

## Paul Theroux: The Memory Priest of the Creech People

One person alone, always a man, serves as the memory for all the dates and names and events of the Creech, the hill-dwelling aboriginals of south-central Sumatra. (The word is also written Crik, Krich, Kreetch, and so on.) This person possesses an entire history of the people and may spend as much as a week, day  
5 and night, reciting the various genealogies.

This Memory Priest reminds the Creech of who they are and what they have done. He is their entertainment and their historian, their memory and mind and imagination. He keeps the Creech amused and informed. The Creech have no chief or headman. The Memory Priest serves as a sole authority.

10 The Memory Priest is awarded his title at birth. As soon as he is able to talk he is given to understand that he is the repository of all the Creech lore.

His is not an easy career. He must memorize great lists of family names and must be able to recite all the events that took place from the moment of his birth. [...]

What the Memory Priest knows, the immensity of his storehouse of facts, is  
15 nothing compared to the one fact that he does not know, a secret that is withheld from him. After thirty years have passed, and he is old by Creech standards (possibly toothless, almost certainly wrinkled and shrunken), a meeting is convened. He recites the Creech history and at the conclusion of this he is put to death. [...] The next male child born to a Creech woman is designated Memory Priest, and elevated;  
20 history begins once again. Nothing that has taken place before his birth has any reality, all quarrels are settled, all debts nullified.

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### Task:

Compare and contrast the Receiver (The Giver, Jonas) to the Memory Priest, his selection, his task and his function for the community, and his end.

4 **entire** whole • 5 **to recite** to speak a memorized text out loud • 5 **genealogy** family history • 9 **sole** only •  
10 **to award** to give as a prize • 11 **repository** here: person who keeps important information • 11 **lore** traditions •  
14 **storehouse** building where goods are kept • 15 **to withhold** to keep back • 17 **to convene** to set, to call •  
19 **to elevate** to lift • 21 **all debts nullified** nobody owes anyone anything any more