

THE WOMB OF HOPE AND LAUGHTER AGAINST MAN-HATRED: A FARCICAL ABSURDIST PORTRAYAL OF THIRD REICH IN JOJO RABBIT

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Abstract:

Man in the plural sense, often exhibited a centrifugal relationship with his very own self irrespective of expressing companionship and we-ness to his fellow beings. This self-centred consciousness was not limited to the individual but passed onto the ethnic clan sprouting seeds of hatred towards his own species by neglecting the inferior sex in the name of gender/ ethnic mapping. This segregation was experienced in its peaks during the era of Hitler in Germany, where he dreamt of 'purifying' the racial pollution from the soil of Germany and presenting it to the Aryan blood. The very idea of Hitler and his doctrines shrills terror in our nerves. On the contrary, in the film Jojo Rabbit, one gets to view an absurdist representation of the Hitler youth; promising 'hope' towards humanity irrespective of their ethnic/ gender identity. The film becomes a touch stone in constructing a new take on the conflicted pure and non- pure Aryan master race in Hitler's Germany through the sensible representation of farce in the absurd logic of humanism injected to the selected characters in the film; where love snakes ethnic tensions blurring the impurity promising a womb full off seeds of hope and not man- hatred for the near future.

Key Concepts: Inferior Sex, Gender, Ethnicity, Humanism, Farce, Man, Man- hatred, Hope, Laughter, Absurdity, Identity, Construct, Consciousness,

Let everything happen to you
Beauty and terror
Just keep going
No feeling is final.

-Rainer Maria Rilke

"A Game of Chess", as T. S Eliot said, life is a game of chess. It is not the black or the white that defines your moves, the king or the queen neither but the caged thoughts that one carries within the self and so with the societal order. And anything can happen to you at any point of time, for no feeling is final; the art of the binaries have been castrated from the episteme and nothing comes either in black or white, but only in the grey, which is sublimely beyond predictions and expectations; likely leading to the snowed path of hope, hidden in the deepest core. One needs great imagination and patience to clear this heavy snow road from the rational sphere to look differently onto the black and white baggage that all of us carry to generation after generations. Scintillatingly, the Polenesian- Jewish- New Zealand director Taika Waititi through his wonder quest and anti-hate satire Jojo Rabbit envisages the audience to find comedy in an unusual and weird situation, the waning days of the Third Reich, the official Nazi designation for the regime in Germany from 1933 to 1945. At this precise point in history, the modern day intolerance is being challenged through the lens of a period piece comedy with a greater heart. Adapted from Christine Leunen's 2008 novel Caging Skies, Jojo Rabbit is a wonderful dark

comedic satire that attempts to depict a totalitarian, fascist regime through a child's viewpoint, as pure as the womb of a woman rarely portrayed on the silver screen. The novel when placed with the film is far darker in tone and ends in a much different manner than the film. The film is a boldest experiment in telling the coming of age of a German boy brought up by a strong widow mother, navigating in an ideologically confusing and capricious world and the unexpected courage of the two women in going against the Nazi.

The film foregrounds a ten year- old named Johannes Betzler (Roman Griffin Davis), an ardent and idealistic and yet misguided Hitler youth during World War II. The boy lives with his mother, Rosie (Scarlett Johansson) who is so concrete and stern in her ideology, fearing no one, not even Hitler, and performs her duty to the motherland by working towards a new world of hope. But the young boy is visited and captivated by a fictitious friend and mentor, a cartoonish adaptation of Adolf Hitler (Taika Waititi). The film can be perceived as the world's weird memories of pro-Nazi propaganda, made in pursuit of success in a farcical representation on screen. The satirical dialogues and the depictions that one encounters in the film propel the viewer to think of the historical facts from a different perspective. The fascist hegemony depicted in the film is highly chaotic where pro-Nazi propaganda influences even the youngest one in the society. The film presents Johannes Betzler's ardent admiration for Adolf Hitler and his concept of Aryan supremacy. Imbibing the Nazi notion of supremacy, the boy has festooned his room with profusion of pro-Nazi images and posters. This influence does not end with the cornucopia of Hitlarian memorabilia, but it extends to the greater psychological complexity of being visited by the imaginary acquaintance, Adolf Hitler, who appears before the boy at moments of emotional crisis to counsel him and buck up his courage against all sorts of idiosyncrasies and assuaging all sorts of humiliations he encounters. It is quite ironical and really had to believe that, a boy of just ten years calls out for a dictator like Hitler to console him and mentor him in the right direction. It deconstructs the worldly outlook to the aura of Hitler. And the film succeeds in presenting Hitler as an ally instead of a foe. This deconstruction is deferred to the imagination of the ideological apparatuses instilled in the conscience of every individual. This deconstruction of the huge metaphor of Hitler to a friend in deed, living in the world of innocence, completely alienated from the pages of history, is the brain child of Waititi; he conceived this image of Hitler to the best possible perfection. But, the question that still remains as a black spot is the violence that the Nazi men carries towards the Jewish clan. The appearance of this fictitious character on screen often becomes a farcical reflection on the dominant ideology that Hitler and his Nazi confrères propagated. In Waititi's first appearance in the film as the typical Hitler, urges the young mentee Jojo to "Hail" him more confidently to be an enthusiastic new member of the Hitler Youth Brigade despite of his multiple failed attempts in gaining the courage. But, his intimidate, rather the innocent behaviour of Jojo, which is so feminine with full of passion, care, and affection is his innate quality that reawakens towards the conclusion of the film. It is this positive attitude that he had inherited from his mother, which helps him to regain his scattered and ambivalent self and fall in love with humanity, irrespective of their cultural differences, because he learned that humanism do not function on the grounds of human- hatred/ ethnographic divisions or gender discrimination; blurring this separation and living with oneness is the biggest achievement of humanity. The very scene also remains as the first testimony to the film's combination of extreme goofball humour and sarcasm with grim and earnest visualization of the terrors of German Reich's genocidal tyranny through a campily over-the-top Hitlarian caricature

played by Waititi himself, plays more like an absurdly exaggerated campy horror comedic fantasy.

Jojo's desire to be uniformed and privileged in the light hearted tone of a scout in Fuhrer Hitler Youth troop remains as the sole dream of his existence. It is not just the desire of Jojo alone, instead it becomes the basic grooming of the ego of the Hitlererian order that the national consciousness was culturing on. The boys at a very young age got fascinated to the Nazi ideology of pure race, building up hatred to the blue eyed men in the parallel run. This fascination is too innocent for they hardly knew the political power construction residing deeper in the womb. Every ism had its own personal agenda which very soon transforms as a political motive inspiring thousands; but the majority of the followers of these political framework are always kept in the dark and they hardly knew what/ why they are fighting for. Mostly the control of the heart and the mind are sold to the ringmaster. Similarly, the Nazi army constructed a pseudo identity of bravery and courage in equivalence to the ability to kill and get killed for the sake of nation. Serving the nation and a portion of its people by disturbing the national equilibrium was the new doctrine that attracted the young mind. A kid like Jojo, who is too young to differentiate the binaries of good and bad; reckon the politics of the power structure, easily gets wooed to the glorified recognition that he could get by joining the dominating force of the nation. It is equally important to notice that, the recruitment is not just limited young boys, but the so called inferior sex is also given a chance to serve the nation; it is too early to sigh that the Nazi's were too broadminded in giving the girl child a chance to potentially serve her nation, and not delineating her in the name of discrimination. But the truth is really hard, the inferior sex is colonised in the troop. They are being nurtured to nurse and breed, and not to fight. On the one hand, the film portrayed the courageous women folk Rosie and the Jewish Refugee living in Rosie's shelter; on the other side, we as audience witness the silenced women folk in the Nazi camp being tamed to serve the phallic order.

Hitler Youth is trained and led by a trio of adult Nazi Hitler comrades, Captain Klenzendorf (Sam Rockwell), Fred Finkel (Alfie Allen), and Fraulein Rahm (Rebel Wilson), who explicate extreme virulent genocidal tendency among the newly recruited scouts through their hegemonic training that attributes hatred towards the Jews and initiates them into the monstrous ritual of cruelty that acclaims the in appropriation of the famous war dictum by Roman lyric poet Horace in his Ode "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" (It is sweet and fitting to die for the homeland). The malignant Nazist regime taught their youth to kill for the Fuhrer. The film bears a scene where the boy Jojo is asked to take hold of a rabbit and snap its neck to prove his courage before his fellow scouts. This scene is impregnated with a lot of beautiful ambiguities. On the one hand, it tests the cold heartedness, and the commitment that the Hitler Youth possess to contribute when the situation demands; on the other side, the way of slaughtering an innocent creature like a rabbit, stigmatises the degree of cruelty cultivated in the young minds in ripping of a poor soul just because he/ she is ethnically different from them. In the film, contrary to the demands of the adult Hitler Youth, he lets the rabbit to escape asking it to run away. This scene permeates a sense of hope and security to the society and the world that humanity with its innate quality of innocence and empathy are not at the verge of moral deterioration; but remains as an ember deep within the person for the right moment to make a definite choice regarding ones identity and dignity as human. This image could be seen as the elixir that could be extracted from this visual treatment that can mould a generation with better vision concerning oneself and fellow

beings. The innate innocence and empathy that Jojo still possesses despite his obsession with Nazi precept of racial hygiene and principle of racial cleansing encompass the saga that humanity can still resort to a sense of self that will redeem them from anomalousness amidst all sorts of sterility and stagnation. At the same time, this invites a lot of humiliation for Jojo from the macho men in the camp, for being timid like a girl and failing to sprain and bleed the poor rabbit highlighting the stigma of male dominance.

Jojo's inherent self and innocence that he frivolously try to get rid emanates from the inordinate and eccentric idealization of Fuhrer Hitler resulting from the Nazi hegemony that devoured the moral consciousness of a generation that silently consented the genocide in the world history. Jojo remains as a representative of a large group of Germans who define themselves as Nazi Germans. But the unexpected digression occurs at a point where Jojo demystifies his mother in his encounter with his mother's real sense of self and worth as a human. This point could be seen as the beginning of a war within the boy, a war within the innate human innocence and fascination for Nazi ideology. The boy starts to know the world through his mother's perception. He starts to value the morals that she was trying to teach him. Jojo slowly started to drift his desire of moving away from his mother, who was not just his mother but a strong independent woman who fulfilled the duties and responsibilities of a father, mother, and a true patriot.

While attending the Hitler Youth Training Camp, the boy Jojo is seriously injured in a grenade mishap resulting from his clumsy effort backed by his imaginary companion, Hitler. This accident makes Jojo look different from the way that he appeared initially. It de-figured him, photographing his very own self to mirror like an outsider or a stranger from that of his previous image. This scene calls out to the directorial brilliance of Waititi, where he very cleverly deconstructs and reconstructs the scars of losing one's true image and self by falling prey to the false consciousness of the hegemonic interest; the continuity shot includes Rosie's reaction towards the mishap and very ironically portrays the element of fear donning the captain in the light of Jojo's mother and her action breaking all the codes of patriarchal domination and stoutness. This entrapment digs out the strange you, envisioning yourself different from the rest of the humanity. It scars not the body but the synchronic and diachronic existence of the mankind in its entirety. It fumes up a battle with 'ego' and the 'super-ego' resulting in the castration of the individual's symbolic order. It shocks the humane consciousness and transforms the conflicting self, where one lacks any of the orders, bringing up existential angst.

The injury relegated him to noncombat such as putting up pro-Nazi posters through the streets. Having deprived of his opportunity to serve Fuhrer as a comrade in Hitler Youth brigade, the boy Jojo has plenty of time to spend all alone at home. Alarmed by a sound in the upstairs, the boy is driven to an investigative mode and he discerns that his mother Rosie has sheltered a Jewish teenage girl, Elsa (Thomasin McKenzie) who was a friend of Inge, Jojo's late sister. This discovery scene has been depicted on screen in complete and absolute naturality as if the unravelling of something that is so precious and unbeknownst to the boy; reckoning the identity to which he really belongs by escaping the clutches of narrow minded eccentricity.

The boy's inculcated hatred for Jews is altered by a sense of meaning and value for life that rejuvenated from the discovery of Elsa from his upstairs which tampers his preoccupation with the Nazi ideology. This could be evidently seen in Jojo's first discovery of Elsa in the cellar upstairs which scares him and he believes it to be a ghost. The situations made him not to accept

her as a normal person. The same way, a mirage of hegemonic doctrines, weird and eerie, are established as authentic and challenging the essence of humanism and its root within society. The moment one encounters a deviation from the major concerns of the hegemony, the first conflict happens within oneself. As in the case of Jojo, the first war he had to make was with himself and later he overpowers his own inclination against being humane. The key figure who fosters Jojo to transcend himself from a person of malign fanaticism to that of elevated humanity is his mother Rosie who ventures and takes risks to be humane in a political turbulence and turmoil resulting from extreme assertion of ethnic identity. Both Rosie and Elsa are the true representation of the false recognition of appropriating woman as the 'weak sex', or the 'empty vessel'. They appear to be bold and courageous than the man in the phallic order. The power of Rosie is clearly narrated in the scene where the captain of the Hitler Youth is scared while Rosie visits wounded Jojo. Her promptness in attacking the captain in the presence of the strong Hitler youth explicitly highlights her lack of fear. It also showcases how being a woman, Rosie is different from the Hitler youth woman recruited to nurse and reproduce. Elsa also metaphorically diminish the stereotyped patriarchy's castrated woman by breaking the symbolic order. Rosie and Elsa revolutionises the mainstream ideology of castration by questioning the phallic man.

The mother figure holds tremendous significance in the life of Jojo as a real mentor who lets her son to encounter the sense of being by leading a heroic life before her little boy Jojo. The culmination of the same grooming finally happens at a point where Jojo discovers the horrible truth of his mother Rosie's death by hanging at the gallows, an instance he recognises Rosie's body by merely spotting her shoes on Rosie's lifeless feet. This results in creating a new saga in the life of Jojo, a kind of rebirth from his old self to that of a humane self. Though it is quite painful for a spectator to look on to the orphaned Jojo, but this gory break sprouts the seeds of hope in the building generation promising to the efforts of Rosie and her fellow comrades, who were martyred for a noble cause. Rosie thus becomes a representative of the unheard polyphone until then, but her death created a drastic change in the attitude of Jojo, which was never attained while she lived. The reality of death strikes out the brutality of the real world and counts on to the phenomenological question of existence.

The deep humaneness that lies within Jojo makes him to be with Elsa keeping aside his stagnated ethnic ideology of Nazi regimes. The once Nazi Jojo, who used cruel means to crucify the Jew even in the caricature, is now free from the clutches of these evil ideologies that dominated his private thinking. In simple terms, the hardest of the experiences enlightened him to become a man of great virtue. The lonely and curious boy Jojo spends time with Elsa in the upstairs harvesting bits and pieces of information concerning her life. Despite the difference in age and ethnicity Jojo develops a sense of love and belongingness towards the Jewish girl Elsa. He does whatever he could do to make her life comfortable and happy. It is an expression of resistance that has its origin in his mother. Resistance permeates everywhere and Rosie extends herself beyond being privately averse to Nazis. The film presents Rosie as a combination of family woman with an active, albeit nonviolent resister within her. The best instance that defines the boldness and definite choice of Rosie could be seen as she and her son Jojo pass a gibbet in the town square where the so called branded ostensible traitors are hanged and she asks her 10 year old son to face the scene as if the expression of valourising their sacrifice. Jojo plainly enquires what they did and she gives the epic reply in a single breath "What they could," a response that defines Germans like Rosie and Captain Klezendorf who wish to bring a difference

in the world.

The culmination of this humane element is furnished through the character Captain Klezendorf, the man commissioned by the Nazi regime to train the Hitler Youth Scouts. The man who is entitled to transform lambs into savages, himself becomes the good shepherd who risks his life and finally sacrifices himself to save the little Jojo Rabbit through whom the panacea of hope for all the wickedness that has devoured the entire humanity. The timely intervention of the Captain in fact saves Elsa and the family of Jojo from being murdered publically for offering home to a Jewish girl. The Captain makes an astounding intervention risking his own life at such a spellbound situation to hide the real Jewish identity of Elsa. This sense of sacrifice is ultimately chiselled vigorously at the moment the Captain saves Jojo from the trails. In his attempt to free Jojo off the trail, Captain Klezendorf loses his own life. The sacrificial eloquence from an army captain is a testimonial of hope deep within humanity.

As the explication of hope threads itself into its fullest form, the plot of the film vigorously employ sarcasm as a means to criticize and project the extent to which totalitarianism really works. Fascism is rooted in the soil of hatred, where one man is brought against the other. It blooms itself into the ultimate scheme through its covert propaganda machineries of dehumanisation, demonization, and idolisation. These prevailing techniques virulently indoctrinate the majority to turn against the remaining ethnographic minority to be incarcerated as in the case of Jews during Hitler's regime in Germany. The cavalier attitude of the vast majority of the German people was the aftermath of successful proselytization of the Nazi agenda to blame the Jews for all the troubles and tribulations that the white German majority really encounters. This marked a period in world history which witnessed man becoming dehumanisingly demon, pervert enough to bring absolute destruction and anarchy in the world. The best means to confront and tackle such a Fascist tendency is to disarm the ideology with satire. The parochial and virulent ideologies that Nazi regime stabilized is nullified satirically by the veteran director Waititti. The directive principle behind the satirical endeavour to defy the nuances of Nazi propaganda constructed upon heap of lies and senselessness. The history of the land was mysteriously forged to support the selfish motives of the totalitarians. The same selfish and senseless motives behind the doctrine could be defused by the counter-farcical depiction deployed by the director. The recurring caricatured-comical figure Hitler in the film arbitrarily poignant in dealing with the demonic ritualization of ethnic segregation inherently works within any political degeneration of the past and the present. The past often holds a great role in building up the nationality, or a community. It is this shared historical narration that unites the folks in the name of a national identity. Therefore, the analeptic documentation should be highly sensible and intellectual with the wisdom of creating the nation of the today for the present is never free from the past and the present in a fraction of seconds becomes another history which never should affect the temporal recordings in any means. The film was released at particular point where various corners of the world is being drowned into the hegemonization of ethnic segregation politics that tarnishes the basic tenets of humanism and the concept of being humane that are central to human civilisation. The unique genre into which the film constructs itself often reminds the reader of the trend defining 1997 Italian Holocaust comedy-drama film *Life is Beautiful* directed and starred by the veteran film director Roberto Benigni who presented the horrors of Holocaust without visualising bloodshed on screen. The film redefined and introduced a new mode of depicting the physical and mental apathy of basic human existence involved in the

struggle for survival in Nazi concentration camps. Reinforcing the same strategy of Benigni, Taika Waititi through his film *Jojo Rabbit* attempts to authenticate an inherent human disgust and repulsion towards irrational man-hated humanism

Jojo's constant and energetic conversation with the imaginary friend Adolf Hitler vitalises and paves the way for tackling the issue of intolerant and parochial hegemony rooted in ethnographic favourism through poignant satire and lampooning. The mimicking of physical and ideological idiosyncrasies of historical figures and its related facts are incorporated into the film *Jojo Rabbit* to make this visual endeavour an instrument to propel humans to sense the innate elixir of humane. Waititi considers this satirical reproach would be an ideal means to bring a kind of purgation from the malign tyranny that encroaches the humanity as a whole. The master piece of exaggerated antics of hatred as a satirical rejection could be derived in its best eloquence from the boasting of Elsa on Jews as being the God's chosen people where as Jojo and his fellow Nazis "were chosen by a weak little man who cannot even grow a full moustache." Gestapo, the deadly political police of Nazi Germany, are also deployed as objects of humour by being caricatured both in appearance and in their dialogues as one of them, enthralled by the Nazi décor of Jojo's room, comments, "I wish more of our young boys had your blind fanaticism." This Holocaustian movie satirical exposes the intensity of propaganda that manipulates and alienates the young buds from being humane and further expounds the gradual cure from such iconic extreme genocidal hatred. Though the film is set in Nazi Germany, it has contemporary relevance with its subject matter. The ethnographic/ gender mapping is not something hidden from the today's world. It exists in the cultural consciousness awaiting to spark in the community to follow a riot. Women and the ethnically 'impure' are often victimized in the public eye. They lack a spatial existence and often gets backgrounded by the superior clan of men. It is highly important to extinguish not just the fire, but the root cause that begins the fumes. This silent fumes can endanger the whole of the mankind. Not just ethnographic or gender conflicts, but the political desire have enhanced a synchronized method of appropriation fissions in each and every sector and thus weakening the power of togetherness. This must be prevented to save the world and hopefully, humanity from the verge of extinction. The societal responsibilities invites our attention in creating a socially normal atmosphere where everybody/ every- body/ every ideology/ every practice, custom, belief should be given equal opportunity in expressing themselves to the world out there. Henceforth, the film appears to transcend beyond mere mocking of Adolf Hitler and Nazis since it is pointless and irrelevant. It possesses no threat absolutely. Sarcasm and satire are to be guided towards people who are in power, crazy and weird in their attitude and conceptualization of the world. The film is evidently an expression of sarcastic revolution against the practical complicity with genocidal ideology and practice existing in different corners of the world in different forms and patterns. The film centres around people who are humane deep within them like Rosie and other branded traitors who made attempts to bring a change through their blatant acts of resistance and self-sacrificing bravery. The thread of hope is woven together once again by exposing the presence of good and humane Nazis who at critical situations conducted their own forms of resistance and retaliation. Though the film is set in the past, visualises a political scenario that is still relevant even today. The film could be seen as anti-hate satire and not anti-Nazi Satire. This farcical representation of the Nazi Germany in favour of anti- ethnic disputes becomes the indicators of hope for the proleptic world. The parallel critique of the not much familiar version of Hitler and his consciousness imagined by the innocent young Jojo invites intellectual laughter

redeeming the wrong doings of the supreme Aryan culture. Therefore, the great blend of hope and laughter becomes the harbingers of eradicating man- to- man hatred, ethnographic violence; propagating the need to love each other and be kind to your fellow beings irrespective of digging up the roots of their origin and slaughtering each other in the name of the purity of race, clan, religion, sex, language anything that counts on to you being culturally different from the other and merging the boundaries of the world of innocence and experience in the name of humanity.

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