HYPERREALITY AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN THE GIVER: A POSTMODERN ANALYSIS OF UTOPIAN ILLUSIONS

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Abstract

Technology had a significant and varied influence on literature in the 20th century, changing writers' way of creating their works and also the themes they explored. Writers addressed the complexities of a rapidly changing world and mirrored the growing integration of technology into daily life. This paper examines how technology helps the state create a state of simulation, an utopian society, in Lois Lowry's The Giver (1993), using Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality. The government employs advanced technology to enforce "Sameness," where personal liberties, feelings, and uniqueness are eradicated to preserve control and authority. The state continues to exert control over its people by genetic engineering, monitoring, and emotional suppression so that they can mould people's identities and experiences following their personal desires. Lowry's dystopian vision of a hyperreal world emphasises the dehumanising consequences of technology, which is used to repress and alter real human experiences and limit their individual freedom. This creates a false sense of stability and contentment in citizens. Through the exploration of these themes, the book gives us important insight into both the fictitious society and our own more technologically advanced world. It warns us about the dangers of ignoring truth and uniqueness for an illusion of order and stability.

***Keywords*:** Dystopia, postmodernism, hyper-reality, dehumanization, suppression

Introduction

Science, technology, inventions, and innovations have all advanced more quickly in the 20th century than in any previous century. The ideas of reality and society are constantly evolving in the postmodern era in which we live. It is marked to be widely affected by technology. It was defined as hyper-reality by Baudrillard, a cultural critic. According to Baudrillard (1994), the excess of mass media and technology has caused society to reach a stimulated stage. Everything is media-generated, and the general public is engrossed in it. People are losing their ability to distinguish between reality and hyperreality. He refers to the postmodern era as the "age of simulation" since it is difficult to distinguish between reality and simulation. Due to the overwhelming influence of media technology, people increasingly perceive artificial realities as genuine. Similar to Derrida, Baudrillard disapproved of the idea that every signifier could have a clear meaning, as well as the idea that there might be a difference between the signifiers' appearance and their underlying

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reality. He refers to the postmodern era as the "age of simulation" since it is difficult to distinguish between reality and simulation. Moreover, he focused on the portrayal of reality and how it is shown in postmodern literature.

Hyper-reality has affected all facets of human existence, including literature, politics, media, art, and architecture. Exceptional shifts in the literary world occurred, as writers and their works of fiction portrayed the chaotic social, cultural, and technical shifts of period in which they were living. Several writers from the 20th century were aware of the damage that the government's fabrication of a hyperreal society, which is defined as utopian, and exploitation of technology were causing to individual freedom and choice. It resulted in a form of writing which is known as dystopian fiction. It addresses political issues like freedom and individuality, future disaster and environmental devastation, identity crises, and blurs the lines between technology and the self. It is mostly set in a futuristic society, demonstrating that attempting to create a paradise will only serve to worsen the situation. The central government holds power, and the values of the individual and the family are subjugated and their identities are being shaped by the use of science and technology. In her book, *The Shapes of Dystopia: Boundaries, Hybridity and the Politics of Power*, Langer (2011) argues that dystopias envision a society in which the government controls every element of daily life. People's lives are extremely controlled and monitored, forbidden from having any personal attachments or emotions. Gerhard (2012) further argues in his research, *Control and Resistance in Dystopian Novels*, that dystopian citizens are directly controlled by the state's collective mindset and authority, which transforms them into mindless robots meant to exist and serve the state alone. The central body uses different strategies to attain ultimate authority in a dystopian world.

Dystopian literature sheds light on the conflict between identities of the individual and the state's collective objectives, which suppresses one's individual expression. This is evident in Lowry's novel, *The Giver* (1993), which is a young adult dystopian American novel. It is set in a futuristic society that initially seems utopian but eventually turns out to be dystopian as the plot develops. Society has eliminated the concept of suffering and conflict by adopting the concept of "Sameness". It lacks any color, climate, landscape, or feelings in an attempt to maintain order. Citizens are convinced to abide by all the rules set by the main authority to live the best way. The community's leaders instill complete obedience in everyone's mind and life as a means of maintaining power. Lone and Zafar (2018) analyzed Lowry's *The Giver* (1993) using Foucauldian concept of power and language. They remarked that the novel shows a totalitarian regime that not only devises a methodical means to dominate not only its victims' brains, but also their environment. The government utilizes language manipulation. The totalitarian government either bans certain words from its social structure or transforms them into strange ideas that are seen as illnesses that require medical attention. Power operationalizes speech in order to produce reality. People who are linguistically enslaved lose their ability to think creatively and intelligently, becoming mindless robots instead. Citizens' lives are governed by the norms, yet the protagonist is the one who rebels against them. Chen Xin and Li Qing (2016) claimed that the book is a dystopian narrative that centers on youth. This book offers readers a sense of hope for redemption through Jonas's last escape. It plays a crucial role in awakening people by portraying a utopian society shaped by science and technology.

The central theme of the novel centers on governments that employ rigidly defined routines, birth control, socially assigned roles, and ongoing monitoring to create disciplined bodies and minds. Previously *The Giver* was examined in terms of its dystopian themes and ethical implications, but no one has analyzed the novel from a postmodern lens of hyperreality. This research aims to fill the gap by closely analyzing how hyperreality is constructed in order to maintain the appearance of a flawless society. It explores how the technological strategies are used to create a hyperreal society that enables the state to exert control over its citizens' identities and perceptions.

Methodology

The research design for the current research is qualitative. Kumar (2011) stated that the purpose of qualitative study is to comprehend, clarify, examine, find, and explain various circumstances, beliefs, emotions, perceptions, attitudes and experiences. The secondary data selected for discussion is a postmodern dystopian novel entitled as *The Giver* (1993) by Lois Lowry. The information would be obtained from the selected novel through close textual reading from a postmodern lens of hyper reality in order to support the researcher's point of view.

Theoretical Framework

Hyper reality is a postmodern concept that will serve as the theoretical foundation for this analysis. Hyper reality, according to Baudrillard (1994), is the breakdown of the boundaries between true and false, subject and object, and real and fake. He claims that the world is dominated by simulations and their representations, making it impossible to differentiate between reality and fiction. This hyper reality is only the symbol of actual occurrences rather than the actual thing itself. Furthermore, attempting to look back will only display a duplicate of reality rather than the original. In his Travelogue, which he titles "*Travel through Hyper reality*," Italian philosopher Umberto Eco (1990) writes about hyper reality. He said that America has become a nation of made-up cities, artwork, pictures, and historical narratives. He contrasted his visit to Disney Land to an extremely hyper real experience and criticized Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Disneyland for being tricks of capitalism. Hyper real universe contains artificial objects such as large cartoon figures that appear real even when they are not. Media technology has a strong impact on all the decisions of our lives. People adopt media technologies and use them to build their own reality. As a result, they have distorted realities.

This research will use close reading as its main textual analysis technique to investigate how *The Giver* portrays the state of hyperreality. The focus of this close reading will be on how setting, dialogue, and narrative voice are employed to create and preserve a hyperreal society.

Research Questions

The study aims to address the following questions:

- How does technology create hyperreal experiences and situations in *The Giver*?
- How does the constructed hyper-reality help the state to control characters' lives and choices in *The Giver*?

Discussion

In the postmodern era, humans live in a hyper-technological world. In addition to helping people live simpler lives, technology has increasingly been used to enable certain people and organizations to exert influence over one another and govern a certain society. Super-sophisticated visual graphics are utilized to create a simulated world that feels more realistic which is defined as hyperreality by Baudrillard. The concept of "hyper-reality," refers to the consequences of mass culture replication, which implies that a replicated item, occasion, or experience seems more real than real, either it replaces or being preferred over its original. It enables humans' consciousness to discriminate between reality and imagination. Hyperreality is just reality without reality. According to Baudrillard (1994), our society is so heavily impacted by the overuse of technology that reality no longer exists independently in the contemporary world. He also contends that it has ruined reality to the extent that it no longer has a distinct character in our society.

Literature and society are both greatly impacted by technological advancements. American writer Lois Lowry's masterwork, The Giver, portrays a future society in which people's lives are planned and controlled following their scientific decisions. They have also lost their independence and capacity to make their own decisions. The Committee of Elders of this society implemented the concept of "the Sameness," a condition devoid of variations in the weather, hues, or individual liberties in order to avoid conflicts and moral issues. It is forbidden for members of this community to experience pleasures like color, music, and love. The community's way of life is incredibly pleasant, predictable, and organized. Human freedom of choice and rights were nonexistent in this society. People had their entire lives well planned and ordered, including their occupations, marriages, and kids, by the state. People live under constant supervision. They never question why the conventions must be followed and instead accept all of the laws and traditions without question. Hyperreality occurs in generations that consider everything real and normal without investigating the origin of reality.

Sameness as a Tool of Control

The community's objective is "sameness," which means eliminating everything from their culture that can encourage bigotry, jealousy, or special treatment for some people. The absence of distinctions makes it possible for every member of the society to have a defined position and to abide by a rigid set of norms, ensuring that everyone is treated equally and uniformly. The elimination of truth and sponsorship of the simulation is carried out by the use of the concept of sameness. *"Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness. Before my time, before the previous time . . . we relinquished sunshine and did*

away with difference". The primary characteristic of the society is sameness. Under this system, the government tightly controls every element of its citizens' lives. Everything is the same, even the food that people eat and the clothing that people wear and the house they live in. Additionally, the majority of them have similar appearances. They all have short hair by the time they are ten years old: *"As each child's hair was snipped neatly into its distinguishing cut: females lost their braids at ten, and males, too, relinquished their long childish hair and took on the more manly style which exposed their ears"*. People even have the same physical appearance, and differences are not permitted. Every child is subject to the same set of laws and ceremonies. There is no aspect of individuality among the members of the society. People are genetically modified to cease perceiving distinctions. Genetic scientists examine human DNA and create genetic engineering to maintain homogeneity by removing distinctions or distinctive features in individuals and the environment. People accept things as they are because they are unaware of any difference. Likewise, in Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), people are not born, but rather raised in industrial laboratories, and their brains are molded by intense training rather than by their upbringing or experiences. Scientific and technological advancement has suppressed diversity through established norms. Except few members of the community, all individuals are identical.

Loss of Freedom through Systematic Regulation

Rules that are enforced also restrict freedom and choice. The community's governing body, the Committee of Elders, is in charge of making all decisions. They have the duty of preserving "Sameness" and making certain that every person abides by social standards. The Committee chooses the precise work that each person is allocated. This guarantees that everyone makes a specific contribution to society. The Elders fabricate various false concepts to achieve sameness and uniformity, influencing people's thoughts and actions to the point where they are unable to distinguish between fact and fantasy. The idea of attaining stability and pleasure is primarily based on complete control over people's lives. These ideologies are only dark vision of a utopian society that may bring about stability and happiness by changing people's perspectives that they have to give up their identities and liberties for everyone to live happily in a utopian world.*" like the Matching of Spouses and the Naming and Placement of new children, the Assignments were scrupulously thought through by the Committee of the Elders" (Lowry, p. 62).* Every kind of decision is only made by the elders of the community. Apart from compatible spouses, the Committee looks at whether a new couple is prepared to have their first child. The couple is supposed to request a child. They will be monitored for three years. The Committee will not grant them the first kid as requested until the Committee is certain that they are eligible. Moreover, they are not allowed to have more than two kids. A family must raise the two children that the government provides. There is no biological bond between parents and children. There is no typical biological mechanism by which children are born. Using advanced reproductive technologies, birthmothers give birth to their babies. They are brought to Nurturing Centers, where they get specialized training and nourishment until adoptive families are located. At these Nurturing Centres, scientific and technical methods are developed and put into practice that allow genetic material to be directly modified to change an organism's or cells' hereditary features. Using scientific

and technological techniques, the Elder of the community succeeded in creating a hyperreal world that they can control.

Emotional Suppression through Medication

In this utopian world, people are carefree, healthy, and relaxed. Members of the community are told to take prescribed pills whenever they feel sick, have discomfort, or have an unpleasant thought. These pills suppress their emotions. They are incapable of experiencing pain, joy, or love. The scientists have genetically changed the way to avoid illness. Everyone is in good physical condition and might live a long life. Additionally, they only recall what the Receiver of the Memory has maintained about the past. Hyperreality manipulates consciousness into giving preference to artificial simulation and endless replications of meaningless appearance above actual emotional connection. *"Relief–of–pain . . . was always provided in his [Jonas'] everyday life for the bruises and wounds, for a mashed finger, a stomach ache, a skinned knee from a fall from a bike. There was always a daub of anesthetic ointment, or a pill; or in severe instances, an injection that brought complete and instantaneous deliverance" (Lowry, p. 137).* This drug is used by people to reduce their discomfort. Additionally, this drug suppresses sexual desire. When Jonas shares his dream with his mother, she interprets it as a sexual awakening and asks him to take this pill to get rid of the discomfort it is causing him. It's the pills. That's the treatment for stirrings . . . *you mustn't forget. I'll remind you for the first weeks, but then you must do it on your own. If you forget, the Stirrings will come back. The dreams of the Stirrings will come back (Lowry, p. 39).* Jonas's mother calls his dream sexual stirrings. In a simulated world, events and objects are substituted with specific symbols. Puberty is euphemized as "stirrings." To avoid puberty, society closely watches youngsters who are close to it. Children are prescribed medicine to avoid the Stirrings at the beginning of puberty. In addition to controlling hormones, pills also control adult thought processes. Their access to emotions and logical thought is restricted by the medications so that they can be kept immature forever.

Euphemisms and Linguistic Manipulation

Likewise, there are linguistic restrictions in this fabricated society. When children are three years old, they begin to acquire precise language, which is considered to be the foundation of proper language usage. The purpose of precise language is to uphold the ruling class's supremacy in this society, as *"The community can't function smoothly if people don't use precise language" (Lowry, p.127).* The use of precise language is a sign that language as a tool of communication is under strict control in this community. It is evident in the conversation between Jonas and his family when Jonas was trying to find a correct word in order to describe his feelings, *"But there was a little shudder of nervousness when he thought about it. Apprehensive, Jonas decided. That's what I am" (Lowry, p. 4).* He finds it difficult to articulate his own emotions or simply to put them into the right words. Before identifying the exact word "apprehensive" to describe his emotion, he attempts to trace other emotive words, including "fear," "frightened," "eager," and "excited. The committee also substitutes synonyms for specific phrases that hide the actual nature of the acts in order to preserve the committee's benign reputation in society. Since the Elders believe that some words pose a danger to their idealized vision of a

community, they select specific terms to influence the community's thinking around such words. This community no longer uses the word "love." When Jonas tries to ask their parents, *"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!" (Lowry, p. 127).* When Jonas used the word "Love", he was asked to consider his emotions and select a suitable word. It appears that the culture of the society demands more accurate communication by making Jonas consider his emotions and select the ideal term. However, careful word choice obscures the true meaning of an emotion. In *1984*, a novel written by George Orwell, linguistic constraint is used as a method of control, creating Newspeak, a language that is intended to exclude terms that would convey independent or rebellious thought. People can hardly imagine concepts like freedom or revolt. This linguistic manipulation efficiently suppresses opposition and upholds complete control over society by preventing people from even thinking critically about their oppression.

Climatic and Environmental Control

Moreover, The Giver's world is free from all natural calamities like tornadoes, droughts, and crop failure because climate and topography are controlled through science. The weather never changes. Nothing challenging or annoying. Technology enables them to control the temperature as per their need. In Chapter 11, the Giver recalls, *"Snow made growing food difficult, limiting the agricultural periods. And unpredictable weather made transportation almost impossible at times. It wasn't a practical thing, so it became obsolete when we went to Sameness" (Lowry, p. 84).* To get rid of impracticality, the committee predetermines the appearance of nature. Through climate control, nature has been changed to seek sameness. Society's rules and conventions also suppress nature in order to preserve the status quo, rather than offering a way out. A fake world has been made feasible by scientific and technical methods that modify real experiences. The development of technology has led to hyperreality, in which replicated signals and pictures are used by the elders of the community as real in the fake world. Citizens perceived imitation as authentic because it is even more real in comparison to reality. According to Baudrillard (1994), imitation hides reality and presents a clearer picture than the real. It seems like a utopian Dream has come true in The Giver's world.

Memory Transmission and the Rediscovery of Reality

Older individuals and those who are different are killed by the authority in order to attain complete uniformity. Even if they are healthy, elderly adults over sixty are executed by fatal injection. In the Giver's community, the phrase "release" is used for ending a person's life, but it is never explained in that way. As a result, the community members believe that the released individuals are taken to another location, while in reality, they are killed. Since they are no longer valuable, the older ones are freed.

> *There were only two occasions of release, which were not punishments. Release of the elderly, which was a time of celebration for a life well and fully lived; and the release of a new child, which always brought a sense of what–could–we–have–done* (Lowry, p.5).

Everybody thinks they are in the real world, but it is a simulation. Their memories of the past have been erased, so they no longer possess them. This community is created with a belief that it is crucial to have at least one individual who can act as an adviser in specific circumstances and who can recall life before emotional and physical realities were altered. When Jonas was assigned the role of the next Receiver of Memory, an elderly man known as the Giver, who is now the Receiver of Memory and possesses all the memories, starts transferring them to him. When Jonas receives memories from the Giver, he experiences joy, sadness, and love. He also gains insight into the possibility of reality. When experiencing the past, Jonas learns,

> *"there was a time…when flesh was many colors. That was before we went to Sameness. Today all flesh is the same. Everyone appears to have the same skin color, and except for a select few—Jonas included—all citizens have dark eyes* (Lowry, p.25).

The same-colored skin implies that reality has been purposefully manipulated. Memory allows him to see the difference between altered reality of Sameness and a past in which life was different. Bourdieu (1992) asserts that sameness is the result of dominance and the Committee's control over society. Through sameness, they smoothly deliver their power. Overall, the structure of society shows that no one needs fundamental necessities because everyone possesses them and has assigned a role in society. Everyone is aware of their place in society as well. This type of society demonstrates the existence of a dominating culture that emphasizes roles, universal politeness, and family values. The members of the community have willingly accepted "Sameness" without realizing the underlying reality. Elders erased cultural and historical memory so that they can trap them in a dystopia that rejects true individual creativity while claiming to support peace within the society. The overuse of technology in creating artificial reality, also referred to as the hyperreal society, is depicted throughout the book. It allows the state to keep its hold on power by repressing its people's personal and social choices.

Lowry portrays a highly sophisticated world where everything has been changed by the use of modern technology. In order to create a regulated and structured environment where individuals would never have to face the reality of suffering or agony, the Committee of Elders decided to create a hyperreal world that promotes Sameness, reducing risk and choice. Conflict, history, misery, greed, selfishness, jealousy, prejudice, passion, and love have no existence in this utopian world. Everything is removed so that people can live peacefully, but in reality, they made this decision to maintain their power and control the citizens.

Conclusion

The utopian society, depicted by Lowry, is extremely technologically and scientifically advanced. The government fully controls people's social and personal lives by imposing its will on them through the use of different techniques like brainwashing, cloning, genetic engineering, censorship, monitoring, and conditioning. The authorities eliminate fundamental human qualities like freedom, love, identity, uniqueness, and family in their quest for sameness and conformity. In an effort to advance their culture, the elders employ their advanced technology to go to Sameness. They frequently use technology to control

the entire community, suppress sexual urges, and release those who do not fit in or do not contribute to society in a way they want. The idea of "Sameness" plays a key role in the hyperreal society since it creates a regulated and artificial world in which individuality and emotions are suppressed. Sameness is portrayed by the Elders as being very important, as if without it, the entire planet may collapse. In Baudrillard's perspective, the real world is presented as a flawed world. Therefore, the artificial world seems more acceptable. The hyperreality is exemplified through the way the community's leaders, the Committee of Elders, control and manipulate the population. They use advanced technology and social engineering to create a society where people are conditioned to conform and accept the absence of emotions and individuality. This hyperreality is further reinforced by the lack of personal experiences, memories, and feelings, which are all replaced by a uniform and controlled environment. The ruling classes are always striving to create a perfect world through uniformity and sameness, which leads to artificial happiness and stability. The study reflects current developments in the digital world, where people's perceptions of others and themselves are shaped by virtual worlds. Relying too much on technology to determine truth, emotion, and meaning puts modern civilisation at risk of losing contact with actual experiences, much like in *The Giver*, where citizens accepted a controlled, and artificial world as normal. Discussing hyperreality in the book encourages readers to consider how modern technology might subtly affect perception, restrict choices, and warp reality in the name of convenience and advancement.

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