

Altarwise by LED Light: Trying to Catch Some Z's at 3 A.M., Hades Time, Abaddon Bites His Hangnail

by [Peter Dreyer](#) (April 2022)



Ya es hora

Ya es hora (Plate 80 from *Los Caprichos*), Francisco Goya, 1797-98

*Altarwise by owl-light in the half-way house
The gentleman lay graveward with his furies;
Abaddon in the hangnail cracked from Adam . . .
–Dylan Thomas*

*A large ox costs only a penny in Hades.
–Callimachus (Alexandria, 3d century BCE),*

Tempo: *Allegro con brio*

If what well-meaning demons' pity tells
is true, mortals, impossible to teach,
inhabit a parallel parcel of bright hells,
instructed by fancies they beseech,
clutching at an open bar each by each,
like *Hirudo medicinalis*, the doctors' leech.

Scapegoating *sub specie saeculi* is my thing
of *tutti quanti* in their worldly station,
especially the sanctimonious to zing,
dishing up from just deserts their ration
and winking out many for damnation,
which calls for triage calculation:

How often must there earthquakes be,
deserts replace lakes, church charabancs
plunge dense-packed, with shrieking brakes,
into ravines, rug rats sicken, no thanks
to birthday cakes, invaders roast in Zelensky
–cocktailed tanks, and whited sepulchers line up
like taxi ranks?

Holy Willies are fit for demons' jokes,

getting their sick kicks on Route 666,
too unfunny to laugh off their yokes,
a bootless, bloody bunch of bossy blokes,
forever scrounging for a cheap-thrills fix
from St. Beelzebub's communion tricks.

Oxen cost a penny in Hell, an old bogart
claims, cows, tuppence-boons to inspire
the Hotel Hades' guests! An *Ausfahrt*
absent though, if beef or milk you desire,
you'll have to purchase them in Mr. Fire
's boutique—to which few aspire.

Coda

Did God create the universe *in error*?
Is what we note about us a mistake?
Good sense rejects this thirteenth juror,
a shill for fraud Abaddon, that fake,
may Ockham shave his quarky wake!
Three cheers for Pyrrhonism's sake!
"There is no God and Mary is his mother,"
says Lowell, in "For George Santayana."

Notes: Abaddon, a highly cultivated demon, like Google, knows many (all?) languages; on the spelling of Zelensky with "yy," see Benjamin Dreyer's opinion [here](#). That God might have created the world by mistake is suggested in a story by the late Stanisław Lem; Ockham: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occam%27s_razor; Pyrrhonism: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyrrho>; Robert Lowell's poem "For George Santayana" is from his collection *Life Studies* (1959).

[Table of Contents](#)

Peter Richard Dreyer is a South African American writer. He is the author of *A Beast in View* (London: André Deutsch), *The Future of Treason* (New York: Ballantine), *A Gardener Touched with Genius: The Life of Luther Burbank* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan; rev. ed., Berkeley: University of California Press; new, expanded ed., Santa Rosa, CA: Luther Burbank Home & Gardens), *Martyrs and Fanatics: South Africa and Human Destiny* (New York: Simon & Schuster; London: Secker & Warburg), and most recently the novel *Isacq* (Charlottesville, VA: Hardware River Press, 2017).

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](https://twitter.com/NERIconoclast)