



Gothic Themes and Monsters in Dark Fantasy Manga: Hajime Isayama's *Attack on Titan* and Koyoharu Gotouge's *Demon Slayer*

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Abstract

Exploring the concepts of abjection, monster theory, and Gothic-postmodernism, my article seeks to analyze the complex relationship between humans and monsters in two popular dark fantasy manga: Attack on Titan by Hajime Isayama and Demon Slayer by Koyoharu Gotouge. The settings and characters of both works combine several Gothic motifs and devices. More specifically, the use of intertextuality gives the manga a mythic dimension and the psychologized landscapes are sites of abjection that reflect the characters' fears and desires. The heroes in each manga attempt to destroy the monstrous characters that plague their world, but the truth often challenges their abjection. The Gothicized worlds undermine the dichotomy between humans and monsters or the deep-rooted idea of good and evil. Humans become monsters. Monsters turn out to be humans. These contradictory ideas demonstrate how we need to probe at the reality of our world, our creation of monsters, and our feelings of abjection toward them. The two manga attract readers with their art and fascinating plotlines, but they also address various forms of the Other in society, humanize the so-called monsters, and provide a space for us to empathize with them.

Introduction

Japanese comics, or manga, soared to popularity in the post-World War II period with influences from American comics and cartoons. Manga take on a wide range of genres, from action and fantasy to romance and drama, appealing to readers of all demographics. Manga have been translated into many other languages and have attracted a global audience in the last several decades. Within the fantasy genre of manga is a subgenre of dark fantasy works that incorporate mature themes and elements of horror and violence. Dark fantasy manga often feature monstrous characters that afflict human society, not unlike those of Gothic fiction. Our fascination with monsters can be attributed to their “function as an alter ego, as an alluring projection of (an Other) self” (Cohen 17). In this paper, I analyze the manga *Attack on Titan* by Hajime Isayama and *Demon Slayer* by Koyoharu Gotouge, examining the postmodern intertextuality that gives them a mythic dimension, as well as the characteristically Gothic, psychologized settings that enhance the emotional intensity of the characters by reflecting their inner state. I also explore the division between humans and monsters in these two manga using the lens of abjection. As my thesis demonstrates, the protagonists of both manga attempt to abject and destroy the monstrosity around them, but they ultimately find that society created the very monsters they are fighting. When humans turn out to be monsters or when humans must ally with monsters to fight another evil, the wall between the two breaks down. Manga aim to make us aware of how we Other people and how we actually find ourselves in the Other. They reflect our society and fuse different cultural traditions that exist in modern settings, creating an intercultural ethos that reflects an increasingly globalized world.

Anime and manga studies is a relatively new, interdisciplinary field that has expanded in the past few decades. Despite the growing global popularity and increasingly diverse audience of manga, this field of study has not gained much academic interest. The primary texts I have chosen are well-known in Japan and abroad. Gotouge’s *Demon Slayer* is a new addition to the dark fantasy genre of manga, having been published first in 2016 and completed in May 2020. Isayama’s *Attack on Titan* series started in 2009 and completed in April 2021, and a few studies have discussed this manga recently. But little work, if any, has been done that compares the above works and analyzes them using the Gothic lens. This paper contributes an original perspective to the discussion of the Gothic in manga, with my argument focusing on the elements of intertextuality, the psychologized settings, and the dichotomy of humans and monsters in each work. These Gothic devices shed light on the reasons for creating fictional monsters, and they are prevalent in literature from different parts of the world.

Abjection, Monster Theory, and Gothic-Postmodernism

To analyze these dark fantasy manga, I draw on Julia Kristeva’s *The*

Portable Kristeva (1997), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), and Maria Beville's *Gothic-Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (2009). I explore Kristeva's concept of abjection in the settings and conflicts of each manga, Cohen's interpretations of monsters to examine how they reflect the cultures in which they are found, and Beville's definition of Gothic-postmodernism to identify examples of intertextuality.

Kristeva introduces the concept of the abject as something that is opposed to or separated from the self, yet it can also exist within the self. The abject is "a 'something that I do not recognize as a thing'" (Kristeva 230). In other words, it is anything we want to remove from ourselves, and we feel repulsed by it. Abjection refers to the reaction to something we do not understand; the instance of separation between that thing and ourselves. It can be internal as we try to expel or erase negative emotions and traits that we do not want to associate with ourselves. It can also have a physical form like vomiting, which is a fundamental form of abjection that causes us to physically expel food from our bodies. Thus, I analyze the various ways that abjection can be recognized in both humans and monsters in the manga.

The abject is a part of ourselves that we have thrown away. We as humans want to maintain the sense of a unitary self, so we reject or deny parts of the Self to feel whole. In the two manga, the human protagonists abject the monstrous beings. They do not want to recognize the monsters as part of their world, so they separate themselves from these monsters. The subject, or the Self, aspires to be different from the abject. However, abjection of self can happen when a subject "finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject" (Kristeva 232). When the characters later discover the monsters in themselves, they experience this abjection of self.

Jeffrey Cohen establishes seven theses for understanding cultures through the monsters they bear, three of which I apply in this paper. His first thesis argues that the monster represents the fears of the culture or cultural moment in which it is created, and it may be born again or reinterpreted later (Cohen 4). The monsters of the manga live in two vastly different settings, but their existences may be interpreted similarly as they come from the same Japanese culture. His third thesis says the nature of monsters is to defy classification, scientific laws, and binary oppositions (6–7). As I demonstrate, the monsters in my primary texts do not conform to any one category or binary. They are dynamic, disturbing order and acting as the perceived evil while also evoking sympathy and changing the way we view them. Cohen's fourth thesis claims the monster represents the Other, or what is outside the norm or status quo (7). The creation of a monster fragments and recombines elements from various forms of the Other according to cultural, political, racial, economic, and sexual lines (11). Intertextuality plays a part in this process by incorporating and combining qualities of the monsters who have long been Othered in real life or in past literature.

Maria Beville explains the Gothic-postmodernist approach to literature as one that evaluates the representation of Otherness, the turbulent landscapes, and the demonized or monstrous characters. She argues that Gothic-postmodernism responds to the fear of what happens when our ideologies become destabilized (Beville 24). Texts in this genre disrupt and deconstruct binary oppositions through counter-narratives and violations to the system that upholds the need for terror. The terror we find in monsters and Othered bodies presents the darker side of our known realities. We can analyze the Gothic in terms of binary oppositions like life and death, good and evil, human and monster, among others (41). “[T]he Gothic functions to blur the distinctions that exist when oppositions such as these are presented” (41). These oppositions generally define societal values and the place of the Other regarding those values.

Gothic texts also reveal a relationship between the Self and the Other using the monster. In doing this, “the dark underside of humanity is put on display with all its hate, greed and prejudice laid bare, for the ‘human’ reader who is often unaware of his or her own monstrosity” (Beville 41–42). Humans and monsters in both manga have a complicated and contradictory relationship. Monsters in Gothic-postmodernist works act as projections of abject Otherness (201). These characters are brought out from the margins of society to expose Otherness in the Self that the human characters may repress.

Finally, Beville asserts that “intertextuality, as well as recurring motifs such as interest in the occult, and a concern with identity and the human psyche as presented in the form of the monstrous ‘other’” are Gothic devices that manifest in postmodern texts (55). The following manga series open a space for readers to analyze the monsters using intertextuality, a device that overlaps in Gothic and postmodern fiction whereby one text shapes another. While monsters do result from a specific cultural moment as Cohen argues, they can transcend that time and culture through intertextuality. “History is just another text in a procession of texts,” and we can recognize that in each manga’s creation of contemporary monsters (Cohen 3). While Gothic novels date back to the eighteenth century, contemporary Gothic fiction and dark fantasy manga still draw elements from this earlier literature and incorporate that material into their own work, bringing new life to old tropes.

Intertextuality: Hajime Isayama’s *Attack on Titan*

Attack on Titan contains several elements of intertextuality, one of which is how giants from ancient Norse mythology shape the history of the titan characters. In both the manga and Norse mythology, Ymir is the name of the progenitor of a race of giants. Ymir in Norse mythology is “the protogiant whose hermaphroditic monstrous acts of procreation produced the race of giants” (Lindow 292). Hermaphroditic means possessing both male and female reproductive organs. Ymir could reproduce by himself, and his body creates three giants: two sons and one daughter, from whom later giants descend. Ymir in

Attack on Titan is a female Eldian slave who, nearly 2,000 years before the start of the manga and while on the verge of death, fuses with a spinelike creature, turning her into the first titan, or the Founding Titan (Isayama 30: 156). She bears the king's children and has three daughters: Maria, Rose, and Sheena. Both in Norse mythology and in *Attack on Titan*, Ymir is the ancestor of the giants and bears three children. The manga, however, reimagines Ymir into a victim of violence who later turns into the matriarch of an entire race, reflective of the new setting and culture in which she has been created and demonstrating Cohen's first thesis in monster theory.

The subsequent death and dismemberment of Ymir in Norse mythology and the manga launch the creation of a new world in which their descendants rule. The gods Odin, Vili, and Vé kill and dismember Ymir, creating the cosmos from his body: "From his blood the sea and lakes; the earth was made from the flesh, and mountains from the bones" (Lindow 324). Similarly, when Ymir dies in the manga, the king cuts up her body and feeds it to their three children so they would each inherit her titan power (Isayama 30: 170). Her powers later split into nine titans who build the Eldian Empire. Future Eldians, also known as subjects of Ymir, continue to gain the power to turn into titans for centuries. The creation of the titans and their ancestor Ymir in *Attack on Titan* thus incorporates these qualities from the primordial being Ymir in Norse mythology.

Naming the monsters in the manga "titans" also reminds us of the Titans in ancient Greek mythology. Gaia, the personification of the Earth, bears "three sets of children to Ouranos, first a group of primordial gods who were known as the Titans" (Hard 32). Kronos, the youngest of the Titans, later displaces his father as "the main god, establishing himself as the new lord of the universe" (33). The Titans, or the old gods, in Greek mythology rule under Kronos in the pre-Olympian world. Similarly, titans in *Attack on Titan* rule the world outside the walls. Both groups of titans are immortal, and their immense size makes them a powerful race in their worlds. One notable difference, however, is that the normal or pure titans that make up most of the titan population in the manga are not nearly as powerful or intelligent as Greek Titans. Pure titans are mindless creatures who roam the land outside the walls of Paradis Island and whose only instinct is to eat humans, despite not needing any food to survive. The nine titans who can control their titan transformations are more like the Greek Titans, as they have greater power and intelligence. Such references to previous monsters demonstrate the longstanding influence of ancient legends on contemporary stories.

Much like the Titan War, or Titanomachy in Greek mythology, there is a Great Titan War in *Attack on Titan* that brings the world into a conflict over the power of Titans. Zeus and the Olympian gods fight for control of the universe from the Titans, and the war rages on "for ten long years without either side gaining a clear advantage" (Hard 68). After obtaining their victory, the gods banish the Titans and imprison them in Tartarus forever. In the Great Titan War,

the humans fight *for* control of the nine titan powers for hundreds of years. The war finally ends when the 145th King Karl Fritz relocates Eldia to Paradis Island, allowing the descendants from the ancient nation of Marley to gain control of the mainland continent (Isayama 25: 47). Unlike the Greek gods, the humans do not want to rid the world of titans. They want control of the titan power instead.

As we have seen, the intertextual references to Norse and Greek myths can be found in the titans and their genesis. The creation of the titans reinforces Cohen's fourth thesis as it fragments and recombines characteristics of other monsters (11). These allusions establish a framework for the new monsters, giving them a history that many readers can recognize. We can find several common denominators from Norse and Greek mythology in *Attack on Titan*, a Japanese story. Bringing these three cultures together thus creates a new myth using old myths. This function of intertextuality is appropriate for a global world, and the manga has become an international art form that a variety of audiences can enjoy today.

Intertextuality: Koyoharu Gotouge's *Demon Slayer*

Intertextuality is a Gothic motif that can be found in *Demon Slayer* as well. Elements from oni in Japanese folktales exist in the demons from this manga. "An oni is a being with many facets. It may be imagined as some ambiguous demon, or it may be impersonated as an ugly and frightening humanlike figure, an ogre" (Knecht xi). Oni are one of the most well-known icons in traditional Japanese tales, and they are generally monstrous humanoids depicted as enemies of mankind. Like oni, the demons are humanoid for the most part, but some gain more grotesque features like multiple heads, mouths, or limbs. While they are "mostly known for their fierce and evil nature," oni can also "possess intriguingly complex aspects that cannot be brushed away simply as evil" (Reider xviii). Their tendencies toward murder and cannibalism naturally set them up to be the villains in their stories. Similarly, the demons in the manga feed on human flesh and blood, reflective of their evil nature. They terrify humans and threaten to disrupt everyday life in past and present Japan. But unlike the oni of ancient stories, some of the contemporary demons, like those in *Demon Slayer*, are actually portrayed as victims of evil. As in Cohen's first thesis, this reimagining of the oni reflects the cultural moment in which it was created (4). The use of intertextuality in the manga demonstrates the long-lasting presence of oni, reinterpreting their roles to match modern attitudes and perspectives of monsters.

Another intertextual source for *Demon Slayer* comes from European vampire legends in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. "The vampire represents one of the most enduring, universal, and popular myths of all time" (Brodman 61). The demons possess several qualities of vampires in their behaviors and weaknesses. Demons are carnivorous and vampiric beings who have pale skin, catlike red eyes, and fangs. They possess invincibility, super

strength, and regenerative abilities, healing wounds and growing back limbs in a matter of minutes. The more humans they eat, the stronger and more monstrous they become. “During the day, the vampire sleeps in a grave, leaving it at night to assault victims” (62). Just as vampires rise from their graves to hunt their prey when the sun sets, demons can only move around at night. They burn to ash in the sunlight, alluding to the photophobic qualities of vampires in previous European folklore. When vampires feed on humans, they “often [convert] them at the same time into fellow vampires” (Brodman ix). In *Demon Slayer*, however, most demons do not have the ability to turn other humans into demons. Only the original demon Muzan Kibutsuji can create demons, and he does so by giving humans his blood. Muzan controls his demons with fear and intimidation. All of them are cursed by Muzan, who can read their minds, see through their eyes, locate them, and even kill them remotely using his demon cells in their bodies. This ability gives a frightening, new quality to the vampiric character, a being that continues to evolve in today’s literature.

The intertextuality between Japanese folktales, vampire legends, and *Demon Slayer* gives the manga a basis for its villainous monsters, combining several traits that many readers may find familiar. We can once again apply Cohen’s fourth thesis of fragmenting and recombining certain elements from different forms of the Other to create a new monster (11). These qualities that appear intertextually present a type of monster with additional attributes that make it more modern yet still terrifying. And while *Attack on Titan* draws on monstrous characters from ancient Greek and Norse myths, *Demon Slayer* alludes to traditional Japanese oni and combines vampiric qualities to represent the demon. The titans and demons do have a common ground, which can be found in Cohen’s third thesis. As aforementioned, the nature of monsters is to defy classification and binary oppositions (Cohen 6–7). The monsters in these manga do not belong to one category or side of a binary. They have complex and sometimes contradictory identities that make it difficult to treat them as purely good or evil. Moreover, the protagonists’ transformations into the monsters they abject disrupt this dichotomy as well.

Demon Slayer brings together different cultural traditions that then creates a new myth that is appropriate for a global world, as we have already seen in *Attack on Titan*. *Demon Slayer*, however, goes even further by dramatically fusing Japanese mythology with Western mythology and explicitly incorporating those Western elements within a Japanese art form. In the Western world, we tend to label other cultures as exotic or strange, but the increasing globalization of our postmodern world has shown us that cultural truth is now relative. Manga becomes even more international this way, demonstrating the universality of storytelling and reminding us of the similarities found among different cultures.

Psychologized Landscape: *Attack on Titan*

Psychologized settings are another Gothic device we can find in *Attack on Titan*. The three concentric walled cities, for example, reflect Eren’s desire

for freedom and his dreams of venturing to the outside world. While the walls protect humans from the titans, they also take away the sense of freedom. Eren first realizes this when he reads a book about the ocean: “I had been living in a birdcage all that time. And those freakish things had taken my freedom. The world was so big, but they’d forced me into a tiny cage. And when I realized that . . . I knew I could never forgive them” (Isayama 18: 116–17). Eren views the walls as a cage, discontent with not having any freedom. The setting amplifies his abjection of titans as they took away Eren’s freedom from the day he was born, tying these two feelings of captivity and abjection together. Titans and walls represent the opposite of what Eren wants to be because they both stop him from seeking freedom. He must erase these parts of himself to meet his goals.

The three walls on Paradis Island also visually represent how Eren feels in several ways. They are portrayed as sheer, stone-like walls that loom fifty meters over the cities, which is taller than most known titans. They also dwarf the citizens and Eren, making him feel trapped and insignificant. At the same time, the walls appear to protect its people from titans in the outside territory. Cannons line the top of the wall, though they are not effective against the titans’ regenerative abilities. Each wall has four districts on its periphery, one in each of the four cardinal directions. The military can focus its defense on these districts because titans are drawn to places with high concentrations of people. Those living in districts around the wall and in the outermost cities are the most at risk for titan invasions. Thus, the walls also separate classes of people on Paradis. The districts are the worst places to live because titans often target those areas. Meanwhile, the king and military commanders live comfortably within the innermost wall, farthest from titan territory. Even though Eren lives in a district along the outermost wall, he has been safe from the titans for much of his life. But his feelings of constraint overpower his feelings of security. The walls’ oppositional aspects of both imprisonment and protection are demonstrated in its visual portrayal and in Eren’s emotions.

Additionally, the walls fuel the protagonist’s abjection of titans, as they attempt to expel the enemy outside, yet some of the monsters still manage to infiltrate. While the walls may be incredibly strong, they are not indestructible. Titans manage to damage all three walls to some degree throughout the course of the manga, showing how futile it is to try to keep them out. When Eren sees the wall break for the first time and titans attack his hometown, it further creates a sense of insecurity and a lack of faith in the walls. Eren starts to think that the walls cannot keep the monsters out, and that the only solution is to go out and kill them all. He personally abjects the monstrous titans, as the walls no longer physically separate the two sides. As the story unravels, Eren discovers that the walls consist of countless, dormant Colossal Titans from when the 145th King, Karl Fritz, established the civilization on Paradis Island over a century ago. With the power of the Founding Titan, the king uses the titans’ ossified bodies as pillars and their hardening abilities to mold the surface of the walls. The king tries to

abject the pure titans outside of the walls and to erase the war that is happening on the other side of the ocean, both of which he does not want to associate with himself or his people. The king even erases his people's memories of the outside world and makes them think they are the last survivors of humanity, a further example of Paradis' abjection of titans. The ironic discovery that humanity has long been protected from titans by titans aligns with Eren's changing emotions toward the monsters and who his enemies really are.

Another setting that demonstrates Eren's inner state is the ocean that lies beyond the walls. Eren used to dream of the ocean as the embodiment of freedom, but his feelings change once he finally goes outside of the walls and reaches it. The ocean takes up the span of two pages when Eren and his comrades see it for the first time (Isayama 22: 179–80). The two-page spread shows a breathtaking panoramic view of the ocean, a vast and unending body. The other characters take in the beauty of the ocean, splashing around against the soft waves, content with their new discovery. This also marks the first time the military has gained full control of Paradis, having killed the rest of the pure titans wandering outside the walls. But Eren does not feel the same relief; he feels sad and burdened still. He used to believe that freedom is beyond the ocean, beyond the other side of the walls: "But I was wrong. It's enemies that are on the other side of the ocean. If we kill them all, does that mean we'll be free?" (22: 185–86). Unlike the rest of his comrades, seeing the ocean disappoints Eren even though it used to represent freedom and hope. Eren now sees it as merely another wall from which to break free.

Similar to the walls, these contrasting images of the ocean reflect Eren's inner turmoil. Instead of marveling at the ocean, Eren can only feel lonely and isolated. He has not satisfied his craving for freedom because he knows the truth about the world. He may have fulfilled his childhood dream, but he has another obstacle in his search for true freedom, and it lies beyond the horizon on the mainland continent. The ocean may give others the illusion of freedom, but it changes Eren's idea of freedom and what he thinks he must do to exact revenge for humanity. This scene also foreshadows how Eren ultimately deals with his feelings of abjection as he confronts the Marleyans on the other side of the ocean.

The changes in the setting both within and outside of the walls represent the changes in Eren's emotions about freedom and his attitudes about the titans. The three walls have qualities of imprisonment and illusory comfort that evoke Eren's desires for freedom: the freedom from fear, hate, and his enemies as well as the freedom to explore and actually live. The ocean has freeing yet disappointing qualities that prompt Eren to rethink his objective and enemies. These two psychologized settings reflect the protagonist's inner state and the development of his abjection. Eren shows us just how much our ideas of abjection and the Other can change when we learn the truth about our worlds.

Psychologized Landscape: *Demon Slayer*

Like *Attack on Titan*, this manga also makes use of psychologized settings. The various settings where the protagonist Tanjiro confronts demons serve dual functions, as they reflect his fears and anxieties while also revealing the darker side of civilization. Several battles that take place in dark and foreboding forests amplify Tanjiro's fear of the unknown. The final selection test to become a demon slayer requires the candidates to survive in a forest on Fujikasane mountain for seven days and nights. The panels that display this location have pitch black backgrounds with minimal light from a crescent moon. Demons lurk throughout the forest, initially appearing as silhouettes. When they emerge from the shadows, they are veiny creatures with bloodshot eyes, fangs, claws, and weapons protruding from their arms (Gotouge 1: 130). A later mission where Tanjiro investigates a report of demons in a forest on Natagumo Mountain has a similar setting and mood. It is a heavily wooded area, and it gives off a sickening smell: "The mountain is emitting some sort of twisted and unnatural smell. It's making my body go into a slight bit of shock." (Gotouge 4: 15). This place is jarring to Tanjiro, prompting an unpleasant reaction that indicates his feelings of abjection. Again, the backgrounds of these panels are black, and the mountain appears more and more eerie the closer he gets to it.

The dark forest settings symbolize the human fear of nature. Tanjiro and the other demon slayers have to confront this fear whenever they fight demons deep in the woods. The demons in the manga hunt for food and prey on humans, in the same way that wild animals do in real life. Humans can get lost and attacked by these monsters lurking within the forest. They are powerless in demon territory, especially at night. The setting reflects Tanjiro's abjection of nature because he fears it. He does not understand it, and his reaction to the forest and its repulsive smells demonstrates this weakness. In these places and on countless other missions, Tanjiro comes across corpses, which Kristeva calls "the utmost of abjection" (232). Corpses remind all humans of what we must reject in order to live: our inevitable deaths. While Tanjiro constantly faces death, he must set it aside and focus on completing his missions. The protagonist's abjection of nature and potential death thus becomes intensified in this psychologized setting.

In another mission, a visit to the Yoshiwara Red Light District reveals a darker side of human civilization. This setting is another example of a site of abjection: "The night district where the lust and charms of men and women swirl in a storm of love and hate" (Gotouge 9: 14). The prostitutes in the Red Light District have been Othered by the rest of society. They live separately from the so-called proper parts of society, cast aside because of their sexuality and lifestyle. This setting represents the ways in which human beings also abject each other, classifying certain groups of people as subhuman or monstrous. Demons are not the only ones considered the Other; so are prostitutes. In Beville's explanation of Gothic-postmodernism, the monstrous characters are brought out from the margins of society to reveal aspects of the dark underside of humanity (39),

which is the human vice of lust in this case. *Demon Slayer* uses this setting to highlight another form of abjection, and readers can search their own realities for representations of the Other.

The Red Light District displays the fear of sexual taboos and of prostitutes because they violate sexual norms. Ironically, the humans who abject sex workers are the same ones who patronize the brothels and control this area. Upon his arrival here in search of demons, Tanjiro says, “The night in this town smells very impure” (Gotouge 9: 85). Tanjiro has a keen sense of smell that he commonly uses to sense enemies and danger. As a human, he can discern that there are things he does not understand, and his strong sense of smell proves that feeling of abjection. This impure smell comes partly from his being in a dark part of society where most of the people *would* be considered abject and impure. But unlike the rest of society, Tanjiro does not abject the sex workers; he feels compassion for them and recognizes the hardships they have had to bear. To him, the impure smell actually comes from the demons in the town. He wants to protect humans from demons, no matter if these people have violated rules for sexual conduct or not.

When demons inhabit the Red Light District, they can easily disguise themselves as prostitutes since the humans in this area have already been vilified. This area also comes alive and operates at night, which is ideal for demons. When they take their victims—who are often attractive, young prostitutes—everyone else conveniently assumes those prostitutes have simply run away without paying their debts, which is not an uncommon occurrence. Daki, the demon who dwells in the Red Light District, manages to become one of the “oiran,” which is the most prominent and highest ranking prostitute in a house (Gotouge 9: 63). They wear elaborate hairstyles, makeup, and clothing with fancy patterns to distinguish themselves from other prostitutes. Daki is both a high-level prostitute and a high-level demon. She can seamlessly fit in with the prostitutes in her human form because of her beauty, which is highly valued in the Red Light District. But regardless of appearance, prostitutes and demons are still the abject. Society views them as monsters and ostracizes both groups for their ways of living. The setting of the Red Light District demonstrates the abjection and Othering of certain groups of humans, while also exposing society’s repressed fear of sexual taboos through the treatment of sex workers. This aligns with Cohen’s first thesis, which says the monster represents the fears and beliefs of the culture in which it is created (4). In this setting, demons naturally blend in with prostitutes, showing how abject groups can often commingle with each other.

The site of the final battle between humans and demons takes place inside the Infinity Castle, an example of a Gothic house. The Gothic house is one plot device in Gothic fiction whereby a house contains dark secrets and crime or has been cursed by supernatural forces. The Infinity Castle is a mysterious structure that is the original demon Muzan’s territory and stronghold, and

sunlight does not reach this place. It has a modern look with wooden panels and paper screens, befitting the manga's setting in the early twentieth century. It is a labyrinth of passageways and doors, and there appears to be an endless chasm in the middle of the structure. Muzan keeps his body in the depths of the house, which is the secret space of this Japanese rendition of a Gothic house. He hides in a veiny, fleshy ball attached to the walls and suspended in midair as he heals from a strong poison (Gotouge 17: 90). The demon slayers must fight his servants in the meantime, many of which have alien-like appearances with extra limbs and multiple eyes. Incredibly strong demons lurk in every room, and the demon slayers fight them in teams. Tanjiro feels like "the building is alive with an unruly pulse" (17: 27) because the Infinity Castle is mainly controlled by one of Muzan's subjects. She can move walls and entire structures in the house as if they were her own limbs. Her abilities make it difficult for the demon slayers to find Muzan, giving him enough time to recover.

While the forest represents wild nature and the Red Light District represents sexual taboos, this setting symbolizes repressed feelings of vulnerability in the main antagonist Muzan. Muzan hides his wounded body deep within the Infinity Castle, which is the part of himself he has been abjecting for centuries. He cannot die by decapitation like the rest of the demons, but he is still powerless to sunlight. Muzan has spent most of his time as a demon searching for a way to conquer the sun, but he could never do it. Both the house and secret space are his ways of abjecting the sun. He, like humans do, fears death the most. However, the battle does eventually reach a place where the sun shines. When the Infinity Castle bursts through the ground and flings everyone to the surface, Muzan's secret space is destroyed, illuminating his abject feelings.

A second version of the Gothic house comes when the demon slayers corner Muzan as the sun rises, and Muzan makes another armor of flesh to protect himself (Gotouge 23: 53). The secret space is, again, Muzan's repression and denial of his fragility. This time, his body swells up into a ball of flesh to block out the sun, shaping into a giant baby. Muzan's different fleshy forms in and out of the Infinity Castle represent the abjection of his own mortality and weakness. Muzan does everything he can to stay alive, while the demon slayers do everything they can to kill him. He is so determined not to die, and both sides continue an already long and drawn-out battle. Even as a powerful and seemingly invincible demon, Muzan is still afraid of dying. The final exorcism happens with Muzan's death and the subsequent death of all his demons. The world is cleansed of evil, and the Gothic house is ultimately destroyed.

As we have seen, the settings in the two manga display the motifs of decay and destruction. The protagonists experience the trauma of seeing the corpses of their loved ones early on in the story, which prompts their abjection of the monsters and their desire for revenge. They frequently face the deaths of their comrades and other victims of the monsters. Because of this, they reject the monsters as part of their world and do all in their power to get rid of

them. In *Demon Slayer*, the psychologized landscapes illustrate three sites of abjection that represent the different ways that humans, and sometimes demons, abject certain aspects of their existence: nature, sexuality, and their psyche. The dark forests depict the fear of nature, the Red Light District draws on society's fear of other humans for their sexuality, and the Infinity Castle is a symbol of vulnerability within the psychic self. These settings reflect several of the characters' inner states and their versions of the Other, demonstrating how our inability to understand parts of ourselves and our worlds leads to abjection.

Abjection: *Attack on Titan*

Attack on Titan initially sets up a division between humans and monsters, but then it deconstructs that opposition in Eren, and the key part of that involves him confronting his abjection of titans. As Kristeva describes it, abjection is caused by “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (232). In a post-apocalyptic world overrun by menacing, man-eating titans, humanity has retreated to a civilization contained within three concentric walls called Paradis Island. After seeing his mother eaten by a titan, the protagonist Eren devotes his life to killing the threat of all titans and getting revenge for his mother and humanity. He enlists in the military and trains for three years, and when Eren fights his first battle against the titans, he soon learns he can transform into a titan himself. The military relies on Eren's titan power to reclaim territory that has been taken over by titans, and the fight between humans and titans intensifies. Eren and his comrades later uncover many secrets about the titans, their home, and what really lies beyond the walls. He learns that the people of Paradis are part of the Eldian race who have been exiled to the island for crimes against a race called the Marleyans. A war ensues between the two groups, and Eren leads the fight to protect his people, at the cost of the rest of the world.

The manga establishes Eren's total abjection of the monsters at the beginning. In the first titan attack on Paradis in over a hundred years, Eren escapes but can only watch helplessly as a titan devours his mother, who is crippled by the falling debris. Devastated by his mother's death, Eren vows to wipe out the titans, “every last one of those animals that's on this earth” (Isayama 1: 85–86). He fiercely abjects the titans, regarding them as nothing more than animals. He is unforgiving of them for killing his mother and destroying his home, and he sees no connection to them whatsoever. Similarly, the humans in the manga have only a limited knowledge of the titans, and no communication or mutual understanding seems possible. As Kristeva contends, when we abject something, we want to think that it has nothing in common with us or our identities. In this part of the manga, readers are experiencing a clear division between humans and titans, between us and them, between the Self and the Other. These events and the lack of understanding of titans lead us to sympathize with Eren, the human hero, and to fear and despise the titans, the monstrous villains. In the

same way that Eren Others the titans in the manga, we have the predisposition to Other those who are different from us in our world. We abject certain undesirable or despicable groups and identities that we do not want to associate with our societies and ourselves.

In a striking reversal, however, Eren experiences an abjection of self when he learns about his link to the monsters—that he can turn into a titan himself. In his first battle, Eren overpowers the titans flooding the town and fights alongside the humans, though he cannot remember anything that happened while he was a titan (Isayama 3: 54). The military, however, is suspicious of Eren's loyalty and is ready to kill him for being a titan—synonymous with being a threat to humanity. Some of his distant memories later reveal that his father Grisha Yeager actually gave him an injection with the power to transform into a titan on the night of the first titan attack (3: 59). The titan power is a power Eren needs to control in order to defeat the monsters and save humanity, but it is also a power that makes him a monster. This reversal brings out the monster inside of Eren, despite his attempts to separate himself from it and project it outside. Kristeva calls this experience an abjection of self, which occurs when a subject finds the abject within himself (232). After the manga has already established a separation between humans and monsters, it disrupts this division. It does not allow us to abject the monsters as much as we would like, even when our own world encourages polarization and Othering those who challenge our ideologies. We start to question our prejudices and become more aware of the monsters within us. As Eren struggles with accepting his new identity, his abjection of titans becomes more difficult. Readers too are more confused and ambivalent, and they feel the line between the Self and the Other start to blur.

The discovery that all titans are actually humans further challenges Eren's abjection of them. He learns about the history of Eldians from his father's diary kept in the basement of his old home. The humans who have the inherited ability to turn into titans come from the Eldian race, descendants of the original titan Ymir. To activate this ability, they need to be exposed to the spinal fluid of a titan, either through injection or consumption. Only those who hold the power of one of the nine titans can control their transformation and take on a human form. Otherwise, they become feral, mindless titans living in an endless nightmare, unable to return to their original self (Isayama 17:177). The people on Paradis are Eldians, but so are the titans who threaten their safety. This revelation shows Eren that he shares an ancestor with the monsters he has long abjected, reversing his earlier belief that he has nothing in common with titans. Cohen's third thesis aligns with this shift, as it is the nature of monsters to defy binary oppositions (6–7). The abject and evil monster may disturb the order of human civilization, but it may also become humanized, and readers are now inclined to sympathize with the titans and the Eldians.

Moreover, Eren finds out that the pure titans who terrorize Paradis have been created directly by the Marleyans, or the race of people who live on the

mainland continent. This threat has been orchestrated to trap the Eldians on the island and eventually wipe them out. When the 145th King, Karl Fritz, moves Eldians to Paradis, he leaves many of them behind on Marley. These people are put into internment zones, separated from the Marleyans and brainwashed into believing that they come from devils. Marleyans cast out Eldian rebels, traitors, and criminals, and they have no problem torturing or killing Eldians because they do not consider them to be human beings. Eren's father Grisha escapes from Marley, and in his revealing book about the titans, Paradis, and the world beyond the walls, one Marleyan sergeant says this about Eldians:

That's who you people really are. Get a little spinal fluid into your blood and you become giant monsters. And you think you're just as human as us? There's no living thing in the world like you Eldians, you 'subjects of Ymir.' You're monsters in human skin. And it's a terrifying nightmare that anyone ever let you reproduce. (Isayama 22: 46)

Eren must now confront his abjection of titans and change his view of them as his enemy and the Other altogether. Knowing that the rest of the world hates Eldians and wishes for their annihilation, Eren's attitude towards the apparent monster flips completely. The manga presents the different sides of Otherness through Eren's view of titans, and readers can examine the harmfulness of their own assumptions. Our shift in opinion reflects the changing portrayal of the monster, complicating our understanding of the abject as we realize that this category may shift, at any time, to include ourselves and people like us.

Eren directs his abjection of titans towards the rest of humanity, turning into a full monster. To protect his friends and his homeland, he becomes the traditional Gothic hero/villain, a character with both good and monstrous qualities. With the power of the Founding Titan, Eren unleashes the Colossal Titans within the walls in what is called "The Rumbling" (Isayama 31: 47), and he ends up killing eighty percent of humanity. He separates himself from the entire world for the sake of his freedom and the freedom of those on Paradis Island. Eren becomes the monster that everyone makes him out to be, the very monster he has abjected for so long. His desire for freedom turns him into a vessel of hatred, and he sets out to return the hatred that has been poured onto him and the Eldian race for centuries. Once again, *Attack on Titan* has dismantled the idea of abjection. Eren, the main character with whom we have identified and sympathized, becomes a full-blooded monster, committing genocide on everyone outside of Paradis. He now abjects other human beings, and readers may feel disturbed by the way he gets revenge on his enemies. Just as the walls on Paradis come crashing down, a lot of our barriers and prejudices fall as well. Eren's actions demonstrate that the monster is not simply the titans on the outskirts of society; the monster is within all of us. Eren warns us of what happens when we discriminate and take Othering too far. Whether we let our abjection of others be destructive or whether we can recognize and unlearn our prejudice is up to us.

Attack on Titan exemplifies many Gothic elements from its intertextuality and psychologized setting to its themes of abjection. The titans in the manga have qualities of giants and titans from Norse and Greek mythology, and the intertextuality demonstrates how such monsters have already existed in a variety of cultures for centuries. The Gothic setting becomes a site of abjection for Eren and reflects his confusing attitudes toward the monster. Eren's experience with abjection changes dramatically throughout the manga as he continues to discover new truths about his world that undermine his previous assumptions.

The protagonist Eren's desire to abject the titans from his environment and himself has not been successful. Instead, he must accept the monster within him in order to use its power to fight his enemies. Eren's experience with abjection centers a lot around his identity of freedom, and his relationship with the monster becomes increasingly complicated when he realizes that he is more similar to the titans than he wants to believe. Readers have been led on a journey in which we experience our own ambivalence about monsters, revealing that the monsters we have abjected are actually part of ourselves. We can think of *Attack on Titan* as a coming-of-age story, as Eren grows up learning about the cruel and contradictory truths about his world. Just like Eren, we too learn that the world has more layers to it than we initially thought, seeing things beyond the extremes of black and white. Eren's complex relationship with the Other gives us a better understanding of how abjection works, and readers can explore their abjection even further through his changing perceptions of the Other and the deconstruction of binary oppositions.

Abjection: *Demon Slayer*

Much like *Attack on Titan*, *Demon Slayer* introduces a division between humans and monsters, and then challenges that idea through the protagonist Tanjiro's attitudes and actions. Tanjiro and his family live in the mountains of Taisho-era Japan (1912–1926), and when he goes to a neighboring village to sell charcoal one day, his whole family is massacred by Muzan Kibutsuji, the original demon. His mother and four youngest siblings die, and his sister Nezuko survives, only she has turned into a demon. Tanjiro trains for two years and joins the Demon Slayer Corps, a group that has been secretly fighting a war with demons for centuries. He vows to take revenge on Muzan for killing his family and to find a cure to turn Nezuko back into a human. The war between humans and demons culminates in the final battle against Muzan, where Tanjiro even gets turned into a demon briefly. The demon slayers ultimately kill Muzan, cleanse the world of demons, and start a new era of peace.

Tanjiro's first encounter with demons marks his abjection of them in the beginning of the manga. He was ignorant to the existence of demons until his family is massacred by one, after which he completely abjects the demons, especially Muzan. He also abjects the demon within Nezuko, convinced that she still has her humanity and that he can make her human again. Tanjiro casts

out that monstrous part of her, separating his beloved little sister from the terrifying demon. Again, the abject is what is opposed to or separated from the self (Kristeva 230). Tanjiro does not want to accept Muzan and demons as part of his world, making them abject. He initially sees no connection between him and the monster. Readers at this point in the manga instinctively sympathize with Tanjiro, the hero, and condemn Muzan and his demons as purely evil. We experience another clear division between the Self and the Other: we are good, and they are evil. This Othering comes easily to us because we often criticize others for their ways of living and doing things that are different from us. Just as Tanjiro does with Nezuko, however, we may also choose to abject certain parts of people's behavior that would undermine our idea of them, whether they are a friend or a relative.

Tanjiro later experiences an abjection of self when Muzan gives him demon blood and powers, transforming him into the monster. Kristeva says that while the abject is separated from the self, it can also exist within the self (232). Tanjiro's abjection of demons is not enough to keep the threat of demonic power outside of himself, and he physically becomes the monster that he abjects, just as Eren does in *Attack on Titan*. Nezuko and the other demon slayers try to get Tanjiro to resist the demon instincts and refrain from killing anyone, calling out to his humanity. They realize he too is trying to fight against the demon and trying to "regain his own sense of self" (Gotouge 23: 142). This aligns with Kristeva's concept of the abject as something that threatens our illusion of a unitary self; it is a part of ourselves that we have thrown away to feel whole and complete, despite the fact that we are constantly changing.

The demon inside Tanjiro threatens his identity as a human, and he abjects it from within. The story moves inside Tanjiro's subconscious state, where he wants to return to reality and go home with Nezuko, but Muzan's presence tries to get him to embrace his new life as an all-powerful demon. Tanjiro refuses to live as a demon and reaches forward. As he does so, his fallen comrades all give Tanjiro a push to raise him up (Gotouge 23: 137). It is a powerful image as readers can see and identify all the demon slayers who have lost their lives in the battle to rid the world of demons. The two siblings turn back into humans, breaking the demon curse and successfully casting out the demons within themselves. When Tanjiro becomes a demon, the manga blurs the line between humans and monsters. The hero cannot fully abject the demons, and neither can the readers. His humanity overpowers his demonic side, however, and he turns back into a human by the end. We learn that it is possible to temporarily abject certain negative traits and maintain our sense of selfhood, but, like the main characters of the two manga, we all must confront our abjection eventually. In experiencing this abjection of self, we must question what we value most and how those values affect our identities.

The two protagonists have varying experiences with their abjection of the self. Unlike Eren, Tanjiro manages to fully separate himself from the monster

and maintain his humanity. While he does become a monster, his desires to protect his loved ones and to remain a human take over and quell the demon instincts. A medicine that can turn demons into humans luckily works on Tanjiro as well; otherwise, he would have been forced to live as a demon forever. But Eren's situation is not as successful because there is no medicine that could turn Eren fully human again. He ultimately has to accept the monster and use its power in order to protect his loved ones, albeit in a morally questionable way. Those with the power of the nine titans are all cursed to die within thirteen years of inheriting that power, a fact that emphasizes another facet of abjection—the mortality that affects all living beings eventually. In the final story arc of *Attack on Titan*, Eren only has four years left to live. Even if he wants to separate from his titan powers completely, which he does not, he knows he would have to pass on that power to another Eldian who can use it to save Paradis. The only way for him to transfer that power is to have a successor eat him. In other words, to successfully abject the monster within him, Eren has to die.

Another way that Tanjiro challenges his abjection of demons is through his alliance with friendly demons to defeat Muzan and his subordinates. He meets Tamayo and Yushiro, two demons who defy Muzan and work with the demon slayers to kill their common enemy. Tamayo is a doctor who is able to manipulate her body on her whim, allowing her to remove Muzan's curse and survive by only drinking a small amount of blood, usually from blood donations (Gotouge 2: 157). During the final battle, Tamayo makes a mixture of drugs and absorbs the poison into Muzan herself, sacrificing her own body to successfully weaken him (16: 98). Tamayo's research and sacrifice allow the demon slayers to finally kill Muzan after a long and grueling battle. This cooperation between humans and demons ensures their success against such a strong and evil opponent.

As we have seen in both manga, the humans must work together with the monsters to defeat another evil, challenging the division between the two groups. In *Attack on Titan*, Eren relies on his Attack Titan and Founding Titan powers to fight other titans and humans who threaten his home. He works with the Paradis military to fend off titan attacks. Similarly in *Demon Slayer*, the friendly demons lend their strength to fight the demons who slaughter innocent humans. While Tanjiro and the demon slayers are all incredibly strong, they still rely on the power of demons to let them find an opening and defeat the other demons. Readers' attitudes toward all demons change, and, like Tanjiro, we start to trust some of them. We see that it is better to let go of our differences and embrace a common goal rather than to cast out the people whom we think have no connection with ourselves. The manga continues to blur the lines between humans and monsters, and neither side is completely good or evil.

The demons began their existence as humans who were abjected by society to the point where they could not save themselves or the people they love. Society treated them as monsters, so they had no reason to live as humans anymore. This reinforces the idea that humans create the very monsters they

abject. In the two texts, what used to be a distinct separation between humans and monsters turns into a substantial gray area. When the plot of *Attack on Titan* progresses, we discover that society's leaders intentionally create the monsters to do their bidding. In *Demon Slayer*, the monsters represent marginalized humans who become demons to save themselves from social oppression. Most of the demons chose to become the abject. Some of them were sick and weak, and gaining demon powers would allow them to become strong and live longer (Gotouge 5: 180). Others were too ugly or too beautiful, becoming objects of ridicule and envy by society. After the revelation of the demons' backstories, readers recognize that a lot of them are worthy of sympathy just as the humans are. Becoming demons gave them strength and life; it gave them the ability to forget their hardships, and to move forward in a world full of sickness, hatred, and evil.

Finding out the truth about these demons humanizes the monster, giving Tanjiro and the readers a space to try to understand them better. Tanjiro wishes for humans to stop suffering, and he knows killing the demons will achieve that. While he does not show mercy on demons, he is not so heartless that he cannot understand how difficult some of their lives were. Tanjiro is unlike many of the other demon slayers in that he can see the humans within these monsters:

To dispel the regrets of those killed, to stop any more victims from appearing, I will relentlessly wield my blade against the demons, and that's a fact. But I will not trample on the pains of being a demon. Nor on those who regret their own actions. Because demons were humans. Because they were humans just like me. He isn't an unsightly monster. Demons are lifeless beings. Sorrowful beings. (Gotouge 5: 186–87)

We can see that Tanjiro has had to confront his abjection of demons many times throughout the manga. The demons are dynamic, acting as the perceived evil while also evoking sympathy, exemplifying Cohen's third thesis that monsters defy binary oppositions (6–7). Readers see that many of the monsters are not actually monsters, but former humans. Beville similarly argues that Gothic-postmodernist texts deconstruct binary oppositions through the use of counter-narratives (41); *Demon Slayer* offers readers a counter-narrative by revealing the past human lives of the demons that Tanjiro must fight. Readers thus become aware of their own monstrosity through this manga, forced to examine their treatment of so-called monsters and the immediate bias they have toward people who are different from them.

The demons experience an abjection of the humans as well, presenting another reversal that disrupts the dichotomy between humans and demons. When the demons face defeat and die, they cannot accept their loss because humans are supposed to be weak and inferior. The demons abject their humanity because it equates with weakness. The demon Akaza says, "I'm repulsed by weaklings.

They make me vomit. The laws of nature dictate that they will be eliminated” (Gotouge 17: 126). The urge to vomit, expelling the substance that makes us sick exemplifies abjection on a basic, physical level (Kristeva 230), no matter who the subject is. In the demon slayers’ final battle with Muzan, Tanjiro suffers from a tumor growing on the right side of his face due to his exposure to Muzan’s blood. Upon seeing this, Muzan says, “You look positively awful, Tanjiro Kamado. This way, it’s hard to tell which of us is the demon. You make my skin crawl” (Gotouge 21: 129). To him, demons are strong, near-perfect beings who can live forever, and humans are pitiful creatures who all eventually get sick and die. The different experiences of abjection found between the human protagonist and the villainous demons in the manga lead the reader to question the binary opposition of good and evil that has previously been established.

The contrasting experiences between the protagonists of *Attack on Titan* and *Demon Slayer* show readers how the concept of who the abject is and who is not can vary. While Eren must embrace the monster to return all the hate he has suffered at the hands of other humans, Tanjiro shows that humans are indeed capable of overcoming the abjection of self. Eren’s story is much more tragic, as he accepts his fate as a monster and dies before he can see the future of his dreams. Eren wants his comrades to be honored as heroes who saved humanity from extinction by killing him. He planned The Rumbling so that no one could wage war and attack Paradis for several generations, and he sacrificed his life so that his loved ones could live long, happy lives and die in peace. Tanjiro’s story tells readers that even if people treat others differently or cruelly for who they are, no one can justify killing other people. Playing into the role of a monster does not always fix one’s abjection of human society. It is better to unlearn some of the biases and stereotypes we have of others because Othering causes a lot of suffering, even if we do not see the consequences. We have been able to confront our abjection of monsters through both manga by evaluating how the protagonists deal with their experiences. We can expose the monsters within ourselves and reflect on how we want them to affect our identities.

Demon Slayer has given us the Gothic motifs of intertextuality, psychologized landscapes, and a detailed abject experience through the protagonist. The demons in the manga have the qualities of oni in Japanese folklore and vampires in vampire legends. This use of intertextuality combines the monsters from Western culture with those of Eastern myths, constructing a new but familiar monster whom readers can examine. The settings where Tanjiro battles against demons reflect his inner state and reveal three sites representing the different ways that humans and demons try to abject certain aspects of their existence. Tanjiro’s abjection of the demon race becomes increasingly challenged as the war between humans and demons comes to a head.

Although both Eren’s and Tanjiro’s efforts to abject the monsters in their worlds have been successful, they each meet different ends. Tanjiro knows that demons cannot coexist with humans, and he cannot allow more humans to

suffer needlessly. As he learns about the demons' past lives, he realizes they were trying to save themselves, and that is not wrong. But Tanjiro cannot forgive them for killing humans; he can only hope to put them out of their misery and let their souls rest. His relationship with the demons changes when he forms alliances with some of them and especially when he turns into one himself. He never loses his humanity, and he does manage to cleanse the world of demons, at the loss of many other demon slayers. Eren, on the other hand, gives up his humanity for the sake of his people. He finds out the power—and curse—of the titans persists only because the founder Ymir Fritz has been obeying the first King Karl Fritz for over two thousand years. Her extreme love for him has bound her to his wish of passing down the titan-shifting ability to every Eldian generation. When Eren dies at the hands of Mikasa Ackerman, the one he loves, that cycle is now broken, and this ability ceases to exist. Eren's tragic death is necessary for the survivors to continue in a world without titans. He ultimately does what he vowed to do at the beginning of the series and rid the world of titans, only he cannot live in the new era he has created. Readers have been through another journey where we have to consider the harmful effects of Othering, showing how monsters are created because of our exclusion and abjection of them. If we confront our abjection and try to understand different traits and people as Tanjiro does, we may be able to discover more facets of our identities, and the world may become more humane.

Conclusion

A rich array of Gothic themes pervades the dark fantasy manga *Attack on Titan* and *Demon Slayer*. Each story initially labels its monsters as villains that afflict their world, but there is a gradual progression that debunks or even reverses this idea. The texts contain several intertextual elements from ancient myths, traditional folktales, and vampire legends. The use of intertextuality in the manga draws attention to how monsters from ancient legends and lore continue to shape today's monsters. We can recognize the resemblance of these creatures and compare the roles they play in each of their worlds. Another Gothic device is the psychologized setting that reveals the protagonist's desires and enhances his emotions. The landscape becomes a site of abjection where the protagonist confronts the monster for whom he bears so much hatred. It can also reveal a darker, more taboo side of society that we do not usually discuss. Finally, by analyzing the dichotomy between humans and monsters through the lens of abjection, I have shown how each manga undermines this distinction and creates a complicated relationship between the two. Learning the truth about the world tends to lead our heroes toward a dangerous and destructive path. After analyzing these three aspects, we can see that they shed light on the cruelty of a world in which humans *and* monsters experience such strong violence and hatred that they lose their humanity altogether.

The Gothic responds to terror by dramatizing our fears of the unknown, of fiction becoming reality, and of confronting the impossible. Yet we are fascinated with monsters, horror, and violence in stories not only because of their appeal to a diverse audience, but also because they invite us to imagine another world saturated with evil. Hajime Isayama's *Attack on Titan* and Koyoharu Gotouge's *Demon Slayer* present us with intense, three-dimensional monsters in different settings that challenge our view of the Other. When we read about monsters in Gothic fiction and dark fantasy manga, we often find ourselves empathizing with them and questioning our values and behavior. We can thus consider our own world and the monsters found there, whether they are imaginary or manifested, within ourselves or in others.

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