

Grade 9 2019 A Christmas Carol Essay

2019 PAPER

Charles Dickens: *A Christmas Carol*

Read the following extract from Chapter 1 of *A Christmas Carol* and then answer the question that follows.

In this extract Scrooge is visited by Marley's Ghost.

- Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands. "You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"
- "I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?"
- 5 Scrooge trembled more and more.
- "Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!"
- 10 Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he could see nothing.
- "Jacob," he said, imploringly. "Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!"
- "I have none to give," the Ghost replied. "It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more is all permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!"
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- 20 It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets. Pondering on what the Ghost had said, he did so now, but without lifting up his eyes, or getting off his knees.

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Starting with this extract, explore how Dickens uses the ghosts to help Scrooge change his attitudes and behaviour.

Write about:

- how Dickens uses Marley's Ghost in this extract
- how Dickens uses the ghosts to help Scrooge change his attitudes and behaviour in the novel as a whole.

[30 marks]

PLAN

Words to use: help, change, behaviour, attitude

- Marley symbolises eternal damnation
- Present- ignorance and want, plight of the destitute
- Yet to come- Bleak future

Dickens makes Marley symbolic of the eternal consequences of the pursuit of materialism- in his life on earth he shunned poverty, indulging in his avarice, thus in his afterlife he experiences spiritual poverty. This serves to be a warning for Scrooge that if he does not reverse his parsimonious miserly attitude, he will be subject to the same eternal damnation. This warning is salient when Marley says, "I wear the chain I forgd in life". As a chain symbolises restriction and entrapment, his chain is a conceit for the restricting and eternal consequences of being parsimonious and refusing to develop a collective social conscience. As Scrooge mirrors Marley's behaviour, Dickens warns that this spiritual poverty, paired with sempiternal torture, is inescapable and inevitable if Scrooge doesn't change his attitude to the destitute and to society. Moreover, the repetition of "link" in "link by link" places emphasis on how all the individual links of a chain are inextricably bound to one another.

Thus, this is a warning for how Scrooge is inextricably bound with his neglect of others: his infatuation with money and abandonment of compassion will mean he is also inextricably bound to his anguish in the afterlife. Thus, Marley serves to be Dickens' first mouthpiece as he explores the desperate need for a collective social conscience. Marley's warning about the eternal punishments of avariciousness and egoism is also a direct warning of the consequences of holding Malthusian views. Thomas Malthus, a British economist, believed that poverty was an inevitable consequence of the increasing population: famine and poverty were unavoidable. Therefore, Dickens constructs Scrooge to hold these ignorant Malthusian views, and be warned about eternal punishment by Marley, to show his readership that Malthusian behaviour and views is synonymous with eternal punishment. Social commentator Dickens therefore constructs Marley to serve as a physical and spiritual representation of the dehumanising and eternal consequences of valuing materialism over society.

Moreover, Dickens utilises the allegorical characters of ignorance and want through the ghost of Christmas present. As Scrooge is microcosmic for the ignorant upper echelon, it allows Dickens to change the attitude of Scrooge to the plight of the destitute alongside the upper classes. Dickens personifies poverty through the children, describing them through the malnourishing adjective "yellow". "Yellow" connotes sickness, mirroring how the upper class believed that poverty was almost alike to a contagious illness or sickness. Thus, the upper-class members like Scrooge in society, felt it was easier to distance themselves from this 'disease' of poverty oppose to helping them. By the ghost forcing Scrooge to face the children who have been dehumanised as a result of poverty, this catalyses a change in his behaviour and attitude as he physically sees the effects of his blind ignorance to want to "decrease the surplus population". Moreover, there is a feral and animalistic portrayal of the children as they're described as "scowling" and "wolfish". This animalistic image highlights how poverty dehumanises individuals, stripping them of their humanity and reducing them to less than an animalistic state of being. Thus, Scrooge, an extension of the rich, is forced to change his attitude and behaviour as he recognises that his ignorance is consequently perpetuating poverty and animalising the innocent poor. The ghost to not only elicit a change in attitude and behaviour from Scrooge, but to critique and indict the ignorance that pervaded the upper class and how this ignorance was synonymous with the suffering of the poor. The 1834 poor law demonstrates the detrimental impact of this ignorance and oblivion as the introduction of the workhouses, due to the belief the poor were lazy, meant children as young as 4 or 5 were subject to these hubs of squalor. Therefore, within Dickens' political diatribe, he makes the ghost make Scrooge face the poor and change his attitude for a sense of justice for the disenfranchised poor. He shows the reader that the rich must be accountable and acknowledge the severity of their ignorance as innocent children ceaselessly suffer in the face of poverty daily- the exploration of the innocence of children being a typical trope in Dickens' work.

Lastly, Dickens constructs the ghost of Christmas yet to come as the archetypal presentation of a menacing ghost to catalyse a permanent change in Scrooge's attitude and behaviour- the finality of his solemn bleak future serves as both a warning to the reader and Scrooge of the irreversibility of leading a sardonic miserly life. The ghost is "shrouded in a deep black garment" which is reminiscent of the description of the grim reaper, a symbol of death, believed to collect people's souls. The likeness in description is suggestive that Scrooge's chances of redemption have vanished, and he is now going to be mercilessly taken to his hellish death. This produces immense terror and "fear" within Scrooge, resulting in his desperation for redemption, this is marked in this climax of the allegorical novella: "I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me". The concept of "three" could be a biblical allusion to the three different forms of God within the holy trinity: the father, the son and the holy spirit. This could emphasise how the three ghosts almost acted as incarnations of God himself- relaying a moral and religious message that penetrated deeply within Scrooge. Thus, despite the ghosts' menacing depiction, through Scrooge being shown his proleptic death, it allowed him to realise that a dire, bleak future is imminent if hatred is not exchanged for benevolence. Scrooge's plead for redemption is pivotal in marking his change in attitude. The idea of redemption and salvation is also paramount within Christianity. Due to Victorian society being extremely religious, redemption was the belief that God provided this when sin had been confessed. Therefore, Dickens allows Scrooge access to redemption and salvation once his behaviour has changed to model an example for his readership- redemption and salvation can only be achieved once a frugal existence is replaced with one of benevolence and compassion.

In concatenation, Dickens constructs each ghost as his mouthpiece to catalyse a positive change in Scrooge's attitude and behaviour. Marley and the ghost of Christmas Yet to come personify a horrifying gothic supernatural element, whilst the ghost of Christmas present provides a socio-economic message about poverty. All are used by Dickens to elicit a change in Scrooge, hopeful he too can do the same to his Victorian readership.