

The Absurdity Portrayed on Jacob Life in *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs

Imas Bening Kamal Aisyah
UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya
imasben@gmail.com

Abstract

This study attempts to analyze the way Jacob against his absurd life in Ransom Riggs' *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*. Jacob Portman experiences unexpected condition. He looks for the truth of his grandfather's past in order to restore his peaceful and normal life. However, after he found out about his grandfather's past, contrary he cannot get back to his previous life as what he planned before. His life changes into dangerous life. It made him feel hopelessness. This study aims to describe Jacob's absurd life, the way he against his absurd life and his characterization. To solve these problems, this study uses Absurdism theory by Albert Camus which is defined about the confrontation between human's desire and the world and revolt as the right way to face an absurd life and New Criticism theory as supporting theory. The result of this study shows that Jacob has five characteristics; intelligent, brave, idealistic, responsible and rebellious. His absurd life describes when his life does not go as what he planned. The feeling of hopelessness and anguish in his life are as the effects of absurd life. Moreover, the way he against his absurd life is by doing revolt. He continues and faces his life which is not as what he expects before.

Keywords: Absurdity, Revolt, Freedom, Choice

Introduction

Literature is a tool to pour personal idea. According to Wellek and Warren, the relation between literature and ideas can be conceived in very diverse ways. Frequently literature is thought of as a form of philosophy, as "ideas" wrapped in form; and it is analyzed to yield "leading ideas." (Wellek & Warren, 1949). It means that literature is a form of philosophy and through analyzing literature, the idea of someone about philosophy can be found.

Literature and philosophy are human's work which contain the author's ideas. Both of them talk about human's life. Philosophy contains the fact of human's life that evaluated its identity and essence, while literature contains human's life that is

processed through author 's imagination. This imagination is stated on the human's creativity that further is poured in written words (Nevada, 2015). Thus, philosophy and literature can run together, due everyone can do philosophy through literature. In line with Thomson, literature is not only a form of philosophy or idea, it is also a form of imagination from the author 's thought. Therefore, literature contains not only philosophy about human life but also imaginative thought from the author to make the reader happy.

Ransom Riggs is a writer from USA. His first novel is *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*, born out of his love for vintage photography and bizarre stories in June 2011. The presences of vintage photographs in his novel serve not only as decorative elements, but also interwoven with the narrative. From this, the author 's imagination can be seen; how he developed the story based on a collection of vintage photos that look odd (Neimneh & Madi, 2014). His novel is also interesting because the presence of the main character, Jacob Portman, who experiences a major change in his life. Jacob Portman, 16 years old boy, wishes to free himself from his grandfather's past that made him fidgety. He looks for the truth of his grandfather 's past by going to Wales, there was an orphanage where his grandfather lived, in order to restore his peaceful and normal life. However, after he found out about his grandfather past and world inside the loop, contrary his life is in danger because he knows that he is not an ordinary boy. He has supernatural power; it is called peculiar like his grandfather. As a peculiar, Jacob life will be more dangerous in normal world, there are hollow Gast that is ready to eat peculiar's soul. He is also trapped by a wight that incognito as his psychiatrist, Dr. Golan, this condition makes him in very awry situation. His hope for a peaceful life as before has been shattered. He realizes that his life has changed. He faces unexpected condition. His life is confronted with the choice that must be immediately decided; back to normal world or stay in a world inside the loop. No one helps him to face it and no one understands his unrest at the time. It makes him feel hopelessness. Jacob does not give up with his unexpected condition. Finally, he continues his life and faces it by choosing stay in a world inside the loop, leaving his parent behind. His choice is purely of himself according to what he wants. He helps his new peculiar friends to rescue their self from wights and hollow Gast rather than come back to the normal world like giving up his life to death without any effort.

In the face of life, human suffering can be lived with full awareness and hope even though he knows that death is a sure thing. This spirit to keep living the life is rated as a revolt against the absurdity of human life. As Camus said revolt, not suicide, is the right protest against the absurd (Lewis, 2009).

Based on the background above, the issue of this study is about Jacob Portman 's life which was not as he expects hence his life being absurd. It made him felt hopelessness but he did not give up on his condition. He continued and faced it.

Camus' attitude toward absurdity is revolt (*La revolte*) since revolt is the existence of subjectivity and freedom (Camus, 1955). Therefore, Albert Camus' concept about Absurdism can be applied in this study. This study also applies New Criticism as the supporting theory to describe about the character of Jacob Portman.

Research Methodology

This study uses library research by using some books and other references like articles, journals, and websites relate to the subject that will be analyzed. This study also employs qualitative research design. Conforming to Vanderstoep and Johnston, qualitative research produces a narrative or textual description of the phenomena under study (Vanderstoep, Scott W Johnston, 2009). The findings of qualitative research will not be in the form of statistic (quantitative). The methods of this study solve an actual problem by collecting, classifying, analyzing, and interpreting data. This study only describes or explains the phenomena found in the objects of study without manipulating the data. The data are used to identify the phenomena of absurdist existentialism in *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar children*.

There are two sources of data, the primary and the secondary. The primary data of this study is *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar children*, written by Ransom Riggs, Published in 2011 by Quirk. Whereas, the secondary data come from books, articles, journals, and websites that relate with the novel and the theory which are used in this study. The data collected will be analyzed related to the literary theory. This study is taken based on some references from a library. To analyze it, this study uses qualitative research methods.

Theoretical Framework

Absurdism

Absurdism concept has its root from the philosophy of existentialism where people ask about their meaning of life. It appeared at the time of Second World War. The World War has brought the Europeans to a bitter reality. Poverty, death and uncertainty brought them to misery. The end of World War I relieved European's heart and gave a new glimmer of hope but the outbreak of World War II brought them back to deeper wounds. After World War II, European was in a very bad situation. It leaved material losses, innocent people die; children and deep sorrow (Solomon & Higgins, 2002)

For intellectuals, at that time the world lost its meaning, they no longer believed the world, they could not be optimistic anymore when looking at the world. Afterwards they were aware that what they face in this world was incomprehensible. They were starting to question about the purpose of their existence in the world. They felt that their rights as a human being was not respected anymore, which can be seen through the huge number of innocent people who were tortured and killed by other humans. The values of humanity that have already existed became meaningless. It created a feeling that their lives were purposeless, meaningless, and senseless (Kurniawan, 1994).

In addition, they begin to feel the futility of their efforts in maintaining a life that leads only to death. That awareness brings philosophers and writers to think more about human condition. It inspires the emergence of new ideas such as absurdism and Albert Camus became the originator. Albert Camus is a writer who was born and grew up in Constantine, Algeria. The bitter experience of war influenced all his works. At the time of World War II, he published his novel *The Stranger* (1942) and an essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). With both of these works Camus is judged as the originator of Absurdism (Solomon, 2004). Camus' whole life (1913-1960) is a passionate struggle to seize the meaning of human existence, because Camus believes that human life is meaningless. Human whole being is absurd, as the suffering of innocent people. Because suffering is absurd, Camus refuses the existence of God. He thinks if God does not help them in their suffering, it is better if he assumes that God does not exist. He believes in one's self to face human suffering (Putri, 2017).

Camus' philosophical ideas. Albert Camus describes his concept of absurdity in his work, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays through Sisyphus' life*. Sisyphus is the figure from Greek mythology that the gods condemned to rolling a rock to the top of the mountain; —The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of the mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor (Raskin, 2001). Thus, it can be seen that the Sisyphus action is a meaningless and hopeless. —Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain (Camus, 1955).

As Sisyphus condition, human seek meaning and clarity towards the world but in the end man will realize that this world will never give the answer. His search for meaning in the world is futile. At the interval of time when Sisyphus was at the top of the mountain, seeing the stone fumbling down, he had to go back down to push the stone again, Sisyphus realized that what he was doing was in vain. This consciousness

brings him to an absurd feeling. Therefore, Camus concludes that Sisyphus' life is absurd and without hope. Sisyphus' plight, a snap of philosophical reflection on life endeavor would reveal that human existence is no less futile, no less absurd than that of Sisyphus (Lewis, 2009).

Camus also describes human life before facing an absurdity: Before encountering the absurd, the everyday man lives with aims, a concern for the future or for justification but after the absurd, everything is upset (38). Absurd situation led to despair, disappointed, frustrated and other bad feelings because what human expects does not match with the reality. Conforming to Camus, the depressing existential problems of man, namely anguish, suffering, sickness, disease, death, anxiety, fear, uncertainty; all of which conspire to render human existence meaningless and opaque. Living the absurd means a total lack of hope, a permanent rejection and a conscious dissatisfaction (Lewis, 2009). Therefore, human existence become meaningless because absurd condition.

Result and Discussion

Jacob's Life

Jacob's life before facing the absurdity is ordinary and peaceful life. He is in safe, everything going on fluently. His teenage years are running normally. He is 15 years old boy, student in a high school. He is a smart boy in academic. He also has to be an apprentice in the pharmacy, Smart Aid, as a family tradition. His life is safe and secure life because his mother is rich. All Jacob's needs are fulfilled so he never feels any worries. His future also neatly arranged. He will go to college and work in a family company, Smart Aid. firmly believes that his future is to work at Smart Aid, finish his school and then go to college. Although he does not like working in the Smart Aid, he remains grateful and feels blessed with his current life. As he describes —I tried to feel lucky for the safe and unextraordinary one that I had done nothing to deservel.

However, Jacob gets calamity. After his grandpa died his life was disrupted. When Jacob was 15 years old his grandpa died. It disturbs all Jacob's ordinary and peaceful life. The incident began when Jacob found his grandfather dying in Century Woods, the forest behind his grandfather's house. His grandpa called Jacob previously, he asked to Jacob where the key of his weapon cabinet is and told him that the monster was attacking him.

Jacob worried his grandpa; he went to his house with his friend Rick. Jacob found him dying in the forest behind his house, Century Woods. His body covered with wounds like a huge wild animal attacked him. At that time his grandpa said to Jacob

that he must go to seek the loop; looking for the bird, on the 3rd September 1940's. There was not enough time to tell Jacob about the truth then he asked Jacob to find Emerson book-the letter then find out the bird.

That night in the dark woods, he hugged his grandfather in his last moments, Jacob saw a monster with terrible tentacles in its mouth. Rick was also there but he saw nothing. After the event in that night, Jacob's life began to fall apart; he could not sleep, his nights filled with nightmares and fear.

Jacob was felt miserable for months. He had nightmares, sleepless and always fears. His nightmares are always the same about the monster and his grandfather carrying a gun. All of these events affect his life. Finally, his parent took him to the doctor, he undergoes psychological therapy, consulted about his condition. His psychiatrist, Dr. Golan, is a very nimble. He explained Jacob's illness calmly and unemotionally. It made Jacob and his family believe that Jacob suffered acute stress reaction due to his relationship with his grandfather was very Jacob 's relationship with his grandfather was very close in his childhood.

Jacob greatly admired his grandfather. His grandpa became a war army and traveled to many countries to hunt. In his childhood life, his grandpa lived in the Wales children's home. It is not ordinary Children's home specifically for children who have extraordinary ability, called peculiar. His grandpa lives with the wise old bird that can change her appearance into a human, her name is Miss Peregrine.

Every time he described them, he had toss in some lurid new detail: they stank like putrefying trash; they were invisible except for their shadows; a pack of squirming tentacles lurked inside their mouths and could whip out in an instant and pull you into their powerful jaws.

Jacob was taunted by his friend because he told his grandpa story at school when he was in grade 2 elementary school then he realized that his grandfather's stories were just plausible tales. He sated: —I declared that I did not believe in his fairy stories anymore. —What fairy stories? he said, —You know. The stories. About the kids and the monsters.

Jacob suffers with his condition after the death of his grandpa. His fear makes him worse off. Even his parents let him stop working at Smart Aid and does not go to school for a while. He is treated with great care by people around him. He also tried to think that the monster he saw was not real, like his doctor's advice but all his efforts were useless.

Jacob cannot endure his condition anymore. He wants to bring his previous life back. He decides to find out the truth of his grandpa past and story. He wants to solve his grandpa last message. He looks for the truth of his grandfather 's past by going to Wales. There was an orphanage where his grandfather lived. He does not care about his grandfather's story and the existence of the monster is true or not. He just wants to

make certain himself because he feels the monster is real but it does not make a sense. He wanted to get rid of his nightmare dream soon. He looks for Miss Peregrine or anyone who knew his grandfather. He plans to find information and then go home. He wants his ordinary life come back.

Jacob is trying to find his grandfather's past in Wales precisely at Cairn Holm Island. He gets some information that the orphanage was indeed there. The place is far from residential areas and it looks like a scary place. Dylan and Worm served to accompany Jacob to the house, but they do not want to accompany Jacob up to the place, they just accompany him till sheepfold, they leave Jacob because they look afraid to go into the forest. But Jacob's desire to settle his business immediately made him dare to go there alone. He entered the old damaged and scary house:

Jacob found nothing in the big old house and no one in the house, he was disappointed. But Jacob did not give up. He sought information on people around. He asked Martin Pagett, part-time curator and his uncle, Oggie, he is eighty-three, lived there his whole life. Jacob got a little information about his grandpa and the children who lived in that house. Jacob finally decided to go back to the house again.

After exploring the house for the second time, he finally found out the world inside loop, as his last grandpa message: "Find the bird. In the loop. On the other side of the old man's grave. September third, 1940. "(23). Jacob entered magic world accidentally, the world inside the loop, September third 1940. He met Miss Peregrine and his grandpa's friends. Jacob realized that his grandpa's story is true entirely. They were real. He is also told that he is not an ordinary boy. Jacob is a peculiar like his grandpa. He had a rare and peculiar talent, something almost no one else could do, he could see the monsters.

Besides knowing that he is a peculiar, Jacob also knows that Dr. Golan has been deceiving and fooling him all this time. It made him very shock. He is a wight. During this time, he stalked Jacob in disguise as Jacob's school bus driver, Jacob family's yard man who had maintained his family's lawn and cleaned their pool and last, Dr. Golan, his psychiatrist. It was the pitch-perfect voice of the man who for years had maintained my family 's lawn and cleaned our pool. —How are you doing that? I said.

He just pretends to recover Jacob by helping him to solve his grandpa's mystery whereas he collects information about where Miss Peregrine's time loop and finally he managed to find Miss Peregrine loop because Jacob has told all his grandfather's stories in their consultation session with Dr. Golan as he said to Jacob "... you already have helped me." (196).

He used Jacob who really thought himself crazy because of his grandpa's fantasy stories and the monster. Jacob easily believed to tell all about his grandpa's stories to Dr. Golan, he hopes that Dr. Golan will help to heal him but he even tricked Jacob. He

lets Jacob continue to dream about the monster, thinks that it is his fantasy whereas it is real and Jacob is not mentally ill.

From all those facts above that Jacob had discovered made all his efforts to restore his ordinary and peaceful life were vain. He was tricked and used by the wight who disguised as his psychiatrist, Dr. Golan, who should help Jacob's recovery. His efforts; consulting his problems to Dr. Golan and solving his grandpa's mystery should make him better. He should come home safely. Jacob is in danger if he is in the normal world. This is not in accordance with what he expected before. He searched for the truth of his grandfather's past to convince and free himself from his nightmares about the monster he'd experienced for almost a year after his grandpa's death. He wanted to restore his normal and peaceful life as before. But after knowing the truth, he cannot return safely. He is in danger of being in the normal world. As a peculiar, Jacob's life would be more dangerous in normal world, there are hollow Gast that ready to eat peculiar's soul. If he wants to be safe. However, in the world inside the loop he will leave his parents and his previous life.

All in all, Jacob's life before encountering the absurdity is a life with aims, he wants to restore his life which was ordinary and peaceful life but after his grandpa died his life was disrupted. Therefore, he believes that he can restore his previous life by finishing his problem with his grandpa past and story. After trying to solve the problem, his life even is in danger. He is trapped by Dr. Golan and he knows that he is not ordinary boy. These facts made him in irremediable condition. He realized that his life has changed. The absurd can be seen in this condition when his life did not go as what he planned. This absurd condition made him hopeless because he faced unexpected condition.

The Way Jacob Face his Absurd Life

This chapter describes about the way Jacob face his absurd life. As Camus said revolt, not suicide, is the right protest against the absurd (Lewis 14). Camus defines the consequence from the absurd is revolt not suicide. Revolt is a happy acceptance of suffering and destructive behavior, against meaninglessness (Neimneh & Madi 118). Thus, by doing revolt man has appreciated his life by staying and not committing suicide despite realizing that his life is absurd, experiencing and enjoying the suffering as human life. It can be seen in the novel through Jacob 's action after he faced his absurd life. After realizing that he was trapped by the circumstances and there was no way out, Jacob faces philosophical problem that is judging whether life is or is not worth living. Because his life is absurd, it means his life is meaningless and not worth living. Generally, people who live in absurdity will choose to end up their lives by

doing suicide to avoid the suffering in their life. Yet, Camus rejects the idea that the absurd itself leads to suicide. He thought that suicide is repudiation (Camus 37).

Jacob is one of the people who appreciate life. He does not want to die nor commit suicide when facing his absurd life:

I would spend the rest of my days living in fear, looking over my shoulder, tormented by nightmares, waiting for them to finally come back and punch my ticket. That sounded a lot worse than missing out on college (Riggs, 2011).

From the quotation above it can be seen that Jacob did not want to die, he did not want to be killed by hollow. "Punch my ticket" means the hollow will kill him then he thinks that he better does not go back home and continue his schooling instead of having to die. He chose to stay alive. Therefore, it can be concluded that Jacob is someone who appreciates his life by not committing or refusing to kill himself despite being absurd.

Jacob's parents would not understand him as a peculiar. Besides hunted by a Hollow, he also will be considered insane by his parents. He cannot live with such conditions. Therefore, he decided to stay with other peculiar children even though he felt very heavy leaving his parents and his previous life.

In addition, Jacob realizes that facing a hollow was not an easy thing. Before deciding to stay inside the time loop, help his friends, he was fighting his life to fight the hollow he was so afraid because for almost 1 year this monster made him like a crazy boy.

Jacob confronts it and finally he manages to kill the hollow. From all Jacob's experience above, last he decided to join with the other peculiars. He wanted to help his friends because at that time the wight successfully entered the loop and kidnapped Miss Peregrine and Miss Avocat. But Jacob and his friends only managed to save Miss Peregrine. Unfortunately, Miss Peregrine cannot change her appearance into human, they do not know what happened to her, and they are confused because they cannot communicate with her in the form of bird. They decide to look for other loops to ask for help. They will travel the world through time loops, searching for inhabited loops. They also want to fight for their future even though they do not know where to go to find the wight. They will leave their loop, facing many dangers, they do not want to stay and do nothing in their house that has been destroyed by a bomb. Jacob boldly will be with them.

Jacob accepts his absurd life by joining his friends to rescue Miss Peregrine and their future. He will travel the world through time loops, face dangers and hollow which appear in their future. As Camus insists that since the absurd is unavoidable and defining as a characteristic of the human life, the proper response to it is its full, unflinching and courageous acceptance. The idea that the absurd should be courageously embraced is revolt. To Camus, revolt is the right protest against the

absurd. It is the real, authentic value and morally accepted solution to the problem of absurdity and life 's meaningless (Lewis, 2009).

Jacob did his revolt passionately We were quiet but excited. The children had not slept, but you would not have known it to look at them. His friends and he is really eager to save Miss peregrine and fight for their future even though they do not know where to go to find the wight as Sisyphus who rocked the stone continuously and he remained happy doing it because he is superior than his rock.

He also gets his freedom after facing the absurd —And yet my old life was as impossible to return to as the children 's bombed house. The doors had been blown off our cages. It means Jacob accepts his destiny and he feels free as a peculiar boy by living with his friends who are also peculiar. Therefore, Camus defines three consequences from the absurd, those are; revolt, freedom, and passion (Camus, 1955). It means that, when human is revolting towards the absurdity in his life, he gets his freedom then does it with his passion. Human faces the absurd life by accepting his fate without letting go. This means human appreciate his life by living his life passionately. Jacob did not give up with his unexpected condition. He continued his life and faced it by choosing stay in a world inside the loop, leaving his parent behind to joining his friends to rescue Miss Peregrine and their future. His choice is purely of himself according to what he wants.

Conclusion

Jacob Portman's absurd life is described when Jacob wants to solve his problem with his grandpa past and story which is interrupting his ordinary and peaceful life. He gets nightmares every day because he believes that his grandpa was killed by a monster but no one believed him, he's like a crazy boy because he's always scared and talk about the monster. He wanted to get rid of his nightmare dream soon. He went to the psychiatrist to solve his problem. He also decides to solve the truth of his grandpa past and story by going to Wales. There was an orphanage where his grandfather lived. He plans to find information and then go home. He wants his ordinary and peaceful life come back. This decision is also strongly supported by Dr. Golan, his psychiatrist. However, after he found out about his grandfather 's past and world inside the loop, his life even in irremediable life because he knows that he is not an ordinary boy. He also had been tricked by Dr. Golan. Therefore, all his efforts to restore his ordinary and peaceful life were vain. His present life is in danger. He lost his previous life. He realized that his life has changed. The absurd can be seen in this condition when his life did not go as what he planned. This absurd condition made him hopeless because he faced unexpected condition. The third is about the consequence from his absurd life.

The consequence drawn that the appropriate way to deal with absurdity is by doing a revolt. Jacob chooses to revolt. He is one of the people who appreciate life. He does not want to die nor commit suicide when facing his absurd life. Jacob continues his absurd life by joining his friends to rescue Miss Peregrine and their future. He will travel the world through time loops, face dangers and hollow which appear in their future.

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