



# Markheim

*Robert Louis Stevenson*

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## **Markheim** Robert Louis Stevenson

Classic short story. According to Wikipedia: "Robert Louis (Balfour) Stevenson ( 1850 - 1894), was a Scottish novelist, poet, and travel writer, and a leading representative of Neo-romanticism in English literature. He was the man who "seemed to pick the right word up on the point of his pen, like a man playing spillikins", as G. K. Chesterton put it. He was also greatly admired by many authors, including Jorge Luis Borges, Ernest Hemingway, Rudyard Kipling, Vladimir Nabokov, and J. M. Barrie. Most modernist writers dismissed him, however, because he was popular and did not write within their definition of modernism. It is only recently that critics have begun to look beyond Stevenson's popularity and allow him a place in the canon."

## **Markheim Details**

Date : Published May 1st 1982 by NTC/Contemporary Publishing Company

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Author : Robert Louis Stevenson

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Genre : Short Stories, Classics, Horror, Fiction, Literature, 19th Century, Gothic

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## From Reader Review Markheim for online ebook

### Jessica says

Fairly interesting quick read about the struggles of good and evil.

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### Bettie? says

[image error]

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### Carmen Hernandez says

"Todos los pecados son asesinatos, puesto que toda vida es guerra."

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### Janelle says

Verbose, even for a short story. It's a multi layered tale, with a bit of philosophy, fantasy and psychology. But I think I must be quite a plebeian. I just want an entertaining story with a likeable, moral character, rather than a fantasised debate about good and evil.

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### Onysha says

This was inspired by Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, apparently. It seems that it was a Romantic tradition to write stories based on previous works like this. I guess those stories are a mixed bag. In this case, the Dostoevsky is better.

Like Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, Markheim murders a pawnbroker. While Raskolnikov does it to put popular philosophies of the day into action, Markheim does it solely for money. Both of them hallucinate and go a little insane after the crime (though Raskolnikov was already crazy before that. Rodion gets crazier!). We also get to look into their brains. Dostoevsky is up-close and personal in his narrative, and we see things in Raskolnikov's point-of-view. RLS is more aloof and distant - he tells us that Markheim is hallucinating and what he's feeling. We live in Raskolnikov but only observe Markheim.

I didn't know Markheim long enough to like him much. A full-length novel would probably be too much like the Dostoevsky. I didn't hate "Markheim" but I didn't love it either.

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### Michael says

Markheim is a short story by Robert Louis Stevenson the story was later published in Stevenson's collection *The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables*. One of my all time favourite Short Stories from the master,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

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### **MacKenzie says**

I was so confused during this book that I pretty much skimmed the second half. Believe it or not, half the book is a man just standing there describing the scenery and wrestling with his conscience after just killing a man. So much more boring than it seems.

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### **Laura says**

*From BBC Radio 4 Extra - A Short History of Gothic:*

*A thief's eerie encounter with a stranger in a shop forces him to reassess his life. Hugh Bonneville reads RL Stevenson's tale.*

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### **Quirkyreader says**

Good versus evil. Which will win?

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### **Nick says**

This story was really good. It was about a thief who goes through an experience that changes him and makes him take responsibility for his actions. I hope that doesn't give anything away. This is probably my favorite story out of the ones I read of Stevenson's.

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### **Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says**

I saw Markheim by Robert Louis Stevenson mentioned in the Read Scotland 2015 Goodreads group and found a free online version at East Of The Web. <http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-sto...> The story is short, at just sixteen pages, and I enjoyed its seasonal setting as this is a traditional supernatural tale for Christmas. This is my twelfth book for Read Scotland 2015 and I am pleased to have averaged one a month.

Markheim is set on Christmas Day although, other than the lack of custom to the antique dealer's shop, we only really know this because we are told so. A regular customer has been let in to the closed shop. He usually takes items to sell, and we are given to understand that these are stolen goods, yet for Christmas Day he wishes to buy a gift for a lady friend. The dealer doesn't completely believe him, but is trusting enough to turn his back ...

Stevenson's story is very much of its time with most of the sixteen pages taken up by overwrought dialogue that is far too deep for natural conversation in the situation described. However, accepting that this is the case stops the melodrama from detracting from the tale. Markheim has led a poverty-stricken life, believing his thieving and worse to be the result of his circumstances. Now that perhaps he has sunk as low, morally,

as it is possible to go, should he heed the words of a devil and profit from his crime or should he stand tall for once and Do The Right Thing?

I liked this tense story and would have preferred it actually to have been a little longer. The claustrophobic shop setting is wonderfully described and I found it easy to imagine the situation. It would be a good story to read out loud or to act out on Christmas Eve.

See more of my book reviews on my blog, Stephanie Jane

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### **Hans says**

This story is incredibly similar to Crime and Punishment's central scene. The only difference being that in this one the main character has a dialogue with the devil that is quite interesting.

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### **Andrea Villar Rios says**

Un cuestionamiento ético sobre lo que esta bien o mal es el centro de esta historia. Los relatos de Stevenson suelen mezclar muy bien el terror paranormal y realista. Es algo que me gusta mucho del autor y puede llegar a hacernos identificar con sus cuentos. Este en particular es muy corto, sencillo, pero da justo en el tema. Él nunca decepciona.

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### **Tonk82 says**

Markheim es un pequeño relato, que cuesta un poco clasificar. El ambiente, la visión del personaje principal o la presencia de un toque sobrenatural parecen indicar que es una historia fantástica de terror, pero lo que se presenta es un drama psicológico de primera magnitud.

El relato en sí es muy corto, poco más de 20 paginas en la estupenda edición de Anaya "Tus Libros: El extraño caso del Dr. Jekyll y Mr. Hyde" (en conjunto con la novela del título y Olalla), y me ha recordado poderosamente a Edgar Allan Poe, concretamente a "El corazón delator". Ambas historias giran sobre las vicisitudes de un pobre hombre que ha cometido un crimen y debe lidiar con su mente y su conciencia.

El protagonista está desesperado y mata a un anticuario para tratar de robar su caja fuerte. Con un miedo atroz por lo que acaba de hacer se obsesiona con el más mínimo detalle y está casi seguro de que ocurrirá algo que lo descubrirá. Toda la parte final es un diálogo entre él, y una misteriosa figura que se le presenta, tentándole e incitándole a seguir con su carrera delictiva.

Y el señor Robert L. Stevenson vuelve a tocar uno de sus (mis) temas predilectos: la dualidad del ser humano, en este caso, la de un delincuente de poca monta debatiéndose entre la persona en que se está convirtiendo con sus actos, y el tipo de persona que le gustaría ser.

Me quedo con un par de citas del "extraño": ""El mal, para el que vivo y dedico todos mis desvelos, no reside en la acción, sino en el carácter."" y ""El pecador me es querido; no así el pecado, cuyos frutos (...) puede que se revelaran más beneficiosos que los de las más excelsas virtudes"".



this point he has had an epiphany. Basically he has been confronted with his inner nature, the fact that he is an evil person, and instead of hiding from it he is forced to confront it.

This is something that many of us have to go through, but in another sense many of us will continue to ignore our dark side rather than face up to it and admit that it exists. This has some very Christian connotations, though I would not necessarily suggest that Stevenson was writing a gospel account, or attempting to convince anybody that they are a sinner. However, in the same way that Dr Jekyll is overcome by Mr Hyde, and his evil nature over rides his good nature, so to we see here with Markheim and the inner struggle that his good side and his evil side are having.

While it is suggested that this is the devil, the problem is that this is not necessarily the way that the devil behaves. To people who are committing evil acts but are justifying them, it would be counter productive for the devil to confront them. In fact the devil will want them to continue to believe that what they were doing was good. Further, to those who were damned, it is beneficial for him for them to remain damned than to confront them with their sin and have them turn around and become saved. As such the whole episode with this character as he devil convincing Markheim that he is actually an evil person despite Markheim believing otherwise is quite uncharacteristic of him. It is more likely that this character is angelic as opposed to diabolical (and remember, the person never actually says who he is, and it is left up to us, along with Markheim, to assume).

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## Carmen says

*He judged it more prudent to confront than to flee from these considerations; looking the more hardily in the dead face, bending his mind to realise the nature and greatness of his crime. So little a while ago that face had moved with every change of sentiment, that pale mouth had spoken, that body had been all on fire with governable energies; and now, by his act, that piece of life had been arrested, as the horologist, with interjected finger, arrests the beating of the clock. So he reasoned in vain; he could rise to no more remorseful consciousness; the same heart which had shuddered before the painted effigies of crime looked on its reality unmoved. At best, he felt a gleam of pity for one who had been endowed in vain with all those faculties that can make the world a garden of enchantment, one who had never lived and who was now dead. But of penitence, no, not a tremor.*

This was amazing. Robert Lewis Stevenson really delivered here in this short story.

Perhaps you tried to read The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde but couldn't get through it, it was such a slog. Perhaps you are looking for something shorter by RLS to enjoy. This is just the ticket.

Now. I've read books and articles which suggest this is about the same thing that The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is about. This is not true. I mean, sure, it deals with the fact that there is good and bad in every person (a concept Stevenson seemed to be obsessed with TBH) but this story is a far cry from Jekyll/Hyde.

Markheim comes to a pawnbroker on Christmas Day. The dealer assumes he's here to sell him more items from 'his uncle's cabinet' but he's implying that Markheim is stealing the items and selling them. Markheim is acting strangely. He claims he's not here to sell this time, but instead to buy. He makes up some cockamamie story about getting married and having done very well on the stock market. The dealer is dubious, but starts showing Markheim some items.

The first item he shows Markheim is a hand-mirror. This is the perfect time for Stevenson to go on one of his rants.

"A glass," he said hoarsely, and then paused, and repeated it more clearly. "A glass? For Christmas? Surely not?"

"And why not?" cried the dealer. "Why not a glass?"

Markheim was looking upon him with an undefinable expression. "You ask me why not?" he said. "Why, look here - look in it - look at yourself! Do you like to see it? No! nor I - nor any man."

The little man had jumped back when Markheim had so suddenly confronted him with the mirror; but now, perceiving there was nothing worse on hand, he chuckled. "Your future lady, sir, must be pretty hard-favoured," said he.

"I ask you," said Markheim, "for a Christmas present, and you give me this - this damned reminder of years, and sins and follies - this handconscience! Did you mean it? Had you a thought in your mind?"

Okay, so Stevenson is hammering home here the fact that Markheim finds it hard to look at himself in the mirror and sees mirrors as a reflection of a person's sins.

Then, when the dealer turns around to get another item for Markheim, Markheim stabs him to death.

Markheim moved a little nearer, with one hand in the pocket of his great-coat; he drew himself up and filled his lungs; at the same time many different emotions were depicted together on his face - terror, horror, resolve, fascination and a physical repulsion; and through a haggard lift of his upper lip, his teeth looked out.

So, Stevenson has written THE most realistic and accurate depiction of a murder I've ever read. Markheim isn't some hardened killer, this is his first time. So Stevenson devotes pages and pages of exquisite writing to his freak-out. He can hear the ticking of the clocks in the shop. He looks at the body.

*From these fear-stricken roivings, Markheim's eyes returned to the body of his victim, where it lay both humped and sprawling, incredibly small and strangely meaner than in life. In these poor, miserly clothes, in that ungainly attitude, the dealer lay like so much sawdust. Markheim had feared to see it, and, lo! it was nothing. And yet, as he gazed, this bundle of old clothes and pool of blood began to find eloquent voices. There it must lie; there was none to work the cunning hinges or direct the miracle of locomotion - there it must lie until it was found. Found! ay, and then? Then would this dead flesh lift up a cry that would ring over England, and fill the world with shouts of pursuit. Ay, dead or not, this was still the enemy.*

Amazing. Stevenson continues with the many, many aspects that come with murdering someone. Next, as Markheim moves through the room, he discusses Markheim's deep fear and doubts.

*And still as he continued to fill his pockets, his mind accused him, with a sickening iteration, of the thousand faults in his design. He should have chosen a more quiet hour; he should have prepared an alibi; he should not have used a knife; he should have been more cautious, and only bound and gagged the dealer, and not killed him; he should have been more bold, and killed the servant also; he should have done all things otherwise; poignant regrets, weary, incessant toiling of the mind to change what was unchangeable, to plan what was now useless, to be the architect of the irrevocable past. Meanwhile, and behind all this activity, brute terrors, like the scurrying of rats in a deserted attic, filled the more remote chambers of his brain with riot; the hand of the constable would fall heavy on his shoulder, and his nerves would jerk like a hooked fish; or he beheld, in galloping defile, the dock, the prison, the gallows, and the black coffin.*

Well, that's wonderful. No wonder RLS is hailed as a great author. He goes on describing Markheim's feelings and terror, and it is wonderful. He even starts hallucinating people at the window, a passerby

witness... he's experiencing some severe paranoia. Stevenson once again describes and details the body, and how a dead body differs from a living one, and how it feels to be the person who has snuffed out all that life and all that possibility and all that future. It's very good. Markheim thinks back on a day when he went to a local festival and saw a display of many famous murders, and how sickened he was by the scene, how nauseous. Now he has joined them. He is a murderer himself, now.

He goes upstairs to find the money.

He's going crazy imagining he's not alone, people can see him, see what he's done. Anything might happen. He imagines wild and crazy scenarios.

But as he is in the upstairs room searching for where the dealer kept his money,

*And as he sat thus, at once busy and absent, he was startled to his feet. A flash of ice, a flash of fire, a bursting gush of blood, went over him, and then he stood transfixed and thrilling. A step mounted the stair slowly and steadily, and presently a hand was laid upon the knob, and the lock clicked, and the door opened.*

*Fear held Markheim in a vice. What to expect he knew not, whether the dead man walking, or the official ministers of human justice, or some chance witness blindly stumbling in to consign him to the gallows.*

Who is coming for Markheim? What will be his fate? Ah, I will not spoil the excellent and wonderful second half of the story for you, but let me just inform you that it is so great. Stevenson completely nails this story, and he doesn't make any missteps IMO. What happens in the last half of the story is also riveting and, like all of Stevenson's musings, full of messages to his readers.

This short story reminds me both of Dickens and Poe. We have shades of both here, it is wonderful, and of course it is uniquely Stevenson.

Wow. After reading *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, I was feeling a little 'meh' about Stevenson. I mean, there were some WONDERFUL parts in *Jekyll*. But the execution was not what I had hoped, and the book wasn't exactly what I would call 'gripping.' But this short story grabs the back of your neck and doesn't release you until you read the last word. It's very arresting, powerful, and well-written.

As usual, Stevenson is obsessed with what makes a person 'good' or 'evil' and how aspects of both can live in the same human being. I guess this is why it is compared to *Jekyll*, but it is completely different and unique. I would not compare it to *Jekyll*, personally.

This is a nuanced, careful, compassionate depiction of a murderer and Stevenson not only realistically portrays what Markheim does and its aftereffects, but then takes the story in a completely unexpected (and some would say bizarre) direction afterwards in order to illustrate the duality of human beings.

I'm saying this is a compassionate and nuanced portrayal of a murderer, but Stevenson is not sugarcoating it or letting Markheim off the hook here. Absolutely what he did was evil, and Stevenson is not trying to justify the murder here. He brushes aside Markheim's insistence that (view spoiler) But on the other hand, he portrays Markheim as a person - with feelings, doubts, fears, and desperation. It's excellently done.

TL;DR - Stevenson knocks it out of the park with this short story. If you can't swallow his longer works or struggle with old-fashioned writing styles, give this a try. It's also deeply psychological and well-crafted. Stevenson is a great author, and I think this short, condensed format really gives him the means to shine. He does an amazing job of delivering his messages and ideas without being preachy or overly sentimental, no mean feat. You probably could analyze and re-analyze this a dozen different ways and it would be an

interesting short story for a discussion group or class.

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### **Lukáš Palán says**

Zlo?in a trest splácnutej na 40 stran. Kdybych tohle v?d?l dop?edu, mohl jsem si ušet?it ?tení té 700stránkové ruské bestie a místo toho t?eba pomáhat št??at?m nebo d?lat hrní?ky pro charitu. :-)

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### **Ajeje Brazov says**

*"La mia vita non è altro che un travestimento e una calunnia di me stesso. Ho vissuto per tradire la mia natura. Così fanno tutti gli uomini; tutti gli uomini sono migliori di questo travestimento che cresce loro intorno e li soffoca."*

*"Il mio amore per il bene è destinato a essere sterile; può essere, e così sia! Ma mi rimane ancora il mio odio per il male..."*

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### **Tanvika says**

Stevenson masterfully brings images to life. Markheim is a tale about a thief after he commits the crime. The torment in his mind , the tension outside symbolized by ticking of multiple clocks, splattering rain, thumping footsteps, strange noises creates a tumultuous environment. When he is about to step outside to escape , a queer visitor arrives.

The plot seemingly simple raises few questions. firstly, the debate of free will. Can a man always be determined by his past or can he deviate. Second, the themes of dual nature residing in man is presented. The tussle between the good and the evil is going on.

Lastly, I have said too much.

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