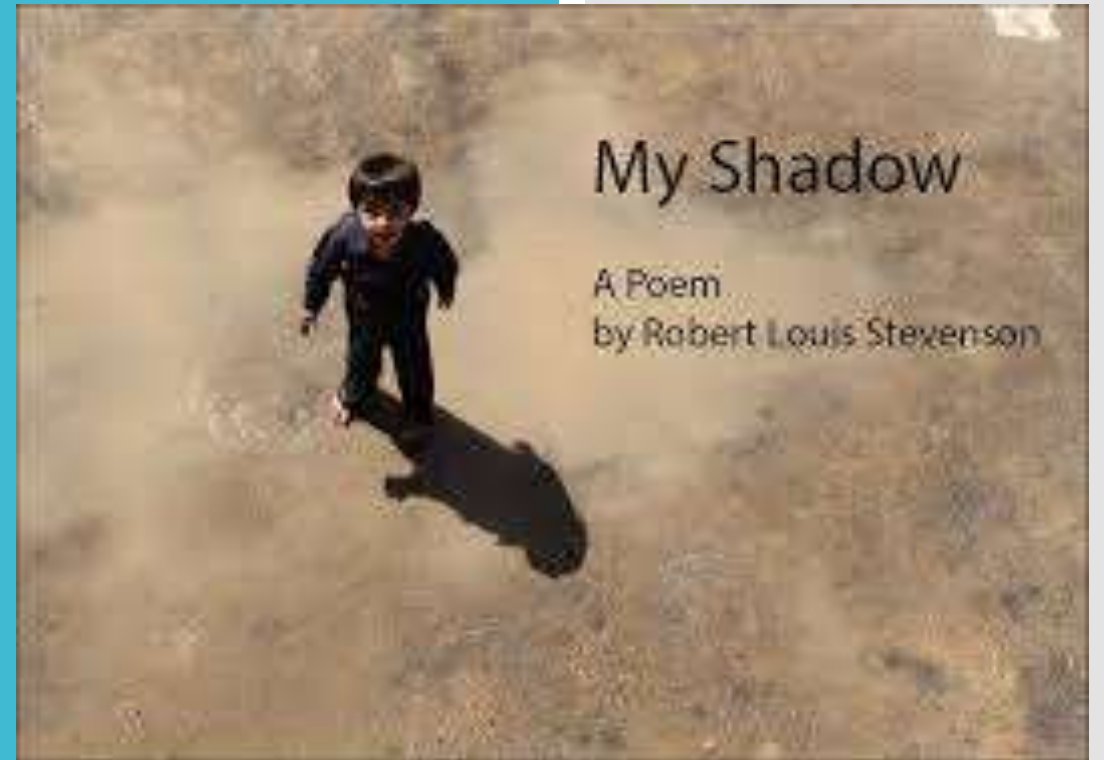


# MY SHADOW

BY R L STEVENSON



## R L STEVENSON(1850-1894)



- Robert Louis Stevenson
- Scottish poet
- Novelist, poet, travel writer and essayist
- Born in Edinburgh, Scotland
- A sickly child, Stevenson was an invalid for part of his childhood and remained in ill health throughout his life.(weak lungs)
- Began studying engineering, then law. His true inclination, however, was for writing.
- It was with the publication of “Treasure Island” in 1883, Stevenson got wide recognition and fame.
- This was followed by his most successful adventure story “Kidnapped”, which appeared in 1886.
- Other notable works: “The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” (from which Hulk is inspired), “The Black Arrow”, “A Child’s Garden of Verses”
- Some of his works are called ‘island literature’
- He took up the pseudonym ‘Captain George North’ when he wrote “Treasure Island”
- Died on 03 Dec 1894
- One of the “26 most translated authors in the world”

# POEM

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.

# POEM OVERVIEW

- Appeared in “A Child’s Garden of Verses” in 1886.
- The book is dedicated to : Alison Cunningham-the nurse who nursed him.  
“To Alice Cunningham, from her boy”
- ‘*My Shadow*’ by Robert Louis Stevenson is a four stanza poem that is separated into sets of four lines.
- Rhyme scheme: aabb ccdd
- Stevenson chose this rhyme scheme to match the content and intend audience of ‘*My Shadow*.’
- It is very straightforward, emphasizing the pleasure of sounds over a complex style of syntax.
- The poem is aimed at two different audiences, first, and most obviously, children. The second is anyone seeking to relive the joy and simple wonder of childhood.
- The main themes of this poem are curiosity and wonder.
- Stevenson’s speaker(the boy) spends the poem considering his own shadow.
- He is unsure what exactly it is, and without the access to or understanding of science, he has to come to his own conclusions. The speaker describes his shadow as a “he,” as if it is another boy accompanying him everywhere he goes.

# SUMMARY

- Told from the perspective of a child who is trying to understand what purpose his shadow serves. (also gives a touch of innocence)
- He shows how the child is happy, excited, mesmerized, and in puzzle with his shadow.
- He wants to show how children do not quit learning and experimenting with things around them, without trying to understand the science involved in it. It also helps us to understand how children look at things around them.
- The poem begins with the speaker describing how there is another child(shadow) who follows him everywhere.
- He(it) sticks close to him when he is playing, so much it is embarrassing for them both.
- He also has the strange ability to shrink and grow quickly, not at all like a normal boy.
- The child's innocence and honest inquiry into the nature of his world is endearing and takes an adult reader back to a time before everything was made so much clearer through science.

- The child in this poem is always experimenting with his shadow, and sees how it follows him everywhere.
- The child discovers that it's like him from the heel to the head, and always sticks to him.
- He follows him while playing, and never gets involved with other children and shadows.
- The poet shows how the child observes the growth of the shadow, and is in puzzle that it is abnormal to him in contrast to the growth of other children.
- The child goes to an extent of experimenting where he wakes up before sunrise to see if his shadow will still follow him, but found himself alone, and the child assumed that it is probably sleeping like a lazy boy.

# ANALYSIS

## Stanza One

- In the first stanza of this piece the speaker begins by describing his shadow as a companion.
- It is something that accompanies him everywhere he goes.
- Although the young narrator does not know what his shadow is, he does recognize it as a boy.
- This means that any adjectives used to describe the shadow likely apply, at least to some extent, to the boy.
- The speaker says his shadow is “little” and that it goes “in and out with” him. This is a wide reaching reference to all of the boys motions.
- The fact that the shadow mirrors him is one of the first things he notices. This is quickly followed by the speaker coming to the conclusion that his shadow does not serve a real purpose.
- Whatever is the “use of him” is beyond the speaker’s ability to understand. This is where, with an adult speaker, science would provide the answers. The child does not have the ability to understand the true cause of a shadow.
- The speaker goes on to take note of the fact that the shadow is “very, very” like him. Every part of the shadow is similar from the “heels to the head.” He speaks on the mirroring of his own motions when he describes the shadow as jumping onto the bed before he does. He sees the shadow as copying him rather than as a projection of his own body.



## Stanza Two

- The second stanza speaks on the strange aspects of the shadow the child takes note of.
- These include its ability to “grow.” He is referring to how the shape changes with the positioning of the sun. It is obviously a very odd feature for a child to have, making him an improper child.
- There is a contrast presented here between real children and the way they grow and the growth of this strange child. Normally kids grow “very slow” and in a much more logical way.
- The speaker compares the quick growth of the child to the bounce of “an india-rubber ball.” It happens so fast that one can hardly follow it. In a similar way, the child shrinks until there is hardly anything left of him.



### Stanza Three

- The speaker goes on to describe how this child (shadow) does not understand how to play, a critical part of a childhood.
- This fact bothers the speaker as the shadow's actions reflect badly on him.
- He is embarrassed by the shadow's needy behaviour and its seeming inability to leave his side.
- The strange child is always there, acting like a "coward."
- In the last line he compares the constant attention of the shadow to the way a very young child would cling to his "nursie."



## Stanza Four

- In the last quatrain of this poem, the speaker describes one time in which the shadow did not appear.
- He is not able to connect the events of this section to the physical manifestation of his shadow.
- Rather he presents the occasion as another quirk of this strange child who follows him around.
- He speaks of a time in which he got up before the sun. The child was awake so early he could see the “shining dew on every buttercup.”
- This line lets a reader know the scene was a beautiful one, something the speaker feels the shadow should not have missed.
- Rather than accompanying him on this early morning journey, the shadow remains in bed like “an arrant sleepy-head.” The speaker thinks this was the wrong decision.

# CONCLUSION

- The poet is trying to give us a perspective of a child in how he sees things around him and how he understands them.
- For a child, there is nothing like science and logic, but fantasy and imagination.
- A child imagines and understands things different than we adults do, which shows the innocence in them.
- The child in this poem assumes that his shadow is his friend, and goes to any extent to experiment with him to understand him better.
- He compares him with other friends, and tries to set a contrast on how he is different than the other friends that he has.
- These differences of the shadow makes him different from the rest of the people he has met and come across.

# Poetic Devices

## **Allusion:**

- The poet has used several allusions to compare the shadow with, and give an idea on what the child thinks about it.

e.g. (i) For he sometimes shoots up taller like an **india-rubber ball**,

Here, the term india-rubber ball is used to show that the shadow grows big and small fast like a ball bounces and comes back to the ground.

(ii) I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;

The poet here tries to give an idea of the freshness of the morning, and the early hour of the day when the sun is still in the horizon.

## **Contrast:**

- The poet has tried to establish a contrast of the shadow with other things around to show the difference in nature of the shadow.

e.g. (i) Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;

Here, the poet is giving an example of the growth of the shadow, where it is not growing the way it should grow. The poet shows that the child thinks of the shadow like another person, and it is abnormal for the shadow to grow big and small in the same day.

(ii) I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!

In this line, the poet tries to show how the shadow is inseparable from the boy, and never leaves his side. The boy would be ashamed of sticking to his nanny the way his shadow sticks to him and always follows him.

## Personification:

- The poet has used personification throughout the poem, where he is personifying the shadow itself. He has written the poem from the perspective of a small child who is fascinated with his shadow, and compares it with any other child that he has seen around.

e.g. 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

- In the first stanza itself, the poet has established that he thinks of the shadow as a person, and is comparing it with everything humanly that happens around him. Hence, he is puzzled by seeing that his shadow is nothing like the other children that he has come across.