

# Investigating how popular children's and young adults' anime, animated shows, comics, and manga shape their habits of visualising war and peace

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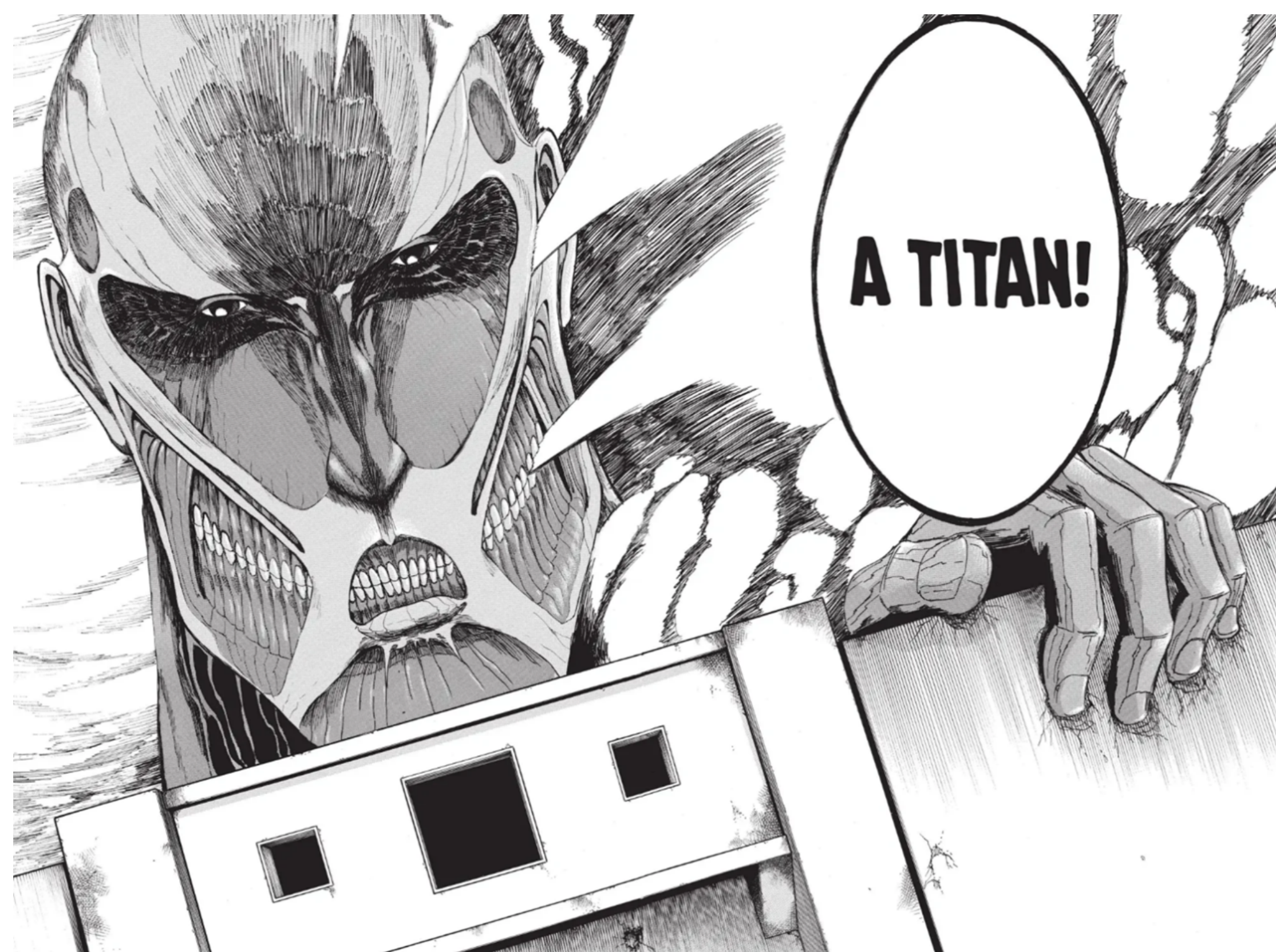


Figure 1: The Colossal Titan [1]

## Introduction

Anime, animated shows, manga, and comics despite being extremely popular and influential mediums are generally understudied. And, exemplary texts from these mediums are generally consumed by and stick with its relatively young audience throughout their lives. This project was aimed at analysing how these far reaching texts influenced its fans and what messages about war and peace they may be trying to impart or implicitly are suggesting.

## Main Objectives

1. Select examples from these mediums which are well received within my research demographic (children and young adults).
2. Explore how they represent violence and conflict through primary analysis of the comic.
3. Explore the impact on the research demographic and what messages or ideologies they might recognise or pick up through engaging with these media.

## Methodology

Initially I was considering a couple of different texts to research, one of these was meant to be *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. However, it became very clear that one text was dense enough. I focused on *Attack on Titan* by Hajime Isayama and began analysing. This mainly involved primary analysis of the hybrid textual-visual medium of comics. This also involved secondary reading from fields such as International Relations and Human Geography on topics of war and peace studies. As well as more literary focused secondary resources that helped me in analysing the text directly.

## Conclusions

### Justifying Violence

One of the main aspects of war that is explored is the moral ambiguities inherent in **fighting** for your survival against the wellbeing of your enemy. Isayama lures us in with a simple narrative of fighting giant unbeatable insentient monsters (Titans). He then makes us question our assumptions through plot twists. Firstly, by revealing that Titans are in fact the same race as our heroes. Then, by showing that in fact this isn't a story of the remnants of humanity against an existential threat akin to Skynet from Terminator in the form of Titans, but in fact that the true 'enemies' are a whole world of people that is prejudiced against our heroes due to the sins of their ancestors. Why were we okay with fighting monsters that are nothing like us? What if those monsters are actually humans transformed into monsters? What if your 'enemy' is the whole world who is, arguably, justifiably scared of you and your race? These are all questions that Isayama confronts the reader with.



Figure 2: The Titans. [1]

## Deconstructing the Story

One of the most interesting things Isayama did was to break down basic assumptions of a typical 'hero story'. These included things like why heroes save the day. Isayama actually made heroes initially focused on self-preservation save a world that is prejudiced against them and considers them literal "devils". Isayama made heroes that had to kill their closest friends to have the chance to save billions of people that would rather have these heroes never exist. This too poses poignant questions to the reader, making them reconsider the most basic of assumptions of consuming these types of stories in media. It also begs the question of why we assume that the heroes will just 'do the right thing', especially when those heroes are child soldiers that have grown up surrounded by tragedy and violence.

## Troubling Readings

Ultimately though, despite the interesting questions Isayama raises, the answers he seems to provide are questionable. He seems to suggest that there is a justified soldier, but the clearest answer he gives is that this soldier is 'rational', 'competent' and 'fighting for what they believe in'. This ambiguity in defining who is justified in their violence as a soldier to an impressionable audience may have more impact than originally intended. Whilst this representation isn't necessarily problematic, for an audience such as the target demographic, a generation of manga and anime fans may treat this message with reverence and not question this implication from Isayama. Such is the popularity of this manga.



Figure 3: The Survey Corps. [1]

## Forthcoming Research

There are several blogs published on the blog of the Visualising War' project based on my research for the Laidlaw scholarship. These blogs are essentially more in depth dives into the explorations shown above. Hopefully, I will be able to create more research in a similar fashion to this project on other worthwhile texts like *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

## References

[1] Hajime Isayama. *Shingeki no Kyojin*. Kodansha, 2009.

## Acknowledgements & Disclaimers

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