

The Expression of the Absurd in Attack on Titan

Yixu Liang^{1,a,*}

¹Zhengzhou No.47 High School, 450000, China

a. 2287692772@qq.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: This paper aims to analyze Eren Yeager in Japan manga Attack on Titan from the aspect of the absurdism of Camus. In their work, Eren Yeager demonstrates a series of actions and thoughts while he realizes his objective. When he does this, his actions share a significant content of similarity that is also mirrored in Sisyphus in the Greek myth, the same evidence of the absurd. In this article, I argue that Eren Yeager can also be considered an example of the wild.

Keywords: anime, absurd, Attack on Titan

1. Introduction

Attack on Titan is a Japanese anime in which people's freedom is taken away by man-eating titans, and people have to live behind three ramparts. This essay examines the leading character Eren Yeager's physical and mental activities, his desire for freedom, and his action to obtain them. Furthermore, this paper analyzes Eren Yeager's ideology from the aspect of the absurdism of Camus. This paper tries to explain Eren Yeager's behavior from the content of the absurdism.

2. What Is Absurdism?

Before we try to analyze the protagonist's absurd action in Attack on Titan, we first must understand what is ridiculous or have a frame of this concept. One thing to remember is that many people may confuse absurdism with existentialism and nihilism. However, they share some similarities in some aspects, which is that the three give their effort

but are eventually different philosophies. Nihilists believe life is a meaningless black hole because death is inevitable and will take away everything we build. Try to imagine your life, how good it is, and try to recall your experiences, that delightful memory. Identify your family and friends and how they support you at your low. Try to the one you love, how you met, and your first date. How about your achievements, for example, the first prize you won in one grade? Or those fantastic works you made at college? Now let's imagine that these experiences are gone like wave crushed sand castle; how frustrating. That is why nihilists believe life is void because death will destroy everything. Existentialists share a similar point of view; they also think that life is meaningless. However, the difference that distinguishes them from nihilists is that they do not consider the vacant a lonely fact. They turn toward searching for a replacement, for example, to solve the existentialism crisis; some people might choose to give themselves to religion or construct an individual's meaning based on free will. In a way, existentialism can be considered optimism. Absurdism can be seen as a tragedy because advocates for caught up between reality and fantasy,

which tend to be contradictory.

2.1. History of Absurd

The history of the absurd is simple and short. Ridiculous has its origins in Søren Kierkegaard. In 1843, in the work *Fear and Trembling*, God asked Abraham to kill his son Isaac to complete the sacrifice. As Abraham is about to kill Isaac, an angel stops him. [1] It can be regarded that Abraham's action is based on absurdism, in which between disobeying his belief or giving out his own son's life, he chooses to follow the demand of god. Refusing sacrifice Isaac means that Abraham's belief was shaken at its foundation, which would bring more incredible pain than losing his child's life.

In 1846, Søren Kierkegaard mentioned the absurd in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript: What, then, is ridiculous?* The wild is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time; God has come into existence, been born, and has grown up. etc., has come into existence precisely as an individual human being, indistinguishable from any other human being, in as much as all immediately recognizable is pre-Socratic paganism and, from the Jewish point of view, is idolatry [2].

And in 1849, in Journals, Søren Kierkegaard further discussed the absurd: What is ridiculous? It is, as may quite easily be seen, that I, a rational being, must act in a case where my reason, my powers of reflection, tell me: you can just as well do the one thing as the other, that is to say where my logic and thinking say: you cannot act and yet here is where I have to act... The Absurd, or to work by the absurd, is to act upon faith... I must act, but reflection has closed the road, so I take one of the possibilities and say: This is what I do; I cannot do otherwise because I am brought to a standstill by my powers of reflection [3].

Albert Camus is known as an absurdist philosopher and probably the most famous one. Although the existence of absurd mirrored in almost every work of Camus, that was indirect. In the work *Myth of Sisyphus* [4], Camus elaborates on the concept of the absurd. Camus believes that the wild is a conflict between fantasy and reality. To be more specific, we can use the example of Sisyphus, in which in the story, Sisyphus was punished by gods that forced him to push a boulder up to the top of a mountain, but the boulder rolled down when every time its bout to near the top. Such an action could be a torment for most people. However, Camus believes that Sisyphus is happy. Camus thinks Sisyphus is combating the absurd by pushing the boulder to the top.

3. Why Can Eren Yeager Be Considered Absurd?

To analyze Eren Yeager's ideology, I divided Eren Yeager's thought into two stages: before and after Eren sees the ocean. Because seeing the sea represents a fundamental transformation of Eren.

The most noticeable character of Eren Yeager is free will. There are three giant ramparts on Paradis Island that keeps titans away from people. When people feel safe and satisfied about their life inside ramparts, Eren doesn't. He argues that they imprison the three ramparts and wants to get out one day to see deserts and the ocean, which he had only seen in books. I believe this is where the absurd first appears; the situation fits the context of Camus's definition of the wild. The will of Eren wants to go out, and the reality is that they are imprisoned in the ramparts because of the presence of titans. Titans are man-eating creatures, about a few meters to ten meters high. When Eren says, he wants to go out, which means that the titans need to be eliminated, which seems absurd. However, at the story's beginning, Eren has not linked his wish to go out with eliminated titans. He generates that idea when the Colossal Titan and the Armored Titan break Wall Maria, the titan break-in, and one titan eats Eren's mother. That is when Eren Yeager decides to eliminate every titan, his wish to visit the world outside, and the hatred of titans unified. By eliminating all the titans, Eren believes he shall gain freedom. However, in the following story, this idea gets

disproved.

People living on Paradis Island believe they are the only human left in the world. Still, when they discover that the Colossal Titan and the Armored Titan are transformed by human beings who do not live on Paradis Island, they realize that Paradis Island people may not be the only human in the world. Reiner Braun and Bertholdt Hoover, the Armored Titan, and the Colossal Titan from a country called Marley.

Marley is not the only country; there are several more countries in the world, but all the countries share one common opinion: they hate Eldian people, and people from Paradis Island also belong to that race. Because centuries ago, Eldian people colonized other countries and enslaved them.

When Eren Yeager discovers this fact and realizes the hatred between the Eldian people and the world is unsolvable, he becomes frustrated. In chapter ninety of Attack on Titan, people on Paradis Island finally eliminate every single titan. Everyone is supposed to feel free, and Eren can finally see the ocean. However, when others rejoice for the fresh sensation of the sea, Eren says:

“On the other side of the walls is the ocean. And on the other side of the ocean is freedom. That's what I always believed. But I was wrong. Its enemies are on the other side of the ocean. This is all exactly as I saw in my old man's memories. Right? Those enemies on the other side of here, if we kill them all, does that mean we'll be free?”

This is because Eren Yeager realized that he could never achieve absolute freedom; something permanently restricts him. At first, he thought it was the ramparts that bound him, then were the titans. Eventually, he found out that it was the whole world. He used to believe that after he killed every titan, he could see the ocean and have freedom, the sea has been a symbol of freedom to him, but when he saw the truth of the world, he realized the space he had been chasing doesn't exist. Which undoubtedly fits the definition that Camus coined for absurd.

In later stories, Eren Yeager decides to wipe out the population in the world except for people in Paradis Island because he believes that this is the only way for him and his friends to have freedom. However, his friends turn against him because such an act is a genocide that cannot be tolerated. One thing to highlight is that during that moment, Eren has already gained the power of the Founding Titan, which is capable of controlling every Eldia people, but he did not choose to control his friends not fight against him; he gave his friends freedom to stop him, which is also absurd. Absurd is a sense of uneasiness, violating common sense. We can see how Camus described the fantastic from another he presents in *Myth of Sisyphus*:

“If I see a man armed only with a sword attack a group of machine guns, I shall consider his act absurd [4].”

In Attack of Titan, the object of the absurd is not Eren only, but his friends. Eren has hundreds and thousands of Colossal Titans as his army; each is sixty meters tall with high-temperature steam surrounding them. But his friends have a squad with only a few people and a lack of a weapon. Eren and his friends can fit into the example of Camus for absurd. Because under such circumstances, Eren's friends lack enough power to fight against Eren, yet they still decide to do so. And Eren can brainwash his friends by using the power of the Founding Titan, but he decides not to do so and gives his friends the freedom to stop him. The ending follows along with the path of the absurd and ends with Eren's death.

4. The Absurdity of the Attack Titan

An additional example of absurdity in Attack on Titan is the Attack Titan. In Attack on Titan, nine different titans have distinguishable appearances and unique superpowers. In the former discussion, we mentioned the Colossal Titan, the Armored Titan, and the Founding Titan; they are all part of the Nine Titans. The Colossal Titan has tremendous size, and during the transformation, the owner can create a gigantic explosion that can function as a tactical bomb; the Armored Titan can create an

impenetrable hard shell that covers the body; the Founding Titan is the most powerful of all the nine titans, its owner can control every Eldian people, including their memory and gene. And the Attack Titan has been called the freest titan because it is the only titan that the Founding Titan cannot control.

Most of the Nine Titans can receive memories from past inheritors, but the Attack Titan can receive memories from both past and future inheritors, which is part of why it has been called the freest titan. However, is this ability truly represent freedom?

Holders of the Attack Titan believe that this titan is free and independent; no people or thing can control or make him obey power. But what is dramatic is that in the late story, we discover that Eren Yeager has been affecting the holders of the Attack of Titan. The story of Attack on Titan begins with Eren Yeager's mother getting eaten by a Pure Titan, which raises the hatred titans of young Eren. Still, in chapter one hundred twenty to one hundred twenty-one, when Eren and Zeke Coordinate, they later find out that it was Eren himself using the power of the Founding Titan to control the pure titan to eat his mother, which successfully leads Eren to generate the idea of eliminating all the titan. In another case, when Grisha Yeager was going to seize the power of Founding Titan, but once he realized the holder of the Founding Titan was just a child, he emerged the idea to give up because he was a doctor, his conscience did not allow him to conduct such brutal action. It was also Eren who was using the power of the Attack Titan to convince Grisha to take control of the Founding Titan and to kill other innocent people, that it is all for the greater good.

In these cases, we can conclude that the so-called freest titan: the Attack Titan, maybe not be like what this name tells us, gratis. This titan does not have free will, and the idea of fighting for freedom also does not exist. The ability to see the future can be regarded as a curse or a prison that locks holders up and force them to fight for an unclear future. The holders of the Attack Titan can't ignore creating an independent future outside of the fixed one because it is easier for them to follow the conclusion instead of creating one. We cannot conclude that each holder of the Attack Titan is affected by Eren Yeager, but undoubtedly two former holders: Eren Kruger and Grisha Yeager.

The absurdity in the character Attack Titan is that its most prominent character becomes the reason for its absurdity. Holders of the Attack Titan have been fighting for freedom, but Eren has been playing the game all the time, secretly affecting them and making them believe that everything they have done is of their own will. The truth is they do not have freedom from the start. They are like Sisyphus working on an unreachable mission.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Eren Yeager and the Attack Titan in the manga Attack on Titan demonstrate a series of characteristics and actions familiar to the frame of Camus's absurdism in specific contents. By analyzing the story from the aspect of Camus's absurd philosophy, we can understand these two characters from an unusual angle and create a brand new space to interpret the two characters' actions and ideologies. Since Eren Yeager shares a great degree of similarity to the example of the absurd of Camus, this interpretation is reasonable and why Attack on Titan can rewrite the stereotype people have for manga. The philosophical element in work has made this work beyond to another level, not just for entertainment purposes.

Reference

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