

## Loss of Individuality and Free Will as Tools for Resistance in Lowry's *The Giver*

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper aims to investigate how "loss of individuality" and "free will" function as tools of resistance in Lois Lowry's The Giver. It examines how Jonas's growing awareness of individuality and free will fuel his rebellion. This study explores the motivations behind the prohibition imposed on citizens in the so-called egalitarian society, which restricts their rights to live and pursue happiness, with a focus on the protagonist Jonas from The Giver and his intent to escape this society, as well as the achievements he attains after his departure. It also argues that the politically controlled society restricts the people from enjoying their rights and freedom to put them under its grip; and Jonas absconds from the authoritarian society to search his freedom, happiness and identity. It further analyzes the impact of loss of individuality and free will for the humanity and the protagonist Jonas. It concludes that losing one's individuality and free choice hinder the growth of creativity, teamwork, and human existence in general. For analytical purposes, the study incorporates theoretical insights and available critical responses from scholars in the writing and theories of individuality and free will, including Hannah Arendt's totalitarianism and individuality, Erich Fromm's freedom and human development, and Michel Foucault's power and resistance. Lastly, the study hopes to offer researchers a fresh perspective on the significance of individuality and free will for human development as a whole.*

**Keywords:** individuality, free will, happiness, identity, resistance, humanity

### INTRODUCTION

Lois Lowry's 1993 novel *The Giver* examines the foolishness of the so-called classless society. This society follows the government's proposed programs and assumes that everyone has egalitarian views. Nobody needs to be concerned about the present or the future. The young adult protagonist Jonas has been or assigned as The Receiver. Better to clarify if this is a post or award. He stands as an eligible person to know about past, present and future. He instigates his mind to know about nature, color and other aspects of life. He presents his demotivation to all the activities of the society. Finally, he revolts from this society. Then questions come to the mind what factors are responsible for Jonas to rebel and why he does not demonstrate his interest to involve in the designated activities of the society. So, this paper unearths factors and reasons comprehensively to inculcate how loss of individuality and free will stands as a catalyst for resistance. For this purpose, it primarily employs the perspectives of Michel Foucault, Erich Fromm and Hannah Arendt about totalitarianism, individuality, freedom and resistance.

Individuality refers to the personal identity, self-expression and ability to act, and make decision independently. Individuality, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2010, Eighth edition), is the characteristic or trait that sets one person or item apart from others of the same kind, particularly when it is strongly marked (p. 793). Similarly, Merriam Webster Dictionary (1828) defines

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individuality as the entirety of a person's unique character that sets them apart from others; this is known as personality (p.364). Here both dictionaries emphasize the distinctive characteristics or traits that set an individual apart from others. Furthermore, John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859) considers individuality as one of the elements of well-being (p.57) and Carl Jung in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933) explains individuality implies becoming one's own self (p.228). Both theorists emphasize on self-development and personal uniqueness. Similarly, free will reflects the capacity to act independently and exercise control over one's decisions, based on personal judgment and reasoning. Philosophically, free will is often contrasted with determinism, which suggests that all events, including human actions, are determined by pre-existing conditions or laws. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines free will as a capacity of agents to choose or act in a way that makes them morally responsible for their actions (O'Connor, 2023, "The Freedom to Do Otherwise" section)). It simplifies that free will is the ability of actors to make morally responsible decisions or behave in certain ways.

### LITERATURE REVIEWS AND RESEARCH GAPS

Since its release, *The Giver* has received many reviews. Kristy A. Brugar (2012) examines it from the viewpoints of figure of speech and attempts to venture how it can buttress scholars to explore narration from dissimilar positions in *Empowering Students through History: The Giver as a Metaphor and Preparation for Studying History in the Secondary Classroom*. Brugar emphasizes that examining as children learn to appreciate the abilities like citizenship and awareness that come with studying history, *The Giver* can assist in bridging the gap between their acceptance and rejection of the lessons. He means that this novel can help close the gap between children's acceptance and rejection of the lessons as they come to value the skills like citizenship and awareness that come with studying history. Brugar further analyzes that it offers a chance to consider a community devoid of history critically (p.89). *The Giver* initiates a discussion about community. According to Brugar, studying history calls for students to assess arguments and make evidence-based decisions in addition to merely memorizing names and dates. Human history and memory are transmitted to Jonas himself or 'history of all humanity' (p.86). This groundbreaking novel serves as the bridge to study history of humanity.

In contrast to Brugar, Ann Lawrence (1999) makes an effort to illustrate the different probabilities of the Giver, the Receiver, and their behaviors in *The Giver* to the *Twenty One Balloons: Explorations with Probability*. Lawrence concludes that the above-mentioned Giver-related difficulty was ultimately made available as a last assessment job (p. 509). She does a good job of outlining the difficulties of growth. Ashley Garman and Lauren Homa portray Jonas as "smart, brave and clever," relating to the protagonist's problems (272). Jonas, according to Garman and Homa, is as audacious and astute as an eagle. They portray Jonas as a proactive and admirable person who has the ability to alter the dynamics of the supposedly equitable society.

Departing from the realistic venture of life and social entity, In the Utopian Function of the Memory in Lowry's *The Giver*, Carter F. Hanson elaborates on *The Giver* from the standpoint of memory's utopian function, departing from the realistic endeavor of life and social entity. Hanson claims that it never offers hope for a brighter future (p. 45). The intricacy of life is portrayed in *The Giver*. The rules, traditions, and surveillance practices that govern life are numerous. Hanson adds that Lowry's inhabitants enjoy complete security, stability, and freedom from material desires, just like the Utopians (p. 47). According to Hanson, memory is crucial to the dystopian agenda because, in many texts, memory suppression prevents the social structure from being seen and analyzed (p. 48). *The Giver*, in Hanson's opinion, definitely elevates the values of the past over the sameness that permeates the novel. In order to completely experience love and suffering and understand the repercussions of their actions, Jonas wants his people to confront their past by abandoning his role as Receiver of Memory. Although the novel focuses largely on accepting the past as a means of achieving full humanity, Hanson contends

that Lowry shows that memory is the primary utopian tool for opening up the future (p.58). The role that memory plays in the utopian concept.

Presenting realistic perspectives, another reviewer, Don Latham presents genuine viewpoints in *Childhood under seize: Lowry's The Giver*, explaining how childhood is lost and how children behave like adults. In this text, Lowry blurs the lines between her young heroes and the grownups in their life, according to Latham (p. 3). According to Latham, Lowry does not clearly distinguish between the motivations of adults and children. Security, solitude, and, to use Lowry's term, "sameness" have come at the expense of free will and individuality in the dystopian society depicted in *The Giver*. Latham claims that it portrays kids as multidimensional, nuanced people who show bravery, empathy, and fortitude in the face of hardship (p.12). Even though Latham argues that children can play a range of roles as adults, he nevertheless expresses his displeasure of the blurring of the boundaries between childhood and adulthood.

Associating with the context of awareness and agreeing with Latham about the activities of young adults as similar to adults, Kyoung-Min Han and Yonghwa Lee examine the significance of color. *The Giver* by Lois Lowry explores the philosophical and ethical meaning of color, and the hue has many consequences for Jonas's events. According to Kyoung-Min Han and Yonghwa Lee, Jonas creates a different subject with a unique internal space as a result of his developing awareness of color (p. 339). The maturity of Jonas is enhanced by his capacity to discern color. Jonas's growth as a mature character in the book is significantly influenced by his whiteness. As the Receiver of Memory, Jonas assumes and relinquishes his role against the snowy background. Since it offers a new perspective on the novel's resolution, it is crucial to comprehend the constitutive and transformative power of Jonas's color vision. Kyoung-Min Han and Yonghwa Lee attest to the fact that during Jonas' training sessions with *The Giver*, he is captivated by colors and recalls a period when people could see them (p.343). There are important historical, contemporary, and future ramifications to comprehending color.

Adding an enthusiasm of Jonas to return to normality, In a *Return to Normal: Lois Lowry's The Giver*, Susan Louise Stewart makes an argument regarding the circumstances and significance of Jonas' return to normalcy after his period of abnormality. Stewart claims that dystopian novels largely deal with these issues because they act as models as to what might happen if we pursue some of our present courses and as cultural critiques (p. 28). As Stewart argues, Lowry challenges us to assess Jonas' culture instead of our own. Given how similar the beliefs at play are to our own, it is far more difficult to identify them even though Jonas lives in a very different society. In order to enjoy freedom and teach young adults the importance of 'revolting' against so-called 'sameness' in order to improve their lives, Jonas consequently wishes to *A Return to Normal* (p. 33).

In order to identify the gaps in the research and the missing aspects, it helps to negotiate with the associates and differences of *The Giver's* critics and reviews. None of the aforementioned critiques of *The Giver* have addressed the role of free choice and individuality in igniting opposition. To the best of my knowledge, none of the aforementioned reviewers of this book have specifically addressed the issues of individuality and free choice. They haven't examined how and why the novel's emphasis on individuality and free agency works. They have not pondered seriously on the issues of individuality and free will and its impact Jonas. So, the novel waits to be analyzed and explored from the angle of individuality and free will as tools for resistance.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Many academics have expressed their views on individuality and free will as tools. In particular, Michel Foucault, a French academic and critic, offered his insights in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, published in 1977 and translated in English from French by Alan Sheridan. Foucault (1977) presents the association between power and resistant. He acknowledges that a body is docile that

may be subjected, used, transformed and improved (p.130). He refers that individuality and free will are suppressed through discipline. Resistance, then, could emerge through reclaiming one's autonomy and rejecting the imposed docility. Referring to the Panopticon concept, Foucault advocates that he who is subjected to a field of visibility...becomes the principle of his own subjection (p.201). He implies it with the internalized surveillance. It also hints that awareness of this mechanism could allow individuals to resist by disrupting or rejecting self-surveillance.

Expanding the perspectives of Foucault, Erich Fromm (1941) combines more philosophical and psychological framework for exploring how individuality and free will empower resistance against both internal fears and external oppression in *Escape from Freedom*. Fromm claims that man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve (p.5). Here he highlights how freedom forces individuals to confront their existence and develop individuality. Furthermore, Fromm contends that positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality (p.258). He depicts that resistance is rooted in embracing creativity and expressing one's full potential. Further, Fromm argues that there is only one meaning of life: the act of living itself (p.121). He discusses how individuals can resist conformity by engaging meaningfully with their own existence. Additionally, Fromm contends that submission to authority is not a solution to the problem of freedom, but an escape from it (p.142). He demonstrates how individuals resist authoritarianism by reclaiming their autonomy.

Correspondingly, Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* offers profound insights into the erosion of individuality and free will under the totalitarian regimes. Arendt (1973) clarifies that what prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience...has become an everyday experience of the ever-growing masses of our century (p.478). She stresses that the isolation and loss of individual identity make people vulnerable to totalitarianism. Resistance requires reclaiming individuality and fostering genuine human connections. Similarly, Arendt emphasizes that loneliness and the sense of not belonging to the world are the foundations of totalitarian dominance (p. 478). It implies that preserving one's sense of autonomy and belonging is crucial to fending against totalitarian rule. This imposed estrangement is countered by exercising free will. When discussing action as resistance, Arendt emphasizes that the human condition of plurality is reflected in action, which is the only activity that occurs directly between men without the use of objects or substance as a mediator (p.324). Here Arendt celebrates human action and interaction as inherently resistant to totalitarianism, which seeks to stifle diverse perspectives and collective agency. Connecting with the role of thinking, Arendt unearths that the essence of totalitarian government, and perhaps the nature of every bureaucracy, is to make functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanize them ( p.459). She means that totalitarian regimes aim to strip individuals of their autonomy. To resist, one must refuse to become a passive participant and engage in reflective thought.

Coalescing Foucault's views on power and resistant, Fromm's perspectives on freedom and human development and Arendt's visions on totalitarianism and individuality creates a strong theoretical framework to dissect how and why individuality and free will as tools for resistance in Lowry's *The Giver*. All three theorists emphasize the roadmap for the free will and individuality. These philosophical standpoints facilitate to analyze the paper's argument on individuality and free will as catalysts for revolt against so called egalitarian and authoritarian regimes in *The Giver*.

### **INDIVIDUALITY AND FREE WILL AS TOOLS FOR RESISTANCE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

In *The Giver*, the community's eradication of 'individuality' and 'free will' creates an environment where choices, emotions, and personal identity are absent. Jonas's introduction to memories, through his training with the Giver, allows him to recognize what has been lost. This awareness sparks his resistance as he begins to see the values of individual thought and emotional depth.

Michel Foucault's ideas on disciplinary power and resistance argue that systems of control create the conditions for resistance. Power is never absolute and always generates counter forces. Foucault claims that where there is power, there is resistance (p.135). In the same way, the community in *The Giver* represents a Foucauldian structure of surveillance and normalization. No one possess rights to act any works except the Giver. When the Giver passes memories of color to Jonas then he questions that why everyone can't see them and why colors disappeared (p.124). He also discloses the life in which nothing was ever surprising. Or unfavorable. Or peculiar. The life without past, color, or suffering (p. 124). This illustrates how the community controls and monitors every part of life, eradicating uncertainty and imposing conformity. People are conditioned to control their behavior under the constant watchful eye of authority, which is characteristic of the Foucauldian concept of a disciplined society. Then resistance appears as Jonas starts to recall a life outside of monitoring and control.

Accelerating awareness for resistance against surveillance and control, Jonas gets knowledge of worldly subjects following his selection as The Receiver. He understands the meaning of color, release, birth, nature, tree and more. He intends to know more in spite of practice of oppression and suppression from the autocratic community. Now Jonas became aware of an entirely new perception: as the memory continued, he became conscious of it for the first time: that it was sunlight. He felt warmth on his face and hands, and suddenly he identified it: it was pleasure. He felt it. The real pleasure of sunshine (p.45). Jonas's growing cognizance of individuality through sensory experiences reinforce to defy the conformity of the community.

Acknowledging the importance of individuality and free will, Jonas demonstrates his desire for choice. He reveals that if everything's the same, then there aren't any choices! I want to wake up in the morning and decide things (p. 157). Here Jonas begins to question the community's lack of free will after gaining memories that reveal the richness of choice. He expresses his desire for personal agency, marking a shift in his understanding of what it means to be alive. Jonas's exposure to memories represents a disruption of this system. Knowledge empowers him to resist as he becomes aware of the artificiality of his society's order. Resistance arises as Jonas begins to reject the norms imposed on him, culminating in his escape. One example of resistance by Jonas is needed In keeping with these impressions, the Giver tells Jonas that his memories would not be lost if he were lost in the river. Recollections endure eternally (p. 181). This quotation emphasizes how powerful and enduring memories are. They stand for uniqueness, life experience, and knowledge—essential resources for opposing the community's repression. Jonas's decision to flee is ultimately influenced by his ability to access these memories, which motivate him to defy expectations. By departing, he hopes to bring the memories back to the community, making them face their feelings and rediscover their humanity.

Prior to leaving the community, Jonas entangles with the web of freedom and security as Erich Fromm explores the tension between freedom and security, arguing that true human fulfillment comes from embracing individuality and autonomy, even in the face of discomfort or danger. Fromm admits that freedom is the ability to live authentically, to live out of one's true self rather than conforming to societal expectations (p.205). He means that freedom is the capacity to live genuinely, to live from one's actual self instead of fitting in with what society expects of one. The community sacrifices freedom for security, creating a society that Fromm would describe as alienated. In the same line, the Giver argues that we have to protect people from wrong choices (p.136). This quote reflects the community's rationale for restricting individual freedoms to ensure societal stability and security, aligning with Fromm's idea that people often give up freedom to avoid the anxiety of making decisions. However, Jonas's departure from the community reflects Fromm's belief that reclaiming freedom, even at great personal cost, is necessary for human growth. By leaving the community, Jonas rejects the false security of conformity and chooses the uncertainty of freedom, asserting his individuality.

Strengthening wish of gaining freedom, Jonas gradually understands that the society's lack of individuality and free will lead to a mechanical existence, where people perform roles without questioning their purpose. Hannah Arendt argues that totalitarian systems suppress individuality and free will to maintain control, but human spontaneity and thought are always potential sources of resistance. Arendt claims that the moment we start thinking, we are engaging in resistance (p.450). She means that begin to engage in resistance the instant we begin to consider. The totalitarian like structure of Jonas's community reflects Arendt's theory, where suppression of freewill ensures traditionalism. Jonas's awakening demonstrates Arendt's idea that individuals can resist through the reassertion of thought and moral judgment. Jonas echoes on his feelings of isolation after being chosen as the Receiver. According to him, I feel bad for everyone who is in a situation where he feels foolish and alienated (p.93). At this point, he starts to realize that his society's norms stifle individualism. There is a reassertion of thought as Jonas begins to examine the moral consequences of a society that devalues individuals.

Jonas challenges the Giver by questioning the system of the community to acquire individuality and free will. Inquisitorial, questioning why the community compels a single individual to carry the weight of memory. He explains, however, why not everyone is able to experience memories. I believe that sharing recollections might make things appear a little simpler (p.138). This mirrors Jonas's development of independent thought and his moral inquisitive of a system that isolates knowledge and pain. Jonas's acts of rebellion by defying rules, feeling love, and choosing to escape demonstrates how resilient human spontaneity can be, even in the face of oppressive systems.

Jonas connects resistance with the release of the children of the community. When Jonas witnesses the release of a newborn through the video recording, he is horrified to learn that 'release' is not a peaceful transition but a euphemism for euthanasia. Then, he resents that he killed it! My father killed it! (p. 186). Jonas realizes the truth about release after witnessing his father euthanize an infant. Jonas's moral awakening aligns with Arendt's emphasis on resisting evil by thinking critically and judging the actions as morally right or wrong. He feels betrayed by his father and the community's values. It sparks an intense emotional response. His revulsion and sorrow for the released children give him a sense of purpose and a drive to challenge the system. The release inspires Jonas to take action. This leads to his resolve to escape the community with Gabriel, the baby slated for release, in order to save him. His resistance becomes a fight not only for freedom but also for the restoration of authentic human experiences.

Sacrifice as resistance, Jonas resolves to leave the community and return emotions and memories to its people. He risks his life and safety to expose the truth. He argues that I can't go back! I would be frightened to live in a community that had no feelings (p.199). He validates his determination to go ahead. His moral judgment compels him to act, demonstrating resistance through thought and ethical responsibility. As Jonas escapes, he reflects on the importance of choice, even with its risks and uncertainties. This illustrates Arendt's belief in the significance of personal agency and moral judgment in resisting oppressive systems. Arendt argues that action is the only remedy to indifference, the most insidious danger of all (p.380). Here, Jonas's choice to escape the community is an act of Arendtian act of resistance by breaking through the indifference that sustains the oppressive system.

## CONCLUSION

The loss of individuality and free will in *The Giver* is not only a mechanism of control but also a paradoxical trigger for resistance. By experiencing what has been taken from him, Jonas is inspired to reject societal norms and reclaim his humanity. His journey demonstrates that even in the face of suppression, individuality and free will remain potent tools for challenging conformity and asserting human dignity. Jonas's resistance represents the power of knowledge and choice to challenge oppressive systems. His awakening highlights how suppressing individuality and free will does not

extinguish them but instead creates the potential for their explosive re-emergence. The memories Jonas carries become tools for dismantling the community's conventionality, suggesting that individuality and free will, even when suppressed, can serve as powerful forces for rebellion.

Thus, this study concludes that Jonas's resistance is fueled by his rediscovery of what individuality and free will mean. Memories of color, music and emotion serve as reminders of human potential and diversity. By choosing to act against societal rules, Jonas embodies the potential for resistance that lies dormant in every individual. His choice to leave the community and venture into the unknown demonstrates an act of free will, reclaiming his individuality in defiance of societal constraints.

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