

A Good Read for a Winter's Night

NEW HAMPSHIRE NATIVE TOM REED
PENS HIS DEBUT NOVEL

Have you ever wondered how Robert Louis Stevenson conjured up the characters Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Have you thought about the inspiration behind that well-known story and how the author imagined and created it?

Tom Reed's first novel, *Seeking Hyde*, released November 1, examines Stevenson's life events and how they influenced his storytelling in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Tom faithfully adheres to Stevenson's biography, describing his conflicts with his father about his decision to write romantic tales, his guilt over the alcoholic death of a friend, and his wife's nagging him to produce one last novel before a chronic lung condition ended his life—but then, he goes further.

"*Seeking Hyde* moves beyond the actual story of how *Jekyll and Hyde* came to be to explore the realm of 'what if?'" reads the description of Tom's novel on the dust jacket. It's the "what if" that Tom explores, saying, "The first two-thirds of the novel is reality, but I took license with the last

third. After beginning as a literary case study of creativity, it turned into more of a thriller." In *Seeking Hyde*, Tom leads us on a suspenseful journey through London's dark streets—defiled by corruption, murder, and Jack the Ripper—in the time of Stevenson.

How does a retired literature professor from Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, find his way to writing a novel about Stevenson's life and characters? It's easy to make the connection once you learn that Tom taught Chaucer and medieval romance literature for years. "My focus on *The Canterbury Tales* and knightly romances about King Arthur gradually evolved into an interest in Victorian


literature," he says.

"At Dickinson I taught *Jekyll and Hyde* in a critical methods class. My students and I were always struck by the way Stevenson describes Jekyll's transformation into Hyde through the language of alcohol. It certainly offered his readers a familiar way to understand the bizarre action, but it also opened up the possibility that the whole story was really a kind of allegory of the dangers of strong drink, a huge social issue in Stevenson's day and also in his personal life. I ended up writing a scholarly book on alcoholism in Victorian literature, which led to writing *Seeking Hyde*, so fiction grew out of scholarship."

Tom's interest in creative writing began 20 years ago at his family's summer boys' camp, Camp Pemigewassett in New Hampshire, where he wrote and edited *Bean Soup*, the camp's satirical newsletter, for years. His grandfather founded the camp, called Pemi, for short, and Tom has a long history of spending summers there—as a camper, counselor, program head, and director. He currently serves on the board of directors, and in the mess hall, he still leads the singing of songs his grandfather wrote in the 1920s and '30s. "I have a very basic connection with the camp," Tom laughs. "In fact, when my mother was pregnant with me, her labor was induced so the camp season could start on time."

The day we talked, he was sitting in front of the massive stone fireplace in the cabin his grandfather built in 1910. Sounds like the perfect setting for reading—or writing—a new novel.

Seeking Hyde is available at your local bookstore and where all fine books are sold.



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