



FACOLTÀ DI LINGUE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE MODERNE  
Corso di Laurea in Mediazione Linguistica per le Istituzioni, le  
Imprese e il Commercio

Tesi di Laurea di I° Livello in Letteratura Inglese

**A Linguistic Approach to**  
***The Signalman***  
**by Charles Dickens**

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*Anno Accademico 2004 / 2005*

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(Townley Green, The Signal-Man, Wood engraving)



*The Signal-man.*

Dickens, Charles. **Christmas Stories from *Household Words* and *All The Year Round***. Centenary Edition. 36 vols. London: Chapman & Hall; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911.

## Presentazione

*The Signalman*, racconto narrativo realizzato da Charles Dickens, è pubblicato per la prima volta nel 1866 nel numero di Natale di *All The Year Round*, un settimanale di cui lo scrittore era, al contempo, fondatore e redattore. Il titolo originale dell'opera è *N°1 Branch Line: the Signalman*. Il testo appare, inizialmente, in una raccolta di "short stories" dal titolo *Mugby Junction*.

*La storia è ambientata in una piccola stazione ferroviaria situata in un luogo solitario: qui un uomo, un segnalatore, svolge il suo ripetitivo lavoro all'interno di una cabina contenente alcuni strumenti necessari allo svolgimento del proprio dovere. L'incontro con uno sconosciuto, narratore degli eventi che resta senza un'identità ben precisa per tutto il racconto, interrompe la routine del segnalatore.*

*Il primo incontro tra i due personaggi è segnato da una frase, pronunciata dal narratore, che diventa un elemento ricorrente nel racconto: «'Halloa! Below there!'» (p.1).<sup>1</sup>*

*In breve tempo, lo sconosciuto diviene il confidente di alcune strane rivelazioni del segnalatore. Questi afferma di aver visto più volte l'immagine di un uomo senza volto ripetere un movimento del braccio: secondo il narratore, il gesto sembra voler dire «'For God's sake, clear the way!'» (p.4). Ne segue un'eccezionale coincidenza: in seguito ad ogni apparizione si verifica un terribile incidente ferroviario. L'ultima visione è ciò che tormenta maggiormente il segnalatore poiché nulla è ancora accaduto.*

*Al termine del racconto il "mistero" si svela. Lo sconosciuto, tornato a far visita al segnalatore, scopre che questi è stato travolto da un treno. Il conducente del treno spiega che, nel tentativo di far allontanare il segnalatore dalle rotaie, pronuncia le parole: «'Below there! Look out! Look out! For God's sake, clear the way!'» (p.9), le stesse espressioni che ricorrono nell'intera narrazione.*

L'approccio linguistico al testo di Charles Dickens si sviluppa a partire dalla definizione fornita da Tzvetan Todorov: «L'esitazione del

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<sup>1</sup> Disponibile all'indirizzo web <http://books.mirror.org/dickens/signalman>, consultato il 31 marzo 2006. I numeri relativi alle pagine delle citazioni si basano sul formato di stampa (su fogli A4) del documento originale.

lettore è [...] la prima condizione del fantastico» (2000:34). L'incertezza, elemento che permette di percepire il fantastico, si rivela attraverso numerosi espedienti narrativi. Tra i principali troviamo:

✓ Il «narratore rappresentato» o «narratore-personaggio» (Todorov 2000:87). Si tratta di una figura che contribuisce a mantenere costante l'incertezza e l'ambiguità nel racconto poiché il lettore può dubitare di ogni sua parola: «[...] in quanto personaggio egli può mentire» (Todorov 2000:87);

✓ La presenza di “avvenimenti strani” che viene sottolineata da Todorov: «[...] senza “avvenimenti strani” il fantastico non può nemmeno apparire» (2000:96);

✓ L'uso attento di termini che permettono di creare un'atmosfera soprannaturale e che, a volte, sottolineano la natura evanescente del fantastico. È il linguaggio stesso che deve essere tenuto fortemente in considerazione poiché, come afferma ancora una volta Todorov «[...] il linguaggio solo consente di concepire ciò che è sempre assente: il soprannaturale» (2000:85);

✓ I «temi dello sguardo» (Todorov 2000:124). Questi mettono in risalto la percezione che i personaggi hanno del mondo. All'opposizione tra «razionalità/irrazionalità» (A.E. Soccio 2006) si affianca quella tra “visto/non visto” che contribuisce a mantenere l'ambiguità nel testo. La posizione del narratore diventa ancora più ambigua al termine del racconto: egli abbandona la spiegazione scientifica e si insinua il dubbio della presenza del misterioso.

L'immagine del treno è l'unico elemento che suggerisce la presenza di una componente sociale nel racconto. Nella società Vittoriana il treno è visto come un prodotto della Rivoluzione Industriale che, oltre a permettere degli spostamenti più rapidi, deturpa il paesaggio delle città. Esso può essere associato ad uno strumento di morte, soprattutto in seguito ai numerosi incidenti ferroviari riportati nelle cronache del tempo. Questa convinzione sociale, insieme ad un'esperienza autobiografica, può far presupporre l'idea di un progresso che in realtà genera una sorta di «regress» (A.E. Soccio 2006).

Altro elemento importante è la figura del «narratore inattendibile», cioè un narratore che «è virtualmente in disaccordo con l'autore implicito» (A. Marchese 1983:53). Il dissenso tra questi due elementi del racconto contribuisce a mantenere viva l'incertezza nel testo.

L'ambiguità che tanto caratterizza il genere fantastico emerge anche grazie a due particolari procedimenti di scrittura, «l'imperfetto» e la «modalizzazione» (Todorov 2000:41), ai quali ci si riferisce rispettivamente con i termini “simple past” e “modal phrase”. Questo aspetto è sviluppato nell'ultimo capitolo in relazione alle traduzioni italiane del racconto.

Infine, alcune tecniche narrative (varie forme del discorso diretto e indiretto) permettono all'autore di stabilire un maggiore o minore controllo sulle parole pronunciate dai personaggi (o sui loro pensieri). Espedienti importanti che spesso generano confusione nel lettore che può perdere di vista il personaggio a cui determinate parole sono attribuite.

# 1- Introduction

## 1a- *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*

Charles Dickens is probably regarded as one of the greatest English novelist: his popularity spread both during his life and in the following century.

His literary production counts a great deal of works, most of which were first published in the periodicals. As a matter of fact, he contributed to different newspapers (such as *The Examiner* and *The Daily News*), during all his life and finally succeeded in funding his own review.

On 30 March 1850 the first number of *Household Words* appeared: this was the title selected by Charles Dickens and his contributors for the weekly publication which became the instrument of Dickens's journalistic writing. The title paraphrases a verse of a popular Shakespearian work: «“Familiar in their mouths as Household words” (*Henry V*, Act IV, Scene iii, l. 52-- in the young monarch's famous Saint Crispin's day speech)».<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/periodicals/hw.html>. Consulted on 9 March 2006.

Moreover, it can be noticed that the title itself found its origin and identity in what was said about the weekly by its editor. In fact, the first number of *Household Words* began with a presentation entitled “A Preliminary Word”:

We aspire to live in the Household affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts, of our readers. We hope to be the comrade and friend of thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions, on whose faces we may never look. We seek to bring to innumerable homes, from the stirring world around us, the knowledge of many social wonders, good and evil, that are not calculated to render any of us less ardently persevering in ourselves, less faithful in the progress of mankind, less thankful for the privilege of living in this summer-down of time.<sup>2</sup>

*Household Words* provided, each week, different kinds of articles regarding a large wage of topic: the review was published on Wednesdays in the offices of Covent Garden, but it appeared on Saturdays. The weekly was published from Wednesday 27 March 1850 until Wednesday 28 May 1859 (30 March 1850 - 31 May 1859).

In the last number of *Household Words* Charles Dickens published the announcement of the approaching publication of a

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

new review, announcement which will be included also in the new weekly publication:

Nine years of Household Words, are the best practical assurance that can be offered to the public, of the spirit and objects of All the Year Round.

In transferring myself, and my strongest energies, from the publication that is about to be discontinued, to the publication that is about to be begun, I have the happiness of taking with me the staff of writers with whom I have laboured, and all the literary and business co-operation that can make my work a pleasure.<sup>3</sup>

On 30 April 1859 the first number of the successor of *Household Words* appeared: the full title was *All the Year Round. A Weekly Journal. Conducted by Charles Dickens. With Which is Incorporated Household Words*.<sup>4</sup> It is curious that also this title paraphrases another Shakespearian work, as P.V. Allingham notices: «“The Story of Our Lives from Year to Year”-- Shakespeare. [...] (specifically, the subtitle paraphrases Othello, Act one, Scene three, lines 128 – 129)».<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Charles Dickens uses the same words in the announcement of the

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<sup>3</sup> Available from <http://www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/lit/charlesdickens/AllTheYearRound/Chap1.html>. Consulted on 9 March 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/periodicals/ayr.html>. Consulted on 9 March 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

publication of *All The Year Round* when explaining the purpose of his new publication:

The task of my new journal is set, and it will steadily try to work the task out. Its pages shall show to what good purpose their motto is remembered in them, and with how much of fidelity and earnestness they tell “The Story of Our Lives from Year to Year”.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear enough that the aim of the editor was to give birth to a review which was related to the previous one. The structure of this new weekly is almost the same and the editor himself affirmed in the announcement that:

That fusion of the graces of the imagination with the realities of life, which is vital to the welfare of any community, and for which I have striven from week to week as honestly as I could during the last nine years, will continue to be striven for “All the Year Round”. The old weekly cares and duties become things of the Past, merely to be assumed, with an increased love for them and brighter hopes springing out of them, in the Present and the Future.<sup>7</sup>

Charles Dickens serialized his novels (and his contributors’) in these two reviews which provided also Christmas

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<sup>6</sup> Available from <http://www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/lit/charlesdickens/AllTheYearRound/Chap1.html>. Consulted on 9 March 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

numbers with collected stories. In 1866, *Mugby Junction* appeared in the Christmas number of *All the Year Round*. This was a collection of short stories «which includes a masterpiece of short fiction, “The Haunted Signalman”». <sup>8</sup> The original title of the story was *Nº. 1 Branch Line: the Signalman*.

*The Signalman* shows Charles Dickens’s ability to master language in order to create a text totally absorbed in the fantastic. The story is rich in descriptions: the environment not only evokes “supernatural” events; it identifies itself with them. All the narrative expedients used in this story are oriented towards the “unreliable” atmosphere which is the central aspect of the fantastic.

At the same time, while everything in the story puts the reader in an almost still place, where time seems to pass ever more slowly till stopping, there is something that recalls the era of the Industrial Revolution; the aim is to remind the reader that something unusual is happening in the reality of the writer’s world. As a matter of fact, the story is set in a railway post where strange events happen. The “signs” of revolutionary changes in

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<sup>8</sup> Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/periodicals/ayr.html>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

life and society take part to the construction of a narrative story with apparently no social issues.

### **1b- *The Signalman*: summary**

*The Signalman* is set in a deserted railway spot where a man is in charge of a duty which requires exactness and watchfulness.

«Halloa! Below there!»<sup>9</sup> (p.1), someone says to the signalman from the top of the steep promontory above him. At that call the signalman shows an ambiguous behaviour, as if the call was unreal, unclear. His first reaction is to strain his eyes into the distance, exactly down the Line. It seems he cannot understand from what quarter the voice came.

«Halloa! Below!» (p.1) the voice repeats: this time the signalman turns to the top of the promontory where he can glimpse a figure. Meanwhile, a train passes causing a violent pulsation in the air and on the earth. The voice asks, this time, if there is a path to reach the signalman: the man gets only a wave

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<sup>9</sup> All the quotations of *The Signalman* by Charles Dickens reported in this writing are available at <http://books.mirror.org/dickens/signalman>. Page numbers refer to the printing format of the mentioned e-text.

by him who points some yards away in the distance, as he holds a flag in his hand.

The man on the top finds a «rough zigzag descending path» (p.1) proceeding through a wet stone, and follows it. Half way, the man sees the signalman standing in a strange attitude, as if he were waiting for someone or something to appear. Then, the man resumes his way; once he reaches the signalman he sees «a dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows» (p.1), a strange figure which begins to haunt him.

The railroad level is a «dismal» place which allows to scan only a little «strip of sky» (p.1) in a direction: in the other, a «gloomy red light» and the «dark mouth of a tunnel» (p.1). What first draws the attention of the man from above is the lonesome aspect of the place.

Somehow, the idea of the signalman to be a spirit and not a man hovers over his mind, but as the signalman shows fear of him, that thought vanishes:

The monstrous thought came into my mind, as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man. I have speculated since, whether there may have been infection in his mind.

In my turn, I stepped back. But in making the action, I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight (p.2).

Afterwards, the signalman confesses his doubt: he is not sure of seeing that man for the first time. He had thought he had seen him near the red danger light at the entrance of the tunnel. His interlocutor admits that there is no reason for him to be there: actually, he has never been there.

After breaking the ice, the two men go on talking: their manners clear and the signalman begins dismissing his reluctance. The interlocutor makes some remarks on his repetitive job. This can be reduced to few and simple actions:

[...] Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him, and of actual work-- manual labour-- he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do [...] (p.2).

Going on with their conversation, the man discovers something about the signalman's life, as the fact that he has taught himself a language and that, sometimes, he «rises» from those

«shadows»: in fact, that Line is less busy than others. He has to be careful because the electric bell may ring anytime.

The signalman takes his interlocutor into his box: there, the man can see some telegraphic instruments and the electric bell to which the signalman has to pay attention. They keep on talking but they are interrupted several times by the sound of that little bell: the man can see the signalman at work, reading messages and sending replies. The interlocutor notices a very strange behaviour: he sees the signalman break off the conversation twice, even when the bell does not sound, turn his face to the electric instrument and finally go out of his box and look at the red light near the entrance of the tunnel. Moreover, the odd air upon him is the same that man saw when they met and which he had not understood:

[...] while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did NOT ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions, he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder (p.3).

Before leaving , the speaker affirms that the signalman shows to be a «contented man» (p.3), maybe by way of encouragement. The answer is different, though he is a troubled man. «With what? What is your trouble?» (p.3) asks the man. The signalman explains that it is too difficult to talk about it, but he promises to tell him during his next visit. The next day, at eleven, he would come: before leaving, the signalman asks his interlocutor why that evening he cried out those words, «Halloa! Below there!» (p.3). The man answers that there was no reason: probably because he simply saw a man below. After promising not to call out again from the top of the promontory, the speaker goes back to his inn.

Next day the man punctually and keeps his promise: not a word is said until they are face-to-face. After shaking their hands, they enter the box and sit by the fire. The signalman begins talking and affirms that he is troubled because the day before he took his friend for someone else. He cannot say exactly who this someone is because he has never seen its face. He only saw a figure with «“[...] the left arm across the face, and the right arm is waved--violently waved”» (p.4). The signalman shows his interlocutor how that «appearance» waved his arm: the man

follows his action and interprets the waving of the signalman as if it meant: «For God's sake, clear the way!» (p.4). Afterwards, the signalman begins to explain what happened to him some time before.

A night, while he was sitting in his box, he heard a voice crying: «Halloa! Below there!» (p.4). Soon after, he saw «Some one else» (p.4) near the red light waving in the way he had showed before. The signalman came up to the “man”, but when he reached him, he was gone: no one was either in the tunnel or near the red light. He came back to his box and discovered that all was well: no alarm was given.

At this point, the man tries to persuade the signalman that the appearance was only a «deception of his sense of sight» (p.5): the cry must have been caused by the wind and the telegraph wires:

Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine, I showed him how that this figure must be a deception of his sense of sight [...]. “As to an imaginary cry,” said I, “do but listen for a moment to the wind in this unnatural valley while we speak so low, and to the wild harp it makes of the telegraph wires” (p.5).

But the signalman remarks that he has not finished. He explains that six hours later there had been a «memorable accident» (p.5) on that Line and that «the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood» (p.5).

The man, who is attentively listening to the signalman's narration, tries again to give a simple explanation of the facts. He maintains that it is a «remarkable coincidence» (p.5) and that «men of common sense» (p.5) do not allow that coincidences, even though remarkable ones, influence the «ordinary calculation of life» (p.5).

However, the signalman tells him once again that it is not all. He saw the «Spectre» again, and this time it said nothing. It simply stood against the red lamppost with its hands before its face. As he did before, the signalman imitates what he saw and the interlocutor interprets it as a mourning action. The same day, another terrible event happened: a train came out of the tunnel and the signalman saw a great confusion in a carriage. He gave the stop-signal to the driver: when the train stopped, some yards away, the signalman went closer and heard some horrible

screams. He realized that a beautiful young woman had died. The woman was brought into the box where they are now.

The man instinctively pushes his chair back. This time, he does not know what to say and feels his mouth became very dry. The signalman resumes his conversation: he confesses to his interlocutor that the “Spectre” has come again two weeks before. Nothing has happened yet but he saw it again «by fits and starts» (p.6) near the danger light, doing the sign of «For God’s sake, clear the way!» (p.6). And he affirms that it is the “Spectre” that rings the little bell.

The other man takes the opportunity to ask the signalman if the spectre was there the day before, when he broke off the conversation and went to the door. «Twice» (p.6) the signalman replies: his guest exposes again his theory. The signalman is misled by his imagination. He himself did not see or hear anything:

“Why, see,” said I, “how your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell, and if I am a living man, it did *not* ring at those times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you” (p.6).

The interlocutor does not convince his friend. The signalman affirms that he has never made confusion between the sound of the electric bell and the spectre's ring. As a matter of fact, they are of different nature:

“I have never made a mistake as to that yet, sir. I have never confused the spectre's ring with the man's. The ghost's ring is a strange vibration in the bell that it derives from nothing else, and I have not asserted that the bell stirs to the eye. I don't wonder that you failed to hear it. But I heard it” (p.6).

Notwithstanding this, the other man is still reluctant.

The signalman goes on talking: he has no rest, he explains, because he cannot understand what is the danger and, accordingly, he cannot do anything to avoid a new tragedy. He is extremely anguished: he feels upon himself an «unintelligible responsibility involving life» (p.7).

The man decides not to question anymore the reality or unreality of the signalman's thoughts. He thinks that his duty is to try to calm the signalman down whose responsibility increases at night. For this reason, the man offers to stay all night but his suggestion is rejected.

While ascending the path, the man turns back towards the red light feeling a sense of reluctance: he is not afraid to admit that he would not be able to have a wink of sleep under it. In a similar way, he does not like the two accidents described.

Frustrated, the man thinks it is not fair to communicate to the signalman's superiors what thoughts came into the mind of their subordinate. At the same time, he wants the signalman to propose a compromise. He thinks to ask his friend to accompany him to a medical practitioner and hear someone else's opinion about these misleading perceptions. However, he promises to come back the following day.

The next evening, the man decides to have a stroll of about a hour before going to visit the signalman. He comes up to the brink, the same point from which he called the signalman the first time. He looks down and suddenly a thrill sizes upon him: near the entrance of the dark tunnel he sees the «appearance of a man» (p.8), exactly like the description the signalman gave him the day before. It is a man with his left arm before his eyes and his right hand waving violently, exactly like the action made by the signalman while telling his story. But, he is sure that, this time, the appearance is a real man, and he is not alone:

The nameless horror that oppressed me passed in a moment, for in a moment I saw that this appearance of a man was a man indeed, and that there was a little group of other men, standing at a short distance, to whom he seemed to be rehearsing the gesture he made (p.8).

He descends the path as fast as he can: once reached the men near the tunnel, he asks them what is wrong and one of them answers that the signalman was killed in the morning. Incredulous, he tries to understand if they were meaning the same person: for this reason, a man raises «an end» (p.8) of the oilcloth which covered the corpse revealing the face of the signalman he previously met.

The man asks to know how the tragedy came about: he is told that the signalman was «cut down» (p.8) by the engine because he, somehow, was too near to the outer rail. The man who drove the engine then gives him a more detailed description of the accidents:

“Coming round the curve in the tunnel, sir, [...]I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective-glass. There was no time to check speed, and I knew him to be very careful. As he didn’t seem to take heed of the whistle, I shut it off where we were running down upon him, and called to him as loud as I could call”(p.9).

The man asks the driver what he said exactly. «I said, ‘Below there! Look out! Look out! For God’s sake, clear the way!» (p.9). the speaker starts, as the coincidence is really remarkable. The driver adds that he put his left arm before his eyes and waved the other, so as to make the signalman understand, but to no avail.

The narrator makes us notice that the warning of the driver not only contained the words which haunted the signalman, «but also the words which I myself--not he-- had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated» (p.9).

## 2- Narrative ingredients

### 2a- The fantastic genre

*The Signalman* is a short story whose genre can be generally identified as that of fantastic literature. Notwithstanding this, this story can be found into collections of works which catalogue it as a “ghost story” or “tale of horror”. Although the difference may appear hardly relevant, it must be underlined that in fact it is.

Montague Rhodes James, considered «as England's Master of the Ghost Story and a specialist in that distinct genre of literature of horror and the supernatural», affirmed that: «“the sole object of inspiring a pleasing terror in the reader . . . is the true aim of the ghost story”». <sup>10</sup> On the contrary, Tzvetan Todorov maintains that: «La paura spesso è legata al fantastico, ma non ne è una condizione necessaria» (2000:38).

Tzvetan Todorov tries to give some indications in order to identify the general aspects of the fantastic and to perceive its

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<sup>10</sup> Available from <http://ednet.rvc.cc.il.us/~fcoffman/103/Horror103/MRJamesRemarks.html>. Consulted on 31 March 2006

presence in a text. In his critical work *«La letteratura fantastica»*, he affirms that: «L'hesitazione del lettore è [...] la prima condizione del fantastico» (2000:34). However, in order to understand better what the fantastic is, Tzvetan Todorov tries to give a more detailed explanation which should make clearer the concept of “hesitation in the text”:

Così penetriamo nel cuore del fantastico. In un mondo che è sicuramente il nostro, quello che conosciamo, [...] si verifica un avvenimento che, appunto, non si può spiegare con le leggi del mondo che ci è familiare. Colui che percepisce l'avvenimento deve optare per una delle due soluzioni possibili: o si tratta di un'illusione dei sensi [...], oppure l'avvenimento è realmente accaduto [...]. Il fantastico occupa il lasso di tempo di questa incertezza; non appena si è scelta l'una o l'altra risposta, si abbandona la sfera del fantastico[...] (2000:28).

From this point of view, it is not difficult to understand that «[...] il fantastico dura soltanto il tempo di un'hesitazione» (2000:45). Further, Todorov makes us notice that the fantastic stands in between two other similar genres: the “strange” and the “marvellous”. In their turn, these depend on the kind of decision (or, rather, the in-decision) that the reader, or the character, takes when analysing an event:

Se [il lettore] decide che le leggi della realtà rimangono intatte e permettono di spiegare i fenomeni descritti, diciamo che l'opera appartiene ad un altro genere: lo strano. Se invece decide che si debbono ammettere nuove leggi di natura, in virtù delle quali il fenomeno può essere spiegato, entriamo nel genere del meraviglioso (2000:45).

According to Todorov, the central aspect of the fantastic story should be the moment in which the protagonist or the reader doubts what is happening. Moreover, the fantastic entails that the reader integrates totally with the characters' world.

Another important element emerges from this: Charles Dickens's story is written in an unusual first person and one of the protagonist is, at the same time, also the narrator of the events. As Tzvetan Todorov defines it, the «narrator-character» or «represented narrator» suits the fantastic genre, because it creates a strong ambiguity in the text. As a matter of fact, what Dickens's character says as a narrator cannot be doubted by the reader. Conversely, we are aware that all he is saying as a character may not be true:

Il problema si fa più complesso nel caso di un narratore-personaggio, di un narratore che dica "Io". In quanto narratore, il suo discorso non ha da essere sottoposto alla prova delle verità, ma in quanto personaggio egli può mentire. [...] Il narratore rappresentato si addice quindi perfettamente al fantastico (2000:87).

For this reason, the beginning of Charles Dickens's *The Signalman* may be taken as perfect evidence of the ambiguity which pervades all the text. Probably, it is not by sheer coincidence that the first words of the story are those pronounced by the "represented narrator" and that they are not received clearly by the signalman. On one hand, at the end of the story we may doubt about just every single word said by the "represented narrator"; on the other, we may decide that everything is true.

The represented narrator is probably one of the central elements in the construction of the tale. The following affirmation underlines the ambiguity that emerges from the presence of this kind of narrator and the uncertainty that we can find through the whole text:

    Riassumendo: il narratore rappresentato si addice al fantastico poiché facilita la necessaria identificazione del lettore con i personaggi. Il discorso di questo narratore ha uno statuto ambiguo, e gli autori l'hanno diversamente sfruttato, ponendo l'accento sull'uno o sull'altro dei suoi aspetti: se appartiene al narratore, il discorso è al di qua della prova della verità; se appartiene al personaggio, deve assoggettarsi alla prova (Todorov 2000:90).

Moreover, going on in the reading, those first words «Halloa! Below there!» echo into the reader's mind and, at last,

become the “sign” of the supernatural event that takes place at the end of the story.

## **2b- Fantastic narrative devices in *The Signalman***

The fantastic, in order to reveal itself, needs some narrative devices which are likely to help the reader to grasp the supernatural. *The Signalman* is a text rich in “signs” that stand there to introduce something “strange” that is going to happen. The behaviour of the signalman himself is continuously described by the narrator through underlining his odd reactions in front of something natural: for example the signalman’s reaction at the greeting of the “visitor” from above the “cutting” which is exactly described in a paragraph:

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came; but instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about, and looked down the Line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said for my life what. But I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice [...] (p.1).

The breaking-off of the conversation while the two characters are talking into the box is another interesting example. They are interrupted several times by the ring of a little bell which requires the attention of the signalman: he has to read messages and send replies in order to guarantee the perfect state of the line. But the “guest” notices that something “strange” happens:

In a word, I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity, but for the circumstance that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did NOT ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions, he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder (p.3).

Analysing carefully the words used by the writer, some relevant observations can be made. On the one hand, Charles Dickens uses capital letters - « did NOT ring » (the underlining is mine) - in order to give more emphasis to that negative which highlights a strange event. On the other hand, what at first was called «the entrance» of the tunnel becomes a «mouth», signalling a kind of antropomorphic personification of the tunnel. This

becomes the mouth of a kind of “monster”, that emphasizes, one more time, the presence of the “strange”.

These are only two examples from Charles Dickens’s text; reading through the story there are many others that can be pointed out. However, two examples are enough to justify another important affirmation made by Tzvetan Todorov: «[...] senza “avvenimenti strani” il fantastico non può nemmeno apparire. Certamente il fantastico non consiste in questi avvenimenti, ma essi ne sono una condizione necessaria [...]» (2000:96). From this point of view, there are a lot of “strange events” that can be noticed. The most remarkable ones are the appearance and the ensuing accidents in the Line.

Charles Dickens’s narrator defines these appearances as “coincidences”. Tzvetan Todorov explains how the expedient of coincidences endangers the existence of the supernatural: he makes a list of some explanations used to describe a supernatural event: «Enumereremo adesso i tipi di spiegazione che tentano di escludere il soprannaturale: vi sono innanzi tutto il caso, le coincidenze [...]» (2000:49). It must be underlined that once the narrator tries to explain away the accidents as mere coincidences in order to accomplish the function affirmed by Todorov. On the

contrary, at the end of Charles Dickens's story the narrator underlines a remarkable coincidence which has the opposite aim:

Without prolonging the narrative to dwell on any one of its curious circumstances more than on any other, I may, in closing it, point out the coincidence that the warning of the Engine-Driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate Signal-man had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself--not he--had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated (p.9).

In fact, in this circumstance the device of the coincidence is used in order to allude to the strange and supernatural side of the event. Moreover, it leaves the story with no conclusion: the reader will continue to doubt the nature of the accidents and, above all, question the signalman's death:

La fine (in)aspettata del casellante, investito da una locomotiva in movimento, non chiude la vicenda ma la enfatizza e le conferisce una valenza ancora più simbolica, poiché non solo la questione dello spettro rimane irrisolta ma è destinata a perpetuarsi nel narratore-ascoltatore (Soccio 2006:9).<sup>11</sup>

There is another important aspect of the text: every single word in the story aims at the building of the supernatural

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<sup>11</sup> Page numbers of "*The Signalman* di Charles Dickens: simulacri e incubi" refer to the printing format of a Word.doc text given directly by A.E. Soccio.

atmosphere which pervades characters and location. All the descriptions, all the narrator's thoughts, all the places have something remarkably "strange" which distinguishes them.

First of all, the description made by the represented narrator at the beginning of the story shows a hostile place, and hostile nature all around him: the place from which he is calling is a «steep cutting» (p.1); the path he descends is a «rough zigzag descending path» (p.1) which «was made through a clammy stone, that became oozy and wetter as [he] went down» (p.1).

Moreover, in the first part of the story there is a significant description of the signalman, and of the place in which the whole story takes place: it gives a clear idea of the importance of descriptive words and negative lexemes:

[...] drawing nearer to him, saw that he was a dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy, deadly smell [;...]» (p.1, the underscoring are mine).

Nouns and adjectives such as «dark sallow man», «solitary», «dismal», «crooked», «dungeon», «gloomy red light», «barbarous», «forbidding», «deadly» have a strong impact on the reader: the whole paragraph presages something supernatural, as the narrator himself underlines in the end: «[...] and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world» (p.1). In paragraphs like this, Tzvetan Todorov's affirmation finds total fulfilment: «Il soprannaturale nasce dal linguaggio: ne è insieme la conseguenza e la prova. [...] il linguaggio solo consente di concepire ciò che è sempre assente: il soprannaturale» (2000:85).

Another affirmation is related to the previous: «Niente ci vieta di considerare il fantastico appunto come un genere sempre evanescente» (Todorov 2000:46). Probably, the evanescent nature of the fantastic finds its confirmation in Charles Dickens' story, especially when the writer tries to talk about the supernatural: in fact, there are many attempts to “capture” the supernatural by defining it through “natural” words which are as evanescent as what they try to define. In this sense, a relevant example is the definition of the “visions” that haunt the signalman. At the beginning, what he sees is a «some one else» (p.4); then, after

coming closer to it, it becomes a «figure» (p.4); later, it is an «appearance» (p.5); finally, it is a «spectre» (p.5). As can be seen, there is not only just one word to describe the signalman's "visions", but many words which underline, every time, the evanescent nature of reality. Moreover, this particular use of the words keeps the reader in a situation of total suspense and uncertainty during all the rest of the story.

Another important consideration concerns the progressive identification of the man above the cutting. As a matter of fact, the signalman's interlocutor is, at first, a «figure»: only later it becomes a person, a man. This episode is quite relevant because it shows Dickens's ability of insinuating uncertainty from the beginning of the story by introducing the unreliability which lies not only in the text but also in the narrator himself.

### **2c- The importance of the sight contact**

At this point, there is something else that must be noticed, the presence of a kind of "intruder" that acts in the main episodes of the story: the train.

The train is an element that interferes in the moments of great suspense. First of all, at the beginning of the story a train passes after the man's call. The passage describes carefully the man's reaction after his question to the signalman: in fact, the man wants to know if there is a path to reach him:

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down. When such vapour as rose to my height from this rapid train had passed me, and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down again, and saw him refurling the flag he had shown while the train went by (p.1).

There is a moment in which the two characters can see each other: it must be brought in mind that the man is indeed a «figure» (p.1) for the signalman. Then, the train passes and its description has something that makes it an evanescent image («skimming away over the landscape»): there is a moment, during which the narrator loses his sight-contact with the signalman, that coincides with the passing of the train. After this, the sight-contact is recovered and the same question is repeated:

I repeated my inquiry. After a pause, during which he seemed to regard me with fixed attention, he motioned with his rolled-up flag towards a point on my level, some two or three hundred yards distant (p.1).

Time seems to turn back: the repetition of the question brings the reader back, as if time skims away together with the train, and nothing has ever happened. As a matter of fact, the signalman does not give any answer to his interlocutor; not a word is said by him before the train has passed. Then, he looks at the man «with fixed attention», as if investigating his identity.

The concept of “deception of the sense of sight” is related to this aspect in the first paragraphs of Charles Dickens’s story. The first relevant episode is the signalman’s attempt to explain the reason of his trouble to his interlocutor: «“I took you for some one else yesterday evening. That troubles me”. [...] “That some one else”» (p.4). Later in the story, the interlocutor uses this concept in order to keep the signalman calm: in fact, he tries to explain away the signalman’s vision as a misleading “figure” caused by his tired nerves:

I showed him how that figure must be a deception of his sense of sight, and how that figures, originated in disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye,

were known to have often troubled patients [...] (p.5, the underlining is mine).

In this paragraph it can be noticed that the interlocutor is reluctant to accept the supernatural aspect of the events; for this reason he tries to find a scientific explanation. He is sceptical about the nature of the events and the reader doubts with him. At the same time, the narrator puts the reader off the scent of the “fantastic” nature of the story by explaining these visions with the signalman’s presumed insanity. It is clear that, in the narrator’s thoughts, it is a deception of the sight that troubles the signalman.

The whole story is full of elements that focus on this aspect. There is often something that distorts the characters’ sight; something that intervenes among the protagonists and the environment, or the “spectre”. Just at the beginning of the story, the signalman’s figure appears «foreshortened and shadowed» (p.1). Instead, at the end of the text there is a significant description made by the driver of the engine while explaining how the accident happened: «I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective-glass» (p.9, the underlining is mine). It is not said if it is the train smoke that causes this distortion or rather something else; this could be seen as evidence of the supernatural

aspect of the accident, a distortion of the man's sight and reason.

Tzvetan Todorov underlines the importance of this aspect when he talks about «[i] temi dello sguardo»:

Possiamo ancora caratterizzare questi temi dicendo che riguardano essenzialmente la strutturazione del rapporto tra l'uomo e il mondo: in termini freudiani siamo nel sistema percezione-coscienza. Si tratta di un rapporto relativamente statico, nel senso che non implica azioni particolari, ma semmai una posizione, una percezione del mondo, più che un'interazione con esso. Il termine di percezione è importante: le opere legate a questa rete tematica ne fanno risaltare continuamente la problematica, la vista [...]: a tal punto che si potrebbero designare tutti questi temi come "temi dello sguardo" (2000:124).

Anna Enrichetta Soccio notices that the story develops on two narrative levels which coincide with the two characters:

Ai due personaggi corrispondono gli altrettanti piani narrativi di cui il racconto si compone. Essi si incrociano da subito e si dipanano contemporaneamente: più precisamente, nella narrazione "prima", enunciata dal viaggiatore, s'inscrive una narrazione "seconda", enunciata dal casellante, che ripercorre, con estrema lucidità e con un sicuro effetto di *suspense*, i momenti salienti della persecuzione subita ad opera di un fantasma (2006:4-5).

In her essay she also underlines the opposition between rational/irrational elements which corresponds to the juxtaposition of narrator/signalman:

Dell'opposizione binaria *razionalità/irrazionalità* (omologa a realtà/mistero) rinvenuta all'inizio e che ha costituito la struttura portante del racconto dickensiano, il narratore era l'elemento logico e raziocinante (2006:10).

Another kind of contrast is that of unseen/seen. During the conversations with the signalman, the interlocutor does not see (or hear) anything: on the contrary, in a following conversation the signalman affirms he saw the spectre twice:

“Did it ring your bell yesterday evening when I was here, and you went to the door?”

“Twice.”

“Why, see,” said I, “how your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell, and **if I am a living man**, it did *not* ring at those times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you.[...] And did the spectre seem to be there, when you looked out?”

“It *was* there.”

“Both times?”

He repeated firmly: “Both times” (p.6).

The balance between reason and imagination continues till the end of the story. But, as A.E. Soccio affirms, it vanishes with the narrator's remark at the conclusion of the story. In fact, the narrator, who represents the rational side of the interpretation of the facts, seems to begin to doubt the possibility of a scientific explanation, leaving the story uncertain: «Con il riconoscimento

dell'esistenza di qualcosa di misterioso e di scientificamente inspiegabile, la sua posizione diventa oltremodo ambigua» (2006:10). This ambiguity emerges also through the narrator's own words. If we look back to the last example, we can notice that the narrator uses a very particular expression: «if I am a living man». The first thing that must be noticed is the conjunction “if”: it is a typical form that we can find very often in this text and which characterizes the fantastic.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the most interesting thing is the expression «living man»: why the narrator should doubt him to be alive? Maybe, in my opinion, it is an ironic expression which contributes to create uncertainty and, above all, to strengthen the idea of the unreliable narrator of the fantastic.

## **2d- The train: emblem of a destructive progress?**

The role of the train in this text can be considered very important if we take into consideration the age of great changes during which Charles Dickens lived and wrote his works. As a

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<sup>12</sup> In order to understand this aspect of Charles Dickens's story see here, paragraph 4a p. 80.

matter of fact, the social, political and economical reality in which the writer lived was upset by the great scientific and technological progress which at first involved Great Britain, and then all the European countries: the Industrial Revolution.

The industrial revolution caused transformations which affected not only many social and political aspects of life, but also the landscape of Great Britain, as Robert Furneaux Jordan describes in his work *Victorian Architecture*: «What had been the wooded hills of Yorkshire or Wales became, almost overnight, a land of squalid villages and black, roaring, crowded cities [...]»<sup>13</sup>.

A lot of Victorian writers described the effects that railways had on the city: there are detailed descriptions which underline not only the environment transformations but also the people's reaction to such changes in their society. As George P. Landow affirms:

The objections all center on the charge, now hard to take seriously, that laying the railway tracks through a landscape in some way irremediably chopped and divided it [...].<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/sci3.html>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

<sup>14</sup>Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/railways/landscape.html>. Consulted on 21 March 2006.

To give an example of what he is affirming Landow quotes

G. Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*:

[...] the heroine objects to the way the railways cut through the landscape, expressing

her personal sorrow at the disfigurement of our dear England. . . Those railways! When would there be peace in the land? Where one single nook of shelter and escape from them! And the English, blunt as their senses are to noise and hubbub, would be revelling in hisses, shrieks, puffings and screeches, so that travelling would become an intolerable affliction. 'I speak rather as an invalid,' she admitted; 'I conjure up all sorts of horrors, the whistle in the night beneath one's windows, and the smoke of trains defacing the landscape; hideous accidents too. They will be wholesale and past help. Imagine a collision! I have borne many changes with equanimity, I pretend to a certain degree of philosophy, but this mania for cutting up the land does really cause me to pity those who are to follow us. They will not see the England we have seen. It will be patched and scored, disfigured . . . a sort of barbarous Maori visage — England in a New Zealand mask.'<sup>15</sup>

During the first half of the Nineteenth Century the coming of the train and the railway system gave start to a new era. There was a new means of transport which allowed to connect with and reach the opposite side of a country in less time than it was possible in the years before. Talking about *Dombey and Son*, a work by Charles Dickens in which he «[...] rivelò brillantemente

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<sup>15</sup>Ibidem.

molti degli effetti sociali più importanti dell'avvento della ferrovia» (A. Briggs 1987:338). E.D.H. Johnson underlines that

In the railways, spreading their network from city to city across the face of England, the novelist found an emblem for the innovating spirit which had overnight replaced the leisurely world of stagecoaches and country inns [...].<sup>16</sup>

The period of maximum growth of the Victorian railways was between 1820 and 1850: the introduction of railways was

[...] a revolutionary transformation -- more revolutionary, in its way, than the rise of the cotton industry because it represented a far more advanced phase of industrialization and one bearing on the life of the ordinary citizen outside the rather small areas of actual industry. It reached into some of the remotest areas of the countryside and the centres of the greatest cities. It transformed the speed of movement -- indeed of human life -- from one measured in single miles an hour to one measured in scores of miles per hour, and introduced the notion of a gigantic, nation-wide, complex and exact interlocking routine symbolized by the railway timetable (from which all subsequent "time-tables" took their name and inspiration). It revealed the possibilities of technical progress as nothing else had done (Eric Hobsbawm).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/edh/2.2.html>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/railways/railway4.html>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

The strong impact of the Industrial Revolution is also underlined in the critical essay written by Anna Enrichetta Soccio, “The Signalman di Charles Dickens: simulacri e incubi”:

L'inarrestabile processo di industrializzazione e di motorizzazione proietta il presente verso un futuro di imminente “modernità” che, da un punto di vista meramente ontologico, significa cambiamento della percezione dello spazio e del tempo e, da un punto di vista pragmatico, cambiamento della concezione dell'organizzazione della quotidianità e della gestione dei rapporti interpersonali (2006:1).

According to these transformations, the conception and way of life underwent relevant changes: on the one hand, there was a new routine in people's life bound to the effectiveness of railways and, above all, to their timetables; on the other, a new class of workers emerged. They were employed in the civil service in order to guarantee the perfect state of the railways.

As said at the beginning of the present work, *The Signalman* is only apparently a short story with no social issues. In fact, the birth of railways and rail transport left indelible signs on Victorian society. On the one hand, railways represented the progress and social optimism typical of the new era. On the other, a kind of rejection of what is new and unexpected emerged and

brought along with it a melancholy feeling towards the past and “tradition”: «[...] il treno diviene quasi naturalmente il simbolo dell’ottimismo vittoriano ma incarna, nel contempo, anche tutte le inquietudini che la perdita delle certezze e dei valori del passato rurale comporta» (Soccio 2006:1). Such a melancholy feeling can be observed in some literary works of the time. The following passages are taken from *Diana of the Crossways*; the heroine underlines that

“I love my country. I do love quiet, rural England. Well, and I love beauty, I love simplicity. All that will be destroyed by the refuse of the towns flooding the land”. Ah, it's all those members of the lower orders freed from their urban settings.<sup>18</sup>

Later a countryman in the same novel affirms:

“Once it were a capital county, I say. Hah! you asks me what have happened to it. You take and go and look at it now. And down heer'll be no better soon, I tells 'em. When ah was a boy, old Hampshire was a proud country, wi' the old coaches and the old squires, and Harvest Homes, and Christmas merryings. — Cutting up the land! There's no pride in livin' theer, nor anywhere, as I sees, now.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/railways/landscape.html>. Consulted on 21 March 2006.

<sup>19</sup>Ibidem.

The breaking off with the certainty of the past led to an ambiguous reaction. In front of a revolutionary innovation such as the railway, the literary world seemed to question the idea of actual “progress”:

Proprio nel momento in cui i vittoriani avvertono sempre più vicino il traguardo di un mondo migliore verso cui spinge la dominante ideologia progressista — accompagnata da una foga celebrativa che si manifesta in modi sempre differenti —, proprio nel momento in cui si vede realizzata una totale coincidenza tra sapere scientifico e autoemancipazione della società britannica, la scrittura letteraria insinua il dubbio che il *progress* generi, come inevitabile risvolto, una *regression* e invita a riflettere sulle molteplici possibilità che si giunga a un diverso contesto sociale e psicologico in cui prevalgono inconsce paure e subliminali incertezze (Soccio 2006:3).

Probably, the visions that begin to haunt the signalman are the personification of those unconscious fears that emerge in a man who finds himself in a totally new reality. And probably it is not a mere chance that one of Dickens’s narrative stories focuses on the image of a Signalman.

Analyzing Charles Dickens’s short story it may be noticed that some paragraphs underline the aspects related to this kind of “progress/regress”, not only from a social point of view, but especially as shown in the characters’ interior disintegration:

L'introduzione della macchina a vapore ha del resto modificato in maniera irreversibile il modo di percepire e di pensare il tempo. Con il treno è possibile percorrere in alcune ore le stesse distanze che fino a pochi lustri prima si percorrevano con giorni di cavallo o di carrozza. E, accorciate le distanze, il tempo diventa più veloce e più frenetico. Ne consegue che l'individuo, in nome della modernità e in un isolamento crescente è sottoposto a un duplice processo: di decostruzione dell'"io-uomo" e di ricostruzione di un "io-macchina" (Soccio 2006:7).

Taking into consideration the description of the signalman's repetitive job and his «solitary» and «dismal» workplace, A.E.Soccio strengthens her theory of the textual correspondence of the interior disintegration of the characters:

A livello testuale, in *The Signalman* i riscontri di tale disgregazione interiore sono molteplici[...]. Un luogo trasformato in inferno dalla tecnologia, un uomo trasformato in strumento passivo della tecnologia: di qui, il rifugio inconsapevole dell'immaginazione in una dimensione sovranaturale, che è tanto più inquietante quanto più il narratore, che dell'impianto semantico-attanziale è l'elemento afferente al polo della razionalità, non riesce ad offrire alcuna spiegazione plausibile alla vicenda del casellante (2006:7).

It may be said that the image of the train represents the symbol of the progress that had a strong impact on Victorian society; the emblem of the rational side of man which fights against the irrational one. This dichotomy can be found also in the

characters themselves: the signalman is a person who is, somehow, integrated with the rational world of technological and social development and he is, at the same time, the character who is affected by strange visions.

Another interesting aspect of the story is that the train causes horrible accidents and several deaths: the «memorable accident of that Line»<sup>20</sup>, the death of a young lady, and finally, the signalman's own death. In this sense, it could be very useful to cite Soccio's discussion of the train accident of *Dombey and Son*. She explains how the train is seen as a “death instrument”:

Ancora più significativo è l'atteggiamento dickensiano che emerge dalla narrazione di un angoscioso ancorché simbolico viaggio in treno compiuto dal protagonista, in cui il treno sancirà, senza ambiguità alcuna, il proprio statuto di strumento di morte. Una lunga pagina descrittiva accompagna il lettore nei meandri di un paesaggio in cui predominano oscurità e dolore e che ricalca gli intimi pensieri di un Dombey immerso in una strana confusione mentale, conseguente alla scomparsa del figlio, che associa la velocità del mezzo di trasporto all'annullamento della vita. “[T]riumphant monster, Death [...] remorseless monster, Death [...] indomitable monster, Death” sono le parole che scandiscono quella scena: la locomotiva, mostro trionfante, mostro senza rimorso, mostro indomabile, cioè Morte. Due sostantivi (*monster, Death*) e tre aggettivi (*triumphant, remorseless, indomitable*) che non lasciano dubbi sulla valenza semantica attribuita al treno che, nella corsa

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<sup>20</sup> Available from <http://books.mirror.org/dickens/signalman/>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

dell'uomo verso la modernità, finisce per acquistare [...] vita propria, sfuggendo al controllo del suo creatore (2006:2).

The passage that Soccio takes into account is probably the detailed description that we can find in chapter 15 of *Dombey and Son* that I report below:

There was no such place as Staggs's Gardens. It had vanished from the earth. Where the old rotten [missing a line] opened a vista to the railway world beyond. The miserable waste ground, where the refuse-matter had been heaped of yore, was swallowed up and gone; and in its frowsy stead were tiers of warehouses, crammed with rich goods and costly merchandise. The old by-streets now swarmed with passengers and vehicles of every kind the new streets that had stopped disheartened in the mud and waggon-ruts, formed towns within themselves, originating wholesome comforts and conveniences belonging to themselves, and never tried nor thought of until they sprung into existence. Bridges that had led to nothing, led to villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks. The carcasses of houses, and beginnings of new thoroughfares, had started off upon the line at steam's own speed, and shot away into the country in a **monster train**.<sup>21</sup>

This is a meaningful passage: Dickens describes not only the landscape but also some positive effects of the railway («Bridges that had led to nothing, led to villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks»).

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<sup>21</sup> Available from <http://victorian.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/victorianweb/authors/dickens/railway1.html>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

The thought of the train as a death instrument probably originates not only from an autobiographical experience but also from a cultural belief.

On 9 June 1865, while returning from a Paris holiday with Ellen Ternan, Charles Dickens was involved in a train accident. The carriage he travelled in left the line but, fortunately, did not fall in the viaduct, as others did: although greatly shocked, he made an effort in order to give help to the other travellers. As far as this accident is concerned, A.E. Soccio asserts that:

Quanto al racconto dickensiano, non è affatto fuori luogo stabilire un collegamento diretto tra quell'evento biografico e la composizione di *The Signalman*. Quale superstite di un incidente, lo scrittore lascia intravedere un tentativo di attribuire, attraverso l'attività fabulatoria, un senso ai propri fantasmi e a quelli della sua epoca al fine di esorcizzarli. E, alla stessa stregua di un superstite, il lettore non può non riconoscere nel treno, piuttosto che un indicatore di prosperità di un popolo, il simbolo negativo della condizione della moderna umanità, soggiogata dall'efficienza ma anche dalla forza incontrollabile e irrazionale della macchina (2006: 5-6).

Notwithstanding this, the cultural element can be considered as crucial. As we said above, many Victorian writers discussed the great impact the new technology had on the English cities and «Not many Victorian or Edwardian novelists follow

Dickens who, while pointing out some of the railways bad effects upon the city, strongly argues for its positive ones as well». <sup>22</sup> But the most interesting thing is that

More commonly, writers describe the railway in an urban setting as largely destructive, and the artificial, mechanical sound of the steam locomotive's whistle, so beloved by modern rail fans, was often cited as the perfect symbol of that destructiveness. <sup>23</sup>

The sound of the steam whistle is a recurring element associated with the train and it «is often described as a “scream”»: it is impressed in the mind of the Victorian as shown by the following passage taken from *Basil* by Wilkie Collis:

It was a very lonely place — a colony of half-finished streets, and half-inhabited houses, which had grown up in the neighbourhood of a great railway station. I heard the fierce scream of the whistle, and the heaving, heavy throb of the engine starting on its journey, as I advanced along the gloomy Square in which I now found myself. <sup>24</sup>

All these examples can help to understand why the train can be seen as the symbol of a destructive progress in Charles

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<sup>22</sup> Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/railways/cityeffect.html>. Consulted on 21 March 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

Dickens' story: at first a strong social belief, it was later confirmed by the personal experience of the writer and.

We have asserted that train was seen as an instrument of death: this thought can find its origin probably in the numerous accidents that came about in the Victorian age. A memorable accident was the death of William Huskisson, who was a politician of the time and an «active leader in the movement towards Free Trade».<sup>25</sup> See the following letter, taken from the *Creevey Papers*:

Jack Calcraft has been at the opening of the Liverpool rail road, and was an eye witness of Huskisson's horrible death. About nine or ten of the passengers in the Duke's car had got out to look about them, whilst the car stopt. Calcraft was one, Huskisson another, Esterhazy, Bill Holmes, Birch and others. When the other locomotive was seen coming up to pass them, there was a general shout from those within the Duke's car to those without it, to get in. Both Holmes and Birch were unable to get up in time, but they stuck fast to its sides, and the other engine did not touch them. Esterhazy being light, was pulled in by force. Huskisson was feeble in his legs, and appears to have lost his head, as he did his life. Calcraft tells me that Huskisson's long confinement in St George's Chapel at the king's funeral brought on a complaint that Taylor is so afraid of, and that made some severe surgical operation necessary, the effect of which had been, according to what he told Calcraft, to paralyse, as it were one leg and thigh. This, no doubt, must have increased, if it did not create, his danger and [caused him to] lose his life. He

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<sup>25</sup> Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/huskisson.html>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

had written to say his health would not let him come, and his arrival was unexpected.[...] <sup>26</sup>.

It could be useful to make some concluding observations about the image of the train. First of all, there are other works in which Charles Dickens describes the transformations of his times related to trains and railways and this could be enough to prove that in his works Dickens showed to be «very much a man of his times; and it is in the full context of an age primarily characterized by rapid change that his writings must, in the first instance, be read as they are to yield their full meaning»<sup>27</sup>. A similar thought is the affirmation made by William Robert Golding in his critical work *Idiolects in Dickens: The Major Techniques and Chronological Development*:

The world in which [the characters] move is the vast, projected cyclorama of the author's own mind, ornamented with the details that his faithful reporter's senses have captured and transmuted there. Take away this scenery, and the full wonder of his work is gone (1982:9).

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<sup>26</sup> Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/accident.html>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/edh/2.2.html>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

Moreover, an important aspect of the story is that the train can be considered as the element that connects the events to a certain historical and social background. At the same time, it is the only image that evokes a rational element in the story. It is interesting to notice that any strange or supernatural event is followed by the passing of the train.

The train brought routine into the social life of those times, especially in the existence of the workers of the civil service and people who used it for travel or commuting. It is relevant that it is precisely a railway post – the theatre of this new mechanized routine – the place in which some unexpected – fantastic – events take place. A thought which seems to summarize well Dickens’s belief appeared in a piece entitled “The Amusements of The People” published in *Household Words*:

There is a range of imagination in most of us, which no amount of steam-engines will satisfy, and which The-great-exhibition-of-the-works-of-all-nations, itself, will probably leave unappeased.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

### **3- A linguistic study**

#### **3a- The time of narration**

The first thing that must be taken into consideration is the way in which the story is narrated. For this reason, it is very important to define what kind of narrator we find in the story.

First of all, there is an aspect that must be noticed: in this text the narrator is, at the same time, the protagonist of the strange events that take place. He tells us a story as the spectator or testimony of certain facts. Moreover, he interacts with the real protagonist, the signalman. In other words, this narrator-character aims at acquainting the reader with the strange experience he lived, giving a nearly objective report which is interrupted, at times, by his thoughts.

The reader can find a meaningful passage just at the beginning of the story:

"Halloa! Below there!"

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what

quarter the voice came; but instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about, and looked down the Line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said for my life what. But I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice, even though his figure was foreshortened and shadowed, down in the deep trench, and mine was high above him, so steeped in the glow of an angry sunset, that I had shaded my eyes with my hand before I saw him at all. (p.1)

This passage, extremely descriptive and rich in details, gives a clear idea of the narrator as a witness: he gives an account to the reader of what he saw. And it must be underlined that the whole text is a succession of descriptions of visual reactions: it is also a reporting of thoughts and dialogues between the two characters.

From this point of view, the presence of an 'I' narrator is almost implicit. In fact, this device allows to create a "one-way" narration, and above all it determines a stronger influence on the reader, who identifies himself with the narrator's ideas:

The choice of a first person narrator where the I is also a primary character in the story produces a personal relationship with the reader which inevitably tends to bias the reader in favour of the narrator/character (G.N. Leech, M.H. Short 1981:265).

All these aspects refer back to the definition of Tzvetan Todorov: in fact, he identifies the typical narrator of the fantastic story, the «represented narrator»<sup>29</sup> and he also explains why first person narration is more appropriate than the third person one:

[Il narratore rappresentato] è anche preferibile al narratore non rappresentato per ben due ragioni. Prima di tutto, se l'avvenimento soprannaturale ci fosse riferito da un narratore di questo tipo ci ritroveremmo subito nel meraviglioso: in effetti non vi sarebbe ragione di dubitare delle sue parole. Ma il fantastico, come sappiamo, esige il dubbio. Non a caso i racconti meravigliosi usano di rado la prima persona [...]. In secondo luogo, ciò si riallaccia alla definizione stessa del fantastico: la prima persona «narrante» è quella che permette più facilmente l'identificazione del lettore con il personaggio, giacché, come noto, il pronome «io» appartiene a tutti[...]. Così si penetra nel cuore del fantastico nel modo più diretto possibile (Tzvetan Todorov 2000:87).

At the same time, there is something more that must be noticed when talking about the narrator in Charles Dickens's «The Signalman»: the narrator is a prevailing feature in the text. In other words, sentences and thoughts belong to the narrator and the presence of the implied author<sup>30</sup> cannot be observed, and neither is his point of view. There is nothing in the text that allows

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<sup>29</sup> See above section 2a (page 12).

<sup>30</sup> For an explanation of the figure of the implied author we may quote the definition given in *L'officina del Racconto* by Angelo Marchese : «L'autore implicito è definito sulla base delle note affermazioni di Wayne Booth (l' "immagine dello scrivente ufficiale"). Non è il narratore, ma piuttosto "il principio che ha inventato il narratore insieme a tutto il resto della narrazione" (S. Chatman)» (1983:53).

us to affirm that a certain thought is shared by the implied author. This distance can be a sign of the absolute dissent of the implied author with every single attitude and feeling of the narrator. Such a narrator is defined «unreliable», as Angelo Marchese explains in his work *L'officina del racconto* reporting S. Chatman's theory:

Una sottocategoria [dell'autore implicito] è il narratore inattendibile: «Ciò che rende un narratore inattendibile è il fatto che i suoi valori divergono notevolmente da quelli dell'autore implicito; cioè che il resto della narrativa –“la norma dell'opera”– è in conflitto con la presentazione del narratore e noi sospettiamo della sua sincerità o della sua competenza a raccontare la versione vera. Il narratore inattendibile è virtualmente in disaccordo con l'autore implicito» (1983:53).

The suspicion and uncertainty of a sincere and true telling make the reader doubt everything and this condition is, as we already know<sup>31</sup>, the main feature of the fantastic.

After defining the kind of narrator we find in the story, it is important to analyse the verbs and their form.

First of all, we can take into consideration the passage quoted above (pages 43-44) and begin to make some remarks about the tense used by the author. The first paragraph of *The Signalman* makes clear that the narrator is talking about

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<sup>31</sup> See above section 2a (pages 11-12).

something which happened in the past. The prevailing tense is the simple past: it is used in order to give a detailed description of the events and environment. The event is something that happened in the past and which is perceived as completely over: moreover, all the elements belong to the sphere of the narrator's memory which brings to life what caught his attention.

In the above example we can find a typical use of the simple past: the whole story is rich in very descriptive paragraphs as if it were a succession of portraits which give shape to an actual literary world.

Notwithstanding this, the author uses the simple past in different situations in order to strengthen the sense of uncertainty, and in these cases the simple past contributes to underline an action which took place in the past but which can be also perceived as continuing in the present: however, the reader cannot be sure of the nature of a certain affirmation either in a sense or in the other.

Tzvetan Todorov affirms that the simple past, together with the use of "modal phrases", is an important device in the fantastic stories:

L'ambiguità dipende anche dall'uso di due procedimenti di scrittura che impregnano tutto quanto il testo [...]. Essi vengono chiamati: l'imperfetto e la modalizzazione. Quest'ultima, ricordiamolo, consiste nell'uso di certe locuzioni introduttive che, senza cambiare il senso della frase, modificano la relazione tra il soggetto dell'enunciazione e l'enunciato. Ad esempio, le due frasi: «Fuori piove» e «Forse fuori piove», si riferiscono allo stesso fatto, ma la seconda indica inoltre l'incertezza in cui versa il soggetto che parla, circa la verità della frase che enuncia. L'imperfetto ha un senso simile: se dico «Amavo Aurelia», non preciso se continuo ad amarla o meno; la continuità è possibile, ma in linea di massima poco probabile (2000:41).

After reporting Todorov's examples, what we said above is clearer. The critic also recognises other important characteristics of the simple past:

L'imperfetto, inoltre, introduce una distanza tra il personaggio e il narratore, di modo che noi non conosciamo la posizione di quest'ultimo[...].

L'imperfetto significa che non è il narratore presente a pensare in quel modo, bensì il personaggio di un tempo (2000: 41-42).

We may now turn to Charles Dickens's story. In the story the signalman confesses to his interlocutor: «I **took** you for some one else yesterday evening». Even if the mistake was made the day before, the affirmation is ambiguous: the reader cannot be

sure whether the signalman still has some doubts about the identity of “what” he saw the day before.

The simple past is also used in order to underline the distance between the character of the past and the present narrator, as in the following sentence: «His pain of mind **was** most pitiable to see. It **was** the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life». We cannot say that this thought belongs to the present narrator.

As far as the present tense is concerned, we can make a similar consideration: the present tense introduces an idea which belongs to the present narrator, but probably the character of the past did not share the same thought:

That I more than once looked back at the red light as I ascended the pathway, that I did not like the red light, and that I should have slept but poorly if my bed had been under it, I **see** no reason to conceal. Nor did I like the two sequences of the accident and the dead girl. I **see** no reason to conceal that either (p.7).

In this case, the present tense is extremely significant: in fact, it underlines not only the current narrator’s thought but also a certain ambiguity. Why does the narrator affirm now that he has

«no reason to conceal» his fears? Probably, the narrator has reached his own conviction but he does not declare what kind of idea he maintains. Accordingly, the reader can but defer his own opinion due to the continuous unreliability of the narrator. The reader can only find himself in a complete uncertainty which depends on the narrator's intent to make clear, or not, his thoughts.

Some paragraphs below, we can find another important statement:

I cannot describe the thrill that seized upon me, when, close at the mouth of the tunnel, I saw the appearance of a man, with his left sleeve across his eyes, passionately waving his right arm (p.8).

Once again the narrator lets his thoughts emerge, leaving the character in a subordinate position.

Finally, we can affirm that when the reader seems to be definitely persuaded by the information given by the narrator character – to the point that he doubts the signalman's position – the narrator intervenes in the first person of the present tense in order to insinuate uncertainty again.

As far as the use of the modal phrases is concerned, we can quote some examples which can help us to understand the importance of such a device:

When I came down low enough upon the zigzag descent to see him again, I saw that he was standing between the rails on the way by which the train had lately passed, in an attitude **as if** he were waiting for me to appear (p.1).

The use of «as if» underlines the uncertainty of that thought: the narrator character interprets the signalman's behaviour but he doubts it. In fact, it is strange to think that a person “appears” as spectres do, but the narrator aims to make the reader doubt his own words and this is a very important effect in a fantastic story.

Notwithstanding this, the form “as if” is not the only one used by Charles Dickens: another “modal” form is the verb “to seem”, as in the following passage: «His manner **seemed** to make the place strike colder to me, but I said no more than, “Very well”». It is clear that the sensation of cold is extremely subjective and for this reason it does not mean that it was actually cold.

There are many other expressions such as “I am afraid”, “I may”, “maybe” and many conditional forms. Let’s observe the following sentence: «One **would have thought**, considering the nature of the ground, that he **could not have doubted** from what quarter the voice came [;...]» (p.1). These conditionals contribute, one more time, to produce uncertainty. In the first case, the distance between the narrator and the reader’s thought is strengthened by the use of the indefinite pronoun («One»).

### **3b- Presentation of speech**

The previous paragraph developed the analysis of the narration’s time and that part of the narrator’s speech which aims to report the events and the characters’ reactions.

Besides this more descriptive part there is another aspect of the tale that needs to be taken into consideration, that is the techniques used to represent the characters’ dialogues.

First of all it must be noticed that in Charles Dickens’s *The Signalman* there is a quite simple configuration of characters: on the one hand, we find the narrator-character who gives birth to the telling; it builds up the story and interacts with another character,

the signalman who is the protagonist of the story. Moreover, there are two different levels in the narration:

[essi] si manifestano quando il narratore del racconto di primo grado (o diegetico) cede la parola a un personaggio, che diventa il narratore di un racconto di secondo grado (o metadiegetico). Il narratore del racconto primo è detto extradiegetico (è situato allo stesso livello del pubblico), quello del racconto secondo è detto intradiegetico e non può che rivolgersi ad altri personaggi del racconto primo, che fungono da ascoltatori (A. Marchese 1983:168).

The narrator keeps the characters' dialogue under his control deciding when letting them talk. The author can express different degrees of control through distinct techniques, and they represent a narrative device used in order to convey a peculiar effect.

Let's discuss some examples from Charles Dickens's story:

[A] "You look at me", I said, forcing a smile, "as if you had a dread of me" (p.2).

[A] "I was doubtful", he returned, "whether I had seen you before" (p.2).

[B] [...]he observed that instances of slight incongruity in such wise would rarely be found wanting among large bodies of men; that he had heard it was so in workhouses, in the police force, even in that last desperate resource, the army; and that he knew it was so, more or less, in any great railway staff (p.3).

As far as the sentences [A] are concerned, they are examples of direct speech (DS); on the other hand, sentence [B] is a typical proposition written in indirect speech (IS). There are some important differences between DS and IS, and the first important thing is that:

The essential semantic difference between direct and indirect speech is that when one uses to report what someone has said one quotes the words used verbatim, whereas in indirect report one expresses what was said in one's own words (G.N. Leech, M.H. Short 1981:318).

There are other noticeable differences: in IS the inverted commas do not appear and the subordinating conjunction "that" replaces them. Other important changes affect the person (the first person becomes the third one), as well as verbs and adverbs.

The IS allows the narrator to introduce a character's discourse in a more indirect way than the DS does. Moreover, direct speech is considered as the norm of the presentation of speech because it excludes the author's intervention.

Nevertheless, direct and indirect speech are not the only way in which the author can make his characters talk. If we

observe the following sentence we can immediately notice that, compared with the previous examples, there are some differences:

[C] “With what? What is your trouble?”  
“It is very difficult to impart, sir. It is very, very difficult to speak of. If ever you make me another visit, I will try to tell you” (p.3).

These sentences represent an example of free direct speech (FDS) because of the lack of a reporting clause. The dialogue passes from a character to the other without an insinuation of the narrator who has apparently no control on the report. This device often contributes to give speed to the interaction among the characters: at the same time it produces confusion in the reader’s mind who can have some difficulty to remember which of the character is talking – especially when he finds a lot of sentences in succession. Finally, FDS is a freer form than DS:

Direct speech has two features which show evidence of the narrator’s presence, namely the quotation marks and the introductory reporting clause. Accordingly, it is possible to remove either or both of these features, and produce a freer form, which has been called FREE DIRECT SPEECH: one where the characters apparently speak to us more immediately without the narrator as an intermediary [...] (G.N. Leech, M.H. Short 1981:322).

The form in between DS and IS is called free indirect speech (FIS). Once again, an example can be useful to notice some differences compared with IS and to understand which are the peculiar features of this form. In the following passage extracted from *The Signalman*, the narrator character seems to summarize the signalman's conversation:

[D] Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness where what was required of him, and of actual work - manual labour - he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do under that head [...] (p.2).

There are three elements that call our attention: the use of the third person pronouns, the absence of the subordinating conjunction "that", and the past tense. Moreover, the reader is doubtful about who is talking: is the narrator or the character? For this reason it is important to recognise and explain the use of this technique, especially in a text in which uncertainty is one of the main features.

Finally there is another important form that can be found in the text, that is the narrative report of speech act (NRSA). It

consists in a kind of summary of what has been said; in other words, the reader is informed that a speech act has occurred but the narrator does not report the words:

The possibility of a form which is more indirect than indirect speech is realized in sentences which merely report that a speech act (or numbers of speech acts) has occurred, but where the narrator does not have to commit himself entirely to giving the sense of what was said [...] (G.N. Leech, M.H. Short 1981:323).

Moreover, this kind of reporting has the characteristic to make the reader see the events from the narrator's perspective:

When a novelist reports the occurrence of some act of speech act we are apparently seeing the event entirely from his perspective (G.N. Leech, M.H. Short 1981:324).

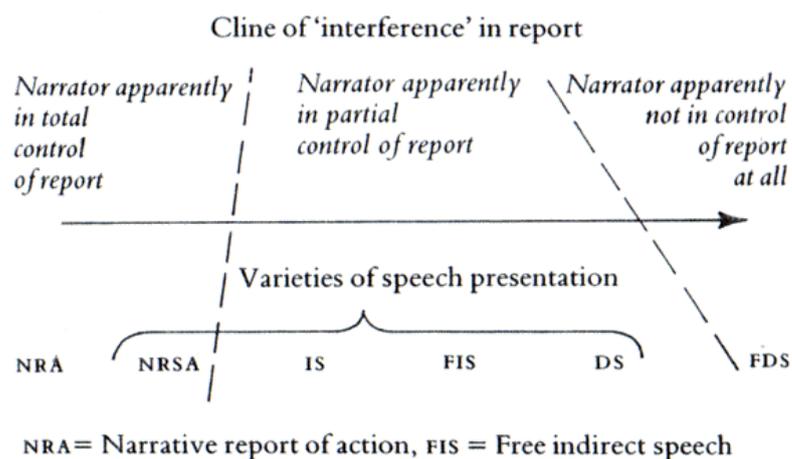
Accordingly, we can affirm that the narrator has apparently total control on the report. An example may explain how the NRSA appears in a text:

[E] He replied to my remarks with readiness, and in well chosen words (p.2).

[E] He thanked me, and went out the door with me (p.3).

Both the examples are NRSA because we are told that something has been said («he replied», «he thanked me») but we are not told which were the exact words used by the speakers.

Finally, I reproduce the scheme<sup>32</sup> proposed in G.N. Leech and M.H. Short, *Style in fiction* in order to give an overview of the techniques of speech presentation and their relevant properties:



Following the statements in the text *Style in fiction* there is an important aspect that must be quoted: as said before, direct speech is considered a norm in speech presentation and:

<sup>32</sup> G.N. Leech, M.H. Short, *Style in Fiction*, Malaysia, Longman Group Limited, 1981, p.324.

[...] any movement to the right of DS [...] will reproduce an effect of freeness, as if the author has vacated the stage and left it to his character; whereas any movement to the left of the norm will usually be interpreted as a movement away from verbatim report and towards 'interference' (G.N. Leech, M.H, Short 1981:334).

The last explanation highlights the importance that the switch from a technique to another one has in the story: the narrator can easily try to puzzle the reader to the point that he is no longer able to distinguish the narrator's point of view from the character's one. Finally, the reader cannot pass from a thought to another without taking a definitive decision.

In Charles Dickens's text there are other passages that are worth quoting and analysing. The following paragraph is rich in different techniques of presentation:

His manner cleared, like my own. He replied to my remarks with readiness, and in well-chosen words. Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him, and of actual work-- manual labour--he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do under that head [1]. Regarding those many long and lonely hours of which I seemed to make so much, he could only say that the routine of his life had shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it. He had taught himself a language down here,--if only to know it by sight, and to have formed his own crude ideas of its pronunciation, could be called learning it [2]. He had also worked at fractions and decimals, and tried a little algebra; but he was, and had been as a boy, a poor hand at figures [3]. Was it

necessary for him when on duty always to remain in that channel of damp air, and could he never rise into the sunshine from between those high stone walls? [4] Why, that depended upon times and circumstances. Under some conditions there would be less upon the Line than under others, and the same held good as to certain hours of the day and night. In bright weather, he did choose occasions for getting a little above these lower shadows; but, being at all times liable to be called by his electric bell, and at such times listening for it with redoubled anxiety, the relief was less than I would suppose [5] (p.2).

The first part [1] has already been taken into consideration some paragraphs above; but now it is important to underline the sequences of speech presentation in the whole passage. It begins with the use of the NRSA and then with FIS; there is a gradual reduction of the narrator's control on speech.

Part [2] shows a kind of narrative introduction which is replaced by IS: this becomes successively FIS due to the omission of the conjunction "that". The part «if only to know it by sight, and to have formed his own crude ideas of its pronunciation, could be called learning it» is quite confused: who is actually saying or thinking it? Is it a narrator's thought or he is simply reporting what the signalman said to him?

Parts [3], [4] and [5] show other examples of FIS. Going on in our reading the confusion seems to double, above all because part [3] probably reports a question the narrator-character asked

the signalman. The entire section is marked by a continuous tension which reaches its peaks in questions and changes of point of view.

We must make some remarks also on the following passage:

“I have made up my mind, sir,” he began, bending forward as soon as we were seated, and speaking in a tone but a little above a whisper, “that you shall not have to ask me twice what troubles me. I took you for some one else yesterday evening. That troubles me” [6].

“That mistake?”

“No. That some one else.”

“Who is it?”

“I don't know.”

“Like me?”

“I don't know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face, and the right arm is waved,--violently waved. This way” [7].

I followed his action with my eyes, and it was the action of an arm gesticulating, with the utmost passion and vehemence, “For God's sake, clear the way!” [8] (p.4).

This section constitutes an example of DS [6] and some questions and answers in FDS [7]. The whole paragraph is characterised by the growth of the rhythm: each character gives a ready answer to the questions of the other with no pauses. Moreover, the pressing rhythm depends as well on the short sentences of the interaction: in fact, even if part [7] is longer than

the others, it is formed by three short and independent propositions which continue to beat the same pressing rhythm.

As far as the last example is concerned, we need to add something. When talking about FDS we affirmed that it also is used to create confusion so that the reader finds it difficult to remember who is pronouncing those very words. However, in the previous passage the interlocutor only makes questions to the signalman who answers in a negative way. It creates a particular effect which could be compared to poetic antinomy: it also underlines the strong opposition between the two characters and their way of judging the supernatural events. A very similar construction can be found again later in the text:

“Did it cry out?”

“No. It was silent.”

“Did it wave its arm?”

“No. It leaned against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face. Like this.”

Once more I followed his action with my eyes. It was an action of mourning. I have seen such an attitude in stone figures on tombs (p.5).

There is a perfect parallelism between this dialogue and the previous one: the questions of the narrator character oppose to the negative answers of the signalman and there is a pressing rhythm

which makes the reader proceed without hesitating; on the other hand, in the concluding part the narrator character introduces his own thought and creates a pause.

### **3c- Presentation of thought**

In a previous example [8] we did not explain the nature of that «“For God’s sake, clear the way!”» (p.4). At a first look it could seem a DS presentation. But it is rather a thought. If we look back at the entire paragraph it is clear enough that the character is attaching a certain meaning to the signalman’s gesticulation: this action happens in his mind (as he makes the reader notice at the end of the story). It is an immediate answer to his interlocutor’s act and the narrator identifies himself with the character’s point of view by insinuating himself in his mind.

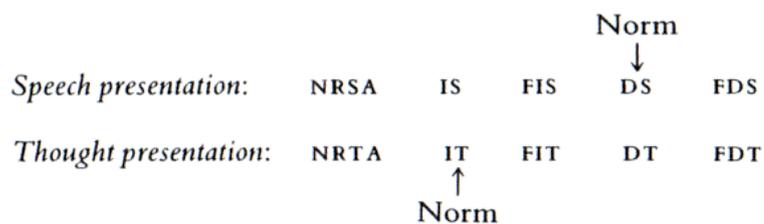
The presentation of thought uses some techniques which allow the narrator to express meaningful thoughts which otherwise would remain unexpressed.

The categories of thought presentation are similar to those of speech presentation: the main difference is that the norm of thought report is indirect thought (IT). For this reason, IT and free

indirect thought (FIT) create a direct contact between the reader and the character's thoughts (while indirect and free indirect speech put away the reader from the very words used by the character):

Hence, while FIS distances us somewhat from the characters producing the speech, FIT has the opposite effect apparently putting us directly inside the character's mind (G.N. Leech, M.H. Short 1981:344).

This is a reproduction of the scheme<sup>33</sup> used by Leech and Short in their text: it will help to give a clearer idea of thought presentation's categories:



«“For God’s sake, clear the way!”» (p.4) is an example of free direct thought (FDT) and it seems a monologue, as if the character were talking to himself.

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<sup>33</sup> G.N. Leech, M.H. Short, *Style in Fiction*, 344

In Charles Dickens's story there are other examples of thought presentation that show how sometimes the narrator abandons simple telling in order to give shape to his thoughts or his characters' thoughts: these interruptions are meaningful because they reveal something to the reader that the other characters of the story probably do not know. In fact, the thoughts represented in the story never belong to the signalman whose mind seems to be impenetrable.

The following is an example of thought presentation in the text: «(I am afraid I must acknowledge that I said it to lead him on)» (p.3). This is a narrator's thought represented in the form of FDT; the fear and the acknowledgement are of a present situation and they are revealed only to influence, somehow, the reader. Moreover, it cannot belong to the time of the experienced events because the sentence «“I am afraid”» underlines an uncertainty which persists.

There is a final example in which speech and thought presentation combine:

It was not to be denied, I rejoined, that this was a remarkable coincidence, calculated deeply to impress his mind. But it was unquestionable that remarkable coincidences did continually occur, and they must be taken

into account in dealing with such a subject [9]. Though to be sure I must admit, I added (for I thought I saw that he was going to bring the objection to bear upon me), men of common sense did not allow much for coincidences in making the ordinary calculations of life [10] (p.5).

Part [9] is an example of FIS and this underlines a certain distance from the character because the words are not reported verbatim and they emerge through an intermediary (the narrator). But in passage [10] a narrator's thought emerges in direct form in order to clarify his reaction through a kind of monologue addressed to the reader.

### **3d- Charles Dickens's rhythm of prose**

In a narrative text such elements as punctuation, repetitions, parallelisms and other figures of speech have a great importance: all these features contribute to create a certain rhythm which is often used in order to convey peculiar values.

As far as the punctuation mark is concerned, quoting Leech and Short's definition of the "rhythm of prose" is very useful:

[...] we may assume that written prose has an implicit, 'unspoken' intonation, of which punctuation marks

are written indicators. This certainly seems to be what many writers on prose style have in mind when they discuss the 'rhythm of prose' (G.N. Leech, M.H. Short 1981:215).

It can be useful to observe some aspects of *The Signalman* in order to understand better the effect of these elements.

Let's analyse the following passage:

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down. When such vapour as rose to my height from this rapid train had passed me, and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down again, and saw him refurling the flag he had shown while the train went by. (1)

In the first sentence we find a parallelism which creates an opposition between the two characters: the signalman «looked up without replying» and the narrator character «looked down without pressing him [...]». The parallelism is based on the use of the same grammatical construction, that is a past simple of the verbs “to look up” and “to look down” followed by a present continuous, and is separated by a visual element, a comma. Moreover, after the sight contact, the first in the story, there is an

incapacity to react in both characters, as if they belonged to different realities, and the distance between them were unfillable. The expression «idle question» is meaningful because it can mean either “stupid question” or “vane question”; the idea of incommunicability conveyed in the second case contributes to strengthen the distance between the two characters.

The narrator establishes a kind of hierarchical relationship between the signalman and the narrator-character: the first is, in fact, immersed in a “downward world” and the other looks at him from above. The image of a descent toward the signalman’s post is a strong metaphor which pervades the whole story and which preludes to the disaster.

While the first sentence has not many nouns and adjectives the second one is based on an accurate combination of them: immediately after the no-contact between these two worlds, a «vague vibration» becomes a «violent pulsation», and finally an «oncoming rush». These terms announce the passing of the train and they accelerate the rhythm of the sentence, which becomes pressing.

As far as the punctuation marks are concerned, the commas separate the sentences in four parts beating a sharp rhythm and

creating an ascending climax. Besides, this sentence seems to be connected to and introduced by the last part of the previous proposition: in fact, it reproduces the same sounds («repetition», «question», «vibration», «pulsation»). For this reason, the whole passage constitutes an evidence of the intense work which lies behind the construction of a prose which aims to picture uncertainty. In this light, the image of the «rapid train» which «was skimming away over the landscape» constitutes an evanescent figure that, at the end of the story, shows to be extremely meaningful (it is the train that appears every time that something strange happens).

Finally, Charles Dickens uses a vocabulary which focuses above all on the perception of the events, especially on the senses of sight and hearing. The great capacity of rendering the space around him through the description of objects and sounds is an important aspect in Dickens's writings as W.R. Golding affirms in his work *Idiolects in Dickens: the Major Techniques and Chronological Development* quoting a comment of W.A. Ward: «The two most crucial of these gifts were 'the prodigious resources of his ear'<sup>34</sup> and his exceptionally acute powers of

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<sup>34</sup> W.A. Ward, *Language and Charles Dickens*, p.874.

visual observation» (1982:9). This aspect of Charles Dickens's works can be underlined also in *The Signalman*. The perception of the exterior reality and, above all, the signalman's description made by the narrator are important means by which the author communicates the supernatural to the reader.

Another paragraph may make my argument clearer:

I resumed my downward way, and stepping out upon the level of the railroad, and drawing nearer to him, saw that he was a dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy, deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world (p.1).

This passage represents a detailed description of the signalman and the spot in which he seems to spend all his life. The narrator character is descending a path which leads him to a «dungeon» immersed in the dark. If we look at the numerous adjectives we realize that each one contributes to create an almost morbid atmosphere and to generate a pressing rhythm:

«he was a dark sallow man  
with a dark beard  
and rather heavy eyebrows ».

This part seems a blank verse in which the repetition of the word «dark» and the adjective «heavy» not only convey speed, they also contribute to convey the mysterious aspect of the signalman. Another important element that recalls the idea of a poetic construction is the strong antithesis “dark / sallow”. Finally, once again the commas separate each proposition and contribute to the rhythm.

The aim of creating a supernatural atmosphere is entirely committed to well-chosen adjectives: the post is «solitary» and «dismal». The use of synonyms strengthens the sense of loneliness to the point that it transforms space in a «great dungeon». Finally, the «gloomy red-light» and the «gloomier entrance to a black tunnel» put an end to the ascending climax. The whole paragraph is rich in climaxes («barbarous, depressing and forbidding air», «earthly, deadly smell») which pass from the visual sphere to the psychological and olphactory one.

In the last part of the passage the narrator character introduces the suspicion of being in another world using a modal

phrase («as if I had left the natural world»): he seems to be in a kind of supernatural reality in which the sense of incommunicability comes again, to the point that also the memory of what has been said is not clear: «but I am far from sure of the terms I used; for, besides that I am not happy in opening any conversation, there was something in the man that daunted me». The narrator uses the word «something» to define an extraordinary thing which cannot be defined in the “natural world” and it is this unintelligible «something» that daunts the man. Everything seems to picture an indefinite place and sensations through the use of selected words and structures.

Another interesting passage is the following:

In a word, I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity, but for the circumstance that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did NOT ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions, he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder (p.3).

First of all, the list of the signalman's actions stresses the rhythm which gives the idea of mechanical gestures; but there is

something that calls the reader's attention. The capital letters «NOT» create a kind of visual and rhythmic pause in the middle of the paragraph. The last proposition («when we were so far asunder») underlines a strong metaphor. The two characters were distant from each other in space and, at the same time, they were far because probably they belonged to two different worlds. Later on in the text the narrator character makes an important remark: «It was easier to mount than to descend, and I got back to my inn without any adventure». The character goes back to his “natural world”: it is much easier «to mount than to descend». There is again a metaphor which strengthens the sense of being in a supernatural place where strange events happen.

Parallelisms, repetitions, climaxes and metaphors are important devices that the reader finds in the whole text and they contribute to create different rhythms together with the punctuation marks.

## **4- *The Signalman*: a comparison of three Italian translations**

### **4a- Modal phrases**

As other works by Charles Dickens, *The Signalman* has several translations into Italian: it can be interesting to compare the way in which each translator tries to reproduce the original text. Literary translation seems to be a simple work; this is in fact a common mistake. When translating a literary work the most important thing is to understand and reproduce the same linguistic and formal intents of the author. Obviously, this does not mean making a literally translation. There is always a great study of the text taken into account, a study which aims to reveal the technical and formal devices used by the author in order to achieve certain effects. For this reason I decided to attempt a comparison of three different translations of Dickens's story.

The translations that I am going to take into consideration are:

A. M. Amendolea<sup>35</sup>;

B. (anonimo)<sup>36</sup>;

C. M. Skey<sup>37</sup>.

These translations seem to be quite faithful: there are some slight differences in the use of certain vocabulary and in the adaptation of punctuation to the Italian usage. Notwithstanding this, there are other differences that can be considered relevant, above all in the light of what has been noticed in the linguistic study in the chapters above.

First of all, it is useful to look at the modal phrases used by Charles Dickens in his story and the way in which they have been translated into Italian.

If we read attentively the English version we can notice that the main forms used by Dickens may be summarized as follows:

1. though + could + present perfect;
2. as though + simple past;
3. as if + past continuous;
4. as if + past perfect;

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<sup>35</sup> Charles Dickens, *Racconti di Fantasmi*, Roma, Theoria, 1992.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Dickens, *Fantasmi*, Roma-Napoli, Theoria, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Dickens, *Da Leggersi all'imbrunire*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi s.p.a., 1997.

5. as if + simple past<sup>38</sup>.

Although, the Italian translations remain quite faithful, there are some differences in the use of certain tenses which do not always correspond from a language to another one.

However, it is useful to quote some passages in order to make direct and clear comparisons among these three texts. The following propositions belong to the first structure (1):

«[...] though I could not have said for my life what» (p.1).

«[...] anche se per nulla al mondo avrei potuto dire cosa fosse» (*A* p.13, *B* p.210).

«[...] anche se non avrei potuto dire per nulla al mondo che cosa» (*C* p.231).

In this case we can notice that the only difference between the English and the Italian is the way in which the negation is made: in English, and in translation *C*, it is the verb itself which is in a negative form while Italian texts *A* and *B* use a negative locution.

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<sup>38</sup> These examples represents the most frequent structures used in Dickens's story in order to create uncertainty but they are not the only devices used by the author. If we look at the text of *The Signalman* we can notice other forms, as for example: To see, to suppose, to think, may, might, etc.

If we look at the second structure, the following proposition is a good example:

«[...] as though it had force to draw me down» (p.1).

«[...] come se avesse la forza di trascinarmi verso il basso» (A p.14, B p.210).

«[...] come se avesse la forza di trascinarmi giù» (C p.232).

Even in this example there is a perfect correspondence between the English and the Italian structure: the English simple past is used to express the Italian conditional tense (past conditional) and the degree of uncertainty is almost the same.

The third structure is more particular than the others taken into consideration; for this reason, maybe, the Italian form is not so similar to the English one:

«[...] as if he were waiting for me to appear» (p.1).

«[...] in attesa che io comparissi» (A p.14).

«[...] come in attesa che io comparissi» (B p.211, C p.232).

The verb in the continuous form does not appear in the Italian translations, by consequence the third person subject,

referred to the signalman, is absent: this form is replaced by a nominal form («in attesa di») followed by a conjunctive verb. Moreover, text *A* does not report the adverb “come” (as if) which is, in my opinion, a relevant omission. In a previous chapter I have underlined the importance of the modal phrases in a fantastic story: the omission of such an element implies disrespect of the writer’s original aim.

There are two other important forms to take into account:

«[...] as if I had left the natural world».

«[...] come se avessi abbandonato il mondo degli uomini» (*A* p.15, *B* p.211).

«[...] come se avessi abbandonato il mondo dei vivi» (*C* p.233).

These examples respect the original form so that, finally, we can affirm that the Italian translations do report almost the same structure except for some adaptations due to the grammar of the language into which the text is translated. Now we can summarize the main Italian forms used to report the English modal phrases:

1. anche se + past conditional;

2. come se + past conjunctive;
3. come se + imperfect conjunctive;
4. anche se + imperfect indicative («anche se la sua figura mi appariva in prospettiva» *A* p.13, *B* p.210);
5. come per + infinitive («come per pregarmi di capire» *A* p.17, *B* p.214).

Notwithstanding this, I noticed some differences which sometimes alter the original text in a relevant manner. Look at the following passage:

«A visitor was a rarity, I should suppose [...]» (p.2).

«Una visita doveva essere una cosa eccezionale, immaginavo [...]» (*A* p.15, *B* p.212).

«Una visita doveva essere una rarità, immaginavo [...]» (*C* p.233).

The English «I should suppose» is, in my opinion, extremely different from «immaginavo»: “should” strengthens the sense of uncertainty. Not only it is an hypothetical affirmation, but it implies also the idea of an uncertainty somehow imposed by the character’s own inner thoughts, as if he aims to convince himself that it is actually so.

Finally, it must be underlined that the Italian translations introduce a modal phrase, which is absent in the English text, maybe in order to be more correct in Italian:

«Seguì con gli occhi la sua azione, ed era l'azione di un braccio che gesticolava **come per** dire con profonda passione e veemenza: per l'amor di Dio, fate largo!» (A p.20, B p.216).

«Seguì con gli occhi il suo gesto: era l'azione di un braccio che gesticolava **come per** dire con profonda passione e veemenza: “per l'amor di Dio, fate largo!”» (C p.238).

The use of «come per dire» underlines something that maybe the author wanted to imply in the original text and it is, probably, a device which contributes to create a grammatically more correct proposition in Italian. We may thus assume that it is not always possible to give a totally faithful translation.

#### **4b- A general analysis**

We now shift the focus of analysis to the way in which the narrator character refers to the signalman from above the cutting:

A. «“Ehi! Voi!”» (p. 13).

B. «“Ehi! Voi laggiù!”» (p. 210).

C. «“Ehi! Laggiù!”» (p. 231).

Text *A* excludes the space indication that we find in *B* and *C*: this indication is, in my opinion, extremely important because it gives shape to a metaphor that is developed in the whole text: the “descent” of the narrator character towards an underworld. The word «“Laggiù!”» («“Below there!”») evokes this underworld which seems to be so important to the English writer, especially in the description of the interlocutor who gets nearer the signalman.

In the English text we noticed the relevant repetition of some adjectives and words which are used to convey a supernatural atmosphere, and the use of climax and antithesis.

The Italian translations *A* and *B* are very similar to each other but they do not respect entirely the original:

A. «Ripresi la mia discesa. Giunto al livello della ferrovia e avvicinatosi a lui, vidi che era un uomo **cupo, tetro**, con una barba **scura e spesse** sopracciglia. La sua postazione si trovava in uno dei luoghi più solitari e lugubri che avessi mai visto. Da entrambi i lati, un muro di pietra **frastagliata** ed **umidiccia** cancellava ogni cosa eccetto una striscia di cielo; la vista, in una direzione, era solo un **contorto** prolungamento di **questa** enorme **prigione**, la vista più breve, nell'altra direzione, terminava con una **tetra** luce rossa e l'**ancor più tetra** entrata di una **buia** galleria, la cui massiccia architettura emanava un'atmosfera **feroce, deprimente e minacciosa**. La luce del Sole vi aveva un così minimo acceso che aleggiava uno **stantio odore terrigno**;

soffiava un vento così freddo che mi sentii rabbrivire, **come se avessi abbandonato il mondo degli uomini**» (p. 14-15).

B. «Ripresi la discesa. Giunto al livello della ferrovia e avvicinandomi a lui, vidi che era un uomo **cupo, giallastro**, con una barba **scura e spesse** sopracciglia. La sua postazione si trovava in uno dei luoghi più solitari e lugubri che avessi mai visto. Da entrambi i lati, un muro di pietra **frastagliata e gocciolante** cancellava ogni cosa eccetto una striscia di cielo; la vista, in una direzione, era solo un **contorto** prolungamento di **quell'enorme prigione**; la vista più breve, nell'altra direzione, terminava con una **tetra** luce rossa e **l'ancor più tetra** ingresso di una **buia** galleria, la cui massiccia architettura emanava un'atmosfera **feroce, deprimente e minacciosa**. La luce del sole vi batteva così raramente che aleggiava uno **stantio odore terrigno**; soffiava un vento così freddo che mi sentii rabbrivire, **come se avessi abbandonato il mondo degli uomini**» (p. 211).

Translation C shows some differences which are more or less faithful to the English text:

C. «Ripresi a scendere. Giunto al livello della massicciata e avvicinandomi a lui, vidi che era un uomo dalla carnagione **scura, olivastra**, con una barba **nera e sopracciglia folte**. Si trovava in uno dei luoghi più solitari e lugubri che io abbia mai visto. Da entrambi i lati, un muro di pietra **gocciolante, tagliata rozzamente**, cancellava ogni cosa tranne una striscia di cielo; dietro, la vista era solo un **contorto** prolungamento di **quell'enorme cella sotterranea**; la vista più breve, nell'altra direzione, terminava con una **triste** lampada rossa e **l'ancor più tetra** imboccatura di una galleria **buia**, la cui architettura massiccia emanava **un che di deprimente e minaccioso**. La luce del sole batteva così raramente in quel luogo che esalava uno **stantio odore terrigno**; e soffiava un vento così gelido che rabbrivii, **come se avessi abbandonato il mondo dei vivi**» (p. 232-233).

First of all, we do not find in text *A* the antithesis and the repetition of the same adjectives: «cupo» and «tetro» do not render the antithetic effect of «dark sallow» because they evoke a dark aspect using terms which belong to the same semantic field. As far as the repetition of certain adjectives is concerned, this is absent in the Italian versions because, in my opinion, they cannot render exactly the same meaning. For example, the adjective «dark» has different meanings and possibilities of use in English. The use of «cupo» suggests an interpretation which aims to underline a mood rather than a physical aspect. In this case, the Italian word «scuro» cannot be referred to the temperament of a person and the word «cupo» is more appropriate. Translation *B* does not repeat the same adjective but prefers to use a synonym. The translator tries to render the antithesis at the beginning of the passage using two opposite adjectives, «cupo» and «giallastro», which imply the same strange impressions. Nevertheless, translation *C* gives a different interpretation: the expression «dark sallow» seems to refer only to the signalman's physical aspect, and in particular to the colour of his skin. This excludes every non physical connotations we find in the other two Italian texts. It is worth mentioning that maybe Skey's interpretation is the most

appropriate, in fact the whole passage focuses on the visual description of the place and of the signalman. Moreover, the description is extremely objective and it respects the author's intent in the remaining paragraph, that is giving a portrait which allows to transport the reader in that space using a pervasive but impersonal register.

The climax we find in the English text is well reproduced in translations *A* and *B*, but not in *C*: «there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air» corresponds to «feroce, deprimente e minacciosa» (*A* and *B*) and differs from «un che di deprimente e minaccioso» (*C*). The proposition loses the suspense and pressing rhythm that the reader finds in the English text; moreover, it introduces an indefinite dimension («un che di»).

There is another important difference worth being underlined: the demonstrative adjective used near the expression «great dungeon». Translation *A* uses «questa enorme prigione»; translation *B* uses «quell'enorme prigione»; translation *C* uses a totally different expression, «quell'enorme cella sotterranea». In my opinion, this is an important difference because in the first case the character seems to have already penetrated the great

dungeon. On the other hand, *B* delineates a kind of distance which makes the character give a description from above, as if he had not left «the natural world», and were not in the «great dungeon» yet. Furthermore, translation *C* differs also in the definition of “dungeon” which becomes an «enorme cella sotterranea». The use of «cella» is an antithesis (compared with «enorme») because it evokes the idea of a restricted place: this is quite significant due to the fact that, in my opinion, Skey aims to underline the heavy atmosphere of the place which seems, here, to press against the signalman.

Finally, in Skey’s text there is a more accurate place denotation: in fact, *A* and *B* do not use any adverb which can help the reader orient in space («la vista, **in una direzione**, era solo un contorto prolungamento» *A* and *B*), while *C* uses an adverb which allows to delineate the space «**dietro**, la vista era solo un contorto prolungamento».

To conclude, we can say that the extremely detailed description of the signalman’s post strengthens the metaphor we discussed earlier on: there is a kind of total immersion in the “underworld” of the signalman.

Even though it is not easy to respect a certain structure when translating from a language into another, both translations reproduce the parallelism we noticed above. When the two characters cast a glance to each other, the Italian runs as follows:

*A.* «Mi guardò senza rispondere, e io guardai lui, senza incalzarlo troppo presto nel ripeter la mia sciocca domanda» (p. 13).

*B.* «Mi guardò senza rispondere, e io guardai lui, senza mettergli troppa fretta ripetendo subito la mia sciocca domanda» (p. 210).

*D.* «Mi guardò senza rispondere, e io guardai lui, senza incalzarlo, ripetendo troppo in fretta la mia domanda tutto sommato abbastanza inutile» (p.231).

The effect is nearly equal to the English text with a slight difference. In English the use of the so called “prepositional verbs” (as the two verbs used by Dickens «looked up» and «looked down») is rather frequent: in this case the verbs indicate an extremely accurate action that is not reported in the Italian texts, maybe because it could seem an unnatural form. Moreover, it is very important to notice that translation *C* differs in a significant way in the second proposition. When we talked about the “rhythm of prose”, we noticed that the expression «idle question» could mean “stupid” or “vane”. Skey is the only one

among the translators taken into account that interprets the adjective in the latter way. In doing so, he underlines the incommunicability between the two characters.

Another relevant difference can be found later on in the text, exactly when the narrator character reports the main things that the signalman told him during their conversation. The paragraph ends with a particular expression: «He had made his bed, and he lay upon it. It was far too late to make another». This idiomatic phrase must be considered as related to the last part of the story, where the narrator sees something strange from above the cutting, near the entrance of the tunnel: «It looked no bigger than a bed». The narrator character is talking about the “bed” on which the signalman’s corpse lays. Maybe the idiomatic phrase presages what will be the signalman’s destiny: the bed could be seen as his deathbed and, accordingly, the place in which he works can be seen as the place in which he is doomed to die. It must be said that the narrator is telling a story which happened in the past; for this reason, some propositions are used in order to make the reader suspicious and, somehow, to guide him to the actual ending of the story.

However, it is not simple to respect the original form of the text, especially when the writer uses idioms which belong to his own language. In fact, the Italian translations do not evoke the image of the bed which has been noticed in the English text: «Si era tagliato quell'abito e ora doveva portarlo. Era molto, troppo tardi per rimediarsi» (*A* p.17, *B* p.214) and «Si era tagliato quell'abito e ora gli toccava portarlo. Era ormai troppo tardi per farsene un altro» (*C* p.235). The sentence does not convey the same idea of destiny because there is nothing that refers to the signalman's death. In this case, the lack of correspondence does not depend only on the ability of the translator: in my opinion, it is in fact very hard to translate literally an English idiom without changing the entire meaning of the proposition.

As far as the definition of the “man” seen by the signalman is concerned, each translation respects the gradual identification of this «some one else» with a «Spectre», a «ghost» and finally an «appearance». However, we can notice the omission of a sentence: «He stopped, with a fixed look at me». In my opinion, this is a relevant omission: the sentence describes an attitude that the signalman shows more than once in the text. Moreover, it is a resolute affirmation which wants to catch the reader's attention

introducing a kind of pause which seems to demand a reaction to the interlocutor and which creates suspense.

Another important consideration is the way in which the proposition «this unnatural valley» is translated. The word «unnatural» may be also interpreted as «monstrous»: texts *A* and *C* translate it as «valle innaturale», while text *B* reports «valle mostruosa». The first two texts report the antithesis while the other text introduces a kind of personification. This depends on the translator's interpretation, but this kind of freedom, in my opinion, is not always positive because it can distort the author's intents.

Moreover, the author uses, in certain cases, capital letters or italics in order to give emphasis to some words or expressions. Sometimes the choices of the Italian translators do not coincide. A first example is the following:

*A.* «“I miei occhi erano proprio sulla campanella, le mie orecchie erano attente, e, se è vero che sono qui, quella campana NON ha suonato”» (p.23).

*B.* «“I miei occhi erano proprio sulla campanella, le mie orecchie erano attente, e, quant'è vero che sono qui, quella campana NON ha suonato”» (p.219).

D. «“Stavo guardando proprio il campanello, le mie orecchie erano attente, e, quant’è vero che sono vivo, quel campanello in quella occasione *non* ha suonato”» (p.241).

In the English text «*not*» is written in italics, as it is in translation C: Skey seems to respect the English text more than the other translators do, differing only in one case:

«Per farla breve, avrei detto che quell’uomo era uno dei più adatti a simili mansioni se non fosse che mentre mi parlava si interruppe due volte, terreo in volto, si giro verso il campanello quando *non* aveva suonato, aprì la porta della cabina (che teneva chiusa per non far entrare la malsana umidità), e guardò fuori, verso la lampada rossa vicino all’imboccatura della galleria» ( C, p.236).

In this passage the English text uses bold type to underline “non”, rather than the italics used in Skey’s text.

In the previous passage there is another thing that must be noticed: A «se è vero che sono qui», B «quant’è vero che sono qui» and C «quat’è vero che sono vivo». The English expression used by Dickens is «if I am a living person» and it differs enough compared with the translations A and B. A is the only one which proposes the modal phrase “se” that we find in Dickens’ text, but Skey’s translation tries simply to be more faithful in the use of certain words. Skey reports «quant’è vero che **sono vivo**» and

even if he does not use the English modal phrase he can reproduce a very similar effect: the proposition sounds quite strange and it conveys the unintelligible gist of the story.

#### **4c- A final observation**

The first two translations are very similar, on the contrary *C* reveals some important differences compared with the others. In my opinion Skey offers the best translation for several reasons:

- his choices are more coherent. He always uses italics in order to give emphasize certain words, while *A* and *B* use both italics and bold type;
- Skey reproduces the circularity the reader finds in the original story in the most appropriate way. He thoroughly respects the most symbolic aspect of narration, that is the key words pronounced at the beginning and the ending of the story. Text *A* does not reach this goal;

- in the translation made by Skey there is a more attentive choice in the use of nouns, tenses and adjectives which contribute to the supernatural atmosphere of the story;
- his reporting of the English modal phrases is, generally, more faithful;
- finally, Skey does not reproduce the typical English phrasing and he does not produce an artificial Italian.

# Appendix

## *The Signal-Man*

by Charles Dickens<sup>39</sup>

"Halloa! Below there!"

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came; but instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about, and looked down the Line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said for my life what. But I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice, even though his figure was foreshortened and shadowed, down in the deep trench, and mine was high above him, so steeped in the glow of an angry sunset, that I had shaded my eyes with my hand before I saw him at all.

"Halloa! Below!"

From looking down the Line, he turned himself about again, and, raising his eyes, saw my figure high above him.

"Is there any path by which I can come down and speak to you?"

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down. When such vapour as rose to my height from this rapid train had passed me, and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down

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<sup>39</sup>Available from <http://books.mirror.org/dickens/signalman/>. Consulted on 31 March 2006.

again, and saw him refurling the flag he had shown while the train went by.

I repeated my inquiry. After a pause, during which he seemed to regard me with fixed attention, he motioned with his rolled-up flag towards a point on my level, some two or three hundred yards distant. I called down to him, "All right!" and made for that point. There, by dint of looking closely about me, I found a rough zigzag descending path notched out, which I followed.

The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone, that became oozier and wetter as I went down. For these reasons, I found the way long enough to give me time to recall a singular air of reluctance or compulsion with which he had pointed out the path.

When I came down low enough upon the zigzag descent to see him again, I saw that he was standing between the rails on the way by which the train had lately passed, in an attitude as if he were waiting for me to appear. He had his left hand at his chin, and that left elbow rested on his right hand, crossed over his breast. His attitude was one of such expectation and watchfulness that I stopped a moment, wondering at it.

I resumed my downward way, and stepping out upon the level of the railroad, and drawing nearer to him, saw that he was a dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy, deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world.

Before he stirred, I was near enough to him to have touched him. Not even then removing his eyes from mine, he stepped back one step, and lifted his hand.

This was a lonesome post to occupy (I said), and it had riveted my attention when I looked down from up yonder. A visitor was a rarity, I should suppose; not an unwelcome rarity, I hoped? In me, he merely saw a man who had been shut up within narrow limits all his life, and who, being at last set free, had a newly-awakened interest in these great works. To such purpose I spoke to him; but I am far from sure of the terms I used; for, besides that I am not happy in opening any conversation, there was something in the man that daunted me.

He directed a most curious look towards the red light near the tunnel's mouth, and looked all about it, as if something were missing from it, and then looked it me.

That light was part of his charge? Was it not?

He answered in a low voice,--"Don't you know it is?"

The monstrous thought came into my mind, as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man. I have speculated since, whether there may have been infection in his mind.

In my turn, I stepped back. But in making the action, I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight.

"You look at me," I said, forcing a smile, "as if you had a dread of me."

"I was doubtful," he returned, "whether I had seen you before."

"Where?"

He pointed to the red light he had looked at.

"There?" I said.

Intently watchful of me, he replied (but without sound), "Yes."

"My good fellow, what should I do there? However, be that as it may, I never was there, you may swear."

"I think I may," he rejoined. "Yes; I am sure I may."

His manner cleared, like my own. He replied to my remarks with readiness, and in well-chosen words. Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him, and of actual work-- manual labour--he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do under that head. Regarding those many long and lonely hours of which I seemed to make so much, he could only say that the routine of his life had shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it. He had taught himself a language down here,--if only to know it by sight, and to have formed his own crude ideas of its pronunciation, could be called learning it. He had also worked at fractions and decimals, and tried a little algebra; but he was, and had been as a boy, a poor hand at figures. Was it necessary for him when on duty always to remain in that channel of damp air, and could he never rise into the sunshine from between those high stone walls? Why, that depended upon times and circumstances. Under some conditions there would be less upon the Line than under others, and the same held good as to certain hours of the day and night. In bright weather, he did choose occasions for getting a little above these lower shadows; but, being at all times liable to be called by his electric bell, and at such times listening for it with redoubled anxiety, the relief was less than I would suppose.

He took me into his box, where there was a fire, a desk for an official book in which he had to make certain entries, a telegraphic instrument with its dial, face, and needles, and the little bell of which he had spoken. On my trusting that he would excuse the remark that he had been well educated, and (I hoped I might say without offence) perhaps educated above that station, he observed that instances of slight incongruity in such wise would rarely be found wanting among large bodies of men; that he had heard it was so in workhouses, in the police force, even in that last desperate resource, the army; and that he knew it was so, more or less, in any great railway staff. He had been, when young (if I could believe it, sitting in that hut,--he scarcely could), a student of natural philosophy, and had attended lectures; but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down, and never risen again. He had no

complaint to offer about that. He had made his bed, and he lay upon it. It was far too late to make another.

All that I have here condensed he said in a quiet manner, with his grave dark regards divided between me and the fire. He threw in the word, "Sir," from time to time, and especially when he referred to his youth,--as though to request me to understand that he claimed to be nothing but what I found him. He was several times interrupted by the little bell, and had to read off messages, and send replies. Once he had to stand without the door, and display a flag as a train passed, and make some verbal communication to the driver. In the discharge of his duties, I observed him to be remarkably exact and vigilant, breaking off his discourse at a syllable, and remaining silent until what he had to do was done.

In a word, I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity, but for the circumstance that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did NOT ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions, he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder.

Said I, when I rose to leave him, "You almost make me think that I have met with a contented man."

(I am afraid I must acknowledge that I said it to lead him on.)

"I believe I used to be so," he rejoined, in the low voice in which he had first spoken; "but I am troubled, sir, I am troubled."

He would have recalled the words if he could. He had said them, however, and I took them up quickly.

"With what? What is your trouble?"

"It is very difficult to impart, sir. It is very, very difficult to speak of. If ever you make me another visit, I will try to tell you."

"But I expressly intend to make you another visit. Say, when shall it be?"

"I go off early in the morning, and I shall be on again at ten to-morrow night, sir."

"I will come at eleven."

He thanked me, and went out at the door with me. "I'll show my white light, sir," he said, in his peculiar low voice, "till you have found the way up. When you have found it, don't call out! And when you are at the top, don't call out!"

His manner seemed to make the place strike colder to me, but I said no more than, "Very well."

"And when you come down to-morrow night, don't call out! Let me ask you a parting question. What made you cry, 'Halloa! Below there!' to-night?"

"Heaven knows," said I. "I cried something to that effect--"

"Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words. I know them well."

"Admit those were the very words. I said them, no doubt, because I saw you below."

"For no other reason?"

"What other reason could I possibly have?"

"You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in any supernatural way?"

"No."

He wished me good-night, and held up his light. I walked by the side of the down Line of rails (with a very disagreeable sensation of a train coming behind me) until I found the path. It was easier to mount than to descend, and I got back to my inn without any adventure.

Punctual to my appointment, I placed my foot on the first notch of the zigzag next night, as the distant clocks were striking eleven. He was waiting for me at the bottom, with his white light on. "I have not called out," I said, when we came close together; "may I speak now?" "By all means, sir." "Good-night, then, and here's my hand." "Good-night, sir, and here's mine." With that we walked side by side to his box, entered it, closed the door, and sat down by the fire.

"I have made up my mind, sir," he began, bending forward as soon as we were seated, and speaking in a tone but a little above a whisper, "that you shall not have to ask me twice what troubles me. I took you for some one else yesterday evening. That troubles me."

"That mistake?"

"No. That some one else."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know."

"Like me?"

"I don't know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face, and the right arm is waved,--violently waved. This way."

I followed his action with my eyes, and it was the action of an arm gesticulating, with the utmost passion and vehemence, "For God's sake, clear the way!"

"One moonlight night," said the man, "I was sitting here, when I heard a voice cry, 'Halloa! Below there!' I started up, looked from that door, and saw this Some one else standing by the red light near the tunnel, waving as I just now showed you. The voice seemed hoarse with shouting, and it cried, 'Look out! Look out!' And then attain, 'Halloa! Below there! Look out!' I caught up my lamp, turned it on red, and ran towards the figure, calling, 'What's wrong? What has happened? Where?' It stood just outside the blackness of the tunnel. I advanced so close upon it that I wondered at its keeping the sleeve across its eyes. I ran right up at it, and had my hand stretched out to pull the sleeve away, when it was gone."

"Into the tunnel?" said I.

"No. I ran on into the tunnel, five hundred yards. I stopped, and held my lamp above my head, and saw the figures of the measured distance, and saw the wet stains stealing down the walls and trickling through the arch. I ran out again faster than I had run in (for I had a mortal abhorrence of the place upon me), and I looked all round the red light with my own red light, and I went up the iron ladder to the gallery atop of it, and I came down again, and ran back here. I telegraphed both ways, 'An alarm has been given. Is anything wrong?' The answer came back, both ways, 'All well.'"

Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine, I showed him how that this figure must be a deception of his sense of sight; and how that figures, originating in disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye, were known to have often troubled patients, some of whom had become conscious of the nature of their affliction, and had even proved it by experiments upon themselves. "As to an imaginary cry," said I, "do but listen for a moment to the wind in this unnatural valley while we speak so low, and to the wild harp it makes of the telegraph wires."

That was all very well, he returned, after we had sat listening for a while, and he ought to know something of the wind and the wires,-- he who so often passed long winter nights there, alone and watching. But he would beg to remark that he had not finished.

I asked his pardon, and he slowly added these words, touching my arm, --

"Within six hours after the Appearance, the memorable accident on this Line happened, and within ten hours the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood."

A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it. It was not to be denied, I rejoined, that this was a remarkable coincidence, calculated deeply to impress his mind. But it was unquestionable that remarkable coincidences did continually occur, and they must be taken into account in dealing with such a subject. Though to be sure I must admit, I added (for I thought I saw that he was going to bring the objection to bear upon me), men of common sense did not allow much for coincidences in making the ordinary calculations of life.

He again begged to remark that he had not finished.

I again begged his pardon for being betrayed into interruptions.

"This," he said, again laying his hand upon my arm, and glancing over his shoulder with hollow eyes, "was just a year ago. Six or seven months passed, and I had recovered from the surprise and shock, when one morning, as the day was breaking, I, standing at the door, looked towards the red light, and saw the spectre again." He stopped, with a fixed look at me.

"Did it cry out?"

"No. It was silent."

"Did it wave its arm?"

"No. It leaned against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face. Like this."

Once more I followed his action with my eyes. It was an action of mourning. I have seen such an attitude in stone figures on tombs.

"Did you go up to it?"

"I came in and sat down, partly to collect my thoughts, partly because it had turned me faint. When I went to the door again, daylight was above me, and the ghost was gone."

"But nothing followed? Nothing came of this?"

He touched me on the arm with his forefinger twice or thrice giving a ghastly nod each time:-

"That very day, as a train came out of the tunnel, I noticed, at a carriage window on my side, what looked like a confusion of hands and heads, and something waved. I saw it just in time to signal the driver, Stop! He shut off, and put his brake on, but the train drifted past here a hundred and fifty yards or more. I ran after it, and, as I went along, heard terrible screams and cries. A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments, and was brought in here, and laid down on this floor between us."

Involuntarily I pushed my chair back, as I looked from the boards at which he pointed to himself.

"True, sir. True. Precisely as it happened, so I tell it you."

I could think of nothing to say, to any purpose, and my mouth was very dry. The wind and the wires took up the story with a long lamenting wail.

He resumed. "Now, sir, mark this, and judge how my mind is troubled. The spectre came back a week ago. Ever since, it has been there, now and again, by fits and starts."

"At the light?"

"At the Danger-light."

"What does it seem to do?"

He repeated, if possible with increased passion and vehemence, that former gesticulation of, "For God's sake, clear the way!"

Then he went on. "I have no peace or rest for it. It calls to me, for many minutes together, in an agonised manner, 'Below there! Look out! Look out!' It stands waving to me. It rings my little bell--"

I caught at that. "Did it ring your bell yesterday evening when I was here, and you went to the door?"

"Twice."

"Why, see," said I, "how your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell, and if I am a living man, it did *not* ring at those times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you."

He shook his head. "I have never made a mistake as to that yet, sir. I have never confused the spectre's ring with the man's. The ghost's ring is a strange vibration in the bell that it derives from nothing else, and I have not asserted that the bell stirs to the eye. I don't wonder that you failed to hear it. But I heard it."

"And did the spectre seem to be there, when you looked out?"

"It *was* there."

"Both times?"

He repeated firmly: "Both times."

"Will you come to the door with me, and look for it now?"

He bit his under lip as though he were somewhat unwilling, but arose. I opened the door, and stood on the step, while he stood in the doorway. There was the Danger-light. There was the dismal mouth of the tunnel. There were the high, wet stone walls of the cutting. There were the stars above them.

"Do you see it?" I asked him, taking particular note of his face. His eyes were prominent and strained, but not very much more so, perhaps, than my own had been when I had directed them earnestly towards the same spot.

"No," he answered. "It is not there."

"Agreed," said I.

We went in again, shut the door, and resumed our seats. I was thinking how best to improve this advantage, if it might be called one, when he took up the conversation in such a matter-of-course way, so assuming that there could be no serious question of fact between us, that I felt myself placed in the weakest of positions.

"By this time you will fully understand, sir," he said, "that what troubles me so dreadfully is the question, What does the spectre mean?"

I was not sure, I told him, that I did fully understand.

"What is its warning against?" he said, ruminating, with his eyes on the fire, and only by times turning them on me. "What is the danger? Where is the danger? There is danger overhanging somewhere on the Line. Some dreadful calamity will happen. It is not to be doubted this third time, after what has gone before. But surely this is a cruel haunting of me. What can I do?"

He pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped the drops from his heated forehead.

"If I telegraph Danger, on either side of me, or on both, I can give no reason for it," he went on, wiping the palms of his hands. "I should get into trouble, and do no good. They would think I was mad. This is the way it would work,--Message: 'Danger! Take care!' Answer: 'What Danger? Where?' Message: 'Don't know. But, for God's sake, take care!' They would displace me. What else could they do?"

His pain of mind was most pitiable to see. It was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life.

"When it first stood under the Danger-light," he went on, putting his dark hair back from his head, and drawing his hands outward across and across his temples in an extremity of feverish distress, "why not tell me where that accident was to happen,--if it must happen? Why not tell me how it could be averted,--if it could have been averted? When on its second coming it hid its face, why not tell me, instead, 'She is going to die. Let them keep her at home'? If it came, on those two occasions, only to show me that its warnings were true, and so to prepare me for the third, why not warn me plainly now? And I, Lord help me! A mere poor signal-man on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with credit to be believed, and power to act?"

When I saw him in this state, I saw that for the poor man's sake, as well as for the public safety, what I had to do for the time was to compose his mind. Therefore, setting aside all question of reality or unreality between us, I represented to him that whoever thoroughly discharged his duty must do well, and that at least it was his comfort that he understood his duty, though he did not understand these confounding Appearances. In this effort I succeeded far better than in the attempt to reason him out of his conviction. He became calm; the occupations incidental to his post as the night advanced began to make larger demands on his attention: and I left him at two in the morning. I had offered to stay through the night, but he would not hear of it.

That I more than once looked back at the red light as I ascended the pathway, that I did not like the red light, and that I should have slept but poorly if my bed had been under it, I see no reason to conceal. Nor did I like the two sequences of the accident and the dead girl. I see no reason to conceal that either.

But what ran most in my thoughts was the consideration how ought I to act, having become the recipient of this disclosure? I had proved the man to be intelligent, vigilant, painstaking, and exact; but how long might he remain so, in his state of mind? Though in a subordinate position, still he held a most important trust, and would I (for instance) like to stake my own life on the chances of his continuing to execute it with precision?

Unable to overcome a feeling that there would be something treacherous in my communicating what he had told me to his superiors in the Company, without first being plain with himself and proposing a middle course to him, I ultimately resolved to offer to accompany him (otherwise keeping his secret for the present) to the wisest medical practitioner we could hear of in those parts, and to take his opinion. A change in his time of duty would come round next night, he had apprised me, and he would be off an hour or two after sunrise, and on again soon after sunset. I had appointed to return accordingly.

Next evening was a lovely evening, and I walked out early to enjoy it. The sun was not yet quite down when I traversed the field-path near the top of the deep cutting. I would extend my walk for an hour, I said to myself, half an hour on and half an hour back, and it would then be time to go to my signal-man's box.

Before pursuing my stroll, I stepped to the brink, and mechanically looked down, from the point from which I had first seen him. I cannot describe the thrill that seized upon me, when, close at the mouth of the tunnel, I saw the appearance of a man, with his left sleeve across his eyes, passionately waving his right arm.

The nameless horror that oppressed me passed in a moment, for in a moment I saw that this appearance of a man was a man indeed, and that there was a little group of other men, standing at a short distance, to whom he seemed to be rehearsing the gesture he made. The Danger-light was not yet lighted. Against its shaft, a little low

hut, entirely new to me, had been made of some wooden supports and tarpaulin. It looked no bigger than a bed.

With an irresistible sense that something was wrong,--with a flashing self-reproachful fear that fatal mischief had come of my leaving the man there, and causing no one to be sent to overlook or correct what he did,--I descended the notched path with all the speed I could make.

"What is the matter?" I asked the men.

"Signal-man killed this morning, sir."

"Not the man belonging to that box?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not the man I know?"

"You will recognise him, sir, if you knew him," said the man who spoke for the others, solemnly uncovering his own head, and raising an end of the tarpaulin, "for his face is quite composed."

"O, how did this happen, how did this happen?" I asked, turning from one to another as the hut closed in again.

"He was cut down by an engine, sir. No man in England knew his work better. But somehow he was not clear of the outer rail. It was just at broad day. He had struck the light, and had the lamp in his hand. As the engine came out of the tunnel, his back was towards her, and she cut him down. That man drove her, and was showing how it happened. Show the gentleman, Tom."

The man, who wore a rough dark dress, stepped back to his former place at the mouth of the tunnel.

"Coming round the curve in the tunnel, sir," he said, "I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective-glass. There was no time to check speed, and I knew him to be very careful. As he didn't seem to take heed of the whistle, I shut it off when we were running down upon him, and called to him as loud as I could call."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'Below there! Look out! Look out! For God's sake, clear the way!'"

I started.

"Ah! it was a dreadful time, sir. I never left off calling to him. I put this arm before my eyes not to see, and I waved this arm to the last; but it was no use."

Without prolonging the narrative to dwell on any one of its curious circumstances more than on any other, I may, in closing it, point out the coincidence that the warning of the Engine-Driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate Signal-man had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself--not he--had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated.

--THE END--

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