Giver wanted to, they could both escape and live on their own, releasing all of the memories of the world back to the Community without any guidance or help. Instead, they decide to leave the Giver behind to help the Community deal with these new emotions, desires, and feelings. The Giver even thinks of this as his life’s work: “My work will be finished [...] when I have helped the community to change and become whole” (161). Jonas and the Giver have the full capability of making a decision that is selfish, but instead, they decide to make the selfless choice of keeping the Giver behind in order to help the Community. Jonas acts almost like a Christic character that “has chosen to increase his own suffering in exchange for the possibility of a better society” (Totaro 132). Jonas’ actions are anything but psychopathic—they reveal to the reader that he has developed morally as a person.

Similarly, critic Michael M. Levy claims that we cannot know whether or not Jonas’ choice to leave the Community is the right one because we do not really know what happens at the end of the novel (56). I think, however, that this is not a logical conclusion to make. The ending may be ambiguous, but the result of Jonas’ action is not an indicator of whether or not his desires are ordered. The reader knows that Jonas’ intentions for leaving the Community are not

just simply because he wants to escape the world he is living in. Of course, escaping the Community for his own sake is partially a motivating reason for Jonas to leave, but Jonas is not content having all the feelings and memories for himself. He knows that these things are meant to be communal, and he cannot stand the thought of leaving his fellow citizens behind knowing the truth. We know that Jonas cares about his friends and family because he “He felt such love for Asher and Fiona. But they could not feel it back, without those memories” (Lowry 135). It is clear to the reader that Jonas’ intentions are to better the individuals in the Community because now he realizes how un-human they really are, not because he is irrational or selfish.

Although some might argue that Jonas and the Giver’s decision to force the memories into the Community is not good, the reader is given evidence to believe that Jonas has good intentions for the Community through the character of Gabriel. Jonas plans to leave the Community by himself, but changes his decision on short notice when he finds out that Gabriel is to be Released the following day. The reader is just as appalled as Jonas is about this decision because it puts the barbarism of this society fully into perspective. Gabriel, an infant, is going to be put to death simply because it will be inconvenient for his parents to have to deal with him not sleeping through the night. In true utilitarian fashion, Gabriel is to be sacrificed for the supposed good of the Community as a whole. Jonas, however, knows that this is not good for the Community because it is dehumanizing. It is an act of injustice. Jonas desires to save him; in fact, his desire is not just to save Gabriel, but the whole community, of its cruelty.

Although Jonas’ father took care of Gabriel through the entirety of his little life, his father still votes for the baby to be Released. First, this is because of the lack of order that

Gabriel's life may have on the Community (164), and second, this is because Jonas' father truly does not understand what he is doing when he Releases Gabriel. Jonas' father is described as feeling "disappointed" about this decision, but he lacks the passion and emotion necessary to do anything about it because he does not have the capacity to care. We know Jonas' father does not understand Release is euthanasia because Jonas asks him about Release with the question: "[S]omebody else comes to get him? Somebody from Elsewhere?" and his father answers, "That's right, Jonas-bonus" (137). Perhaps one could argue that he is just saving Jonas from the harsh reality of death, but I truly do not think this is the case. I will use Don Latham's phrase by calling the Community members "perpetual children"—and this includes Jonas's father. His light-hearted phrasing and lack of compassion tells the reader that he does not realize that when he injects the poison into the baby, he is killing the newborn. By the time Jonas leaves the Community, he knows what Release actually is, but his father does not. Like a child, Jonas' father is shielded from the reality of the situation, but the most disturbing part is that though ignorant, he still performs the task. It makes sense, then, why his father does not care what happens to Gabriel because to him, nothing bad happens at all, so why would he desire anything else? Not only that, Jonas' father does not see the sanctity of Gabriel's life; he only sees him as a potential asset or a burden to society. However, Jonas—like the reader—is not hindered by the Community's manipulation that suppresses all passion and desire. Instead, Jonas knows that his Community needs to change now. He does not have time, and the passionate desire he has for saving Gabriel drives him to this realization—a realization that his father could not possibly come to without the knowledge Jonas has.

Because of Jonas' ability to desire, he is able to see Gabriel as an individual and not as a generalized burden to society. Throughout his journey to "Elsewhere," Jonas continuously sacrifices for the sake of Gabriel. Towards the end of the novel, when Jonas is starving and cold, instead of keeping the memory of warmth and comfort to himself, he transmits the memory to the infant because he felt "an urge, a need, a passionate yearning to share the warmth with the one person left for him to love" (176). When Gabriel is crying because he is hungry and tired, Jonas cries for a different reason: "He wept because he was afraid now that he could not save Gabriel. He no longer cared about himself" (173). This is important because it is a stark contrast between Jonas' view of Gabriel's life and his father's view of Gabriel's life. The reader knows that Jonas' actions are far more ethical than his father's because Jonas loves Gabriel as an individual, as a human being.

Of course, desire and love are not the same thing, but it is this intense feeling found in desire that is necessary for love. Jonas and the Giver are the only characters in the book who express their love to each other. It is true that Jonas does express love to other people, but he and the Giver are the only ones able to reciprocate this: "'I love you Jonas,' [the Giver] said" (162). On the other hand, when Jonas asks his father about the concept of love, the reaction of his parents is quite striking. They reprimand him for not using precision of language, and his mother says, "[Y]ou used a very generalized word, so meaningless that it's become almost obsolete" (127). Instead, his father opts for telling Jonas that he enjoys him and takes pride in his accomplishments (127). The use of the word "love" is described as inappropriate, and this makes sense because the citizens have no conception of what love actually means. However, Jonas' desire to save Gabriel and to save society seems to be generated by the love he feels for them.

Jonas' society is supposed to be perfect, yet the reader and Jonas both know something is missing. This comes to the forefront when Jonas' father, who is supposed to be living in a society where everyone is equal, is not aware of the inherent value of human life. Jonas, however, is capable of seeing Gabriel as a human, and his knowledge of this sparks a passion—a love—and a desire to save him. Jonas' desire to save Gabriel (and his Community)—even at the expense of his own life—shows that the diminishment of desire can actually lead to a hindrance of justice and a dehumanization of human life.

Lowry argues she does want her readers to learn anything from her novels except that they learn to question. Perhaps this quest of inquiry is the reason why her novel is so well regarded and so commonly read in the middle and high school English classroom. Perhaps this is the reason why many critics have felt inclined to write about her acclaimed book—even if it is considered “less academic” because it is young adult literature. The society Lowry presents has many implications for young readers, and in a society so conflated with opinions on how we should or should not live our lives, maybe we should try to question the world around us more critically. Especially on the topic of desire, Lowry gives her readers an immense amount of moral implications to think about, regardless of what her opinions on each topic may actually be.

Most of the characters of *The Giver* are led to believe that human desire is to be avoided because it obstructs the good of the Community; however, it seems that the opposite is the case. Because of the squandering of emotion and desire in the Community, the lives of many human beings are seen as worthless and dispensable. Jonas comes to this realization, and his intense yearning to give justice and humanization to this Community cannot be contained. It is not

desire, but *lack* of desire that causes Jonas' society to become unjust, cruel, and brutal. Through the characters of Jonas and the Giver, the reader can see that desire is the driving force behind virtue and good in this novel.

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