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For this essay I have chosen to discuss question 2: “If we insist on telling children that everything in the garden is lovely, we’re doing them a disservice” (Browne quoted in Crown, 2009, p. 12). Analyze the work of illustrators and, particularly, author illustrators who tackle difficult, sensitive and sometimes shocking themes.

An artist whose work can be argued encapsulates the idea and implications of Browne’s quote is Japanese illustrator Kentaro Miura, most famous for writing and illustrating the manga series *Berserk* for over 30 years until his death in May 2021. The manga is known for its dark tone, the difficult themes it deals with frequently and openly, as well as Miura’s striking and highly detailed artwork.

Throughout the series, the narrative deals with themes such as betrayal, hate, and revenge, as well as topics such as abuse, loneliness, and the effects of trauma and how hardship shapes a person. These are all topics and themes that are very much a part of life, but are things we often try to ignore rather than confront. As it is a disservice to “insist everything in the garden is lovely” , it is also a disservice to ignore rather than address and learn to accept the darker realities of life, and therefore be prepared to deal with and accept these harsh realities, as well as overcome them, which is a major theme in Kentaro Miura’s *Berserk*.

Berserk has been described as a “remarkably human story for a franchise wrapped around hyperbolic ultra-violence and extremely dark actions”. (White, 2021). Miura achieves this balance of violent action and darkness with humanity and light through the utilization of both writing and art.

When depicting lighter moments of the story, Miura will use softer, curvier lines to give the characters and environments a calmer tone, but when depicting violence or dark events in the story sharper, rougher lines are used. Since the manga is in black and white, white is used more prominently than black in lighter moments, and heavy blacks are used in darker moments. This is also reflected in the increasing use of black as the narrative develops and darkens. These are simple but effective changes that connect the story and the artwork together in such a way that the two elements develop and change together, creating a narratively and visually tighter overall work. (Calvez, 2021).

Below are two examples from the manga that demonstrate how the art style shifts to line with what is occurring in the story. Figure 1 depicts a light hearted love scene, while figure 2 depicts a dark action scene.



Figure 1

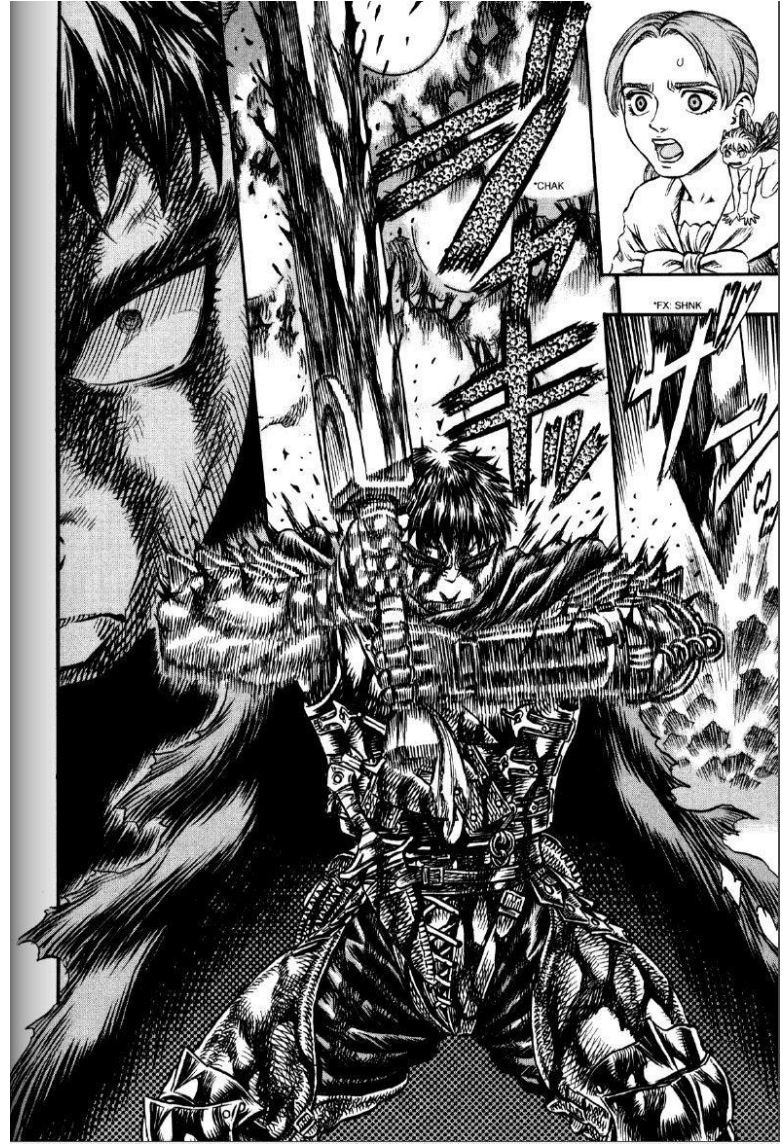


Figure 2

A notable difference between these examples is the greater focus on close up, detailed shots in fig 2. Miura uses greater detail to accentuate the brutality of the violence depicted throughout the manga, making effective use of the contrasting

black and white color palette to prevent the illustrations becoming muddled and hard to follow due to the high levels of detail, maintaining a balance of the two colors to contrast highlight where necessary.

Black is used most prominently in these darker scenes, as black is a color associated with death and evil. A thematic link can also be drawn from the black and white style used, as the story of *Berserk* deals heavily with the nature of many concepts that are often represented in art by light and dark, such as good and evil, death and life, innocence and the absence or loss thereof. (Rooijakkers, 2019).

In contrast, in fig 1 Miura mainly makes use of white, a color that is associated with purity and peace. Heavy blocks of black are mostly unused in favour of light grey when depicting details such as shadows. There is also a notable lack of the excessive detail that is present in fig 2, giving the imagery in fig 1 a more settled, peaceful tone, demonstrating how Miura uses varying levels of detail to alter the tone as necessary. Effective use of empty space gives fig 1 a less cluttered, erratic look, in a way giving the viewer a chance to 'breathe' so to speak, as the majority of the manga resembles the tone and style of fig 2, which could begin to wear on the reader without lighter moments to break up the story (Chambers. 2020).

To refer back to the quote from Anthony Browne, and continue the analogy of a garden, a beautiful flower surrounded by thorns and dead plants makes the flower, and its beauty, stand out more. In this way, acknowledging the darker and

uglier parts of reality can give one a greater appreciation of the good and beautiful things in life. Kentaro Miura weaves this idea throughout all of *Berserk*, both narratively and visually. This quote from an article discussing the influence of Kenatro Miura's work on the genre of tabletop gaming expresses a similar conclusion, stating that Miura's illustrations manage to -

“convey tapestries of incredible violence and agony, rendering worlds shifting and bending to the will of dark, supernatural forces beyond the ken of mortals, whilst also effortlessly portraying moments of great tenderness and quiet contentment.” (Shaw, 2021).

The previous example of the contrasting pages from the manga, their vastly different tones, and how Miura uses the black and white style of his work to convey his stories concepts and themes through illustration, is just one simple but effective way this manifests in Miura's work, as well as how the idea behind Browne's quote can be applied to his work.

It is possible to see in Browne's quote a criticism of a simplistic or naive worldview, as 'insisting everything in the garden is lovely' is to ignore any negativity or ugliness which are undeniable parts of reality. Gardens usually bring to mind flowers and green grass, when in reality a garden can be overgrown and full of dead plants and flowers. This idea is explored by Kentaro Miura in *Berserk*, where he subverts the common perception of heroes and villains and the imagery

usually associated with each, most prominently explored through the story's main antagonist, Griffith, and its main protagonist, Guts.

The design and imagery used by Miura to portray the antagonist of the story, Griffith, is unique when compared to the classic depiction of a villain in fantasy fiction and fiction as a whole. Traditionally a villain is portrayed as wearing black or other dark or muted colors that are, as was previously mentioned, associated with death and evil. An example of this is the character Sauron from *The Lord Of The Rings*, an evil character portrayed as wearing black spiked armor and a black cape. Griffith however, as can be seen in fig 3 and fig 4 below, wears white armor with a long flowing white cape, has long flowing hair, and is drawn to be and is described in the story as intensely beautiful.

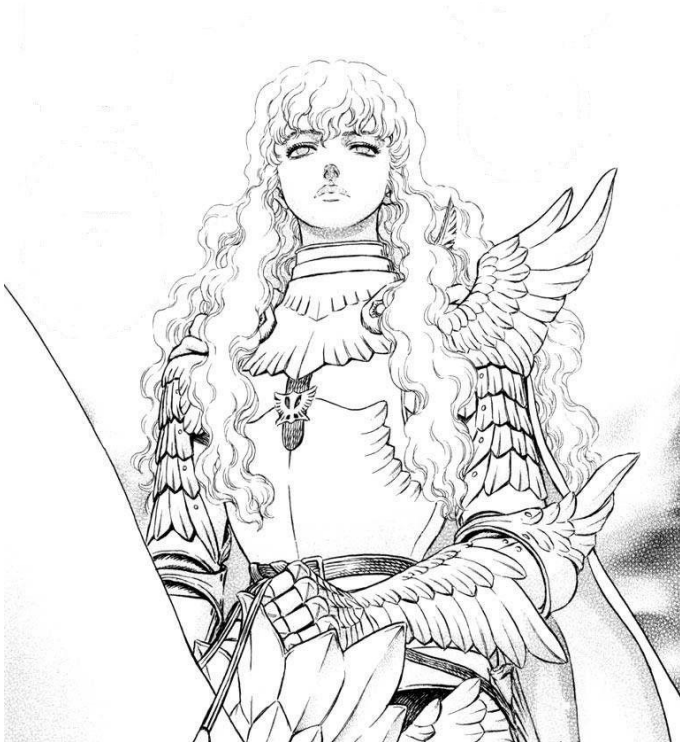


Figure 3

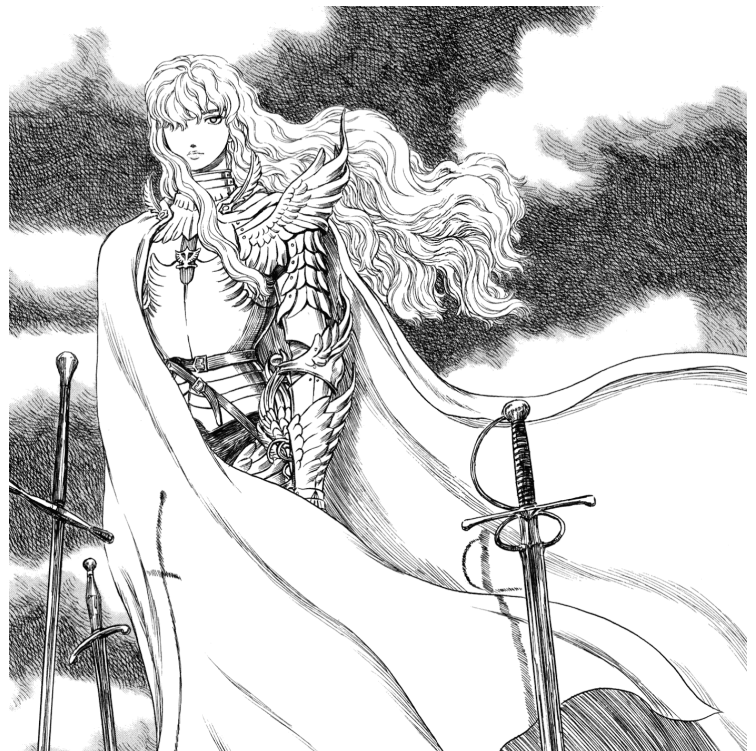


Figure 4

As can be seen from the above figures, especially fig 4, Miura frequently employs imagery when drawing Griffith that is usually reserved for portraying heroic characters. For example, the image of a character standing proudly with a long, clean cape flowing behind them has its roots in the character of Superman, who has come to represent the stereotypical 'good guy' in popular culture worldwide. Miura evokes the Superman visual archetype when drawing Griffith with great frequency, but this is often contradicted by Griffith's actions in the story, as while Superman is associated with justice and selflessness, Griffith at numerous points in *Berserk* is selfish, manipulative, and narcissistic. However, Griffith is also shown to be brave, strong willed, and intelligent, preventing Griffith from being categorized simply as a 'bad guy' instead taking the character into the realm of moral ambiguity (Chambers, 2020).

Real world examples of morally ambiguous or evil figures being portrayed like heroes are not difficult to come across. As an example, this concept can be applied to Napoleon Bonaparte, a figure in history who can be viewed from one perspective as a hero and a great man, but from another as a villainous tyrant (Trouillard, 2021). However, in portraits depicting him Napoleon has been portrayed using heroic imagery. This can be seen in the portrait *Napoleon Crossing The Alps* shown below in fig 5, where Napoleon is shown upon a white horse, a pristine cape flowing around him. To look at this portrait from a naive

worldview, taking everything at face value, believing everything in the garden is lovely, one would assume Napoleon was a great hero revered by all when in reality he was neither a hero or a villain, but a complex figure who did both good and bad.



Figure 5

The same can be said for Griffith, whom Miura portrays as morally ambiguous through the use of imagery and narrative leaving the reader to ponder the character and draw their own conclusions about his actions. Griffith is however only one half of the moral ying-yang that Kentaro Miura uses to convey

and explore the depiction and perception of good and evil in *Berserk*. The other half is the protagonist of Miura's story, the character Guts. In an article celebrating Kentaro Miura and *Berserk* in response to Miura's passing, the writer says of the dichotomy between Griffith and Guts-

“that hopeful mercenary (Guts) we see grow up is eventually broken down to a nightmarish warrior that looks like evil incarnate. On the other hand, manga's vilest villain, Griffith, is portrayed as an angelic messiah.” (White, 2021).

In this quote the writer highlights the contradictions at the heart of the portrayal of the two characters. Griffith, as was previously explored, is portrayed as a beautiful hero, but Guts is the complete opposite. As can be seen below in fig 6 and fig 7, Miura employs the use of rough jagged edges and deep scratchy blacks when portraying Guts, at first glance making the character look like a villain or horrible monster, when in fact he is the hero of *Berserk*.



Figure 6**Figure 7**

When fig 4 and 5 are compared with fig 6 and 7 the differences in how these characters are portrayed are striking. Guts is often shown hunched over like a monster unlike Griffith's constant confident stance, and Guts is often shown as just a foreboding black silhouette with just two sharp white shapes staring out, once again in stark contrast to Griffith often being bathed in light, his features highlighted to accentuate his supposed beauty. A viewer unfamiliar with *Berserk* when presented with these two characters would more than likely assume Griffith to be the hero and Guts to be the villain, but when reading the story that viewpoint is flipped completely, with the reader following Guts as he displays qualities such as perseverance, dedication, and kindness, and fiercely protects those he loves.

Miura uses Guts' character to explore the inherent darkness inside all people, how it is something that has to be carried and sometimes struggled with but he emphasizes that through strength and determination that darkness can be overcome. The darkness that Guts struggles with is visually represented through his design and manifests as a character itself, 'The beast of darkness' that appears as a demonic wolf like creature to taunt and tempt Guts. Miura uses the beast to display Guts' heroism as he struggles against and overcomes these temptations and flaws, a struggle that arguably everyone can relate to, while Griffith embraces his darkness to achieve his goals, becoming a monster himself.

Through the use of his two central characters, Kentaro Miura presents one of the follies of insisting everything in the garden is lovely and how it is detrimental to how one perceives the world. The world as well as the people in it is a complex place, and appearances can be deceiving. *Berserk* tackles the complex reality that there is good and bad in almost everything, something outwardly lovely and good can be inwardly ugly and evil, as well as vice versa through effectively subverting the common portrayal of heroism and villainy both visually and narratively.

The nature of evil and the concept of evil in general is another theme explored by Kentaro Miura in *Berserk*. One way that evil manifests in *Berserk* is through the monstrous demons and evil entities that serve as antagonists throughout the story.

Unlike the monsters commonly found in other fantasy works the majority of the monsters in *Berserk* are former humans, who traded their humanity for power and were transformed into horrific beings. This aspect of the story is one way that Miura explores the concept of evil not just as an intangible force, but as something that is inherent in humanity, that all people have the capacity to be evil (Wolf, 2021). Miura incorporates human-like features into the designs of these monsters to provide a more literal visual representation of this concept, as can be seen in fig 8 and 9, where Miura combines human faces with grotesque monstrous bodies.



Figure 8



Figure 9

Miura uses the inclusion of human features in his monster designs to give them a sense of humanity, and by doing so they come across as unsettlingly familiar as opposed to a more traditional fantasy monster that bears little resemblance to a human. In an article about why we find humanesque monsters so unsettling, the writer makes an assertion that supports this conclusion-

“As humans, we have a strong idea of how other humans should ‘work’ and any deviation from that idea is deeply unsettling. You can see this with the

‘uncanny valley’ phenomenon, where people react extremely negatively to robots or mannequins because of their disturbing, almost-human qualities. They *seem* human, but something is wrong, so they’re repulsive, threatening in a unique way.” (Jones, 2019).

Evil is also portrayed in a more abstract way through the supernatural and existential aspects of *Berserk*. The God Hand is a council of demons that serve as secondary antagonists in the story, and while Miura still includes human elements in their design, he employs surrealism in the moments when they appear. The scenes shown in fig 10 and 11 were influenced visually by the surrealist lithograph print *Relativity* by M.C. Escher.



Figure 10



Figure 11

Miura uses the imagery of a sprawling tangle of impossible geometry to portray this evil realm the demons inhabit as overwhelming and incomprehensible, playing on

the fear of the unknown and unfamiliar that takes the theme of the nature of evil into a more existential context. This is also another instance of Miura utilizing the black and white style of *Berserk* to create a coherent image despite the tangled, confusing nature of what is being shown. These moments in the story deal with existentialism, specifically the concept of evil being a constant force of existence.

Questions of the 'whys' and 'hows' of our existence is something that all people in some form or another at some point ponder, and *Berserk* uses The God Hand and the realm they inhabit to introduce these concepts to the reader. *Berserk* expands on what is being implied in Browne's quote by challenging readers to not only face what is not lovely about the garden, but the nature and existence of the garden.

From examining the themes of Kentaro Miura's *Berserk*, and how he conveys those themes through his writing and illustration, one can conclude that the philosophy behind the quote from Browne is woven throughout Miura's work. Miura brutally and honestly presents the darker side of reality, and how difficult truths can, through facing up to rather than ignoring them, ultimately be used to better oneself.

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