

ENGLISH: *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

In 'A Christmas Carol,' Dickens suggests that if Scrooge can change, society can change too. Do you agree?

In his allegorical novella 'A Christmas Carol' Dickens endeavours to raise the awareness of the comfortable elite upper class to the conditions of poverty and suffering around them, thus creating his novella to serve as an expose of the social inequality and injustice suffered by the poor and destitute of society. Through the miserly protagonist in Ebenezer Scrooge, Dickens highlights the expanding divide between the rich and the poor which provides the framework for the social commentary and morality tale which ensues. Dickens creates an idealistic image of the world where the hope of bridging this gap between the rich and poor is not only feasible but imperative, brought about by Scrooges redemption from a 'wicked old screw' to a charitable philanthropist, representative of that of the upper class. As Dickens illustrates that even the coldest of souls, barren of any skerrick of goodness and compassion, can be touched by the warmth of the Christmas spirit, the hope of redemption for the wider society and the Victorian elite is firmly established.

Dickens creates Scrooge as an allegory of the Victorian elite who embodies all that is amiss in the predominantly self-serving society, thus through his redemption Dickens offers hope to the wider society that they too may be redeemed. Heaped upon Scrooge are all the faults, vices and shortcomings of those who are consumed by their own prosperity and self advancement as Dickens aims to highlight the indifference of society's upper class. This is further heightened with Dickens' characterisation of scrooge as 'a squeezing, wrenching, gasping...covetous old sinner...hard and sharp as a flint...and solitary as an oyster' to whom 'no warmth could warm and no wintry weather chill.' Even the traditionally warm sentiments of the festive season appear to have little effect on his frigid character as he maintains his 'Bah! Humbug!' manner, so adamantly refusing to partake in the celebrations of the Christmas period. It seems that there is no hope of change for this merciless merchant as even when he is confronted by the ghost of his former business partner, bound by the chains he forged in life, coming with a warning of an impending fate and a hope of shunning the same path that he is bound to tread, scrooge would 'rather not' participate in a journey that offers him the hope of evading the same procuring. However, through the visitations of the three Christmas Ghosts the reader observes that Scrooge is not intrinsically the cold hearted miser he appears to be and that if he of all people can forgo his miserly conduct and avaricious pursuit of wealth, surely there is hope for others who lead their lives in a similar way.

Dickens contends that the crux of society's problems, particularly those of the rich, is the deeply rooted fear of poverty leading to 'the golden idol' of money and 'the master-passion' of gain. However, through Scrooges dealings with his nephew and Clerk, Dickens reveals to the reader that the culmination of money and pursuit of materialistic wealth does more harm than good, and because of it Scrooge 'loses some pleasant moments which could do him no harm.' Both in Fred's world and that of the impoverished, yet seemingly contented Cratchits there is an abundance of joy, relationship and harmony. Even though the Cratchits have little by way of material wealth or possessions, whatever they do have is a source of shared merriment. In fact, it is this sharing, the very thing which the unredeemed Scrooge is incapable, that brings the greatest happiness. In juxtaposing this with the avaricious ways of Scrooge; 'taking his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern' despite his abundance of money that he refuses to use to 'make himself comfortable with,' Dickens clearly illustrates that 'his wealth is of no use to him.' In doing so he challenges the firmly held belief that money equates happiness and prompts the reader to re-evaluate what is truly important, as does Scrooge who sees that it results in a pointless end to a lonely life through the ghost of Christmas yet to come. Dickens asserts that if society can value its members and understand that human connections bring much greater happiness than money ever could, they can let go of their debilitating fear and hope of being 'beyond the chance of [poverty's] sordid reproach' to achieve a much kinder and more generous world in which they live.

Dickens' message to the reader is that if they can 'honour Christmas' in their hearts all year round and 'keep [it] well' society as a whole would greatly benefit. Setting his novella during the Christmas season allows Dickens to implement the prevailing themes of generosity and altruism to teach his affluent reader that 'at this festive time of the year...it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly...choosing this time because it is a time of all others when want is keenly felt and abundance rejoices.' Furthermore Dickens reminds his reader of the fact that Christmas 'is the only time...in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them' which results in a more harmonious society as is illustrated in stave 5 through Scrooge who goes about '[patting] children on the head and [questioning] beggars' in the hope that he will make his name pleasant among all. Hence Dickens challenges the Victorian elite to do the same all year round and have 'a kinder word for another' everyday and not just on that particular day of the year.

Through Scrooge's reformed character, Dickens seeks to teach his affluent contemporaries about their obligation to the suffering and destitute of society as well as the value of human connections and the power of Christmas in a largely bleak world. He contends that if the readers, like Scrooge can adopt the lessons of 'charity, mercy and forbearance' there is a hope of change and a chance of achieving the idealistic world depicted in Stave 5.