



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Blurring Boundaries: Apocalyptic Bodies in Berserk

verfasst von | submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 844

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Anglophone Literatures and
Cultures

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Sarah Heinz

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Introduction

Apocalyptic narratives, defined as stories that depict the end of the world and the revealing of a new one, are embedded in ancient forms of storytelling and continue to persist and proliferate in contemporary media. For many manga, the portrayal of the apocalypse and the significance of apocalyptic themes for the unfolding of a story are core components. *Berserk*, a dark fantasy manga created by Kentaro Miura, explores many apocalyptic themes, such as the end of the world, good vs. evil, the revelation of a cosmic truth, and the disruption of boundaries to name a few. A key site for the text's exploration of apocalyptic themes is the body of the two main protagonists from the manga *Berserk*, Guts and Griffith, who undergo multiple bodily transformations during the plot. Through their bodies and bodily transformations triggered by apocalyptic events, central binary oppositions associated with the apocalyptic such as good vs. evil, self vs. Other (the "Other" as a concept is capitalized in this thesis), or old vs. new are disrupted and undermined. In this context, this paper asks how bodies and bodily transformations are represented and used as a tool to destabilize binary oppositions associated with the apocalyptic narrative.

Apocalyptic narratives have been a dominant subject of study in the fields of theology, film studies, literary studies, and cultural studies. For example, *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* edited by Collins presents a comprehensive overview of the definition and narrative components of apocalyptic literature in the religious context. Collins definition of apocalyptic literature as "a genre of revelatory literature" (2) has been cited across many academic works, which establishes him as a prominent figure in the field. In the article *Apocalyptic Narrative schemas in Dystopian Films*, Muwaffaq et al. analyze how humanity is represented in the face of before, during, and after an apocalypse. In order to analyze the representation of humanity in dystopian movies, Muwaffaq et al. proposed three types of apocalyptic schema: pre-apocalyptic, apocalyptic, and post-apocalyptic. Although this narrative framework is developed to analyze movies, it is also applicable for books because most of the movies referred to in their article are movie adaptations based on novels. In Lisboa's work *The End of the World*, she provides a "panoramic illustration" (xv) by making an in-depth analysis of the apocalyptic theme in works of literature, film, and visual arts from past and modern times. Lisboa explores the concept of the end of the world, which in the apocalyptic context is rather ambiguous because post-apocalyptic stories imply a continuation after the apocalypse. The concept of the end, the three types of apocalyptic schema, and the

definition of apocalyptic literature are discussed further in the theoretical framework of this thesis. These three examples of scientific works constitute a mere speck of a spectrum of apocalyptic narrative studies. However, given the abundance of studies focusing on the relevance of the apocalypse, there remains a lack of research regarding the centrality of bodies and physical transformations as a key narrative device to shape apocalyptic narratives.

This lack of research on the connection between bodies, bodily transformations, and the apocalyptic narrative can also be observed in manga studies. The majority of English-language manga research dealing with the apocalypse is associated with historical and cultural phenomena which transpired in Japan. For example, the traumatizing events of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 have shaped the visuals and the storytelling in manga and anime significantly, which has been outlined by Tanaka in her work *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction* from 2014 and Bouissou in her historical overview of manga from 2000. Despite much academic research on the cultural implications of the apocalypse as a narrative tool in manga and anime, few scholars have attempted to establish a connection between the apocalyptic narrative and bodily transformations in their specific function to blur boundaries. When bodies are discussed in relation to the apocalypse, the focus is often on cyborgs (e.g. Jakešová; Orbaugh; Bolton), highlighting the intersection of technology and humanity rather than the transformative and boundary-blurring functions of the body itself. Whether Japanese-language research has dealt with this topic is unfortunately unknown to me due to the existent language barrier.

This research gap is worth filling because bodily transformation is a reoccurring motif within transcultural and transhistorical apocalyptic narratives. The terminology “bodily transformation/s” is used to denote not only the moment of transformation itself but also indicates the existing bodily forms embodied by a character before and after their transformations. This motif can be found in myths and traditional stories, such as the dismemberment of Osiris by Set in Egyptian mythology, the dismantling of the frost-giant Ymir by Odin in Norse mythology, and the death and rebirth of Christ in Christian narratives. Bodily transformations still prevail in modern narratives, such as the metamorphosis of humans into Titans in the award-winning manga/anime *Attack on Titan* by Isayama, the zombie transformations in the American show *The Walking Dead*, or the radiation-induced mutations in the Russian post-apocalyptic novel *Metro 2033*. In apocalyptic settings, bodily transformation does not merely signify physical change but serves as a site where apocalyptic binaries are destabilized and reconfigured. Examining these bodily transformations and their

ability to challenge oppositional dualism thus provides crucial insight into the complex, yet obscure, nature of such binaries and how they shape the apocalyptic narrative. Thus, the central question that my research addresses is: How are the physical forms and body transformations of Guts and Griffith used to destabilize binary oppositions associated with the apocalyptic throughout the narrative of *Berserk*? More specifically, how does challenging these boundaries contribute to the overall apocalyptic narrative of *Berserk*? In the context of this thesis, body transformations and their ability to disrupt boundaries serve as a lens through which the apocalyptic narrative is explored.

The reason why *Berserk* has been chosen as the primary material is because it is widely acclaimed for its detailed art, storytelling, and characters. It has won the Tezuko Osamu Cultural Award for Excellence in 2002 (New York Public Library) and was among the Manga's Division Jury Selections of the Japan Media Arts Festival Awards in 2001 and 2002 (Japan Media Arts Festival Archive). In the US, it has found its place as number one on the IMDb list for "Top 100 Manga of All Time" in 2023 and made it on the bestseller list of *The New York Times* in June 2024. *Berserk* has also received the 2007 award for best *seinen* manga (a specific genre of manga aimed at adult men) at the Japan Expo Awards in France (manga-news) and won the Manga Barcelona award for the *seinen* category in 2013 and 2021 (RTVE; La Vanguardia).

The first volume of *Berserk* by Miura (1966-2021) was published in 1990, and the series is still ongoing even though Miura passed away in 2021. His childhood friend, who is also a fellow *mangaka* (transl. manga artist), Kouji Mori continues to publish the remaining chapters of *Berserk* as Miura has entrusted his vision of the ending for *Berserk* to Mori (Hakusensha). As of 2023, 60 million copies have been circulating worldwide (Asahi Shimbun), and there is also an anime adaptation of the manga, which was released in 1997. The English digital version, which I use for the analysis in my thesis, is published by Dark Horse Comics. During an interview led by Crunchyroll, the director of international publishing and licensing of Dark Horse Comics, Michael Gombos, said that *Berserk* was their best-selling product of all time in 2017 (Vincent). Given the widespread popularity of *Berserk*, it deserves more scholarly attention, especially in the context of apocalyptic narratives, because it offers rich apocalyptic thematic as represented by the plot, the characters, and the artwork.

In order to analyze the apocalyptic narrative and the reoccurring bodily transformations in *Berserk*, this paper is divided into four main chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. In the first chapter, the term "apocalypse" as a literary theme is defined, the traditional and

contemporary meanings of apocalypse are elucidated, and a working definition is proposed. Subsequently, the Aristotelian narrative structures of religious and secular apocalyptic texts are outlined and compared. While post-apocalyptic storylines are often treated as their own genre, they are considered as a temporal narrative theme within the broader framework of apocalyptic narratives in this paper. The reason for this choice is due to the apocalyptic narrative structure which is fundamentally shaped by a before and after logic that centers on the aftermath of an apocalyptic event rather than representing a separate thematic category. In the last subchapter, thematic binaries belonging to the apocalyptic genre, which I call “apocalyptic binaries” are explored. I begin by establishing the significance of binary oppositions through reference to structuralist theory from Saussure. Building on Saussure, I outline the poststructuralist critique on binary oppositions to show the limitations of such a concept. After establishing the structuralist and poststructuralist views on binaries, I explore apocalyptic binaries which are divided into three categories: temporal, moral, and ontological. The binaries associated with the categories are listed by drawing onto both religious and secular sources, and their literary relevance for the apocalyptic narrative is examined. Although recurring apocalyptic binaries are assigned to one of the three categories, some are not confined to a single category and may overlap with others.

The second chapter revolves around apocalyptic bodies, in which the phenomenological, the transformational, and the monstrous bodies are introduced. The first section draws on Merleau-Ponty to establish the centrality of the lived body in perception and experience. In the section on transformational bodies, I establish and define four distinct types of bodily transformations, namely metamorphosis, polymorphy, incarnation, and reincarnation. The final section on monstrous bodies engages with theories of liminality to frame their ontological and symbolic significance. I further outline the visual depiction of monstrous physiques using concepts of hybridity and the grotesque before turning to their psychological dimensions through Kristeva’s theory of the abject and Freud’s notion of the uncanny. These frameworks which focus on the body provide a multifaceted approach to understanding how *Berserk* utilizes the body within its apocalyptic landscape.

Once the theoretical foundations are set, the methodology used to analyze *Berserk* is presented in the third chapter. The methodology used to analyze *Berserk* is a close reading via multimodality, which is defined as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined” (Kress and van Leeuwen 20). While there are many models of multimodality available, I

primarily focus on Natsume's manga expression theory, which puts emphasis on three modes of manga, pictures, words, and panels. I briefly draw on McCloud's comic theory to complement Natsume's manga expression theory since Natsume's material is originally written in Japanese and the English translation of such is limited. It is important to note that while I primarily use the multimodal approach in my analysis, I would on occasions provide a more general analysis in which I position the characters in the overall story and plot. This type of analysis provides contextualization, which can be especially beneficial for those who are not familiar with *Berserk*. In addition, as *Berserk* contains topics and graphic depictions of violence, self-harm, torture, and sexual assault, a disclaimer is necessary: while such imagery is thematically central to the narrative and to my analysis, images that are excessively explicit or violent are kept to the minimum to avoid potential distress for readers. I completely omit sexually violent pictures as prolonged exposure of such has generated discomfort in me and may also potentially be distressing for readers.

After establishing theoretical foundations and methodology, the fourth chapter focuses on the analysis of *Berserk*. While the methodology is specifically geared toward manga, the content of *Berserk* is analyzed through a predominantly American and European theoretical framework. This choice is not intended to undermine the cultural and historical specificity of the apocalyptic narrative tradition of Japanese manga (or any other culture) but rather to engage in a cross-cultural discussion which highlights the apocalyptic theme as a transnational motif. The characters selected for analysis are the two male protagonists Guts and Griffith. In the analysis, each bodily form is inspected chronologically according to the story, which is divided into three parts: the pre-apocalypse, the apocalypse, and the post-apocalypse. This structure of analysis allows a more comprehensive view on the transformations and the character developments of the main characters. Each analytical part entails insights and implications which are discussed in connection with the research question. The result of the findings is ultimately summarized in the conclusion, which is the final chapter of this thesis.

1 Apocalyptic Narratives

1.1 Definition

In contemporary language, an apocalypse is synonymous with the end of the world, and it manifests in different forms, such as natural catastrophes, nuclear wars, pandemics, and other catalyst events. When investigating the etymology of the word "apocalypse", however, a

different view of the term emerges. The word “apocalypse” has its roots in biblical stories and was first translated into English as the title of the Book of Revelation (hereafter referred to as “Revelation”) (Pitetti 439; Leigh 23; Stone 384). It stems from the Greek verb *apokalyptein* (Greek: ἀποκάλυψις) which can be translated as “to uncover”, “to reveal”, and “to disclose”. What is revealed is “mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world” (Collins 2). In essence, obscure secrets, phenomena, and processes as well as God’s purpose for the end of times are unveiled through an apocalypse (Hernandez vii).

While the Christian notion of apocalypse is fundamentally about revelation, this revelation is inseparable from the imminence of the end-time (Ostow 307; Stone 384; Leigh 5). The apocalyptic text from the Judeo-Christian tradition does not merely disclose divine truths but does so in the context of an unfolding cosmic finale. Toward the end of this narrative, a holy war between the forces of good and evil is depicted where evil initially prevails but is ultimately defeated by the power of good. This triumph signals a final judgment and an ultimate transformation of the world, marking the end of a historical period and the beginning of a new era. Thus, apocalyptic literature as per Judeo-Christian tradition is prophetic as it foreshadows the imminent end of times in the form of visions and scenarios that gradually unfold the ultimate end of time and an otherworldly realm (Collins 20; Stone 284 & 427; Wieser et al. 3).

In this paper, I adopt the working definition of the apocalypse from Christian traditions because it is more extensive than the contemporary understanding of the concept. Rather than signifying mere destruction, it encompasses revelation, which allows a more nuanced reading of the narrative and the symbolic functions of the apocalyptic. While this definition is rooted in religious discourse, I nevertheless consider secular dimensions of apocalyptic narratives, particularly in terms of narrative structure and binary oppositions. The dual focus on the religious and secular narrative structure is appropriate given that the primary text is a contemporary apocalyptic story which follows a narrative blueprint heavily influenced by the Christian notion of apocalypse. By examining both the religious and secular dimensions of apocalyptic storytelling, I create a suitable theoretical framework, which enables an in-depth analysis of *Berserk*.

1.2 Narrative Structures

Building on the working definition of apocalypse as a revelatory phenomenon followed by end-time scenarios, it is essential to examine the narrative structures that shape both religious and secular apocalyptic texts. According to Tyler, narrative structure “refers to the framework that shapes the way a story is presented and understood”. A key distinction within narrative theory is that between a story and a plot. The story encompasses the unfolding sequence of events, and all the information conveyed in a narrative, i.e. *what* is presented in the narrative. In contrast, the plot refers to *how* these contents are arranged and delivered to the presented audience. In other words, the plot serves as a “skeletal framework of events” (Sachs 4) and stories are “genuine wholes that already have a life on their own” (Sachs 4). This distinction between story and plots originates with Aristotle, who emphasized that every plot should consist of a beginning, middle, and end (30). A beginning does not follow from anything else but is followed by something. In contrast, an end follows from something else and is not followed by anything further. A middle is situated between the two: it both follows something and is, in turn, followed by something else. Aristotle summarizes that a well-structured story should follow a coherent form which is consistent with the principles outlined above (Aristotle 30). By analyzing the plot structures of religious and secular apocalyptic narratives through this framework, the temporal logics and recurring motifs that define apocalyptic storytelling become apparent.

In the religious discourse, the apocalypse is depicted in Revelation, also known as the Apocalypse of John. Revelation is the final book of the New Testament, and thereby the concluding text of the Christian Bible. While some scholars argue that the narrative plot of Revelation lacks a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end, it is nonetheless possible to identify three broad thematic movements that provide structural coherence (Moloney 642; Smith 373; Barr 382). Chapters 1-3 of Revelation form the beginning of the narrative where John experiences a vision of the risen Christ and is instructed to write letters to the seven churches (Barr 382). This opening functions to establish context and a moral framework of the apocalypse by introducing key themes of such as judgment, faithfulness, and salvation, thereby setting the ethical and spiritual stakes for what is to come. Chapters 4-11 represent the middle part of the narrative, which is centered around the theme of heavenly worship and judgment (Barr 382). In these chapters, many incidents happen (e.g. John is taken to the Throne of God, the seven seals are opened, the seven trumpets are sounded, etc.) which initiate the divine judgment of good vs. evil that destabilizes the earth and signals an escalating conflict between

the divine and the demonic. Chapters 12-22 concludes with a holy battle between the forces of good and evil, culminating in the defeat of evil, the final judgment, and the establishment of a new heaven and new earth. Through divine victory over evil and ultimate transformation, Revelation delivers a sense of narrative closure that corresponds to the Aristotelian structure of beginning, middle, and end.

In contrast to the narrative plot structure of Revelation, secular apocalyptic narratives tend to follow a plot shaped primarily by temporal progression centered around an apocalyptic event. These stories are typically framed in three stages: what occurs before, during, and after the apocalyptic event. Accordingly, the plot can be divided into a pre-apocalyptic beginning, an apocalyptic middle, and a post-apocalyptic end. According to Muwaffaq et al., the pre-apocalyptic storyline portrays the impending catastrophe, such as environmental catastrophes, pandemics, technological collapse, as a potential threat to be anticipated and a problem to be solved. It commonly places humanistic individuals as protagonists who are tasked with responding to and preventing the looming apocalyptic event (218). This pre-apocalyptic world is characterized by meaningful hierarchies and ordered societal structures (Stifflemire 4-5). Thereby, the pre-apocalyptic narrative functions to establish contrast between what was before and after an apocalyptic event. Despite the protagonists' efforts to prevent apocalyptic disasters, it inevitably occurs, depicting a dramatic rupture in the world's order. The characters and, by extension, the audience witness the collapse of all meaningful societal and cultural structures through large-scale destruction, and the world falls into chaos (Muwaffaq et al. 220). The story of the post-apocalyptic endings may vary. On one hand, the post-apocalyptic world can depict a happy ending in which the apocalypse is averted. On the other hand, the post-apocalyptic world emerges as "a gap, a dilation between one ordered existence and the revealing of the next" (Stifflemire 4-5) in which a devastating, dystopian wasteland where survival becomes the primary concern is portrayed (Stifflemire 12; Muwaffaq et al. 221). In this new world, hierarchal systems are either entirely absent or radically reversed. Humanity is confronted with its own fragility as survivors desperately attempt to reconstruct meaning by piecing together the remnants and fragments of the past from the pre-apocalyptic world (Moon 1; Pitetti 444).

Having outlined the narrative structures of both religious and secular apocalyptic texts, it is now important to highlight their key differences. Firstly, one of the most notable distinctions between the secular and religious narratives lies in the positioning of the apocalyptic event. In Christian tradition, the apocalypse occurs toward the end of the narrative,

whereas in secular narratives, it is often situated in the middle, although this is not a universal pattern given the diversity of apocalyptic representations in literature and visual media. Secondly, while both traditions treat the apocalypse as inevitable, their treatment of such diverges. Secular protagonists often attempt to prevent or mitigate the catastrophic event (Muwaffaq et al. 218), whereas in the religious narrative, no such intervention is possible due to the absolute authority of divine causality. Thirdly, the nature of revelation differs among the religious and secular narratives. In Christian theology, the apocalypse reveals God's divine purpose, the existence of a transcendent realm, and the promise of eschatological salvation (Collins 2). In contrast, secular apocalyptic narratives tend to unveil the fragility of seemingly stable structures, the vulnerability of humanity, and the moral ambiguity that arises in times of collapse (Moon 1; Pitetti 444). Thus, while both narratives center on the act of revealing, what is revealed differs fundamentally. Lastly, the outcome of the apocalyptic event varies significantly. The Christian apocalypse ultimately culminates in the defeat of evil and the establishment of a new and divinely ordered utopia (Galley 10; Riesch 2). Secular post-apocalyptic narratives, by contrast, may offer visions of renewal but frequently depict dystopian worlds in which order is unstable and societal structures are either nonexistent or radically transformed (Stifflemire 4-5). It is important to note that in secular storytelling, the post-apocalyptic can constitute an entire genre with extended focus on survival and reconstruction. In contrast, in the Christian narrative, the post-apocalyptic marks the definite end of an era. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this paper, the term "post-apocalyptic" is used to denote a chronological phase within the broader apocalyptic timeline instead of a separate genre of its own.

For the purpose of the analysis, I apply this narrative framework to examine the apocalyptic structure of *Berserk*. While the plot structure of the manga primarily follows the secular apocalyptic model, divided into pre-apocalyptic, apocalyptic, and post-apocalyptic phases, it also incorporates key elements of the Christian tradition, particularly in the nature of revelation. Similarly to religious apocalyptic narratives, *Berserk* unveils a transcendent realm and supernatural entities. What makes *Berserk* a worthy subject of analysis is its unique fusion of the two traditions, especially its post-apocalyptic storyline. It frames the post-apocalyptic world as both utopian and dystopian, simultaneously offering the potential for renewal and the persistence of suffering. Furthermore, the post-apocalyptic phase is not treated as a conclusive end but rather as an open continuation of the narrative, suggesting that apocalypse is not a final rupture but an ongoing post-apocalyptic condition.

1.3 Apocalyptic Binaries

Having examined the overarching structure of both religious and secular apocalyptic narratives, I now turn to the underlying element that shapes these narratives. Apocalyptic binaries, which are referred to as binary oppositions associated with the apocalyptic narrative, serve as the foundation for meaning making within apocalyptic storytelling. According to the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, a binary opposition is “the principal of contrast between two mutually exclusive terms: on/off, up/down, left/right, etc.; an important concept of structuralism, which sees such distinctions as fundamental to all language and thought” (27). Saussure, a Swiss linguist prominent in the development of structuralism, laid the foundation for understanding binary oppositions in the context of linguistics and language philosophy. He postulates that the relational identity, i.e. the value, of signs is composed “(1) of a *dissimilar* thing that can be *exchanged* for the thing of which the value is to be determined; and (2) of *similar* things that can be *compared* with the thing of which the value is to be determined” (115). The first point contributes little to the theoretical framework of this thesis, whereas the second provides more insight into understanding apocalyptic binaries. To illustrate the second point, the opposition good vs. evil is used as an example. In accordance with Saussure’s claim, the value of a word becomes apparent when compared with “other words that stand in opposition to it” (115). As such, the concept of good only has value because it can be distinguished from its opposition, namely evil. Good is understood as the absence of evil and is only meaningful because it is not evil. This example shows that binary oppositions generate meaning through comparison and contrast.

While structuralism emphasizes fixed systems of meaning through binary oppositions, poststructuralist thought challenges this stability by exposing the inherent instability and fluidity within these structures. In an encyclopedia entry on poststructuralism, Woodward et al. summarize three main critiques derived from the structuralist mode of thought. Firstly, they contest the structuralist claim that binary systems are the foundation of our language system (Woodward et al. 399). Instead, binaries are hypothetical construct, which reveals more about the society that creates it instead of them being a mirror of reality. This socially constructed nature of binaries promotes an either/or mentality, which in turn creates hierarchy among binaries (e.g. good is preferred over evil). Poststructuralism does not reject the concept of binary oppositions, instead, it is interested in the production of those hierarchies and boundaries which demarcate the oppositional binaries from each other (Woodward et al. 399). Secondly, binaries limit the way in which we understand the world. Due to the structuralist fact that

everything has to be either/or, it “can only posit a world in which everything either ‘is’ or ‘is not’” (Woordward et al. 399). Thereby, it oversimplifies complex realities, exclude liminalities, and constrains epistemology. Thirdly, Woordward et al. claims that structuralist thinking does not fully embrace the relational nature of meaning it claims to uphold (399). Saussure argues that language consists of arbitrary signs which derive meaning from their negation. For example, a cat is understood as a negation of a dog, i.e. a cat is *not* a dog. However, he assumed that the concept of a cat directly represents a real-world animal. Derrida, a key figure associated with poststructuralism, challenges this notion by arguing that the idea of a cat only gains meaning through its difference from many other related concepts, such as a dog, a horse, or a lion. These concepts, in turn, are shaped by various cultural and linguistic systems (Derrida 44-45). Thereby, Derrida argues that meaning is always differed and never complete or fixed, which is the cornerstone of poststructuralist thinking. While poststructuralism does not oppose the concept of binary structures, it rejects the idea of fixed meanings and puts emphasis on complexity and context. It questions whether reality can ever truly be represented since all meaning is produced through shifting relations and not direct reflections of the real world (Woordward et al. 399).

With these contrasting views from structuralism and poststructuralism on binary oppositions, I now examine how these ideas translate to apocalyptic narratives. From my observation, both religious and secular apocalyptic narratives rely on structuralist binaries to make sense of existential threat and cosmic rupture. They use binaries to impose clarity on chaos, thereby creating an internal logic within the narrative. Especially in the religious apocalyptic narrative, binaries are prevalent throughout the beginning, middle, and end of the story as good vs. evil, order vs. chaos, purity vs. corruption, etc. are part of the narrative structure. As for secular apocalyptic narratives, binaries are primarily used at the beginning and end of the story. Depending on the story, binaries can persist during the apocalyptic event (e.g. in an alien invasion apocalypse, the binary opposition us vs. them is common); however, the apocalypse itself, in its extremity, is predominantly used as a narrative device to set the stage for the dissolution of the binaries. The bodies within the apocalypse, as will be illuminated in later chapters, ultimately expose the poststructuralist reality that such oppositions are inherently unstable and unsustainable.

In the next subchapter, I examine reoccurring binaries within the apocalyptic narrative. Since there is a multitude of binary oppositions within the apocalyptic narrative, I have grouped them into three broad categories: temporal, moral, and ontological in the subsequent

subchapters. By categorizing binaries temporally (e.g. old vs. new, beginning vs. end), morally (e.g. good vs. evil, God vs. Satan), and ontologically (e.g. life vs. death, heavenly vs. earthly), the operation of binaries in different dimensions of an apocalyptic story becomes apparent. Temporal binaries primarily structure the plot and sequence of the story, moral binaries reflect character and judgment, and ontological binaries shape identity and existence. While these categories are not exclusive and may occasionally overlap, this categorization nevertheless allows for analytical precision while preserving interpretive depth.

1.3.1 Temporal Binaries

If an apocalypse marks the end of an era through global destruction and annihilation, yet reveals an otherworldly realm or depicts survivors, then the question emerges of whether the end is truly the end. An ending suggests the finality of something, and in the case of the apocalyptic, the end may indicate the nothingness that comes after the obliteration of the world, for “the end-time, as this time, our time, is the time of ending things, everything, the world, ourselves, and every other thing on it” (Babich 147). When looking at the Christian tradition, nothing comes after Revelation in canonical text. However, paradoxically, the last chapter of the Bible portrays “a new heaven and a new earth” (*New International Bible*, Rev. 21.1) as well as a vision of New Jerusalem, depicting a new beginning after the end. This biblical depiction of a new world suggests a continuity and progression beyond the end in which humanity remains. Similarly, as established in the previous chapters, there are many secular post-apocalyptic stories which “are set in a world or civilization after such a disaster has taken place.” (Moon 1), indicating that the end is not final.

Due to this ambivalent temporality found in both religious and secular apocalyptic narratives, the definition and concept of “the end” warrants revision and clarification. Several scholars emphasize that the apocalypse is not a definite conclusion but rather a transitional phase. According to Pitetti, the apocalypse marks “the future as the end of the present” (441), signaling not total erasure but the emergence of something new. Similarly, as Men noted in one of his lectures regarding Revelation, “the end of the world is a permanent reality; it constantly repeats”, suggesting a cyclical repetition rather than a final closure. Pippin extends this idea by arguing that “[e]very apocalypse is a sequel. A sequel is a work which follows another work and can be complete in itself and seen in relation to the former and what follows it. The story becomes the never-ending story, in ever-evolving renditions” (1). The reason why Pippin chose the word “sequel” to define an apocalypse is due to the etymology of the word. She argues that

the word “sequel” is related to the words “seal” and “sign”, thus a “re-reading of the Apocalypse means a cycle of sealing, cracking open, and resealing, over and over again” (2).

In accordance with Pitetti’s, Men’s, and Pippin’s understanding of “the end” as defined through continuity, Lisboa offers insight on the linguistic precision when talking about the destruction associated with apocalypse. The post-apocalyptic continuity and survivalism negate the principal of *total* destruction immanent in apocalyptic events. Instead, the destruction inherent in an apocalypse cannot be described as a *total* universal destruction, but a “*near-global* destruction” (Lisboa 8), which leaves “just enough life left intact to guarantee a reasonable likelihood of a new beginning” (Lisboa 53). Although there is a type of apocalypse “that consists of mere downfall which doesn’t represent the opening of a new, positive state of affairs” (1), coined as “naked apocalypse” (1) by Anders, post-apocalyptic timelines are always characterized by their continuation after an apocalypse. Consequently, apocalyptic narratives tend to not solely focus on the moment of the end itself, but also on the broader timeline shaped by it, encompassing both the lead-up to the end (pre-apocalypse) and the future it sets in motion (post-apocalypse) (Pitetti 446).

Whether it is the establishment of an otherworldly realm or new societal structures in post-apocalyptic timelines, scholars such as Lisboa, Booker, and Timofeeva argue that a new world is constructed after an apocalyptic event took place or is narrowly averted. This new world can be both on earth and in heaven according to Revelation (21.1). Both in religious and secular narratives, this new post-apocalyptic world strives to rectify past mistakes and restore a sense of order. Despite the intention of achieving a world free of its previous errors and shackles, i.e. a utopia, the new world may not necessarily be better or different. Especially in a dystopian setting, the “post-apocalyptic interim is fraught with temporal, spatial, existential, and ontological concerns as survivors construct lives and worlds from fragments of the meaningful, ordered, pre-apocalyptic world” (Stifflemire 5). As Lisboa summarizes, “in reality, [...] the deep structures of the new world often have inbuilt in them the prototypes of old errors repeatable indefinitely” (53-54).

If the old is present in the new, then the ambiguity surrounding the definition of “the end” equally extends to the term “new”. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, there are several definitions of the adjective “new”. One definition is “being other than the former or old” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This definition circles back to Saussure’s structuralist theory which posits that the value of a word can be determined by comparing similar things (115), i.e. new is the absence of old. While this definition might be self-evident, it poses a

problem when put in the apocalyptic context because of the errors from the past which remain in and therefore shape the new world. In effect, the new is not entirely new, rendering this definition ambivalent. Another definition, which is more fitting for the apocalyptic context, is “beginning as the resumption or repetition of a previous act or thing” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This definition is more suitable for the apocalyptic context because it associates the new with the beginning, which is a fitting association, given that apocalyptic narratives reveal new worlds at the beginning of a new era. The resumption and repetition aspect of the new aligns with the concept of the existing continuity after an apocalyptic event (Pitetti 441; Men; Pippin 2) and the underlying traces of old mistakes in the new world (Lisboa 53-54; Booker 95; Timofeeva).

While “the end” is a prominent subject among scholars studying the apocalypse, much less effort has been put in defining “the beginning”. According to Stifflemire, the “post-beginnings give meaning to endings” (8), referring to the new beginnings that emerge in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event. Similarly to Stifflemire, Milicevic claims that “at the *judgment day* the righteous will be ushered into the beginning of eternity” (27). These two claims are similar in how the beginning is positioned in a temporal setting. In essence, the beginnings described by Stifflemire and Milicevic are both post-apocalyptic; it is the beginning *after* the end. However, the beginning is not merely limited to the post-apocalyptic beginning, it can also be a pre-apocalyptic beginning, i.e. a beginning of a story. The framing of “the beginning” may differ within the pre- and post-apocalyptic context. As established, the beginning of a post-apocalyptic world depicts a new world which reveals itself through an apocalypse, but it is not the beginning of a story according to the Aristotelian plot structure. In contrast, a pre-apocalyptic beginning may portray the start of a story and is thereby the Aristotelian beginning of a plot.

As demonstrated throughout this attempt to define temporal binaries, the oppositions of beginning vs. the end and old vs. new contain significant interpretative flexibility. While the Christian narrative portrays the apocalypse as the end of the current world, it simultaneously envisions a new beginning through the creation of a new heaven and earth. Similarly, secular narratives often depict post-apocalyptic worlds that emerge after catastrophe. Thereby, both religious and secular narratives indicate toward the continuity rather than the finality of the end. Scholars such as Pitetti (441), Men, and Pippin (1) frame the apocalypse as continuous rather than final, while Lisboa emphasizes that destruction is rarely total, allowing for resumption (53-54). The so called “new worlds” that follow whether utopian or dystopian is

often haunted by the remnants of the old, calling into question the definition of “new”. Structuralist definitions of the new as “not old” fails in this context as post-apocalyptic world frequently reproduces past errors, which validates the poststructuralist thought that binaries are inherently unstable. A more fitting definition views the new as a repetition or resumption of previous incidents. While much scholarly attention is given to endings, the concept of beginnings also warrants scrutiny. Both pre-apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic beginnings play a crucial role: the former frames the beginning of a story in which catastrophe is imminent, while the latter represents the start of a new world shaped by the rupture of the apocalypse. Accordingly, I use these terms beginning vs. end and old vs. new in alignment with these expanded and context-specific definitions rather than in strictly final terms.

1.3.2 Moral Binaries

While temporal binaries structure the unfolding of apocalyptic narratives, moral binaries serve to stabilize its ethical landscape, framing characters, events, and outcomes in terms of good vs. evil. The binary opposition of good vs. evil has long served as a foundational moral structure in religious and literary traditions. According to the biblical tradition, the Battle of Armageddon is the climax of the apocalyptic conflict and the manifestation of the struggle between good and evil (Rev. 16.16). Good is represented by God, Christ, and angels, whereas Satan, demons, the Beasts, and their allies are the personification of evil. Although both parties exhibit destructive and violent behaviors during the war, the victims of the good are “monsters, beasts, heretics, or unrepentant sinners, such as those branded with the Mark of the Beast, thereby allowing the destruction to adopt a tone of justice” (Behrooz 7). At first, the external forces of evil seem to prevail, but they are ultimately defeated by God and His representatives (Ostow 307). Satan, along with his human and supernatural followers, are cast into the lake of fire where they face “the second death” (Rev. 20.14), meaning that those who are thrown into the lake of fire are separated from God eternally, which makes this an irreversible act. Thus, the apocalyptic text of the Bible contains an aspect of hope that all evil will be judged and punished in the end (Leithart 57; Pippin 80).

While the Bible categorizes divine and demonic entities within a clear moral framework, associating the divine with good and the demonic with evil, this binary becomes more elusive when applied to human beings. Good and evil souls receive their respective rewards or punishment during the Last Judgment which transpires at the ultimate end of the cosmos (O’Leary 5-6). The forces of evil are destroyed by God through the power of love, and

only the good remains at the end (Leigh 32). If the benevolent God possesses the power to eliminate all that is evil, then the question arises why evil exists at all. As Platinga argues,

God can create free creatures, but he cannot causally or otherwise determine them to do only what is right; for if he does so they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures of moral good, therefore, he must create creatures capable of moral evil; but he cannot create the possibility of moral evil and at the same time prohibit its actuality.... The fact that free creatures sometimes err, however, in no way tells against God's omnipotence or against his goodness; for he could forestall the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good. (39)

Platinga's argument points to a fundamental aspect of biblical teachings. Good and evil are not external forces, or some innate human characteristics given since birth; instead, every individual is subject to the temptations of evil and the motivation to be righteous (Matt. 15.19-10; Rom. 3.10). In other words, good and evil are not innate human characteristics insofar that nobody is born good or evil. Instead, it is through each individual's free will that moral choices are made, determining whether one succumbs to sin or strives for righteousness (Riesch 37). Thereby, the boundaries of good and evil are not drawn between people but *within* a person. In this context, Riesch argues that apocalyptic beliefs offer a more accessible framework for reconciling the coexistence of good and evil despite a benevolent and omnipotent God: "If the world does eventually come to an end and souls receive their judgements, evil will be punished, therefore God can allow evil (and thus also free will) to exist while at the same time being benevolent. If not now, then – in the long run at least – justice is served" (37-38).

While Platinga frames the biblical concept of doing good and evil as a moral choice enabled through the free will granted by God to individuals (39), this perspective does not fully account for oppressive social structures and other external influences that may shape morally questionable decisions. As a critique toward the biblical notion of good and evil, Nietzsche offers secular insight into this issue through his exploration of the shifting dynamics of morality in *Beyond Good and Evil*, particularly how moral values are shaped by historical, social, and psychological forces. According to Nietzsche, there is master morality and slave morality. While these two types of moralities are not conventional apocalyptic binaries, they offer valuable insights through which good and evil can be defined beyond biblical narratives of judgement. Master morality originates from "the noble, powerful, higher ranking and high-minded who perceived and determined themselves and their doings as good, that is, as ranking foremost" (Nietzsche 219). In other words, the position of power granted the nobles control over language, expression, and the concomitant ability to define what was considered "good" and labeled "bad". Good was defined based on traits such as strength, virility, and excellence,

while “bad” denotes weakness and inferiority (Nietzsche 220-223). In contrast, slave morality arises from those who are “oppressed, violated, unfree, and suffering” (Del Caro 447).

Slave morality inverts the value system of the nobles by redefining good and evil as the opposite of how the powerful defined them (Nietzsche 229). The driving force behind this moral system is when “*ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of those beings who are denied genuine reaction, that of the deed, who make up for it only through imaginary revenge” (Nietzsche 228, italicized word French in the original). Lacking power and unable to act upon their instincts to overcome their powerlessness, the oppressed internalize their frustration and create a new moral system shaped by their *ressentiment*. Even though *ressentiment* can be translated into English as “resentment”, Del Caro, the translator of Nietzsche’s work, notes that “neither [the German word] *Groll* nor English *resentment* capture the nuance N[ietzsche] brings to the term: when otherwise passive resentment becomes active and creates its own value system in order to compensate for its sense of inferiority, we have *Ressentiment*” (410). Through *ressentiment*, traits such as harmlessness, meekness, obedience, and suffering are regarded as good, whereas power, pride, strength, and assertiveness are considered evil (Nietzsche 228-229).

While Nietzsche puts significant effort into defining what the nobles considered as “bad” and what the common people defined as “evil”, the reasoning for his words of choice between “bad” and “evil” remains unclear. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the concept of evil is necessary to describe and understand extreme moral transgressions, “such as genocides, terrorist attacks, mass murders” etc., that ordinary terms such as “wrong” or “bad” fail to capture adequately. This distinction clarifies why slaves were merely considered as “bad” in the perspective of the nobles. In essence, the slaves were not perceived as committing such evil moral transgressions due to lack of power and hence, they did not fall under the category of evil. Another aspect which becomes apparent through the concept of evil is that evil actions necessitate a moral agent, which Nietzsche’s theory does not account for since he puts more emphasis on the *perception* of evil rather than *doing* evil. Although Nietzsche’s work does not explicitly account for moral agency, his framework remains highly relevant and can be extended to include considerations of moral agency rather than being seen as incompatible with them. In this way, such an extension builds upon Nietzsche’s theory rather than negating it.

To clarify what is meant by moral agency, it is helpful to turn to Taylor’s definition in *Animals and Ethics: An Overview of the Philosophical Debate*, where he describes moral

agents as “those who can make choices based on some commonly understood standard of right and wrong and who can thus be held accountable by others for their actions” (20). In essence, moral agents are first and foremost humans (Taylor 20), and as I would further argue, any entity possessing human traits, e.g. an organization, a company, a troupe, etc. and in a narrative context, any anthropomorphic entity. Biblically, anthropomorphic entities, such as demons and angels, adhere to a strict representation of fundamentally good and evil; however, in many apocalyptic narrative contexts beyond the Christian Bible, these anthropomorphic beings demonstrate moral agency through which the good chooses to do evil and the evil chooses to do good. For example, in *Berserk*, the count who turned from human into a monstrous figure by sacrificing his wife and brutally killed and tortured multiple heretics decides to turn into the savior of his daughter during his final moments as a monster (Miura v1). According to the Christian moral framework, this act of self-sacrifice would likely be interpreted as redemptive or good – a final gesture of love and moral clarity. However, from Nietzsche’s perspective, this act may be read differently. Given the count’s vulnerable position at the brink of death faced with stronger demons, this moment of compassion can be interpreted as an expression of slave morality, which is a reactive moral stance rooted in weakness and guilt rather than strength. This example shows that an apparently evil character is indeed capable of doing good deeds and vice versa. It further shows that ethics do not arise from general principles or pre-established systems. Instead, they emerge in singular moments of uncertainty and lived experiences (Derrida 61).

Both Christian and Nietzsche’s secular frameworks offer valuable perspectives on the binary of good vs. evil in apocalyptic narratives. While the Christian view emphasizes divine justice, free will, and the moral clarity of final judgment, Nietzsche challenges these assumptions by framing morality as historically, psychologically, and socially constructed. Yet, because Nietzsche does not fully account for moral agency, his theory is extended here to include the capacity of individuals to choose ethically. As revealed by the moral frameworks, good and evil are complex and context-dependent concepts. Rather than treating them as fixed categories or universal truths, I aim to define good and evil situationally, based on the specific narrative and ethical context in which they appear. In the apocalyptic context, where chaos reigns, and survival is in the forefront, these moments of crisis become the stage upon which moral agents reveal their ethical orientation where good and evil are not pre-defined but emerge through action.

1.3.3 Ontological Binaries

Beyond structuring time and morality, apocalyptic narratives engage deeply with ontological binaries, such as life vs. death. Life and death are two ineluctable experiences that occur in reality, and they shape the themes of all apocalyptic narratives. While life is a universal human experience accessible to articulation, the matter of death is more elusive. A human being can describe their past, live in the present, and contemplate their future. However, when talking about death, one can only talk about it conceptually and speculate about the afterlife because nobody truly knows what lies beyond death. As Mason states,

[d]eath and its concept are absolutely empty. No picture comes to mind. The concept of death has a use for the living, while death itself has no use for anything. All we can say about death is that it is either real or it is not real. If it is real, then the end of one's life is a simple termination. If it is not real, then the end of one's embodied life is not true death, but a portal to another life.

This idea of physical death being a gateway to a different life is fundamental to Christianity. After death, people are destined to be resurrected and to face judgment (Heb. 9.27). Their deeds are either rewarded with eternal life in heaven or punished with eternal separation from God in hell (Dan. 12.2; John 5.28-29).

Both concepts of heaven and hell indicate the existence of an afterlife albeit they signify different states of postmortem existence. On the one hand, heaven is a place for the righteous in which they can overcome mortality and vulnerability. Through physical death, the soul becomes united with God, which is “free from the rule of time, the body, and mortality” (Schwarz et al. 2). It is important to note that the Bible distinguishes between the earthly body and the heavenly body (1 Cor. 15.40). The major difference between the two is that the earthly body is perishable, whereas the heavenly body is not. After Jesus' resurrection, the appearance of his body does not differ from the one in which he experienced physical death. In essence, his incarnation took on human flesh with eternity in view. His body becomes a “glorious body” (Phil. 3.21), which enables him to ascend to heaven (Acts 1.9), and the bodies of all believers are destined to conform to the image of Christ (1 Cor. 15.49).

Hell, on the other hand, may be interpreted as a place of eternal torment and suffering. The punishments for those in hell is described metaphorically and symbolically in the Bible. A common biblical imagery of hell is fire and burning (Mar. 9.43; Mat. 13.42), which may symbolize pain, purification, and suffering. Hell is also described as somewhere “outside, into the darkness” (Mat. 8.12), which may be a metaphor for isolation, abandonment, and loss of divine presence. The sounds of hell are filled with “weeping and gnashing teeth” (Mat. 8.12,

13.50), indicating the agony, regret, rage, and anguish felt by those who are evil. Hell is also used synonymously with the lake of fire or “the second death” (Rev. 21.8), in which the evil face permanent annihilation of their souls and bodies (Largey 80 & 82; Mat. 10.28). According to Revelation, “the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars” (21.8) are thrown into the lake of fire. While the eternal suffering in hell may imply an ongoing afterlife, the lake of fire suggests a definitive end to human existence.

In contrast to the physical and spiritual death depicted in biblical traditions, Derrida offers a more secular understanding of death in relation to the apocalyptic. Derrida distinguishes between two types of death: “individual death” (28) and total annihilation. Individual death is the death of a singular person, which can be mourned, remembered and symbolically processed within a cultural framework, such as funerals, writings, and memory (Derrida 28). Total annihilation, however, is a catastrophic, unsymbolized death, such as a nuclear apocalypse, which destroys not only individuals but also the entire archive, language, memory, and symbolic structures (Derrida 28). It is important to note that Derrida’s concept of total annihilation differs from the notion of total global destruction discussed in Chapter 1.3.1. While total global destruction refers to the literal end of the world or civilization, Derrida emphasizes the symbolic and cultural dimensions of annihilation. In his view, total annihilation is not merely about physical obliteration but resists representation and renders mourning or memory impossible, eliminating all possibilities of survival (Derrida 28).

Derrida’s idea of total annihilation underscores the importance of how survival and death are opposing notions even though survival does not have a salient binary. The prospect of a definitive end to human existence whether in hell or on earth may evoke profound existential anxiety, which is why survival emerges as a central motif in apocalyptic fiction narratives, especially in the post-apocalyptic timeline (Stifflemire 13-14; Muwaffaq et al. 222-223; Jones 2). Survivors in apocalyptic narratives are typically represented as individuals or collectives who have endured and emerged from a catastrophic event (Stifflemire 13-14). Although they have overcome an apocalyptic event, survivors are often bound to continue to struggle, navigating the challenges of a fractured and uncertain post-apocalyptic world (Stifflemire 14). Thereby, I adopt the definition of “survival” from the *Cambridge Dictionary*, which delineates survival as “the state of continuing to live or to exist, esp. after a dangerous event” (Cambridge Dictionary). In other words, this definition indicates that survival is the state of not dying although death was a possible outcome of a previous event.

In apocalyptic narratives, humans often not only strive for survival, but also a form of immortality whether physical, spiritual, or symbolic (Milicevic 25-28). Immortality can be defined as both “life after death, and [...] life without death” (Schwarz et al. 2). While many dystopian science-fiction genre may use the motif of life *without* death enabled through technology to portray immortality, I argue that many apocalyptic narratives often conceptualize immortality as life *after* death. The reason why life *without* death is an uncommon trope in apocalyptic narratives, dystopian science-fiction narratives aside, is because it negates the principle of an apocalypse, which is the end to a new beginning. Thus, it is precisely the presence of death and the afterlife it enables that sustains the symbolic depth of apocalyptic narratives. In this context, death functions not as a final negation but as a narrative and metaphysical threshold that allows transformation, rebirth, or redemption.

As established in this subchapter, life and death are central to apocalyptic narratives. Death is often portrayed not as an end but as a gateway to transformation or judgment. In Christian tradition, physical death leads to resurrection and either eternal life in heaven or damnation in hell depending on the judgment of an individual, while a more secular notion of death from Derrida distinguishes between individual death, which can be mourned and remembered, and total annihilation, which erases all traces of meaning and survival (28). Apocalyptic narratives frequently center on survival and immortality as forms of continuation that gain meaning through their contrast with death. Rather than depicting eternal life *without* death, these narratives often frame immortality as life *after* death made possible through destruction. In this way, death enables the emergence of new beginnings, ensuring that apocalyptic storytelling, especially during the post-apocalyptic timeline, reflects on what persists after the end.

In summary, apocalyptic narratives are fundamentally shaped by three core binary oppositions: temporal, moral, and ontological. A table of all the binary oppositions discussed in this and upcoming chapters is available in the Appendix. From a structuralist perspective, these binaries impose order on chaos, allowing the apocalypse to unfold in a seemingly coherent logic. They create a framework through which meaning, ethical judgment, and narrative resolution become possible. However, when viewed through a poststructuralist lens, these oppositions reveal themselves to be unstable and context dependent in apocalyptic narratives: the new often contain traces of the old, moral categories are moment-specific, and death may serve as a threshold rather than a conclusion. The apocalypse thus becomes a site where structural meaning is both constructed and destabilized. These binaries remain essential

to the narrative, not because they provide fixed truths but rather because their breakdown reflects the uncertainty and transformation that the apocalyptic narrative seeks to dramatize.

2 Apocalyptic Bodies

As the apocalyptic event itself provides a setting through which the dissolution of binaries is prevalent, the body and its transformations serve as a powerful site for destabilizing apocalyptic binary structures and making the breakdown apparent. This chapter explores such apocalyptic bodies, which is understood as representations of the body within apocalyptic narratives. In apocalyptic stories, the body often becomes a canvas upon which violence, decay, and renewal of the world are inscribed. The apocalypse does not merely unfold externally, but it is also lived and experienced through the body. Even when the apocalypse destabilizes systems of meaning in terms of time, morality, and ontology, the body becomes the last frontier of identity, coherence, and meaning. The body ultimately mirrors this epistemic crisis caused by the apocalypse when it begins to deteriorate or transform. Thereby, these bodies serve as narrative vessels through which temporal, moral, and ontological anxieties are enacted and examined.

My discussion of apocalyptic bodies begins with the phenomenological body by drawing on Merleau-Ponty's notion of corporeality. The reason phenomenology is essential in this context is because it emphasizes the body not merely as a biological entity but as the fundamental medium through which the world is perceived and experienced (Merleau-Ponty 84). In apocalyptic narratives where time is disrupted, morality is ambiguous, and meaning is unstable, the body becomes a crucial site for understanding how individuals navigate and internalize this collapse. As the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* notes, "phenomenology is the study of 'phenomena': appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience". This approach lays the groundwork for exploring how experiences can be altered, fractured, or intensified through physical transformations.

Building on this phenomenological concept of the human body as fundamentally situated in the world, the next section turns to the transformative body. The Latin word "transformare" can be translated as "to change across or through form" as the prefix "trans-" means "across", "beyond", or "through" and "formare" means "to form". Thus, transformation in this context defines "a complete change in the appearance or character of something or someone" (Cambridge Dictionary). This subchapter aims to provide a brief overview and adequate definitions of four key types of bodily transformation: metamorphosis, polymorphy,

incarnation, and reincarnation. These four types of bodily transformation are selected based on their significance in *Berserk* and their potential to challenge notions of temporality, morality, and identity. Each of these transformations represents a different facet of bodily change, offering a diverse range of perspective on the relationship between the body, the self, and the broader narrative framework of the apocalyptic.

The next chapter focuses on the monstrous body as a product of human bodily transformation as they are often portrayed as an apocalyptic binary prevalent in both religious (e.g. angels and demons) and secular (e.g. zombies and aliens) apocalyptic narratives. They often signal a rupture in the human condition in terms of existential, moral, or ontological collapse. Even though humans and monsters are often depicted as an apocalyptic binary opposition, especially in Christian literature, the matter of monsters in terms of identity and embodiment proves to be far more complicated. In order to illuminate the complexities of the monstrous, I draw on theories of liminality by Turner, the abject by Kristeva, and the uncanny by Freud. By examining such human-monster transformations, this theoretical framework highlights how the body becomes a site where boundaries between humans vs. monsters as well as the self vs. Other are blurred or destabilized.

While this subchapter focuses on transformations into monstrous forms, it is important to note that transformations can also manifest on the human body itself through torture, mutation, surgery, or growth, i.e. alterations that affect the human body while it remains recognizably human. These shifts likewise challenge fixed identities and reveal the body as a site of instability in apocalyptic conditions. While such human transformations are equally significant than human-monster transformations, they are not theorized in this subchapter because they require distinct theoretical frameworks beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, human transformations are explored in the analytical part where their narrative and symbolic functions are examined in greater depth in relation to the two protagonists of *Berserk*.

2.1 Being in the World: The Phenomenological Body

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty explores the body by challenging objective views of the world by emphasizing the lived experience of embodiment. He contests the traditional philosophical notion of an objective world as a fixed reality existing independently of the subject and emphasizes that this perspective overlooks the fundamental importance of embodied perception and our lived experience of interacting with the world (Merleau-Ponty 73-74). Instead of viewing the world as detached and separated from the body, he argues for a

mode of existence as “being-toward-the-world” (Merleau-Ponty 78). Thereby, Merleau-Ponty lays the groundwork for his analysis by placing the body at the center of human experience because “[t]he body is our general means of having a world” (147). Rather than viewing the body as a passive object or container of consciousness, which is a common perception in traditional Cartesian philosophy, he described it as “the vehicle of being in the world and, for a living being, having a body means being united with a definite milieu, merging with certain projects, and being perpetually engaged therein” (84).

Through this statement, Merleau-Ponty views the body as not separate from the mind or the world, but rather, intertwined with both, enabling a dynamic interaction with our environment (83). Engagement is not optional but intrinsic to being alive and embodied. By “being united with a definite milieu” (Merleau-Ponty 84), we are not detached observers of the world but deeply embedded in it. Our bodily existence is shaped by and in turn shapes the environment. While being in the world, the body engages in “projects” (Merleau-Ponty 84), which refers to goals and tasks that structure our actions and give meaning to our lives. The phrase “perpetually engaged therein” (Merleau-Ponty 84) underscores the continuous and active nature of our embodied existence through which our bodies are constantly involved in the world through movement, perception, and interaction.

At the core of Merleau-Ponty’s account of embodied experience lies the concept of bodily intentionality, which refers to the idea that the body is not merely situated in the world, but actively directed toward it through perception, movement, and engagement. It is important to note that intentionality is not the only dimension of embodied experience according to Merleau-Ponty, but it remains a foundational concept for understanding how the body orients itself toward the world and generates meaning. Merleau-Ponty challenges the notion of intentionality from Husserl, who indicates that intentionality is “the *directedness* of consciousness [...]. A perception or memory, for example, is not just a mental state, but a perception or memory *of* something. To think or dream is to think or dream *about* something” (Carman viii). Instead, Merleau-Ponty sees intentionality as something “noncognitive – indeed often unconscious – bodily skills and dispositions” (Carman x). To further elaborate, he states that intentionality is temporally layered: the present body, characterized as “I can” operates in tandem with the “habitual body” (Merleau-Ponty 84), which is shaped by past experiences and automatic actions. Thus, the body’s spatial awareness or “situational spatiality” (Merleau-Ponty 102) is shaped by potential actions and tasks or as Merleau-Ponty calls it: “projects”

(Merleau-Ponty 84). Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty shows that the body does not simply exist in space; instead, it lives and inhabits the world with purpose and orientation.

To frame my analysis of embodied experiences in *Berserk*, the phenomenological insights of Merleau-Ponty help illuminate the body's role as both a site of perception and a socially mediated presence. While I do not apply Merleau-Ponty's theory directly to my analysis, his phenomenological account offers a crucial foundation as to why the body is a meaningful and necessary subject of inquiry. His work establishes the body as fundamentally entangled with consciousness and as a medium through which we perceive, act, and make sense of the world (Merleau-Ponty 84). Through Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body, it can be argued that in an apocalyptic context, the apocalypse itself is not sufficient to destabilize apocalyptic binaries, but it is through the body and the engagement of it with the world, that such dissolution becomes possible and apparent. Essentially, there is no objective world in which things are, for example, good or evil. It is through the body and the interaction of it with the world that things are perceived as good or evil.

2.2 Bodily Changes: The Transformative Body

Having laid the basis of the body as a vehicle for perception and experience, I now turn to four distinct types of bodily transformations: metamorphosis, polymorphy, incarnation, and reincarnation. Metamorphosis, the first type of bodily transformation, can be understood through two aspects: biology and literary. In biology, metamorphosis refers to the post-embryological transformation of an organism's body, such as the transition from a larval to an adult stage (Cruz 163). Classic examples include the tadpole becoming a frog or a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly. These changes allow organisms to occupy different ecological places throughout their life cycle, thereby minimizing competition for resources such as food and space, e.g. tadpoles feed on algae, whereas frogs consume insects. In this context, metamorphosis is an adaptive and often celebrated process, particularly in the case of the butterfly where transformation is symbolically associated with beauty, growth, and renewal (Cruz 163). Whereas biological metamorphosis refers to a natural, developmental transition aimed at adaptation and survival, the literary version connotes a radical and complete change of state or substance enacted through supernatural or divine intervention (Cardin 797). This change of state or substance indicates a "transformation of the human into another organism or inanimate object" (Cardin 797). In this thesis, metamorphosis is defined as a form of bodily transformation that encompasses both the biological function of environmental adaptation and the literary notion of a radical change in the body brought by supernatural or divine means.

This definition allows for a more nuanced understanding of transformation that acknowledges the body's shifting relationship to its environment and its reconfiguration in response to forces beyond the natural order.

The second type of bodily transformation explored in this subchapter is polymorphy. Polymorphy refers to the capacity of a body to assume multiple forms either simultaneously or successively. It is a concept derived from, although not limited to, the Christian tradition where Jesus is believed to take on multiple forms, embodying different aspects of divinity and humanity (Czachesz 116). Unlike metamorphosis, which implies a permanent or linear transformation, polymorphy is characterized by the coexistence or alternation of diverse physical forms (Czachesz 117). This concept is particularly relevant in fantastical narrative and, by extension, the narrative of *Berserk*, where characters may shift between human, animals, or hybrid forms, often defying stable identity or categorization.

The third type of bodily transformation under investigation is incarnation, which refers to the embodiment of non-corporeal entity, such as a deity, spirit, or quality, into a physical, human form (Oxford Languages). Traditionally, incarnation is a theological concept rooted in Christian doctrine, referring to the belief that God assumed a human form in the flesh of Jesus Christ. According to this doctrine, Christ is both fully divine and fully human with his two natures united. This union does not diminish or merge the divine and human natures but preserves the full integrity of each within a single person (Britannica). For this thesis, I adopt the *Oxford Languages* definition of incarnation as it offers a clear and general understanding of the concept as the embodiment of a non-corporeal entity in human form. I intentionally avoid relying on the theological definition because its doctrinal specificity and metaphysical complexity make it elusive for the analytical scope of this study.

Reincarnation, the last type of bodily transformation which this subchapter explores, refers to the rebirth of an enduring aspect of a person, such as the soul, consciousness, or mind, into a new form of existence following physical death, potentially across multiple lifetimes (Britannica). Since rebirth is inherent in reincarnation, the two terms are used synonymously in this thesis. Even though reincarnation may seem to reinforce Cartesian dualism by suggesting a separation between mind and body, the reborn consciousness still requires a physical form to exist and act within the physical world. Therefore, the argument of Merleau-Ponty (84) that consciousness is fundamentally embodied and that the mind and the body are inextricably entangled remain valid within the framework of reincarnation.

Building on the idea of the body as a site of perception and meaning, this subchapter explores the transformative potential of the body in the form of metamorphosis, polymorphy, incarnation, and reincarnation. Each type of bodily transformation is selected for its relevance to *Berserk* and its ability to challenge concepts of temporal, moral, and ontological binaries. Metamorphosis is defined both as a biological and literary transformation, involving a radical change in the body through supernatural means. Polymorphy refers to the ability of a body to shift between multiple forms. Incarnation involves embodiment of an abstract entity into a human form, while reincarnation addresses the rebirth of the soul, mind, or consciousness of a person.

2.3 Beyond the Human: The Monstrous Body

Having established various types of bodily transformations, this subchapter delves into the monstrous body. The monstrous body is a distinct physical form as a result of transformation where the human body becomes a site of hybrid and grotesque alteration, embodying the breakdown of identity and the defiance of natural order. The definition of a monster is convoluted because “[m]onsters are universal. [...] Their pervasiveness [...] is [...] characterized by cultural specificity, for each culture has its own take on monstrosity” (Aarcha and Krishnan 2). Despite the monster’s different shapes and forms, each monster narrative serves as a reminder that “the self is never secure in itself” (Kearney 3). As Kristeva postulates, this instability and breakdown of the ego is rooted in apocalyptic narratives (207). Kristeva’s analysis of apocalyptic literature provides a reorientation of apocalyptic thought by offering a new perspective which deviates from the traditional framework of apocalypse. While the traditional notion of apocalypse puts emphasis on revelation as a consequence of the end of the world, Kristeva shifts the focus to the psychological and symbolic rupture that accompany the collapse of meaning and identity. The collapse of identity opens a space of ambiguity in which boundaries between the self and Other begin to dissolve. It is within this indeterminate space that the concept of liminality becomes crucial.

Liminality is a concept developed by the cultural anthropologist Turner and first appeared in his work *The Ritual Process*. Turner derives the term liminality from the Latin word *limen*, which signifies “threshold” or “doorway” (94). He defines liminality and liminal entities as

necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions

assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. [...] Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (Turner 95)

At its core, liminality denotes a state of being in-between, situated at the threshold of established categories and boundaries. It is a state of transition and ambiguity, where conventional distinctions are unsettled and suspended.

In line with this definition of liminality, the monster figure is often associated with this concept (Beghetto 16; Aarcha and Krishnan 11-12; Kearney 117; Cohen 17). Monsters belong to neither category, yet simultaneously participating in both, mirroring the contradictions inherent in apocalyptic narratives. Similarly to the etymology of apocalypse, the word “monster” derives from the Latin *monstrum* which can either mean “to reveal/to show” or “to warn” (Beghetto 16). In the same way as the apocalypse provides a setting which unveils the paradox within systems of meaning, the monster exposes the instability of binary structures through its body and ontological liminality (Cohen 6). Hence, monsters serve as a warning of looming catastrophes or moral disorder, embodying the fear of what lies beyond the known and the controllable. As Cohen elaborates on the liminality of monsters, they are “disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions” (6).

Building on Cohen’s quote, this section first discusses the physical forms of monsters, and subsequently, their ontological liminality is examined. The reason why the monstrous body complicates fixed categories is due to their “freakish compilation” (Cohen 7), which refers to an amalgamation of categories that does not adhere to or resist categorical integration. According to Bildhauer and Mills, the monstrous body consists of parts which diverge from the typical characteristics of a species (13). This physical deviation can be categorized into two dimensions: one involving an inter-species hybridization, and the other is characterized by the grotesque exaggeration of certain human features. The inter-species hybridization may involve a patchwork of the many species in which the human is barely or entirely unrecognizable, such as animal-human, plant-human, or thing-human hybrids (Dorrian 310; Aarcha & Krishnan 4). If the human is still recognizable within this hybridization, the imagery of such can be especially frightening because it confronts us to reevaluate what we consider human and natural (Cruz 162). As Dorrian argues, the monstrous body, “the fragmentation of the body, the multiplicity within unity” (310) is a contradiction against the classical aesthetics of the body. This aesthetics of the classical body is epitomized by da Vinci’s drawing *Vitruvian Man*, which

enshrines the ideal of a unified, symmetrical, and rationally ordered human form. If the monstrous body is put in contrast with the ideal classical human body, the oneness of the monster's body consists of "compressed forms oxymoronic and unreasonable in their conjunction" (Dorrian 310), eliciting the "fear of the 'many in one'" (Dorrian 310).

Beyond inter-species hybridization, the second form of bodily divergence is found in the grotesque, which is characterized by its "[e]xaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness" (Bakhtin 303) of the body. Bodies that exceed the limits of their natural compositions, i.e. physical parts "which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off" (Bakhtin 320) are often perceived as grotesque as they disrupt the familiar taxonomies that define the human form. Although Bakhtin primarily associates the grotesque with the carnivalesque, which is marked by laughter and suspension of social hierarchy (4 & 10), no such humorous or subversive intent is present in *Berserk*. Instead, Miura utilizes the aesthetic technique of the grotesque in combination with inter-species hybridization to create monstrous imageries, which is why the concept of the grotesque is integral.

Having outlined the two physical forms which monsters may embody, the focus now shifts to the ontological liminality of monsters. To explore this aspect, it is helpful to draw on Freud's theory of the uncanny and Kristeva's notion of the abject. As stated by Freud, the uncanny "belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (123). It inevitably creates a feeling of uncertainty and a sense of helplessness (Freud 135 & 144). At the beginning of Freud's exploration of the uncanny, he notes that the German word *unheimlich*, which is the nearest semantic equivalent to the uncanny, is the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, *vertraut*, meaning familiar, native, or homely. Following this translation, one might be tempted to assume that anything novel and foreign is uncanny. However, Freud argues that not all novelty elicits a sense of the uncanny, which is why there must be additional factors in play which make the unfamiliar frightening (124-125). He thereby concludes that the uncanny arises when something that was once repressed or forgotten returns in a distorted form, creating discomfort. Something that was once familiar becomes and recurs as something strange. Objects, situations, or figures become eerie not because they are entirely unfamiliar but because they disturb the boundaries of what we believe to be natural or real (147-148). Through Freud's theory, it is shown that the uncanny arises when the self recognizes itself in another form, such as the corpse because it looks human but lacks life (148), the figure of a doppelgänger because it is both itself and not itself (141), or an automaton because it blurs the boundaries between the living and the mechanical, the authentic and the artificial (135). The

uncanny thus arises when the ontological boundary between the self and Other becomes unsettled, revealing how fragile and unstable this boundary is.

Similarly to Freud, Kristeva's abjection theory makes apparent the in-betweenness of ontological liminality. However, unlike the uncanny, abjection is more violent because it is "elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (5). Abjection refers to the revulsive reaction (e.g. disgust, horror, nausea) that arises when meaning collapses and the distinction between subject and object, or self and Other, becomes lost (Kristeva 2). For Kristeva, abjection is first experienced during birth. In order for infants to construct their identity as a subject, they have to abject the mother, whose body is a mere object for creation, by separating themselves from the overwhelming presence and symbiotic unity with the mother (Kristeva 13). Through the infant's abjection from their mothers' bodies and thus a part of what used to define them, Kristeva writes "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (3). In addition to birth, abjection is also present in death for the corpse is "the utmost of abjection" (Kristeva 4) and "a border that has encroached upon everything" (Kristeva 3). It represents the collapse of the distinction between life vs. death and thus undermines the condition that allows us to constitute ourselves as subjects. The sight or presence of the corpse confronts us with our own materiality, mortality, and the subsequent meaning of loss (Kristeva 3-4). In addition to the corpse, Kristeva draws on bodily fluids, such as blood, urine, vomit, and excrement, as examples of the abject. When these substances from within the body get expelled from the body, the distinction between inside vs. outside is violated. The leaking fluids from the body disrupt bodily integrity as the substances are perceived as unclean, foreign, and threatening of "one's 'own and clean self'" (Kristeva 53). However, it is "not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4).

While Kristeva postulates that the object of abjection is primarily the subject and marginalized group such as women, Punter argues that "the principal object of abjection is the body itself" (96). When revisiting Kristeva's examples of the abjected, Punter's argument becomes fortified because it is the maternal body, the dead body, and the internal body which are abjected in addition to the self-identity associated with them. This emphasis on the body as the primary site of abjection directly connects to the notion of the monstrous body, which precisely embodies those traits that disturb identity, system, and order (Cohen 6-7). The

monstrous body visualizes the abject by materializing what should remain hidden, such as bodily excess, decay, or hybridity, and thus, becomes a powerful figure of ontological disruption.

Building on the idea of the body as a site of transformation, this subchapter explores monstrous forms as a challenge to fixed identity. Two dimensions of the monstrous body, namely inter-species hybridization and the grotesque, are explored. In the analysis of the two protagonists in *Berserk*, the grotesque is not treated as a standalone aesthetic but is instead intertwined with hybridized bodily forms. By drawing on theories of liminality, the uncanny, and abjection, the monstrous is revealed as a figure that disrupts binaries and unsettles boundaries between the self vs. Other. Whether through corpses, bodily fluids, or excessive and hybridized physical features, the monstrous body makes visible the instability of identity and the breakdown of order. In the analytical part of this thesis, I apply all these theories in combination to examine how the monstrous body destabilizes ontological apocalyptic binaries.

3 Approaching *Berserk*: Multimodality in Manga

Having outlined the theoretical framework through which *Berserk* is analyzed, I now turn to the method of close reading, which draws on a multimodal approach. As a long-running and thematically expansive manga, *Berserk* offers a rich site for analyzing how meaning is produced across multiple modes of communication. This interplay of distinct yet interdependent semiotic resources is at the core of multimodality. The multimodal approach, developed and brought to prominence by scholars such as Kress and van Leeuwen, asserts that meaning is not solely constructed through language but through the interaction of multiple communicative modes and their potential to contribute to meaning equally. As such, Kress and van Leeuwen define multimodality as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined” (20). Multimodality is considered as “a field of application rather than a theory” (Jewitt 2) or as Kress puts it “a domain of enquiry” (54), which is why it can be applied in various spheres. While this definition of multimodality from Kress and van Leeuwen is widespread and agreed upon by scholars, the meaning of a “mode” is ambiguous. On the one hand, Kress defines a mode as “a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning. *Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack and 3D objects* are examples of modes used in representation and communication” (79). On the other hand, O’Halloran and O’Toole conceptualize a mode more narrowly as a form of expression through which meaning

is conveyed. For example, for O'Halloran, language can be expressed through a visual mode (i.e. a text) or an oral mode (i.e. spoken language) (98). Similarly, O'Toole uses mode to refer to artistic media, such as "oil on canvas" (217) or "gouache on paper" (222), emphasizing their distinct semiotic contributions such as texture, opacity, and color behavior. These distinct definitions of a mode provided by Kress, O'Halloran, and O'Toole may stem from the versatility of the multimodal approach in various disciplines.

For the purpose of analyzing *Berserk*, I adopt Kress' definition of a mode as a socially and culturally shaped semiotic resource. O'Halloran's conceptualization of a mode is less relevant for this paper because no differentiation is made between images, text, and other design elements since they would all be subdued under the broad category of a visual mode. Although Yefymenko, whose usage of mode aligns with O'Halloran, argues that manga inherently consists of "visual, verbal, and to some extent aural modes", Kress' definition offers a more nuanced understanding by identifying specific elements that constitute each sensory dimension. Furthermore, given the focus on content and narrative analysis in this paper, I do not engage with the material or technical aspects of the production of *Berserk*, such as discerning which pen, ink, and paper types are used as O'Toole did for his mode analysis on displayed art. Thereby, Kress' broader and more functional understanding of mode seems the most suitable for a multimodal analysis of *Berserk*. Even though Kress gave multiple distinct examples of modes as outlined in the previous paragraph, it is important to note that modes cannot be clearly separated (Reschenhofer). In the context of children's picturebooks, Reschenhofer suggests that verbiage is given a color, font, size, etc. Images can contain, frame, or merge with the texts. Thereby, one mode is rarely or never perceived in isolation. Although some of these aspects mentioned by Reschenhofer are not applicable for manga, such as the color of the text since manga is produced in black and white (with the occasional exception of the first few pages in a volume), her argument is nevertheless valid due to the multimodal components of manga.

Since multimodality is an approach used in various studies, I draw on multimodal frameworks from manga studies, specifically Natsume's manga-expression theory. There is a notable lack of multimodal frameworks specifically tailored to manga within English-language academia. This lack of theoretical framework may be due to the novelty of manga as an academic field, which gradually emerged throughout the 1990s (Suzuki and Stewart 4-5). Thanks to the efforts from Holt and Fukuda, an English translation of selected chapters from Natsume's work *Why is Manga So Interesting? Its Expression and Grammar* is available.

Despite the existence of an English translation, not all chapters of Natsume's work have been translated. Given both the limited availability of multimodal frameworks of manga in English-language scholarship and the incomplete translation of Natsume's work, I occasionally incorporate theoretical frameworks from comic studies, particularly those proposed by McCloud, as an extension to Natsume's theory. While manga and Western comics differ culturally, both are forms of graphic narrative that rely on multimodality to generate meaning. Thereby, McCloud's theories offer useful tools for analyzing manga's multimodal components and are thus briefly incorporated in both the theoretical and analytical sections of this thesis.

3.1 Manga-expression Theory

In the 1990s, Natsume trailblazed a new formalistic approach to manga criticism by developing a theoretical framework to analyze the visual structures of manga. Natsume is less interested in the narrative structures of manga but focuses on the visual elements instead ("The Structure of Expressions", Holt and Fukuda). He thereby developed the manga-expression theory (*manga hyōgenron*), which allows a more focused approach for analyzing the formal properties of a manga.

According to Natsume, there are three elements or "modes", as Kress would call it, inherent in manga: pictures, panels, and words. These three elements each function according to certain rules while being mutually connected to each other. Natsume states that pictures have symbolic functions, words have semantic functions, and panels have a larger syntactical function. Together, they share some boundaries in terms of meaning-making, yet each retains own semiotic distinctiveness within the overall composition ("The Structure of Expressions", Natsume). For Natsume, pictures and panels are "the most indispensable elements that make manga what it is" ("When the Line Gets Interesting"). Every content of a manga is depicted in panels and the pictures within the panels. If either are missing, then manga cannot exist in its form. Furthermore, manga invariably incorporate a significant amount of written language, making words a crucial and complementary component alongside panels and images. While wordless manga, also referred to as "silent manga", do exist, they remain a rare exception ("When the Line Gets Interesting", Natsume; "The Construction of Panels", Natsume).

While a picture may contain various elements, in manga, the line is considered its most fundamental component. Although there are manga which lack lines that are, for example, computer generated with dots or done with screen tone, most of the manga are made of lines ("When the Line Gets Interesting", Natsume). Similarly to Natsume, McCloud argues that lines

can exert certain effects on the readers (*Understanding Comics*, McCloud 125). Figure 1 provides examples from McCloud's work of how the direction, shape, and character of lines have expressive potential.

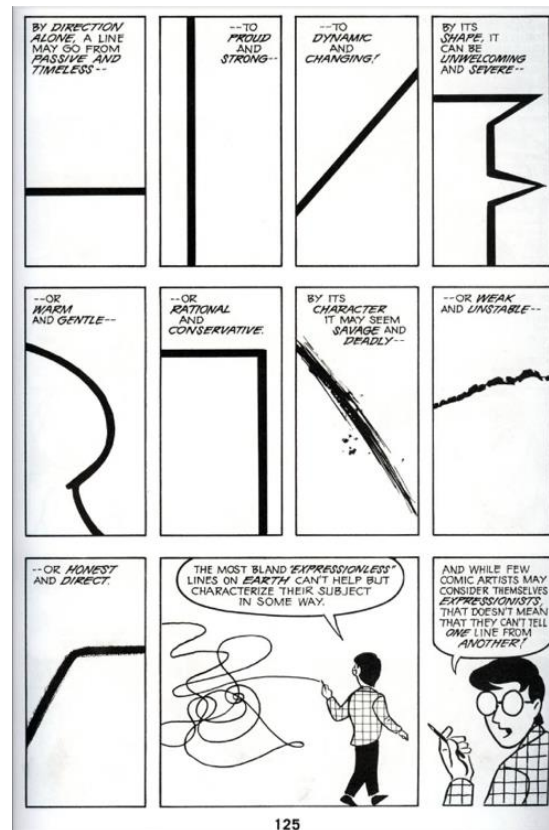


Figure 1: McCloud – Living in Line.

Lines play a significant role when examining word balloons and onomatopoeia. Natsume deems the two modes as having both picture and word qualities as text and image are closely connected ("The Structure of Expressions"; "The Characteristics of Japanese Manga", 175). In manga, onomatopoeia is drawn in a pictorial way and integrated into pictures. It is usually written in *katakana*, one of the four writing systems of Japan, and has the function to create atmosphere and dynamics (Ito 457). While the usage of onomatopoeia may seem more informal and at times childish for English speakers, it is a common phenomenon among Japanese adults. In essence, Japanese onomatopoeia includes both sound-based words (*giongo*) and mental-state words (*gitaigo*). Sound-based words mimic physical or vocal sounds, whereas mental-state words express internal states or emotions. In Japanese, some onomatopoeic expressions shift over time from representing external sounds to conveying mental states. In contrast, English onomatopoeia primarily consists of sound-related terms and expressions for mental states are uncommon ("The Power of Onomatopoeia in Manga", Natsume 160-161). Therefore, translating Japanese onomatopoeia comes with its own challenges. Due to the

translation inaccuracy and the lack of translation of onomatopoeia in the beginning chapters of *Berserk*, the semantic meaning of onomatopoeia is kept to the minimum in the analysis. However, the artistic qualities of the lines of onomatopoeic expressions are examined in terms of how they contribute to the entire image.

Having briefly examined images and words, the discussion now turns to the functions and constructions of panels. According to Natsume, there are three primary functions of panels. Firstly, panels “segment time and thereby create a sense of order for the reader” (“The Functions of Panels”, Natsume). In the act of observing an object, the human subject requires a framing mechanism to translate the visual experience into an artistic form. These frames are then arranged sequentially from right to left and top to bottom, following the flow of time. Before arranging the panels in sequence, the artist has to deconstruct the images according to an abstract temporal framework. The sequential arrangement of panels ultimately indicates the narrative progression of the story (“The Characteristics of Japanese Manga”, Natsume). While panels confine images within a temporal structure, the space between panels represents a gap in time. In English, this space surrounding the outside of the panels is called a “gutter”. In Japanese manga, this space can be distinguished as either the border (*waku*) or the gutter (*sukima*). As Natsume explicates, the gutter signifies the absence between two moments, while the border defines the spatial boundaries of the image and can be directly manipulated by the characters within the story (“The Characteristics of Japanese Manga”, 177). Due to this extensive and more elaborate description of the border and the gutter, I adopt these terminologies for my analysis.

Secondly, panels have “a compression and release function that shapes the reader’s mental perception” (“The Functions of Panels”, Natsume). Compression (*asshuku*) and release (*kaiho*) are two fundamental elements of panels. Both effects can be achieved through “panel size, panel shape, and panel changes” (“The Functions of Panels”, Natsume). For example, in terms of size, a small panel focusing on a specific part of the face of a character can invite readers to get closer to them psychologically, thereby creating a compression effect. With regard to panel shape and changes, a large, vertical panel following a succession of small, squared ones may give readers a sense of liberation and openness, thereby creating a release effect. The interplay between panel sizes, shapes, and changes can create a contrasting effect, and Natsume believes that this contrast is one of the factors which make manga interesting (“The Functions of Panels”).

The third and last function of panels is to “limit the picture by frames, creating a symbolic space that can provide additional meaning for the picture” (“The Functions of Panels”, Natsume). To illustrate this function, Natsume highlights that the orientation of characters, particularly the direction they face, is the result of conscious artistic choices grounded in symbolic associations. In instances where the emphasis lies on the character’s internal experiences or psychological depth, artists often depict them facing right. Conversely, when the narrative engages with external events or reality, characters are typically shown facing left. Furthermore, a character walking in the left direction can indicate a venture into the future or far distance, whereas the right direction suggests a journey back to the past or home (“The Functions of Panels”, Natsume). Natsume concludes the chapter “The Functions of Panels” by summarizing the importance of these three functions for the constructions of panels. It is crucial to note that paneling techniques and methods can extend beyond these examples and are, in fact, highly diverse and complex. Nevertheless, Natsume provides a solid foundation of the core functions of panel designs and arrangements, which enables an in-depth analysis of *Berserk*.

In summary, Natsume’s manga-expression theory provides the foundation by highlighting the interplay between pictures, panels, and words, each contributing to distinct semiotic functions. Key visual features such as the expressive potential of the line as well as the composition, construction, and functions of panels are examined. Building on the principles the manga-expression theory, the following chapter applies this methodology of close reading to the analysis of *Berserk*, exploring how images, paneling, and words interact and generate meaning.

4 Apocalyptic Bodies in *Berserk*

With the theoretical frameworks and methodology now established, the following section turns to the analytical examination of *Berserk*. The edition used for analysis is the English-language publication of *Berserk* by Dark Horse Comics. In total, *Berserk* has 42 volumes compressed into five story arcs. This analysis extends to volume 41, which is the last volume published by Miura before his passing. Central to this analysis is the body and its transformations in relation to the apocalyptic narrative. According to the concept of body extension, objects such as clothes, ornaments, and tools can be integrated into one’s body representation due to their functional and symbolic relation to the body (Berlucchi and Aglioti 561). Thus, the characters’

clothing, accessories, and weapons are treated as integral components of the body as they contribute to the visual, symbolic, and narrative construction of *Berserk* and its characters.

For the sake of this analysis, the story is divided into three main segments in alignment with the secular apocalyptic narrative structure (Muwaffaq et al.) as discussed in Chapter 1.2: pre-apocalypse/beginning, apocalypse/middle, and post-apocalypse/end. This structure not only mirrors the chronological unfolding of *Berserk's* narrative but also captures the characters' transformation stages over time most effectively. "The Golden Age", which is the second arc of *Berserk*, is the time before the apocalypse, i.e. the pre-apocalyptic beginning. *Berserk* follows the story of Guts as readers witness his growth from infancy to adolescence, and eventually, his encounter with Griffith and their shared journey as the leader and a member of a mercenary group engaged in warfare. This arc is characterized by relative peace, camaraderie, and prosperity within the mercenary group under Griffith's leadership, which gives the arc its name. Although the apocalyptic event is foreshadowed on various occasions, the protagonists do not actively attempt to prevent it as "everything lies within the currents of causality" (Miura v12), meaning that all events are predetermined and inevitable through an intricate chain of cause and effect – a network that governs both the world itself and the fates of its inhabitants. This lack of engagement and prevention of the apocalypse is quintessential to the biblical plot of the pre-apocalyptic story as discussed in Chapter 1.2. In the following close readings, the first section focuses on three aspects. Guts' infant body and Griffith's human body are first examined in Subchapters 4.1.1 and 4.1.2. Subsequently, Griffith's tortured body is scrutinized in relation to Améry's theory on torture, which is explicated in his work *At the Mind's Limits*. Améry is a survivor of Auschwitz, and his theory is applicable due to the physical and psychological dimensions of torture, particularly how it strips the individual of their sense of self and autonomy.

"The Eclipse" is the turning point of the story as it is the apocalyptic event itself where the human and the supernatural world collide. The nature of revelation in *Berserk* mirrors the biblical concept of revelation where a supernatural world is unveiled, signaling the end of an era. This section is marked by violence, horror, and monstrous transformation within the physical and metaphysical realms as the boundaries between the human and the supernatural worlds blur. Griffith's transformation and new demonic identity as Femto are first examined, and subsequently, Guts' injuries and their symbolic meanings during the Eclipse are analyzed. Please note that the word "Eclipse" is capitalized when I refer to the apocalyptic event in

Berserk. If the word is not capitalized, the natural phenomenon of the sun and moon overlapping is indicated.

“The Millenium Falcon” is the post-apocalyptic storyline, where both Guts and Griffith undergo drastic physical changes. A crucial factor to note about “The Millenium Falcon” is the translation. The title of this subchapter is borrowed and shortened from the “Falcon of the Millenium Empire Arc” (Miura v23). The “Falcon of the Millenium Arc” is translated as “Hawk of the Millenium Arc” in volume 22; however, the translation of “Hawk” changed to “Falcon” in volume 23. According to *Berserk*’s fandom, the Japanese word “taka” (Japanese: 鷹) can be translated both as “hawk” and “falcon” (Reddit). While both bird species are birds of prey, they are nevertheless distinct species. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss which translation is more suitable, but in order to clarify, I primarily stick to the “Hawk” translation in the pre-apocalyptic and apocalyptic storyline whereas “Falcon” is used for the post-apocalyptic storyline because it symbolizes a new era in the story although both of these terms are used to symbolically refer to Griffith. As for the content of analysis, this subchapter focuses on three physical forms. Guts’ healed body and his liminal position after the apocalypse is first examined. Subsequently, the Berserker Armor and its implications on Guts’ body are analyzed, and lastly, the symbolisms of Griffith’s incarnated body are explored in regard to the phenomenon of polymorphy.

4.1 The Golden Age: Pre-Apocalyptic Bodies

4.1.1 Guts’ Birth: The Infant Body

Guts is first discovered by a mercenary group as a newborn lying beneath a tree laden with corpses hanging from its branches (Figure 2). Thus, the story of Guts begins with a grim, apocalyptic tone as he lies on the ground beneath the feet of his lifeless mother. Whether the newborn Guts is alive or dead is a mystery to the mercenaries and the readers. The umbilical cord seems to be ripped as depicted on the bottom left panel in Figure 2, signifying a violent and premature severance from the maternal body. Among the mercenary group, it is Shisu, the wife of the group’s leader, Gambino, who first discovers the child. Driven by maternal instinct and the potential lingering sense of loss from her own miscarriage lead her to immediately cradle the seemingly lifeless baby without hesitation (Figure 3).



Figure 2: Gut's origin.



Figure 3: Shisu and Gambino discovers Guts.

Guts' ontological status, i.e. whether he is alive or dead, is confirmed through the three panels at the bottom of Figure 3. The two smaller panels on the right exhibit the compression effect. They depict Guts' movement as the angle zooms in on his face, inviting the reader to closely observe the changes in the facial expression of the seemingly lifeless infant as he makes his first sound. The final panel in Figure 3 is the largest, achieving the effect of release as the perspective suddenly zooms out. This sense of release is further reinforced by the proportions of Guts as he is miniscule in this panel whereas the surrounding environment becomes more expansive. This formal progression from compression to release and stillness to movement from Guts functions as a dissolution of the boundary between life vs. death. While the prior compression sequence sustains tension of whether infant Guts is alive, the release panel confirms his ontological status, assuring the mercenaries as well as the readers that Guts is indeed alive. Guts' status of life is not only indicated through his physical movement, but also an auditory element in the form of onomatopoeia. The onomatopoeia indicates that Guts lets out his first birthing cry, which is typically a positive indicator that a newborn is alive and healthy.

While the compression and release panels as well as Guts' transition from seemingly dead to being alive blurs the boundary between life vs. death, this binary is further collapsed through the depiction of Guts' biological mother and Shisu, his soon-to-be adoptive mother, in

the release panel of Figure 3. The corpse of Guts' mother is depicted on the right side, and Guts is likewise positioned on the right. This positioning may mean that Guts' journey has yet to begin as the right side signifies home or more specifically, his place with his mother. Shisu is drawn at the center of the panel as if she is prepared to cross the invisible border which separates Gambino and Guts. From the high angle, Shisu and Guts' mother are visually parallel to each other, highlighting the striking resemblance of the two figures. This juxtaposition visually places death and life side by side with Shisu embodying the living maternal figure and Guts' biological mother representing death. Guts is positioned beneath them and thereby occupies a liminal space between the two ontological states. This placement not only foreshadows his future as illuminated in later chapters but also reinforces the collapse of the life vs. death binary already initiated through the compression and release sequence.

The following page (Figure 4) continues to stage this collapse between the ontological binary of life vs. death by shifting the focus from the juxtaposition of maternal figures to the symbolic details of Guts' physical connection with his mother. In the bottom panel of Figure 4, the full body of infant Guts is shown from a high angle with his mother's feet depicted on the upper right corner. While at the beginning, the severed umbilical cord from Guts and his mother is depicted as a straight line, signifying the connection between the child and the mother, Guts' umbilical cord falls to the left side while the one on his mother dangles toward him in this panel. This depiction may symbolically indicate the final separation of Guts from his mother and emphasizes the binaries between life vs. death. This contrast between life vs. death is further amplified through the narration because it juxtaposes "the dead body of the mother" with the "birthing cries [of Guts]" (Miura v3). In terms of apocalyptic narrative, the portrayal of the ontological binary of life vs. death usually depicts death *in* life as something inherent because the apocalypse is inevitable and barely escapable for those who are alive. There can also be life *after* death or life *without* death (Schwarz et al. 2), which an individual may achieve in an apocalyptic narrative as established in Chapter 1.3.3. However, life *from* death is a completely different matter because it is uncommon for the dead to remain actively involved in the world of the living as death typically signifies an end rather than the production of new life.



Figure 4: Guts' first cry.



Figure 5: Mother-son unification.

Interestingly, Miura positions Guts as a paradoxical figure who embodies the collapse of an ontological boundary at the beginning of *Berserk*. This approach is interesting insofar that Guts' birth is a contradiction in itself, similarly to an apocalypse, which usually occurs in the middle or end of an apocalyptic narrative (Muwaffaq et al. 220; Rev. 12-22). As his body enters the world, he becomes the embodiment of both life and death. His chances of survival as a newborn are next to none as it requires nourishment from the mother, which Guts indicatively did not receive sufficiently. While he is at the doorstep of death, he assures the mercenaries and the readers that he is alive as soon as he lets out his first cry. His body is perceived as a site of wonder and awe by the mercenaries, yet he is perceived as a "bad omen" who brings "bad luck" due to his birth condition (Miura v3). Despite his body's resilience to survive and his will to live, he is perceived as the bringer of death by the mercenaries.

In addition to the ontological binary of life vs. death, Guts' birth destabilizes a temporal binary, namely beginning vs. end. This destabilization of the temporal boundary can be inferred through the big panel on the left in which Shisu holds baby Guts with a smile on her face (Figure 5). In this panel, she faces left, which is a notable shift from the previous panels where she consistently faces right in her attempts to reach for Guts. This change in direction can also be interpreted as the beginning of Guts' life and the end of his relationship with his biological mother. This release effect of the panel is additionally emphasized through the change in

atmosphere, which shifts from tension and distress to a moment of unification between a maternal figure and a son. In that moment, their union becomes the sole focus, as the background is reduced to lines, omitting any depiction of their surroundings.

Beyond this panel of mother-son unification, the destabilization of the beginning vs. end operates on a broader narrative level. Guts' birth sets the stage and atmosphere for the beginning of *Berserk's* story, but it also signifies the end of his mother's life and by extension the conclusion of her story. This interplay of the beginning and end reflects the narrative structure of a plot as discussed in Chapter 1.2. Furthermore, his birth does not signal a hopeful beginning but rather a violent emergence from ruin, representing the end. In doing so, Miura establishes a narrative in which the apocalyptic is not only a singular, external event, but a persistent condition inscribed onto the body itself.

4.1.2 Between Heaven and Earth: The Leader's Body

Having established how Guts' birth complicates apocalyptic binaries, I now turn to the second central figure of *Berserk*, namely Griffith. Throughout the story of *Berserk*, Griffith's dream of founding his own kingdom serves as his sole ambition and motivation, which also inspires loyalty among his followers and soldiers. Griffith is the leader of a young mercenary group called "Band of the Hawk" (Miura v4) ("Hawks" for short), and he is often referred to as "the White Hawk" (Miura v7) or "the Hawk of Light" (Miura v27). As for his appearance, his armor, most notably his helmet, reflects the name of his mercenary group as it bears a striking resemblance to the pointed beak of a hawk. When Griffith removes his helmet and reveals his face for the first time, the contrast between him and Guts becomes immediately apparent (Figure 6). While Guts has short, spiky, dark hair, Griffith has long, flowy, light hair. His facial features seem soft and delicate unlike those of Guts who has more sharp and rugged features. The outline of his hair is omitted in Figure 6, and when contrasted with the light grey background, Griffith seems to emit an ethereal glow. This visual framing elevates him to an almost otherworldly being, presenting him as a figure of androgynous beauty, mystery, and power. This elevation is further reinforced in the bottom panel of Figure 7 before Guts loses consciousness due to fatigue from his previous fights. With the last of his strength as he lies on the ground, he manages to catch a glimpse of Griffith's face looking down on him from the top of his horse. His hair almost merges with the sky, blurring the boundaries between him, a human, and the heavens. This low angle of elevation does not merely endow him with a higher status as a higher elevation signifies a higher status level (McCloud *Making Comics*, 102-103), but it also presents him as a near-divine presence in Guts' fading vision. His body is thus

merged with and positioned against the sky from a low angle, reinforcing his celestial image and suggesting an otherworldly presence beyond the human realm.



Figure 6: Griffith removes his helmet.

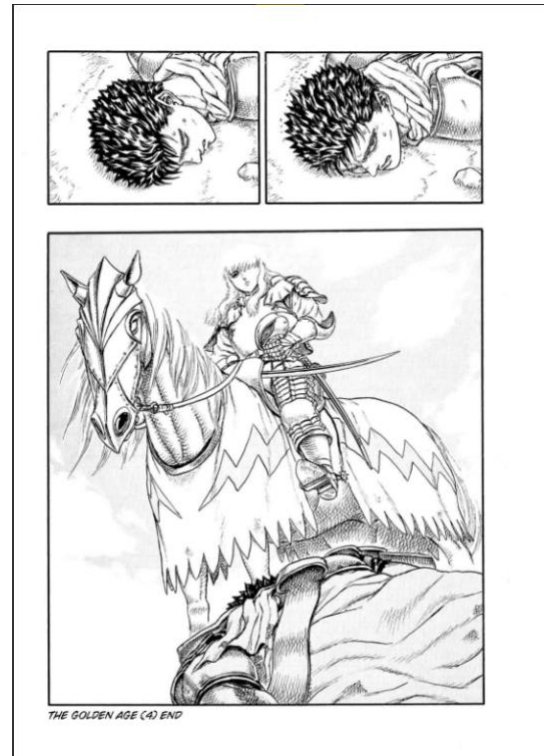


Figure 7: Guts faints.

The portrayal of Griffith as a human yet divine figure persists for the most part throughout the pre-apocalyptic storyline. In addition to low angles, this earthly yet transcendent image of Griffith is often achieved through the color white. Griffith is predominantly portrayed in white, i.e. his skin, hair, and armor all share this color scheme. In the religious context, white is often linked to innocence and purity, which are virtues considered as “good” (Saxena 193). The color white is also associated with angels as they are traditionally depicted as wearing white robes (Jones 20). This color association with angels amplifies Griffith’s portrayal as a human who possesses a heavenly body because angels are anthropomorphic heavenly beings. While Griffith’s body does not literally ascend to heaven as heavenly bodies traditionally do (Acts 1.9), Griffith’s physical form nevertheless evokes the imagery of a near-divine being. Thereby, he blurs the boundaries between the ontological apocalyptic binaries of earthly vs. heavenly body and human vs. divine.

Even though Griffith is often depicted as a heavenly figure, he is nevertheless an ambiguous character. This ambiguity becomes apparent to the readers and those who are close to him through the objectified gaze of other characters. One concrete example is when Casca, the only female soldier in the Hawks with romantic feelings for him, accidentally sees him

entering a chamber with an older man who is later to be revealed as the governor (Miura v7), implying that he is prostituting himself. Thereby, Griffith's body becomes objectified under the gaze of Casca as well as the older man, who sees Griffith as someone who can satisfy his homoerotic urges. Griffith is acutely aware of being seen whereupon he asks Casca whether he is "dirty" (Miura v7). This conversation takes place while he is bathing in the river as if to wash off the sins from his body (Figure 8). His facial features, in particular his eyes and mouth, are omitted throughout the entire page, which may signify a sense of shame arising either from his actions or being witnessed by Casca during an undesired and morally compromising act. Griffith explains to Casca that he did it to obtain money because maintaining and organizing a troupe demands massive financial resources. In Figure 9, he shows awareness that his dream of gaining his own kingdom is built on the corpses of the soldiers who have died under his command. Although he does not have regret nor remorse over the death of his comrades since they voluntarily chose to follow him, he nevertheless rejects the idea that he alone should remain clean. To him, staying morally untainted would make it impossible to achieve his dream (Miura v7).

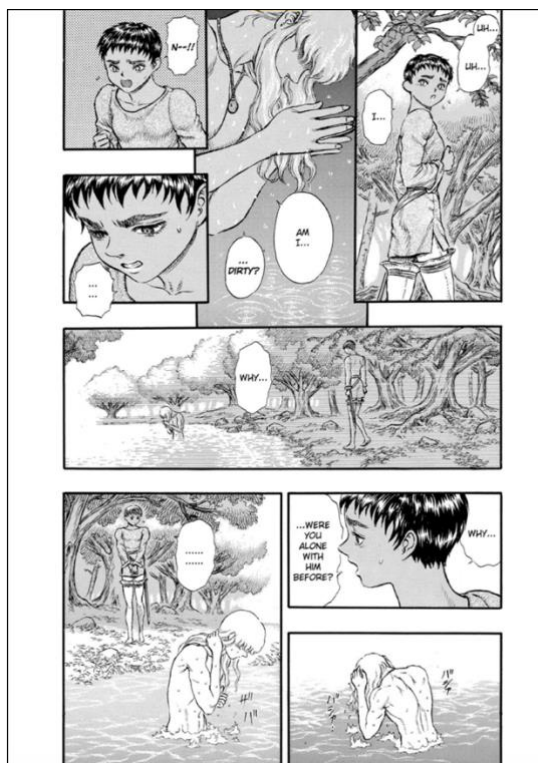


Figure 8: Griffith bathing in the river.

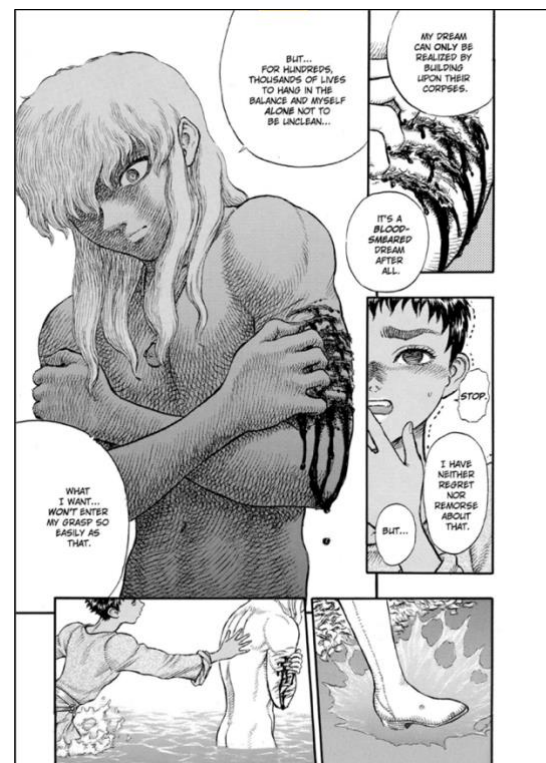


Figure 9: Griffith self-harms.

As he provides this explanation to Casca, his figure is rendered in a grayscale with lines accentuating the shadows on his body even though he is typically depicted in white (Figure 9). He self-harms by scratching open his arm with his fingernails, a physical act indicating the

guilt, shame, and pressure he is experiencing. This act of self-inflicted pain illustrates a rupture between the ontological binary of self vs. Other. In this context, the “self” refers to Griffith’s internal perception of himself. In this particular scene, he perceives himself as “dirty” and morally tainted in his pursuit of his own kingdom and to not sully the sacrifices of his followers. The “Other” refers to his other self, which he intentionally projects outward as a perfect, charismatic, and destined leader admired by many. His other self corresponds to the near-divine portrayal as discussed at the beginning of this subchapter. Both dimensions are facets of Griffith’s identity, which are two sides of the same coin, separated yet inextricably linked. These aspects of his identity would on occasion collide as an existential consequence after Griffith has performed a morally questionable action, such as in this particular scene. Borrowing from Kristeva’s theory, Griffith seems to suffer from a breakdown of his ego as the distinction between self vs. Other becomes lost once the two aspects of his identity collide (2). This breakdown leads to the abjection of his identity by treating his own body as foreign and repulsive, expelling it through the act of self-harm.

The tension between Griffith’s “dirty” self and his idealized outward image of his other self extends beyond the ontological binary into the moral realm. Dirtiness and cleanliness are often associated with moral actions; for example, in everyday language, doing someone’s “dirty work” refers to doing unpleasant and dishonest work for others, which is considered bad, whereas someone being “clean” can indicate that a person is free from wrongdoing, which is perceived as good. Griffith, an ambivalent character, raises the question of whether his actions can be deemed good or bad. The occasional use of gray in Figure 8 and Figure 9 reinforces Griffith’s ambiguity because it is a mixture of white and black, which are symbolic colors for good and evil. While Griffith cannot be easily categorized as good or bad within the Christian framework, from a Nietzschean perspective, he demonstrates elements of master morality as he seeks to transcend conventional moral constraints in the pursuit of his own will to power. Due to his ambition and willpower, Griffith can be defined as “good” under the moral framework of master morality. However, from the perspective of slave morality, he can be considered “evil” because his dream is built on the sacrifices of others. Thereby, Griffith occupies a morally gray zone, which corresponds with the grayscale of his body used in Figure 8 and Figure 9, no matter which framework is applied.

Through this scene, Griffith’s body becomes a central site through which the apocalyptic narrative unfolds in which the destabilizing of ontological and moral binaries is central. Marked by an ongoing crisis of identity, morality, and meaning, Griffith embodies

tensions that are typically reserved for the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic phases, as the pre-apocalyptic world is generally characterized by stable societal structures and ordered hierarchies (Stifflemire 4-5). On the surface, Griffith reflects this order through his status as a beautiful, charismatic, and successful mercenary leader who inspires loyalty through his dream of founding his own kingdom. However, a closer examination reveals the underlying fragility of the apparent stability he represents. This fragility indicates that Griffith is already undergoing a kind of apocalypse himself because it signifies an unraveling of the discrepancies between the self-image and social role he projects, i.e. a breakdown of his ego, which is a central theme in apocalyptic narratives according to Kristeva (207). In addition to the dissolution between self vs. Other, Griffith's personal apocalypse retains the fundamental aspect of a theological apocalypse, namely revelation. His personal apocalypse reveals the other facet of his identity, i.e. his other self, which surfaces under moments of psychological pressure. This internal unraveling positions Griffith as both a harbinger and embodiment of the apocalyptic condition which he triggers long before the Eclipse occurs.

4.1.3 Griffith in Pain: The Tortured Body

Griffith's personal apocalypse, which is evident through his inner conflict as analyzed in the previous subchapter, is further intensified through the experience of torture. Throughout the years, Griffith's and Guts' comradeship has blossomed; however, Guts feels the need to undertake his own journey to be able to match Griffith's lifelong ambition. Thereby, Guts decides to leave the Hawks to find his own personal goal. Devastated by Guts' departure in volume eight of the overall story arch, Griffith secretly engages in sexual intercourse with the unmarried princess, which is an act considered a royal crime (Miura v9). Although his motivation for this "crime" is not explicitly stated in the story, it can be inferred that it is Griffith's way of coping with the overwhelming emotions he harbors toward Guts, which are triggered by his decision to part ways. Griffith's unlawful behavior is soon discovered by the king whereupon he is imprisoned in the Tower of Rebirth, a place associated with torture and death.

Griffith, the embodiment of heaven finds himself in a place identical to hell, thereby blurring the ontological binary of heaven vs. hell. The Tower of Rebirth can be equated with hell because it functions as a site of torture where the sound of "weeping and gnashing teeth" (Mat. 8.12, 13.50), an auditory experience associated with hell in the Bible, is ever-present. This dissolution of the boundaries is further reinforced through Figure 10. The background of the bottom right panel is primarily white, which aligns with Griffith's heavenly imagery. The

gray streaks in the upper corner of this panel correspond to the ambiguity and humanity surrounding Griffith. In the bottom left panel, it is revealed that the white and gray background from the previous panel comes from the single source of light in that cell. The light stream illuminates the upper half of Griffith's body while darkness surrounds him. This contrast between light and dark portrays Griffith's state which is suspended between transcendence and degradation, heaven and hell.

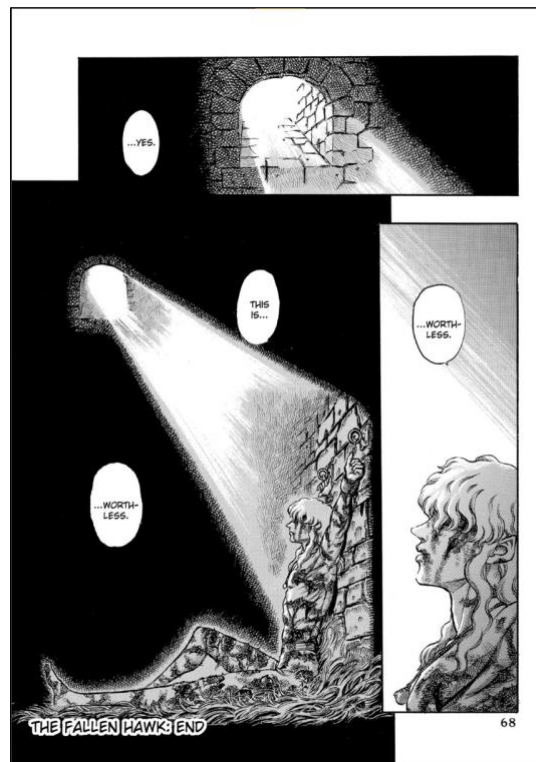


Figure 10: Griffith in hell.

While the biblical hell is often linked to “the second death” (Rev. 21.8), Griffith's hell is instead a place of suspended existence, where prisoners linger in a state between life and death. Griffith himself is subjected to brutal torture without the option of death as the king specifically demands him to be kept alive. Thus, Griffith is portrayed as the living dead, blurring yet another ontological binary of life vs. death. This is further reinforced through the contrast between black and white in Figure 10 as black is often associated with evil and death whereas white is associated with good and life in Western culture (Gray 7). Besides Griffith's torture, the king also orders his troupe to be annihilated; however, a few soldiers manage to escape under Casca's command. A year after this incident, Guts encounters Casca and the remaining Hawks by chance. She informs him of Griffith's whereabouts, prompting them to embark on a rescue mission. Figure 11 captures the shocking moment in which Griffith is discovered by the rescue team. The page contains eight panels, which is a relatively high

number for panels to occupy a single page. The cramped panels on the page create tension through the compression effect, highlighting the violence and horrors inscribed onto Griffith's body. Notably, there is no release panel to liberate the readers of the dread evoked by Griffith's mutilated form.



Figure 11: Guts finds Griffith.

Torture is a key element in apocalyptic narratives (Pippin 121). By revealing the layers of the body and removing its parts, the instability of the ego and the fragility of the human body are exposed. In Figure 11, the top four panels depict how Griffith's body is turned inside out. Through torture, Griffith suffers from severe body mutilation from severed tendons and tongue to the peeling of skin and muscle layers. His entire ribcage is visible due to malnourishment and punishment, and his limbs are rendered useless. His hawk helmet, once the symbolization of his leadership and success, is also intact although its function has shifted from a protective shield against external threats to a cage, imprisoning him and serving as a constant reminder of who he once was and what he has become. Thereby, the boundary between the temporal binary old vs. new, i.e. Griffith's old image as the leader of the Hawks and his new tortured body, is blurred through the helmet. This stark contrast serves to dismantle his former image, confronting the reader and those characters who know him with the vulnerability and degradation of the once idealized figure. In addition to the temporal binary of old vs. new, Griffith also destabilizes the ontological binary of self vs. Other. As discussed in the previous

subchapter, Griffith destabilizes this ontological binary in which his self is defined by ambiguity and his other self is the perfect and heavenly image he projects outward. In the context of Griffith's torture, however, this binary is reversed. His self is no longer the idealized figure admired by other characters but his current reality of having a mutilated and disabled body marked by violence and degradation. His other self, in turn, becomes what he once embodied, namely the beautiful and charismatic leader, whose image now exists only as a haunting contrast to his present condition.

This scene of bodily destruction aligns with Améry's philosophical account of torture, which provides a different perspective on the boundary of the binary opposition self vs. Other. Améry claims that the boundary of the body is also the boundary of the self. The surface of the skin shields an individual from external violations (28). This dissolution of the binary of self vs. Other differs from the breakdown of self vs. Other discussed in the previous subchapter and paragraph since the Other here does not refer to the other self of Griffith, but another human being who imposes themselves onto the flesh of the person being tortured. This is evident through the marks of violence on Griffith's body in Figure 11. As Améry claims, in order to trust the world, the body must feel only what the individual consents to feel on their skin (28). The "trust in the world includes all sorts of things: the irrational and logically unjustifiable belief in absolute causality perhaps, or the likewise blind belief in the validity of the inductive inference" (Améry 28). "Inductive inference" (28) refers to a way of reasoning that draws broader conclusions from particular observations which occur in daily life. For example, the experience of burning one's skin with fire leads to the inductive inference that fire will burn our skin whenever we come into contact with it. Once the first unwanted contact with the skin occurs, the prisoner not only loses this "trust in the world" (Améry 27) but also becomes helpless in the face of their torturer (Améry 27-28). Similarly to how the king and his accomplice seek to punish Griffith, the torturer, whom Améry also describes as a "god, or at least, a demigod" (36) exercising absolute power, aims to nullify the prisoner's world by negating their very being by reducing them to a body (that is reduced to flesh or matter). Thereby, the torturer becomes the "master over flesh and spirit, life and death" (35). Améry's theory aligns with Kristeva's concept of the abject, particularly in how the distinction between self vs. Other collapses as the torturer forcefully inscribes his presence onto the prisoner's body, literally engraving themselves onto the body of another human being.

Overcome with rage upon witnessing Griffith's tortured body, Guts and his group kill Griffith's torturer and ultimately succeed in rescuing Griffith although they are being chased

by the king's troupes. Once Guts and his group escape with Griffith from the Tower of Rebirth, it becomes apparent that Griffith's perception of the world has been altered significantly. As Améry states, anyone who has endured torture can no longer feel a sense of belonging in the world. The deep sense of violation and shame it causes is permanent. The initial loss of trust in the world begins with the first act of violence directed toward the body, but under prolonged torture, that trust is entirely eradicated and cannot be restored (40). Essentially, "whoever was tortured, stays tortured" (Améry 34). The power to reduce someone to flesh and death is an ineradicable horror. Griffith, who is traumatized by the experience of torture, appears psychologically fragmented and uncertain, struggling to make sense of his identity and surroundings. Griffith seems to experience intense despair and a profound loss of control, triggered by the collapse of his ambitions and dream. He seems to struggle with emotional turmoil, marked by depression, wounded pride, and a growing sense of jealousy as he observes the deepening romantic relationship between Guts and Casca, who was once in love with him.

Lost in his emotions, Griffith decides to abscond by stealing the carriage in which he is resting; however, he does not get far and is thrown into a pool of water from the impact. He attempts to commit suicide by piercing his throat with a sharp piece of wood. As he pierces the tip of his throat, he pulls back at the last second as if deciding against it, and at that moment, the solar eclipse begins. The double-spread of Figure 12 shows the scenery of the beginning of the Eclipse as Guts runs toward Griffith. In the first panel, Guts faces left, witnessing the eerie monstrous figures with diverse humanoid forms appear in the background depicted in the second panel while Griffith remains seated in the water. His side profile extends beyond the frame as if he is refusing to be confined by any boundaries or obstacles to reach Griffith. In the second panel, Griffith is positioned in the middle, precisely beneath the eclipse as if he is the focal point of this cosmic convergence. According to Turner, liminality is often associated with the eclipse because it is an unusual phenomenon in which the sun and moon overlap, disrupting the habitual order we are accustomed to on Earth (95). Due to Griffith's positioning in Figure 12, it can be inferred that he is a liminal figure, which is a foreshadow to his future embodiment as a demon in the supernatural realm and a somewhat human in the earthly realm. While his liminal position is a mere foreshadow here, it becomes fully apparent in the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic storyline where Griffith embodies the tension between human vs. monster.

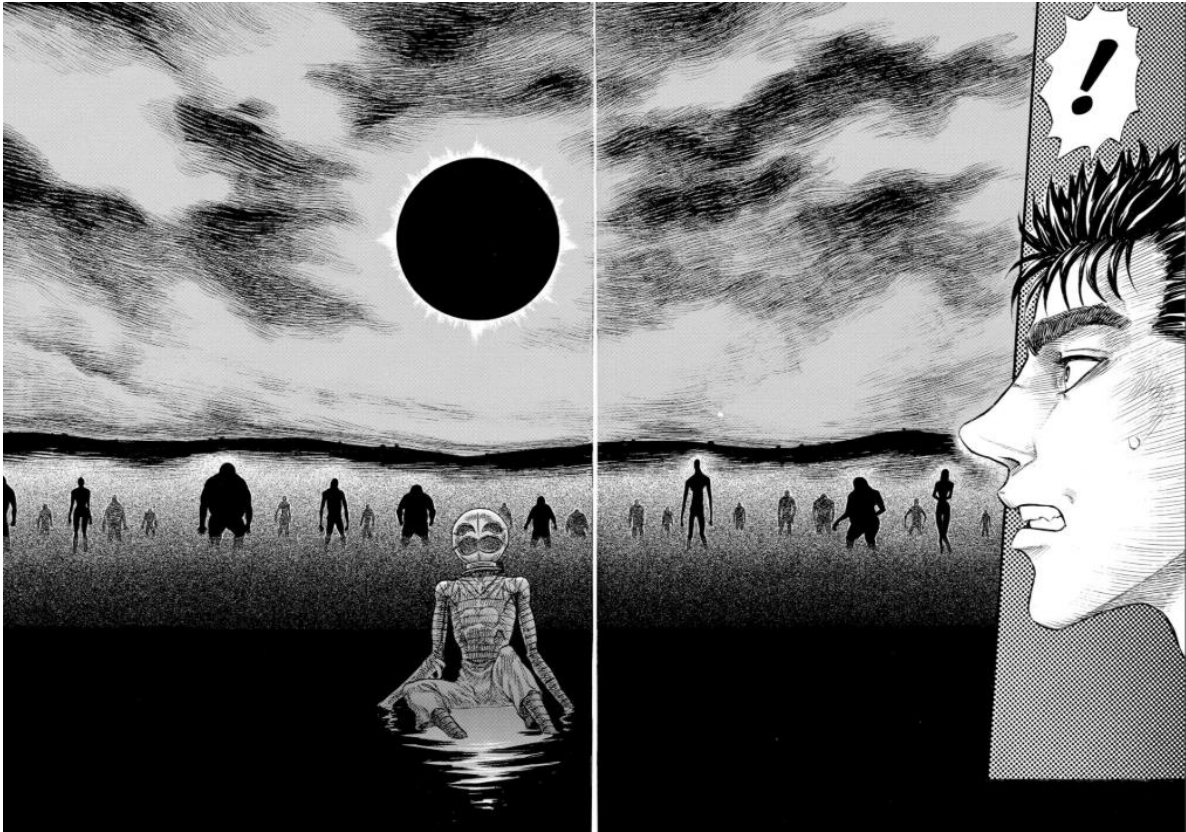


Figure 12: The start of the Eclipse.

As Guts' rushes to Griffith in Figure 12, he finally reaches Griffith in Figure 13 although Griffith makes it clear in the preceding pages that he wishes Guts to stay away. In the second panel of the page, Guts' reflection is once again visible in Griffith's eyes, only this time, Griffith seems to abhor the pitiful look directed at him. The four panels at the bottom depict a sequence of events involving the Behelit, a supernatural item in Griffith's possession since the beginning of *Berserk*. Griffith's Behelit functions as a trigger for the apocalyptic event, which is activated when he reaches a moment of profound despair and when blood comes into contact with it. Once these two criteria are fulfilled a portal to an interdimensional realm from which monsters begin to emerge is opened, and the landscape transforms into a canvas of grotesque and distorted faces. This scene marks the beginning of the end, an apocalyptic turning point that irreversibly alters the fate of all characters involved.



Figure 13: Guts' reaches Griffith.

Griffith's body in these sequences plays a pivotal role in shaping *Berserk's* pre-apocalyptic narrative by serving as a site of foreshadowing, symbolic instability, and narrative transition. In the pre-apocalyptic world where structures of meaning and order are still ostensibly intact (Stifflemire 4-5), Griffith's mutilated body becomes the first visible and undeniable rupture in that illusion of stability. Once the embodiment of light, heaven, and utopian aspiration, Griffith is reduced to a state of physical and existential degradation. His body no longer signifies power or transcendence but utmost abjection, vulnerability, and fragmentation. This stark collapse of his body and identity exposes the fragility of the values upheld by the pre-apocalyptic world. Thus, his broken form becomes both a symbol for the disintegration of the old world, in which the Hawks dominate the battlefield, and his dream is within his grasp, as well as the catalyst for the emergence of a new, grotesque, and chaotic world. Griffith's body thereby disrupts the temporal boundaries between new vs. old and functions as a transition between the pre-apocalyptic beginning and the apocalyptic middle by showing that the apocalypse has already begun in the violent unraveling of his human form.

In the chapter "The Golden Age: Pre-apocalyptic Bodies", the human forms of Guts and Griffith were analyzed in relation to the apocalyptic binaries they embody and destabilize. Although their monstrous transformations have not occurred thus far, their physical and emotional development foreshadows the narrative rupture to come despite them being unaware

of it. As demonstrated in the analysis, Guts' birth, Griffith's human and mutilated body destabilize all three categories of apocalyptic binaries. These disruptions of temporal, moral, and ontological binaries do not merely anticipate the apocalypse, but also imbue the pre-apocalyptic narrative with ambiguity, instability, and a sense of inevitable collapse, which are elements more typical for the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic storyline (Moon 1; Stifflemire 4-5). Rather than existing in a world of fixed moral and cosmic order, the characters inhabit a narrative already marked by contradiction and decay, which are made apparent through their embodiments. Thereby, the apocalypse is inscribed onto their body rather than a singular event happening in the story. The following chapter turns to their apocalyptic bodies in which the monstrous form and the fragility of the human body are foregrounded.

4.2 The Eclipse: Apocalyptic Bodies

4.2.1 From Griffith to Femto: The Transformative Body

Although *Berserk's* storyline features multiple end-of-the-world scenarios, the Eclipse stands out as *the* apocalyptic event as it marks the turning point which alters both Guts and Griffith deeply. Beyond its narrative impact, an eclipse itself carries symbolic weight because it is a rare celestial phenomenon visible on Earth in which the sun and moon overlap. It embodies a cosmic contradiction that mirrors the collapse of binaries central to the apocalyptic mode. Furthermore, the Eclipse also reveals an otherworldly dimension and eschatological salvation, which aligns with this thesis' definition of an apocalypse derived from Collins (2). While the Eclipse does not bring forth near-global destruction of the world, it nevertheless signifies the end of the world as Guts and Griffith previously know it. During this interdimensional event, the members of the God Hand appear, which consist of a group of four, soon to be five, powerful demonic entities who act as executors of God, also known as the Idea of Evil, fulfilling its will as their own desires are inherently aligned with that entity. In *Berserk*, all demonic and monstrous entities are called "apostles", and in this analysis, I use the words "demon/s", "monster/s", and "apostle/s" interchangeably.

As the demons of God Hand explain to Griffith, every human present in the interdimensional space is destined to be sacrificed for him, a consecrated being, to become their kinsman as "all lies within the currents of causality" (Miura v12). Fate, destiny, and causality are central themes to the religious apocalyptic narrative wherein judgment is inevitable (Collins 256; O'Leary 5-6). In *Berserk*, Griffith's fate of becoming an apostle has been subtly foreshadowed on some occasions in the pre-apocalyptic storyline. As Griffith is

elevated to the God Hand by a pedestal of distorted faces to fulfill his destiny, Guts attempts to cling to him in a desperate effort to protect his fragile body. However, Guts loses his grip and only manages to hold onto Griffith's arm. As shown in Figure 14, Guts occupies the bottom half of the page while Griffith is depicted above. Griffith's face is not visible, leaving the readers uncertain of his emotional response to the situation. By rendering Griffith's face invisible, the readers are denied insight into his humanity. In contrast, Guts' visible distress and desperate attempt to hold onto Griffith highlight his humanity. Another factor in this panel is the background. The top of the panel is occupied with twisted faces whereas the bottom is purely black. This foreshadows Griffith's fate of ascending as a demonic entity and Guts' descension into the darkness as he will be trapped to fight monsters for the rest of his life after the Eclipse. While the position and (the lack of) facial expressions of the characters as well as the background seem to produce binaries such as human vs. monster, ascension vs. descension, it is through Guts' desperate act of still holding onto Griffith that these binaries are dissolved. On a closer look, Griffith's hand is slightly over the threshold of the grotesque faces whereas Guts' hand transgresses the boundaries of darkness, indicating that both characters are already crossing into the realms that the binaries seek to separate.

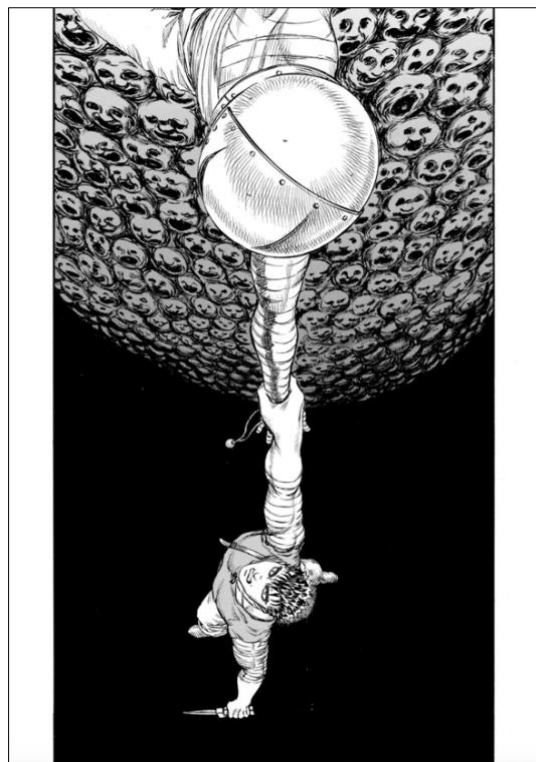


Figure 14: Guts hangs onto Griffith.

Although Guts desperately clings onto Griffith, he nevertheless is forced to let go as Griffith's fragile arm begins to tear under Guts' weight. Guts plummets into the darkness but

ultimately survives, whereas Griffith is carried upward into the palm of God Hand. Once in the palm of God Hand, Griffith is confronted with the decision of sacrificing his troupe. Thus far, Griffith's status, accomplishments, and embodiment have been contingent upon the deaths and sacrifices of others. One of the reasons why Griffith gained loyal followers is due to his charisma, which he exercised through his body. With his current mutilated body and mental state, he is unable and unfit to lead troupes and achieve his ambitious dream. In order to once again chase his dream, he needs to lose his humanity and sever emotional ties, viewing his close comrades not as individuals but as necessary sacrifices for the fulfillment of his ambition. While Griffith has always acknowledged the sacrifices it takes to achieve his dream, he was shown to struggle with accepting it in the pre-apocalyptic storyline. This is evident through the scene where Griffith struggles to make sense of his identity during the conversation with Casca as analyzed in Subchapter 4.1.2. Essentially, Griffith's embodiment represents a dream of utopia realized through dystopian means, thereby blurring the lines between this apocalyptic binary.

In order for Griffith to obtain the ability to chase his dream again, he makes the decision to turn into an apostle, which blurs the boundary between the ontological binary of individual death vs. total annihilation derived from Derrida (28). In the moment of ultimate decision, Griffith chooses both types of eradication: individual death since his mortal human identity and body needs to be eliminated for him to undergo his demonic transformation, and total annihilation because this transformation entails the sacrificial death of his entire troupe on his behalf, effectively erasing the legacy of the Hawks. By choosing both, Griffith would ensure that he obtains a new, able-bodied, demonic physique by destroying the entire existence of the Hawks as well as his old identity as the leader. During his last moment before ultimately making his final decision, he smiles at Guts, the only one who was able to make him forget his dream, indicating the depth of their bond and the emotional conflict within Griffith – a final, fleeting acknowledgment of his humanity before embracing evil.

As Griffith utters the words "I sacrifice" (Miura v12), the monsters are unleashed to devour his fellow comrades. While the Hawks are fighting for their lives, Griffith's human body begins to unravel. His monstrous transformation unfolds on two levels: one physiological, occurring in the palm of the God Hand, and the other psychological, within his consciousness, where he encounters God. Since Griffith's transformation occurs on two levels, his bodily transformation can be categorized as both metamorphosis and reincarnation. It is a metamorphosis insofar that his body undergoes a radical transformation from one form to

another enacted through supernatural intervention, adapting to the interdimensional environment of the God Hand's realm. At the same time, it is a reincarnation as his human body experiences a physical death only to be reborn as a demonic entity, marking the end of his former existence and the beginning of a new one, thereby blurring the temporal boundary between beginning vs. end and old vs. new.

On the psychological level of Griffith's monstrous transformation, he meets God within his consciousness, who is the embodiment of accumulated evil. Griffith, a soon to be member of God Hand, is destined to execute God's will, thereby blurring the moral boundaries between God vs. demons and, by extension, good vs. evil. As established in Chapter 1.3.2, God and demons are biblically a binary opposition. In the Bible, God is associated with absolute perfection and the embodiment of goodness whereas demons, the Beasts, and their allies are the epitome of evil (Psm. 23.6 & 119.68). However, the God in *Berserk* is not associated with goodness but evil, and the executors of God's will are not angels but demons instead. By reversing the morality associated with God and demons, the boundaries of the ontological and moral binaries are blurred. Figure 15 serves as a depiction of this destabilization. On top, a demonic figure is visible, which is a preview of Griffith's soon-to-be revealed demonic body. The demonic silhouette is surrounded by abstract swirls of perhaps God's energy or aura, creating a coherent image of demon and God. Thereby, this image combines God vs. demons and by extension good vs. evil.

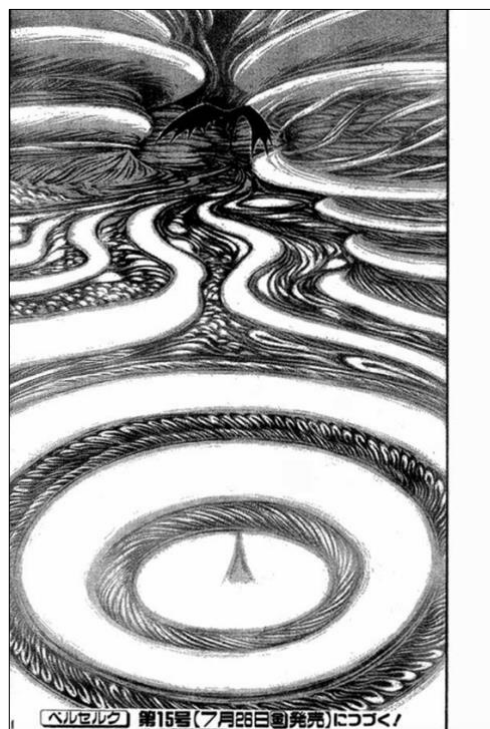


Figure 15: God and demon.

In relation to the physiological level of Griffith's transformation, Figure 16 illustrates the initial phase of Griffith's reincarnation in which his body gradually loses its human structure. His body is reduced to a molten, barely recognizable form, which is no longer entirely human but not yet fully reborn, thereby blurring the boundary between human vs. inhuman. This state suggests the erasure and rewriting of his identity, emphasizing that despite his active decision to become a demonic entity in pursuit of his dreams, he is nevertheless a pawn of causality. This determinism of his destiny is further reinforced through the caption, marking this as a metaphysically predetermined moment. While Griffith is enshrined in light, the background is speckled and somewhat cosmic, indicating his entrance into the apocalyptic. Through the contrast between his human body and the cosmic background, the boundaries between human vs. cosmos are destabilized.

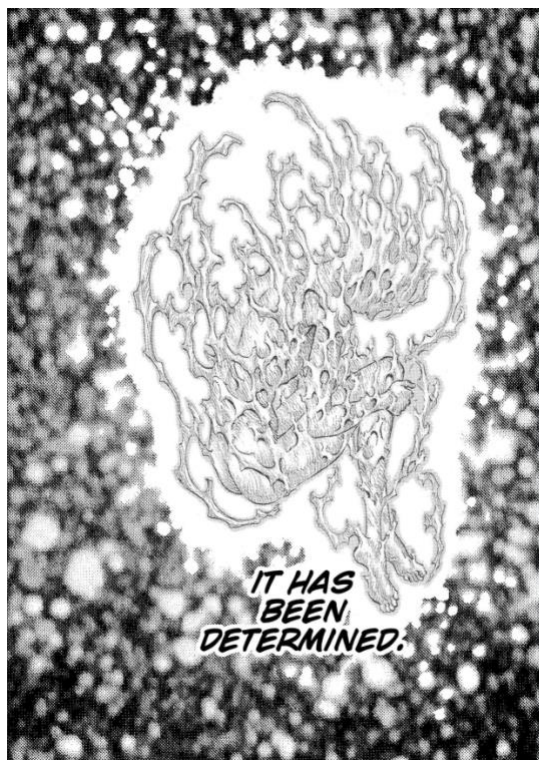


Figure 16: Griffith's body unravelling.

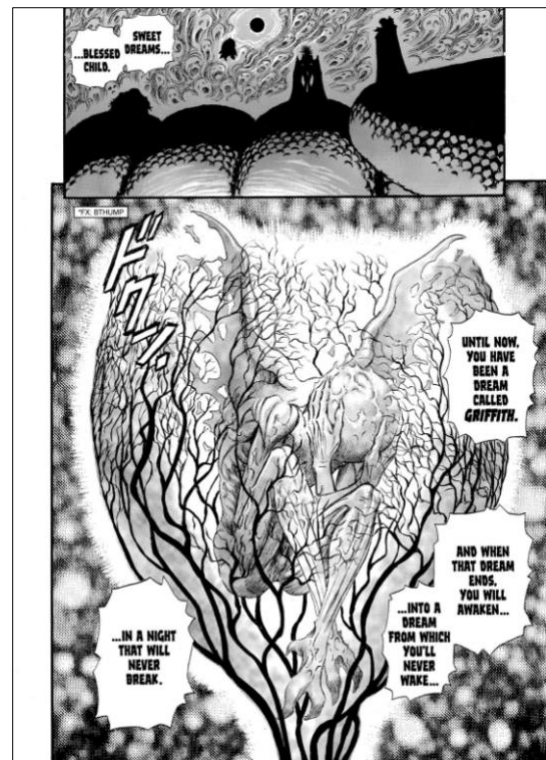


Figure 17: Griffith's body in transformation.

Figure 17 portrays his physical transformation in a more defined yet embryonic state, encased in a vascular, womb-like structure. His feet begin to resemble claws, and wings emerge from his back. His fetal position evokes vulnerability, gestation, or infancy; however, this moment is not innocent but sinister, thereby contradicting the fetal imagery. Rather than symbolizing the promise of a new, innocent life, it reflects his rebirth into darkness. It marks the end of his humanity and the beginning of demonic embodiment, blurring the apocalyptic binary of life vs. death and light vs. darkness. Moreover, Griffith's rebirth is contingent upon

the total annihilation of the Hawks. The death of his comrades is absorbed into his body, which is visible through the blood vessels in Figure 17 as they are connected to the Hawks members through the brand of sacrifice, thereby blurring the line between his individual death and the total annihilation of the troupe. To become a demon, Griffith must reject his bodily integrity and humanity to undergo a transformation into the monstrous. A textual analysis of the surrounding dialogue reveals a dissolution of the boundaries between his former and emerging self. Griffith, as a human, existed as a dream, suggesting that his human identity as Griffith is cast aside for his new demonic identity to emerge. The dialogue further underscores the entrapment of Griffith's transformation. His transformation is not liberating, but eternal and inescapable instead. The eternal night signifies the apocalyptic permanence inscribed onto his body, which is a new ontological state that defies waking, morality, and his return to the human realm. Griffith's identity, which was once rooted in ambition and ethereal beauty, is now entwined with monstrosity and abjection. This moment marks the obliteration of his human self and the emergence of his new demonic identity, Femto.

4.2.2 The Birth of Femto: The Demonic Body

Figure 18 shows the completed process of Griffith's monstrous transformation into Femto. It is characterized by a sequence of compressed panels, which depict his gradual emergence amid the God Hand. One of the God Hand apostles introduces his new identity to the world as "the Wings of Darkness, Femto" (Miura v13), which contrast starkly to his previous nickname as "the Hawk of Light". Femto embodies both the end of Griffith's human identity and the Golden Age as well as the beginning of Femto and "the Age of Darkness" (Miura v13). On the next page, Guts' horrified expression in the top panel indicates the uncanny distance between the former man known as Griffith and this new being known as Femto (Figure 19). At the bottom of the page, Femto emerges drenched in blood, as though he has absorbed and integrated the blood of his sacrificial victims into his very being. His face is hidden, rendering him anonymous and inhuman; however, an open, beak-like structure is recognizable, suggesting a grasp for air after being reborn.

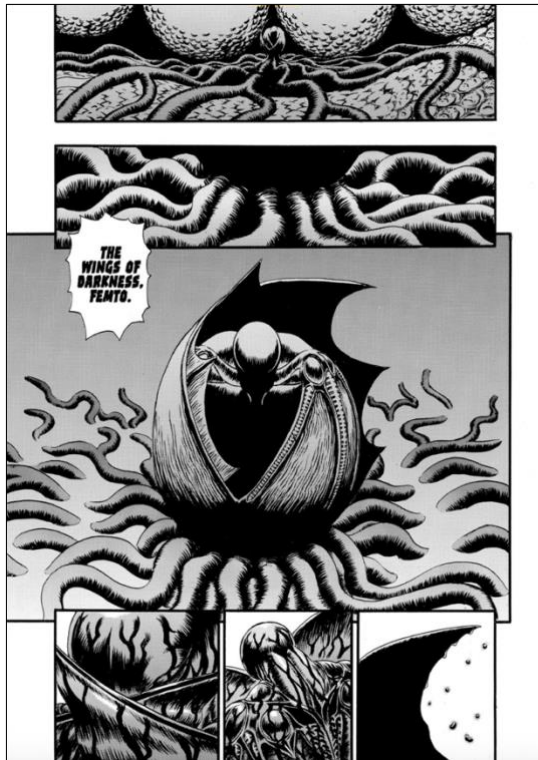


Figure 18: Femto emerges.



Figure 19: Guts' reaction to Femto's emergence.

In Figure 20, Femto erects himself and stands at the center of the God Hand with his new kinsmen each standing on a finger of the God Hand. His symmetrical stance within the divine architecture implies order amid chaos. Even though the scene is marked by violent disorder as the Hawks are slaughtered, a sense of order is reestablished when Femto appears. According to McCloud, “symmetry is the natural order of things” (*Making Comics*, 109) and conveys a strong and stable self-image. This symmetry in Femto’s depiction mirrors Griffith’s transformation into a perfected, God-like being, symbolizing his newfound power and stability as a demonic entity. Thus, Femto represents order as a member of the God Hand, wielding sovereign power over other apostles. Yet, this symmetry is juxtaposed with the grotesque details of the surrounding flesh and souls, grounding his transcendence in horror. The use of central framing reflects Griffith’s new mythic stature while the encroaching vortex of souls implies that this elevation was built on the human sacrifice of the multitude. Thereby, Femto’s body destabilizes apocalyptic binaries such as order vs. chaos, mortality vs. immortality, and human vs. monster. This destabilization of apocalyptic binaries is further amplified when contrasting Femto’s new demonic body with Griffith’s former tortured form. A comparison of Femto’s and Griffith’s form reveals that there seems to be a strong logic of inversion: whereas Griffith’s tortured body appeared as grotesque and deformed, it is now the external landscape that bears this grotesqueness, while Femto’s body emerges as unified and stable. This inversion

highlights how Femto's ascension reconfigures Griffith's tortured body by stabilizing it while displacing horror onto the world around him.

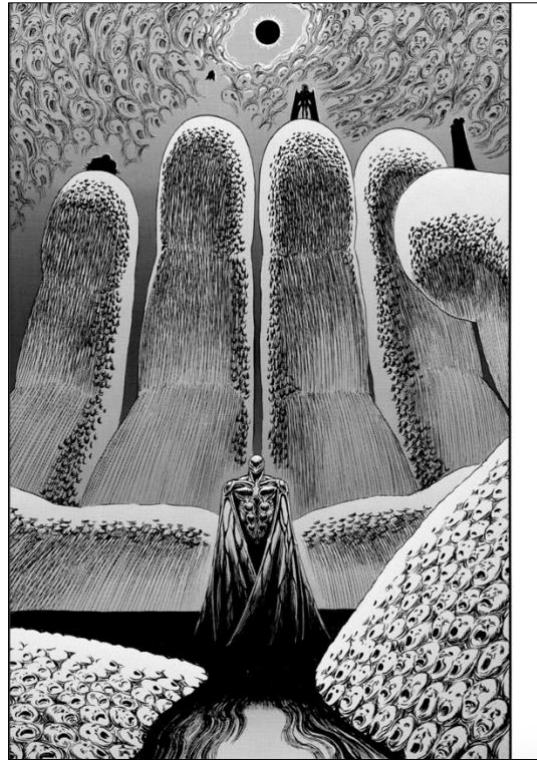


Figure 20: Femto amid the God Hand.

With his new form, Femto spreads his wings and descends to Guts, demonstrating the functionality of his wings as other apostles observe him in silence (Figure 21). Even though he adopts a bird-like form, his wings resemble those of a bat rather than a bird. In Western fantasy and folklore, demons with bat wings are a common motif, often symbolizing darkness and evil (Riccucci 137). This visual choice reinforces Griffith's unification with the dark side as Femto. In the panel positioned at the center of the double-spread, Femto's wings extend beyond the border of the panels, indicating his transcendence of spatial boundaries and symbolizing his emergence as a being no longer confined by the human world or its limitations.

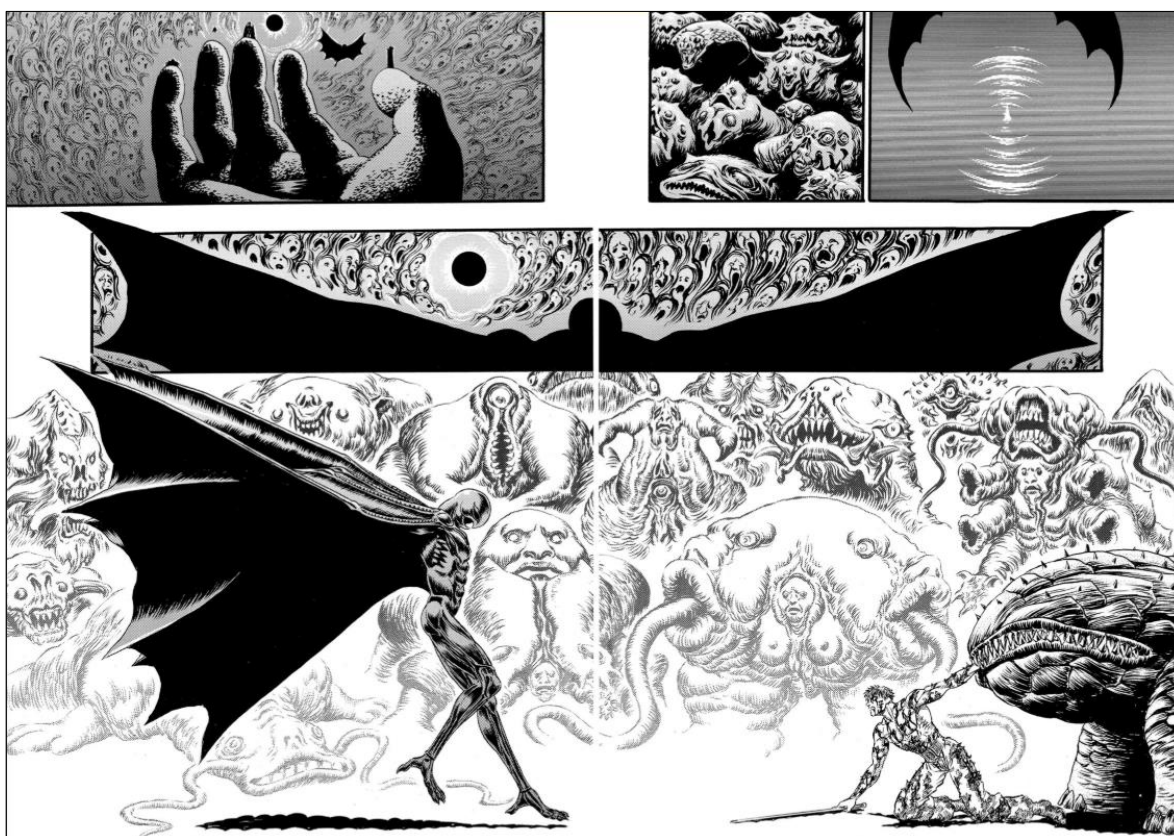


Figure 21: Femto descends.

On the next page, Femto is depicted alone at the center of the panel (Figure 22). The plain background contrasts sharply with the chaotic carnage earlier as he stands on top of a bed of twisted faces, symbolizing that his ascension is built upon collective suffering. His form seems cold, reflective, and sealed, devoid of expressive features in the face. Drawing on theories of bodily hybridity in Chapter 2.3, Femto's liminal body combines both human and animalistic traits, which blurs the boundary between human vs. animal. His cape spreads like wings, referencing the earlier "Wings of Darkness" and his nickname as the "Hawk", while his head has taken on the shape of his former helmet as if it has completely fused with his body. Femto's demonic form is not only defined by hybridity, but also grotesque features: his chest and abdomen protrude unnaturally, the outline of his ribcage is clearly visible, and everything on his body is pronounced as if sculpted. His form evokes both elegance and terror, signaling his complete transformation into something demonic. Whereas Griffith was predominantly depicted in white in the pre-apocalyptic storyline, his merging with darkness has turned his new form black, which is not only the opposite color of his former self but also a color associated with darkness and evil.

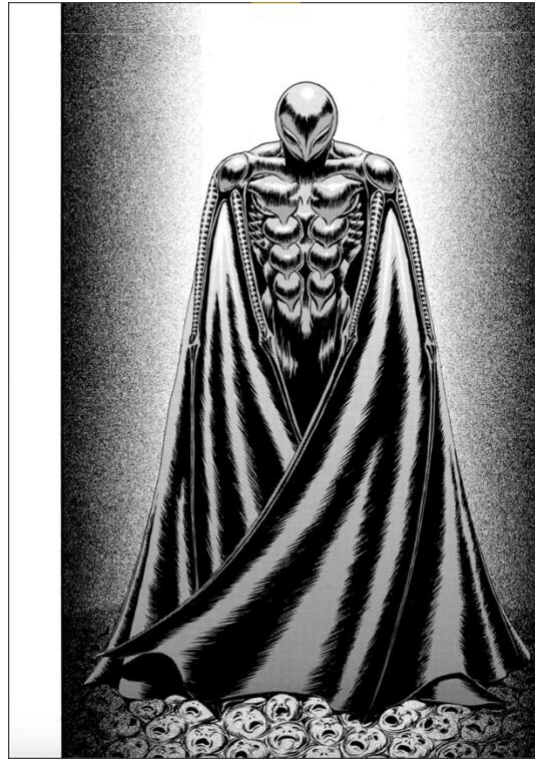


Figure 22: Femto close-up.

Femto's uncanny appearance is further highlighted in Figure 23, where his face is revealed for the first time after his transformation. The black background of the first panel signifies Femto's ascension to darkness while the grotesque apostles surrounding him seem to have replaced the Hawks as his new followers. His facial expression seems to exude smugness and pride, which is conveyed through his predatory gaze and the slight upward curve of his mouth. In the bottom panel, Guts looks up at Femto, barely able to utter the name of the man formerly known as Griffith. His hesitation reflects a deep sense of disbelief, an inability to reconcile the friend he once knew with the demonic figure now before him. This moment illustrates the shattering of the self vs. Other binary between Griffith and Femto as Guts is forced to confront the uncanny unfamiliarity of the man he once followed. Femto's predatory gaze soon manifests into predatory behavior when he rapes Casca, who has been spared thus far as an object of revenge directed toward Guts as he is forced to watch this atrocious deed. Through this act, maximum psychological damage is inflicted on Guts, and Femto severs his connection with the last remnants of his former self by asserting power over Guts, desecrating what he holds most dear. As Pitetti (441), Men, and Pippin (2) point out, the old mistakes in the pre-apocalyptic societies are often inherent in the new, post-apocalyptic world. Femto's behavior serves as a prime example of this contradiction. Even with a new physical form and identity, Femto retains the resentment he harbored toward Guts as Griffith even though he has

supposedly severed ties with his humanity and, by extension, his former self. Unable to let go of his resentment, he exercises revenge in front of Guts, preserving the lingering grudge from his past self while asserting his newfound power. This scene embodies the apocalyptic collapse of moral order and underscores the full transformation of Griffith from a charismatic leader into the demonic Femto.



Figure 23: Femto's face reveal.

Instead of perceiving the Eclipse as the end of the world, Griffith's radical body transformation into Femto represents the culmination of a deeply personal apocalypse that has already unfolded within his tortured human body. The torture he undergoes during his imprisonment already marks the true nadir of his humanity, which can be seen as the equivalent to an apocalyptic experience. While apocalyptic narratives tend to depict transformation and change as a cataclysmic rupture (Seager 221), it becomes a moment of rebirth and metamorphosis for Griffith, as he exchanges his human limitation for demonic transcendence. Although Femto has shed most of his humanity associated with Griffith, Guts seems to be the only and final obstacle which he must overcome for him to embrace his new identity. With Femto's new demonic form, Femto is enabled to exercise revenge and reject his humanity entirely by raping Casca, whom Guts loves the most. Thereby, his transformation is not framed as a fall but an ascension into a form that finally aligns with his ambition, which is detached from morality and emotional ties. Griffith's body does not signal the end, but the beginning of

the end, demonstrating what Pippin (1), Men, and Pitetti (441) describe as the continuity that follows the apocalypse. As such, Femto becomes the embodiment of change, portraying destruction not as an endpoint, but as the condition for reordering power, identity, and cosmic structure. His body, which is now grotesque and divine, fuses the old and new, self and Other, morality and immorality, light and darkness, revealing the instability of such binaries. Through Femto, the apocalyptic narrative explores not only the terror of apocalypse but also its seductive promise of a new and better world (Leigh 5).

4.2.3 Losing Parts: The Wounded Body

While Griffith undergoes drastic bodily transformation into the monstrous, Guts' body is also altered. When Griffith decides to sacrifice the Hawks, all the Hawks members receive the Brand of Sacrifice. In the three compressed panels on the bottom left in Figure 24, one of the God Hand apostles explains to Guts that the branded individuals are marked for sacrifice for Griffith to ascend as a demon (Miura v12). The Brand of Sacrifice symbolically resembles the Mark of the Beast since both marks are associated with demons. Traditionally, the Mark of the Beast is inscribed on the forehead or the right hand, bearing the number 666 (Rev. 13.16-18). While the Hawks do not worship the devil per se, they revered Griffith as a savior, whose moral compass in tandem with his body gradually eroded in pursuit of his ambition, ultimately leading them into a sacrificial fate decided by the man they trusted. Although the location of the Brand of Sacrifice varies for each individual, Guts receives his on the right side of his neck (Figure 24). This may signify vulnerability, marking a site of exposure and intimacy. It also evokes imagery of execution, emphasizing the dangers that perpetually follow him. Although Guts is arguably a morally good character through the Christian moral framework because he fights demonic entities, possesses a strong conscience, respects others, seeks purpose beyond violence, and chooses loyalty, empathy, and self-determination in a world that constantly tests those values, he now bears the mark of evil. Thereby, his moral embodiment of good is complicated by the brand of evil, blurring the boundaries between the binaries.



Figure 24: *The Brand of Sacrifice.*



Figure 25: *Guts amputates his arm.*

Besides receiving the Brand of Sacrifice, Guts also loses his left arm during the Eclipse. When Femto emerges and rapes Casca, Guts' left arm is bitten by a monster. Furious upon witnessing Femto's sexual assault, Guts amputates his own arm to free himself from the monster's grip. The top panel in Figure 25 shows how Guts manages to sever his arm. The lines of the onomatopoeia are thick and spiked, matching the lines and intensity of the blood gushing from his wound. Notably, the veins of the severed arm are visible on the right side of the panel, indicating that part of his arm is left behind, i.e. his old self as Griffith's friend, while the attached upper arm is on the left, suggesting that Guts is storming leftward toward Femto, the embodiment of his present and future torment. Although this panel specifically may suggest a hard cut between the past and the present, Guts' severed arm simultaneously blurs the boundaries of this temporal binary because it serves as a constant reminder of the incident that transpired at the Eclipse. In the bottom panel, Guts is shown charging at Femto. This action is conveyed through the streaked background, a technique pioneered by Tezuka (also known as "the God of manga") called "subjective motion" (*Making Comics*, McCloud 218). As McCloud explains, manga artists frequently use this method to immerse readers in the characters' experience of movement, allowing them to feel as though they are moving with the character rather than observing from a distance with a static perspective (*Making Comics*, 218). In this panel, the urgency of Guts' intent to save Casca and strike Femto is heightened by the dynamic

background. The jagged lines of the speech bubble match the lines of blood on Guts' body, conveying the intensity of this scene. The employment of subjective motion enhances the dissolution of the temporal binaries of beginning vs. end and new vs. old because it immerses the reader in a perpetual present where Guts' past as a Hawk, his immediate action toward Femto's sexual assault, and the inevitability of his future torment in a single visual experience. Furthermore, Guts' pupils are absent, which may indicate emotional distress or loss of self-identity as eyes are often referred to as the window to the soul. In this moment, Guts seems to be consumed by rage and blinded by hatred as he charges toward Femto.

In addition to severing his left arm, Guts also loses his right eye. Due to the sensitive imageries containing sexual violence related to this scene, I deliberately do not include any figures in this section. I refrain from a multimodal analysis in this section regarding Guts' loss of his eye as the imagery may cause distress to some people. Nevertheless, Guts' injury can be tied to theological implications. Biblically, the right eye is associated with adultery and moral transgression as expressed in the verse "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Mat. 5.29). Guts loses his right eye precisely in the moment when Femto completed exercising revenge by sexually assaulting Casca. The last view which Guts sees with his right eye is Casca as she lays on the floor. Although Guts and Casca are not married, Griffith is nonetheless violating Guts' beloved, an act that can be interpreted as a grave transgression within biblical moral frameworks. Yet it is not Griffith, the perpetrator of the sin but Guts who suffers from bodily loss. This inversion underscores a profound injustice as the sin of the aggressor is marked on the body of the observer. Guts' loss of his eye becomes a symbolic burden, a physical manifestation of Griffith's moral fall, thereby blurring the boundary between self vs. Other.

Guts' wounds and injuries along with the traumatic experience of the Eclipse serve to destabilize several apocalyptic binaries. His physical mutilations are not merely the result of the massacre but are inflicted by the supernatural others, including his left arm where he had no choice but to sever it himself under desperate circumstances. These injuries thus become a permanent reminder of the imposition of the monstrous Other onto the human self, blurring the ontological binaries of the self vs. Other and human vs. monster. Additional apocalyptic binaries which are destabilized are temporal binaries such as beginning vs. end and old vs. new. Guts' damaged body carries the mark of Griffith's betrayal, symbolizing the end of their former bond. The loss of his eye, his limb, and his comrades not only marks the end of his identity as

a former soldier of the Hawks but also the beginning of a new self which is forged in pain, trauma, and the singular pursuit of vengeance against Griffith. Thereby, Guts abandons his former self, which was once driven by loyalty and fellowship and assumes a new identity defined by his new ambition to kill Femto.

Guts' injuries, i.e. the Brand of Sacrifice and the loss of his eye and arm, play a central role in *Berserk's* apocalyptic narrative by marking his body as a site of cosmic rupture. Unlike Griffith for whom the Eclipse signals rebirth, power, and transcendence, the same event is experienced by Guts as a descent into horror, death, and betrayal. The apocalyptic event not only reveals an otherworldly realm to him but also exposes Griffith's true predatory and egocentric nature. Branded as a sacrifice and mutilated in his attempt to resist, Guts' wounds become a permanent reminder of his severed ties with Griffith and his past self as well as the Eclipse. The trauma of the Eclipse propels Guts into the post-apocalyptic narrative as a figure who embodies the remainders of the pre-apocalyptic world, which he carries everywhere in the narrative that follows. Thereby, he becomes a survivor who attempts to piece together the fragments from the pre-apocalyptic past and to live on with this irreparable trauma, which is a common post-apocalyptic motif (Stifflemire 6).

In summary, this chapter "The Eclipse: Apocalyptic Bodies" explores the central apocalyptic event in *Berserk*, which marks a radical turning point for the narrative and the protagonists. Triggered by Griffith's decision to sacrifice the Hawks in exchange for demonic ascension, the Eclipse unfolds in an interdimensional space where physical laws collapse, and monstrous forces emerge. While Griffith's transformation into Femto enables him to fulfill his ambition, it comes at the cost of immense destruction and violent sacrifice. In contrast, Guts experiences the event as a moment of extreme trauma, losing comrades, body parts, and his former identity. His wounded body becomes a site of memory and grief as he carries the scars of betrayal and loss into the post-apocalyptic storyline. Both characters destabilize temporal, moral, and ontological binary oppositions, highlighting the destructive potential inherent in an apocalypse (Lisboa 8; O'Leary 32; Pippin 79).

4.3 The Millenium Falcon: The Post-Apocalyptic Body

4.3.1 After the Apocalypse: The Healed Body

Four days after the Eclipse, Guts awakens from his coma. Upon remembering that all his comrades are dead and discovering that Casca suffers from amnesia and post-traumatic stress disorder, he sprints off to release his rage. He eventually finds himself in the middle of

nowhere, and as night falls, his Brand of Sacrifice begins to throb in pain. The left top panel in Figure 26 depicts Guts' realization that the Brand on his neck is bleeding, which is a reoccurring motif that signals the approach of monsters. In the fourth panel, Guts is surrounded by darkness, yet his figure seems to illuminate his surroundings. This imagery is the depiction of the metaphor used by Skull Knight (a character which I return to in the subsequent paragraph), who describes Guts as "a torch tossed into the darkness" (Miura v13). While Griffith is predominantly portrayed as a figure of light in the pre-apocalyptic narrative, it is now Guts who embodies light. However, unlike Griffith's divine and ethereal glow, which symbolizes heaven and hope, Guts' light is associated with fire, rage, and darkness. Griffith illuminated the space and the people with hope wherever he went, however, Guts is a bright light that admits the darkness as depicted in Figure 26, a symbol of struggle and survival. Thereby, Guts transgresses the boundaries of the light vs. dark binary opposition as his Brand of Sacrifice makes him the embodiment of light in the darkness.



Figure 26: Guts as light in the dark.



Figure 27: Guts' encounter with Skull Knight.

In addition to destabilizing the boundaries between light vs. dark, Guts' body also challenges several ontological binaries. Even though Guts does not acquire a new physical form as Griffith does, the trauma of the Eclipse and the inscription of the Brand of Sacrifice profoundly alter his perception of reality. In Figure 27, Guts encounters Skull Knight, a self-proclaimed "foe of the inhumans [i.e. apostles]" (Miura v14), indicating his alignment with

Guts. It was also Skull Knight who saved Guts and Casca from the interdimensional space of the Eclipse. As Skull Knight explains, “the boundary between the mortal world and that of the dead, the ‘Interstice’” (Miura v13) has now become Guts’ new reality. The supernatural realm remains invisible to the human eye and is separated from the physical world of the living. Although Guts survived the Eclipse, he is deeply entangled with the realm of the dead as he is marked as a sacrificial offering to evil. Yet, he is also intertwined with the world of the living since he has not forsaken his humanity unlike Griffith. As a result, Guts becomes a liminal figure positioned between mortals and immortals, the earthly and the supernatural, as well as life and death.

Figure 27 serves as a depiction of Guts’ liminal position. Similarly to Guts, Skull Knight is a spiritual character who occupies the Interstice. In essence, he transgresses the boundaries between the living and the dead realm. According to Kearl, skulls can symbolize “an intermediary between the worlds of the living and the dead” (2). This symbolization is suitable for a character such as Skull Knight as he occupies both dimensions. In the top panel of Figure 27, Guts’ back is turned to the reader (or us humans) as he faces Skull Knight. By turning his back to the reader, Guts is symbolically distanced from the human sphere and drawn further into the Interstice embodied by Skull Knight. This encounter establishes the cornerstone of Guts’ own trajectory as a figure who, from here on the story, continually traverses and destabilizes the ontological boundaries of mortals vs. immortals, the earthly vs. the supernatural, and life vs. death.

Guts’ entanglement with the darkness and the supernatural is further reinforced through the birth of his child. The grotesquely deformed and seemingly premature child is possessed by evil as a direct consequence of Casca’s rape by Femto while she was with child. In Figure 28, the top left panel reveals the shapeless, fetal form of the infant, whose appearance diverges from human anatomy, signaling its status as an abjected being. The two compressed panels at the bottom of the page seem to prolong time by focusing closely on the eyes of both Guts and the child. Whereas Guts’ wide-eyed expression conveys rejection and existential dread, the child’s eye lacks familial resemblance and thus fails to affirm kinship. Furthermore, the two panels are placed side by side which creates a striking contrast in which the child is depicted as the monstrous Other through his deformed, abjected, and grotesque body, while Guts, despite his liminal position, still possesses a recognizably human body. While the two panels placed side by side create a contrast that reinforces the binary between human and monster, the child’s existence nevertheless destabilizes this division since he is conceived by two humans

yet mixed with Femto's demonic semen. Upon seeing the child, Guts' immediate reaction is to kill the infant, an abject revulsion toward his own child as he does not recognize any humanity or himself in it. However, Casca intervenes and protects the child until dawn when the child vanishes in thin air alongside the evil spirits haunting Guts and Casca. In addition to the child's contradicting existence, his presence nevertheless serves as a physical and emotional reminder of Guts' descent into a world where boundaries between human vs. monstrous, mortal vs. immortal, as well as life vs. death can no longer be clearly drawn.

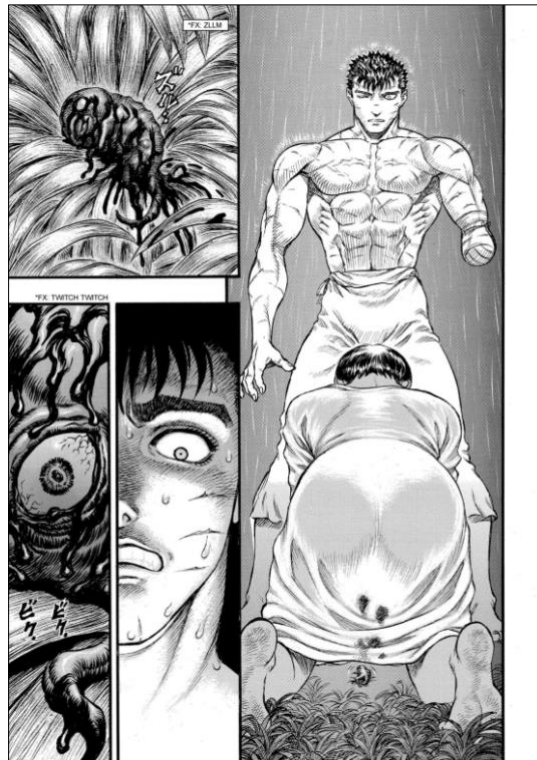


Figure 28: Guts' child.

After the birth incident and recovery from his injuries, Guts acquires a new set of equipment: a black armor, a prosthetic arm, and a new sword. Unlike in the pre-apocalyptic and apocalyptic storyline where Guts does not wear any unique clothing, Guts now possesses a distinctive armor forged by a renowned blacksmith and his apprentices. The armor's black color not only allows him to camouflage in the darkness but also reinforces the boundary between light vs. dark, which Guts increasingly transgresses. Furthermore, Guts receives a magnetized prosthetic arm that functions both as a cannon and a crossbow, enhancing his combat capabilities. Shortly after obtaining his new gear, Guts is attacked by a monstrous creature, offering him an opportunity to test his new arsenal. Although he is initially given a standard sword, it shatters immediately during the battle as it is not made for slaying monsters. In a moment of crisis, Guts finds the Dragon Slayer, a massive sword made for obliterating in

humans and uses it to deliver the final blow to kill the apostle. Figure 29 showcases the Dragon Slayer's power and functionality. The double-spread effectively conveys the sword's massive size, while the use of subjective motion in the second panel emphasizes its immense weight and impact as Guts cleaves through the grotesque body of the monster.



Figure 29: *The Dragon Slayer.*

The Dragon Slayer, which becomes Guts' iconic weapon, functions as more than a mere tool of combat. It is a symbol of his liminal existence and a catalyst for the collapse of apocalyptic binaries. The blacksmith who forged the weapon remarks that it is merely a "meaningless slab of iron" (Berserk v14), crafted with the essence of a weapon as a tool for killing in mind. However, because no ordinary person can wield it, let alone master it, it was in storage for many years until Guts' arrival. The blacksmith expresses genuine astonishment that Guts, despite his physical disabilities, is able to wield the weapon with lethal precision. Due to Guts' capabilities of wielding the sword, the Dragon Slayer becomes uniquely suited to Guts' body, merging man and weapon into a singular entity of destruction. Furthermore, the sword was originally designed to slay dragons albeit they do not exist in the world of *Berserk*. Its very purpose is rooted in the supernatural and the inhuman, thereby reinforcing Guts'

liminal position between human and the monstrous, the earthly and the supernatural. In Figure 29, the usage of a double-spread to depict the Dragon Slayer further reinforces this dissolution of the aforementioned binaries. The two pages of the double-spread can be read as visual representations of two distinct realms: the human and the monstrous. Although Guts bears the Brand of Sacrifice and thus occupies a liminal position, his body remains visually recognizably human. Positioned on the left page, he signifies the human world, while the monster on the right embodies the demonic realm. The Dragon Slayer cuts across both pages, thereby transgressing the boundary between the two worlds and reinforcing its role as a weapon that dissolves the binaries of human vs. monster and earthly vs. supernatural. In doing so, it functions as an extension of Guts' body because both the weapon and wielder embody the same collapse of binary boundaries. In essence, the Dragon Slayer contributes immensely to Guts' survival by bringing death upon apostles and, on occasions, humans. As such, the Dragon Slayer is not only a tool of violence and protection but also an object that blurs the ontological boundary between survival vs. death.

After the combat between Guts and the monster, Erica, the blacksmith's adopted daughter who has known Guts for a longer period, remarks that "he's scary" (Miura v14). This reaction underscores the profound transformation in Guts' character following the Eclipse. No longer motivated by comradeship or a desire for belonging, Guts is now driven by vengeance, wrath, and the singular aim of exterminating apostles and Griffith, giving him the nickname "the Black Swordsman" (Miura v1). Erica's remark is supported by Figure 30, which depicts Guts mid-battle. Similarly to the moment when he severed his arm during the Eclipse (Figure 25), his pupils are once again absent, signifying his immersion in violent rage and a dissolution of the self. This imagery conveys that Guts is no longer fully present as a coherent subject, but rather, he is overtaken by a destructive force within him. As discussed in Chapter 1.3.1, the remnant of the old world often remains latent within the new post-apocalyptic one (Pitetti 441; Men; Pippin 2). The Guts who now hunts apostles bears the imprint of past trauma, and his new self is continuously haunted by the old. Thereby, the boundaries between self vs. Other and old vs. new collapse as Guts' identity becomes shaped not only by his conscious will but also by the monstrous legacy imposed upon him. This dissolution of self is further enhanced through the Berserker Armor, which is examined in the following subchapter.



Figure 30: Guts in the middle of battle.

4.3.2 The Berserker Armor: The Uncontrollable Body

The Berserker Armor, once worn by a human warrior who later becomes Skull Knight, functions by suppressing the natural physiological limitations of the human body. Essentially, it breaks down the barriers that would typically prevent an individual from exerting force to the point of self-harm. As a result, the wearer experiences a dramatic increase in physical capabilities, including strength and speed. The armor achieves this by eliminating the distressing aspect of pain: although the wearer still experiences pain as a sensation, it is no longer cognitively registered as harmful, thus allowing the wearer to disregard it completely. Furthermore, the armor intensifies negative emotions such as hatred, fear, and rage, inducing a heightened state of bloodlust that enhances combat performance. In battle, the armor can also temporarily restore function to severely injured limbs by using internal spikes to reconnect broken bones even though it does not have any healing function. Additionally, Guts observes that the armor improves his night-vision in dark environments, and it possesses the ability to regenerate itself when damaged.

Guts' first dons the Berserker Armor during his battle with a formidable apostle, Grunbeld (Miura v26). At this point in the narrative, Guts is already injured and exhausted

from a previous battle. Overwhelmed by Grunbeld's brute strength and power, Guts resolves to wear the Berserker Armor despite knowing the dangerous consequences that his lifespan would gradually deplete each time he uses it and that he might lose his self-identity in the process. Figure 31 captures his first appearance in the armor. The border of the panel is black, signaling Guts' descent into the darkness. The armor itself is also black, and the helmet resembles a skull. This skeletal design reflects its unique ability to physically manifest the inner darkness of its wearer. Since Skull Knight was the previous owner of the Berserker Armor, its default form mirrors his appearance; however, as Guts continues to wear it, the armor begins to morph, adapting to reflect his inner turmoil and darkness. Notably, Guts' cape floats in an unnatural way, which underscores the armor's otherworldly qualities and its fusion with Guts' body.



Figure 31: Guts in Berserker Armor.

While Figure 31 presents Guts' appearance from an external perspective, Figure 32 and Figure 33 depict the moment in which he first confronts his inner darkness. In Figure 32, a sequence of three panels progressively zooms in on Guts' eye, visually emphasizing his growing internal turmoil. In the third panel, Guts seems to come to a sudden realization of what he is witnessing although the accompanying text remains unfinished, suggesting a psychological rupture or a moment of dawning horror. Notably, the outline of his eye in the third panel seems to merge with the shape of the page's background, reshaping into a form that

visually echoes the embodiment of his inner darkness. The gutter between the three panels anticipates the shapes and forms of this darkness, which materializes in Figure 33. The manifestation of Guts' inner darkness takes the form of a hound although its grotesque facial features transcend those of any ordinary hound. Its eye shape matches the one from the third panel of Figure 32, reinforcing Guts' descent into the darkness and the notion that the creature is an extension of Guts himself. The surrounding lines in the background seem to radiate from the hound as if it emits an ominous aura, signaling the full emergence of Guts' internal monstrosity.

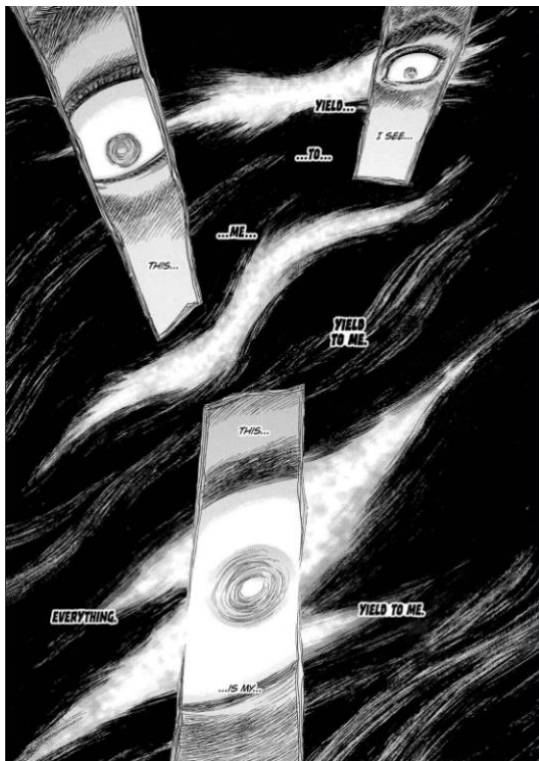


Figure 32: Guts' consciousness.



Figure 33: Guts' inner darkness.

Once Guts and, by extension, the readers witness the form of his inner darkness, the shape of Guts' armor begins to transform, matching the form of the hound residing in him. Figure 34 illustrates a double-spread of the Berserker Armor's complete transformation, which has now fully assumed the form of Guts' inner hound. In this moment, Guts appears to have entirely surrendered to his inner darkness. This is visually evident as none of his facial features are discernible, unlike other instances where his face or eye briefly reemerge when he regains his consciousness. In this figure, however, his identity is fully obscure as it would be impossible to recognize Guts in the armor without context. Confronted with his inner darkness, Guts' ego is split between self vs. Other. While the hound appears as a separate entity capable of overtaking his body and will, it remains fundamentally dependent on Guts' hatred and malice

toward Femto and the apostles. The hound is thus not merely a symbolic embodiment of darkness but also the materialization of Guts' fragmented self, i.e. his "other" self. Guts' horrified reaction upon encountering the manifestation can be understood through the lens of the abject as it emerges when the boundaries between subject vs. object and self vs. Other begin to disintegrate.



Figure 34: Guts' Berserker Armor.

This fragmentation of self vs. Other can be paralleled to Griffith's sense of identity in his human form as discussed in Subchapter 4.1.2. Although in Subchapter 4.1.2, the self refers to the perception of how Griffith perceives himself and the Other indicates toward his other self which he projects outward, Guts' identity of the Other is slightly different. The self in this context is the same as discussed in Subchapter 4.1.2: it is how the characters perceive and know themselves. While the Other refers to how Griffith projects himself externally, the Other here concerns Guts' internal darkness brought forth by the Berserker Armor. Guts' inner darkness has haunted him since the Eclipse; however, it is through the Berserker Armor that his darkness takes on a visible and externalized form in the shape of a hound. Whenever Guts retains self-awareness while wearing the armor, his perception of self collides with this embodied darkness, leading to the ultimate dissolution of the binary of self vs. Other.

Another ontological binary that is destabilized through Guts' transformation is the boundary between human vs. monster, which is evident in Figure 32 as his eye merges with the hound's eye shape. While Guts does not undergo a physical transformation similarly to Griffith's reincarnation/metamorphosis into Femto, his body remains visibly human. However, the Berserker Armor radically challenges the distinction between human and monster. As previously established, Guts is deeply entangled in the world of the apostles, engaging in relentless combat with demonic beings since the Eclipse. Even though his child assumes a monstrous form, Guts himself does not become hybridized nor exhibit explicitly inhuman traits until the introduction of the Berserker Armor. While Guts does not wear the armor constantly, every instance he dons it results in a temporary loss of self. Consumed by his inner darkness, he enters a trance-like frenzied state, in which his rationality and humanity are overridden by rage and bloodlust. On one occasion, this leads him to attack his own allies who he swears to protect, demonstrating how the armor effaces not only his identity but also his moral agency. His return to self is only made possible through the intervention of one of his companions, a witch, who can enter the Interstice to recover his consciousness, which is an act that carries considerable risks. Guts' status as a liminal figure is also reinforced through the observations of other characters. Those who witness his fights, regardless of whether they are a human or apostle, frequently comment that his movements and combat style are no longer that of a human, suggesting that he has surpassed the physical limitations of his species (Miura v26). Although these observers do not label him as a monster, their descriptions frame him as such within the logic of structuralist binary oppositions. Through the Berserker Armor, Guts does not simply confront monstrosity but also embodies it, thereby collapsing the binary between human vs. monster.

The Berserker Armor's capacity to affect Guts' moral judgment raises complex questions about the nature of his ethical alignment. When overtaken by its influence, Guts is no longer guided by conscience but by unrestrained rage and hatred, which challenges a straightforward classification of his character as either good or evil. The biblical framework does not provide moral clarity in this context as it relies on rigid dichotomies that cannot account for Guts' liminal existence between human and monster. In contrast, Nietzsche's theory of master and slave morality offers a more nuanced lens. From the perspective of master morality, Guts embodies good through strength, power, and vitality, qualities traditionally associated with nobility and greatness. However, viewed through the lens of slave morality, which upholds humility, empathy, and meekness as virtues, Guts' violence, pride, and

relentless pursuit of vengeance would mark him as evil. This duality reflects the tension within Guts' character, where his actions are neither wholly virtuous nor wholly corrupt but a constant struggle within himself. Nietzsche's framework highlights this internal conflict as Guts' actions, driven by his will to defeat Femto, challenge conventional moral categories.

Even though Nietzsche's framework allows for an ambiguous classification of Guts' behavior along the lines of master and slave morality, the question of moral agency remains complicated because Guts does not possess full control over his moral agency when donning the Berserker Armor. His most violent and immoral actions often arise when he is overtaken by his inner darkness, which suppresses conscious decision-making and replaces it with instinctual rage and bloodlust. As such, it is questionable whether Guts can be held fully accountable for his actions committed in this altered state. Nevertheless, these acts are executed through his body, and if drawn on phenomenological theories that conceptualize the body and mind as a unified entity, his behavior cannot be entirely dissociated from his identity. From this perspective, Guts' other self is not a wholly external force but rather a concentrated embodiment of his repressed pain, anger, and trauma. Thus, even in moments when Guts does not actively engage in moral decision-making, his moral agency is still shaped and enacted through those latent emotional forces. Thereby, the Berserker Armor does not absolve Guts of responsibility but instead reveals the fragmented and unstable foundation upon which his moral agency is built. This interpretive tension underscores the context-dependent and situational nature of moral judgment. Rather than occupying a fixed moral position, Guts oscillates between frameworks, thereby destabilizing the apocalyptic binary of good vs. evil and revealing the insufficiency of absolute ethical categories in capturing his character.

Through this and the previous analysis of Guts, it is revealed that his body plays a crucial role in shaping the post-apocalyptic narrative of *Berserk*. Guts' body does not merely survive the Eclipse, but it is the prime vehicle for exploring what remains after the end. His body is a constant reminder that the apocalypse is a permanence inscribed onto his body. Marked by the Brand of Sacrifice, Guts is condemned to live in the Interstice, and through his existence in this liminal space, the transition from the apocalyptic to the post-apocalyptic as well as the contrast between the pre-apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic take form. Guts' irreversible injuries prove that it is impossible for him to return to his former self and world. He cannot escape the dystopian aftermath of the Eclipse because evil monsters and death accompany him wherever he goes. His journey becomes the lens through which the post-apocalyptic narrative interrogates what it means to live on after a catastrophe. His struggle with

the Berserker Armor and inner darkness reflects how trauma fragments identity and destabilizes binaries. In essence, Guts embodies the post-apocalyptic condition, which is marked by survival, memory, and confusion (Stifflemire 13-14; Muwaffaq et al. 222-223).

4.3.3 Return of the White Falcon: The Incarnated Body

Even though Griffith is reborn as Femto during the Eclipse, his existence is confined to the interdimensional realm. In other words, his corporeal form cannot manifest itself in the physical human world. However, this limitation is overcome during the Incarnation Ceremony, which is a mass sacrificial event. This ceremony does not function as an apocalyptic event unlike the Eclipse since it neither reveals a supernatural realm nor signifies the end of the world. Instead, it is confined to the earthly domain through which Femto is incarnated into the physical world, once again assuming the form of Griffith. For this incarnation to occur, a vessel is required, which is an egg-shaped apostle. In the Conviction Arc, the third story arc in *Berserk*, it is revealed that the egg-shaped apostle, who is moved by pity for the deformed child of Guts and Casca, consumed the fetus without their knowledge to protect him. During the incarnation process, the child loses its deformities as it fuses with Femto's essence, rapidly maturing into a new and fully developed body, i.e. Griffith's physical incarnation. Thereby, Griffith's new embodiment emerges from a fusion of the egg-shaped apostle, the child of Guts and Casca, and his essence as Femto. While the egg-shaped apostle ceases to exist during the incarnation process, the child's consciousness persists within Griffith to a certain degree. However, Griffith functions as an autonomous entity under normal circumstances except for during full moons when the child takes temporary control over their shared body and typically appears as a separate entity to Guts and Casca.

In order to unravel the complexities of Griffith's new embodiment, an analysis of Griffith's incarnated body is first provided. Figure 35 depicts the rapid development Griffith undergoes during the Incarnation Ceremony. This page is divided into four panels, each showing different stages of development of Griffith's new body. The gutter on the right is thicker than the borders between the four panels, indicating that before Griffith assumes a fetal form, there was darkness. The first panel shows Griffith's fetal form, suggesting the advent of his new body as he gradually grows into a mature form. This transition from the gutter to the first panel indicates that the boundaries of light vs. dark and human vs. monster are transgressed. In the next four panels, Griffith slowly diverts from a fetal position, and in the last panel, only his iconic white hair is visible. Even though the readers are unaware that this is Griffith's rebirth, they can nevertheless infer that this is Griffith by seeing his hair. The

background of the four panels is cosmic as if light has entered the darkness. There is no text on this page, encouraging the readers to solely focus on this moment.

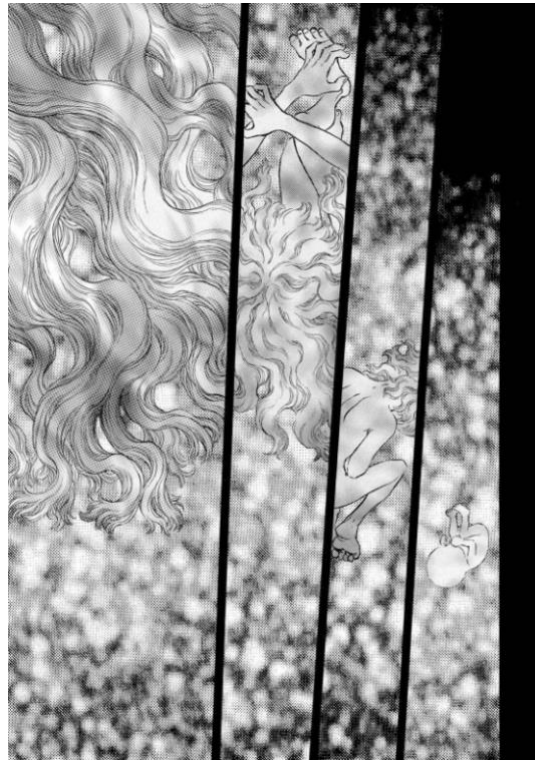


Figure 35: Griffith's incarnation process.

Figure 36 depicts Griffith's emergence in his new form. In contrast to Griffith's form as Femto, who possesses bat-like wings of a demon, Griffith is surrounded by feathers and birds. This visual motif of feathers reoccurs throughout the post-apocalyptic narrative as Griffith's new armor and sword is engraved with wings. Even though the feathers presumably belong to the birds, they can also symbolize the feathers of angels' wings. According to Youvan, the wings of angels serve "to visually communicate core theological concepts such as God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and protective care" (19) in Christian theology. In this context, the visual motif of feathers contributes to the construction of Griffith's new embodiment as messianic and divine. A messianic figure is "usually a young man, who after many struggles is ready to meet his destiny and become what he was meant to be" (Sjö 178). In Griffith's case, his incarnated body is ready to fulfill his destiny to claim his own kingdom he has long desired. This divine and messianic imagery distances him from the monstrous grotesquery and hybridity of his form as Femto and recasts him as a figure of hope and reverence. However, this apparent transformation is deeply ironic because the audience is aware of the violent, sacrificial origins that underpin his prior and current incarnation. Thus, the symbolism of feathers not only elevates Griffith's mythic status but also blurs the moral

binary between the divine vs. the demonic, good vs. evil, and light vs. dark, revealing the instability of binary oppositions and the complexity of apocalyptic embodiment.



Figure 36: Incarnated Griffith.

Griffith's embodiment and, by extension, his existence are marked by ambiguity as shown in the previous section. Even though he possesses a human body, "spiritually he cannot be called that" (Miura v24). This statement further reinforces his divinity and his role as a messianic figure long awaited by the people in the post-apocalyptic narrative as they all received a vision that the White Falcon will return. As discussed in Chapter 1.2, the secular post-apocalyptic storyline is frequently characterized as a dystopian wasteland in which one established order has collapsed, and a new one is in the process of emerging (Stifflemire 4-5). After the Eclipse and prior to Griffith's rebirth, the world of *Berserk* descends into chaos: war erupts, plague spreads across the land, and governmental structures begin to fail. Griffith's return is thus framed as a messianic event because it fulfills the people's prophetic dreams of promised salvation and a new era. While Griffith already destabilizes the boundary between earthly vs. heavenly body in the pre-apocalyptic storyline, he now fully embodies a heavenly body and the beginning of a new world. Similarly to Guts, Griffith emerges as a liminal character situated at the threshold between the earthly and the divine, reinforcing the dissolution of these apocalyptic binaries.

Despite Griffith's divine appearance, he is nevertheless inseparable from his identity as Femto and the former Griffith. This continuity between his past and present complicates moral boundaries of good vs. evil. While his embodiment evokes traditional Christian values such as purity, salvation, and divine authority, his prior actions as Femto anchors him within a narrative of violence, destruction, and betrayal. This duality mirrors the tension within Christian morality where good and evil are framed as binary opposite and yet figures of divine purpose may enact violence in the name of a higher plan (Behrooz 7). In addition, Nietzsche's framework of master and slave morality offers further insight into Griffith's ambiguous ethical position. From the perspective of master morality, Griffith could be considered good for embodying strength, ambition, and power. Conversely, slave morality would deem him evil for those same traits, valorizing instead humility, compassion, and self-denial. Griffith's existence thus destabilizes both theological and philosophical moral systems, revealing the limitations of absolute categories in capturing the complexity of moral agency in apocalyptic narratives.

Beyond the external appearance of Griffith's new body, another critical aspect warrants closer examination, namely the dual consciousness that inhabits his body. As Griffith shares his corporeal form with the child of Guts and Casca, his embodiment becomes the site in which the boundary between self vs. Other is destabilized. In this context, the self is Griffith, and the Other refers to the child's consciousness and bodily form, which takes over Griffith's body every full moon. Due to Griffith's body being able to take on more than one corporeal form, Griffith is thus a polymorphous being although he has no control over the child's form. Rather than focusing on the child's physical form, the subsequent paragraph centers on Griffith's subjective experience of the child's lingering consciousness.

In Figure 37, the second, fourth, and sixth panels illustrate grand reveal in which the child transforms back to Griffith. The focus of these panels is on Griffith and the child's hair which consist of the contrasting colors black and white. As Griffith explains, he often dreams of being a child during the full moon and wakes with an overwhelming sense of loneliness, which soon dissipates (Miura v41). These moments of dream-like vulnerability suggest a continued mental presence of the child within him. At times, Griffith would experience the child's emotions physically. For instance, he describes a sudden throbbing in his heart and attributes it to the child's feelings. This fusion of emotions and affect across consciousnesses reveals that Griffith's body is not a singular entity but a shared vessel. The blurred boundary between self vs. Other is thus not merely symbolic but corporeally enacted. Notably, this reveal of Griffith and the child's shared body constitutes the final chapter published by Miura before

his passing. As such, it stands as a poignant culmination of the complex themes surrounding the ambiguities of embodiment and identity in *Berserk*.



Figure 37: Griffith's polymorphy.

In the post-apocalyptic world of *Berserk*, Griffith's body becomes the locus of divine promises as well as moral and ontological ambiguity. Unlike Guts, who is condemned to a secular dystopian wasteland of perpetual violence, Griffith reemerges as a messianic figure, leading humanity into a utopian new order as similarly envisaged in the post-apocalyptic world of the Bible. Through his new embodiment, Griffith fulfills the religious promise of "a new earth" (Rev. 21.1), echoing Christian eschatology as he builds a peaceful kingdom amidst global chaos. Yet, his body remains morally ambiguous through his portrayal as both angelic and demonic as well as a savior and betrayer, revealing the false purity of his divine image. As such, his body exposes the fragile foundations of the post-apocalyptic world where salvation is built on sacrifice, and paradise conceals a past defined through horror.

In summary, "The Millennium Falcon: The Post-apocalyptic Bodies" chapter explores the transformation of Guts and Griffith after the Eclipse, focusing on the destabilization of temporal, moral, and ontological apocalyptic binaries. Guts' post-apocalyptic body, marked by the Brand of Sacrifice and new weaponry such as the Dragon Slayer, is positioned in a liminal space between the human and the supernatural. His use of the Berserker Armor, which

heightens his physical strength but suppresses moral judgment, blurs the line between human vs. monster as well as self vs. Other. This transformation is further symbolized by the manifestation of his inner darkness as a hound. In contrast, Femto's incarnation as Griffith is marked by divine imagery, particularly through feathers, positioning him as a messianic figure. However, his past complicates his moral position, collapsing the binary of good vs. evil. Griffith's shared embodiment with the child of Guts and Casca further destabilizes temporal, moral, and ontological categories in *Berserk's* apocalyptic narrative. In addition, both Guts and Griffith embody opposing trajectories of the post-apocalyptic narrative. While Guts' scarred and weaponized body reflects survival, trauma, and the horrors of a dystopia plagued by monsters and death, Griffith's divine, messianic form becomes the foundation for a utopian new order built on sacrificial violence. Their bodies ultimately expose the post-apocalyptic as a space of profound ambiguity and contested meaning.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis is to answer the central research question: how are the physical forms and body transformations of Guts and Griffith used to destabilize binary oppositions associated with the apocalyptic throughout the narrative of *Berserk*? More specifically, how does such destabilization of binaries via the body contribute to the construction of the apocalyptic narrative in *Berserk*. To address this, I argue that physical forms and bodily transformations serve as narrative devices that actively unsettle temporal, moral, and ontological binaries that underpin the apocalyptic narrative. In doing so, *Berserk* utilizes the body and its transformations to expose the instability of binary oppositions and presents the apocalypse not only as a singular event experienced through the body, but a constant permanence inscribed onto the body of the characters.

The theoretical framework that supports this analysis begins by adopting the Christian conception of apocalypse, which denotes that the apocalypse is not simply the end of the world, but also a revelation of an otherworldly dimension intermediated by a human (Collins 2). This religious lens allows for a dual reading of apocalypse: as both destruction and disclosure. Building on this definition, the narrative structures within religious and secular traditions are examined, and a common tripartite structure of pre-apocalyptic, apocalyptic, and post-apocalyptic phases are identified (Muwaffaq et al.). This division proves to be crucial in organizing the storyline of *Berserk*. Following this definition of the apocalypse and the narrative structures of apocalyptic plots, the concept of "apocalyptic binaries" is developed,

which is categorized into three domains: temporal, moral, and ontological. From a structuralist standpoint, these binary oppositions offer a sense of order amidst the chaos of apocalyptic stories. However, as the analysis has shown, the poststructuralist reality of these binaries is ultimately revealed: they contradict themselves, are inherently unstable, and collapse under pressure.

It is under this context that the body emerges as a particularly rich site of inquiry. Through a phenomenological lens by drawing on Merleau-Ponty, it is deduced that the body is not a container for our consciousness but the primary medium through which we experience the world. In this sense, the body is deeply entangled with identity, perception, and meaning making. Thus, through the transformation of the body in an apocalyptic narrative, the terms and conditions through which we understand the world change. Thereby, this thesis distinguishes between four key types of bodily transformation: metamorphosis, polymorphy, incarnation, and reincarnation. Upon establishing the definitions for these terms, the monstrous body as a result of bodily transformation was scrutinized. The monstrous body was theorized as a liminal form, both physical and ontological. Through this lens, transformation is not merely a change of form but a revelation of the body's capacity to embody contradiction, ambiguity, and instability.

In order to analyze *Berserk*, I employed the method of close reading with a focus on Natsume's theory of manga expression. This approach considers the multimodality of manga, particularly the interplay of words, images, and panel composition in constructing meaning. The analysis part is divided into three segments adhering to the secular narrative structure: pre-apocalyptic, apocalyptic, and post-apocalyptic (Muwaffaq et al.). Within each segment, apocalyptic binaries are shown to not only be present but consistently disrupted by the bodily experiences of the protagonists, Guts and Griffith. In the pre-apocalyptic world, all three categories of apocalyptic binaries are contested through the unconventional birth of Guts and Griffith's bodily portrayal as a human before and after undergoing torture. While the pre-apocalyptic storyline is marked by the "Golden Age", in which societal structures and the world seem stable, Guts and Griffith's embodiment already expose the fragility of such structures through their bodies. The apocalyptic phase marked by the Eclipse further collapses these three categories of apocalyptic boundaries through Griffith's monstrous transformation into Femto as well as Guts' injured body. The revelation during the Eclipse follows the religious blueprint of an apocalypse because it reveals a supernatural realm and eschatological salvation. The Eclipse further reveals Griffith's true predatory nature, which haunts Guts for the rest of the

story. While an apocalyptic event indicates the transformation of the world, Griffith's body also transformed into a monstrous one, enabling him to once again reach his dream. Guts, however, suffers deeply from the incidents which occurred during the Eclipse as the memory of it is inscribed onto his body forever. In the post-apocalyptic setting, these binaries disintegrate further through Guts' existence in the liminal Interstice and his conflict with his inner darkness as well as Griffith's divine incarnation. While Griffith embodies as a symbol for hope and utopia as he is the long-awaited messianic figure to restore order, Guts embodies a dystopia as he is the remnant of the past, carrying the scars of ruin and the trauma of a world that has already collapsed.

Through the analysis, it is shown that Miura employs the body as a central narrative device through which apocalyptic binaries are challenged. Through the various transformations and physical forms which Guts and Griffith experience and embody, their bodies are not merely situated in the apocalyptic setting, but they become the key mechanism for dismantling and exposing the instability of binaries. Through these shifting embodiments, *Berserk* resists fixed systems of meaning as postulated by structuralists and presents a fluid and incomplete network of signification as claimed by poststructuralists (Woodward et al. 399). Miura's narrative hence situates the apocalypse not only as a singular event but as a continuous process enacted through the body as it challenges the structures once believed to define reality.

While this thesis has explored the role of the body in destabilizing apocalyptic binaries in depth, certain limitations remain. Firstly, this thesis is confined to the two male characters, Guts and Griffith, and their respective bodily trajectories. Even though this focus was necessary to define the analytical scope, it leaves out other characters whose transformations could offer alternative insights into the function of bodies within the apocalyptic narrative. For example, Casca experiences a bodily and psychological transformation that is central to the story's emotional landscape and might challenge apocalyptic binaries in a distinct way from Guts and Griffith.

Secondly, the cultural specificity of *Berserk* as a Japanese manga analyzed through a predominantly Western theoretical lens creates a gap between the source material's cultural origins and the interpretive lens. While the transnational nature of the apocalyptic motif justifies a cross-cultural approach, this thesis does not account for specifically Japanese narrative traditions or religious frameworks, such as Shinto or Buddhism, which might further illuminate *Berserk's* apocalyptic themes.

Lastly, although apocalyptic bodies and their transformations are presented as a destabilizing force, future research might invert this perspective and examine whether these transformations can also generate new forms of order. In other words, while binaries collapse under the pressure of embodiment and physical transformation, they may also reassemble into new ideological structures. As such, transformation itself can potentially give rise to new systems of meaning. These dynamics suggest fruitful directions for future research building on the findings of this thesis.

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Appendix

a) List of Apocalyptic Binaries

Binary Oppositions	Category
Beginning vs. End	Temporal
New vs. Old	Temporal
Pre-apocalyptic vs. Post-apocalyptic	Temporal
Utopia vs. Dystopia	Temporal
Good vs. Evil	Moral
Good vs. Bad	Moral
God, Christ, Angels vs. Satan, Demons, the Beasts	Moral
Light vs. Dark	Moral
Life vs. Death	Ontological
Heaven vs. Hell	Ontological
Survival vs. Death	Ontological
Total Annihilation vs. Individual Death	Ontological
Earhly Body vs. Heavenly Body	Ontological
Human vs. Divine	Ontological
Mortality vs. Immortality	Ontological
Self vs. Other	Ontological
Human vs. Monster	Ontological
Human vs. Animal	Ontological

b) English Abstract

This thesis investigates how bodies and bodily transformations destabilize binary oppositions fundamental to apocalyptic narrative structures in Kentaro Miura's manga *Berserk*. While apocalyptic narratives are explored extensively in theology, cultural, and literary studies, the body and its transformations have rarely been considered as a central site of apocalyptic meaning. Thus, existing research leaves a gap in understanding the role of human bodily transformation in apocalyptic narratives. Thereby, this paper addresses the questions of how the bodies of Guts and Griffith, two male protagonists in *Berserk*, disrupt apocalyptic binaries, such as beginning vs. end, good vs. evil, and life vs. death. The theoretical framework combines apocalyptic narrative theory, structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to binaries, as well as phenomenological and monstrous body theories to explore this research question. Through a multimodal analysis primarily derived from Natsume's manga expression theory, this analysis shows that bodily transformations operate as a key narrative device for collapsing

apocalyptic binary oppositions. The findings demonstrate that in *Berserk*, the apocalypse does not merely unfold as a single catastrophic event, but it is a permanent state inscribed onto the bodies of the characters.

c) German Abstract

Diese Arbeit untersucht wie Körper und körperliche Transformationen die binären Gegensätze hinterfragen, die für apokalyptische Erzählstrukturen in Kentaro Miuras *Berserk* grundlegend sind. Während apokalyptische Erzählungen in der Theologie, Kultur- und Literaturwissenschaft untersucht werden, wurden der Körper und seine Transformationen selten als zentraler Ort apokalyptischer Bedeutung betrachtet. Daher hinterlässt die bestehende Forschung eine Lücke im Verständnis der Rolle menschlicher körperlicher Transformationen in apokalyptischen Geschichten. Aufgrund dieser Forschungslücke befasst sich diese Arbeit mit der Frage, wie die Körper von Guts und Griffith, zwei männlichen Protagonisten in *Berserk*, apokalyptische Binärität wie Anfang vs. Ende, Gut vs. Böse und Leben vs. Tod hinterfragen. Der theoretische Rahmen kombiniert apokalyptische Erzähltheorie, strukturalistische und poststrukturalistische Ansätze zu Binäritäten sowie phänomenologische und monströse Körpertheorien, um diese Darstellungen zu kontextualisieren. Anhand einer multimodalen Analyse zeigt diese Analyse, dass körperliche Transformationen als wichtiges narratives Mittel dienen, um apokalyptische binäre Gegensätze aufzubrechen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass sich die Apokalypse in *Berserk* nicht nur als einzelnes katastrophales Ereignis entfaltet, sondern als permanenter Zustand, der den Körpern der Figuren eingeschrieben ist.