

El Diablo Sabe Mucho & More

by [Jack D. Harvey](#) (August 2024)



Get thee Behind me, Satan (Ilya Repin, 1895)

El Diablo Sabe Mucho

Evil is he
and ever on the *qui vive*
anytime, anyplace, anyhow
to increase his kingdom.

Arriving in Spain,
the Devil spoke devilishly
good Spanish, riding upstanding
on a coal-black horse, clip, clop

through the mountains
of Castile and León.

Spoke all of it,
from *joda tu madre*
to Calderón and beyond;
why should he not?
Part of the job.

Careful as a cat
on hot bricks,
after brief palaver
pounced on
the unwary, the naive,
the foolish, the clever;
by his constraint
stopped in their tracks
and bound over
to eternal damnation.

Whatever you say,
the Prince of Darkness is able;
whatever you know of him
not enough to define
his presence in any aspect
of his being, in any aspect
of what most assuredly he is not,
wicked tail to cloven hoof.

Unsavory adversary
more or less,
of all that's good and kind,
but in the mythology of mankind
we must admit
he's the best kind of adversary,
fearless and resourceful,
brutal and subtle to entrap us

and we're lazy,
we mortals, some of us,
most of us, every chance we get
taking the easy lazy way
never eager to pay the freight
for our brief sojourn here on earth.

So can we blame the Devil
for digging into our accidia?
Sloth by any name
makes us vulnerable;
fundamentally
one fatal moment
is all it takes.

On the other hand
Adam and Eve
greedy for change
got kicked out of the garden.
The race grew
in the fullness of time
to an assembly
on the plain of Shinar;
occasion of the Tower of Babel
man's presumption
and God's anger and correction.

One tongue,
understood by all,
turns
to the twittering
of birds.

That'll do it.

So we'll leave Satan
where we found him,

in Spain, on a horse
cantering along,
talking persuasive talk
to some prospect for the pit,
his mastery, his cozening words
not confined to one tongue;
he speaks all tongues
created by God above
thundering down incoherence
that far-off day
on the plain of Shinar.

What does Old Clootie care
about the discord of tongues?
He's got them all
he understands them all
and when he speaks
people listen;
the wicked and the lazy
those in-between
in sudden surmise
know where they're going.

Become part
of the rota of Hell
their anguished eternal complaints
in a storm of multitudinous speech
heard and ignored;
the Devil doesn't give a damn
for the damned or
by God's inexorable command
their twittering discrepant tongues.

Riddle Me A Riddle

Who is Athena's owl to
solve the unsolvable problem?
To crack the
unspeakable code
with his beak?
Who is the intelligent?
Who is the secular ivy
climbing the walls of monasteries,
creeping green up the columns
of pagan temples?
Where the spirit of
Phidias, of Augustine ends,
there the permanence, the
seemly beauty, immovable, of stone.

In the great American west,
inside the bunkhouse
the dancing fiddler plays
Mozart's music backwards
to its original
pure and simple shell;
easy as pie for his
expert supple hands
and fingers.
His audience loves the mystery
of his skill
more than the music;

that is all right.

John the Baptist,
pure and simple,
lost his head;
mother and daughter wanted it
sitting on a plate
and they got it
and while it sat,

we saw,
as in a dream,
the walls, the bulwarks
of his magnitude fall away,
saw his power evade us and
surround us, like the air.

John, waiting on the one to come,
the Savior, the solver
of the only certain problem,
Himself a solution seeming
clear as the stars above
and as remote, though
He walked among us.

Did He save and solve
or only create faraway
white escarpments, holy
places of refuge
we can never reach?
We see
His violet brow
coming across the water
of the Sea of Galilee,
we see His agony
on the cross,
we know from the bible
some few details
of His life;
in the simple and elegant
flow of parables and miracles
we discern His truth, but
do we know from Him
any more than we know
from the dancing fiddler?

Our ardently desired solution

to the mystery,
our trials, our travails,
no more, no less than
too much time on our hands,
too much useless rind
in our heads, so
we can't find our way
to the simple world
where there is no owl
and no problem.

Only the sweet music
of the fiddler filling
our brief days until
he, too, plunges
in the shadowy ocean

and that is enough.

Drama

Stop clapping in
the children's gallery;
no one feel sorry for me;
I'm just an actor,
a figure in a tragedy,
a player in a comedy,
a hero like Hamlet or
a rogue like Pathelin,
miles gloriosus to furious Ajax,
an invention, an involution
chewed on for too long
by the author and spit out
at the audience;
a hugger-mugger muddle

of a play,
patterned accidentally
on some long-ago opus,
lost in the lost
archives of Alexandria.

Oh, don't brood, Guy Guckersneff,
you big fat dope in the balcony,
your bald red hippo-dome will
remember this day, this play,
become famous as Don Juan in Hell,
King Lear or Colonial Oedipus;
all of them
paid the price of greatness,
snapping and crackling
with energy and glowing
with life and you can aspire
same as them
to the same fateful magnificent end
but it will never come;
Roland will never blow
his horn for you,
the messengers
of fame and fortune
will never come;
you will go ungrieved to Orcus.

Go home now with sugar-baby,
go to your little house
and live your life
as best you can;
for you, there are no
great moments,
no divine opportunities,
no monuments
to your enterprise;
an occasional playgoer

home late and
waking up again
and again going off
to the endless wheeling day
and like a weary buzzing bee,
loaded with labor,
going home again to sleep.

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Jack D. Harvey lives in a small town near Albany, New York and has been writing poetry since he was sixteen. His poetry has appeared in *Scrivener*, *The Comstock Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Typishly Literary Magazine*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Piedmont Poetry Journal* and elsewhere. Jack has been a Pushcart nominee and, over the years, has been published in several anthologies.

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