

In what ways do you believe Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde reflects the interests of victo...



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Queen Victoria reigned in Britain between 1837-1901. During this time in British history a large degree of change occurred. The writers of the time often reflected these substantial changes in their literature focusing on the interests of society. I have studied a variety of literature from the Victorian period and have chosen to write about three particular pieces; 'The Signalman' by Charles Dickens (a short story), the novel 'Frankenstein' by Mary Shelley and another short story called 'The Tell Tale Heart' by Edgar Allen Poe. At the point when these stories were written, there were a wide range of issues touching society.

However, for the benefit of this essay I am only going to focus on three of these; the role of God, the increasing advances in science and technology, the supernatural and insanity. The point which I am going to focus on first is about the role God played in many people's lives and how this is reflected in the literature of the Victorian period. In 'Frankenstein' Mary Shelley's point of view about the advances occurring in the progress of medicine and technology can be seen. She also explains the dangerous issues connected with man trying to copy the role of God.

The central characters in 'Frankenstein' are Dr Frankenstein and his creation, the monster. Dr Frankenstein tells the story. At the beginning of 'Frankenstein', Dr Frankenstein becomes over confident with new advantageous technology. He intends to make the 'perfect human' in order to save lives and becomes somewhat obsessed with this idea. He surgically attaches many different body parts together from deceased people. He believes from his previous research that sending a lightning bolt through these grimly attached pieces may result in his creation coming to life.

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However Dr Frankenstein wasn't prepared for the result he achieved, 'It's unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes'. Without giving the monster a chance, Dr Frankenstein flees, abandoning his creation, leaving it to fend for itself. When the monster goes out into society, people attack him with knives and dogs, they won't give him a chance either.

Underneath his ugly exterior features was a 'Soul glowing with love and humanity'. The monster is forced to take refuge in the mountains nearby because he is scared of society. 'What hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing?

They spurn and hate me'. The monster has committed no evil; 'The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge. The monster lives a solitary life until he meets a blind person, who obviously can't judge him on his looks but purely on his personality, of which is 'Benevolent and good'. The monster found some love, something he had been looking for, for a long time. Perhaps he could begin to lead a fairly normal, happy life. His newly found happiness and security, however doesn't last long.

A member of the public discovers his place of hiding and believes he will try to harm the blind person. Once again society turns against him. He is left with no-one, no-one wants him, and no-one cares. 'Everywhere I see bliss, from which I am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend'. The only thing the monster witnesses is hate and misery this turns the monster wicked. The monster wants Dr Frankenstein to listen

to him. 'Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or
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commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. He doesn't want to hurt the doctor, but it may be the only way to get him to listen.

The monster, maliciously murders members of his creator's family, beginning with his brother William. `Restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered! ` His plan works, for obvious reasons Dr Frankenstein becomes angry `I trembled with rage and horror`. Dr Frankenstein wants to put an end to these brutal killings and arranges to meet with the monster on the mountains. Dr Frankenstein goes with a narrow-mind, he only wants to destroy his creation. `Begone, or let us try our strength in fight in which one must fall`. The monster refuses. He believes he is parallel to Adam, created by God.

God didn't kill Adam and therefore he shouldn't be killed. Dr Frankenstein is his creator, the monster won't hurt him. `Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel`. Dr Frankenstein feels he has the right to play God and take away the monster's life as he created it, `Relieve me from the sight of your detested form`. This argument between Dr Frankenstein and the monster goes on for quite some time. Eventually Dr Frankenstein gives in to his creation and agrees to listen to the monster in a small hut situated somewhere on the mountainside.

Dr Frankenstein was seeking many answers from the monster. `I had hitherto supposed him to be the murderer of my brother, and I eagerly sought a confirmation or denial of this opinion`. ` For the first time, also, I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that I ought to render him happy before I complained of his wickedness`. Dr Frankenstein

listens to his creation for the first time. He hopes to establish why he is unhappy, and to see if the matter can be resolved. 'But I consented to listen, and seating myself by the fire which my odious companion had lighted, he thus began his tale'.

I believe 'Frankenstein' is a warning against people trying to play God. This is shown in the conversation between the Doctor and Frankenstein on the mountainside. Mary Shelley makes many references to God during this extract. If Frankenstein hadn't created the monster, the creation wouldn't have killed those dearest to the doctor, 'Cursed be the day, abhorred devil, in which you first saw light! Cursed (although I curse myself) be the hands that formed you! The Doctor painstakingly regrets ever creating the monster and giving it life. The monster sees the Doctor as his God and he feels like the devil, 'You purpose to kill me.

How dare you sport thus with life?' Frankenstein feels he is superior to the monster and has the right to take away his life. 'Begone, vile insect! Or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust and, oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence'. The monster has been given life and doesn't want it taken away from him. 'Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it'.

The monster won't hurt his God but would easily elude him in a mortal fight. Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine, my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee'. Frankenstein has the responsibility and duty to

act like God to his creation. The monster wants society to accept him, `Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver them from an evil`. (Part of the Lord's Prayer.) The reader will begin to empathize with the monster because he is being reasonable, not insulting like Dr Frankenstein. I also strongly believe the same warning is a viable reason against people trying to play God today.

It is wrong to manipulate nature to force the evolution of humans for our benefit only. A problem that has already been witnessed in our society is ' Designer Babies' where doctors can control exactly what the baby will look like, it's personality and it's future by changing it's genetic make-up, which could affect humanity in ways laboratory testing can't predict. There could be some advantages like being able to develop new and better medicines and predicting and preventing certain diseases. It is wrong to play God though, because as the example of ' Frankenstein' sets us, not everything goes to plan.

I think there are two simple morals behind this story, ' Don't play God' and ' Appearances can be deceptive'. The second point I am going to reflect on is the Victorian interest in the supernatural, also linked to God and the afterlife. Victorians were very interested in spirits and the afterlife. This was because Science was becoming increasingly popular and people were looking for scientific evidence or explanations to support common phenomena. Their technology, although advancing, couldn't explain many mysterious happenings. People still believed far more in God and the devil than science, and put strange occurrences down to their work.

In the Victorian Era the mortality rate was very high, especially that of young children. This was due to primitive medicines and poor hygiene, though the Victorians thought it was because of God and/or the Devil. They believed ghosts or spirits were `stuck in between` Hell or Heaven. I am going to discuss `The Signalman` by Charles Dickens, as this is a ghost story, which is relevant to my present point. The two main characters in `The Signalman` are the signalman and a passer-by. The passer-by tells the story. The story is set in the Victorian Era on a steam railway line in ghostly surroundings.

The signalman is responsible for a particular stretch of line. When Queen Victoria was first made Queen, transport was very minimal. When she died there were steam trains, cars and advanced boats. The reason the story is set on a railway reflects the fact that new transport systems were progressively evolving and people were very interested in this ever-changing technology. The story begins with the passer-by trying to grab the signalman's attention. `Halloa! Below there!`.

The signalman looked very confused as he stood waving his red flag as if not knowing which direction the voice came from. 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`. The passer-by called again, this time the signalman looked in the right direction. He asked if there was a path by which he could get down to the signalman's level. He pointed to a zigzag path by which the stroller could get down to the line.

The surroundings in which the signalman works are very eerie, ghostly, as if not in the 'natural world'. His post was in as solitary and dismal 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 was only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon... there was a barbarous, depressing and forbidding air'. The signalman himself is a 'dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows'. The passer-by explains that he thinks the signalman is scared of him, the signalman answers simply 'I was doubtful whether I had seen you before', whilst pointing at a red light in the mouth of the tunnel.

This is the first time in the story when the passer-by explains he thinks the signalman is insane. 'I have speculated since, whether there may have been infection in his mind'. The signalman takes the passer-by into his control 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'. The passer-by suggests the signalman is very clever, perhaps more intelligent than what his job requires of him.

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'. The passer-by describes the signalman as being very attentive and watchful. When the bell rang and he had to wave his flag. '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`.

However the incident that followed made the passer-by change his mind, `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... and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel`. Something was troubling the signalman but he wouldn't say what it was, `It is very, very difficult to speak of`. The signalman promised the passer-by that if he made another visit, the next day at 11pm, he would try to tell him what it was. `If you ever make me another visit, I will try to tell you`.

They wished each other goodnight. The signalman explained he didn't want the passer-by to call out to him when he arrived the following night. `And when you come down tomorrow night, don't call out! ... What made you cry, "Halloa! Below there!" tonight`? The signalman is extremely concerned and asks if those exact words were conveyed to the passer-by in any `supernatural way`. The passer-by denies any knowledge of this. The passer-by arrives on time at 11pm to meet the signalman, to find out what has been troubling him. The signalman explains he took the passer-by for someone else, `I took you for someone else yesterday evening.

That troubles me`. He begins to tell his story. `One moonlit night... ' The signalman explains he heard a voice calling him, `Halloa! Below there!` He got up, out of his seat and looked out of the window to see who it was. ' It' was standing near the red light outside the tunnel, shouting repetitively, `Halloa! Below there! Look out!` When the signalman ran up to ' it', to find

out the problem, 'it' disappeared, into thin air. 'I ran right up at it, and had my hand stretched out to pull the sleeve away, when it was gone'. The passer-by tried to console the signalman. He ought to know something of the wind and the wires'.

The signalman had not finished. He went on to explain, 'Within six hours after the appearance, the memorable accident on this line happened, and within ten hours the dead and the wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood'. The passer-by reasoned that it was probably a coincidence. The signalman still had not finished his story. Six or seven months had passed and the signalman had recovered from the previous incident when the presence returned again.

This time, however it was silent. I, standing at the door, looked towards the red light, and saw the spectre again'. The same day another tragedy, on the same stretch of line occurred. 'That very day, as a train came out of the tunnel... I heard terrible screams and cries. A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments'. The passer-by couldn't think of anything to explain this strange occurrence with. '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'. The signalman still had not finished his story. The spectre came back a week ago.

Ever since, it has been there, now and again by fits and starts... At the Danger-light'. 'It calls to me, for many minutes together, in an agonized manner, "Below there! Look out! Look out!" It stands waving to me. It rings my little bell'. The passer-by asks if it rang the bell when he was there with

the signalman the evening before. `Did it ring your bell yesterday when I was here, and you went to the door?` The signalman agrees with the passer-by, `Twice`. The passer-by disagrees, `How your information misleads you.

My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell... it did not ring at those times`. The signalman shakes his head; the ghost's ring and the station ring are both very different. `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`. Both times the bell rang the spectre was out by the danger light. The passer-by accompanies the signalman outside to see if the presence is there again. `Do you see it?` asks the passer by. `No, it is not there`, replies the signalman.