

Satan Lost

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About *Devilman: Crybaby*

There are many stories that stem out of the Bible (and the Abrahamic religions in general). Noah's ark, Sodom and Gomorrah, David versus Goliath, and many more. Yet, every story needs a beginning. Not just for the Abrahamic, but many other forms of human's cultures start with a creation. In the Bible, the Qur'an, the Torah, we have the story of Adam and Eve.

The story of these first two humans might not be an unfamiliar tale to you. Even if you don't know the full context, you would likely at the very least have the gist of it. That Adam is the first man, and Eve, his wife, is the first woman. That Satan disobeyed God when he thought himself to be higher than man and was casted to Hell and be the force of evil we know today. That Adam and Eve eventually succumbed to Satan's temptation and ate the apple from the garden of Eden and was forced to be casted out of Heaven to this very Earth. It's, in a way, technically, a tale as old as time.

English poet John Milton, a name which should ring familiar amongst literature enjoyers, wrote in the 17th century an epic poem titled *Paradise Lost*. An epic that pertains to the Fall of Man but more so in Satan's perspective and retrospective. Milton exemplified these Biblical characters into new heights, especially with Satan. Casting the devil in a light that many deem to be more complex and sympathetic. However you decide to interpret Milton's text, those concerned with Biblical studies would most likely deem Milton's story as an important work in understanding religious stories.

Before Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*, 14th century poet Dante Alighieri had written *Divine Comedy*. The narrative portrays, in a somewhat self-insert manner, Dante himself journeying through the three believed Christian afterworlds; Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Dante's work too was just as important as his narrative paints how the journey of a soul through the afterlife going into those vividly painted afterworlds can be understood.

References and inspirations taken from the Abrahamic, or more commonly Biblical, didn't end with Milton and Dante. Throughout the centuries, you should be able to find Christianity, Islam, or Judaism being a point of reference for the creation of a writing. It never dies, never will, until today, I believe that someone out there has internet pages open in regard to the Bible and its components wanting to understand where he could take his story. It's possible that they would have chosen either Milton or Dante as a point of reference for writers who have taken the Biblical into their story, but I propose someone different, someone more in vogue to our generations today, someone named Hideaki Anno, the creator of the anime series, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.

If *Paradise Lost* and *Divine Comedy* sounds unfamiliar to you, I hope that the mention of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* doesn't. Hideaki Anno created a mecha anime whose main themes borrowed many religious elements, including Christian, to scatter symbolisms throughout the story. Arguably, the most known borrowed element was *Evangelion's* iterations of Judgment Day in the series' movie followup, *The End of Evangelion*. Although *Evangelion* didn't only borrow from Christian and Biblical elements, the elements of Christianity and Biblical are still the most known amongst pop culture.

The success of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* shows that such a story presented to modern audiences has a chance of reaching such a high peak of interest. More than twenty years after it was first released, the world's love for *Evangelion* has never fully subsided. You don't even have to ask a diehard anime fan to find the possibility that the person you're asking has watched *Evangelion*, and may have a strong opinion whether it's toward liking or disliking it, and that opinion has the chance of the person mentioning the aspect of religious elements in the series.

Nevertheless, it's easy for us to assume that creating a story iterating in respect to elements that can be found in the Abrahamic religions would not be something easy. If it was, we would have more Milton, Dante, and Anno in our pop cultures. A story like this isn't the same as a story that *just* pertains to religion, it's *religious*. Yet, in 2018, director Masaaki Yuasa with studio *Science SARU*, alongside *Netflix*, brought us *Devilman: Crybaby*.

Originally created by prolific Japanese mangaka, Go Nagai, in 1972, the manga *Devilman* tells the story of Akira Fudo who's reunited with his childhood friend, Ryo Asuka, to save the world from the forces of evil, of demons. Akira, after attending a depraved and corrupt party of Black Sabbath, was possessed by the arc-demon, Amon. But, because of Akira's pure heart, instead of succumbing to the demon's corruption, he merged with Amon to become something in-between, a Devilman. As a Devilman, Akira fights for the good in a world where it's rapidly becoming harder to be one.

Devilman: Crybaby, being a faithful adaptation of the manga, condensed the fifty three chapters into ten episodes. The story initially builds itself as a tale of a heroic journey. Akira is that prime example of a hero; a chosen one who, in spite of the circumstance that could at any time bring annihilation to his heroic status, stands stall to the good and the pure. Not even his first big loss after his humanity, that of his parents, was enough to push him off. Nonetheless, Akira Fudo is still a crybaby.

Crack of who the true enemy is begins to form clearer once we reach episode six. In luring out a track athlete suspected of being a demon, Ryo let the transformed promising young star run rampage across the stadium all the while broadcasting what's happening to the rest of Japan, essentially fearmongering the populations rather than protecting them through the veil of ignorance. In the next episode, the consequences are immediately felt, Japan is in ruin.

Seemingly mirroring a state where before divine's retribution comes, the ruins portrayed in episode seven is immediately paid off at the end when a direct reference to Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt happens against the vessels full of demons at one of Japan's oceans. The end of that episode shows that the presence of a divine figure, a God, exists as clearly as demons do in *Devilman: Crybaby*.

With episode eight breaking Akira completely because of the death of his guardians, his truer parents, and their son as well as the complete betrayal of Ryo framing Akira, the Devilman, as the mastermind behind all of the demons, we, as an audience, would assume that the two remaining episodes would be about redemption, about victory, like how a Biblical story would most commonly go. Episode nine delivered on that, partially. Akira is able to convince a crowd witch hunting, hungry for blood, to find reason and hope amongst the world's brink of total chaos. Yet, what good is one man touching the souls of several men when uncounted numbers of other men roam the roads dirty and ever dirtier than ever? Exactly. The price that Akira has to pay for being able to bring the crowd to his side was to find the side who has been with him ever since the beginning to be impaled upon sticks and spears, one limbs to another separated from each other, with the head, with its lifeless eyes, claiming the possessed prize of the savages that we can comfortably label such because we live almost in complete ignorant that they might be us someday, especially with the world we're living in today...

Episode ten, the last, the climax, is the most religious in tone. Akira Fudo alongside all of the world's remaining Devilman fight against Ryo Asuka who regained his memory of who he really is, Satan himself. In an intense fight where Satan warned the Devilman that it's a fight where he wouldn't end up alive; Satan held his word. Akira Fudo, split in half, lifeless, unresponsive to Satan—no, Ryo, calls upon him. And as Satan looks to the stars which really are just the fragments of the destruction of the universe that is yet to reach him, God smote the wretched being as he was shedding his first true tear amongst the glistening crimson sea of blood.

The images of Akira and Ryo's pasts are repeated, repeated, and repeated; faster, faster, faster; until the dying cat's death.

What I see *Devilman: Crybaby's* story being is somewhat similar to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The biggest and most obvious parallel is that they both tell the story of Satan. On one hand, *Paradise Lost* concerns Satan at the very early on when he still has larger than life spirits to gather the forces of Hell's outcast to rebel against God and demand authority. Overall, Satan and the devils and demons in Milton's have stronger, better traits. God too, when he only had Adam and Eve as the only humans to watch over, put so much care into them, as did his subjects that stayed loyal to him. On the other hand, *Devilman: Crybaby* shows a portrayal of the offsprings of Satan being basely depraved, weak without guidance of a united leader, until Ryo was there for them. God, too, in the series, came only after a certain point where humanity was in shambles, and especially after Satan was on his last strength. The two are polar opposites of each other.

It's to be remembered that John Milton has been suggested to be a devout Catholic, therefore his creation of *Paradise Lost* was, I would say, a praise to God. While *Devilman: Crybaby* I doubt was made by the most devout men of God, if at all. Nihilism, pessimism, cynicality: those are the main essences which build *Devilman: Crybaby* Biblical tale-telling. One might argue that *Evangelion* had done the same thing, but the three movies following *The End of Evangelion* shows that Hideaki Anno's intention was to portray positivity. Episode nine and ten held no punches and it would certainly stick to many viewers long after the series ended, wondering about various religious and spiritual existential questions inside their head. Within those many possible questions, I want to ask one; but why?

In the end, I can't contend that my assessment is the objective truth. Because thus, the assessment is but a contention claimed from the comfort of the outside. In here, I wouldn't dare myself to write the dread I might have felt in dwelling on the hypothetical philosophizing of God turning against humanity. It's enough that *Devilman: Crybaby* implied it.

Still, when the time comes that a new story in this kind of caliber comes to us, should we find ourselves sitting down for that?
