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History Is Truth, Truth Is History: An Analysis of Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*

Jahana Sheri E.K
II MA English (Student)
Noble Women's College.Manjeri.

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Abstract:

History always lies on the truth and truth depicts the history. Here, I would like to assess the contribution of Lois Lowry's fictional work *Number the Stars* to the notion of the events related to the rescue of Danish Jews, in the time of World War II. It recounts the best integrated account of interaction between truth seeking and self protection, when thousands of Jews were helped to reach neutral ground in Sweden in order to avoid being relocated to concentration camps. In Lowry's novel *Number the Stars*, the war makes it indispensable for the truth to be concealed at the time. Which retells the story of the difficulty of growing up in the cultural mainstream. This novel presents the liberty of belief, the struggle of the people who are oppressed by the Nazi party, and also this novel scrutinizes the exploitation and difficulties of Jews by the Nazi dominance.

Keywords: Danish Jews, Concentration Camps, Exploitation, Nazi Dominance.

Brave Inside: The Face of Fright

We are living in the world of literature with great writers. They all are trying to say something to the people, though the history records the truth of the past, what has happened in yesterday. We all know that history lies on the truth itself. There is history behind every truth. From the historian onwards we hear the quandary of early period that is faced by the people and society, which is still reminded as a true story to us. The written report of history helps to find the valid truth.

Lowry wrote *Number the Stars* in 1988. She was inspired by a friend who had grown up in Denmark during World War II, when the country was occupied by Nazi dominance. At that time, Jewish people all over Europe were being arrested and then killed by Germans. In

Denmark the Danish people banded together to save their Jewish population. The story tells the true story where Annemarie is a fictional character, but Lowry was inspired to create her by a real story that came from a hour of conversation with her friend Annelise Platt and others who experienced the hardship of World War II. The novel is dedicated to her, who was a child in Denmark during the years of the war. According to Lowry: "The Danish people were the only entire nation people in the world who heard the splash and the cry and did not turn away from the distance."

Annemarie has a great sense of nostalgia for the past. Though she is only ten years old and her memories are a source of pleasure and comfort to her. Frequently Annemarie looks to the happier days of the past with a feeling of regret. She has particularly strong memories about the house by the ocean where her mother grew up and where she spent summers. As Annemarie listens to her mother and uncle talk she is reminded of what it felt like before the war. The long days of light give the impression of safety. The distinction between the children "tucked away" and the adults downstairs is clearly cut and makes Annemarie feel secure in the knowledge that children exist on one side. This is a division that Annemarie cannot make anymore. The impression of safety in her image of the past also comes from the easily drawn separation between the adults and the children. Now things are not as simple. Annemarie has trouble knowing which group she belongs in. The security of the past has dissipated.

"For a moment, to Annemarie, listening, it seemed like all the earlier times, the happy visits to the farm in the past with summer daylight extending beyond bedtime, with the children tucked away in their bedrooms and the grownups downstairs talking".(96)

In *Number the Stars* Jewish people are being taken away, including Annemarie's best friend Ellen and her family. Annemarie has to help the people for their safety without the awareness of Nazi authority. If the Nazis catch them, both will get serious punishment. The conflict between the Nazis and the Jews is crucial to the plot of the novel, which is a realistic historical fiction that portrays a young Danish girl Annemarie, during the Nazi occupation. She is a true representation of life. The novel is set in Denmark when the country was full of Nazi soldiers though the Danish people had lost many of their freedom, individuality and identity. The title of the story is taken from a reference to *Psalms* 147, in which the writer of the book relates that God has numbered all the stars. God as all-knowing: his understanding is so great that he can

number and name the stars "She falls asleep, and it was asleep as thin as thin might clouds,dotted with dreams that came and went like the stranger".(43)

The characters encounters with the Nazis seem rather offensive. When Annemarie, Ellen, Kristi are terminated by the soldiers on the way hoe from school, the soldiers are simply a presence in Denmark, although an unpleasant one. At this point the girl has no conception about all the things that are going on. So they are able to tell the truth about everything without problem. Since there doesn't seem to be much at stake. But when people are being unjustly oppressed, lies and deception may help protect them. It may even allow for greater bravery than if everyone knows all the truth. The Nazi sieze the synagogue lists, so they can identify and relocate the Jews. From this point, the conflict escalates as the reader witnesses jack- booted soldiers enter the johansens apartment in the middle of the night, seeking the Rosens.

The Danish people's reaction against Nazi can be seen when Annemarie's sister Lise was killed as a result of her part in the resistance movement. In addition, the Johansens assist their Jewish neighbours, the Rosens, and there by bringing themselves in to the direct conflict with the Nazi soldiers. Hence, Danes have a protecting tradition those who are in danger. Annemarie's personal experiences when growing up is common to most of the young people. Her growth is represented as a struggle for identity. She plays the line in between a child's responsibilities and an adult's responsibilities. Lowry uses the war to exhibit how confusing the seperation between childhood and adulthood can be. Because of the war, people needs greater protection but at the same time has to learn things that once normally does not learn until later life. Innocence, perhaps the most vital feature of childhood, is no longer possible for Annemarie. Because of this, she does not identify with her little sister. She is not sure that whether she belongs to the adults or others. Children concern about thier ability to be brave and also make them feel that they are mature. Yet Annemarie is beyond the point where her youth will protect her from being called on for aid. The war plays a major part in complicating the issues related with the conflict of childhood and adulthood. For Annemarie, she wants to know more about the process what is happening around her. This curiosity is being a part of her life.

"It was only in the fairy tales that people were called upon to be so brave, to die for one another. Not in real- Life Denmark".(56) Annemarie struggles with the concept of bravery. Her parents say they are willing to risk their lives for Denmark, but Annemarie is not sure that she

could do the same. In this quotation, Annemarie justifies what she views as her own lack of bravery. As in other places in the novel, here Annemarie associates the war with a fairytale like reality. She separates what is "real-life" from the war. In doing so, Annemarie is able to keep herself outside of the war at least for the moment. She always tries to know about the reality of the war.

These are all issues that Annemarie attempts to resolve for herself. Annemarie has already found out that Jewish shops are being closed, but she does not understand the extent to which the Germans are after the Jews. Her father says that he wishes he could protect the children from this knowledge. Mr. Johansen's inability to protect the misadministration of the way that war requires young children to be exposed to information they would normally not have to handle. Lack of knowledge is presented as a protection. But Mr. Johansen does not have the power to keep the knowledge from Annemarie. A delicate balance is established between how much a child needs to know in order to act safely and how much the information will destroy the child's trust in the world.

"What's happening?" Annemarie asked when she and Ellen were alone with Papa in the living room. "Something's wrong. What is it?" Papa's face was troubled. "I wish that I could protect you children from this knowledge," he said quietly".(72)

In *Number the stars* the ignorance can be a form of self protection where young people struggles and fight with differentiating the information that is being withheld for their own safety and the information that is being concealed. Annemarie watches others being brave around her but is relieved that she will never be called upon to show the same level courage. Peter Neilson, for example, regular risks his life for the resistance. They courageously hand up to hostile German soldiers. She feels that she could never live up their example and is grateful that she will never have to. The Jewish refugees take a great risk to save their life. However, people must aid in the dangerous mission to rescue a group of Jewish refugees from the German soldiers. Although they are rightfully fearful while undertakingsuch a dangerous mission, they shows courage by acknowledging their fear and then overcoming it in order to carry out the task at hand

“It was in the early fairy tales that people were called up on to be so brave to die for one another. Not in real life Denmark. Oh, there were the soldiersthat was true. And the courageous resistance leaders, who sometime lost their life; that was true

too.....tobe an ordinary person who was never be called upon for courage “.(23-24)

The reality of the war is at time so terrible and strange that feel unreal. Annemarie sometimes has difficulty to accept the events of the war were real. She fictionalizes them. She keeps herself calm by telling fairy tales to herself. Later, going through the novel it reveals that the courage is not about being fearless but it is about doing things even if we are scared. Many of the characters show courage in the face of dangerous situation although being brave does not mean ignoring your fears - but it just means accepting them and trying to fight through them. Like that, once in a time many of the people protest against theobnoxious activities that arise from the Nazi parties. Throughout the novel itself the character Annemarie learns many strategies for being brave.

"It is much easier to brave if you donot know everythig. And so your mama does not know everything. Neither do I. We only know what we need to know".(65)

Lois Lowry uses the context of World War II as way of making the difficulties to stand out clearly. These experiences are common to most of the young people. Everyone needs great protection, but at the same time as to learn things that one normally does not learn untill later life. Again, the war plays as a complicating issue. It is not appropriate for everyone to be told certain things, particularly concerning war. But in *Number the stars*, ignorance can be a form of self protection. The reality of war is at times so terrible and strange that it feels unreal, though death was a product of the war. Despite the terrible events where the people are witnessed in the past years, they manages to maintain a sense of perspective and keeps faith that the war will eventually end. This hope keeps them motivated to stay brave and steadfast in the face of danger. In German occupied countries, Jewish citizens were arrested and relocated to concentration camps, where they were enslaved or killed. They can avoid confrontations with German soldiers by making an effort to remain inconspicuous. Once the entire population of Denmark see themselves as friends of the Jews during the challenging time. Over the course of the novel, the life under Nazi occupation was hard at the best of times. The collective bravery of the Danish people is also much in evidence throughout the story. Numerous people risk their lives to protect Jewish folk from the Nazis and help them to escape.

Number the stars has been acclaimed as one of the masterpieces of American fiction and which is written in third person omniscient point of view. It is the story about a Jewish girl where history renders her troubled life. It addresses many of the social and political issues including the Nazi dominance, the conflict between Nazis and Jews, the Danes who are trying to help and protect the Jews from the Nazis. This novel belongs to the literary genre Historical fiction, because it focuses on the history as such, Lowry wrote this novel based on the historical background where it can be considered as a true version of life or depicting the truth itself.

"Surely that gift- the gift of a world of human decency- is the one that all countries hunger for still. I hope that this story of Denmark, and its people, will remind us all that such a world is possible".(88)

When the country was full of Nazi soldiers and the Danish people had lost many of their freedom, this story is from an unusual view point. It took a turn for the serious and true visuals about the saved life. The story goes through a different lens than we are used to, which makes the whole people more worthwhile. The reader is protected from the full implications of the events but will be caught up in the suspense and terror of several encounters with soldiers. Though Annemarie's courageous sprint as courier on the night to escape. The Jews return after the war, to their home was well kept by their neighbors. The story dramatizes that Danes appoint themselves as bodyguards- not only for their king, who was in the habit of riding alone in Copenhagen, but for their Jews. The resistance fighters are known by their actions, not their individual personalities and that is the way things have to be, if they want to stay off the radar and continue their fight against the Nazis.

In *Number the Stars* Lowry extensively visualizes the history of World War II. Many of the characters are being a part and victims of the war, many of them are real ones in the history of World War II. The real characters are based on members of Danish resistance who had helped to rescue Jews from the Holocaust. The description of the German's dark, shiny boots comes dirty from true stories. The Jewish families are willing to sacrifice their personal safety in order to help their community. Although many of them lost their jobs, their possessions and even the physical markers of their Jewish identity, they still carry themselves with dignity. Hence, they learn that the pride comes from within and not from external objects or achievements. To Annemarie, knowing more information means being more adult. When she is deceived,

Annemarie gets upset about the lie but also because she feels she is not being treated like an adult. Uncle Henrik helps her to see that in this case knowing too much can be a disadvantage. It can even impede bravery. Though she does not yet see just how true Henrik's explanation is, Annemarie notices over the course of the night exactly what he means. She also begins to form a new picture of what it means to be brave. All the adults she loves and respects are brave. What Annemarie comes to discover with the help of Uncle Henrik is that bravery is not necessarily about facing everything at once.

Every character has had to make a sacrifice for the greater goodness. Even though they are forced to give their belongings and move to a foreign country in order to protect themselves and their younger ones. The feeling of patriotism and fraternity is being shown in their blood. Put in a mortal danger to save the lives of the country's Jews, even those they don't know personally. The people are fighting for a cause that is more important to them than their lives—remain as a symbol for Danish solidarity and courage after the war is over. Growing up in occupied Denmark forces, the younger ones are mature faster than they could have to be in more peaceful times. They start to feel a sense of responsibility for the people around them, even makes a dangerous delivery to ensure the success of the rescue. The courageous resistance activities can be seen in many of the characters. They too symbolise the truth and effort behind the war but their decision is to make the ultimate sacrifice to fight for a higher ideal.

"....Peter had written a letter to them from prison the night before he was shot. It had said simply that he loved them, that he was not afraid and that he was proud to have done what he could for his country and for the sake of all free people".(110)

The Jewish people and the Nazi party became the integral part of this novel. Here, many of the characters are trying to fight with courage, in order to escape from the dilemma that they are facing due to the invasion of the Nazi party, and to mingle with the society where they live in. This is the actual truth, not only in the novel but also in history too. The main historical events related with the World War II are depicted realistically in the story via different characters. The protest of the people can also be found within it. Freedom is the necessary part of life. The people who lived under the supreme power of the Nazi party too needed their rights. Most of the Denmark's Jews were saved because of prompt and sometimes very imaginative action by

ordinary citizen. The history of Denmark is portrayed well in the novel as what is it in the earlier days, Though the true nature of the story is always mingle with these historical features.

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