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Transformation

by Susan North

What did “devil” mean in the quote, “My devil had been long caged; he came out roaring”? The words come from Robert Louis Stevenson’s story about the freedom to be oneself: *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. It may be a melodrama of good against evil, but I have chosen an alternative view—a different kind of transformation, one that empowers the individual.

I will call him David. He was to become an apprentice—a “printer’s devil”.

David began to gain knowledge and learn new skills. The incredible new printing workshop of the 1450s was like a devil’s cauldron: dark, dirty, raucous and dangerous. It had an almost supernatural aura—the smell of ink, the metal type, the unbearably loud clatter of the press. Here was a new ability to transform words and ideas into print, making the invisible visible and shaping how people thought. Religious texts, scientific discoveries and political pamphlets could all be printed. This was his home for seven years.

After seven years, as an adult, he began to understand and realise the effect this new reformation was having on the people around him, beyond the confines of the printing shop. New ideas were emerging and transforming history. He was about to travel into a new world, full of possibility. Throughout his apprenticeship, books were always within reach, and he had constant opportunities to read. He knew there was an exciting world out there. Europe was expanding its borders, and perhaps he was eager to be part of it.

David, an apprentice—a “printer’s devil”—lived in a world changing around him. I believe this could be a metaphor for the world today: he wanted to understand and experience more. In 2026, we have it all at our fingertips—a chain of transformations that began with the invention of the printing press and continues with futuristic AI. A devil once caged, now let loose: once again, capable of good, but also of evil.