



The Absurdist Doctrine of Jojo Rabbit and Absurdism in Personalized Characters

Wanqi Ni^{1,*†}, Tianyi Wang^{2,†}

¹Hefei No.8 High School, Hefei, Anhui Province, China

²Nanjing Foreign Language School British Columbia Academy, Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China

[†]These authors contributed equally.

*Corresponding author. Email: clwang@nflsbca.com

Abstract. The film *Jojo Rabbit*, directed by Taika Waititi, tells the story of World War II when a young German boy was brainwashed by Nazi propaganda and was determined to become a dictator like Hitler. However, his life changed after finding a Jewish girl hidden in the house by his mother. The film *Jojo rabbit* is an absurd film mainly expressed by Jojo's first-person visual performance. The whole film is full of absurdity, and various scenes show the depiction of human alienation, the nothingness of life meaning, and the loss of the harmonious relationship. Through the words and deeds of the people around Jojo and Jojo, the psychological change, vaguely show the brilliance of human nature. Through the war, the movie also shows us many characters' distinctive characteristics and personality traits.

Keywords: Absurdism, Human Alienation, Nothingness, Harmonious Relations, Human Glory.

1 Introduction

The film "*Jojo Rabbit*" is an absurdist film that mainly featuring on what Jojo has seen and heard. *Jojo Rabbit* tells the life story of a boy living in the latter stages of Nazi control. Jojo believed in Hitler and Nazis. He hoped to join the Hitler Youth. And after a grenade throwing accident, he began to fantasize about talking to Hitler. Jojo's mother is a secret communist party. She is found hiding a Jewish girl in her house by his son. Jojo initially wanted to delate the girl, but later he dismissed the idea for his mother's safety. When talking with the girl, jojo changed his ideas about Jews and have a favorable impression to the girl. At last in the great war, the Allies win, Jojo and the girl dance in the street after the war, implying that victory and peace will come again. This film satires Nazism in an absurd way, while reflecting the human brilliance produced in the fight against the Nazis. The film is a fusion of children's film and comedy film, with a child's perspective of war, the Nazis, and humanity, thought-provoking in happiness [1]. The film vividly portrays each character's personality. Through the character's demeanor, tone and some details of small movements, all these absurd expressions

show audiences the characteristics of the different personalities [2, 3]. The thoughts and actions of each character have a great effect on the progress and end of the film.

Through the absurd plot and footage of the film, this study will reconsider the narrative technique of the film [4]. Combined with the theme of the film, with relevant papers and discussion on how the film expresses absurdity, this paper cuts into the study of this film's absurdity from three aspects: human alienation, the loss of the harmonious relationship, and the nothingness of the meaning of life [5, 6]. It summarizes the human brilliance expressed in the film's absurdity. In addition, the symbols of Jojo's mother and militarily trained children are also explored from a metaphorical perspective. The conclusion is reached that the absurdity in this film reflects the silent resistance of some people with conscience against the Nazi feudal regime.

2 The Absurdist Doctrine

After the repeated deliberation, the film has the three following points under the absurdity. The first point deals with Jojo's mother, who risked her life to care for Jewish girls, and is also a point of human brilliance. After Jojo's mother was hanged, the secret police searched Jojo's house. The Jewish girl hiding in the house pretended to be Jojo's sister. The leading officer of the secret police picked up Jojo's sister's documents to ask about the age of the Jewish girl, the Jewish girl pretended to be calm to cast a panic, while the officer helped the Jewish girl by acting in front of others and saved them from the difficulty. The third absurdity is when the officer made a last effort to protect Jojo by spitting at Jojo and scolding him for not being a Nazi, trying to make American soldiers think that 10-year-old Jojo was not a Nazi soldier, so they didn't kill him.

2.1 Human alienation

Jojo's good nature has not yet disappeared. He refused to accept the officer's order to kill the rabbit and rushed into the woods to avoid it, so is regarded as a coward by other boys and called him "Jojo Rabbit" to make fun of him. But Jojo picked up the insurance grenade and threw it out, because he believed that throwing grenade training is to throw people forward, and it doesn't need a real target, so he does not worry about hurting anyone, so he randomly threw it into the bush. As a result, Jojo was bounced back by the tree and injured himself. It can be inferred that his refusal to kill the rabbit is not that he is not very brave, but that his good nature is not lost. As a 10-year-old ignorant child, Jojo was blinded by the wrong words from Nazi soldiers: Jews are like animals, and they don't have the equal rights with normal people. Jojo's mother taught his son patiently that the Jews are just like ordinary people, and should not be discriminated against by him. Under the guidance of his mother and the process of getting along with the Jewish girl Elsa and did not go distorted by Nazis soldiers' brainwash, Joe held the last light of humanity and saved Elsa [7].

The young children were asked to charge with their rifles and grenades. The United States and Russia attacked Germany. The Nazis let some of the young children pick up grenades and deadly bombs to charge the enemy. Another child picked up their rifles

to fight the enemy bravely. But Jojo ran home to escape from the war. This is a more absurd plot and lens. The other children are so desperate and determined to kill the enemy, while Jojo was afraid of the wars and ran away. No other Nazis will agree with his idea. Generally speaking, adults will also fear death, and it is also absurd for a group of innocent young children to kill their enemies on the battlefield. As Jojo's mother said to Jojo: at your age, you should climb a tree, fall, and enjoy the romance of life, rather than carrying a rifle in your arms.

In the film, Jojo vilified the Jews and painted them as strange animals. Jojo expressed his hatred for the Jews. He painted the Jews as strange animals for the Jewish girls to see. Jojo thought that this would mean that he was superior. In Hitler's words, the Jews were considered inferior, and the purebred Germans were considered those of a noble race. As the storyline progressed, Jojo and the Jewish Girls gradually accepted each other after spending some time together, and Jojo even had a crush on the Jewish girl in the end. Even after Germany was captured, Jojo lied to Jewish girls to keep them safe. The lie is the German victory. Although it was a fragile lie, the Jewish girl quickly saw it through with it. The Jojo vilifying the Jews is one of the alienation of human beings [8]. Jojo's change and growth can be reflected in many ways, whether it is the ultimate tie of shoelaces for Elsa, or representing the love of the "butterfly symbol" in Jojo's room quietly appearing.

2.2 The loss of a harmonious relationship and The nothingness of the meaning of life

Normally, ordinary children do not have strong hostility towards unmalicious strangers. Jojo found his mother hiding a sheltered Jewish girl her age. He said that the Jews are hybrids of animals. He thought without thinking that he had said them correctly. He was subtly brainwashed by the Nazis to say this sentence. A 10-year-old could say, how the Hitler group hated Jews.

Jojo often imagined Hitler as his friend, as if he were schizophrenic. He had often fancied that Hitler had often encouraged and enlightened him. This state comes from people being brainwashed by Nazism and being tense in life during the war. After the United States entered Germany and won, he kicked Hitler hard to make him fly out of the window, and the fundamental reason was that he did not need to accept Nazi brainwashing and Hitler's high rule, and his spirit was completely liberated. By this time, his subconscious mind was unified. He was no longer schizophrenic. A 10-year-old child, who can not enjoy the romance of childhood, to hold a rifle on the battlefield, was seriously inculcated in militarism and lost the original meaning of life that children should have. Hitler's image is exactly the product of the Nazi thought in Jojo's mind, is the Nazi German ideology, is the product of the German state machine. In the film, the director overcomes the representative of Hitler by describing the kindness of human nature, showing that the Nazi thought is an anti-human and irrational thought [8, 9].

Once, Jojo refused to kill the rabbit, and rushed into the woods to avoid ridicule at his incompetence, but imagined that Hitler encouraged him to throw grenades. After being injured by a grenade, Hitler praised his thumb. He did not see Hitler and did not know what a bad man he was. He broke out with Hitler because of the prevailing of

Nazism, when the Nazis in Germany thought Hitler was supreme and said long live Hitler. He was not worth doing it. The Nazi brainwashing caused his inner nothingness, and he falsely placed his spirit on a political demon.

Hitler was just a pervert murderer, forming the State Secret Police, and all lived under Hitler's high pressure. Hitler persecuted and slaughtered Jews. For example, the Jewish girl secretly protected by Jojo's mother is one of the persecuted and not found killed. The Jewish girl can only live in the dark in the upstairs wall all day and can come out comfortably to take a bath. Then Hitler persecuted the Germans who took a different attitude from him later. For example, Jojo's mother, who is not Jewish, was hanged in the square by an anti-fascist man, conveniently placing inspirational signs on the tables on the street.

3 A strong metaphor

One of the most important ways of expressing English literature is using the metaphor. A seeming understatement shot of Jojo rabbit is significant. That was the scene when Jojo's mother was hanged. The shot is only a pair of feet hanging in midair in clean red shoes, and Jojo's shocked mirror expression. Red contrasts with the yellow clothes of the Nazi soldiers showing that red is a relatively bright color. Red is a symbol of youth, lively, and a symbol of vitality. Clean represents Jojo's mother's yearning for a better life. The red leather shoes that appeared when Jojo's mother was hanged are a symbol of Nazi cruelty. A woman with a flowery youth was executed by the Nazis without mercy. She was in Hitler-pressed Germany, but anti-Nazi. Until her death, she still did not forget the thinking of the future life, the yearning for the future. Until her death, she still did not forget the thinking of the future life, the yearning for the future. The whole of Germany was made up so much that all the people were soldiers. Children lose their childlike innocence, just like a killing machine, with no fear of death, a walking dead. Both are a metaphor for the ferocity of the Nazis [10]. It makes you feel angry.

4 Personalized characters

Hitler, who is created by Jojo, is different from that Hitler in people's imagination. He is not an unpardonable sin. In contrast, he is funny, humorous, and even adorable sometimes. In the late Nazis period, the environment in the country is stressful and depressive. The imaginative Hitler played a very powerful role in activating the atmosphere. He always appears with funny action and a humorous speaking style, which is like a rainbow on a cloudy day. He helps Jojo indirectly and teaches Jojo how to deal with people who hurt him. When Jojo sees the Jewish girl for the first time, Hitler shares his advice to Jojo, telling him how to treat this uninvited guest. He thinks Jewish is trying to use powers on Jojo in order to control his mind, so he wants Jojo to use his mind to fight back on the Jewish. In the movie, this is an interesting communication between Jojo and Hitler, for it shows us the innocent thoughts of a child. In the part near the climax of the movie, Jojo and his mother were having dinner together. Jojo's mother feels happy at that time because the war might end soon. Jojo and his mother

sit on two sides of the table, and Hitler sits between them. This implies Jojo is looking at the war from a different standpoint than his mother. Hitler sits in the middle of the table, looking exactly like a dividing line between the mother and her son. A few minutes later, he felt embarrassed and leave, which means that Jojo's standpoint was beginning to slacken.

The girl named Elsa is a Jewish. Because of her identity, she has to hide in the loft of Jojo's house to survive. When Jojo sees her in the first time, she is hiding in the cupboard. Although she looks very dirty and messy, there was caution and determination in her eyes that was not appropriate for her age. Elsa isn't flustered when Jojo sees her, and she even begins to tease the naïve Jojo. From a communication between her and Jojo, we can know she has a boyfriend who is fighting in the resistance at that time. She believes that her boyfriend will come back to rescue her and take her to Paris. She longed for an early end to the war. Before Jojo's mother died, some Gestapo agents come to Jojo's house for researching. In this part, Elsa shows us her composure and resourceful mind when facing an emergency. She pretends to be Jojo's sister and answers each of the questions calmly, and her leisurely expression makes the German officer can't find any flaw. It's really impressive. After Jojo's mother died, she stays with Jojo and gives him comfort, because Jojo is as lonely as her now. She knows the feeling of losing a family. Throughout the film, Lisa uses her action to change Jojo's stereotypes about Jews, and gradually became Jojo's important family member to some extent. She told Jojo about all her experiences, which inspired Jojo's love and affection, and brought warmth to Jojo.

Jojo's mother is a great woman in this film. She is a member of the German Resistance, propagandizing anti-Nazi activities underground. She goes to do a secret mission during the day and goes home to take care of Jojo at night. She even hides a Jewish girl at home in such a dangerous environment. Every day she works at the risk of her life, but she never shows her tired and helpless feelings to her son, so Jojo knows nothing about her mother's work. When her son falls asleep, she will go to see Elsa and talk with her about the war. Jojo's mother tells Elsa about many wonderful things that she should be doing at seventeen years old. She wants to use this way to encourage Elsa to not give up on survival and look forward to the future. One day, when Jojo's mother and her son walking on the street, they saw resistance soldiers hanging by the Nazis.

Jojo's first instinct was to look away, but his mother turned his head, and said seriously: 'What did they do?' 'What they could.' She knew that she could not directly accuse her son of Nazi tyranny. She could only present him with powerful facts and let him experience them for himself. In the face of Jojo complaining about things to his father, she still can dissolve it in her way. During a dinner she had with her son, Jojo told her: 'I wouldn't expect you to understand. If my father was here, he'd get it.' When Jojo's mother heard this, she didn't punish her son for her anger, instead, she wore her husband's Nazi uniform, dabbed her beard in mantel ash, and served as a formidable father figure of Jojo's lost longing. In this way, she patched up her relationship with her son quickly. Jojo's mother is an anti-war character in this movie. Although she doesn't have much time to stay with Jojo, she still wants to use her words and actions to guide Jojo, preventing him from being brainwashed by the Nazis and deeply affecting Jojo's thoughts.

Captain K is a German officer. The first impression he gives to the audience may be undisciplined and doesn't care about anything. However, if we look closely, we can find many thoughts in this man's heart that are completely contrary to his appearance. At the beginning of the movie, Captain K was giving a speech to the children. He was slovenly dressed, with an open collar, and looked very scattered. In his speech, he even said, "There isn't much hope in that's winning this war." At night, children gathered around the fire and threw Jewish books into it. The director gives Captain K a close-up here, and we can see that Captain K's expression is not very good, as if he hates doing so. In the middle of the movie, Jojo's mother died, and some Gestapo agents went to Jojo's house. At this time, Captain K comes to Jojo's home too. His arrival infers Jojo's mother's death, and Captain K wants to protect Jojo. When Gestapo agents began to search Jojo's sister's room, Captain Herman Deertz asked Elsa to bring him her paper. At this time, Captain K, who had been following behind, deliberately stood in front of the agents and got Jojo's sister's ID card before Captain Herman Deertz got it. When Elsa told them Jojo's sister's date of birth, she said the wrong date, but Captain K didn't expose Elsa. Instead he protected the girl. At the end of the movie, the German army was defeated, and Jojo and Captain K were being held with other captives. Captain K told Jojo about his actual thought, that his mother is an actual good person. Then, he took off Jojo's coat, yelled that Jojo is Jewish, and helped Jojo to escape. From here, we can know Captain K has a conscience. In fact, throughout the movie, there are many details told us the characteristic of Captain K. It is implied in the movie that K and his deputy are in a homoerotic relationship, which is forbidden at that time. Because of this special secret relationship, K may be able to identify with Jews. He fought as hard as he could in the war until the end because he wanted to do his duty as a soldier to protect his country, not to fight for the Nazi regime. Maybe he, like Jojo's mother, loves the country deeply but does not support the government.

5 Conclusion

Jojo, just a 10 years boy, was trained like the rest of his peers. The purpose of being trained was to be trained into a killing machine to maintain the Hitler group. The training did not fit his age. Moreover, his mindless words of hatred against the Jews also showed that his thoughts did not fit his young age. Movies are full of his immaturity everywhere. He is still in a pure childhood, innocence has not disappeared. The film has absurdist plots and scenes everywhere. The film depicts the hatred of the Nazis, but it vaguely reveals that the individual Nazis like Captain K still have their own humanity. This film was originally a comedy, the rhythm is clear and light, but there is a light sadness, that gives people a meaningful taste. Although the story only focuses on the little boy JOJO, it also lets us see the inner thoughts of kosome people around JOJO, reflecting the silent resistance of some people with conscience against the Nazi feudal rule. It describes the existence of kindness and beauty under the background of that time in a gentle and healing way, and uses black humor to counter irony and express anti-war thoughts. In the movie we can see that there are many anti-Nazi people like Jojo's mother. They were secretly rebellious, but they did not love their country. As

Jojo's mother says in the movie: 'I love my country. It's the war I hate. It's pointless and stupid, and the sooner we have peace, the better.'

References

1. B. Franz, *Jojo Rabbit*, *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 49, 2019, pp. 34-36.
2. J. Buchleiter, *Film Review—Jojo Rabbit* (Dir: Taika Waititi, 2019), *Not Even Past: Digital & Film*, 2020.
3. C. W. Lippert, *Snake Mind, Wolf Body, Panther Courage: Jojo Rabbit as a Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity*, Utah State University, 2021.
4. R. Motl, *Jewish Representation in Modern Film and Television*, 2020.
5. S. Reji, A. Nandha, *Carnavalesque subversion and the narrative gaze of children: Taika Waititi's Boy (2010), Hunt for the Wilderpeople (2016), and Jojo Rabbit (2019)*, *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, no. 1, 2022, pp. 2-16.
6. N. Broth, A. Weinstein, *Comedy out of Tragedy: A Jojo Rabbit Screenplay Analysis*, 2022.
7. S. Pillai, P. M. Kurup, S. Chellarian, *War And Psyche: An Examination Of Psychoanalytic Theory In The Movies "Jojo Rabbit" And "Dunkirk"*, *Annals of the Romanian Society for Cell Biology*, 2021, pp. 17692-17697.
8. R. B. Janna, *A disclosure of sarcasm in " Jojo Rabbit" movie by Taika waititi*, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, 2021.
9. G. Gemünden, *Brecht in Hollywood: Hangmen Also Die and the Anti-Nazi Film*, *The Drama Review*, no. 4, 1999, pp. 65-76.
10. J. W. Moser, *Detectives in a Criminal Regime: Krimis in Nazi Comedy Film*, *Colloquia Germanica*, no. 2, 2013, pp. 154–161.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

