

**MOCKINGJAY AND MEMORIES: AN EXPLORATION IN THE DYSTOPIAN  
INSURGENCE AND ITS CINEMATIC RENDITION**

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**Abstract**

*When conformity is demanded, don't people just abide or do they fight? To stay alive, a person would do anything. In a dystopia, conformity rules it all. Bereft conformity the dystopian society doesn't exist. Everybody does as they are told as they know the consequences of not doing so. Uniqueness or individuality is not at all in the picture. But when it blooms among the constrained thought, then the real fight begins. One doesn't know the future and what it holds but if a confined society is formed like in a dystopia, then will there be any individuality and freedom? In Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games trilogy, one finds that the Mockingjay pin of the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen becomes the major symbol of rebellion. In the paper, an attempt has been made to study the individuality in a person that drives revolution and eventually crumbles the fear of the unknown in the conformed society. The little boy, Jonas of Lois Lowry's The Giver and the teenage girl, Katniss Everdeen from the Hunger Games trilogy of Suzanne Collins will be studied to comprehend this rebel notion. Its cinematic rendition creates a new venture into divergent possibilities as one sees how the adaptations have unfolded.*

**Keywords:** Dystopia, Rebellion, Apocalypse, Survival, Individuality, Conformity, Pop Culture, Movies.

*"Every faction conditions its members to think and act a certain way. And most people do it. For most people, it's not hard to learn, to find a pattern of thought that works and stay that way. But our minds move in a dozen different directions. We can't be confined to one way of thinking, and that terrifies our leaders. It means we can't be controlled. And it means that no*

*matter what they do, we will always cause trouble for them.*" Veronica Roth, *Divergent* (pp. 441 - 442)

### **Introduction:**

Conformed life is quite predictable and monotonous. It is a routine that never seems to end and goes on in an orderly manner. There are no surprises whatsoever and no one is out of tune. It is ingrained in the people so deeply that they fear the unknown, which makes them inept to take any action outside the ordinary. Even if some try to be different, their life turns unbearable that they either eventually concede to the compliant source or they are eliminated. Only individuality that defies all notions can stand against this pattern. Apocalyptic stories which are mostly science fiction often have this conformity pattern in its setting. It is most popular in dystopian fictions.

Dystopian tales came on the rise after utopian tales. The reason for this upsurge is that people stopped believing in a perfect place when the realities around them started to take on a disparaging approach. Everything around turned to ruins and that's when dystopias came to be. Advancement and change, though popular and comfortable, it has its negative side. Often people get hoodwinked and their voices never reach the proper authorities. All the sufferings led writers to perceive a dystopian future. These novels are rampant with rebellion, freedom and survival. They lucidly bring out the uniqueness in a person which phenomenally changes everything if the characters decide to take the risk. The sixteen-year-old, Katniss Everdeen of District 12, Panem and the twelve-year-old boy, Jonas of a community decide to fight and it sets the dormant tale in motion. The insurgency or the rebellion notion will be scrutinised in both the characters and their movie adaptations will be discussed.

The milieu of *The Hunger Games* trilogy which includes, *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010), by Suzanne Collins is evidently post-apocalyptic as it is based on a reaping system which was imposed on the people as a punishment for a past rebellion. According to it, each district has to provide two tributes (a boy and a girl in the age group of twelve to eighteen) for the Annual Hunger Games in which they will put in a live arena, where they have to fight to the death. While in contrast, *The Giver* (1993) by Lois Lowry, is a quiet, peaceful place yet the monotonous life without the memories of the past is questioned by the little boy, Jonas once he comprehends what a life full of choices could create.

### **Mockingjay and Memory Study:**

Mockingjay is a black and white bird which copies human melodies in a whistling tone with perfect harmony. These creatures were not supposed to exist. The Capitol, the power controller of the land of Panem created mutations or mutts during the Dark Days of the rebellion to create fear and spy on the rebels. Jabberjays were one type of birds which were specifically designed to spy on the people, as they could enunciate human conversations

exactly as heard, but the joke was on the Capitol when the rebels figured the ability of the birds and fed lies to them. So after the rebellion was dampened, these birds were left to die in the woods as they were all male birds, but these birds survived by mating with the female mockingjays and created a whole new species called the Mockingjay. In district 11, these birds are used to signal the end of work. Thus, these birds mortified the Capitol by surviving among the odds and due to its fortuitous creation and so it became a symbol of rebellion.

The beginning of the mockingjay becoming the rebellion symbol started when Katniss Everdeen entered the games by volunteering for her sister and wore the mockingjay pin, which was given by her friend, Madge, the mayor's daughter from District 12. Katniss loved to whistle to the mockingjay birds as they would imitate the tune perfectly and echo it in the woods while she went hunting. Her father had taught her this and when they heard her whistle, the birds would fall silent. During the games, she outwits the gamemakers by taking the deadly berries called nightlock with Peeta Mellark, her co-district baker boy. Due to this both of them are declared victors for the first time in their history. But President Snow and many other people don't view their actions as a desperate love tale but as defiance act against the system.

Through this act, the mockingjay pin of hers, 'A mockingjay flying in a circle of gold' (Collins CF 41) becomes an inspiring symbol of insurgency. Cognizant of the uprising of the districts, President Snow visits Katniss' house before the Victory Tour and threatens her about the tiny spark which she instilled on the people. Now she has become 'a catalyst for rebellion' (Collins CF 124) and the President knows it very well and now he wants her to stop it. Katniss sees various glimpses of the mockingjay symbol everywhere like in Plutarch, the new head gamemaker's watch, in the bread of District 8's survivors and in the District 13's video. 'A mockinjay is a creature the Capitol never intended to exist. They hadn't counted on the highly controlled jabberjay having the brains to adapt to the wild, to pass on its genetic code, to thrive in a new form. They hadn't anticipated its will to live.' (Collins CF 92) In an analogous situation, Katniss's will to survive in the games against all odds makes her the mockingjay.

While the uprisings occur, Katniss questions her own identity and about her mockingjay status. 'Am I unwittingly the face of the hoped-for rebellion? Has the mockinjay on my pin become a symbol of resistance?' (Collins CF 150) But in the Quarter Quell, when she is again put in the arena, Cinna, her stylist defies all ideas and portrays Katniss as the rebel figure. 'Clothed in black except for the white patches on my sleeves. Or should I say wings. Because Cinna has turned me into a mockingjay.' (Collins CF 252) When Katniss sees the chink in the force field she destroys the arena and with it, she is taken to the rebel camp in District 13. While she thinks she is dead, she feels more awful when she hears that Peeta is captured and that District 12 is defeated. But Plutarch understands the rebel heroine and convinces her that "While you live, the revolution lives." (Collins CF 386) And Katniss now has to become the symbol, to make the Capitol and President Snow crumble. 'The bird, the

pin, the song, the berries, the watch, the cracker, the dress that burst into flames. I am the mockingjay. The one who survived despite the Capitol's plans. The symbol of the rebellion.' (Collins CF 386-387)

When she accepts herself as the revolutionary figure, she apprehends how power had crushed the people for so long. Even the rebel leader, President Alma Coin was a powerful figure and she wanted Katniss to play with her. But Katniss being the Mockingjay comprehends it and even defies orders to divulge that she is not someone who people can control.

What they want is for me to truly take on the role they designed for me. The symbol of the revolution. The Mockingjay. It isn't enough, what I've done in the past, defying the Capitol in the Games, providing a rallying point. I must now become the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution. The person who the districts--most of which are now openly at war with the Capitol--can count on to blaze the path to victory. I won't have to do it alone. They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances--as if that doesn't sound horribly familiar--and all I have to do is play my part. (Collins MJ 10)

When people saw her, they marvelled and they gained inspiration as the rebel figure trampled all notions and trampled the power players along the way. 'I was their Mockingjay long before I accepted the role.' (MJ 90) Even at the end of the trilogy, when the time comes for Snow's assassination, Coin plans another Hunger Games to be held with the Capitol's kids, and that's when Katniss realises that 'Nothing has changed. Nothing will ever change now.' (MJ 370) Due to this, the point of her arrow shifts, 'I release the string. And President Coin collapses over the side of the balcony and plunges to the ground. Dead.' (Collins MJ 372)

Due to her revolutionary act, she destroys all power players and gives Panem a hope to rise up and eventually become a better place. Dystopian rebellion though taxing brings all together to stand up and give the clarion call. Gregory Claeys in his book, *Dystopia: A Natural History* lucidly pictures this,

Dystopia thus describes negative pasts and places we reject as deeply inhuman and oppressive, and projects negative futures we do not want but may get anyway. In so doing it raises perennial problems of human identity. Shall we be monsters, humans, or machines? Shall we be enslaved or free? Can we be 'free' or only conditioned in varying degrees? Shall we preserve our individuality or be swallowed by the collective? (498)

Katniss questions it all and eventually chooses her individuality and brings hope like a dandelion in the spring. Therefore, through one person's actions, the whole idea of rebellion becomes contagious and eventually paves the way for freedom and individuality.

Intimidations always come, but standing up and fighting for justice leads to a better world and a better life.

Entering Jonas' world, the twelve-year-old boy from the community, one can see that it is set in the future with a repetitious routine. When Jonas realises that when their world chose 'sameness,' they took away freedom from all and inconsiderately made one person suffer so that others may live in ignorance. 'Now, for the first time in his twelve years of life, Jonas felt separate, different.' (Lowry 88) When Jonas becomes the Receiver of Memory, that's when his rules tell him to defy all rules and be different, which is difficult for Jonas as from young he has followed all rules in perfection. Jonas begins to comprehend the life which was designed for them and begins to question its nature.

This conversation between the Giver and Jonas blooms in him a different perspective of life as he says,

"But I want them!" Jonas said angrily. "It isn't fair that nothing has color!"

"Not fair?" The Giver looked at Jonas curiously. "Ex-plain what you mean."

"Well ..." Jonas had to stop and think it through. "If everything's the same, then there aren't any choices!

I want to wake up in the morning and *decide* things! A blue tunic, or a red one?"

He looked down at himself, at the colorless fabric of his clothing. "But it's all the same, always." (127)

Life for the people of the community is so simple and happy that is if they follow the rules and if they don't then they are 'released,' which in their vocabulary is simply going to a place called Elsewhere. But when Jonas receives the memories he understands that they are killing people without any idea of what they are doing. And the Giver says that 'they don't want change. Life here is so orderly, so predictable— so painless. It's what they've chosen.' (Lowry 134) Yet life goes on in sameness without any idea of expressing oneself. 'It's just that . . . without the memories it's all meaningless. They gave that burden to me. And to the previous Receiver. And the one before him.' (Lowry 136) With the memories intact in the Giver, he knows that people have chosen things which is far too easy and without any kind of individuality.

Hence, when Gabe, the little baby is to be released, Jonas acts fast and like he said before "When did they decide that?" Jonas asked angrily. "It wasn't fair. Let's change it!" (Lowry 146), he sets out to Elsewhere to change it all and make people comprehend the truth. 'He had seen a birthday party, with one child singled out and celebrated on his day, so that now he understood the joy of being an individual, special and unique and proud.' (Lowry 156) When individuality is not even in the picture, there is no difference, there is no colour, there are no new ideas and there is no inspiration. Jonas wanted people to see change and therefore rebels in a very quiet way. He leaves his community with Gabe in search of

Elsewhere so that people may get their past memories and comprehend what life is all about. On his way, he thinks, 'At dawn, the orderly, disciplined life he had always known would continue again, without him. The life where nothing was ever unexpected. Or inconvenient. Or unusual. The life without color, pain, or past.' (Lowry 207) And as he ventures into the new world, he is fascinated and thrilled. 'All of it was new to him. After a life of Sameness and predictability, he was awed by the surprises that lay beyond each curve of the road.' (Lowry 215) Though the ending of *The Giver* is ambiguous one can see that there is hope when Jonas sees people, family and lights.

In both these tales, one sees that there is a varying difference in their approach to individuality. While the world of Katniss is too chaotic, Jonas' community is too pale. Katniss wins through war and by amplifying her warrior spirit while Jonas does it in a subtle way but eventually they both leave the people confounded due to their uniqueness. They bring a positive change in their world due to their own empowered identities. Whether it is a mockingjay or memory chaos, an excellent way to deflect all conformed ideas is to be curious and to question it all in a constructive mode.

#### **Book to Cinematic Rendition:**

Novels are often adapted to movies but the question of their integrity stands in limbo. Writers and directors work together in the various adaptations of their work and they create a wonderful picture that becomes the blockbusters of today. Its reach to the masses is decided on its ratings and reviews. *The Hunger Games* was adapted into a movie in 2012 and was directed by Gary Ross. *The Hunger Games* film series and was produced by Nina Jacobson and Jon Kilik. The sequels *Catching Fire* came up in 2013, while the last book was divided into two parts, *Mockingjay* Part 1 came in 2014 and *Mockingjay* Part 2 came in 2015. The film stars Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen, Josh Hutcherson as Peeta Mellark, Liam Hemsworth as Gale Hawthorne, Woody Harrelson as Haymitch Abernathy, Elizabeth Banks as Effie Trinket, Lenny Kravitz as Cinna, Stanley Tucci as Caesar Flickerman, and Donald Sutherland as President Snow and it was distributed by Lionsgate Films. Suzanne Collins herself collaborated with the screenwriter Billy Ray and The director Gary Ross to adapt the novel for film.

Praise for the *Hunger Games* was mostly positive due to its fascinating adaptation and its true rendition. The average rating of 7.28/10 was given by Rotten Tomatoes. Cinema Score gave the film grade A with the audience poll. The acting of Katniss Everdeen by Jennifer Lawrence was widely renowned as she pictured the exact emotions of the character. The movie also delves into the unseen conversations too which are not seen in the novel like with the gamemakers and President Snow. It enigmatically creates a world that is true to its origin.

Aglaia Ho in a review titled "Hunger Games: A Satisfying Adaptation" says,

To my surprise, *The Hunger Games* was a faithful adaptation. When my favorite books hit the screen, usually the stories get lost along the way. Yet, this film brilliantly kept my favorite aspects of the book. Additionally, small changes were cleverly made and actually helped to make the plot clearer and the themes more poignant. I particularly liked how Katniss's song is sang twice (rather than once), first to her sister and second to young competitor, who reminds Katniss of her sister. The viewer can easily draw the parallels and understand Katniss's love for her sister.

Katie Bircher says in her review that 'With *The Hunger Games* enjoying a record-breaking opening weekend and the second movie, *Catching Fire*, already in the works, this promises to be an overwhelmingly successful franchise for director Gary Ross and Lionsgate. This well-executed first film assures that the odds for excellent sequels are definitely in fans' favor.'

In a quiet divergence, *The Giver* came up as a film in 2014 directed by Phillip Noyce. This adaptation is not as true as *The Hunger Games*, because many differences could be noticed between the novel and the movie. Starring Jeff Bridges as The Giver, Brenton Thwaites as Jonas, Odeya Rush as Fiona, Meryl Streep as The Chief Elder, Alexander Skarsgård as Jonas' Father, Katie Holmes as Jonas' mother, Cameron Monaghan as Asher, Emma Tremblay as Lily, Taylor Swift as Rosemary, and Alexander/James Jollins as Gabriel, the movie depicted the community remarkably. It received a People's Choice Award nomination for Favorite Dramatic Movie and got mixed reviews from critics.

In her article, "Review: Why 'The Giver' is a Flawed Adaptation of Lois Lowry's Book", Diana Drumm points out that 'For fans of the book, this adaptation brings it to paint-by-numbers life, blurring over many details while capturing the overall, at times overwhelming, spirit. For newcomers, it's a familiar tale of self-discovery set in a semi-distant future — a young man is "chosen," he discovers a new outlook and becomes the champion for free thinking.' These movie adaptations thus, bring out the wondrous outcome of the novel and makes it complete and bridges the gap between the readers and viewers.

### **Conclusion:**

Dystopian constrained life is thus invaded with unique ideas and it paves a way to enlighten and illuminate their life in the bleak plane. Though futuristic, it grants a chance to develop an understanding of the political aspects of today's world. When the present sets the future course, one needs to have this distinctive quality so that the manipulation of the higher-ups may have no effect on the people. 'Dystopian literature has emerged as amongst the most powerful intellectual currents of our time.' (Claeys 268) Through these works of literature, people are made to reflect on the futuristic aspects and a change could be effective before the plunge.

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