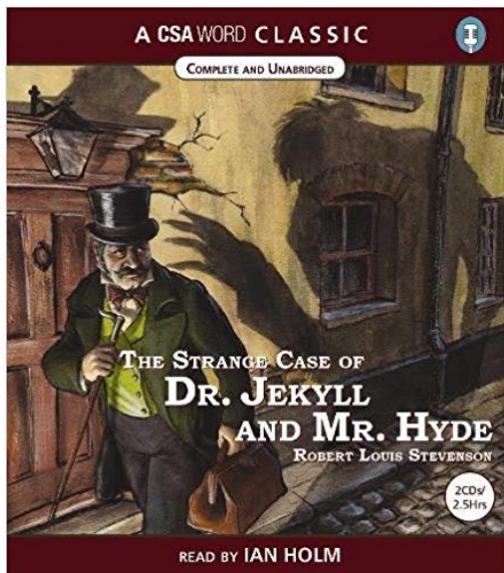


The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde *by* R. L. Stevenson, Ian Holm



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A stellar reading of the horror classic



Reviews of the *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* *by* R. L. Stevenson, Ian Holm

- **Burgas**

It's presumptuous for Amazon to ask someone to "review" a classic of literature ... but I'd simply like to point out that in my opinion Stevenson is one of the great masters of light, elegant Entertainment Lit during its last great blossoming: Victorian England. Of course even the greatest classic English lit (ie Shakespeare's plays) were designed as entertainment: the more pompous, formal, ponderous moralistic stuff (like Johnson) survives only in academic circles and was probably endured rather than enjoyed even back in the day. But Stevenson is as pure an entertainer as Fred Astaire: breathtaking, charming, playful, he's chock full of small, masterful asides but, like Stephen King's,

they thrill and amuse but in no way distract as the tale races along -- they're like white water in the rapids. See for yourself: just find the first page of Jekyll and Hyde anywhere online and skim it -- you'll find it just feels like skimming, you'll be in a whole new world with a witty genius for a guide..

- **Kanrad**

This is not the actual book Dr.Jekyll and Mr.Hyde. It is actually a collection of speeches and essays about the REAL book and a summary of Dr.Jekyll and Mr.Hyde. That fact wasn't stated anywhere on the selling page.

- **in waiting**

I love a good story of a mad scientist. It is told from the third person perspective of Dr. Jekyll's close friend Mr. Utterson. It's funny to me how long it took for him to put the idea together, though having heard of this story long before I read it, I imagine the thought of someone being two different people is hard to fathom.

Still, I enjoyed the surmounting evidence piling up for the real story and especially found it funny that Mr. Utterson had in his possession a letter that would explain things (even a little) very early on from Lanyon.

I expected the book to be told from Dr. Jekyll's point of view but I really liked that it focused on a concerned friend trying to understand what was going on with a mysterious will.

- **Enila**

I am reading Stevenson's complete tales chronologically, so this is my second volume, after New Arabian Nights. In this review, I will focus on the tales included in The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables, as the book is in fact titled. For general comments on Stevenson, please see my review of New Arabian Nights, in which I comment, among other things, on Stevenson's ability to entertain his readers, a gift that so many writers, even so many popular writers, lack.

The Merry Men (1887), a collection of 6 tales, is a worthy successor to New Arabian Nights (1882). I do not find either one to be "better" or "worse" than the other; they are both equally pleasing and entertaining, and both are excellent examples of Stevenson's seductive narrative voice, a voice that combines suspense with vivid descriptions and a touch of humor. This mixture results in some of the most readable stories in the English language, as authors such as G. K. Chesterton, Jorge Luis Borges, Jack London, and Ernest Hemingway have remarked. The two collections are, furthermore, equally wide in scope, including elements of adventure, satire, parody, allegory, and the supernatural. I will comment on the stories included:

* The Merry Men: The title, as has been observed, refers to a particularly dangerous group of waves. The story takes place in an island, to which the protagonist, Charlie, retires. Aros, a farm on the island, is the property of Charlie's uncle Gordon, whose daughter, Mary, Charlie wishes to marry. Aros is famous for the shipwrecks that take place nearby, due to the "merry men," so Charlie is not only pursuing Mary, he also hopes to find the treasure of the sunken Spanish ship Espirito [sic, should be "Espíritu"] Santo. A great story, reminiscent of "The Pavilion on the Links," from New Arabian Nights.

* Will o' the Mill: A story in three parts, this is one of those narratives that cover the entirety of a character's life. Will lives in the country, and wishes to see the world. His life is changed when he notices Marjory, the parson's daughter. I found this to be an excellent story, and I must say it is not as predictable as may appear from the description. The good thing about "life-stories" is that they allow you to observe the destiny of a character, and Stevenson lets you draw your own conclusions from Will's life journey.

* Markheim: Borges included this story, along with the entire New Arabian Nights collection, in one of the volumes of his "biblioteca personal." This is one of Stevenson's most famous stories, on the same level as "A Lodging for the Night" and "The Bottle Imp." I cannot say much about it without giving away the plot. Let me just say the story relies on the unexpected, and by reading the first two or three pages you would never expect what's coming. One of the gems in Stevenson's oeuvre.

* Thrawn Janet: A rare piece, as it is written in Scots! I understand there is only one other story that Stevenson wrote in this language, but it appears to be an uncollected tale. "Thrawn Janet" is a creepy ghost story, not a very profound one, but very entertaining nevertheless. The language may pose a slight challenge, but I am an ESL student and I had no trouble at all understanding the story. (The reason why I call myself an ESL student, by the way, is that I believe one does not simply stop being an ESL student; learning a second language is a wonderful life-long process, no matter how advanced one may be.)

* Olalla: According to Borges, Stevenson got the idea for this story from a dream. "Olalla" takes place in Spain, and this tale is another achievement in setting construction. A convalescing soldier stays at the estate of a very strange Spanish family, composed of a very basic son, his mother, and his mysterious, elusive sister, Olalla. The ominous presence of an uncanny portrait is an excellent addition to the plot. A compelling read, this was my favorite story in the collection.

* The Treasure of Franchard: Stevenson ended New Arabian Nights on a lighter note with "Providence and the Guitar." He follows the same effective formula in this collection, with "The Treasure of Franchard," and in this case, with much greater success. This is a simply hilarious story about a family that adopts a boy who has the reputation of being a thief. The tale is mainly about the effects that wealth can have on a family. The story points to--and even lampoons, though respectfully--the work of Edgar Allan Poe.

New Arabian Nights inspired me to read all of Stevenson's tales. The Merry Men has increased my enthusiasm for the work of the immortal Tusitala, or "Teller of Tales," as the Samoans called Stevenson. Both of these works will fascinate lovers of the traditional short story. I look forward to reading Island Nights' Entertainments (1893), the last collection of Stevenson stories to appear in the author's lifetime, and will share my reaction to it in a review.

Thanks for reading, and enjoy the book!

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