


The Victorian Gothic Short Story
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Lecture – 03
Charles Dickens's 'The Signal - Man' –II
Close reading and the anxieties of the age

Hello and welcome back to this second lecture on Charles Dickens's 'The Signal Man'. We will continue with probing the anxieties of the Victorian age as reflected in this gothic short story. If you remember the previous session, we saw how the narrator gets into conversation with a signal man. So, at this particular point of time in the story, we have two men conversing in the cabin of the signal man.


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Is he the safest man?



□ 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.

Life bell
↳ mystery
↳ electric bell
↳ not ringing
↳ falling
↳ fallen in
↳ inhumanity
↳ pale drained of blood



So, this is the assessment that we have about this railway servant from the opinion of the narrator who is looking at the world that he finds there through his lens. So, this is his assessment. 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 an inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder.

So, the narrator says that this man who is in front of him, the signal man, should be one of the safest men to be employed or ought to be one of the safest men to be employed in that capacity, at least that's how the narrator saw him until this point of time. So, what are the set of affairs which makes him change his mind? So, let us pick those. He breaks off the conversation twice; why does he do that and how does he do that? There is a fallen colour on his face, his colour becomes pale. He is drained of blood; why? Drained of blood from his face. Why does he react in this manner?

Because he looks at the little bell, when it does not ring; so, the bell is an alarm for him to do something and that is a communication that he gets from some other sender, connected with this railway business. So, he looks at the bell when it does not ring and he opens the door of the hut which was kept shut to protect themselves from the unhealthy damp and he looks towards the red light and when he comes back, he is not very happy with himself and he has an inexplicable manner about him.

So, all these clues or cues about the signal man makes the narrator wonder whether he is one of the safest men to be employed in this position at this important junction. So, let me go back to the choice of words, fallen; fallen is a very interesting choice of word. Fallen has a metaphoric signification as well; fallen humanity, someone who has committed some kind of sin and someone who is not part of the norm or the ordinary.

So, there is something odd about him and the narrator is also very very observant. He notices that the man looks at the bell when it is not ringing. So, there is a mystery about the little bell and in my earlier lecture, I pointed out that this electric bell, this object of technology is used by Dickens for the purposes of the gothic narrative. So, more of this shortly.

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Halloa! Below there!

- "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."

precision

anxiety ⇒ numerous directions



And after they talk, the narrator decides to make his leave and the signal man helps him walk back. He shows the light and he says that when you go back to the top of that cutting, on top of that trench don't call back, don't speak to me, just leave. So, that is the instruction that the signalman gives the narrator and there are further instructions by the signal man.

So, he is worried. You can see his anxiety being expressed through his a numerous directions to the narrator. He says when you come down tomorrow night, don't call out. Let me ask you a parting question: What made you cry 'Halloa, below there!' to-night?" So, if you remember the first lecture on Charles Dickens, you will know that the beginning of this story are these words, 'Halloa, below there'. So, there is this refrain that is coming back to this story.

And then, the narrator says 'Heaven knows, I cried something to the effect'. He says that I am not very sure if I did say those words. Something to that meaning, I did utter and the signal man says not to that effect sir, those were the very words, I know them well. So, he is insistent that these are the exact words. Now, the idea of precision is very interesting in the story because this idea comes back again and again. So, we can sense that this is a society or these are men who are a part of a professional group, who are very much interested in being precise.

So, the signal man says that those are the precise words. I know them well. "I admit those were the very words". He wants that acknowledgement and 'I said them no doubt, because I saw you below. Admit those were the very words...' He says that yes, I agree; maybe those are the words because I saw you below which is why I could have called out 'Halloa, below there'.


So, these words are significant in terms of the way the narrative is plotted. Because if you read the end of the story, you will know that those words are crucial or vital and those were the responsible perhaps for the tragedy that happened to the central character.

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The Spectre / Spirit / Supernatural Appearance

- "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!"

Handwritten notes:
- "faceless spirit" ⇒ hidden emotion
- troubled
- Early on, Spectre
- spirit ⇒ monstrous thought



Now, the narrator comes back to the signal man, the second time the next night. They have an arrangement to meet the next day and he comes back the second time and they have a conversation and the signal man asks him about those words and then the signal man also tells him that he is troubled, he is troubled deeply, and he also tells him what causes this trouble.


He says that he came across a spectre, a spirit, a supernatural appearance and the narrator asks him how did it look like. He says 'I don't know, I never saw the face.' It's a faceless spirit; in the sense that the face is hidden. 'The left arm is across the face and the right arm is waved violently, 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'.

So, this man, the signal man is acting, enacting to the narrator, to his witness, what exactly the spirit did. So, the spirit is hiding its eyes with its hand and then, waving its hands with passion and vehemence. And now, at this point in the story there is no spirit of course, there is the man who does the action. So, in some ways symbolically this man himself becomes the spectre and if you remember the earlier sections of the story, the narrator thinks that this man himself could be a spirit and if you remember that monstrous thought-- that monstrous thought is about the possibility that this signal man could be a spirit himself.


So, lots of things are going on in terms of the associated set of meanings about this man and his visions or the visions that he sees. And I want you to pay attention to his manner gesticulating- making wide gestures, very very clear gestures with utmost passion and vehemence-- lot of emotion behind his action-- and this is what he claims the spirit did, the spectre that haunts that tunnel.

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The Spectre



□ "One moonlight night," said the man, "I was sitting here, a voice cry, 'Halloa! Below there!' 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 again, '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." *even*



This is the exact narrative in the story which is described by the signal man to the narrator about the spectre. "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 someone 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 again, '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, I advanced so close that it upon it that I wondered at its keeping the sleeve across its eyes. I ran up at it, had my hand stretched out to pull the sleeve away, when it was gone.' So, you can see it is a very very eerie description of what had apparently happened and again there the words are "Halloa, Below there." So, you can see why the signal man is so fussy about these set of words because he claims that these words were uttered by the spectre, by this ghost, some time ago and it's very odd and it's very strange that those same words are uttered by the narrator, who is saying those words and calling out to get the attention of the signal man, the first time he comes into this story.

So, this evocation of the same idea is what makes the signal man be frightened about this narrator. So, that is one thing. The other thing is that he tells the narrator that as he is trying to get near to the spectre it is moving away and initially this man does not think that this is a ghost, he thinks that it is an ordinary figure; a man who is giving the signal man some kind of alarm to prevent some kind of disaster.

So, he is trying to get to this man and, look at the way, he is trying to pull the sleeves from its eyes and at this point it disappears. So, it is a ghost which is clothed which is trying to not see something which is horrible in front of its eyes. So, that is what we have here. It is a ghost that is affected by the tragedy that it apparently sees. So, this is a fantastic scene which captures the past according to the signal man.

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Deception of the sense of sight?

- 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.

rational attitude

wary cautious



And the signal man says that he telegraphed both ways, 'An alarm has been given. Is anything wrong?' The answer came back, both ways, 'All well.' So, as soon as he sees this spectre, he communicates with the other points in the railway network and everybody says that everything is fine, nothing to worry about. And now, we have this passage here which shows us the reactions of the narrator and the narrator is slightly disturbed by this claim that the signal man has made about seeing a vision, a spectre, a spirit.

And, he writes that '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 the affliction, and had even proved it by experiments upon themselves.'

So, the narrator becomes wary, that is what we see here. He becomes cautious. So, yet despite his rational attitude, we see a rational attitude here of course, despite his rational attitude, he is slightly frightened and that is indicated by this set of words here. He is trying to resist the frozen finger tracing out his spine; the fear which is a trying to run down his spine. He is trying to resist that fear, not get caught up in this narrative of the signal man, and he believes that this vision, the spirit that he sees must be a deception of his senses.

The signal man is mistaken, he is perhaps hallucinating and this hallucination could be caused by some kind of disease of the nerves and it is such a disease that makes the eye think that it is seeing certain things which are not there. And in fact, some patients who have been afflicted by this nervous disorder have proved this fact by experiments that they have participated in to prove this point. So, the narrator feels that this is the effect of some kind of nervous disorder, the ideas that the signal man have about seeing ghosts is a result of the disease that he possibly has.

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Wild Environs

- "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."

*Environment
↳ wild natural aspects
→ imagine things supernatural
the working conditions*



Now, and he further goes on to say just listen- he tells the signal man just listen to the wind, listen to the sounds that are made in this environment and he says '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.' So, he says that the sounds that come about from the setting could be mistaken to be an imaginary cry made by the spectre.

So, the environment has wild natural aspects. This is a desolate isolated spot and the wind can make the telegraph wires make a noise which can be mistaken for something supernatural. So, something in the environment perhaps is making this signal man imagine things; things supernatural. In other words, the working conditions, the working conditions of this signal man is the reason behind seeing such spirits.

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The Accident

- "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."

tragedies to come — warning ← Spectre



Nevertheless, this man says, the signal man says, within six hours after the Appearance-- a capital A is there—'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'. So, what happened after the appearance of the ghost is that there was a big accident and lots of dead and wounded people, passengers from the train were brought through this tunnel and to the exact place where he saw the spectre.

So, what this signal man is claiming is that the spectre is a warning, is a warning for tragedies that are about to happen. That is the claim of the narrator, that is the claim of the signal man.

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The Spectre Returns



□ “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.



“This,” he said, again laying his hand upon my arm, and glancing over his shoulder with hollow eyes, “was just a year ago”. So, this happened this railway accident happened 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 a red light, and saw the spectre again.” He stopped, with a fixed look at me.

So, he says that the spectre did come back a second time. It came back to that exact spot near that red lamp. So, it is warning me again. That is his assumption. So, the red light is somehow a signification of danger, of tragedy or some terrible trouble to come and this is really interesting because it happens again.

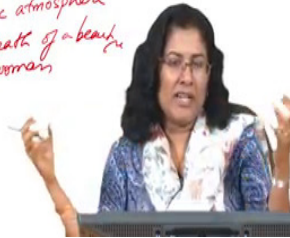
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The Death of a Beautiful Young Lady



□ "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."

*What was the cause?
Inevitable about tragedy
hallmarks of Gothic narrative
Gothic atmosphere
the death of a beautiful young woman*



And now after the appearance of this spectre, something terrible happens again and he says "That very day, as a train came out of the tunnel, I noticed, at a carriage on my side, what looked like a confusion of hands, and heads and some and something waved. I saw it just in time to signal the driver Stop. He shut off; 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."

So, he seems to prove his point. He says that the spectre appeared and on the same day, there was a tragic death of a young woman on the train. So, the train is going fast, there is some kind of noise and confusion that he can see inside a compartment and he calls the driver to stop the engine, but an engine cannot be stopped very quickly. So, it goes past a hundred and fifty yards and stops. And then, this man runs after the train and soon there are screams and cries and a beautiful young lady has apparently died and the body of that young woman is brought to this cabin and laid down on this floor, just in the spot between the two men who are there in the cabin talking. So, this is a perfect gothic atmosphere.

We have the death of a young woman; beautiful young woman and that is one of the hallmarks of gothic narrative-- classic gothic narrative. Now, we do not know what caused the death of the young woman. That is a mystery. All that we know is it happened

suddenly and it is terrible and look at the way in which the signal man brings the past to the present. He points to the space between the two men inside the cabin and says this is the exact place, where she was laid. So, he makes it very very tangible and real. It is almost as if he is seeing that body once again there in his mind laid out between the two of these figures.

So, it is a very eerie evocation of the past and there is something inexplicable about the tragedy. There is no cause given and that in itself is a puzzle- what causes this death in an object which is made out of technological advancements. So, there is a lot of rationality, reason, experiment and other associated ideas which have worked to create this massive set of objects which are moving on the rail track and we have an inexplicable death that is happening inside its compartments. So, we have two very contrary ideas brought together in this particular moment in the story.

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The Spectre is Back Again

- 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!"

*Multiple Spectres → Signal-man
Narrator himself Spectre's utterance.*



Now, the spectre is back again claims the signal man. 'The spectre came back a week ago. Ever since, it has been there now and again by fits and starts'. So, it has returned and at what point has it come back, it is back at the danger-light. Therefore, it is a clear warning, at least to the mind of the signal man. Something terrible is going to happen. What does it seem to do, asks the narrator. He repeated, if possible with increased passion and vehemence, that former gesticulation of 'For God's sake clear the way'. So, this is what the ghost apparently utters, the spectre's utterance, 'Clear the way, don't

stand in the way.’ So, that is the message and again he repeats the same gesture with a lot of intensity and when you read this and take it in you imagine as if this man himself is a spectre. He seems to embody the mannerisms and the voice of the apparent spectre that he sees near the danger light.

So, we seem to have multiple specters here. The signal man is one if not literally symbolically and the narrator himself is perceived as a spectre by the signal man at the beginning of the story and there will be other spectres. So, as the story progresses towards and when it comes to its conclusion. So, again this points to the society’s faith or belief in or fear of these supernatural figures and incidents or anything which cannot be explained by reason, can be categorized under the terminology of spirit.

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The Ringing of the 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."

objection to the claim that the spectre is calling him.



So, the narrator is trying to make sense of all the information that comes to him from this very anxiety-ridden signal man and he captures at a particular information. He says that did it ring your bell yesterday evening, when I was here and when you and you went to the door. So, he thinks back to the previous night and he remembers the fact that the electric bell was looked at by the signal man, while they were conversing and he suddenly goes out of the door to check. So, he asks about that and he says “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.”

So, the narrator comes up with an objection. So, this is basically an objection to the claim that the spectre was calling him. So, if you go back to that previous incident, if the electric bell apparently rang; then, it was rung by the ghost or the spectre according to this according to the signal man. But the narrator claims that the bell did not ring at those times even though the signal man looked at it and he says that it did not, it did not ring except when the station called you and you did communicate with them.

So, it did not ring at any other point and therefore, he feels that this signal man is imagining things and look at the way this is in capitals. He is really very sure that the bell did not ring and let us see what this signalman has to say to this claim.

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The Ghost's Ring

- 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."

asserts

Spectre's ring → vibrations
Voice of Reason = narrator = signal man
Voice of spirit/faith in supernatural



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 fail to hear it. But I heard it." Now, you can see you can clearly see the difference between the real ring and the apparent ring imagined by the signal man. He says that there is a difference. The spectre's ring is about some vibration, he says and it is a strange vibration and he says that you can't hear it. It can be heard only to

him, only to the signal man, and it is not also easily visible. You cannot even see it vibrating.

So, it is a special message or some kind of vibration that can only be noticed by the signal man. I am interested in the word vibration because this vibration is also used in connection with the appearance of the train, the vibrating motion, the pulsating movement on the rail tracks which is followed by the speeding train down the rail track. So, it is very interesting that the word is again used by the signal man to talk about the movement of the bell. So, if he says that it can only be visible or heard only to him, then, there is no arguing with that and the narrator asks if the spectre did seem to be there, when he looked out, and he claims it was there. It was there, he asserts that.

So, we can see two voices coming through; one is the voice of reason which is that of the narrator, other is the voice of the spirit world or faith in the spirit and that is that of the signal man. It is very strange that this man associated with technology and modern means of transportation is the one who really believes in all these spiritual things and figures and he is very very confident that it was there at both those times when the when the bell vibrated and he claims to have seen it.

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Examination

- 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.

Handwritten notes:
- "spectre" (pointing to the word in the first bullet)
- "can't see it." (pointing to the "No" response)
- "look negative associations." (pointing to the "No" response)



Now, the narrator is at a loss what to do and then he quickly comes up with a solution and he says will you come to the door with me and look for it now. He says come out and let us look for the spectre now, let us see whether it is there near the red light. The

signal man bit his under lip as though he was 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 about them.

“Do you see it? I asked, 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 honestly towards the same spot. “No,” he answered. “It’s not there.” “Agreed,” said I. So, the narrator says that yes, it is not there because I cannot see it. The narrator cannot see it. So, he comes to the conclusion that this man at this point of time is not hallucinating because he is not noticing it and if you look at the description of the tunnel, look at the way the word dismal is used and the word mouth. So, the mouth of the tunnel is dismal, it is bleak. It has a whole lot of negative associations.

And the narrator does take a look at the man who is looking at the red lamp and he can see that his eyes are prominent perhaps bulging and they are strained and the narrator is sympathetic. Because he also thinks perhaps his own eyes are like that when he is looking at the eerie red light at this dark setting and everything is in darkness that there are the red stones of the cutting, the stones are jagged if you know from previously and there is are just the stars there are darkness, but there is nothing very comforting about this setting.

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What is the warning about?

- “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?”

*Worried
Anxious
Helplessness
mental pressure*



Now, this signal man is obsessing about the presence of the spectre and he is at a loss about the warning; “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?”


So, he is turning to himself, he is going inward. He is just not even looking at the narrator frequently as he used to do. ‘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?’ So, he is extremely worried, anxious and he is also helpless. That helplessness is also communicated in these questions. What can I do? But he is also sure that some dreadful tragedy will happen because the spectre always comes before a tragedy. And therefore, we can see a lot of mental pressure on this figure.

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Madness?

- 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?”

*Losing his job
Displacement*



And he says that if he communicates to the station, if he communicates to all the stations on this line, they will get back to him saying that everything is fine. “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?”

So, he really nicely puts it-- the back and forth that would happen between the signal man at one point and the station at the other point. He says to be careful of some danger and they will ask what the nature of the danger is, where exactly is the danger and he

would say 'I do not know' and they would think that he is crazy. So, he is worried about losing his job too.

Because unnecessary caution would indicate that he is paranoid and they would displace him. So, displacement is a real fear for this man, at the same time, he is very conscientious, he is worried about the loss of lives or injury and he wants to do something about it. So, he is in a real quandary, he is in a real complex situation.

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Mental torture

- It was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life.



And the narrator can see that it was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life. So, the word unintelligible is very interesting here. This man feels responsible, but he is not very sure where the threat is coming from. So, he is fighting against something that he is not very sure of and that is why he is feeling very very oppressed. And at the same time, we are told that he is a very conscientious man who is at pains to attempt to stop or avoid the danger which is going to come upon this line.