

# **Monst[her]-Making and Dina: Looking at the Creation of the Monstrous Feminine Through the Lens of Derrida's Différance**

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Man has often written about the creation of the monster. The monstrous figure frequently appears in a way that differentiates itself from the human by its grotesqueness, its potential immortality, and/or, of course, its desire to defile the body of the human (i.e. zombies, vampires, etc.) This trauma—i.e. that of being *other than* human—is often categorized as wicked and wrong. In the case of *Attack on Titan*, there is a deviation from the norm—namely, instead of being seen as merely evil, these monsters are seen as some “one” to sympathize with. *Attack on Titan* forces us to question the blurry line that is used to divide monster from human, and forces the viewer to question the human condition of the demonized and repressed everyday “monsters.”

It is our claim that Dina Fritz works as a representation of “monster.” We look at Dina as an example of representative trauma inflicted through horrific events—such as a genocidal war, dehumanization, and, of course, forced bodily violation—and how these traumas create the beasts that lead to such events; i.e. making these “monst[hers]” out of humans. We argue that the characterization of Dina Fritz is a warning to its audience that segregation, violence, and the loss of bodily autonomy perpetuates a cycle of monstrous births/creation. In this article, we will speak not only to the end result of the monstrous creation—i.e. the monst[her]—but also to the line that has been blurred with this monstrous *other* and the human in the world of *Attack on Titan*.

Keywords: Monster, Différance, Othering, Feminism

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## **1. Monstrous Mothers and Media**

Is a monster the deformed figure of some gruesome fairytale story told to children to make them eat their veggies, or is it something more? Can it be that this “monster” is, in fact, the human equivalent of feared transformation, progress, and, of course, continuous change? Throughout this article, we argue that the monsters situated in fairytales *do* exist, but with the caveat that they are not simply *other* in all ways. These creatures of myth, legend, and lore *are* humans who have been ostracized and changed beyond the accepted norm of the de-facto power at large. There are many examples that we could have drawn from, but the one we have chosen to focus on is *Attack on Titan* (AOT), one of the anime powerhouses in the United States. We look at the most obvious and horrifying cases of *othering* and monstrous figures in anime, to date, which we believe are the women of AOT and, most specifically, the characterization and monstrous transformation of Dina Fritz.

AOT has many great moments and characters who could exemplify this case, not in the least beginning with the show's main character and de-facto anti-hero, Eren Yeager. Eren is characterized by the overwhelming violence that he is subject to at the story's impetus; i.e. the brutal death of his mother, Carla Yeager, at the hands of a seemingly storybook villain and monster. This monster, whose body is so deformed and “non-sexed” that one can only initially tell that they are a “she” by grasping at the fact that the monster has long hair...has

a name. Dina Fritz, as the audience comes to find out later, is not only a human-turned-monster, but so much more. Previously a rebel leader, Dina was violated by humans to become a monster, herself; forced to cannibalize the very people she sought to free from the hands of political turmoil. In looking at Dina Fritz throughout this paper, we prove a simple, yet necessary, throughline: Dina Fritz exemplifies the horrific, and very human, punishments for being “different”. She is turned, physically and psychologically, into a monster for this difference; or, as we argue using Jacques Derrida’s *Writing and Difference (L’écriture et la Différance)*, for the virtue of her *différance*<sup>1</sup>.

Throughout this article, we will primarily utilize the example of Dina Fritz as the foothold for our argument to look at the monstrous female and Derrida’s “différance”. To prove that our argument is seen throughout the show, however, we will also look at the various women of AOT and how the term “monster” is imposed upon them by the inherently flawed patriarchal and unjust system of AOT’s Paradis and Marley; typically due to some inherent “otherness” or rebelliousness. We will first justify our argument by looking at the theoretical implications of the role of patriarchal rule and failing governments in the AOT franchise. These politically unstable and morally problematic political powers are built upon systems of systemic racism, ostracization, and isolation. We will then give a brief overview of our deconstructive methodological approach in looking at monstrous women through the lens of Jacques Derrida’s “différance”. In this work we will use the space provided to speak on how the women in AOT are forcibly constructed, physically and psychologically, to be “monstrous”. We do so by looking at war-torn societies through the example of Dina Fritz, but also by foregrounding the necessity of this argument by looking at other women in the franchise such as Ymir Fritz and Annie Leonhart. Finally, we will conclude by offering our theory, that AOT’s anime-adaptation is intentionally arguing that women in war-torn societies are intentionally *othered* by men when they become too powerful; or worse, when they become weak to men (thus proving that women are inherently categorized by their connection to men); proving that the women of AOT are stuck in our understanding of the deconstructed view on the female monster and that monsters are man-made.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Hesserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

## 2. Destruction, Decimation, and “Democracy”: The Making of a monst[her]

To say that dehumanization is a tactic of only extremist governmental powers is too generous. The image often painted is that of the treatment of Jewish people in Nazi Germany, however we know this is not the stopping point of “othering” individuals for political gain. For example, following the 2016 Presidential race, a headline out of *CNN* read *Eric Trump: Democrats in Washington are ‘not even people’*<sup>2</sup>, which furthered an already heated political situation that was mired in the othering of individuals based on ethnicity and political outlook. This sort of tactic is weaponized in nearly all forms of governance.

Through the use of dehumanization as a tactic, one can safely draw a line in the sand as to what accounts for proper human behavior; or, how one should act, look, or how one can be expected to see the world. In the past, this strategy has been used by political regimes to further political control. To earn this political control, governments weaponize fear and hatred. These feelings arise as the result of portraying people who are “different” as being more different than they really are; for example, calling Mexican immigrants «rapists and murderers»<sup>3</sup>. This argument is used by people in political power to claim that whatever difference the political power is weaponizing makes the “other” inherently incompatible with the rest of the world, i.e., these humans who are being othered are being seen as monstrous. In this way, othering removes the factor of empathy and makes them appear to be more of a threat to the natural order of the human world by the virtue of being, now, a monster who can hurt the humans they stand against<sup>4</sup>.

This tactic of dehumanization, or, as we will call it throughout the rest of this work in a small theoretical edit for clarity, “monst[her]-making”<sup>5</sup>, is incredibly dangerous. This is because monst[her]-making puts the lives of everyday people at risk of being caught in the

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<sup>2</sup> E. Cassese, *Partisan Dehumanization in American Politics*, 2019, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> S. Tatum, *Eric Trump: Democrats in Washington Are ‘not Even People’* | CNN Politics, *CNN*, 7 June 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/07/politics/eric-trump-hannity-democrats-obstruction/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> E. Cassese, *Partisan Dehumanization in American Politics*, 2019, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> In defining “dehumanization”, the idea of depriving a human of human qualities is, to us, very separated from the responsibility of actually “creating” a monster out of a human. The architect in this monst[her]-making is usually someone who is very aware that they are making a monster out of a human, and thus going beyond the original definition of dehumanization.

misguided vitriol that comes from the spread of this separatist ideal that some people are incompatible with “civilized” human society and is thus a “monster”. In example, a study conducted by researchers on the impact of dehumanization tactics in American politics has shown that the use of «exclusionary policies proposed by Donald Trump» and others was directly correlated to the dehumanization of Latino and Muslim groups by majority Americans<sup>6</sup>. This leads to the reflective/mirrored monst[her]-making of ex-President Donald Trump (and other Republican politicians who backed these ideals like Marjorie Taylor Greene) from those “made/created/born” victims of those policies. It is difficult not to see those who have made the general “you” into a monster as a monster, in turn. This reflective/reflexive tactic based on hatred gets to be used by lawmakers on all sides to further push for policies that directly hurt one side or another.

We believe that a huge part of this comes down to the fact that humanity has become a factor of politics and law. In essence, this spectrum of what is considered “more” or “less” human is in the hands of lawmakers. As a result, humanity is «a status that can be taken away or given back»<sup>7</sup> which is a concept that should give just about anyone pause. Samera Esmeir offers that so long as humanity is considered a juridical status «the more dehumanization is possible»<sup>8</sup>. We can therefore create a link between the use of monst[her]-making language/action and a direct tie to political power. This connection becomes emphasized when we begin to look at how modern culture tends to criticize the othering of individuals for the sake of political power. From here, we can begin to understand the impact of these messages from the author and artist of *Attack on Titan*, Hajime Isayama.

As the show opens, we are introduced to this world and the last of humanity which is walled into a series of three districts, and these monstrous beasts known as “Titans” are the defining existential threat to the whole of humanity on Paradis, and places them on the brink of extinction. Or at least, this is what the ruling power of Paradis—what we know of human civilization in the opening—would have us believe. The picture painted of the Titans is not one meant for the faint of heart. The monsters appear as giant caricatures of humans with

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<sup>6</sup> N. Kteily and E. Bruneau, *Backlash: The Politics and Real-World Consequences of Minority Group Dehumanization*, 2017, pp. 101-102

<sup>7</sup> S. Esmeir, *On Making Dehumanization Possible*, 2020, p. 1549.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

giant heads, mouths full of massive teeth, no genitalia or external secondary characteristics, giant eyes lacking the light of awareness, and they kill indiscriminately and violently; specifically looking for human bodies to gorge on.

In this way, the Titans are human-like if one is to think of side street paintings of human faces and bodies drawn disproportionately, for the sake of entertainment. They appear human, they have human hair and faces, and walk on human legs. However, they are very clearly not human. This is what Eren Jaeger, the protagonist of the *Attack on Titan* manga and anime, sees within the Titans as his mother is devoured by one known as the “Smiling Titan” in front of his face on the day his world was forever changed. From this moment in the show, Eren swears to seek revenge on all Titans, promising their extinction. Unfortunately, this is before he is made aware that he, himself, was injected with the spinal fluid of a titan by his own father; becoming that which he swore to eradicate from the world he knows. He is then, by the virtue of his otherness, made into a monster by 1) his father’s machinations, and 2) through the orchestrated death of his mother at the hands of Marleyans who weaponize Titans against the small island to eradicate Paradisians from this world. Eren then becomes one of the leaders of an army as he is no thoughtless Titan, like the ones we described earlier. Eren, instead, becomes a useful tool by the people of Paradis against the rising threat of a new age of Titan because he is injected with the spinal fluid by one of the nine Titan powers. While we have come to sympathize with Eren for the loss of his mother at the hands of a Titan—whom we will later find out is Dina Fritz, the first wife of his father that Eren did not know about—we are also meant to question his otherness. The first image we saw of these monsters is that of a destruction of nearly an entire town of people and chaos and mass, gory violence that turns the stomach of even the hardest of individuals. There is no question, in a viewer’s mind, that these are beasts; monsters inside and out that have no mercy for the citizens behind the wall and based on what we see, they are a force that we should root for their complete annihilation.

This idea for Titan extermination is the exact image sold to the citizens of Paradis from their ruling class. The nobility—and their king kept safe behind the third of three walls—wants people to live in fear of the monsters beyond. The ruling class desires the full annihilation and extinction of Titans so that the “good” people behind the walls can be safe

from their own eradication and replacement. This idea that their governing body forcefully feeds them is, however, is deeply rooted in ignorance and requires that the people within the walls know nothing of the Titans or their origin in order to give cause for their destruction at the hands of the power of humanity. To this end, the forces of the walled city of Paradis are required to give their heart to mankind and swear to live and die for its preservation. The ruling class would like to unite the “normal” people to fight for the preservation of what they consider to be the human race. This is, as we can see, exactly the problem. In order to convince *you* of the monstrosity of the Titans, the author and directors merely have to sell you, the reader, on the singular image of an attack that happened to the main character’s mother. This image, a rhetorical choice, is all we need to fight to preserve the human race as we know it. This is done without giving away the singular truth necessary to contextualize the Titans and the attacks. In the first few seasons, we can justify any and all attacks on these Titan monsters in order to “preserve” the “proper” people; i.e. the non-monsters.

We use this language quite purposefully, as well. There is no denying that there are subtexts and themes of fascism within *Attack on Titan*. Titans are made of a race of people, Eldians or “children of Ymir,” with a unique ability to become the Titans that we see: both the mindless and the mindful. Oftentimes, we see Titans with unique intellect who are capable of keeping control of themselves when they become the “monsters” we regularly see, as they are part of the nine Titan powers. Eren Jaeger is a prime example of this. However, the mindless Titans we see created are not beasts from birth to death... the people who oppress the race of Titan-people known as the Marleyans, bastardize this unique capability of the Eldian people and create what we normally see as the mindless, cannibalistic Titans like the one who cannibalized Eren’s mother; Dina Fritz. In other words, the way that the Titans are presented is not true to their actual nature and is instead imposed upon them by the governmental powers that be; i.e. Marleyans (mankind) make the very monsters that they fear, fight for them against other humans for two major reasons: fear and resources. Neither of these reasons is more important than the other. There is a lot of fear in the ability for Paradis and its island of Eldians to start weaponizing their Titan powers against Marley, but also... it does not hurt that there is thought to be a bevy of resources on Paradis. This then

leads the viewer to think about the Eldians to wonder, “what happens to the Eldians who live *in Marley*”.

The Titan-powered Eldians, otherwise, exist as a people who live within what can only be seen as internment camps. They exist under low food, terrible shelters, little pleasure, and are force-fed years of propaganda about their monstrous beginnings as “Children of Ymir”. They are trained to think of themselves as demons in human form and it is only through the work of restorationists like Dina Fritz and Grisha Yaeger (Eren’s father) that anyone is fighting against this treatment in secrecy, under threat of being “made into a true monster”. This dehumanizes them even within their human form and betrays them as monsters to themselves and others<sup>9</sup>. This is the reality of many “monsters” that we are not shown when we initially see these Titans in their first appearance with the attack on wall Maria in Episode 1. As a result, when we see Eren take on his Titan form, we begin to think of him as an “exception to the rule”. He is, now, a mighty tool that can be used to put an end to all other Titans. Perhaps, even, “one of the good ones” unlike the Smiling Titan, Dina Fritz. This is the mindset imposed upon the characters of *Attack on Titan*. A fight of good versus evil with certain elements of evil being used to even the odds. After all, if Eren is a good Titan who can fight off the others and maintain control, then he must be able to serve the greater good of preserving humanity on Paradis and, instead of being a monster who cannibalizes humans, he is a “human made monster who fights for the sake of humanity”. This connection is reminiscent of the Black Confederate Soldiers myth and the Mammy characterization in American history. Alongside this, we are made to think that Dina Fritz, the Smiling Titan, is merely a monster, born and bred. Her life, and her life’s work to protect Paradis and other Eldians, does not recuse her from the initial thoughts that she is a monster by virtue of her mindless actions and “othered” appearance. We do not know that she was forced into this position for trying to protect other humans from the fate of cannibalism by one of their own. This constant threat of being turned into a true monster scares other Eldians in Marley from rising up; and acts as a deterrent from protecting themselves or stepping out of line. This will not save them from war in the future.

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<sup>9</sup> T. Brinkhof, *Revisiting the Fascist Subtext of Attack on Titan: Some Notes on a Modern Reactionary Anime*, 2021, p. 22.



Meanwhile, the other humans of Paradis are allowed to turn their anger and their hatred of Titans into their primary motivator in their war of survival, as they understand it. We see that even in reality, hatred, spite and fear existed as a useful tool during the reign of the Nazi regime<sup>10</sup>, and so to see it be used as a motivator to fight for the government that begins to appear more and more like the fascists of the “real world” the longer we dissect it. Of course, this is not accidental. Much like in Orwell’s *1984*, the world of *Attack on Titan* contains an overseeing government body that seeks to create the history for the surviving humans<sup>11</sup>. One of the key plot points midway through the show is about the erasure of history and how the history of reality was “rewritten” by the ruling class at the founding of Paradis. For example, there is a very clear connection to Nazi Germany in the use of armbands around the arms of the oppressed Eldian people who live in Marley to make a clear connection in the minds of the audience of the treatment of Jewish people in Nazi Germany<sup>12</sup>. This is not the only place where propagandistic connections can be made, of course. Even within the music, there are hints of this propaganda. The lyrics of the earliest song: “Guren no Yumiya” by Linked Horizon give this feeling of being an underdog and how they will not wait around to be slaughtered. They will fight back because they are the hunters and the Titans are their prey. It would be very inspiring if the world is as it was meant to be portrayed from Episode 1, but if there is one thing to take note from in the world of *Attack on Titan*, it is that nothing is ever so simple.

These combined elements lead one to realize that the propaganda is not necessarily satisfied with fooling the characters of the show, but also the audience. It acts as sort of an immersive exposure therapy to the power of this political discourse in how this sort of propaganda can fool anyone, including those with the benefit of existing outside of the realm of internal information and the inner-workings of the world at hand. The lesson to learn from this usage of propaganda is that anyone is susceptible. As a result, looking towards the real world, we need to recognize the impacts that real world fascists hidden behind the rhetoric of hate-fueled propaganda have on underprivileged groups as we saw during WWII and as

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<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, p. 23

<sup>11</sup> R. Hemadeh, *Attack on Titan and the Hunger Games: Dystopias with an Orwellian Foundation*, 2022, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

represented by the Eldians within the world of *Attack on Titan*. When *Attack on Titan* reveals the truth of the identities of the Titans, and especially Dina Fritz, the narrative trap reveals exactly what it is that the audience had been buying into. The full picture of their analogy opens up and shows exactly how easy it is to be led astray by graphic language, horrifying imagery, and the sympathetic story of someone who lends themselves to become a tool of the system. This analogy continues, even, with the outright lies of a governing force with something to gain from the consistent oppression of those they fear and hate. We see in the manga and anime that there is a direct correlation to the treatment of Jewish people in Nazi Germany, through the reaffirmation that the Eldian race cannot succeed in their society, they cannot leave their neighborhoods, can be killed with reckless abandon by their government, and that they are inherently inferior because of their bloodline, we see exactly what lies behind the curtain of propaganda and through the example of Dina Fritz, we see how the world of AOT functions as a mirror to what is going on in the United States, even today.

### **3. The Monst[her] That is Me “She”: Différence, Différance, and a Deconstructive View Dina**

Jacques Derrida originally wrote the intentional misspelling of *différence* in his 1963 paper *Cogito et histoire de la folie*<sup>13</sup>. He changed the spelling slightly from *différence* to *différance*, highlighting a key pun in French that “*différer*” means both “to defer” and “to differ”<sup>14</sup>. Like Derrida, we want to highlight a key conundrum in the definition of “monster” when referring to a woman. Much like the reclaiming of [her]story<sup>15</sup>, we believe that a monst[her] better defines a female (biologically and through gender identity) who is made into a “monster” by man. The role of the woman, by the virtue of being called a “monster”, is undermined in this case as easily as it is undermined by being called “wo[man]”, if Simone de Beauvoir is to be believed<sup>16</sup>. The quality of being female needs to be reclaimed even in the state of monstrosity

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<sup>13</sup> W. Schultz and L. Fried, *Jacques Derrida Bibliography*, London & New York: Garland, 1992, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> The Editors of The Encyclopædia Britannica, *Jacques Derrida*, in “Encyclopædia Britannica”, 25 May 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jacques-Derrida#ref748407>.

<sup>15</sup> The first known usage of the term [her]story comes from: R. Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, 1970.

<sup>16</sup> S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, NRF essais (in French), in “Les faits et les mythes”, Vol 1, ([Facts and Myths), 1949.

(monstrosi[she]). While Derrida argues that words and signs can never truly be indicative of what they mean—as words and symbols rely on their relation to other words from which they differ—we believe that Derrida, while correct, should also offer an actionable item to this. Our goal, as rhetoricians and elocutionists, is to try and do better about this perpetuation of vagueness. For this reason, we offer our term for Dina Fritz and other women-made-monsters in AOT: the monst[her].

Throughout this section, we explore how *différance* challenges traditional notions of identity and alterity through the character of Dina Fritz. By doing so, we can uncover the transformative potential of embracing the monst[her] as a means of deconstructing established hierarchies and categories such as gender and identity. In AOT, Dina is born into a world under fire by the curse of the Titans, and she is also cursed by her generational connection to Ymir Fritz, the founding Titan who will be later discussed in this article. Through these very connections, it is hard to not think that Dina’s life was destined for tragedy. However, it is crucial to note that Dina, herself, did not choose the path that led to her monstrous transformation. Instead, she became a victim of her birth and the decisions made by those in power around her in Marley, as we discussed in the first section of this article. Dina was used as a pawn for power by her husband, Grisha Yaeger, and so many others who relied on her to “lead them” due to the virtue of her lineage. Dina, of course, is indicative of the others monst[hers] of AOT.

Dina Fritz was born biologically female in Marley prior to the start of the show. Her birth was never spoken about in AOT, but it is known by the viewers and the Eldian resistance that she is a direct descendant of the first Titan, Ymir Fritz. This makes her Eldian royalty, and she is treated as the light of the resistance according to Season 3, Episode 57, «She[, Dina,] was the last descendant of royal blood who remained on the continent. She provided info about the Titans that only the royal family knew. This was the break we needed for victory...Let’s fight. The true royal family held their ground on this continent for the sake of Eldia»<sup>17</sup>. She is then thrown into not only the role of the light of resistance, but that of wife and mother as she gives birth to her and Grisha’s son, Zeke. Dina is, like the other Eldians in

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<sup>17</sup> H. Isayama, Writer and Director, *Attack on Titan*, Season 3, Episode 57, “That Day,” 8:34-9:42.

Marley, forced to wear a white armband signifying her “otherness” and her monstrosi[*she*] even as she bears a child resembling that of a “normal” human being. It is because of this hidden connection to the royal Eldian family that Dina is the perfect character to look at for the question of the female monst[*her*]. Betrayal, however, is ugly.

Zeke sees his mother and father as a version of monster/monst[*her*] through their political machinations to force him to be part of the resistance and, in the future, be promoted to the monster that everyone fears in this world: a Titan. Zeke is told that he is “the one who will save Eldia from disgrace” and given a duty too large for his own young shoulders<sup>18</sup>. However, he is a weapon that is used in opposition to their original goals to destroy Marley and reestablish Eldia. Instead, Zeke ends up becoming a further weapon used by the Marleyan government against Eldians when he is turned into the Beast Titan. The reason he is given such a prestigious “honor” is because he turns in his parents as members of the Eldian resistance, which sentences them to become monsters/monst[*hers*] fighting against those they sought to protect. However, it is Dina who is truly lost in this struggle for political power.

Dina and Grisha are both punished for their acts of treason, but it is only Dina whose punishment works out the way it was intended. Dina is punished more thoroughly, in our opinion, than Grisha for her act of treason, becoming a true, mindless, monst[*her*], whereas Grisha is given the ability by the Owl (a resistance leader who works in the Marleyan police force) to retain his thoughts and feelings and working within the walls of Paradis. She promises Grisha on the day of sentencing that «no matter what form [*she*] take[s], [*she*] will always come find [*him*]»<sup>19</sup>. Then, she is changed into a Titan in front of Grisha prior to him being punished and...the change is an act of true violence.

While Dina is typically seen as a soft-spoken, blonde haired woman who is conservative (she wears a button-up blouse and ankle-length skirt), her Titan form is terrifying to behold. The first thing to note is that Dina is injected with the spinal fluid of Titans in a true act of bodily violation. The second thing of value is that the Titan transformation happens with a change akin to a flash bomb. There are large, flashing lights, a gust of power, and true violent abruptions to the world around the wall, as if the world is

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<sup>18</sup> *Ivi*, Season 3, Episode 57, “That Day,” 12:06-12:12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ivi*, Season 3, Episode 57, “That Day,” 16:29-16:32.

fighting back against the change to monst[her]. Then, in monst[her] form, she is large and sexless which is a direct attack on her womanhood by the creators of AOT and a direct attack on her gender identity by the Eldians who turn her. As is said in the Introduction, the only way one can tell that she is female is by the length of her hair and the lack of a beard and/or mustache. She is well, and truly, penalized in this form; no longer is she a mother or wife, she retains no thoughts of this or any activity prior to her transformation. The only goal she has in mind is to feed the cannibalistic thoughts she has to somehow try and assuage the hunger that pounds through her belly...or so we think. However, this is inherently questioned in Season 4, Episode 62.

In the first episode of AOT, we witness the beginning of the anti-hero's story. The audience is privy to the violent, terrifying cannibalism that Dina commits on Eren's mother, Carla. In it, Eren is whisked to safety by one of the officers of the town. In this scene, we see Dina (or, as we know her at this point, the Smiling Titan) pick up Carla from the wreckage of her home and devour her in a horrific, nightmare-inducing manner in front of her son and his best friend, Mikasa<sup>20</sup>. However, the reason this is pertinent to this article is not because Dina is acting like a monst[her] but because of what we find out in Season 4, Episode 62. In this episode, we see a strange activity that brings forth a question of what Dina's Titan might remember of her past. To clarify, from 14:00-14:13 we see another major character and sapient Titan antagonist, Bertholdt Hoover, come out of his Attack Titan form. As he is standing, in human form, the Smiling Titan up and walks past him. This Titan, who is so consumed by hunger, leaves him be and does not initiate a single attack against him<sup>21</sup>... This begs a question: why? There are two major theories that we have: 1) Dina wants to find Grisha and can smell him/feel him or 2) Dina was called by the strong number of people in the crowded city and did not care to stop for a single person. The first theory is what we shall elaborate on because we believe the second theory null-and-void because Titans always attack indiscriminately.

In continuing with this thought, it is important to think about Dina Fritz as a human-turned-monst[her]. It is also important to think about Dina as potentially being "other" from

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<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, Season 1, Episode 1, "To You, 2,000 Years in the Future -The Fall of Zhiganshina," 20:23-23:27.

<sup>21</sup> *Ivi*, Season 4, Episode 62, "The Door of Hope," 14:00-14:13.

the random assortment of Titans that we see attacking Paradis because she has the blood of Ymir Fritz; i.e., she is a royal. The theory we have most strongly is that Dina still retains bodily memories of her relationship with Grisha Yaeger, and was trying to find him, even if just on animalistic/monst[her] instinct. This is important to the continuation of the story because Dina is “different” from the other characters we have met thus far *because* of her lineage and because she is female<sup>22</sup>. For example, when Grisha was about to be turned into a Titan, it was a row of men who were put on the wall to be turned. There were no other women. Then, at the last possible moment, Dina is brought out by herself and turned in front of Grisha, whose screams are the stuff of nightmares as his beloved wife is made into a monst[her] in front of his very eyes. However, it is also very interesting for the writers to choose to go with this plot line. By crafting a narrative where Grisha’s “wife”, Dina, cannibalizes his other “wife”, this scene acts as a moment of very deep feminist rage on Dina’s part *or* it means that Carla Yaeger smelled like Dina’s beloved...In any case, it is simply fascinating to speculate as to why Dina is “othered” as a monst[her] beyond that of the instinct-driven cannibalistic monsters that we encounter throughout the story. At this point, the question of *othering* and monst[hers] begins to take true root. This brings us to some of the other characters of AOT who are also indicative of this othered monstrosi[she].

In Derrida's philosophy, rhetoric disrupts conventional categories and challenges established norms, which is what we are trying to emulate in this article about othered monst[hers]. The figure of the monst[her] represents alterity—an entity that resists easy classification, defies boundaries, and disrupts the stability of identity—which we believe is executed by a variety of female characters throughout AOT. By embracing the monst[her], we are compelled to question our assumptions about what is considered normal, acceptable, or *other*, and engage with the radical alterity that lies beyond the familiar. This, in turn, asks us to question the role of other women in AOT to prove our theory: men make monst[hers] and do not even give them enough individuality to further categorize them *as* the women they are, even in “monst[her]” form. Some of the women we wanted to speak about include Ymir

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<sup>22</sup> Along with the fact that in Season 2 Episode 28 we hear Connie’s Titan-turned mother say “Welcome Home” in minutes 1:42-1:45.

Fritz and Annie Leonhart as they relate to the Derridian change of monst[her]. To begin, we look at Ymir Fritz and how she exemplifies the monst[her] we have been discussing thus far. Ymir Fritz is made into a monst[her] through tragedy. 2,000 years prior to AOT's beginning, Ymir Fritz's village was attacked by the Eldian leader, Fritz, and his people<sup>23</sup>. The Eldians ended up murdering the young Ymir's parents and cutting out the tongues of the survivors; including Ymir, herself. By taking away their ability to vocally communicate, the survivors are *othered*, physically and by ability. However, the tragedy of Ymir does not end there. While in captivity, Ymir was blamed for the escape of a pig and the Eldian leader, Fritz, released Ymir into the wild so that his men could attempt to hunt her for sport<sup>24</sup>. Afraid and hurt, Ymir tried to hide in a large tree's base and she fell into a sinkhole in a very *Alice in Wonderland* fashion. The sinkhole was full of water and she fused with an unnatural spine-like creature who ended up turning her into the first Titan<sup>25</sup>. Ymir then returned to Fritz, the only life she knew, and was used, like Dina, as the new "light" of the kingdom. She helped cultivate lands with her strength, build bridges, and fight to amass wealth for the Eldians against Eldia's rival, Marley. As a "reward", Fritz took advantage of Ymir and made her into his concubine.<sup>26</sup> However, the most important part of the story comes with Ymir's untimely death. An assassination attempt on Fritz gone wrong, Ymir jumped in front of her leader, Fritz, to protect him and ended up dying in her human form. However, tragedy continued and Rose, Maria, and Sina were forced to cannibalize their own mother's dead body in an attempt to continue the power of the Titan<sup>27</sup>. Fritz forced his daughters to reproduce and have their children eat their mothers' spines so that Ymir's blood would not die out and Eldia could continue to house the power of the Titans and destroy any attempt to thwart its massive power. This, again, continues the ideas of the monst[her] that we have brought to attention thus far.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ivi*, Season 4, Episode 80, "From You, 2,000 Years Ago," 08:18-08:50.

<sup>24</sup> *Ivi*, Season 4, Episode 80, "From You, 2,000 Years Ago," 09:10-10:40.

<sup>25</sup> As this is prior to the separation of the Nine Attack Titans, Ymir had the power of all of them before her untimely death.

<sup>26</sup> They had three daughters: Maria, Rose, and Sina.

<sup>27</sup> *Ivi*, Season 4, Episode 80, "From You, 2,000 Years Ago," 14:54-15:12.

Ymir, like Dina, is *othered* and ultimately made into a monst[her] by the actions of mankind. Her young, impressionable self is further altered by being in captivity and not knowing a life outside of Fritz's control. Like Dina, she finds her strength in being useful to a man who uses her: pushing her to bear children and act as a "leader" for the continued betterment of Eldia. However, also like Dina there is an appearance of choice and agency to consider. Ymir *does*, in fact, go back to Fritz. She does have the option of turning into a monst[her] and destroying the people that enslaved her and her people. Dina is much the same. Dina had the option of remaining hidden. Dina had the option to not marry a revolutionary. She has the choice to not allow her child to be indoctrinated into Marley's military attempts. She does not take it. Yes, there is a question of choice and agency in these situations that we can not discredit, but they did not *choose* to become monst[hers]. Ymir was quite literally looking to escape her fate, and so was Dina. Both women were seeking freedom, a theme the show plays out throughout the series. They were looking to increase their choices and not be used by the "wrong" people for the "wrong" reasons. In Ymir's case, however, she goes back to the "villain" of her story because she is a woman beaten by society and she is also so young that she does not know a life outside of this. She feels like there is no choice but to return. Dina, on the other hand, feels like there is no choice but to stand up for her people, as she assumes the role of leader of the Eldian people. Both women, in their own ways, fight for the opportunity for the life they think they want, but they did *not* choose to be monsters. This is different from Annie Leonhart and, also, the very same.

Annie Leonhart is a woman who quite literally had nothing when she came into this world. Left for dead as a baby, she was taken in by her adoptive father, Leonhart, whose name she has taken on as her own. She is trained ruthlessly to become the next of the Nine Attack Titans, becoming the first Titan with secondary sexual characteristics: breasts. While we do not have it falling into R or NC-17 rating territory, this is the very first time we, the audience, are shown a monst[her] with any sort of qualities like that so it is a bit startling for the viewer. Annie is, very much like her personality, a hardened woman. She has the ability to crystalize parts of her body to protect herself from being violated, which is, in true rhetorical fashion, something that could easily be looked at through a feminist rhetorical lens. For the purposes of this article, we think it important to note that while Annie is given a vague



appearance of a choice, much like Ymir and Dina, she was masterfully coerced and manipulated by a father who wanted the prestige of his daughter becoming a weapon for the Marleyan Empire. While we will not go into this more deeply because we believe that it is necessary to look at Annie, it is important to note that Annie does willingly choose to become a part of this fight and she is damn good at it. However, this begs the question about her relationship to two women she has never met before: Ymir and Dina.

Annie Leonhart acts as the antithesis to much of what Ymir Fritz and Dina Fritz stood for. Not yet a mother or wife, Annie is indicative of much of the responsibility women bear in the show if they choose to survive amidst the violence in Paradis and Marley. Whereas Dina relied on Grisha, and Ymir on Fritz, Annie relies on herself. She is strong, capable, muscular, and stands in direct opposition to Dina and Ymir at first glance. However, their striking differences are not nearly as interesting as their slight similarities. For example, Annie is also a blonde woman who wears her hair short, like Dina and Ymir. Annie also is beholden to a man...her adoptive father: «I didn't used to care about anything. But it's different now. I think I've committed irredeemable sins...But. If it meant I could return to my father...I'd do it all over again»<sup>28</sup>. Throughout the manga, as opposed to the show, the viewer is witness to much of Annie's angst in relation to her father. However, the show has only currently proved that Annie thinks *of* her father, not whether she thinks of him fondly. She is also, not too subtly, able to crystalize her body for protection from the Eldians who would potentially violate her. She, in her own way, is the “bettered” version of Dina and Ymir, who were unable to protect themselves or be protected by the men they love. Not so for Annie, for now. She is also “othered” by the virtue of being Eldian *and* fighting against the very people by whom she could form a relationship with due to shared legacies. Forcibly, by some accounts, Annie is othered by the very people whose protection she relies on: her Father and the Marleyan government.

AOT's anime adaptation is intentionally arguing that women in war torn societies are intentionally *othered* by men when they become too powerful; or worse, when they become weak to men by their systems of power. This act of othering is a very political activity. It is

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<sup>28</sup> H. Isayama, Writer and Director, *Attack on Titan: Chapter 125*, P. 6.

intentional, and useful in patriarchal societies; especially under fascist regimes. By virtue of being a woman in patriarchal societies, they are automatically seen as an aide to men: Dina to Grisha, Ymir to Fritz, and, of course, Annie to Leonhart. This is, of course, just the immediate ramifications of their actions. These women are also othered by the very patriarchal society which looks to use them. The historic Eldians used Ymir to fight the historic Marleyans, the Eldian resistance uses Dina to fight the Marleyan government, and the Marleyan government uses Annie to fight the Eldians on Paradis. Women are accessories. Something of a trophy sword, a monst[her] in form, to be weaponized to galvanize other men to do the “power’s” bidding. This, of course, helps to aid in our understanding of the monst[her] as being man-made because men create the very weapons they are terrified of. Dina, Ymir, and Annie all have one more thing in common: fear. They fear the repercussions of men just as much as they are feared by these men who made them through the processing of othering.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Dina Fritz exemplifies humanity's capacity to transform its own kind into monst[hers]. Her story serves as a haunting reminder of the consequences that arise from the pursuit of power, the perpetuation of oppressive systems, and the disregard for the individual's agency as we spoke about in our first section of the paper while we looked at the inherently fascist system of Marley. Through Dina's tragic journey, the series provokes introspection and challenges the readers and viewers to question the roles they play in perpetuating such cycles of suffering and monstrosi[shes]. Dina is indicative of the true pain women feel in systemically sexist societies where women are seen as bearers of burden, such as is seen with her role as the “light” of the resistance, her role as wife, and her final role as mother. We have also looked at other examples of this othering in the monst[her] through our brief explanations of Ymir Fritz and Annie Leonhart. Much of our theory rests on women as being burdened by this *othering* that occurs when women become too powerful and when women become weak to men. The figure of the monst[her] disrupts normative gender roles and challenges the binary constructions of male and female in inherently sexist societies. By embracing the monstrous,

we can explore the fluidity of gender and sexuality, highlighting the diversity and multiplicity that exists beyond the confines of rigid, binary categories such as “male” and “female”, but we can also reclaim our femininity, even in horrific situations. Embracing the monst[her] becomes, instead of an act of terror, an act of liberation, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic world.

This act of othering is a very political decision. It is intentional, and useful in patriarchal societies; especially under fascist regimes. It helps to perpetuate the systems that be, and stomp out the threats to the status quo by giving the common majority a fabricated enemy to fight against. In this way, it polarizes what should be a steady grayscale of nuance and truths that reveal the nature of the world we live in and the people that inhabit it. In the case of AOT, the monsters are found to be literally fabricated through acts of bodily horror and bastardization of the people’s ways to help give reason for the extermination of the Eldian people, and a core component of this practice is the monsterization of the powerful women who represent what would be the greatest threat to the patriarchal status quo of the Marleyan government.

While it is understood best as a representation of classic fascist governments we see in history, there is no question that the practices continue to be seen in the modern activities of contemporary governments. The tactics, dehumanizing as they are, unfortunately work well for the powers that utilize them, and this threat of the abuse of power to put down minority groups is exactly what AOT warns us to keep our eyes open for. Knowing the history it is important to not allow these systems to victimize, dehumanize, and monstrify these groups. We, as the viewers whom this message is being imparted to, need to take a stand to rehumanize these monsters and monst[hers] through understanding that being a threat to the status quo and being different from the common majority does not make them less human or less important to existing within this world. Like Derrida, we seek to reclaim the power of words. Unlike Derrida, we seek to change the world for the bett[her].