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Exploring and Identifying Postmodern Features in *Demon Slayer*'s Infinity Castle

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the postmodern elements in Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba, focusing on the Infinity Castle Arc as a representation of fragmented narrative and visual excess in contemporary anime. Using a qualitative descriptive method within the framework of postmodern theory, the research analyzes the arc's narrative structure, spatial design, and symbolic motifs to identify the features of postmodernism, including fragmentation, hyperreality, metafiction, and pastiche. The analysis reveals that the Infinity Castle functions not merely as a setting but as a reflection of postmodern instability, its constantly shifting architecture disrupts linear storytelling and challenges conventional narrative logic. Moreover, the arc's use of visual exaggeration and emotionally charged imagery creates a sense of hyperreality, where spectacle and feeling become inseparable from meaning. The presence of metafiction and intertextuality further demonstrates how the series blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, tradition and innovation, and local and global cultural influences. Through these aspects, Demon Slayer constructs a layered narrative world that mirrors the complexity and uncertainty of postmodern experience. Ultimately, this study argues that the Infinity Castle Arc transforms the series into a postmodern text that reflects the fluid nature of identity, truth, and perception in today's media landscape.

Keywords: *Demon Slayer*, postmodernism, metafiction, hyperreality, anime analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Literary works and visual narratives have always served as a primary medium for exploring the human condition, reflecting the dominant philosophies and artistic sensibilities of their eras (Abrams, 2000). From the epic, mythic storytelling of pre-modern times to the introspective, and often alienating narratives of Modernism, the evolution of narrative form maps the shifts in cultural consciousness (Eagleton, 2011). In the contemporary globalized landscape, Japanese anime has emerged as a potent form of such narrative art, capable of synthesizing traditional folklore with cutting-edge animation to tell stories that resonate worldwide (Napier, 2005; Steinberg, 2012; Berndt, 2018; Bolton, 2018). Among these, Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba has achieved monumental success, not only for its animation but also for its layered storytelling that reflects philosophical and cultural anxieties (Fennell, 2021; Ortega, 2023).

A survey of academic discourse reveals a significant focus on thematic and culturally-grounded interpretations. For instance, several studies analyze its engagement with pre-modern Japanese folklore and ethics, examining how the series draws upon Shinto and Buddhist concepts to construct its moral universe (Kamei, 2022). Conversely, other scholars have interpreted the series through a Modernist lens, focusing on its Taisho-era setting as an allegory for modern anxiety surrounding identity and the loss of a coherent self in a changing world (Saito, 2021). However, a clear gap exists in the application of Postmodernism as a critical framework. Unlike Modernism,

which laments the loss of unity, Postmodernism actively celebrates fragmentation, instability, and the collapse of grand, overarching narratives (Lyotard, 1984).

Our study fills this gap by using a postmodernist theoretical framework, which is suitable because it focuses not on what a story means, but on how meaning is created and questioned. Using this approach, the Infinity Castle arc will be analyzed through several important postmodern ideas. First, the idea of **fragmentation** and the **rejection of metanarratives** will be explored by seeing how the arc breaks the usual "hero's journey" story into separate and confusing parts. Instead of following one clear truth or path, the story shows many pieces that don't always fit together, making the audience question what is real or true. The study will also apply the idea of **hyperreality** to show how the arc's strong visual and sound effects create experiences that feel "more real than real" (Baudrillard, 1994). These intense scenes make viewers feel deeply involved, as if they are inside a world that is both real and unreal at the same time. Next, the concept of **metafiction** will be discussed through the Castle's impossible and changing structure. The strange design of the Castle reminds the audience that they are watching something created, not real. It makes the story aware of itself as a story and invites viewers to think about how fiction is built. Finally, the idea of **pastiche** and **intertextuality** will be used to explain how the Infinity Castle mixes Japanese art styles with surreal, dream-like geometry. This mix creates a space that does not belong to any single time or culture, showing how postmodernism often celebrates combination and diversity instead of clear boundaries. Through these ideas, this research aims to show how the Infinity Castle arc reflects postmodernism by breaking traditional storytelling, questioning meaning, and blending reality with illusion.

In essence, while other studies use Demon Slayer to find a fixed point of cultural or philosophical reference, our postmodern analysis will demonstrate how the Infinity Castle arc systematically dismantles such fixed points. We argue that this arc represents a deliberate foray into postmodern storytelling, using its narrative and visual form to plunge both characters and audience into a world where reality is contested, perspective is everything, and meaning is an ongoing, active process of interpretation.

METHOD

This study uses a **qualitative descriptive method** in analyzing the postmodern elements of Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba, particularly during the Infinity Castle arc. Qualitative descriptive analysis is used since it offers a thorough explanation of meaning, themes, and narrative patterns devoid of numbers. Creswell (2014) argues that qualitative research focuses on knowing phenomena from the perspectives of the participants or texts, and emphasizes interpretation and contextual meaning.

The data used in this study are narrative and visual elements taken from the Infinity Castle arc of the anime series and similar scenes in the manga. These elements include dialogues, character interactions, setting designs, and visual symbolism. Crucially, the primary source material for the visual and narrative analysis, including the time-stamped evidence, was drawn from the following YouTube video: **https://youtu.be/rac3FAQYPD8?si=4y63Q3e49xTL7dww**. The research aims to identify postmodern characteristics such as fragmentation, hyperreality, intertextuality, and metafiction, as described by scholars such as Lyotard (1984) and Hutcheon (1988).

To collect the data, the researchers carefully watched and rewatched the episodes that cover the Infinity Castle arc, specifically using the aforementioned YouTube link as the main source for sequential visual data. During this process, important scenes were noted down, especially those that showed postmodern elements such as fragmented storytelling, shifting perspectives, or unstable settings. These scenes were then examined using a descriptive-analytical technique, where each selected moment or visual sequence was described and interpreted through the lens of postmodern

theory. The analysis focused on how the Infinity Castle arc illustrates postmodernism's rejection of fixed meaning and its openness to multiplicity, ambiguity, and subjectivity.

Through this method, the study is then able to provide a rich, interpretative account of how postmodernism functions in contemporary Japanese animation, positioning Demon Slayer as both a commodity of popular culture and as a complex text that is counter-hegemonic to standard narrative and moral forms.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Our analysis confirms that the Infinity Castle Arc, as depicted in the Anime, utilizes specific visuals and narrative mechanics that align with a postmodern theoretical framework. The key findings demonstrate how the arc challenges narrative stability, objective reality, and fixed identity.

1. Metafiction and the Constructed Nature of Reality

The concept of metafiction highlights the self-aware nature of the narrative, where the environment itself signals its constructed artifice. The Infinity Castle is not a believable place; it is an impossible mechanism designed to manipulate the narrative space and, consequently, the viewer's suspension of disbelief.

The most immediate proof of this is the chaotic introduction. At **[00:03:55]**, when Tanjiro first lands, he is instantaneously disoriented, stating, "What is this place? Everything's upside down..." This initial moment is crucial because it violently shatters the established laws of physics and gravity that govern the external world of the story. The narrative setting is immediately revealed to be subject to arbitrary, non-sensical rules. This functions as a sophisticated, if subtle, nod to the viewer that the events unfolding are governed by the will of a creator (Nakime, the demon, acting as a stand-in for the author) rather than any natural or stable physical law.



Furthermore, the characters explicitly identify this setting as a narrative trap. Around **[00:40:03]**, the Hashira acknowledge that the environment is a large-scale Blood Demon Art, a sophisticated magical mechanism designed specifically to disorient and isolate them. This recognition transforms the setting from the backdrop into the primary antagonistic force,

confirming its role as an actively mutable and constructed reality. The castle itself becomes a commentary on the fabricated nature of fictional worlds.

2. Fragmentation and Rejection of Metanarratives

Postmodern theory is skeptical of metanarratives, the "grand stories" (like the definitive victory of good over evil or the singular "Hero's Journey") that provide universal meaning. The Infinity Castle arc rejects this unity through radical fragmentation, both spatially and narratively.

The systematic scattering of the Demon Slayer Corps upon arrival serves as the primary mechanism for this fragmentation. Giyu's assessment at **[00:37:40]** that the building "keeps shifting and rearranging itself as if it's alive" to "separate us," is a direct acknowledgment of the narrative's refusal to maintain a central, unified focus. Instead of following one linear plot, the audience is forced into a series of disconnected, concurrent, and high-stakes micro-narratives (Shinobu vs. Doma, Tanjiro/Giyu vs. Akaza, etc.).





This spatial fragmentation leads directly to the rejection of the unified metanarrative. The ultimate victory is not achieved through a single, grand, collective plan; rather, it is achieved only

through a string of desperate, isolated sacrifices and highly personal duels. This confirms Muzan's strategy, explained around **[00:40:44]**, to keep the core members "isolated." By making fragmentation the strategic and structural principle of the final conflict, the arc denies the audience the comfort of a single, coherent path to justice, emphasizing multiplicity and contingency instead.

3. Hyperreality and Emotional Spectacle

Hyperreality, a concept popularized by theorist Jean Baudrillard, suggests that in modern media, the simulation of reality becomes more compelling, intense, and "real" than objective reality itself. In this arc, the spectacular visual intensity of the battles functions as a mechanism for sensory overload, creating an overwhelming emotional experience that bypasses rational logic.

The battle against Akaza is the perfect illustration. Around **[01:41:22]**, Akaza unleashes his "final form blue silver chaotic afterglow," a breathtaking display of speed, energy, and destructive force. The visual rendering, the dynamic camera, the impossible velocity, the vibrant color pushes the action beyond realistic physical limits.



This hyper-spectacle serves to heighten the emotional experience. However, the most profound postmodern use of hyperreality occurs around **[02:19:22]**. Akaza, driven to self-destruction, is literally overwhelmed by the feeling of his past human memories (**Hakuji**), which are presented as a powerful, emotional, and visual truth. This emotional reality violently overrides his physical, demonic reality, forcing him to attack himself. This finding demonstrates that in the arc, the internal, subjective, and intensely felt emotional truth is given more power to dictate action and fate than the biological or narrative "truth" of being a demon.



4. Pastiche and Intertextuality

Pastiche involves the blending of disparate styles without any attempt at critique or satire, creating a hybrid or "blank" imitation. This technique in the Infinity Castle detaches the setting from a stable, fixed cultural or historical identity.

The visual design is a striking pastiche because it merges two completely different aesthetic realities. Visible from **[00:03:55]** and in subsequent establishing shots, the setting combines recognizable traditional Japanese architecture (shoji screens, tatami mats) that anchors the series in the Taisho-era with surrealist**,** non-Euclidean geometry (floating structures, impossible angles) associated with abstract or dream-like spaces.



This blending creates a cultural mash-up that transforms the setting into a non-place. The space is neither authentically historical nor purely fantastic; it is an abstract combination of borrowed signs. This signals the arc's intertextuality: the setting is a construct of various media and aesthetic influences combined for dramatic effect, shifting the focus from the series as a reflection of "fixed Japanese history" (as suggested by other scholars) to a commentary on the fragmented, consuming, and boundary-less nature of contemporary global media.

DISCUSSIONS

The Infinity Castle Arc in Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba exemplifies the aesthetic and philosophical tendencies of postmodernism, particularly through its narrative disjunction, visual excess, and self-conscious construction of meaning. By exploring its narrative and visual design through the framework of postmodern features, fragmentation, hyperreality, metafiction, and pastiche/intertextuality, we can observe how the series moves beyond the modernist search for coherence toward a dynamic and unstable representation of reality and identity.

Fragmentation and Rejection of Metanarratives

Fragmentation, a defining trait of postmodernism, refers to the breakdown of unified structures, whether in narrative, identity, or ideology and the refusal of a single, all-encompassing truth (Lyotard, 1984). In the Infinity Castle Arc, this fragmentation manifests through the spatial and temporal disarray of the setting. The Castle's constantly shifting architecture mirrors the narrative's refusal of linearity, breaking the conventional "hero's journey" into disconnected scenes of chaos and confrontation. Each demon encounter occurs in its own pocket of distorted space, preventing the viewer from perceiving a cohesive world order. This structural instability symbolically rejects the metanarrative of moral absolutism, the clear division between good and evil that typically governs *shōnen* anime. Instead, the story embraces multiplicity, emotional contradiction, and moral ambiguity, aligning it with Lyotard's notion of "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984).

Hyperreality

Baudrillard's (1994) concept of hyperreality refers to a condition where simulations and media images become more real and emotionally potent than the physical world itself. The Infinity Castle Arc embodies this through its overwhelming sensory design, an endless labyrinth animated with floating chambers, surreal lighting, and disorienting camera movement. The spectacle produces a heightened emotional response that exceeds realism, pulling the viewer into an experience that feels "more real than real." The intensity of its visual and musical composition transforms the battle sequences into immersive emotional environments rather than mere narrative progressions. This hyperreal quality blurs the boundary between physical struggle and psychological experience, suggesting that what matters is not the factual reality of the world but the depth of feeling it simulates.

Metafiction

Metafiction, another postmodern hallmark, refers to the self-awareness of a narrative about its own artificiality. It invites the audience to recognize that what they are watching is a constructed world rather than a transparent reflection of reality (Hutcheon, 1988). The impossible geometry of the Infinity Castle functions as a metafictional device: the constantly shifting architecture defies spatial logic, reminding the audience that the setting cannot exist outside of the story's constructed frame. This spatial paradox forces viewers to engage with the fictionality of the anime medium itself, echoing the postmodern emphasis on representation rather than reality. The Castle becomes both a battlefield and a metaphor for the instability of narrative truth, a place where meaning continually collapses and reforms.

Pastiche and Intertextuality

Pastiche, as defined by Jameson (1991) and expanded within postmodern discourse, involves the blending of multiple styles, genres, and cultural references without hierarchical

distinction. The Infinity Castle Arc showcases this through its interweaving of Japanese traditional aesthetics and modern surrealism. The Castle's interior fuses elements reminiscent of traditional architectural styles, Buddhist symmetry, and kaleidoscopic digital abstraction, a hybridization that resists belonging to any single time or culture. This intertextual layering creates a sense of temporal dislocation, situating the viewer in a cultural collage that celebrates aesthetic excess rather than coherence. In doing so, the arc reflects the postmodern fascination with remixing and recontextualizing existing forms to generate new meanings (Jameson, 1991).

Taken together, these features demonstrate that the Infinity Castle Arc embodies postmodern sensibilities not by offering a stable interpretation but by destabilizing meaning itself. Fragmentation dismantles linear narrative logic; hyperreality amplifies emotional truth through simulation; metafiction exposes the artificiality of storytelling; and pastiche dissolves cultural and temporal boundaries. Through these interlocking strategies, the arc transforms Demon Slayer from a mythic tale of heroism into a self-reflexive meditation on perception, representation, and the impossibility of absolute truth.

Therefore, the Infinity Castle is not merely a narrative climax, it is a postmodern labyrinth of meaning, where reality and illusion, tradition and innovation, coexist in perpetual irregularity.

CONCLUSIONS

The exploration of the Infinity Castle Arc in Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba demonstrates how postmodernism in contemporary Japanese animation operates as both a visual strategy and a philosophical statement. Rather than presenting a straightforward narrative of good versus evil, this arc invites viewers into a space where meaning is constantly shifting, truth is unstable, and perception becomes the primary site of experience. The Infinity Castle does not simply function as a physical location, it is a conceptual metaphor for the fragmented state of reality in the postmodern world. Every twist of its hallways and inversion of gravity reflects the disorientation of meaning in an age where boundaries between the real and the simulated have dissolved.

In the fragmented storytelling of the arc, we can see how modern heroism gives way to postmodern uncertainty. The scattered battles and parallel timelines do not unite into a single, linear quest but remain suspended in multiplicity. This refusal of closure represents a deliberate rejection of the metanarratives that once organized stories into clear moral structures. Instead, each encounter unfolds as its own microcosm, revealing that identity and truth can no longer be contained within universal frameworks. This reflects Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) notion of "incredulity toward metanarratives," in which the stability of overarching truths collapses under the weight of individual experiences and competing realities.

The Infinity Castle itself becomes a living form of metafiction, an environment that is self-aware of its own constructed nature. Its endless, shifting rooms remind the audience that what they are witnessing is not an illusion of reality, but a deliberate composition of artifice. The castle's manipulation of space and physics mirrors the creative manipulation of narrative itself, drawing attention to the act of storytelling as performance. Through this, Demon Slayer engages with one of postmodernism's central impulses: to expose the mechanisms of representation rather than conceal them. The viewer is made aware that the emotional intensity and visual grandeur of the anime are not simply immersive, but reflective of how fiction produces meaning in a hyper-mediated culture.

Equally significant is the use of hyperreality, what Baudrillard (1994) calls the state in which simulations become more "real" than the real. In the Infinity Castle arc, the dazzling battles, surreal architecture, and overwhelming spectacle of sound and color do not aim to reproduce reality, but to exceed it. The experience of watching these scenes generates sensations that feel truer, deeper, and more powerful than ordinary life. Through this aesthetic excess, Demon Slayer shows how media no longer mirrors the world but replaces it with a more emotionally potent version of itself. The

characters' pain, loss, and triumph become intensified to such an extent that the viewer's response transcends logic, revealing how postmodern storytelling privileges feeling over fact and perception over truth.

Furthermore, the presence of pastiche and intertextuality situates the Infinity Castle Arc within the global cultural context of remix and hybridity. The anime merges traditional Japanese motifs, such as sliding doors, paper walls, and temple-like symmetry with non-Euclidean, dreamlike geometries reminiscent of surrealist art or Western digital aesthetics. This visual blending dissolves temporal and cultural boundaries, creating a world that belongs to neither the past nor the present, neither Japan nor the West. It embodies Fredric Jameson's (1991) concept of pastiche, where diverse styles and symbols coexist without hierarchy, forming a patchwork of borrowed references that together generate new meaning. The arc, therefore, becomes a cultural meeting ground where globalization, technology, and tradition merge into a singular postmodern aesthetic.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the Infinity Castle Arc functions as more than a climactic narrative event, it is a philosophical reflection on the postmodern condition itself. The arc's rejection of unity, its celebration of fragmentation, and its emphasis on perception over certainty mirror the disorientations of modern digital culture, where meaning is decentralized and endlessly reproduced. The viewer is not asked to seek absolute answers but to engage actively in the construction of interpretation. In this sense, Demon Slayer transcends its genre as a mainstream shōnen anime and enters the realm of postmodern art: a site of continuous negotiation between order and chaos, authenticity and simulation, individuality and collectivity.

Ultimately, the Infinity Castle Arc reveals that the power of postmodern storytelling lies not in providing resolution but in sustaining ambiguity. It transforms instability into beauty and confusion into depth. By weaving together fragmentation, hyperreality, metafiction, and pastiche, the narrative affirms that meaning today is not a stable entity to be discovered but an ever-shifting experience to be felt, questioned, and reimagined. Through its labyrinth of motion, sound, and emotion, Demon Slayer stands as proof that even within the spectacle of popular culture, profound philosophical reflections on truth, identity, and perception can emerge, and that, perhaps, in chaos itself, lies the truest form of understanding.

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