BERSERK

ILLUSTRATIONS FILE
INTERVIEW

Translation by Puella (2015)

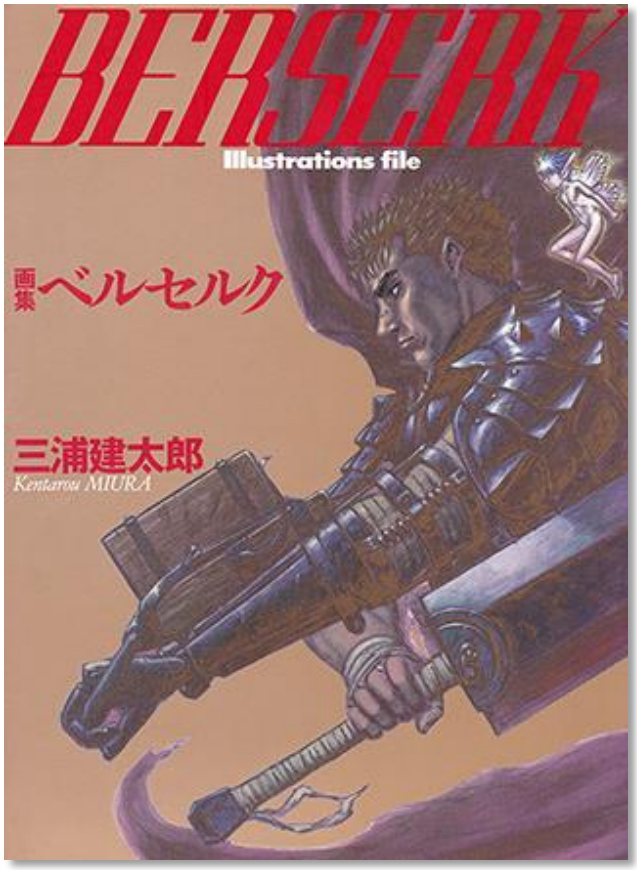
The following interview was originally printed in the Berserk Illustrations File in 1997.

Q: "Berserk" is your first work, right?

Kentarou Miura: Mmm, yeah I guess, though I made my debut by drawing one-shots.

Q: When you started the serialization, did you already plan the manga at this scale?

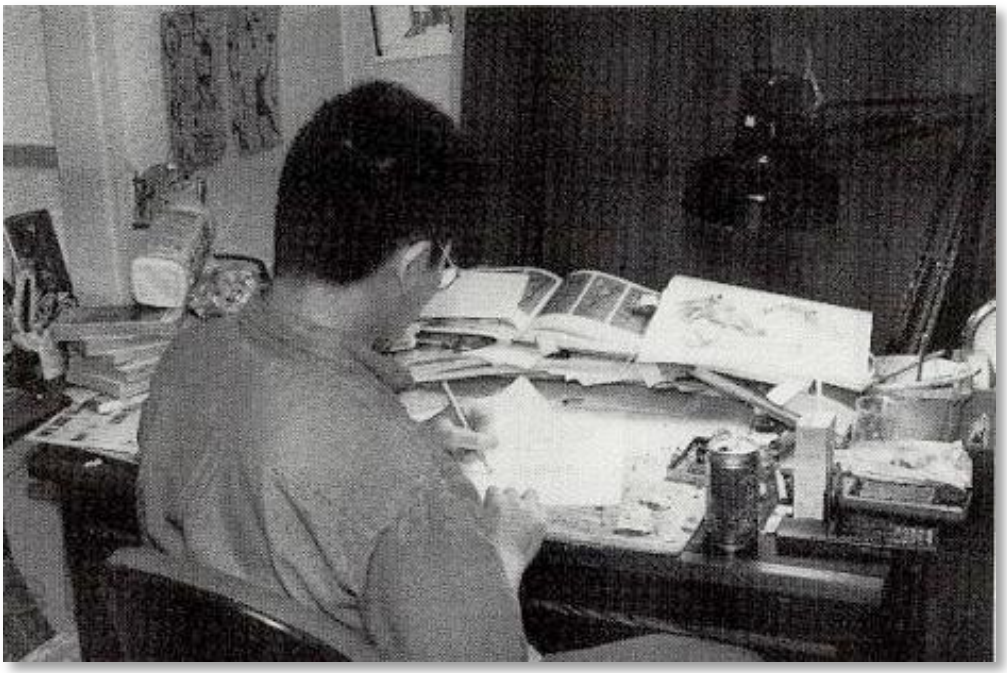
Miura: No, I didn't. At first I didn't have any advanced plan. I just thought to do a shônen fantasy manga with a dark hero because the manga of mine that had received a prize was published in a shônen magazine. A hero that suited shônen magazines. And well, there weren't many fantasy manga at that time. If I had to name any... just "Bastard!!"? So I thought about going for a niche genre... But that's all. I couldn't see further than that. It was my first serialization not based on an original work, I didn't know what to do! *laughs* First of all, I focused on creating an atypical hero.



Berserk Illustrations File, published 1997 by Hakusensha.

Q: Did you always have a prototype of Guts, of that kind of hero, in your mind?

Miura: Well, I have loved Science Fiction and Fantasy since my school days. Some of my doodles from back then are similar to him. I can't say they're the prototype for Guts, but I was able to create him by merging them together: The initial image of the knight was nothing more than a black knight with an artificial arm. Other things were inspired by various sources, for example, the appearance of the character came from Science Fiction. Basically, each element came from something different.



Q: What about the name, Guts? Had it been in your mind for a long time?

Miura: No, *laughs* I came up with it like for the other things, when I barely managed to start doing my work. Likewise, I thought about a name for a shônen

manga hero, and I thought that a voiced sound (sonant)[1] would be good for it. Besides, "Guts" sounded somehow like a German name. I liked it as well, so I took it. There already existed many cool names or names that went well with Fantasy stuff. It was simply because I thought the name would suit a shônen manga at that time — nothing more. However, there's one thing I learned later: the German word meaning "cat" sounds like "Katte" or "Gatte", which sounds similar to "Guts". I thought it's also good that it can bear some atmosphere that evokes a "wildcat". I learned about this coincidence a long time afterwards though.

Q: In terms of style, what specific things did you focus on when you created the huge sword?

Miura: As for the related materials, so many sources were mixed together. The arm canon, the big sword, the outfit of a black knight and the one-eyed man... I'd say they form a kind of image. The canon and the sword are my signature items. It's because I'm from the generation that was impacted directly by "Hokuto no ken". The idea is the most important part of the manga. It was a time when the idea was considered to be the core of it, preceding the story or the characters. In "Hokuto no Ken", Hokuto Shinken was a lot more important than Kenshiro's personality. The idea of Hokuto Shinken — once attacked, they explode. That's why it blew us away.

So, to come up with a novel or fantastic idea was a trend among us mangaka at that time. To me, a mangaka should think of, should be able to think of such things. I milked my brain. Finally, I came up with the idea of a huge sword or a huge thing...

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[1] This refers to a specific type of sound in the study of phonetics. It's a very basic concept in Japanese but not so in English.

Q: Now, the rest is about the gun and the cannon.

Miura: At first, I just decided on the image of a "bowgun". As for the sword, my initial idea was a very sharp sword, like a Japanese sword. However, I thought it would be ideal to take a few more steps from that initial idea. A bowgun with a cannon. Speaking of cannons, fantasy manga were drawn, at that time, in a time setting before the age when cannons appeared. So, my final touch was to include the "age of cannons" in my world.



Sketching, then inking. The solitary work goes on.



At the time, he was drawing Episode 92.



The various assistants' tools.

Q: As for "the age of cannons" you mentioned, it means you set up the time setting of your world around that era?

Miura: Surprisingly, it's not like that. At first, I had various thoughts. There are rough things in the very early Middle Ages, but brilliant things like the Palace of Versailles are far after that. In the end, I created one age that looked like it spanned from the early Middle Ages to the end of the Middle Ages in Europe. For example, the ball in Midland is, I think, close to the end of it. But the story of the lord comes long before that time. So, European readers might say "what the hell is this?" Well, I think the way foreigners see us, Japanese people, matches this case perfectly: "hey, ninjas!" It's Ok because I just draw my work to please Japanese people, I don't have any strategy for the global market. *laughs*

Q: The details are quite elaborate. You must have a lot of material and so on, right?

Miura: It's because I want to draw images of the Middle Ages in Europe. I've collected quite a lot of material, like images. When I first started my work, I actually racked my brain to decide on whether to go for a historical manga, faithfully following History, or to do a fantasy manga. Now, it's been helpful that I studied History a lot at that time. Some historical elements are taken as they are. But in some parts, the age of Dracula and that of Jeanne d'Arc are set together a little bit. In that regard, at some point I thought it would be good to make the characters wander around Europe.

Q: Why did you go for a fantasy manga, not just following History?

Miura: Precisely speaking, it's because I thought the range of my imagination might become narrow if I already depended on History while I was still young. For example, Mr. Mitsuteru Yokoyama has currently been drawing a historical manga,

but he drew "Tetsujin 28" and "Babel II" in his early career. And Mr. Shotaro Ishinomori has drawn many informative manga recently. But without "Cyborg 009," one of his early works, he wouldn't be what he is now... So I preferred to bet on my imagination while I'm young rather than to do a historical or informative manga. I want to work on these kinds of manga in my late career.

Q: Is there something you used as a reference when you created Berserk's world with your imagination?



Miura: There are many things. Movies like "Hellraiser" and "The Name of the Rose". I've liked Escher for a very long time. Well, I think Berserk readers would already know this kind of thing from "behind the scene" features... It's also inspired by "Grimm's Fairy Tales" and so on.

Q: Using your imagination, did you create the whole world, etc. in *"clicks"* (very easily and quickly, like snapping a picture with a camera)?

Miura: It's what I should do from now on *laughs*. I've just done *"tada!"* images so far. (Miura answers using onomatopoeia since the interviewer used one.)

Q: What about the range of the world?

Miura: Griffith became one of the God Hand at last in the youth segment, which was mainly about the human world. What to say, non-human things will show up more often from now on. In other words, I'd say it's extended to a world covering things like gods, demons...

Miura: However, this is just what I try not to go with. If they are defined with words like gods, demons or something, it feels like the world is limited, revealing everything, and there's no room for extension. Anyway, these things are kind of what humans created. And (they are) what humans' spirits are materialized as. This is a question like "who was first between the chicken and the egg?" though. All of them are a mirror of humans. I think their image should be no more than that. I only want to use them as an element that the readers can sympathize with.

Q: As for the details, there's one more thing. What about martial arts? I think these kinds of scenes are important in Berserk.

Miura: I like it very much but I haven't collected much material for it. I just have some images of samurai and knights. When it comes to action scenes, I want to draw them realistically. A harmony of reality and fabrication. But it *is* hard to harmonize them.

As for the image of Guts and the image of the sword he uses, sometimes he crushes small objects with one slash. In this case, I think there's no real sword-fighting skill that matches it exactly. So I want to collect information to some extent, but I don't want to let the images that come up to my mind initially be damaged by it. I decided to use the best balance between informative manga about

martial arts and animations featuring machines. I want to put priority on images, even those for which I'd say "I won't do such a thing". I mean in "Hokuto no Ken", for example, sky-flying-like-jumps may be too much but "poking enemies and they explode" could be accepted. I have no idea about things after that. *laughs*

Q: But I think martial arts are quite complicated... Though Berserk is a world of swords and fantasy, Griffith seemed to try something like a joint-locking technique during the Guts vs. Griffith fight...?

Miura: Ahh, I don't know if it's considered to be on a level that ordinary people can recognize. In fact, I have many people, around me, who are absorbed in martial arts. Some of them are actual martial artists. I find myself quite a big lover of it but when I'm with them, I get to think, "Ahh, I'm just an amateur, indeed." *laughs* Maybe I could manage to draw a martial arts manga, mobilizing all the knowledge I have, but I know it wouldn't work for them. Compared to them, I'm far from being an expert. Since I know it, I leave this kind of thing to others.

Q: But didn't you get to like martial arts a lot through their influence?

Miura: Yes, to some extent. But what I ultimately like are things like manga and story. It's not like I love martial arts themselves. However, sometimes we have drama-like-martial arts. The recent match of Holyfield VS Tyson, this *is* a drama, I even shed tears. It was amazing. I watched it from a video that a friend of mine recorded though. When the two men weighed, their bodies were unsurprisingly great. No heavyweight boxers could be like them. *laughs* It's a bit awkward to say, but I took Holyfield's body as a model for this Berserk episode. The abdominal muscles are divided lengthways. I've never seen center-divided abdominal muscles. They can't be built with common training.

Q: I see, but what you like most: reading manga and drama, it's quite linked to your work. Do you have any hobby that is unrelated to manga creation?

Miura: As for my current hobby, it's playing games — that's all. Because I don't have to spend a long time on it. I've been absorbed in simulation games these days. I also like girl games and action games. Well, I usually like popular games.

Q: You do it quite well. Is it for diversion?

Miura: Yes. I play games about one hour a day. But it's enough, considering some games are finished in two hours. You know, that's the way. I have piled up some games. I plan to start playing them when my holidays come. Actually, I bought a Nintendo 64 recently.

Q: How do you allocate time for your hobby and work? Can you tell us what your schedule is for one episode's deadline?

Miura: As for my usual daily schedule, I get up around 7– 8PM. I start to work around 8:30 – 9PM. I work and then eat. And then I work again until the next break at 3AM, when I take one meal. Hmm, until 3:30AM I watch a video that I recorded on that day while eating. And then I get back to work. After that, I have my last meal at 6AM and work until around 12PM. Until 1, 2 or 3PM at the latest and until 11 – 11AM at the earliest. That's my normal working routine.

Q: Do you set your norma precisely as well?

Miura: Yes, I do. If I can't work a daily norma, it's carried out to the next day... Generally, I fix one day more than the schedule as a surplus. That's why I have no holiday sometimes. But without "the surplus", I'll be often late. When I allocate the same amount of time for sketching and inking, the former is relatively quickly done but the latter usually takes more time.

Q: How many pages do you draw each day?

Miura: I sketch around 6 pages a day. One month is taken up with this workload. Considering I have two deadlines a month, it means I only draw. I create a certain amount of storyboards at another time so it's not included in the two weeks creating period. However, I've managed well thanks to the great role of Mr. Shimada, my editor.

Q: At what stage do you usually have trouble?

Miura: I'd surely say it's drawing. The hardest time is just before I go to bed. Precisely speaking, it's at 19 hours before 6AM (around 11AM). Around that time I get distracting thoughts while I work. Sometimes my work doesn't proceed. That's why I set some extra days. However, that doesn't happen when I sketch.

Q: What's your working type in this kind of time? Do you concentrate on your work or do you work while doing other things?

Miura: The latter is my type. I watch TV. I watch TV or listen to music. But I work on storyboards with no sound. All other off-work activities bring me some kind of luck.

Q: We usually don't pay much attention to it. Watching TV is just a part of our downtime. Do you watch TV like watching recorded videos?

Miura: Yes, mostly. When a friend of mine is playing a game at my side, I can't say the noise doesn't bother me at all. But my work proceeds when he's there.



Q: How about a must-have item? Is there a thing that you always have when you work?

Miura: Yes. Well, I need much water or drinks. I always prepare this kind of thing (mineral water or other drinks in a PET bottle).

Q: Does it include coffee or something as well?

Miura: Precisely speaking, it's coffee. However, I get stomachaches after a while because I drink so much coffee. So I take tea instead. If I also have a problem with tea, I shift to water. If I get better, I take coffee again. And then I shift to tea again and then to water again... this is how it goes. *laughs*

Q: As long as your stomach is okay, basically, coffee is your favorite...

Miura: Yes, but I drink it too much.

Q: Do you have occasions to drink liquor or not at all?

Miura: I can enjoy drinking but not much... Anyway, I have no occasion for it.

Q: What about your holidays?

Miura: I have no holidays. For the past year, no holidays at all. I finally have 2 weeks' holidays now but it will be used to look for a house. I should move.

Q: I guess you're hardly exposed to sunlight...

Miura: I see the morning sun through the veranda. I come out to the veranda and the morning sun is so bright that it dazzles my eyes. I can concentrate best on my work under the light of this lamp. I don't see the sunlight. I'm a vampire!

Q: Do you do exercise?

Miura: I do pushups or work on my abs whenever I feel like it. But it's occasional.

Q: You're healthy despite this lifestyle. Is it Ok for you to lead your life this way?

Miura: I think my "rhythm" enables me to manage it. I'm a mangaka-type and suitable to be a mangaka. Though it's hard to work without holidays, I don't have much trouble leading my own regulated life. Instead, I'm not very good at concentrating intensively on work when there's little time left until the deadline.

Q: You said you're suitable to be a mangaka. When did you first know you wanted to be a mangaka?

Miura: It's so long ago that I can't even make an approximate estimation. I guess it's around my kindergarten years since I drew for the first time in my life before I entered an elementary school. I really don't remember the very first moment. All I

can remember is that I drew manga first on a notebook for university students during the second grade in elementary school.

It was some kind of revelation. To please others or to receive praise by drawing was the happiest thing in my youth. I guess "old habits die hard". My family moved quite often at that time. My drawings enabled me to make new friends in the schools I shifted to. Now that I think of it, it was a time when I already established my identity as a drawer in a way. *laughs*

Q: Do you mean that your childhood dream or hobby eventually directed you to become a professional mangaka?

Miura: It was after I entered high school. Before that, I only focused on visuals and I felt like drawing manga or pictures. So I had an ability to draw but wasn't zealous in building a story. In an art class at my high school, I made close friends with all those who were interested in movies or music. However, I got to realize there was some kind of emptiness in me, in getting along with them.

Meanwhile I was one of a group of five friends whose goal was to be mangaka. All of them had their own specialty other than drawing manga, like playing the guitar for example. We influenced and introduced each other saying things like "the ongoing movie is enjoyable" or "it's good to read this book"... "Otherwise, you won't be able to be a mangaka;" this represented well how the group was.

There was a thing that today's high school students can't understand: in my days, friends were also some kind of rivals. So I wanted to look great to the others. What should I do to look great? I had to watch movies and read books. Repeating this, I learned that manga isn't only about drawing. I acquired the ability to conceive a story while I was a university student — precisely speaking, when I entered for a prize in my university days.

Q: Did you have any experience as an assistant before?

Miura: No.

Q: Then, did you learn structuring, paneling... all by yourself?

Miura: Yes, I learned many things through trial and error in the 5 friends-group. I had no mentor.

Q: Do you have any favorite mangaka who has influenced you?

Miura: Yes, I've been influenced by numerous manga through all the ages. There are so many that I can't even mention one and its creator specifically. My current style was established by being influenced more and more over time, like a snowball.

Q: Could you tell us a manga that you like as a reader, excluding the ones that have influenced you?

Miura: I enjoy stories through the drawings themselves. I like manga so much that I'm always influenced by it. So, I'd say I like all the manga I read.

Q: Now, you ARE a pro-mangaka whose work is read by everybody. From now on, will you create your work with the intention to please the readers? Or on the contrary, will you create it without taking this kind of intention into account?

Miura: I don't have such intentions at all. I've been drawing for myself, which is combined, somewhere along the line, with "some parts of it are for the readers".

Q: Considering all the things you mentioned, I guess you're interested in a wide range of subjects. However, you've been absorbed in a single work:

Berserk. You may have many themes other than those of this manga that you'd like to draw, am I right?

Miura: I have many things to realize with my work, but have no time for them. *laughs* I work on Sci-Fi or some manuscripts from time to time. I really need some leisure time.

Q: What about other genres like videos, movies or animations...? Are you inclined to try some of them?

Miura: No, not at all. I think it's because of my friends. I mean I want to stick to my fields since I have friends who are brilliant in other fields. Besides, I want to do my best on my current work above all. Berserk is my first good serialization. I'll be sad if I can't complete it while I set about doing other works.

Q: Regarding Berserk that you want to concentrate on, how do you want to develop the story from now on?

Miura: First of all, I want to add more female characters. Since having only a "man's world" is not well balanced, one or two new female characters are needed. And important new characters should be introduced as well. They are related to Guts in a way similar to the Band of the Falcon, instead of taking their place. Staying alone is too hard for Guts. However, these characters aren't as close to him as the Band of the Falcon. They can be rather hostile with him. I've conceived some characters with whom the story development can be varied.

Q: I can't wait to see the new characters appear. I'll look forward to the upcoming episodes. Thank you very much for telling us many interesting things.

[December 4th, 1996, from Kentarou Miura's studio]



POSTFACE

"Artbook" – this is a very holy word to those who draw for a living. One of my friends was an illustrator years ago, so I know full well that it's quite a big strain when a book filled only with one's drawings is showcased in bookstores. However, I was lucky and had the opportunity, so I felt I shouldn't create anything that might be unworthy of the word "Artbook". Not to be sorry to illustrators, I made efforts so my work wouldn't end up as just a manga-related mook[2] while having the honor of using the word! As a result, this "BERSERK Artbook" was created.

How do you find it? Are there reactions that an artbook might elicit? I worked on it steadily, increasing my drawing workload for half a year. I'm sure that all the staff exerted themselves to make it into a guide book that shows a bit of Berserk's world as well as serving as an artbook. However, I'm just shameful because... I didn't expect that even the work I did during my elementary school days would be inserted. What's more, the interview... I'm a poor public speaker. Was what I said conveyed as well as I thought?

Did I say useless things? A mangaka should bet his everything only on his manga.

It's okay that I reveal myself in my manga, but it's not good that I let my personal details leak out little by little through other sources. Within my work, I leave everything to the readers.

This was my thought. Anyway, I've done it. I pushed myself almost too hard.

My feeling is something like "Okay, now I give everything up! Look, look, this is me ♡". However, if some people like it, let's take it well. I would expect to go

[2] *A hybrid between a magazine and a book*

through this kind of shameful experience again in some years. It will also be also a token of the fact Berserk's going well.

Thank you very much for your purchase. Please keep enjoying Berserk.

I also thank all the staff for their hard work.

Kentarou Miura, January 1997.



SPECIAL THANKS

The translation of this interview, one of the most informative of Miura's career, was made possible by many loyal Berserk fans and members of Skullknight.NET, who offered their incredibly generous support over the years.

If you would like to see more interviews like this, please consider supporting our ongoing Berserk translation efforts at Patreon.com/SKnet.

-Walter

