

# My Shadow Robert Louis Stevenson

## My Shadow

By Robert Louis Stevenson

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,  
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.  
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;  
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.

The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow-  
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;  
For he sometimes shoots up taller like an india-rubber ball,  
And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.

He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,  
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.  
He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;  
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!

One morning, very early, before the sun was up,  
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;  
But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepy-head,  
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.



**My Shadow** is a beloved poem by Robert Louis Stevenson that captures the innocent curiosity and playful imagination of childhood. Stevenson, renowned for his works such as "Treasure Island" and "Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde," also showcased his lyrical prowess in poetry. "My Shadow" is one of the poems from his acclaimed collection, "A Child's Garden of Verses," published in 1885. This article delves into the themes, structure, and significance of "My Shadow," providing a comprehensive understanding of this charming piece.

## Context of "My Shadow"

"My Shadow" is part of a larger collection aimed at reflecting the thoughts and experiences of children. Stevenson wrote the poems in "A Child's Garden of Verses" during a period when he was inspired by his own childhood memories and the unfiltered wonder that characterizes youth. By focusing on the simple yet profound observations of children, Stevenson captures timeless themes

that resonate with readers of all ages.

## Background of Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Louis Stevenson was born on November 13, 1850, in Edinburgh, Scotland. He grew up in a well-to-do family as the son of a lighthouse engineer. Despite his family's expectations for him to pursue a career in engineering, Stevenson became passionate about literature and writing. His literary journey began in earnest while studying law at the University of Edinburgh, though his health issues often impeded his academic pursuits.

Stevenson's experiences with illness and travel greatly influenced his writings. He traveled extensively across Europe and the Pacific Islands, and these experiences often shaped the vivid settings and characterizations of his stories. His ability to convey complex human emotions and moral dilemmas made him one of the foremost writers of his time.

## Analysis of "My Shadow"

"My Shadow" consists of a playful and whimsical exploration of a child's understanding of their shadow. Through simple language and vivid imagery, Stevenson invites readers to consider the significance of the shadow as both a companion and a source of wonder.

## Structure and Form

The poem consists of several stanzas, each comprising four lines. The rhythmic quality of the poem, combined with its rhyme scheme (AABB), contributes to its musicality, making it appealing to children. The consistent structure allows for a sense of familiarity, enhancing the theme of childhood exploration.

## Themes Explored

Several key themes emerge from "My Shadow," each contributing to the poem's charm and depth:

- Imagination and Playfulness:** The poem exemplifies the imaginative spirit of childhood. The child's perspective on their shadow—seeing it as a friend—reflects the playful nature of young minds.
- Identity and Self-Discovery:** The shadow serves as a metaphor for the child's developing sense of self. The way the child interacts with their shadow symbolizes the exploration of identity and individuality.
- Fear and Comfort:** While the shadow is a source of wonder, it also embodies a sense of the unknown. The child alternates between awe and trepidation, reflecting a common childhood

experience of confronting fears.

4. **Transience of Childhood:** The poem subtly hints at the fleeting nature of childhood innocence and imagination, invoking nostalgia in adult readers.

## Imagery and Language

Stevenson's imagery in "My Shadow" is vivid and relatable. The child describes their shadow in various playful ways, attributing to it qualities that resonate with young readers. Phrases such as "I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me" create a sense of companionship and adventure. The use of simple yet effective language allows readers of all ages to connect with the poem.

The repetition of phrases—such as the child's observations about the shadow's behavior—reinforces the playful tone and rhythm. This repetition not only adds to the musicality of the poem but also mirrors the repetitive nature of a child's exploration of the world around them.

## Significance of "My Shadow"

"My Shadow" holds a special place in children's literature and poetry for several reasons:

### Universal Appeal

The themes of imagination, identity, and the wonders of childhood are universal experiences that resonate across generations. Children can relate to the experiences described in the poem, while adults can reflect on their own childhood memories, creating a bridge between ages.

### Educational Value

The poem is often used in educational settings to teach children about poetry, rhythm, and the beauty of language. Its simple structure and relatable themes make it an excellent introduction to the world of poetry for young readers. Teachers often use "My Shadow" to encourage children to write their own poems, fostering creativity and self-expression.

### Cultural Impact

"My Shadow" has left a lasting impact on popular culture, inspiring various adaptations, illustrations, and performances. The poem's enduring popularity speaks to its ability to capture the essence of childhood in a way that is both poignant and entertaining.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, Robert Louis Stevenson's "My Shadow" is more than just a poem about a child's shadow; it is a profound exploration of childhood imagination, identity, and the fleeting nature of innocence. Through its playful language, rhythmic structure, and universal themes, the poem continues to captivate readers, evoking nostalgia and encouraging a sense of wonder. Stevenson's ability to articulate the complexities of childhood in such a simple yet profound manner solidifies "My Shadow" as a timeless classic in children's literature. Whether read aloud to children or revisited by adults, the poem invites reflection on the joys and mysteries of growing up.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the central theme of 'My Shadow' by Robert Louis Stevenson?**

The central theme of 'My Shadow' revolves around the relationship between a child and their shadow, exploring themes of identity, companionship, and the innocence of childhood.

### **How does Stevenson use imagery in 'My Shadow'?**

Stevenson employs vivid imagery to describe the shadow's movement and characteristics, creating a playful and imaginative world that resonates with the experiences of children.

### **In what ways does 'My Shadow' reflect the perspective of a child?**

The poem captures the whimsical and curious nature of a child's perspective, showcasing how they perceive their shadow as both a companion and a mysterious entity that can behave differently from themselves.

### **What literary devices are prominent in 'My Shadow'?**

Prominent literary devices in 'My Shadow' include personification, as the shadow is given human-like qualities, and rhyme, which adds a musical quality to the poem, enhancing its appeal to young readers.

### **Why is 'My Shadow' considered a classic children's poem?**

It is considered a classic because it captures the imagination and innocence of childhood, making it relatable to children while also being appreciated by adults for its simplicity and depth.

### **How has 'My Shadow' influenced children's literature?**

'My Shadow' has influenced children's literature by showcasing the importance of imagination and the unique perspectives of children, encouraging future authors to explore themes of childhood wonder in their works.

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