

Laura Johnson

<http://reconfigurations.blogspot.com/2008/11/laura-johnson-another-world.html>

Another World

This comic is an interweaving and interpretation of the cosmologies presented by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, Neil Gaiman in the *Sandman* series, and Philip Pullman in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

My original concept was inspired mostly by the passage from Book II from *Paradise Lost*:

...Chaos Umpire sits,
And by decision more imbroiles the fray
By which he Reigns: next him high Arbiter
Chance governs all. Into this wilde Abyss, [910]
The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,
Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt
Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,
Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain [915]
His dark materials to create more Worlds,
Into this wild Abyss the warie fiend
Stood on the brink of Hell and look'd a while,
Pondering his Voyage: for no narrow frith
He had to cross.

I was intrigued by the idea of primordial Chaos, and imagined a plethora of universes, a plethora of Edens, from which Satan could choose his mortal avatar, Eve. In my original comic concept, I was going to have Satan visit more than a dozen different Edens, each with its own Adam and Eve (or in one case, Adam and his identical twin/gay lover), but I just ran out of time.

While reading *Paradise Lost*, I was completely taken in by the character of Lucifer, and I decided to take a step beyond Milton and make him a wholly sympathetic character instead of a mere sympathetic villain. To complete the transformation, I drew him as an angel, the only difference being the red wings. I also gave him a just cause—the creation of the Republic of Heaven, as described in Pullman's trilogy. Satan and the angels who fell from Heaven with him are unjustly-persecuted freedom fighters, who need mortal help to reclaim Heaven and wrest it from the fist of The Name, an angelic dictator (the term "The Name" is used by Gaiman).

To enlist the aid of mortals, Satan must tempt them to original sin, but the exact nature of that sin is unclear. Not even Satan truly knows what he's looking for, much like both the protagonists of *His Dark Materials* and Gaiman's *Lucifer Morningstar* (he stayed in his dead-end job for aeons!). In the end, Satan realizes that Lyra and Will are his Adam and

Eve, and that he's been going about the thing all wrong. Instead of looking at ONE Eden, he should have been looking at ALL of them simultaneously. I'm not sure I got this point across in the comic.

Most of my visual choices were made based on the various artists who illustrated Gaiman's work. I gave Satan red wings so that he could pass through many transformations and still remain identifiable, much like Morpheus with his star-like eyes. A friend half-jokingly suggested putting a lighthouse in, since I already appeared to have appropriated the kitchen sink for my mega-conglomeration of a project. It was actually a brilliant idea, so I copped it and *The Lighthouse at the Edge of Chaos* came into being. The lighthouse is useful for two reasons: it's visually dramatic, and it serves to identify the edge of Hell from all the other worlds that I draw.

The moral of my story is that the knowledge of the truth, as conveyed by Dust, is a prerequisite for Original Sin...or perhaps the knowledge of the truth is Original Sin, I can't decide. Dust, or angels, are actually fallen angels under Satan. As I was drawing page four, I originally wanted to have the group of angels in the fourth panel shrinking/dissolving into Dust in Satan's hand (panel five), but the visual effect of red feathers falling was too appealing to abandon.

In sum, the main elements pulled from each work:

- *Paradise Lost*: character of Satan, search for Eden/Adam/Eve, desire to depose God, setting (border between Hell and Chaos), Satan as ruler of the fallen, title ("Another World" comes from the argument of Book II)
- *His Dark Materials*: multiple universes/Edens, angels as Dust, idea of Republic of Heaven, Lyra and Will as characters, sexual/romantic love and/or knowledge as Original Sin
- *The Sandman*: look of Satan (more or less), "The Name" as God, concept of cat universe, all visual elements, theme of the search from Morpheus' search for a new steward for Hell

Everything was hand-drawn on a Wacos Intuos III tablet using Photoshop Elements 4. I sketched first, then inked with the equivalent of a black calligraphy pen. The color was done with that same pen, but with a larger nib, and with opacity set to 85 percent in order to mimic the effect of water-based markers. All in-comic text is in Tekton Pro font, bold.

Laura Johnson is a writer/drawer/cookie-eater-for-hire based in south Denver. Woefully overeducated and fabulously underjobbed, she spends her time testing the upper limits of her hearing (18khz, bishes) and expanding her esoteric survival-Korean vocabulary (recent additions: honeycomb, liquid, nosebleed). You can send her electronic mail at laura.ch.jo@gmail.com.