

Model

Literary Essay

English 10

2014

Love and Pain in *The Giver*

Lois Lowry, in her novel *The Giver*, proves that our memory allows us to experience true happiness. In this futuristic society, people no longer have the power of memory. Memory caused people to suffer pain as they recalled war, famine, poverty, and despair. So, the society manufactured a pain-free, memory-free world where people were civil and polite, but had no say about their wants and desires. The main character, Jonas, is different from the others in his society, as he is expected to receive the memories of the past. His mentor, The Giver, passes along human history to Jonas. While Jonas is shocked by the pain he experiences, he ultimately comes to believe that memory allows for happiness, a state of being worth striving for.

Jonas goes from accepting the ordered, emotionless life his Elders have created, to questioning it, to finally rejecting it all together. Key moments in the novel illustrate his progression toward love. At first, Jonas willingly takes his medication to curb his “Stirrings,” accepting that it is for the best that he not experience emotions. Later, when the Giver explains that the Elders want to protect people from their emotions, Jonas begins to feel angry. It is this anger paired with the growing knowledge and weight of the memories he must accept from The Giver that increases his doubt about his job and the rules of the Elders. Finally, as he leaves the society, we see his total rejection of this ordered life. To him, life is not worth living unless it includes love. He does not accept a society that values order over being human and connecting

with others. At this moment, he understands the cost of loving. Although he is forced to endure pain, he is happy to have found, can feel and give love.

Jonas comes to understand the concept of love throughout the novel, but one moment that especially illustrates his understanding is when he chooses to flee on his bicycle and save Gabriel from release. This decision also saves him from a solitary and burdened life. However, he could not foresee the overwhelming obstacles ahead of him. Eventually, he becomes exhausted from riding his bike every night and hiding Gabriel during the day. He has little food and lacks proper clothing for the elements they face. Jonas is starving, freezing, and lonely, but none of it is as important as his love for Gabriel. In a moment of realization, he cries, but the tears and fear were not for him. The narrator states: “He wept because he was afraid now that he could not save Gabriel. He no longer cared about himself” (173). For Jonas the physical and psychological hardships are less meaningful than the love he feels for Gabriel. The obstacles he faces as he takes flight on the bike are the price he willingly pays for love.

While Jonas’ escape with Gabriel is a key moment in his growing understanding of love, other important events cause his change as well. Jonas’ attitude about love changes from the time he first learns about love from the Giver to the moment he looks into a home where a family’s holiday is being celebrated. A child himself, Jonas, like the previous young woman who failed and requested release, finds the job of becoming a Giver burdensome even when he wishes to relieve The Giver from his pain. When he learns about love and feels it, he likes the feeling. But when he must discuss love with The Giver he confesses, “I like the feeling of love. Of course,” he added quickly, ‘I do understand that it wouldn’t work very well. And that it’s much better to be organized the way we are now. I can see that it was a *dangerous* way to live” (126). These words are part confession and desire, but largely, they are submissive acceptance of rules.

However, by the end, he sees no reason for his society's lack of love. After he is given more and more memories, he understands the power of love and the loss individuals face when it is taken away. At the end of his journey, he recognizes a place "where families created and kept memories, where they celebrated love" (178). He knows "with certainty and joy" they are waiting for Gabriel and him. This vision supports him and gives him power to search for the place and to give love to Gabriel.

Jonas learns throughout the novel that love is a complicated emotion; Lowry uses the sled ride from one of Jonas' early memories as an analogy for love's complications and possibly Jonas' journey to understanding the world of color and emotions. The Giver explains that carrying the memories is like riding a sled: "It's like going downhill through deep snow on a sled...At first it's exhilarating: the speed; the sharp, clear air, but then the snow accumulates, builds up on the runners, and you slow, you have to push hard to keep it going..." (78). He uses the analogy to clarify that learning about a world filled with emotions is thrilling for Jonas, but learning about pain and suffering is difficult. It is fitting that Jonas' first memory of extreme pain comes from an accident on the sled. He recalls the memory with this description: "It was as if a hatchet lay lodged in his leg, slicing through each nerve with a hot blade" (109). The sled ride, like love and Jonas' journey causes both good and bad experiences, but in the end, the sled carries Jonas to a place of love and comfort.

Lowry, in *The Giver*, is really saying that pain and pleasure and pain are linked. A person can't have one without the other, and creating a world without emotions to avoid the pain also takes away the pleasure. Jonas' journey to Elsewhere began with his value for love and loving others. It was also painful and dangerous. However, the choice to love enabled him to experience real joy.