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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

168. Robert Louis Stevenson
INTRODUCTION

You may know Robert Louis Stevenson as the author of *Treasure Island*, a rousing tale of a young boy’s adventures as he grows up among a band of pirates. You may also know Stevenson as the writer of a delightful collection of poetry for children, *A Child’s Garden of Verses*. One of those poems, “A Good Boy,” begins like this:

*I woke before the morning, I was happy all the day,*
*I never said an ugly word, but smiled and stuck to play.*

*And now at last the sun is going down behind the wood,*
*And I am very happy, for I know that I’ve been good.*

The boy is “very happy” because he knows he has “been good.” Stevenson says more about being good in a poem titled “The Whole Duty of Children”:

*A child should always say what’s true*
*And speak when he is spoken to,*
*And behave mannerly at table;*
*At least as far as he is able.*
In that final line—“At least as far as he is able”—Stevenson is smiling. He knows that it’s not easy to always be honest and self-controlled and polite. It’s not easy to be good all the time.

About a year after that poem was published, Stevenson wrote a book that again recognizes how hard it is to be good—but this time he wasn’t writing for children, and he wasn’t smiling. Indeed, this book sprang from a nightmare. His wife, Fanny, recalled that very early one morning she was “awakened by cries of horror” from her husband—and, “thinking he had a nightmare, I awakened him. He said angrily: ‘Why did you wake me? I was dreaming a fine bogey tale.’”

What’s a “bogey tale”? Think of how children are sometimes told, “The bogeyman will get you!” Stevenson was dreaming a scary story, a tale of horror. From his feverish nightmare came the book published in 1886 as Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. (Stevenson did not use The in the title.)

In the character of Dr. Jekyll, Stevenson not only shows how hard it is to be good, he also explores why it is so hard, especially when powerful impulses inside a person strain to be released—impulses that must be kept down and hidden in order to be a respected member of society. Stevenson’s story dramatizes how these dark impulses, once they are allowed to run free,
can grow stronger and stronger—and then the issue is no longer how hard it is to be good but how easy it is to do evil.

Those who have heard of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* but haven’t read the book sometimes assume the two men named in the title represent a clash between good on one side and evil on the other. But Stevenson’s story is not a clear case of good versus evil. Rather, it is (as the full title tells us) a “strange case”—troubling and shadowy, like the murky fog that often blankets the London streets where the story is set.

A mix of horror tale, science fiction, and detective story, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was an immediate success when it was first published. The story was quickly adapted as a play for the stage. Many years later, it was made into movies, and even into a Bugs Bunny cartoon. Something about the story—something beyond the thrill of a good scare or the pull of a good mystery—keeps readers returning to it even after many generations.

After writing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Stevenson said that he had “long been trying to write a story on this ... strong sense of man’s double being which must at times come in upon and overwhelm the mind of every thinking creature.” As you read this book, think about what Stevenson meant by “man’s double being.” What is he suggesting
about the nature of the individual self, and about human nature? And what is it about this story that continues to fascinate readers to this day?

Editor’s Note
This Core Classics edition of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is abridged and adapted for young readers. Some passages have been left out of the original text, and some have been rewritten to make them more readily understandable. Any adaption is also an interpretation—in choosing what to leave out and what to rewrite, we have tried to be guided by the goal of remaining faithful to the themes, style, and spirit of the original novel.