



ISSN 2827-8151 (Online)
SRAWUNG: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
<https://journal.ifpublisher.com/index.php/jssh>

Vol. 1, Issue. 1, (2022)
doi.org/10.56943/jssh.v1i1.22

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

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

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, Choice, Freedom, Revolt

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a medium for expressing personal ideas. According to Wellek and Warren, the relationship between literature and ideas can be understood in various ways. Literature is often seen as a form of philosophy, where "ideas" are wrapped in artistic expression and analyzed to reveal underlying concepts (Wellek & Warren, 1949). This means that literature serves as a form of philosophy, allowing the exploration of philosophical ideas through literary analysis.

Both literature and philosophy are human creations that contain the author's thoughts, and both discuss human life. Philosophy presents factual evaluations of human existence and identity, while literature portrays human life through the author's imagination. This imagination is a product of human creativity, which is then translated into written words (Nevada, 2015). Thus, philosophy and literature can coexist, as literature provides a means for philosophical reflection. In line with Thomson's perspective, literature is not only a vessel for philosophy and ideas but also a product of the author's imagination. It does not merely explore philosophical aspects of human life but also incorporates imaginative elements to entertain readers.

Ransom Riggs, an American author, published his debut novel *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* in June 2011. His fascination with vintage photography and bizarre stories inspired the novel, where vintage photographs are not just decorative elements but are intricately woven into the narrative. Through this, the author's imagination is evident in how he constructs the story based on an odd collection of vintage photographs (Neimneh & Madi, 2014). The novel also captivates readers through its protagonist, Jacob Portman, a 16-year-old boy undergoing a significant transformation. Initially, Jacob seeks to free himself from the unsettling mysteries of his grandfather's past. His journey takes him to Wales, where his grandfather once lived in an orphanage, in hopes of restoring his peace of mind. However, after uncovering his grandfather's secrets and the existence of a hidden world within a time loop, his life takes a drastic turn. He realizes he is not an ordinary boy—he possesses a supernatural ability, known as being "peculiar," just like his grandfather.

As a peculiar, Jacob's life becomes perilous in the normal world, where creatures known as hollowgasts prey on peculiars. Additionally, he is deceived by Dr. Golan, a wight disguised as his psychiatrist, placing him in a dire situation. His hopes for a peaceful life are shattered, and he is confronted with a life-changing decision: return to the normal world or remain inside the loop. Alone and misunderstood, he experiences despair. However, he refuses to surrender to his circumstances. Instead, he chooses to stay within the loop, leaving his parents behind. His decision is entirely his own, driven by his personal resolve. Rather than returning to the normal world and resigning himself to a meaningless

existence, he decides to fight alongside his newfound peculiar friends against the wights and hollowgasts.

In life, human suffering can be endured with awareness and hope, despite the certainty of death. This perseverance is considered a form of revolt against the absurdity of human existence. As Camus stated, revolt—rather than suicide—is the proper response to the absurd (Lewis, 2009). Based on this perspective, the central issue in this study revolves around Jacob Portman's life, which deviates from his expectations, leading him into an absurd existence. Although he experiences hopelessness, he does not succumb to despair but instead chooses to confront and embrace his reality.

Camus' perspective on absurdity emphasizes revolt (*La révolte*), as revolt signifies subjectivity and freedom (Camus, 1955). Therefore, Albert Camus' concept of Absurdism can be applied to this study. Additionally, New Criticism serves as a supporting theory to analyze Jacob Portman's character.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Absurdism

Absurdism has its roots in existentialist philosophy, where people question the meaning of life. This concept emerged during World War II, a period that exposed Europeans to a harsh reality filled with poverty, death, and uncertainty. While the end of World War I brought a sense of relief and hope, the outbreak of World War II deepened their suffering. The war left Europe in a dire state, causing immense material losses and the deaths of countless innocent people, including children, resulting in deep sorrow (Solomon & Higgins, 2002).

For intellectuals of that time, the world lost its meaning. They no longer believed in it and could no longer be optimistic about the future. They realized that what they faced was incomprehensible and began questioning their existence. They felt their rights as human beings were no longer respected, evident in the widespread torture and killing of innocent people. The values of humanity, once deeply ingrained, became meaningless, leaving them with a sense that life was purposeless, empty, and absurd (Kurniawan, 1994).

This growing awareness of life's futility led philosophers and writers to reflect on the human condition. It inspired the rise of new ideas, including absurdism, pioneered by Albert Camus. Camus, born and raised in Constantine, Algeria, was profoundly influenced by the war. During World War II, he published his novel *The Stranger* (1942) and the essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). These works established Camus as the founder of absurdism (Solomon, 2004). His life (1913–1960) was a relentless search for the meaning of human existence. He believed life was inherently meaningless, much like the suffering of innocent people. Since suffering itself is absurd, Camus rejected the existence of God, arguing that if God did not intervene in human suffering, it was better to

assume God did not exist. Instead, he believed in relying on oneself to confront the absurdity of life (Putri, 2017).

Camus explains his concept of absurdity through The Myth of Sisyphus, using the Greek mythological figure Sisyphus as a symbol. Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to roll a rock up a mountain, only for it to roll back down each time: "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). Sisyphus' struggle is meaningless and endless. As he watches the rock tumble down and prepares to push it back up, he realizes the futility of his actions. This awareness brings him to an absurd realization—his existence is without meaning or hope. Camus argues that Sisyphus' plight reflects the human condition: people seek meaning and clarity in life but ultimately realize that the world offers no answers. Their search is futile, making human existence just as absurd as Sisyphus' eternal struggle (Lewis, 2009).

Camus further describes how humans live before confronting absurdity. Before encountering the absurd, people have goals, concerns for the future, and a need for justification. However, after experiencing absurdity, everything collapses: "Absurd situations lead to despair, disappointment, frustration, and other negative emotions because human expectations do not align with reality" (Lewis, 2009). According to Camus, the existential struggles of human beings—including anguish, suffering, illness, death, anxiety, and uncertainty—all contribute to the absurdity of life. Living within this absurd condition means having no hope, rejecting false meaning, and embracing conscious dissatisfaction. As a result, human existence itself becomes meaningless.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs library research by utilizing books and other references such as articles, journals, and websites related to the subject being analyzed. It follows a qualitative research design, as stated by Vanderstoep and Johnston, where qualitative research produces a narrative or textual description of the studied phenomena (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). The findings of qualitative research are not presented in statistical (quantitative) form. This study addresses an actual problem by collecting, classifying, analyzing, and interpreting data. It solely 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: primary and secondary. The primary data in this study is Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children, written by Ransom Riggs and published in 2011 by Quirk. Meanwhile, the secondary data come from books, articles, journals, and websites related to the novel and the theories used in this study. The collected data will be analyzed in relation to literary theory. This

research is based on references from a library and is analyzed using qualitative research methods.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Jacob's Life

Before facing the absurdity, Jacob's life was ordinary and peaceful. He lived safely, everything went smoothly, and his teenage years were normal. At 15, he was a high school student, academically smart, and followed his family tradition by working as an apprentice at the Smart Aid pharmacy. His life was secure because his mother was wealthy, ensuring all his needs were met, leaving him with no worries. His future was neatly planned—finish school, attend college, and work at Smart Aid. Although he disliked working there, he remained grateful, describing his life as, "I tried to feel lucky for the safe and unextraordinary one that I had done nothing to deserve."

However, Jacob's life was disrupted when his grandfather passed away. At 15, he found his grandfather dying in Century Woods, the forest behind his house. Before his death, his grandfather had called him, asking about the key to his weapon cabinet and warning him of an attacking monster. Jacob, worried, rushed to his house with his friend Rick. They found his grandfather covered in wounds, seemingly attacked by a wild animal. In his final moments, his grandfather told Jacob to "seek the loop, find the bird, on September 3rd, 1940," and to look for Emerson's book and the letter. As Jacob held his grandfather, he saw a monster with terrible tentacles in its mouth—something Rick couldn't see. From that night, Jacob's life began falling apart. He suffered from nightmares, fear, and insomnia.

For months, Jacob was miserable, haunted by nightmares of the monster and his grandfather with a gun. These events affected his life, leading his parents to send him to therapy. His psychiatrist, Dr. Golan, calmly explained that Jacob was experiencing acute stress due to his close relationship with his grandfather. Jacob deeply admired his grandfather, who had served in the war, traveled, and lived in a peculiar children's home in Wales, run by Miss Peregrine, a wise old bird who could transform into a human. His grandfather's stories described peculiar children and terrifying monsters with tentacle-filled mouths. Though Jacob once believed these stories, he was ridiculed at school and eventually dismissed them as mere fairy tales.

After his grandfather's death, Jacob's fear worsened. His parents allowed him to stop working at Smart Aid and take a break from school. Though he tried to convince himself that the monster wasn't real, his efforts were futile. Unable to endure his condition, Jacob sought the truth about his grandfather's past and final message. Determined, he traveled to Wales, specifically Cairn Holm Island, where his grandfather had lived in an orphanage. Despite warnings, he ventured alone into the old, eerie house, hoping to uncover the truth. He asked locals, including

Martin Pagett and his uncle Oggie, for information. Though disappointed at first, Jacob did not give up and returned to the house, where he discovered the hidden world inside the loop.

Following his grandfather's message—"Find the bird. In the loop. On the other side of the old man's grave. September 3rd, 1940."—Jacob accidentally entered the magical world within the loop. There, he met Miss Peregrine and his grandfather's peculiar friends, realizing that everything his grandfather had said was true. He also learned that he was not an ordinary boy but a peculiar, just like his grandfather, possessing the rare ability to see monsters.

Jacob also discovered that Dr. Golan had deceived him. Golan was actually a wight who had been stalking him for years, disguising himself as his school bus driver, his family's yard man, and finally, his psychiatrist. Jacob realized that Golan had manipulated him into revealing details about Miss Peregrine's loop, using his trust to gather information. Golan had never intended to help Jacob recover; instead, he let him believe he was insane so he wouldn't uncover the truth.

All of Jacob's efforts to return to his ordinary life were in vain. He had been tricked and used by Golan, whom he trusted for guidance. What should have been a journey to heal and restore normalcy had instead placed him in even greater danger. Jacob initially sought the truth to rid himself of nightmares and reclaim his peaceful life, but he soon realized he could never return safely. As a peculiar, staying in the normal world would be life-threatening, as hollowgasts hunted peculiar souls. If he wanted to be safe, he had to stay in the loop, but doing so meant leaving his parents and his past life behind.

Ultimately, Jacob's life before encountering absurdity was structured and secure. He believed he could restore it by uncovering his grandfather's past, but instead, he found himself in even greater peril. Trapped by Dr. Golan and faced with the truth of his own peculiarity, Jacob realized his life had irrevocably changed. His carefully planned future was shattered, and he was left in a situation he never expected. This absurd reality filled him with hopelessness as he faced an unforeseen destiny.

The Way Jacob Faces His Absurd Life

This chapter explores how Jacob confronts his absurd life. As Camus stated, revolt—not suicide—is the proper response to absurdity (Lewis 14). Camus argues that the consequence of recognizing the absurd is revolt, not self-destruction. Revolt entails a joyful acceptance of suffering and a defiant stance against meaninglessness (Neimneh & Madi 118). By revolting, one appreciates life by choosing to live rather than ending it, despite acknowledging its absurdity and embracing the struggles of human existence. This is evident in Jacob's actions throughout the novel. Upon realizing he is trapped by circumstances with no way out, he faces the philosophical dilemma of whether life is worth living. Since his

life appears meaningless, most people in his situation might choose suicide to escape suffering. However, Camus rejects the idea that absurdity inevitably leads to suicide, arguing instead that it is an act of repudiation (Camus 37). Jacob, however, values his life and refuses to succumb to despair: "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). This quote highlights Jacob's refusal to die—he does not want to be killed by the Hollow. The phrase "punch my ticket" implies his imminent death at the hands of the Hollow, and he realizes that instead of returning home and continuing school, he would rather stay alive. Thus, Jacob demonstrates his appreciation for life by rejecting suicide despite the absurdity of his existence. His parents would not understand him as a peculiar, and in addition to being hunted by the Hollow, he would be perceived as insane by them, making it impossible to live under such conditions. As a result, he chooses to stay with other peculiar children, even though it is painful for him to leave his parents and former life behind. Moreover, Jacob understands that facing a Hollow is not an easy task. Before deciding to remain in the time loop and assist his friends, he had struggled against the Hollow that had tormented him for nearly a year, making him feel like a madman. He ultimately confronts and kills it. After these experiences, Jacob decides to join the other peculiars in their mission to save Miss Peregrine and their future. Although they manage to rescue Miss Peregrine, she remains trapped in her bird form, unable to communicate, leaving them confused and uncertain about how to help her. They resolve to search for other time loops and seek assistance, traveling across time despite the dangers ahead. They refuse to remain idle in their bombed-out home and instead choose to fight for their future. Jacob courageously joins them, embracing his absurd life by committing himself to their mission. He will traverse time loops, face dangers, and battle the Hollow that threatens their future. Camus asserts that because absurdity is an inherent and defining aspect of human existence, the appropriate response is its full, fearless acceptance. This embrace of absurdity is what Camus calls revolt—the genuine, morally justified answer to life's meaninglessness (Lewis, 2009). Jacob embraces revolt with passion: "We were quiet but excited. The children had not slept, but you would not have known it to look at them." Jacob and his friends are eager to save Miss Peregrine and fight for their future, despite not knowing where to find the Wight, much like Sisyphus, who continuously pushes his boulder yet remains happy because he is greater than his burden. Ultimately, Jacob attains his freedom: "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." This signifies that Jacob accepts his fate and finds liberation as a peculiar, choosing to live among his fellow peculiars. Camus identifies three consequences of absurdity: revolt, freedom, and passion (Camus, 1955). When a person revolts against absurdity, they gain freedom and pursue life with passion.

Confronting the absurd means embracing fate without surrendering, thus demonstrating an appreciation for life by living it passionately. Jacob does not give up despite his unexpected circumstances. Instead, he chooses to continue living, staying in the loop, leaving his parents behind, and joining his friends to rescue Miss Peregrine and safeguard their future. His decision is entirely his own, shaped by his desires and convictions.

CONCLUSION

Jacob Portman's absurd life unfolds as he struggles to resolve the mystery of his grandfather's past, which disrupts his once ordinary and peaceful existence. Plagued by recurring nightmares, he firmly believes that his grandfather was killed by a monster, but no one believes him. Labeled as crazy, he lives in constant fear, haunted by the thought of the creature. Desperate to escape his nightmares, he seeks help from a psychiatrist and decides to uncover the truth about his grandfather's past by traveling to Wales, where his grandfather once lived in an orphanage. His plan is simple—gather information and return home to reclaim his peaceful life. Dr. Golan, his psychiatrist, fully supports this decision.

However, after uncovering his grandfather's secrets and discovering the hidden world inside the time loop, Jacob's life spirals beyond repair. He realizes he is not an ordinary boy and, worse, has been deceived by Dr. Golan. His attempts to restore normalcy prove futile, as his present life is now in danger. He loses the life he once knew and comes to terms with the fact that everything has changed. His existence takes an absurd turn when nothing goes as planned, leaving him feeling hopeless in the face of unexpected circumstances.

The consequence of his absurd life leads him to a crucial choice—revolt. Jacob refuses to succumb to despair or consider ending his life. Instead, he embraces the absurdity of his existence by fighting back. He chooses to stand alongside his friends to rescue Miss Peregrine and protect their future. With his new reality set in motion, he embarks on a journey through time loops, facing dangers and monstrous hollows that threaten them all.

REFERENCES

- Camus, A. (1955). *The myth of Sisyphus and other essays* (J. O'Brien, Ed.). Vintage Books.
- Kurniawan, P. (1994). *A study of absurd characters in Ionesco's Rhinoceros*. Petra Christian University Surabaya.
- Lewis, M. (2009). *The existentialist philosophy of Albert Camus and Africa's liberation*. IGBAFEN.
- Neimneh, S., & Madi, N. A. (2014). Existential revolt in Albert Camus's *The Renegade*. *International Journal of Academic Research*, 6(5).

- Nevada, N. (2015). Existentialism perspective on Siddhartha's self-discovery in Hesse's Siddhartha. <https://doi.org/10.7813/2075-4124.2014/6-5/B.18>
- Putri, R. M. (2017). An existence of Victor Frankenstein's life in Frankenstein by Mary Shelley. UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya.
- Raskin, R. (2001). Camus's critiques of existentialism. *An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, 5, 156–165.
- Riggs, R. (2011). *Miss Peregrine's home for peculiar children*. Quirk Books.
- Solomon, R. C. (2004). *Existentialism* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Solomon, R. C., & Higgins, K. M. (2002). *Sejarah filsafat*. Bentang Budaya.
- Vanderstoep, S. W., & Johnston, D. D. (2009). *Research for everyday life*. Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint.
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1949). *Theory of literature*. Harcourt, Brace, and Company Inc.