

How does dickens
use scrooge to
highlight injustice in
victorian society



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A Christmas Carol which is a bildungsroman written by Charles Dickens in the 1800's, an undermining social diatribe possibly accusing the political injustice. As a Unitarian he was passionate about morality and ethics and abhorred the poverty inflicted on the underclass by the obnoxious upper-class. The poor were merely pledged to a life working for little pay often in the Debtor's prisons enacted by the Poor Laws.

Dickens critiques this through the use of Scrooge the protagonist of the novella whom undergoes a transformative change which shows the effects on himself and those around him. He begins as an allegory for the exploitive parsimonious upper-class, exemplified as being a money lender. Dickens, who passionately believes in a full humanity uses the theme of injustice symbiotically with redemption to unify all classes in a more civilised and utopian idealistic society. His reformation is aided by the three ghosts, who show him his past present and future and how his actions have influenced others.

In the exposition Scrooge is introduced as a ' squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner', and this lexis of constricting verbs suggest his violent and manic pursuit for money, which shows his greed and materialistic needs as he ' clutches' out of desperation. The phrase ' solitary as an oyster' could connote to several things. Firstly, an ' oyster' is a calcified shell that is extremely difficult to open, likewise, Scrooge is very emotionally difficult to converse with. This could refer to his oblivious attitude to the poor, and be the reason the rich upper-class dismiss the lower class.

However, in time, the 'oyster' opens to reveal a pearl. This could implicitly infer that with force, he could become a better person. This imagery is used to show how Scrooge has become metaphorically emotionally frozen because of his actions and isolation. 'External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge' shows that the bad weather (or his negativity) is coming from him which is why it doesn't affect him. The use of 'misanthropic ice' later in the stave enforces the idea that his wealth and disregard for others and humanity to find wealth is what has led to his frozen emotions 'misanthropic' could have been used to show his hatred for humanity but also his disliking for the poor because of their lack of wealth.

This was a common opinion at the time when workhouses and debtors prisons were common and were funded indirectly by the wealthy middle class industrialists and so Scrooge could believe that this action justifies his lack of generosity and humanity to the poor. Scrooge is the juxtaposition with Fred who emanates heat, whereas Scrooge does the opposite. Fred introduces the idea of a happy generous better of the class who are open forgiving and loving whereas Scrooge is the antithesis of this as he is 'self-contained' unloving and doesn't believe in sharing his wealth, which is seen later on when he is met by two portly gentlemen, asking for money for the poor. The two portly gentlemen ask Scrooge for money for those in need at Christmas but Scrooge refuses and asks whether the 'union workhouses', 'prisons' and the 'treadmill' and the Poor Laws are in full vigour which the gentlemen reply they are, which leads Scrooge to speak the words of the Malthus and that 'if they would rather die.... they had better do it and decrease the surplus population'.

This theory highlights the injustice in Victorian times, as Malthusian philosophy was something believed by many middle class Victorians who believed that the poor should die for the greater good of the rich which shows the lack of humanity. At the end of the stave, when Scrooge returns home and Marley's ghost haunts him, he says he doesn't believe in ghosts which could be a metaphor for him not wanting to change, ' he was incredulous, and fought against his senses'. This could suggest that Scrooge is unwilling to change his opinion on the poor laws and most didn't want to change in Victorian times, as it wouldn't benefit them. The spirit then takes Scrooge to the household of the Cratchit's house which bears more social irresponsibility from the apathetic upper-class. Tiny Tim is malnourished and requires a surgery which they cannot afford. Everything is described in a mantra of ' substantialness' in order to create a juxtaposition between the rich and destitute.

For example ' Tiny' Tim, ' small' feast etcetera. Bob Cratchit the father and Scrooge's clerk is described as ' little Bob' which reflects his statue in society because at the time wealth was what you needed to have any authority. He could be described as little because Scrooge's treatment of him, and how these were seen as poor beneath the wealth and ' little people' who were insignificant, which highlights injustice at the time. They all contribute to the overarching idea that they are powerless in their inevitable fate, which is made obnoxiously clear when ghost Christmas present denounces Tim will die.

Scrooge asks the spirit ' spirit tell me if Tiny Tim will live' which shows how he is starting to reconnect with society and humanity. Obviously, Scrooge
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has the ability to reverse the fate of Tim, but has always dismissed others for his own benefit. This explicitly links to the title of injustice, as Scrooge fundamentally dictates the quality of other people's lives. But then Mrs Cratchit describes Scrooge as 'the ogre of the family' and that 'the mention of his name cast a dark shadow' which shows how they are oppressed by Scrooge because Bob works for Scrooge because he has to keep the family together and out of the workhouse.

This shows the impact Scrooge has on their lives, because he is the one dictating their life because he has power over their health, as Bob's employer which highlights the injustice in Victorian times. The symbolic children disclosed by the ghost of Christmas present 'ignorance and want' relate to social injustice because they provide Scrooge the epiphany that it is his actions that manifest the conditions of the poor. The children are capitalised abstract concepts that personify the plight of those who suffer deprivation. The child personifying 'want' arises from the desperation that is induced from abandonment.

Likewise, 'ignorance' is inflicted from lack of education. Dickens, whom recognises this harsh cycle used the dialogue 'Doom, unless erased from his head' suggests that children of the Elizabethan plight are all heading in the same direction; becoming 'wolfish' and 'meagre' meaning that they will likely steal as a result. The word 'wolfish' suggests that they will go to all ends to forage for food, and materialistic goods. Most children became pickpockets, and stole from food stores for their family, because they simply could not afford these goods. Dickens suggests that it is not the fault of the poor that they have to take these measures, but the fault of the aristocrats

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whom need to ' erase' the ' Doom' which they impose. The word ' Doom' is also capitalised to suggest that it is not something to be appeased through ignoring the problem, but is much greater than the rich acknowledge.