A Christmas Carol Study Guide

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

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Contents

Introduction

It is hard to believe that there is anyone on the planet who is not familiar with the story of A *Christmas Carol.* Written in a six-week period in October and November of 1843, the novel was the first of five short Christmas books published by Charles Dickens. Obviously, it was the most successful novel in the series. In fact, he was so certain that people would like his story that he refused to sell the rights to his publisher and instead paid to publish it himself. His instincts proved correct, and soon after its publication all of the copies were sold.

In his later years, Dickens would read an abridged version of A *Christmas Carol* at public readings for which he charged a fee. Often, that fee went to the several charitable organizations that he was involved with throughout his lifetime. The book itself was instrumental in raising people's awareness of poverty.

Since its publication, the story has been told many times in all imaginable forms. Despite the thousands of times that A *Christmas Carol has* been adapted to stage, radio, movies, and television, the novel remains the most popular and poignant telling of the tale.

Author Biography

Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England on February 7, 1812. His family moved to London before he was two, but his father had trouble making enough money to feed his large family. In 1824 Dickens' father was sent to debtor's prison, along with most of his family. Charles, who was twelve years of age, did not have to go to prison because he was already working at Warren's Blacking Factory. In later life he remembered the factory bitterly and would only talk about it with a few close friends.

The family was released from debtor's prison a few months later, thanks to an inheritance that Dickens' father, John, received when his mother died. His mother wanted Charles to continue on at the factory, but his father made provisions for him to attend school. Dickens attended school until he was fifteen, and then worked as a clerk in a lawyer's office, studying Latin at night.

Dickens became a freelance reporter at Doctors' Commons Courts in 1829. In 1834 he started publishing sketches of London life using the pseudonym "Boz." In 1836 these short pieces were collected in a book called *Sketches by Boz.* Soon after the publication of these sketches, William Hall, of the publishing firm Chapman and Hall, approached him to write humorous text to accompany a series of plates by the illustrator Robert Seymour. Immediately, Dickens conceived of Mr. Pickwick.

When Seymour committed suicide, Dickens went on to turn his ideas into *The Pickwick Papers.* That was the start of his career as a novelist.

By 1843 he had completed four books and was in the middle of the next, *Martin Chuzzlewit,* when he took time out in October and November to write *A Christmas Carol.* He continued to write novels, most of them being published in serial form before being bound as novels.

The list of Dickens' books are familiar to any casual reader: *David Copperfield, A Tale of Two Cities, Oliver Twist,* and *Great Expectations,* to name just a few. Dickens also did charitable work, managed a theater company, and edited magazines. When he died in 1870, he was buried Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, an honor reserved for England's most notable literary figures.

Plot Summary

Stave I: Marley's Ghost

As *A Christmas Carol* opens, readers are introduced to Ebenezer Scrooge, the epitome of a tight-fisted miser: he is too cheap to heat his office, too cheap to give his clerk Christmas Day off without demanding he come in early the next day, and too cheap to care about the suffering of the poor people all around him. The tale begins on Christmas Eve, and Scrooge is visited by his nephew Fred, a good-natured man who tries to celebrate the holiday with his uncle, but is rebuked:

"If I could work my will," said Scrooge, indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!"

Yet Fred is not discouraged by his uncle's crankiness and wishes him well. As he leaves, two men from a charitable organization enter and ask Scrooge for a donation to help the poor. He suggests that the poor should go to prisons and workhouses, and the man points out that many would rather die than live under those wretched conditions.

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

When he goes home that evening, Scrooge sees the face of his long-dead business partner, Jacob Marley, in the knocker on his front door. Going upstairs to his flat, he thinks he sees a hearse riding up the stairs. Dozing in a chair by a dim fire, he hears chains in the cellar coining nearer, until Mar-ley's ghost enters the room.

Marley's ghost explains that he is required in death to wander the earth, walking among humanity as he never did in life. The chain around him is "the chain I forged in life." He has come to warn Scrooge that he must change his ways, and he foretells that three spirits will come to Scrooge over the next three nights. When he leaves through the window, Scrooge sees hundreds of ghosts in chains wandering out in the street below his window.

Stave II: The First of the Three Spirits

The next morning, Scrooge is visited by the Ghost of Christmas Past. The ghost walks to the window and orders Scrooge to accompany him, but Scrooge asserts that he will fall.

"Bear but a touch of my hand *there"* said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this."

Scrooge finds himself at the school that he attended as a boy, watching all of the other children leaving for Christmas. He is shocked to see a young Scrooge, a lonely but imaginative boy that daydreams about characters out of Ali Baba and Robinson Crusoe. Suddenly it is the same scene a few years later, when Scrooge's little sister, Fan, excitedly tells him that their father said he can come home this year.

The next stop is the shop where Scrooge was an apprentice as a young man. It was run by Fezzi-wig, a ruddy, jovial man who tells his clerks to put away their work to prepare for the holiday festivities. All of the business equipment is put away and food and musicians and guests come in, and Fezzi-wig and his wife lead the dancing. Scrooge starts to realize the benefit of kindness, telling the Spirit:

He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome, a pleasure or a toil Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up, what then[7] The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune

In the next scene, a woman named Belle breaks off her engagement to young Ebenezer Scrooge. He has changed, she explains: he has become obsessed with money and fearful of poverty. Although heartbroken, he eventually he agrees. Scrooge is then taken to Belle's house several years later, where she is surrounded by a happy, laughing family. Her husband returns home and says that he heard that Marley was dying, and that Scrooge would then be left all alone in the world Distraught, Scrooge begs the Spirit to take him home.

Stave III: The Second of the Three Spirits

Back in his room, Scrooge is awakened by the Ghost of Christmas Present, a jolly giant carrying a torch. His room is decorated with wreaths and holly and delicious-smelling foods. This spirit takes Scrooge through London, where shopkeepers are joyfully setting out baskets of food and happy people are doing last minute shopping. As people pass with their dinners, the Spirit sprinkles some kind of seasoning on it with his torch, and they become even happier.

He takes Scrooge to the home of his clerk, Bob Cratchit. Mrs. Cratchit and some of the children are preparing the Christmas dinner Bob Cratchit comes in from church carrying their son, Tiny Tim, who has a crutch. There is little to eat, but it is prepared well, and the family is glad for what they have. Bob Cratchit raises a toast to Scrooge, but Mrs. Cratchit and the children cannot find it within herself to say anything nice about him:

Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes.

Before leaving the Cratchit house, Scrooge asks the spirit if Tiny Tim will live. He is told that if things do not change, the young boy will die.

Next, they visit an impovenshed mining camp. There, they see cheerful people celebrating Christmas despite heart-wrenching poverty. They go to a ship out at sea to find the ship's crew also making the best of the holiday. They observe a party at the house of Scrooge's nephew and see Fred's family playing games, eating, and laughing. When Scrooge's name is brought up, Fred expresses his pity for him. Yet most of his guests think of Scrooge as a nasty, foolish old man.

Before leaving, the Ghost of Christmas Present opens his gigantic robe to show Scrooge two pathetic-looking young children: Ignorance and Want. Scrooge asks if there isn't someone who could take care of them, and the spirit responds:

"Are there no workhouses?" said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses[9]"

Stave IV: The Last of the Spirits

Scrooge is visited by the Ghost of Christmas yet to Come, which is shrouded in black and does not speak. This mysterious apparition takes him out into the town. They pass a group of businessmen standing on a street corner, talking about a death and laughing about how cheap the funeral will be.

Another group of people on the street mentions a death in passing and then go on to talk about the weather. In the cheap, dingy part of town they observe a pawnbroker buying things that two women have stolen from the room where a dead man was laid out. They have spoons and clothes and the curtains from his bed, complete with rings, and even the shirt that had been left on the body. Scrooge recognizes the things as his.

When Scrooge asks to see anyone in town who felt emotions over this man's death, the Spirit takes him to a couple who owe the dead man money. They are relieved to hear of the death, hoping that their debt will pass to someone more understanding. When he begs to find someone grieving, he is taken to the Cratchit house, where the family is devastated by the loss of Tiny Tim. With a sinking feeling, Scrooge demands to know who the dead man is. The Spirit takes him to a churchyard and shows him a grave with his own name on it. Scrooge falls to his knees and begs for the chance to change, and when he grabs the Spirit's hand his cloak collapses into a pile of bed linen.

Stave V: The End of It

Elated that he is alive and has a second chance at life, Scrooge goes to the window and calls down to a boy in the street and asks what day it is. When he finds out that it is Christmas, he tells the boy to go to the poultry shop and have them bring the big prize-winning turkey, which he sends anonymously to the Cratchit house. He then dresses in his best clothes and goes out.

In the street he meets the man from the charitable organization that he chased from his office the day before. He gives him money and promises more. Then he visits Fred's

house and recognizes all of the party guests who were there when he saw it with the Ghost of Christmas Present The next morning, Bob Cratchit arrives for work eighteen minutes late; for a moment, Scrooge acts like his old self, but then he breaks into a smile and tells Cratchit that they will sit down with a bowl of warm punch that afternoon and talk about raising his salary.

Eventually, Scrooge becomes like a second father to Tiny Tim, taking care of his medical bills so that he regains his health. In future years he is aware that people find his change of personality strange, but he realizes how fortunate he is to have a second chance.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Dickens begins his story by assuring his readers that Jacob Marley is, indeed, dead. He explains that without this assurance, the true miracle of the tale he is about to relate would not be fully understood. From there, he goes on to introduce Marley's former business partner Ebenezer Scrooge, a cold, bitter, miser; in the words of Dickens' narrator, Scrooge is a "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner." It is quickly apparent that Scrooge has shown this miserly persona to the world for years, and he likes it that way.

As the story begins, Scrooge is being assaulted by the Christmas season. First, to try to bring him some Christmas cheer is his nephew, whose invitation to Christmas dinner is met with a series of hearty "Bah Humbugs!" Next are two gentlemen soliciting charity for the poor-- again, a sound rejection. The last to experience Scrooge's overwhelming lack of holiday spirit is his long-suffering clerk, who must first plead his case for the favor of taking Christmas as a day off of work and is then warned to be in even earlier on the day following Christmas.

Upon returning home, Scrooge begins to experience several mysterious occurrences, such as seeing the long dead Marley's face in his doorknocker and bells that seem to ring themselves. The clanking of chains, however, announces the appearance of Jacob Marley's ghost. Marley's ghost informs Scrooge that his spirit has been doomed to walk the earth after death as punishment for his ways in life, and that it is his hope to save Scrooge from a similar afterlife. He warns Scrooge that three spirits will visit him, and that they alone hold the key for him to escape his torturous fate.

Chapter 1 Analysis

When reading Dickens' classic tale, *A Christmas Carol*, it is easy to dismiss it as a pleasant little story of holiday cheer. Closer inspection, however, reveals Dickens' philosophies on the human condition; namely, that we as humans are all inter-connected and that our ultimate happiness is found in experiencing and sharing the pleasures of the soul.

In this first chapter, Dickens describes in great detail the world that is our starting point. First, by establishing that Marley is dead, and that Marley was the same type of greedy old man as Scrooge, Dickens shows that all that will happen in the story is truly miraculous. In addition, he spares nothing in his descriptions of Scrooge; it is said of him:

"External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he; no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't

know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often came down handsomely, and Scrooge never did."

This reputation, this miserly, bitter way of Scrooge's, has been carefully cultivated through the years. As the narrator says, "But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked." We are told that he has spent his life shirking any warmth of humanity, and that, to him, those who do not follow the same path are worthy of derision.

Scrooge is seen interacting with several people, each trying in some way to draw him in to the Christmas spirit and, as such, humanity as a whole. The first, his nephew Fred, attempts simply to force human company upon his uncle; he invites him to Christmas dinner. Scrooge does not understand his nephew's way of thinking – what is the point of such an invitation when it will yield no profit for either of them? Fred counters that it is the very generosity of spirit and joyful feelings of people during the holiday season that is its own reward, telling Scrooge, "And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!" Though he finishes by plainly asking why they can't be friends, Fred is dismissed by Scrooge.

Scrooge's encounter with two men collecting for the poor illuminates another facet of his views on mankind. The poor are the responsibility of either prisons and workhouses, or of themselves, and he should be left out of the equation entirely. He tells the men that he doesn't make merry himself at Christmas and that he can't afford to make idle people merry. If any statement sums up Scrooge's outlook, it is this last pronouncement. It is only much later that night, in the throes of his visit from Marley's ghost, that Scrooge first begins to let his lack of connection, and its possible results, sink in.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Having fallen asleep after his ghostly visit with Marley, Scrooge wakes to the sound of the clock chiming twelve. He is perplexed – how could it be only twelve when he went to bed sometime after two? Then he recollects that Marley's ghost told him his first spirit would visit him when the clock struck one. He vows to stay awake until that time passes to disprove the silly notion of the ghost, and yet, as the clock chimes once, his bed curtains are parted.

Scrooge's first spirit visitor identifies itself as the Ghost of Christmas Past. After much discussion, the Ghost takes Scrooge back in time to a holiday season long forgotten. Here, Scrooge sees himself as a very young boy, left alone at school during Christmas when all of his friends are joyfully going home to their families. Scrooge's only companions are those he reads about in books, and his imagination is so strong that even as the present day Scrooge watches from the shadows, the young Scrooge conjures characters such as Ali Baba and Robinson Crusoe to keep him company, at least in fantasy.

Suddenly years pass and Scrooge sees himself again, a little older, in the exact same setting. This time, however, his sister Fan, whom he obviously adores, quickly joins him. She tells him that he is to come home forever, not just for Christmas, and that their father has softened and become much kinder. The two children leave the school and are carried home by a carriage. It is this sister, Fan, who is the mother of Scrooge's aforementioned nephew.

With another sudden leap in time, Scrooge and the spirit find themselves standing outside of a warehouse. Scrooge recognizes it immediately as the place in which he was under the apprenticeship of a Mr. Fezziwig. Fezziwig is shown to be a kind and generous benefactor, hosting a holiday dance with his family and making sure that everyone has a joyous time. Seeing such a display of generosity even makes Scrooge wish, for a moment, to see his clerk, perhaps to show a bit of the spirit he himself had learned from Fezziwig and seemingly forgotten.

After this scene of holiday festivities, Scrooge is moved forward again in time. This time, he is said to be in the prime of life; however, it is also noted that there is a detection of greed and restlessness about him. He is with a girl, and it becomes evident that there was, at one time, a romantic pact between them. She is seen releasing him from this obligation, because while she still holds the same values as when they came together, his priorities have changed to reflect his growing greediness for gain. As the spirit quickly takes him from this scene to another, Scrooge sees the happy home of this young girl, now a woman surrounded by loving children and a husband. It is this husband's mention that he had seen an old friend of hers, Mr. Scrooge, and their

discussion of him that causes Scrooge to plead to be removed. There is a struggle with the spirit, and Scrooge is finally home, exhausted from his first of three visitors.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In Chapter 2, the introduction to the first of Scrooge's three ghostly visitors is there to show Scrooge visions of Christmas' past. Interestingly, the physical manifestation of the spirit is representative of the past.

With this ghost, Dickens continues to explore his theme of connectivity – the actions of others affect not only our lives, but also our spirits, and vice versa. The young Scrooge, deserted at school, is given a brick by his family to help build the wall of abandonment that will forge his disconnect in later years; his summoning home by Fan is an example of the way others, in this case, his family, are able to plant seeds that will grow into the changes he will undergo. More of these seeds are planted by Scrooge's mentor Fezziwig, whose Christmas party and subsequent kindnesses are all done simply for the sake of good, not for any profit or gain. Even Scrooge defends this way of thinking to the spirit.

Scrooge's visit to his former love, and his look at the life she established after him, provides another illustration of Dickens' theme. When she is releasing him from his commitment, she already recognizes that he has started to change, becoming greedy and interested only in profit. By seeing her later family life, and how it contrasts with the life Scrooge had formerly deemed important, he and we as readers, are made to understand how each choice we take affects both others and ourselves.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

After his encounter with the Ghost of Christmas Past, Scrooge is once again asleep. As Chapter 3 opens, Scrooge wakes himself up with a particularly loud snore. He's ready this time for a ghostly visitor, even opening his bed curtains so as to be prepared for whatever appears. His preparations, however, are all for nothing, because when the clock strikes one, no apparition appears. Instead, Scrooge finds himself bathed in a mysterious light.

Once recovered from NOT seeing a spirit, Scrooge determines that the source of the strange light seems to reside in the room connected to his. He discovers in this adjoining room that the room itself has been transformed onto a holiday wonderland, and that it is indeed occupied by the second spirit, who identifies himself as the Ghost of Christmas Present. Soon, the two traveling companions are out amongst the holiday revelers, taking in all the sights and smells of the season.

Their first stop is at the home of Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's clerk. The Cratchit home is poor but full of love, and every family member celebrates Christmas with excitement. Scrooge is particularly interested in the fate of Cratchit's youngest son, Tiny Tim. Tim walks with a crutch and, though he seems weakened from illness, his heart and spirit seem strong. The ghost tells Scrooge that little Tim will not live. Hearing this, Scrooge is ashamed by his own earlier words to the gentlemen seeking charity for the Poor. Then, even more shame is heaped upon him as Bob Cratchit, despite Scrooge's ill treatment of him, and despite his own family's objections, offers up a Christmas toast in his name.

Finally, ghost and man leave Cratchit's home and are once again taking in the sights of Christmas in the city streets. Quickly, however, they are whisked away to several non-traditional holiday celebrations. In the first, a large family of miners seems to be having a very merry Christmas together in their small but cheery hut, despite their bleak and desolate setting outside. Next, Scrooge is carried out to sea to witness the celebration between two gruff old lighthouse attendants, not much more than some grog and a song, but a celebration, nonetheless. Lastly, Scrooge is taken to a ship out on the sea, where crewmembers are humming Christmas tunes and recalling holiday memories despite being miles out to sea and away from their families.

Upon leaving the ship, Scrooge is surprised to arrive at the home of his nephew. Even more surprising is that he himself is the topic of discussion. Amidst the protests of the other guests at his party, Scrooge's nephew Fred genuinely wishes Scrooge could have a merry Christmas. Fred, a very happy and generous man, believes that if he continues to try and draw his uncle into the spirit of the season, year after year, Scrooge will eventually begin to thaw. By disregarding good cheer, Fred contends, Scrooge injures none but himself. The party-goers go on to sing, dance, and play games; Scrooge, so enthralled by the fun, even begins to play along, though he is, of course, still invisible to

the others. He has such a grand time, in fact, that he begs the spirit to let him stay longer. Unfortunately, the Ghost cannot comply, and he and Scrooge depart from the scene as Fred is offering up a toast to his uncle.

Soon they are once again visiting Christmas celebrations around the world, and even the most poor and miserable are made happy again by the silent presence of the spirit. At this time, Scrooge begins to notice that the spirit seems to be aging; he informs Scrooge that his life on earth is only for one night. Scrooge then notices two sickly, horrible children grasping at the Ghost from beneath his robe. When Scrooge inquires if these children belong to the Ghost, the following exchange takes place:

" 'They are Man's," said the spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!" cried the spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse! And bide the end!"

"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. ``Are there no workhouses?"'

As his own words are once again used against him, Scrooge hears the clock strike twelve, and he sees the third spirit, an ominous phantom-like hooded figure, making its way towards him.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The Ghost of Christmas Present, again, is a physical manifestation of the time it personifies; he is more real than his counterparts, and he interacts with the physical world, and he ages. This spirit is more of a participant in Scrooge's vision, as opposed to the former and last ghosts.

Visiting the Cratchit home, his nephew's home, and the various desolate locations to which he is carried that night, Scrooge observes time after time that the celebratory conditions one sees with one's eyes are of no importance; it is the celebration you hold in your heart, and share with the world, that is your legacy. There is no reason for it, no profit to be made, yet both Bob and Fred toast to Scrooge; here, again, Scrooge is shown that we are all parts of a whole.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Unlike the two Ghosts that precede it, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come does not speak; in fact, it is Scrooge himself who says aloud who this spirit is. The spirit, for its part, does nothing but point one outstretched hand to lead the way, and yet, for some reason, this Ghost fills Scrooge with more fear and foreboding than any of the past spirits he has seen.

The first stop for Scrooge and this third spirit is the city street. Here, they listen in on the conversation of a group of gentlemen who seem to be discussing the death of someone that they did not care for. As he moves on from this group, Scrooge overhears a group of wealthy businessmen whom he had always tried to make a favorable impression on mention, then quickly dismiss, the passing of someone they call "Old Scratch." Scrooge doesn't understand the importance of these conversations, but trusts they will prove to be important.

Their next stop is at a seedy pawnshop in the bad part of town. Here, a charwoman, laundress and undertaker arrive, intent on pawning off the earthly possessions of their deceased employer. The laundress has even gone so far as to take the dead man's burial clothing, sheets and bed curtains; sadly, he had no one to care. Scrooge believes he is seeing these things to warn against what could befall him, should he not change his ways. Upon seeing the dead man, lying covered by a sheet in a bed, he cannot remove the cover and see his face. When he asks the Ghost to show him at least one person who is feeling some emotion at the death of this man, the spirit takes him to the house of a family who are very happy at the news, as it means they will not be forced to leave their home by their creditor, the dead man. Scrooge pleads with the spirit for something more, "Let me see some tenderness connected with a death."

With this request, Scrooge is conducted to the Cratchit household. The family, formerly boisterous and excited with Christmas cheer, now sit quietly. Bob himself soon joins them, and it becomes clear what has happened – Tiny Tim has died. All are solemn, and Bob is, at one point, overcome with grief. He goes on, however, to relate to the others that he had spoken to Scrooge's nephew Fred, and that he had been extremely kind and generous. The family vows to each other that the tragedy of Tiny Tim's passing will serve to remind them that they must always stay close to each other, so that even in there sorrow, there is hope.

Scrooge, unable to bear much more, demands to know whom the man is that he had seen and heard spoken of so callously earlier. He then decides that he would like to see himself on this day in the future, to see what changes had occurred. He is puzzled when they pass by the courts, where he thought he should be at that time of day, and enter the cemetery. Reality finally begins to sink in, and he asks the spirit: if these are the shadows of the things "that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?"

The silent figure still offers nothing but it's outstretched finger, which points to a grave. The headstone, of course, reads *Ebenezer Scrooge*. Scrooge begins to plead that the ghostly visions have altered his life. With this, Scrooge attempts to grab the spirit and, failing this, sends up one last prayer to reverse his fate. He awakens to find himself praying next to a bedpost.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The third and final Ghost is the perfect personification of the future: ominous, mysterious and silent. It can offer no commentary, only direct Scrooge on the path to which his behavior has led him. Also, in the same way that no one can know his future, Scrooge could not know this figure representing his future by seeing its face or speaking with it.

Each of the scenes Scrooge overhears surrounding his passing all reinforce one theme; his life, and his behavior, have bore no good fruit. No one is saddened by his death; in fact, all who show any feeling at all show gladness at how they might profit. His death, in some ways, supports his assertions that all are looking for profit; however, he sees that in some cases, these reactions are his own doing. Others highlight that he does not want to be the kind of person who would profit from such things.

On the other end of the spectrum, Scrooge sees how the death of one small boy whose spirit was good and kind affects many in a way that, though tragic, is also positive. The Cratchits take Tiny Tim's death, in all its sadness, and vow that it will bring them closer. They are also heartened by the generosity of Fred, a virtual stranger to them with nothing to gain who reaches out to them. Again, Scrooge sees the contrast that exists between the ripple effects of one's own behavior, but the finality of his lonely death prompts him to embrace the goodness in life.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In this last chapter, Scrooge wholeheartedly joins the land of the living. He promises to "live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" and begins his day by shocking a young boy outside his window with a request for him to take Scrooge's money and buy the prize turkey. He has this turkey sent anonymously to the Cratchits. Then, meeting one of the men he had refused a donation to on the previous day, he makes a generous donation for both the present and the past. Finally, he arrives at the home of Fred and enjoys dinner with his nephew's family and friends. Throughout his day, Scrooge marvels at the joy he experiences by interacting with the world around him.

The next day, he can scarcely wait for Bob Cratchit to arrive at work late. Pretending to be angry, Scrooge quickly tells him he is getting a raise, and that from that day on, he will help Bob's family in any way he can and he does. We are told that Scrooge becomes like a second father to Tiny Tim, and that "he became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world."

Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter sums up Dickens' theme by showing the positive outcome of positive behavior. We see all the joy that Scrooge's generosity brings, not only to others, but also to himself. Not everything worth doing in this world is accompanied by some monetary or material gain; unselfish generosity affects the world in more ways than anyone can see in their own life.

Characters

Belle

Belle is Scrooge's old girlfriend. Years ago, she broke her relationship off with him because she felt that he had changed for the worse. In a vision of Christmas past, Scrooge sees her married and surrounded with laughing, happy children who love her.

Bob Cratchit

Cratchit is Scrooge's assistant, a loyal and diligent employee. After leaving the gloom of the Scrooge and Marley office on Christmas eve, Cratchit "went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, to play at blind-man's bluff." A child at heart, Cratchit truly enjoys carrying Tiny Tim around town, and is a loving family man.

Martha Cratchit

Martha is the Cratchit family's oldest daughter.

Peter Cratchit

Peter is Bob Cratchit's oldest son.

Tim Cratchit

See Tiny Tim

Mrs. Dilber

In Scrooge's vision of his own death, he sees Mrs. Dilber sell some of his belongings: "sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar tongs, and a few boots."

Fred

Fred is Scrooge's nephew and only living relative. A genial man, he stops by on Christmas Eve to wish Scrooge a Merry Christmas and ends up thoroughly rebuked. Yet the young man does not seem to let his uncle's nasty demeanor bother him or affect his relationship to his uncle.

The Ghost of Christmas Past

The first spirit to visit Scrooge is The Ghost of Chnstmas Past. Wearing a white tunic trimmed with summer flowers and carrying a sprig of holly, the ghost has rays of light emanating from its head and carries a candle extinguisher to wear as a cap and snuff the light. Scrooge is able to travel with him to long-ago times and places; in this way, Scrooge is able to see himself as a younger man and remember a time when he was more open and hopeful about life

The Ghost of Christmas Present

The second spirit is loud and boisterous, a large man who shows up with a mountain of food and drink. His purpose is to show Scrooge how his friends and family are celebrating Christmas without him. For example, Scrooge's nephew, Fred, is throwing a lavish party for a large group; and Bob Cratchit is enjoying his time with his family, even if the Christmas dinner is modest and the presents few.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

This ghost does not speak, but shows Scrooge a bleak future. Resembling the popular conception of the Grim Reaper, The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is enshrouded in a long black robe. From this future, Scrooge learns that Tiny Tim will not survive because Cratchit could not afford adequate medical help. Also Scrooge learns that when he dies, no one really cares. His passing is a relief to some and ignored by others.

Joe

Joe is the disreputable fence who buys Scrooges old clothes and linens. He will eventually sell them for a big profit.

Jacob Marley

Marley is Scrooge's late business partner. Dead for seven years, he comes back to haunt Scrooge and warns him that he is wasting his life. Moreover, he tells him that if he doesn't change soon, he'll end up like Marley: a restless old ghost. Initially, Marley's face appears in the knocker of Scrooge's front door, but then the ghost appears in full. His appearance is shocking: his jaw is tied together with a rag, which drops when he takes the rag off; he is bound around the waist with a chain, "the chain I forged in life," made of "cashboxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel." He informs Scrooge that he will be visited by three ghosts.

Old Fezziwig

Fezziwig is Scrooge's old employer. A large and genial man, he throws a huge Christmas party, with food and music and dancing and drinks and good cheer all around. He provides a contrast to the kind of employer Scrooge turns out to be: parsimonious and cold.

Ebenezer Scrooge

Scrooge is the protagonist of the story and is one of the best-known characters in all of literature. He is described as a miserly man; for example, he is so stingy that he won't pay to keep his own apartment heated It is never fully explained why he has become such a miserable old miser, but some clues are given in the scenes of past Christmases. The reader learns that Scrooge had a strict and distant father□he made him stay at school during Christmas break and only let him come home one year because his sister asked if he could come home. Maybe as a result of such childhood rejection, Scrooge later withdraws from his friends and loved ones. As his girlfriend notes: "You fear the world too much.. . All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach."

Throughout the course of the story, Scrooge learns to treasure humanity through the glimpses that the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future give him into his own life. Also he realizes the impact one person can have, as with Tiny Tim. After the spirits leave, Scrooge is relieved to find that he still has a chance to change the course of his life. This he promptly does: he becomes generous and good-humored, a positive force in the community, and good friends with Tiny Tim.

Fan Scrooge

Fan is Scrooge's deceased sister. She seems to have been a loving and supportive presence in his youth.

Tim Cratchit

Tim (also known as Tiny Tim) is Bob Cratchit's youngest son. He is physically challenged, as he must use a crutch to get around. As a result, he is often carried from place to place by his father. Tiny Tim never complains about his handicap, and his emotional strength and positive attitude impress everyone around him. After being shown a version of the future in which Tiny Tim is dead, Scrooge vows to help the boy. In fact, Scrooge does donate money for Tiny Tim's medical treatment.

Themes

Guilt and Innocence

Often in ghost stories, the ghostly apparitions function to remind the main character of something evil he or she has done in the past. In other words, ghosts act as the character's conscience. Scrooge certainly has enough to feel guilty about: he is mean and tight-fisted with his assistant, Bob Cratchit; dismissive of his nephew, Fred; miserly and cold with the men from the local charity association; and nasty to the little caroler that he chases away from his keyhole with a ruler. Each of these people are associated with some form of innocence, a reminder of the less fortunate or the love of family and friends.

Marley's ghost raises the question of guilt directly, explaining that he himself is forced to walk the earth as a ghost because he was a heartless, self-involved man. The ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future make no accusations toward Scrooge about his behavior□but with the warning that Marley has given him, Scrooge interprets the visits to mean that unless he changes his life and learns to value the people around him, he will end up like Marley. Moreover, by revisiting events and people from his past, he realizes just how much he has missed by shutting himself off from family, friends, and coworkers. With the help of the ghosts, he resolves to change his life.

Fear

"You fear the world too much," Belle tells Scrooge as she is breaking off their engagement It is implied by his sister's visit to his school that the roots of these fears can be found in a problematic and dysfunctional relationship with his father. Although we don't know the details, it was an obviously unhappy relationship that impacted Scrooge's relationships with others the rest of his life. It figures that his withdrawal from Belle, his growing interest in financial dealings, his lack of companions, and his unhappiness is a result of this early trauma. The ghostly intervention makes him see that the loneliness and neglect he has brought upon himself is even worse than the general fear of the world that he developed from the neglect suffered during his childhood. Beside the fear of his own death, Scrooge is very affected by the realization of Tiny Tim's death, which he inquires about with "an interest he had never felt before." When he finds out that the boy's fate could be avoided, he finds an opportunity to reach out and help someone other than himself. His emotional and financial support saves Tiny Tim's life and provides the true emotional connection that Scrooge desired all along.

Wealth and Poverty

A recurring theme in the work of Dickens is the tremendous gap between the rich and poor. In fact, he portrayed the gritty world of the working class and lower class of

London at a time when most novelists□most of them educated and from the upper class□had no sense of what poverty or its victims were like.

In this story, Bob Cratchit's meager earnings can barely feed his family. In spite of this, the members of the Cratchit household are a cheerful and happy bunch. When Scrooge looks in on them with the Ghost of Christmas Present, he hears about the tinng jobs that the children work or will work, and he notes the little they have to eat, with the meager plum pudding being a great treat. As Scrooge observes, 'They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being waterproof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of pawnbroker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another's company, and contented with the time. "

By contrast, the wealthy Scrooge lives in miserable circumstances in a cold abandoned building that is dark because he does not want to spend money on candles ("darkness was cheap, and Scrooge liked it"). His wealth is not bringing him any more happiness□it only perpetuates the fear that one day he will lose it.

A Chnstmas Carol does not equate poverty with cheer and wealth with misery, however. The party at Fred's house shows people who are wealthy having a good time, while two children revealed to him by the Ghost of Christmas Present□Ignorance and Want□make it clear that even though people like the Cratchits can laugh in their poverty, it still a serious and life-threatening matter.

Style

Point of View

Mainly, this novel is narrated in the third person; that is, the story is usually told as "he said" or "she said" or "Scrooge watched them," etc. In the beginning, though, there is a little touch of a first-person narrator, as someone talking directly to the reader, referring to himself as "I." This narrator is the type of personality who will use a phrase and then mull over its appropriateness ("I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail the deadest piece of ironmongery ... ") and to make humorous satirical remarks.

This first-person voice fades away once the characters in the book start interacting with one another, leaving the characters and the action of the novel to keep the readers' attention. The last time this first-person narrator is heard from is when it remarks on how strange it is that Scrooge, who had not thought of Marley since hours earlier, would see his face on the door knocker ("let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that... ")

Setting

London is the setting of this novel, as it is for many of Dickens' works. The character of the city does not come into play much except in the gloomy darkness on the afternoon of Chnstmas Eve, caused by London's legendary fog. It is also present during the scene on Christmas morning presented by the Ghost of Chnstmas Present, with the city coming alive. Dickens gives long lists of the objects associated with Christmas (baskets of chestnuts, Spanish onions, tea, coffee, raisins, mistletoe, etc.), a bounty and richness that Scrooge has rejected in favor of his lonely, solitary existence.

The one other notable setting in the novel is the cold, dark house where Scrooge lives, which had been occupied by Jacob Marley before his death. Among its more individual characteristics are the wide staircase and the fireplace, which is decorated with carvings of scenes from the Bible. It is also symbolic of his isolation that Scrooge would live in such spare, dark surroundings.

Historical Context

Victorian Christmas

At the time when Dickens was writing, the Christmas tradition was not nearly as important as it is today. Celebrating Christmas started in the fourth century, incorporating many of the symbols of pagan holidays such as the Roman Saturnalia and the Saxon Yule holiday, such as holly and wreaths. The date of December 25th was borrowed from pagan cultures—it was the date of the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year.

For centuries Christmas grew in importance slowly, but treating it as a celebration was looked upon suspiciously because of its pagan origins and because it made a festive celebration out of one of the most solemn days on the Christian calendar, the birth of Jesus. During the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century that sought to turn the church away from worldly and materialistic concerns, celebrating Christmas was actually outlawed for a short time. Yet it wasn't long before the symbolic, festive aspects of the holiday started showing up again as people carried on the traditions they had been taught.

During the reign of Queen Victoria in England, the Christmas tradition gained popularity. One reason for this was that the monarchy supported it: Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, brought the German tradition of decorating the Christmas tree when he came to England. Another reason was economic, as the Industrial Revolution was creating a population shift from rural areas to cities, where new manufacturing techniques required workers. This growing urban population found comfort in the Christmas traditions. As the city became more crowded and dirty, the citizens looked forward to celebrations, especially Christmas.

Urban Life

In the mid-nineteenth century. London was a crowded, dirty place, a fact that no one did more to publicize than Dickens himself. Industries were not regulated, and widespread pollution and exploitation of the work force resulted. Laborers, many of them children, were required to work four-teen-hour days in order to help their families pay bills; if a family was unable to make ends meet, they might end up in Debtor's Prison—as Dickens' family did when he was twelve.

Dickens described the squalid, dirty condition of London in vivid detail. Yet, some historians believe that the actual conditions of Victorian London might not have been as gruesome as described. Because the reign of Victoria was a time of increased social concern in England, there probably is much exaggeration in the reports of squalid poverty.

Critical Overview

A Christmas Carol has never been considered Dickens' finest work by literary critics, but from its first publication it was a popular favorite. It sold an impressive six thousand copies at its first printing in 1843, and was quickly reprinted in numerous authorized and unauthorized editions.

Today, critics seldom discuss *A Christmas Carol,* in part because of its universal popularity. Also this short novel is considered not emblematic of Dickens' work in general. Although critical reaction to his novels has been favorable, commentators tend to deride the length of the books he produced. David Cecil, for example, was critical of Dickens' novels when he commented in his book *The Victorian Novelists: Essays in Reevaluation:* "He cannot construct, for one thing. His books have no organic unity; they are full of detachable episodes, characters who serve no purpose in furthering the plot."

It is a criticism that did not apply to the development of ideas in this short novel. Cecil went on to point to Dickens' finest quality: his ability to fill every scene he wrote with exact, convincing details. Famed novelist Anthony Trollope had it wrong, according to Cecil, when he charged that Dickens' writing was "exaggerated." He emphasized that what might seem excessive was actually Dickens' strength; "Scott's imagination and Emily Bronte's were of a finer quality, Jane Austen's was more exactly articulated, but they none of them had an imagination at once so forceful, so varied and so self-dependent as Dickens."

In addition, commentators often focus on the characters in Dickens' work. Some critics quickly dismiss them as being broadly written in order to play upon readers' emotions; moreover, it has been charged that they are designed more as sentimental caricatures than well-rounded psychological portraits. On the opposing side are those critics who concede that his characters are drawn broadly, but then go on to point out that even a character with one exaggerated trait can be real. On this point, Julian Symons asserts: "It would be nearer to the truth to say that they are pathological distortions of human egoism, in which a thwarted radical enacts forbidden scenes of violence through the mouths and bodies of characters labeled *wicked* "

Scrooge is not violent, but that is only because he is old and decrepit. His attempts to threaten Bob Cratchit for wanting coal for warmth, or his harsh treatment of the little caroler at his door, are done with the spirit of evil that Symons says audiences identify with as "forbidden scenes." It is clear to any new reader of Dickens that he is trying to manipulate his audience's emotions, and the critical debate hovers around whether or not he has a right to do that.

One of the great writers of the twentieth century, G. K. Chesterton, summed up the effectiveness of Dickens' manipulations this way: "A Dickens character hits you first on the nose and then in the waistcoat, and then in the eye and then in the waistcoat again, with the blinding rapidity of some battering engine.... " While other critics consider

Dickens' emotional manipulation as dishonest and even cheap, Chesterton believed that this was the business of the novelist.

Dickens was often called a sentimentalist In one sense he sometimes was a sentimentalist. But if sentimentalism be held to mean something artificial or theatrical, then in the core and reality of his character Dickens was the very reverse of a sentimentalist He seriously and definitely loved goodness To see sincerity and charity satisfied him like a meal. What some critics call his love of sweet stuff is really his love of plain beef and bread.

It makes sense that critics are usually suspicious of a novel that the general public likes too much, especially one that uses such emotion-wringing devices as Christmas and a physically-challenged child. However, despite critical condemnation, the short novel has remained a well-loved Christmas classic for people around the world.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of Creative Writing and Literature at Oakton Community College and College of Lake County, in Illinois. In this essay, he examines the question of whether Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol *is effective because of its adept manipulation of readers' sentiments, or if it earns its popularity with powerful storytelling.*

I guess I would have to agree with Charles Dickens' detractors who say that he was too long-winded, that he should have learned to cut to the point of almost anything he was writing about a little quicker. I agree with them□but then, so would Dickens himself. There is a story about him, told by Kate Douglas Wiggin, the author who grew up to write *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.* She was only twelve when she approached him on the train between Portland, Maine and Boston and started a discussion about his books, listing what she liked and then mentioning that he should have cut "some of the very dull parts." In response, Dickens roared with laughter and pressed for further thoughts on the subject of what she might think dull. Now, it could be considered just common politeness for a grown man to give a twelve-year-old critic his full attention, patronizing to let her call him dull; on the other hand, when a child could see what was excessive, he would have no choice but to take heed

Fortunately, he was able to avoid the problem of wordiness in his novellas by working in a form so short that it never has time to be excessive. This is never truer than in *A Christmas Carol,* which lends itself to quick scene changes. Still, this book brings up the next most common charge levied against Charles Dickens: that of cold, manipulative sentimentality. He has been called the Norman Rockwell of literature, a technical stylist who says the things that he (rightly) thought his audience wanted him to say.

For those like myself who think that critics have no business blaming a book for being popular, Dickens was a good, interesting, vivid writer first. Yet I can see the other side's point□that too much of what he did was driven by popular opinion and not by artistic standards.

I think that what saves Dickens from the charge of excessive sentimentalism, in A *Christmas Carol* and in general, is the fact that he was always willing to balance life's joy against its misery. This would be an easier point to support with the life stories presented in the longer books, such as *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* or especially *Bleak House,* but it stands even with a commercial enterprise like the story of Scrooge. He took risks that were clearly not popular in order to round out his vision of the world.

Considering the charge of sentimentality, the first thing to get out of the way is the simple, obvious fact that nobody had or has any deeply held hatred for Charles Dickens. Not only are those who raise questions about his work too sensible to try to dismiss him as a fraud, but they probably don't even feel good about taking sides against him. As G. K. Chesterton, himself a powerful and interesting novelist, noted, "In everyone there is a

certain thing that loves babies, that fears death and that likes sunlight: that thing enjoys Dickens."

Ironically, A *Christmas Carol* happens to play off of all of the elements Chesterton mentioned. It has the baby□Tiny Tim□who, though able to verbalize his saintly philosophy in whole paragraphs, still has to be carried around on his father's shoulders like an infant. It teases readers' thirst for sunlight throughout from the foggy afternoon at the start to the beams shining from the head of the Spirit of Christmas Present to the sooty darkness of the coal mines to, at last, the "Golden sunlight" that pours down on the reformed Scrooge when he throws open his shutters on Christmas morning. Moreover, it clearly has death□other figures of death through the years have matched the frightening quietude of the Ghost of Christmas Future, but none has surpassed it as a representative of fate's no-nonsense certainty.

There are certainly some grim moments presented in this story, the kinds of details that are avoided by true commercial sentimentalists who today cheapen our sense of the time by using phrases like "Victorian Christmas" or, worse, "Dickensian Christmas" to hawk their merchandise. For one thing, Scrooge is really pretty evil. Adaptations have made him a comical cranky grouch, characterized with the quaint, faintly Biblical epitaph "covetous old sinner"; his crabbing about Bob Cratchit's use of coal might remind readers of their own grandfather or father's battle to control the thermostat in order to hold off poverty. The fact is, though, that the Scrooge of the book is nearly as mean and dangerous as he would like to think he is.

Aside from his interactions with Cratchit□ who, after all, toasts Scrooge's health on Christmas and so just may be a glutton for his abuse□the clearest view readers get of his business practices is from the young couple, Caroline and her unnamed husband. They find themselves on the verge of ruin at Scrooge's hand, and are only saved by his death; as a creditor, Scrooge was "merciless."

In his personal life, too, Dickens paints Scrooge's heartlessness more sharply than is necessary to establish the idea of the cranky old miser who has a heart of gold deep within. The strength of his ici-ness comes through when Belle surprises him by breaking off their engagement on the grounds that he idolizes only money. He has no argument to raise, forced to admit in the face of her well-stated rationality that she is right.

It could be argued that these disturbing aspects of Scrooge's personality cannot be considered true looks at life's dark side because they serve a function in the story: they are things to be overcome to make his final conversion truly triumphant So they are not about reality, but about good storytelling. I think of it from the other perspective, though, considering how easily it would have been for Dickens to make Scrooge just nasty, not evil, leaving out the extreme details, which show human nature as being a little less disturbing as mass audiences would like to think of it. A book that was only playing off of popular sentiment could easily have done without the young couple celebrating Scrooge's death, or could have had a younger Scrooge snarl "good riddance" when his woman leaves him instead of having him stand awestruck.

Scrooge is the story's protagonist; therefore, Dickens had to necessarily keep him likable to some extent, positioning Scrooge close enough to the border of evil to make him redeemable in the end. With other aspects of *A Christmas Carol* he could be freer to show the world as he saw it, or to show a world that his readers wanted to believe m, if that was what he was trying to do. For every bad in the novel's world there is a good, and for every good a bad: the question becomes whether Dickens was sentimentalizing or manipulating emotions with these valleys and peaks, creating the proverbial "emotional roller coaster" that leaves readers drained but satisfied, or if this balance of extremes is just an honest way of presenting life.

Among the grimmest sights presented is the back street that the final Ghost takes Scrooge to, a presentment of the only place where his life will matter after his death□the "obscure part of town." The people there are "half-naked, drunken, slipshod and ugly"; the whole area "reeked with crime, with filth, with misery." Unlike the poverty of the Cratchit house, or the dingy coal mine or the lonesome ship at sea, there is no joy in the misery here, and there is going to be no ray of sunshine coming into this quarter once Scrooge has lightened up and started loving his fellow human beings. The foul-smelling street populated by cretins has its reverse image in the joyful Christmas morning scene the Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge, and it is meant to inspire Scrooge's (and, presumably, the reader's) fear of extreme poverty. Yet what it does not have is any comforting sense of hope.

This sort of urban despair became Dickens' hallmark, his strength as a social activist, waking the public to the miseries that come from forcing uneducated, angry people into crowded, unsanitary conditions. This could only be considered manipulative if the author overstates the case to elicit sympathy for a condition that doesn't really exist: historians may argue Dickens' accuracy in recording urban blight in other novels, but here, and throughout *A Christmas Carol,* the short form keeps him from going too far past the truth.

The pawnshop that is located in this slum also has a reverse image□in that cheeriest of all workplaces, Fezziwig's warehouse. In the pawnshop, one encounters "old rags, bottles, bones and greasy offal"; the other has its floors swept and its lamps trimmed by eager employees, encouraged by their boss, so that "the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ballroom, as you would desire to see on a winter's night." It is in his portrayals of these two places that critics might be able to find the most fault in Dickens' characterizations, which tend to be on the broad side, so that no one could miss their significance to the story.

The benevolent Fezziwig might have been a credible character if only he hadn't taken up the dance, or danced so well, or had a few more lines of dialogue so that readers could get to know him as something more than a contrast to the figure Scrooge cuts as he presides over his counting house. It makes its point too well, making too memorable in his larger-than-life gusto, straining our imaginations just a little too much by asking us to believe that Scrooge could ever forget what happened there.

Old Joe, the pawnbroker, shows the similar defect of being given too little space within the text of the book to really act out the function he has been assigned Dickens is not above taking the easy way out□that of having the character tell the audience exactly what conclusion they should reach themselves. "You couldn't have met in a better place," Joe tells the people who have picked the dead man clean of his possessions, reinforcing our impression of the people and the rotten location.

Later he actually says, "We're all suitable to our calling, we're well matched."

Does Dickens have to tell us this[9] As obvious as it is, would Joe have been conscious if it? As with Fezziwig, this is not so much a case of populist sentimentality, because such people do exist and they do have their place within this story. It is more a case of underdevelopment, of having the characters acting too obviously for functional purposes, which is only slightly different than the unearned emotion that causes critics to charge him. with sentimentalizing.

A Christmas Carol has been adapted to the stage, radio, television, and movies thousands of times since it was first printed. Like many things associated with Christmas, these adaptations are meant for children The weirdly Scrooge-like logic here, that Christmas is something to be put away as one gets older, poses an obvious irony. The result of these adaptations, though, is that many people in our non-reading world only know the story in its sanitized version, from scenes and lines that scriptwriters find acceptable for children.

There is a difference between a well-crafted story that leaves readers feeling good and one molded to be a feel-good piece, and Dickens, with *A Christmas Carol,* stays well within his artistic bounds. There will always be questions about whether particular lines or characterizations or even certain books were made with no better purpose than to yank at the public's heartstrings, but this book, which has a unique place in popular imagination, is more about reality than popularity.

Source: David Kelly, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 2000

Critical Essay #2

Buckwald examines the theme of restriction and containment in A Christmas Carol, *as exemplified by the description of Scrooge as "solitary as an oyster."*

Oh' but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge[1] a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner' Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster

If at the beginning of *A Christmas Carol* Ebenezer Scrooge apparently lacks a heart, he is at all times the undisputed heart of the story he inhabits. It is thus entirely fitting that this formal introduction to the miser's objectionable qualities, occurring in the piece's sixth paragraph, anticipates much in the narrative fabric that follows. We could, for example, profitably begin an interpretation of the tale with the first two figures in the description□the "tight-fisted hand" and the unproductive "flint"□for from them spring the images of closed and open and clasped and touching hands; feeble and potent fires; and brightness and darkness through which Dickens' Christmas message palpably appeals to the imaginations of its readers. And yet, the centrality of hand and flint notwithstanding, I want to focus on the culminating simile in which Scrooge is compared to an oyster. The oyster image, I argue, despite its unassuming character, is really a kind of master-trope for the story, one that casts new light not only on Scrooge but on imagery, structure, and meaning in the *Carol* as a whole.

To assess the oyster image's importance in the story, we need to begin with the simile's three-part characterization of Scrooge: "secret, and self-contained, and solitary." That the Scrooge of the first "stave" is "solitary as an oyster," isolated from his fellow creatures as an oyster's body is by its enclosing shell, needs only acknowledgment here. This fact is both generally evident in the story and specifically remarked by the narrator: "To edge his way along the crowded paths of life," we are told, "warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call 'nuts' to Scrooge." By identifying reclusiveness and misanthropy with miserliness, the story characterizes Scrooge's habitual shunning of other people as the denial of the human commerce upon which a healthy society depends.

Unlike the accusation of reclusiveness, the charge that Scrooge is "secret ... as an oyster" seems suspect. "Secret," if it is not to be confused with the other terms, implies in this context that there is not only something hidden inside of Scrooge but something *good,* some equivalent to an oyster's tasty flesh or cradled pearl. We might well be puzzled by such a notion because beneath the miser's outward chilliness, there seems to be, as the narrator says, more "cold within him." But true to the simile, Scrooge does have something better deep inside of him, though for the most part it is kept hidden even from us. Two earlier incarnations comprise the first part of his secret: once there was a Scrooge who, craving love, longed to leave school to join his family for Christmas just as later there was a Scrooge who gratefully, gleefully partook of the Fezziwigs' abundant and caring Christmas hospitality. Like the rooms in his present house that are

now let out as offices, the younger Scrooge once belonged to a home; and like the house itself, which once "playfed]" with other houses, the older Scrooge belonged to a festive community. The second part of Scrooge's secret is that, beneath his rough shell, something of his earlier incarnations still lives and can even on occasion be glimpsed, though by now, with respect to his daily life and outward behavior, it has been rendered as feeble as the small fire he allows his clerk; nearly as contained as fire within flint; and as incapable of issuing forth on its own as is his house, which, during its game of hide-and-seek, must have hidden itself "where it had so little business to be ... and ... forgotten the way out again." It is only granting this surviving inner warmth that Scrooge's feeling response to the ghostly visions, at first guarded but soon afterwards engaged-in openly, is at all probable

It is the narrator's claim, however, that Scrooge is "self-contained ... as an oyster" that proves the most fruitful, only partly because it addresses both the miser's solitariness and secrecy. If we take into account the way the adjective is colored by the oyster image□an image of a crusty shell "containing" an organism quite shut-off from the world around it□"self-contained" points to a condition best summarized thus: what there is inside a thing is kept under wraps, prevented from finding its way to the outside, and what might be larger is kept smaller. It is in this dual sense that the simile speaks expressively of Scrooge.

The narrator's first pointed words about Scrooge, "Oh' but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone," prepare us for the extreme containment of his physical self. "The cold within him," we are told, "froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait"; we hear of his "thin lips" and "wiry chin." When, a few paragraphs later, we learn of Scrooge's predilection "to edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance," it is impossible not to imagine him keeping to the edge of the sidewalk when he must venture out onto the London streets. In short, restriction defines, literally or imaginatively, not only Scrooge's physique and physiognomy but his stiff gait, the area trodden by that gait, and his bodily activity in general. In case we fail to notice these physical containments, we are given a foil in Bob Cratchit, who, when finally released from the dungeon-like counting-house for the holiday, emblematically celebrates his freedom in a burst of bodily kinesis. Cratchit, we are told, "went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas-eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, to play at blindman's-buff." The active expansiveness of the clerk's physical presence, his body now vertical, now horizontal, his legs kicking out in front of him as he races home, is matched by the extravagance of his movement over land, twenty taps downhill when one would have been out of his way.

But later we are also given foils with an added dimension. When the Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge the vision of Belle as a grown woman, she is at home with her daughter, and both are surrounded by activity personified□more children than Scrooge can count, and "every child . . conducting itself like forty." The narrator, however, enviously sexualizes the "young brigands'" "ruthless" "pillag[ing]" of Belle's daughter. He confesses that though he longs to be "one of them," he could never take such liberties with the daughter's person:

And yet I should have dearly liked, I own, to have touched her lips, to have questioned her, that she might have opened them; to have looked upon the lashes of her downcast eyes, and never raised a blush; to have let loose waves of hair, an inch of which would be a keepsake beyond price, in short, I should have liked, I do confess, to have had the lightest licence of a child, and yet been man enough to know its value.

Later, Scrooge witnesses a game of blind-man's-buff played by the company at his nephew's house, during which the narrator disingenuously deplores the conduct of the young man called Topper, who somehow manages to pursue "that plump sister in the lace tucker" wherever she goes, and finally traps her in a corner where he engages in conduct "the most execrable." Whether in the horde of rampant children freely touching Belle's daughter, or in Topper's pursuit and braille identification of Scrooge's niece, the dimension of sexuality is admitted into the expansive physical activity which in the story counterpoints the unredeemed Scrooge's "stiff gait"

Scrooge's self-containment, of course, is more than physical. His obsession with business and wealth not only occupies his time and energy but constitutes the frame of reference by which he judges everything and everyone in his world: "can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl," says Belle to Scrooge in one of the first spirit's vision, "□you who, in your very confidence with her, weigh everything by Gain ..."?" Proving Belle's appraisal, Scrooge earlier reacts harshly to his nephew's greeting of "merry Christmas":

Merry Christmas[1] What nght have you to be merry" what reason have you to be merry" You're poor enough

What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you?

In addition to an idolization of wealth, Scrooge betrays in these lines a problem of *comprehension,* an inability to see beyond the containment of his own perspective and understand his nephew's opposing values: "what reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough," he cries in the second of his three questions. The fact that Scrooge concerns himself with his nephew's fortunes at all reveals that more than self-concern is at work here: he attempts to purge Fred of his Christmas spirit precisely because *it makes no sense to him* that Fred should keep it. In other words, Scrooge's anti-Christmas speech is, oddly enough, his least selfish moment in the first stave, for it is an attempt to disabuse Fred of unprofitable behavior for Fred's own good The attempt is feeble, however, due to the very philosophy that Scrooge champions. As he says later to the "portly gentlemen" who urge him to know the conditions and suffering of the poor, "It's not my business.... It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!" Even Scrooge's un-self-conscious use of the word "business" here for "responsibility" reveals that his perspective is contained by his miserly occupation, just as his lonely living quarters are surrounded by offices, or as an oyster's body is by its shell.

It is perhaps remarkable that Scrooge says as much as he does to Fred about the irrationality of the Christmas spirit, for speech is apparently another activity he prefers to curb. The scene with Fred is of great importance to the story because we witness in it the sparring of opposite philosophies of Christmas. Thus it is necessary that Scrooge, then Fred, each have his say, though Cratchit's applause from the next room after Fred's humane, eloquent utterance ensures that not even the most Scrooge-ish of readers will fail to recognize which philosophy the story sanctions. But once the positions are stated, little more is said, mostly because Scrooge closes his mind to any further discussion and shuts off his flow of words with a resounding "Good afternoon!"□an utterance that he repeats four times, until his nephew is convinced of the impasse and leaves the office Scrooge also condescends to a brief and unpleasant exchange with the gentlemen who ask him for a Christmas contribution for the poor□an exchange also ended by an unambiguous "Good afternoon '"□and two briefer ventings of spleen directed toward his clerk. We know of no other words he shares with anyone of flesh and blood until Christmas morning.

Marley's ghost clearly emblematizes an oyster-like containment of body and bodily activity when he laboriously drags up to Scrooge's sitting-room the heavy chain of "cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel" which "wound about him like a tail" That his condition also represents containment of mental activity is revealed m the Ghost's declaration, "My spint never walked beyond our counting-house□mark me!□in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole." Leaving nothing to chance, the phantom makes the connection that hardly needs making: "would you know," he asks Scrooge, "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!" Scrooge has, we might remember, just "double-locked" himself into his chambers for the night.

Which brings us to the message of the *Carol,* only part of which, in accordance with Marley's appraisal of his own oyster-against-the-"ocean" life, has traditionally been grasped. Responding to the Ghost's lamentations, Scrooge says, "But you were always a good man of business, Jacob":

"Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business, chanty, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

If Scrooge's notion of his life has been limited by too narrow a focus on financial gain, Marley's appraisal of his past life is similarly limited by too narrow a focus on social responsibility. While the story unequivocally prefers reformed Marleyism to unreformed Scroogism, it advocates the former philosophy as only part of a more inclusive program for existence.

A good life, the story tells us, is a vitally *excursive* one. Such a life requires, first, that the individual go beyond the containing limits of the merely self-concerned self to benevolent participation with one's proper society□that is, with humanity or, in Fred's

words, with one's "fellow-passengers to the grave." Of course, this participation includes the guardianship of "the common welfare" that Marley outlines, and the love and festivity that he fails to mention, but also more-mundane behaviors such as walking full in the center of a busy sidewalk, frank and honest communication with members of one's family; spontaneous snow-sliding with neighborhood boys; knowledge and sympathetic understanding of other people, ideas, and things; friendly conversation with relatives, solicitors, and employees; even romance and physical sexuality. A "good man" or woman, according to the *Carol* if not to Marley, is social in a very wide sense of the word.

And yet, the story tells us, a properly excursive life also means that the individual, by engaging in the benignly expansive behavior that is all of our nature, realize *for his or her own benefit* the manifold possibilities of being, mental and physical. To put it another way: Scroogism not only damages society but the self that, through action and interaction, could be much more. It is this concern for the self s potential that accounts for the persistent and disturbing imagery of individual impairment and thwarted development in the story: the flint unproductive of fire to which Scrooge is compared; Scrooge's "shrivelled" cheek; the gold and coals in Scrooge's care that are not turned to the human comfort that is their purpose, Belle's daughter who figures to Scrooge the daughter he might have fathered; the Cratcnits' threadbare and meager existence; and most pointedly, Tiny Tim, who is in the first scheme of things both lame and destined for a childhood grave. A concern for the self, independent of any concern with social justice, also accounts for the sympathy which the story encourages in us for Scrooge in his manifestly unhappy humbug existence and which is articulated by the *Carol's* spokesperson for the Christmas spirit. As Fred says regarding his uncle's refusal to join him for Christmas dinner:

the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his mouldly old office, or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him.

The story, insisting again and again that self-interest and social good coincide, refuses either to choose or to distinguish between them. In the *Carol,* really one of the most optimistic of all possible worlds, self-interest (properly defined) and social good are quite simply the same thing. It is precisely this identity that is figured in the mutual pleasure-taking/pleasure-giving between Topper and the "plump sister" during blindman's-buff as well as in the nameless phantoms' misery over not being able to help others when Scrooge glimpses them from his own window; and it is precisely this identity that the miser Scrooge, setting his interest at odds with others', cannot see.

Appropriately, the final stave shows that Scrooge-the-oyster has opened his shell, or had it opened, or lost it altogether, as a condition of his redemptive humanization. Where initially he is unrelentingly "solitary," at the end he turns up at the door of his nephew and niece's where he is made to feel at "home" amid the Christmas company; in coming years, he becomes "a second father" to Tiny Tim and "as good a friend ... as

the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world." Similarly, where Scrooge initially keeps his surviving warmth of heart "secret" beneath a wintry exterior, fellow-feeling, sympathy, and joy cascade out of him when he wakes on Christmas morning.

To be sure, his gift to the Cratcnits is anonymous. But rather than betraying a division between self and others, his anonymity demonstrates a selfless generosity apparently common enough in the world of the story that the collectors for charity readily assume Scrooge means this when he tells them to "put [him] down for" "Nothing!" But there is a further distinction to be drawn as well. The anonymity of Scrooge's gift, as well as similar instances of "secret" behavior in the story, socializes and thus redeems secrecy by making it a condition of festive surprises. We have seen such surprises when, on Christmas day, Martha is playfully hidden from, then revealed to, Bob Cratchit in the spirit of holiday merriment and when Topper seems to be blindfolded and disinterested, but inexplicably pursues the "plump sister" until he uncovers his matrimonial design with gifts of ring and necklace. In the final stave, playful surprise explains Scrooge's side-"splitting" glee that Bob Cratchit "shan't know who sends" his family the large prize Turkey, and is perhaps partly behind the miser's unannounced poking of his head into Fred's dining room when, for the first time ever, he has come to join the holiday celebration. And such surprise is triumphantly seen in Scrooge's reversal of manner, from "feign[ed]" surliness and displeasure to joyful fellow-feeling, when Bob arrives at the office late on the day after Christmas:

"Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer And therefore," he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again, "and therefore I am about to raise your salary!"

Scrooge also escapes his various self-containments Where the "old" Scrooge is contained in person and activity, the "new" Scrooge, like Bob Cratchit on Christmas Eve, explodes with joyful, expansive physical activity, flailing his arms as he wildly attempts to dress himself, "running to the window" and "putting] out his head," and then dancing while he shaves. When he gets out "into the streets," instead of keeping to the edge of the sidewalk, literally or figuratively, Scrooge meets passersby "with a delighted smile," heartily shakes hands with one of the "portly" men who visited his office the previous day, and "pat[s] children on the head." "He had never dreamed that any walk□that anything□could give him so much happiness " Scrooge never gets to engage in the sexual fondling that the narrator earlier envies, but he does show a decided, and joyful, inability to keep his hands to himself on the day after Christmas, playfully giving his clerk a powerful "dig in the waistcoat" as he offers him a raise and a clap on the back while he says□"with an earnestness that could not be mistaken"□"A merry Christmas, Bob[1]" In the same way, where the "old" Scrooge suffers from a containment of perspective, the "new" Scrooge clearly shows that he understands the importance of the Christmas spirit when, for instance, he unreflectingly chooses to enhance the Cratchits' meager celebration or decides to join the festivity at his nephew's home. Finally, where Scrooge at first seems intent on restricting his speech, he now exhibits a positive delight in it. Waking on Christmas morning, he spontaneously "Whoopfs]" and "Hallo[s]" to "all

the world" his new-found Christmas spirit. He reveals a fondness for conversation when he shouts from his open window to a boy on the street below:

"Do you know the Poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner"" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I did," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy"' said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy[1] Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there[1]' Not the little prize Turkey the big one"'

"What, the one as big as me"' returned the boy

"What a delightful boy[1]" said Scrooge. "It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!"

Scrooge is so filled with Christmas spirit that even the boy's "smart" response is to him an "intelligent" one, and a simple question is "delightful"□so welcome is any conversation now to a man who has just found the joy of what lies beyond himself, that "everything could yield him pleasure." The identity of self-interest and social interest that the earlier staves so optimistically assert is also asserted in the final stave, most clearly in Scrooge's interaction with the poulterer's man and the boy when they return with the prize turkey: for every coin paid, there is at least one "chuckle" as Scrooge is giddy with the privilege of making expenditures that will bring the Cratchits happiness.

Scrooge, in short, finally passes beyond his shell. And yet, if we stopped here, we would be ignoring the peculiar resonance that the oyster image has for the larger structure of the story To perceive it, we need to begin with a couple of facts about the *Carol.*

The first pertains to the "old" Scrooge. Though initially he is far from being another mobilely malignant Iago, neither is Scrooge the innocuous stay-at-home that a shut oyster is. If he were only this, people and dogs would not fear to meet him on the street as they do, nor would we be so sure in our disapproval of him. The truth is that Scrooge is a positive source of pain to others, though only if they have the misfortune of crossing his path, or in some other way rubbing against his immovable, "abrasive" character. When Fred wishes him, "A Merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" Scrooge snaps back, "Bah! ... Humbug!" Later, when an unlucky caroller stops at Scrooge's keyhole, the miser chases him away with a ruler. Of course, the best example is Bob Cratchit, who suffers in Scrooge's presence but whose spirits soar when he leaves the office. Interestingly, other characters can feel Scrooge's unpleasantness when his presence has merely been invoked. Bob's family feels it when, in the vision of Stave Three, he bids them toast his employer with their holiday concoction of gin and lemon, and, we are told, "the mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes." Scrooge's niece, in another of the second spirit's visions, also finds the festivity of her evening disrupted by talk about her uncle. Scrooge's "abrasiveness," his power to cause discomfort through no special effort of his own, is surely one of the ways in which he is "hard and sharp as flint."

The second fact concerns nearly everybody in the story *except* Scrooge. The "old" Scrooge is unique in the sense that he lacks the Christmas spirit nearly all of the world of the *Carol* possesses so wholeheartedly. If Scrooge is "hard and sharp as flint," the other characters can be seen as "soft"□a word appropriate anyway to the human compassion and lack of severity comprising the Christmas spirit. Softness also inspires the words of the engagingly intrusive narrator. When, for example, the Ghost of Christmas Present reveals the power of his torch to placate angered dinner-carriers, the narrator enthusiastically explains, "For they said, it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was! God love it, so it was!" Even the narrator's active disapproval is expressed with appropriate softness□with lightness, even affection: "Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!" The colloquial ring of the initial metaphor, and the participial *tour deforce* that follows□both in charged exclamation□are simply too gleeful to allow us to feel the narrator is repulsed, alarmed, or even greatly disturbed by Scrooge's example. There is an amusement and relish in these lines reminiscent of the oral storyteller each time he or she introduces an eccentric character who has taken the polish of time and become a favorite. Perhaps nothing, however, so well articulates the dual attitude of the narrator toward Scrooge as the final "old sinner!"□a label expressing both disapproval and warm familiarity. To sum up, we can see how the story's fictional world and the words of the narrator are consonant, enveloping the "hard," "sharp," "abrasive" Scrooge with concentric layers of "soft" matter.

My point, of course, is that Scrooge is lodged within his world, and his story, as an irritating grain of sand against the fleshy part of an oyster. A benefit of this analogy is that it not only describes the state of things in the first stave but also how the rest of the story works: Scrooge, undergoing a process of transformation through the visits of the three spirits, finally emerges as the story's "pearl."

There is some sense in regarding Scrooge's transformation as the result of a destructive process. If we see him as an oyster within a crusty shell, closed to the world, Marley's ghost and the three spirits force their way into his mind and heart just as they force their way into his locked apartments. They either pry open his shell bit by bit, or neutralize its hardness through the bombardment of pathetic visions: thus, sounds accompanying a childhood scene "fell upon the heart of Scrooge with a softening influence," and "he softened more and more" when his mece plays on the harp "a simple little air" once familiar to his sister. As a result of the visitations, Scrooge is able to pass through his containing shell as easily as he and the first sprat "passed through the wall" of his solitary dwelling en route to the place of his boyhood.

But the problem with this view of the transforming process is that it does an injustice to Scrooge. Is he defeated by the spirits who come to Mm for his benefit? Compared with his old humbug self, does the Scrooge of Christmas morning seem diminished in stature or completeness? The answer to both questions is clearly, no. The first spirit increases Scrooge by bringing into his everyday consciousness Christmas memories long-stored in some secret, lost place within him. The second and third spirits augment this consciousness with knowledge of the present and predictions of the future. Together,

Marley's ghost and the spirits give Scrooge the wisdom of a new perspective, which then branches out in the qualities of love, compassion, altruism, and joyfulness that he previously lacked. Many of the visions, like that of the Fezziwigs' ball, are a pleasure to Scrooge, but even when he is most plagued by what the spirits show or say to him, he is only set back briefly, the pace of his travels allowing him little time for grief or self-reproach.

In fact, generally speaking, Scrooge's own spirit is unmistakably ascendent during the night. His curiosity, and desire to benefit from the un-preventable visitations, soon supply their own momentum. Vision after vision holds his attention and provokes his questions and comments; "the game of How, When, and Where" that is played at his nephew and niece's Christmas gathering even provokes guesses which none of the company can hear. By the time Scrooge meets the second spirit, it is clear that he accepts the entire supernatural enterprise as his own: "'Spirit,' said Scrooge submissively, 'conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. Tonight, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it'." With the appearance of the third spirit, whose "mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread," Scrooge's determination and eagerness seem still greater: "'Lead on!' said Scrooge. 'Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!'" Because he does possess this momentum, which aligns his will with that of the spirits, we see again how the story is both unequivocally critical of Scrooge's attitudes and behaviors, and merciful to Scrooge the man. Holding him up to rebuke and humiliation and blame is not the story's intent. Rather, the dissociation of the man from his sins allows Dickens to make his point doubly Dickens condemns Scroogism while he exemplifies an un-Scrooge-like mentality by showing Scrooge authorial kindness.

If Scrooge may be considered ascendent during the night, he emerges positively triumphant on Christmas morning when, among other robust exuberances, he shouts from his window to the street below, adding his joyful noise to the general peals of church bells, "the lustiest peals he had ever heard." Scrooge's expansive vocalizing and bodily movements on Christmas morning are appropriate to a character who seems not to diminish but to grow stronger and more complete before our eyes.

A better way to regard the movement of the story is to discern the "abrasive" anti-Christmas Scrooge made compatible with the "soft" pro-Christmas company comprised of nearly all of the fictional world surrounding him and the narrator as well. Indeed, Scrooge finally joins the others m Christmas spirit and activities And yet, we have to realize that Scrooge is not so much remade *in* the others' image as he is remade *according* to it. In no other character are Christmas qualities given such a dazzling embodiment as in Scrooge on Christmas morning: "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man," he cries. Scrooge is so charged here with seasonal energy that he takes on multiple identities another way in which he is "more" or greater at the end of the story than at the beginning. *Too* charged is more precise, for the "new" Scrooge ceases to be merely mortal: he is really the Christmas spirit personified, its pure essence, and an embodiment more important to the story's meaning than the allegorical and spooky

Ghost of Christmas Present because he provides us with a human model of behavior, if also an exaggerated one. It is Scrooge's super-Christmas spirit which gives the story such a satisfactory climax (how less exciting if Scrooge awoke merely to become like Fred!) as well as dictates the brevity of the final stave□such dazzle cannot be prolonged without devaluation. Scrooge's dazzle is the appropriate end-product of the story, a treasured moment revealed only after the necessary processes of generation are complete. Dickens' story, it might be said, finally opens in the last stave to offer us this treasure, this "pearl." When Thackeray praised the *Carol* as "a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness," he implicitly paralleled its writing and publication with the giving of a gift *[Fraser's Magazine* 29 (February 1844)]. More Christmas present than mere gift, the story proceeds, even as it obeys the dynamic of a pearl-generating oyster, from the concealment of Scrooge's inner goodness to a climactic unwrapping of that goodness that involves each reader with Dickens in a personal enactment of a Christmas ritual. And so author and reader participate in the excursive sociality that *A Christmas Carol* celebrates.

We can never know, of course, the extent to which Dickens conceived of the structure of his story according to the image of a pearl-generating oyster. But there is some reason to conclude that he would have welcomed such an interpretation as consonant with his own sense of how his story works and of the nature of his authorial role. The careful mothering of supernatural agents effects Scrooge's change, accreted wisdom making Scrooge both more than what he was and better. But behind these spirits is the narrator□certainly an alter-ego of Dickens himself□who really presides over the re-creation. Thus, we should not be surprised to hear the narrator's comment on Scrooge's Christmas laugh: "Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!" In Genesis we hear of another Creator who, once the work was done, looked down with approval on his Creation. Just what is created in *A Christmas Carol* is glimpsed in the newly awakened Scrooge's own words: "I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop[1] Hallo here!" In an oyster's experience, the nearest thing to a baby is a pearl.

Source: Craig Buckwald, "Stalking the Figurative Oyster: The Excursive Ideal in *A Christmas Carol,"* in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol 27, No. 1, Winter, 1990, pp. 1-14

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Morris examines Ebenezer Scrooge's "conversion" in A Christmas Carol. *According to Morris, "Dickens does not intend Scrooge's awakening to be a promise for all covetous old sinners, but only a possibility to be individually hoped for."*

As everyone knows, being called a "scrooge" is bad. When labeled like this, one is considered "a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone.... Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fibre; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster." In reality, and in short, one is a party-pooper, afflicted with general overtones of inhumanity.

This is the popular definition of the word *Scrooge,* and it is unfairly the usual description of Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge, of *A Christmas Carol.* Scrooge's conversion to a permanent goodness, which is every bit up to those impossible standards met by the totally admirable Cheerybles and Mr. Brownlow, seems to have been utterly forgotten, or ignored. Popularly lost is Dickens' last word on Scrooge: "... it was always said of him that he knew how to keep a Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge." By common consent Scrooge has been a villain at every Christmas season since 1843. Indeed, that reformed old gentleman might well answer, "'It's not convenient, and it's not fair.'"

What "we" remember about *A Christmas Carol* is the flinty employer, the humbly simple (and sentimental) clerk, and sweet Tiny Tim. If the general reading public remembers Scrooge's conversion at all, it sees the alteration as a punishment brought about and maintained through fear. The conversion is seen as only a part of the story, when in fact it is what the story is *all* about. *A Christmas Carol* is not, as some readers seem to think, "The Little Lame Prince" or "The Confidential Clerk." It is the reawakening of a Christian soul, although (as Edgar Johnson makes clear [in *Charles Dickens, His Tragedy and Triumph,* 1952]) it is not a religious conversion. Religious or not, the story is a celebration of an important conversion, the sort of conversion on which Dickens pinned his hopes for social, moral, economic, and even political recovery in England. The carol sung here is a song of celebration for a Christmas birth that offers hope; it is not a song of thanks for revenge accomplished or for luck had by the poor. To be an "old Scrooge" is, in the final analysis, a good thing to be. And with careful rereading of the tale the cliches of a hasty public would surely disappear.

What is more damagingly unfair than the popular mistake is the critics' treatment of Scrooge's conversion, which ranges from Edgar Johnson's insistence that Scrooge is "nothing other than a personification of economic man" to Humphry House's assertion [in *The Dickens World,* 1941] that "his conversion, moreover, seems to be complete at a stroke, his actions after it uniform." At the critics' hands the enlightenment of Scrooge is not individual, believable, real, or even interesting. Perhaps the most surprising comment is this one by Chesterton [in *Charles Dickens,* 1906]:

Scrooge is not really inhuman at the beginning any more than he is at the end. There is a heartiness in his inhospitable sentiments that is akin to humour and therefore inhumanity, he is only a crusty old bachelor, and had (I strongly suspect) given away turkeys secretly all his life The beauty and the real blessing of the story do not he in the mechanical plot of it, the repentance of Scrooge, probable or improbable, they lie in the great furnace of real unhappiness that glows through Scrooge and everything round him, that great furnace, the heart of Dickens. Whether the Christmas visions would or would not convert Scrooge, they convert us.

It is my contention that the story records the psychological□if overnight□change in Scrooge from a mechanical tool that has been manufactured by the economic institutions around him to the human being he was before business dehumanized him. His conversion is his alone, not that of "economic man"; Dickens does not intend Scrooge's awakening to be a promise for all covetous old sinners, but only a possibility to be individually hoped for. Further, if the visitations by Marley and the three spirits be accepted as dreams ("Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that."), their substance, as well as their messages and their effects, must have come from the recesses of Scrooge's own mind. And finally, if the conversion comes from within Scrooge, it could have been effected at a stroke, for surely it had been subconsciously fermenting for along time. Of such things Christmas miracles, or epiphanies, may very well be made. Scrooge explains it:"'I haven't missed it. The spirits have done it all in one night They can do anything they like. Of course they can!"[1]

From the Marley-faced doorknocker to the third Phantom's hood and dress shrinking, collapsing, and dwindling down to the bed post, Scrooge is dreaming, awake and asleep. The entire substance of the dreams has been all of Scrooge's own making; he has, in an agitated state, conjured up those things that he has until now hidden from himself but has not been unaware of: his own compounded sins, and Marley's; his happy and sad boyhood; his small sister and the memory of an unkind father; the gay times working under old Fezzi-wig on a Christmas long ago; Scrooge's denial of Belle, the girl he was to have married; the supposed or heard-of later happiness of the same girl (at Christmas, of course), married to another man; the eve of Marley's death, the Christmas gaiety of common people at the present Christmas season (which he had known, for he spoke harshly of it at his place of business only that afternoon); the happy Cratchit home this Christmas, with its touching sight of Tiny Tim and the blight of the subdued Cratchit opinion of Scrooge; Christmas present with miners, lighthouse keepers, and seamen□all more content than Scrooge despite their condition; the bright games at the Christmas home of his nephew, a place to which he was invited and angrily refused a few hours ago; the sight of the two tattered children under the Spirit's robes□the boy Ignorance, the girl Want; his own cheap funeral and the theft of his possessions; the scorn of him among business men; the death of Tiny Tim and the view of Scrooge's own tombstone. All these would have been known to him, through experience, imagination, or the public press or gossip.

The dream visions are connected, as dreams, not only to what he knew or feared or imagined, but to each other through recurring scenes, motifs, verbal expressions, and

physical props. They are behevably motivated□that is, if dreams are ever behevably motivated.

In Stave One, before Scrooge goes to sleep, Dickens presents several clues to what trouble his dreams; we can infer the other clues from the dreams themselves. First the reader learns that this afternoon is cold, foggy, and dark. And during the dreams cold, fog, and darkness persist and dominate until they are the atmosphere of the dreams. Cold, which dominates the day, runs through the dreams, relieved only by and for persons who share each other's company. It is not relieved for Scrooge, who in his dreams can no longer use the imagination which Dickens says he relied upon to defeat cold at his counting-house Cold is the most persistent element m the story□more pervasive than even the fog and darkness. It is the temperature of the world that cannot be shed or blown away by anyone but must be lived with and among. It is triumphed over only by the philanthropy of fellowship (which might be more specifically called kindness, love, tolerance, and sympathy between individual persons), not by the misanthropy of solitaries or the collective bargaining of institutions (" 'I help to support the establishments I have mentioned□they cost enough: and those who are badly off must go there,'" explains Scrooge). Here is that assertion dramatized:

The cold became intense In the main street, at the comer of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered, warming their hands and winking then: eyes before the blaze in rapture The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowing suddenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice

The great fire in the brazier of the workmen is the exact opposite of Scrooge's "very small fire" and the one he allows his clerk ("it looked like one coal"); their rapture is not at all like Scrooge's grouchiness and gloom. In contrast to the laborers', Scrooge's overflowings are congealed and turned to misanthropic ice, like the water-plug left in solitude It is the solitude of Scrooge that has congealed him so that no outside force of weather knows where to have him. It could not be less open to the warmth that in this story is equated to human companionship.

And yet Scrooge does feel the cold, in spite of what people thought. He has caught cold in the head; he does bundle up; he does sit close to the small fire in his chambers and brood over it The denial of cold as an economic hindrance is part of a public role that he has taken on as he has slipped into isolation. Fuel costs money just as warmth costs human feeling; and human feeling leads into a world which he has come to foreswear. "What shall I put you down for'" asks one of the gentlemen who come in the spirit of charity to collect money for the needy on Christmas Eve. " 'Nothing!' Scrooge replied. 'You wish to be anonymous'? "I wish to be left alone,' said Scrooge." What Scrooge comes to see (and thus the reason for his conversion) is that if one is left alone he does become anonymous.

Over and over in the dreams, this is Scrooge's fear: that he will be left and forgotten, that he will die and no one will care. This fear grows as the suggestion of anonymity recurs more frequently during the course of the dreams. Defense against cold is the first

demand Scrooge makes of Bob Cratchit on the day after Christmas, for a fully awakened Scrooge says, " 'Make up the fires and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!'" At last Scrooge has determined to keep human warmth about him.

Fog and darkness become symbols for incommunication and isolation in the dreams; their opposites become symbols for communication and integration with mankind. Light and clarity of vision are subdued, except in flashes of Christmas past when Scrooge is a schoolboy at play, or a young man at old Fezziwig's party, or an onlooker at Belle's happy home. These flashes are only glimmers in a usually dark atmosphere. One of the few bright outdoor scenes is the one in which Scrooge is shown himself playing as a boy: "The city had entirely disappeared. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground." But, as the Spirit of Christmas Past reminds him, "These are but shadows of the things that have been." Fog and darkness dominate until the last section of the story, when Scrooge awakes on Christmas morning and puts his head out the window to find, "No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring cold; cold piping for the blood to dance to; golden sunlight; heavenly day; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious! Glorious!" Throughout the dreams Scrooge's mind has kept the real weather of the day on which he retired.

Part of the darkness motif is figured in the games hide-and-seek and blindman's-buff. It may be paraphrased as "none are so blind as those that will not see." Apparently in the recent past Scrooge has noticed the blind men's dogs pulling their masters from his path, and then wagging their tails as though they said, " 'No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master[1]'" The observation must have been Scrooge's. Perhaps, too, was the plight of his house, "up a yard, where it had so little business to be, that one could scarcely help fancying it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and-seek with other houses, and forgotten the way out again." Even Scrooge on this evening is being buffeted like a blind man in trying to find his house amid the fog and dark. His flight of fancy about the house ("one could scarcely help fancying it") must surely reflect his unformulated yet subconscious worry about his own state, which the personification of the lost house parallels. Whether Scrooge knew that Cratchit hurried home to play blindman's-buff we do not know, though his dreams and his Christmas actions in behalf of the Cratchits indicate that he knew a great deal about his clerk's family. In any case, in his dreams Scrooge imagines a game of bhndman' s-buff at his nephew's home, and he also imagines Martha Cratchit playing a game of hide-and-seek with her father. The blind men are buffeted out of love; their awakenings are joyous□in Scrooge's dreams, in his yearnings. It must be the case with Scrooge that he is lost yet struggling to be found.

Cold, fog, and darkness afflict Scrooge's sight and feeling. The sound of bells also plagues him. It is significantly recurrent. At his counting-house it has long disturbed him: 'The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremendous vibrations afterward, as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there." In his chambers, "his glance happened to rest

upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose now forgotten with a chamber in the highest story of the building." This is the bell that starts ringing mysteriously, then stops, and is followed by the clanking noise of Marley's ghost. This bell, as well as the others, symbolizes the mystery of what is lost to Scrooge□the proper use of time and service, of a call to human beings. Bells toll the coming of the spirits, though Scrooge's sense of time causes him to doubt their relevance ("The clock was wrong. An icicle must have got into the works.") Bells call happy people to church; they punctuate parties and other human assembly. At last Scrooge responds to bells without fear, but happily to "the lustiest peals he had ever heard." He has found the purpose for which the bell communicated with a chamber in the highest story of the building. He has had bells on his mind since the evening before, not merely because they marked time's passing but also because they connected people in warmth, worship, play, death, and love. This last would have a special tug upon Scrooge: the girl he was to have married long ago was named Belle.

The hardware of life haunts Scrooge, too□the forged metals which he has depended upon in place of human relations to secure, lock up, and insure what he will possess of existence He has replaced with metal "solidity"; he has forged a chain, has relied on steel. But the hardware is unsubstantial. On Christmas Eve it melts into the hallucination of a doorknocker that comes alive in the likeness of Jacob Marley. And, though Scrooge doublelocks himself in, the hardware of Marley clanks to him, as does that of numerous other phantoms. Hardware reappears several times more as an undependable tool of life. The last of the Spirits takes Scrooge to a filthy den, a junk heap. "Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones." It is here that the dreamed-of charwoman, laundress, and undertaker's man bring to sell for hard cash the only effects of dreamed-of dead Scrooge. And his imagined effects belong here, among the junk. For these, material possessions, Scrooge has traded human love. In the dreams his fear of losing them has emerged. Spirits from the outside world have come into Scrooge's counting-house this afternoon□his nephew, the chanty gentlemen, the lad who sang through the keyhole.

'God bless you, merry gentleman[1] May nothing you dismay[1]'

They have asked for his money and love. Worse, they have threatened his only security: the belief in only material possession. In the dreams their invasion is reasserted by magnification into phantoms who would take away his wealth.

Selling Scrooge's possessions in the dream, the women say, "'Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose? "No, indeed,' said Mrs. Dilber, laughing. 'If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, a wicked old screw,' pursued the woman, 'why wasn't he natural in his lifetime?"' Scrooge, like an old screw□a piece of hardware himself□has not been natural. This he has known subconsciously. He is struggling through metaphor to make himself aware of it; for he is not yet, in spite of appearances, inhuman. He is not yet as dead as a doornail, which, as Dickens observes at the outset, is considered "the deadest piece of ironmongery in the

trade." It was what Marley was as dead as, but not Scrooge, thanks to his submerged conscience.

It is easy to see why several other motifs should run through Scrooge's dreams—the many references to death and burial, to the passage of time, to the poor, to persons unhappy alone and happy gathered together. They are life that Scrooge has tried not to live by.

One motif, marriage, needs exploration, however. The Christmas Eve of the dreams was not only the seventh anniversary of Jacob Marley's death— of Scrooge's last connection with a true fellow misanthropist—but it was also the afternoon he had replied to his nephew's invitation to dinner by saying he would see the nephew in hell first, then had blurted out as rationale: " 'Why did you get married[9]' " Love, to Scrooge, was the only symptom nearer insanity than the wish for a merry Christmas. Scrooge had built a wall of scorn against happy married life, and in the dreams we see his return to the problem, before and after the wall was built. In Stave Two, Belle sums up the problem: "You fear the world too much,' she answered, gently. 'All your hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you.'"

But why does gain obsess him[1]? Why has he given up Belle for gold? And why does marriage appall him? The answers may be revealed in the dreams. Taken back to his solitary and unhappy days as a schoolboy, Scrooge sees his old imagined friends of those days, characters from *The Arabian Nights,* and he cries: "'And the Sultan's groom turned upside down by the Genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him right. I'm glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the Princess!"' The groom is not good enough to marry the Princess, for he is poor. In the next scene of the dream Scrooge appears as a boy left at school while his classmates have gone home on holiday. He is discovered by his sister Fan (later to become mother of Scrooge's nephew), who announces her errand to take Scrooge home:

'To bring you home, home, home[1]'

'Home, little Fan"' returned the boy. 'Yes[1]' said the child, brimful of glee. 'Home, for good and all. Home for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home's like Heaven[1] He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man[1]' said the child, opening her eyes, 'and are never to come back here; but first, we're to be together ail the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in the world'

We can conjecture the relationship between Scrooge and his father; surely the father had been a tyrant, and possibly he had shaped the ideal of marriage for his son. Or, if one guesses, perhaps the father's cruelty resulted from money worries so that Scrooge felt marriage was possible only if the husband were secure financially. This at least seems to have led to the rift between Scrooge and Belle, which could very well have stemmed from the example of Scrooge's father. The simple fictional childhood of

Arabian Nights and *Robinson Crusoe* ("Poor Robinson Crusoe, where have you been, Robinson Crusoe?") has been lost, cut in upon by the harsh facts of economic life. Obsession with wealth for its own sake has begun as a desire to build a platform on which to base married life. The obsession has made love for anything but gold impossible. This is what ailed Scrooge this and the submerged struggle against the master-passion, Gain at the expense of humanity and in the interest of dehumanization.

Scrooge has observed and evidently thought kindly upon the marriages of the Fezziwigs and Cratchits. But the former was overshadowed by fear of insecurity in marriage; Scrooge's youthful sympathy for the Fezziwigs' union was submerged. Similarly, Scrooge's reveling in the happy-and-threatened Cratchit family remained under his flinty consciousness until the dream conversion. Of his sister's marriage we learn only that it resulted in Fan's death; apparently Scrooge cannot think upon it further. He has believed the only safe road is the one to personal economic security Travel along that road, as Scrooge takes it, necessitates avoidance of human love.

No change can come from without his mind. His emergence must originate in his mind, for that is where he has locked everything up. The dreams are remembrances and imaginings based on remembrance. They are subconscious fears. Moreover, they have been so tightly, inhumanly, pressed that they must burst forth, and Scrooge must either in his crisis reform totally or not at all. There is no degree of inhumanity. It is true that he overcompensates and becomes a ridiculous countercaricature. But then he has shocked himself severely. The understanding of self has been huge; so its early manifestations were bound to be foolish- If it is difficult to imagine such overnight conversion, it is even more difficult to imagine a gradual one. He is being smothered by his isolationist creed; so he must throw it off violently. Scrooge is either a human being and must understand it, or become a thing. On this fateful Christmas Eve he has denied all he has had of human life family, friendship, love, charity indeed, all fellow-feeling. He can no longer find life enough to breathe in isolation; he must break out into the world. The dreams inner explosions of conscience- are the last resort.

They are not reform theory. They do not echo pamphlets, or legislation, or sermons from the public pulpit, but individual human conscience. They come from the effects of a lifetime at last asserted. Thus they can, apparently at a stroke, overset the habits of many misled years.

Source: William E. Moms, "The Conversion of Scrooge: A Defense of That Good Man's Motivation," in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. m, No 1, Fall, 1965, pp 46-55

Critical Essay #4

Johnson is a major Dickens scholar whose Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph *(1952) is considered the definitive biography of the novelist. In the following essay adapted from that work, Johnson expounds on the social importance of A* Christmas Carol.

Everyone knows Dickens' *Christmas Carol f*or its colorful painting of a rosy fireside good cheer and warmth of feeling, made all the more vivid by the contrasting chill wintry darkness in which its radiant scenes are framed. Most readers realize too how characteristic of all Dickens' sentiments about the Christmas season are the laughter and tenderness and jollity he poured into the *Carol.* What is not so widely understood is that it was also consistently and deliberately created as a critical blast against the very rationale of industrialism and its assumptions about the organizing principles of society. It is an attack upon both the economic behavior of the nineteenth-century business man and the supporting theory of doctrinaire utilitarianism. As such it is a good deal more significant than the mere outburst of warmhearted sentimentality it is often taken to be.

Its sharper intent is, indeed, ingeniously disguised. Not even the festivities at Dingley Dell, in *Pickwick Papers,* seem to have a more genial innocence than the scenes of the *Christmas Carol.* It is full of the tang of snow and cold air and crisp green holly-leaves, and warm with the glow of crimson holly-berries, blazing hearths, and human hearts. Deeper than this, however, Dickens makes of the Christmas spirit a symbolic criticism of the relations that throughout almost all the rest of the year subsist among men It is a touchstone, revealing and drawing forth the gold of generosity ordinarily crusted over with selfish habit, an earnest of the truth that our natures are not entirely or even essentially devoted to competitive struggle.

Dickens is certain that the enjoyment most men are able to feel in the happiness of others can play a larger part than it does in the tenor of their lives. The sense of brotherhood, he feels, can be broadened to a deeper and more active concern for the welfare of all mankind It is in this light that Dickens sees the Spirit of Christmas. So understood, as the distinguished scholar Professor Louis Cazamian rightly points out, his "philosophie de Noel" becomes the very core of his social thinking.

Not that Christmas has for Dickens more than the very smallest connection with Christian dogma or theology. It involves no conception of the virgin birth or transubstantiation or sacrificial atonement or redemption by faith For Dickens Christmas is primarily a human, not a supernatural, feast, with glowing emphasis on goose and gravy, plum-pudding and punch, mistletoe and kissing-games, dancing and frolic, as well as open-handedness, sympathy, and warmth of heart. Dickens does not believe that love of others demands utter abnegation or mortification of the flesh; it is not sadness but joyful fellowship. The triumphal meaning of Christmas peals in the angel voices ringing through the sky: "On earth peace, good will to men." It is a sign that men do not live by bread'alone, that they do not live for barter and sale alone. No way of life is either true or rewarding that leaves out men's need of loving and of being loved.

The theme of the *Christmas Carol* is thus closely linked with the theme of *Martin Chuzzle-wit,* which was being written and published as a serial during the very time in which the shorter story appeared. The selfishness so variously manifested in the one is limited in the other to the selfishness of financial gain. For in an acquisitive society the form that selfishness predominantly takes is monetary greed. The purpose of such a society is the protection of property rights. Its rules are created by those who have money and power, and are designed, to the extent that they are consistent, for the perpetuation of money and power. With the growing importance of commerce in the eighteenth century, and of industry in the nineteenth, political economists□the "philosophers" Dickens detested□rationalized the spirit of ruthless greed into a system claiming authority throughout society.

Services as well as goods, they said, were subject only to the laws of profitable trade. There was no just price. One bought in the cheapest market and sold in the dearest. There was no just wage. The mill owner paid the mill hand what competition decreed under the determination of the "iron law of wage." If the poor, the insufficiently aggressive, and the mediocre in ability were unable to live on what they could get, they must starve□ or put up with the treadmill and the workhouse□ and even these institutions represented concessions to mere humanity that must be made as forbidding as possible. Ideally, no sentimental conceptions must be allowed to obstruct the workings of the law of supply and demand. "Cash-nexus" was the sole bond between man and man, The supreme embodiment of this social theory was the notion of the "economic man," that curiously fragmentary picture of human nature, who never performed any action except at the dictates of monetary gain. And Scrooge, in the *Christmas Carol,* is nothing other than a personification of economic man.

Scrooge's entire life is limited to cash-boxes, ledgers and bills of sale. He underpays and bullies and terrifies his clerk, and grudges him even enough coal in his office fire to keep warm. All sentiment, kindness, generosity, tenderness, he dismisses as humbug. All imagination he regards as a species of mental indigestion. He feels that he has discharged his full duty to society in contributing his share of the taxes that pay for the prison, the workhouse, the operation of the treadmill and the poor law, and he bitterly resents having his pocket picked to keep even them going. The out-of-work and the indigent sick are to him merely idle and useless; they had better die and decrease the surplus population. So entirely does Scrooge exemplify the economic man that, like that abstraction, Ms grasping rapacity has ceased to have any purpose beyond itself: when he closes up his office for the night he takes his pinched heart off to a solitary dinner at a tavern and then to his bleak chambers where he sits alone over his gruel.

Now from one angle, of course, *A Christmas Carol* indicts the economic philosophy represented by Scrooge for its unhappy influence on society. England's prosperity was not so uncertain□if, indeed, any nation's ever is□that she needed to be parsimonious and cruel to her waifs and strays, or even to the incompetents and casualties of life. To neglect the poor, to deny them education, to give them no protection from covetous employers, to let them be thrown out of work and fall ill and die in filthy surroundings that then engender spreading pestilence, to allow them to be harried by misery into crime□all these turn out in the long run to be the most disastrous shortsightedness.

That is what the Ghost of Christmas Present means in showing Scrooge the two ragged and wolfish children glaring from beneath its robes. "They are Man's," says the Spirit. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased." And when Scrooge asks if they have no refuge, the Spirit ironically echoes his own words: "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?"

Scrooge's relation with his clerk Bob Cratchit is another illustration of the same point. To say, as some commentators have done, that Scrooge is paying Cratchit all he is worth on the open market (or he would get another job) is to assume the very conditions Dickens is attacking. It is not only that timid, uncompetitive people like Bob Cratchit may lack the courage to bargain for their rights. But, as Dickens knows well, there are many things other than the usefulness of a man's work that determine his wage□the existence, for example, of a large body of other men able to do the same job. And if Cratchit is getting the established remuneration for his work, that makes the situation worse, not better; for instead of an isolated one, his is a general case. What Dickens has at heart is not any economic conception like Marx's labor theory of value, but a feeling of the human value of human beings. Unless a man is a noxious danger to society, Dickens feels, a beast of prey to be segregated or destroyed; if he is able and willing to work, whatever the work may be□he is entitled at least to enough for him to live on, by the mere virtue of his humanity alone.

But the actual organization that Dickens saw in society callously disregarded all such humane principles. The hardened criminal was maintained in jail with more care than the helpless debtor who had broken no law. The pauper who owed nobody, but whom age, illness or industrial change might have thrown out of work, was treated more severely than many a debtor and jailbird. And the poor clerk or laborer, rendered powerless by his need or the number of others like him, could be held to a pittance barely sufficient to keep him and his family from starvation.

Against such inequities Dickens maintains that any work worth doing should be paid enough to maintain a man and his family without grinding worry. How are the Bob Cratchits and their helpless children to live? Or are we to let the crippled Tiny Tims die and decrease the surplus population? "Man," says the Ghost, "if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered What the surplus is and Where it is.... It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh God! to hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!"

Coldhearted arrogance and injustice storing up a dangerous heritage of poverty and ignorance□ such is Dickens' judgment of the economic system that Scrooge exemplifies. But its consequences do not end with the cruelties it inflicts upon the masses of the people or the evils it works in society. It injures Scrooge as well. All the more generous impulses of humanity he has stifled and mutilated in himself. All natural affection he has crashed. The lonely boy he used to be, weeping in school, the tender brother, the eager youth, the young man who once fell disinterestedly in love with a

dowerless girl□what has he done to them in making himself into a money-making machine, as hard and sharp as flint, and frozen with the internal ice that clutches his shriveled heart? That dismal cell, his office, and his gloomy rooms, are only a prison within which he dwells self-confined, barred and close-locked as he drags a chain of his own cash-boxes and dusty ledgers. Acting on a distortedly inadequate conception of self-interest, Scrooge has deformed and crippled himself to bitter sterility

And Scrooge's fallacy is the fallacy of organized society. Like his house, which Dickens fancifully imagines playing hide-and-seek with other houses when it was a young house, and losing its way in a blind alley it has forgotten how to get out of, Scrooge has lost his way between youth and maturity. Society too in the course of its development has gone astray and then hardened itself in obdurate error with a heartless economic theory. Scrooge's conversion is more than the transformation of a single human being. It is a plea for society itself to undergo a change of heart.

Dickens does not, it should be noticed, take the uncompromising position that the self-regarding emotions are to be eradicated altogether. He is not one of those austere theorists who hold that the individual must be subordinated to the state or immolate himself to the service of an abstract humanity. Concern for one's self and one's own welfare is necessary and right, but true self-love cannot be severed from love of others without growing barren and diseased. Only in the communion of brotherhood is it healthy and fruitful. When Scrooge has truly changed, and has dispatched the anonymous gift of the turkey to Bob Cratchit as an earnest of repentance, his next move is to go to his nephew's house and ask wistfully, "Will you let me in, Fred?" With love reanimated in his heart, he may hope for love.

There have been readers who objected to Scrooge's conversion as too sudden and radical to be psychologically convincing. But this is to mistake a semi-serious fantasy for a piece of prosaic realism Even so, the emotions in Scrooge to which the Ghosts appeal are no unsound means to the intended end: the awakened memories of a past when he had known gentler and warmer ties than in any of his later years, the realization of his exclusion from all kindness and affection in others now, the fears of a future when he may be lonelier and more unloved still. And William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* provides scores of case-histories that parallel both the suddenness of Scrooge's conversion and the sense of radiant joy he feels in the world around him after it has taken place. It may be that what really gives the skeptics pause is that Scrooge is converted to a gospel of good cheer. They could probably believe easily enough if he espoused some gloomy doctrine of intolerance.

But it is doubtful whether such questions ever arise when one is actually reading the *Christmas Carol.* From the very beginning Dickens stakes a tone of playful exaggeration that warns us this is no exercise in naturalism. Scrooge carries "his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days." Blind men's dogs, when they see him coming, tug their masters into doorways to avoid him. The entire world of the story is an animistic one: houses play hide-and-seek, doorknockers come to life as human heads, the tuning of a fiddle is "like fifty stomach aches," old Fezzi-wig's legs wink as he dances, potatoes bubbling in a saucepan knock loudly at

the lid "to be let out and peeled." Scrooge's own language has a jocose hyperbole, even when he is supposed to be most ferocious or most terrified, that makes his very utterance seem half a masquerade. "If I could work my will," he snarls, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!" Is that the accent of a genuine curmudgeon or of a man trying to sound more violent than he feels? And to Mar-ley's Ghost, despite his disquiet, he remarks, "You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blob of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

All these things make it clear that Dickens as always when he is most deeply moved and most profound is speaking in terms of unavowed allegory. But the allegory of Dickens is in one way subtler than the allegory of writers like Kafka or Melville. Kafka is always hinting the existence of hidden meanings by making the experience of his characters so baffling and irrational on a merely realistic level that we are obliged to search for symbolic significances. And Melville, too, by a score of devices, from those rolling, darkly magnificent and extraordinary soliloquies to the mystery of Ahab's intense and impassioned pursuit of the White Whale, forces us to realize that this is a more metaphysical duel than one with a mere deep-sea beast

Dickens, however, leaves his surface action so entirely clear and the behavior of his characters so plain that they do not puzzle us into groping for gnomic meanings. Scrooge is a miser, his nephew a warmhearted fellow, Bob Cratchit a poor clerk what could be simpler? If there is a touch of oddity in the details, that is merely Dickens's well-known comic grotesquene; if Scrooge's change of heart is sharp and antithetical, that is only Dickens' melodramatic sentimentality. Surely all the world knows that Dickens is never profound?

But die truth is that Dickens has so fused his abstract thought and its imaginative forming that one melts almost entirely into the other. Though our emotional perception of Dickens' meaning is immediate and spontaneous, nothing in his handling thrusts upon us an intellectual statement of that meaning. But more than a warm-hearted outpouring of holiday sentiment, the *Christmas Carol* is in essence a serio-comic parable of social redemption. Mariey's Ghost is the symbol of divine grace, and the three Christmas Spirits are the working of that grace through the agencies of memory, example and fear. And Scrooge, although of course he is himself too, is not himself alone: he is the embodiment of all that concentration upon material power and callous indifference to the welfare of human beings that the economists had erected into a system, businessmen and industrialists pursued relentlessly, and society taken for granted as inevitable and proper. The conversion of Scrooge is an image of the conversion for which Dickens hopes among mankind.

Source: Edgar Johnson. "The Christmas Carol and the Economic Man," in *American Scholar,* Vol. 21, No. 1, Winter, 1951. pp. 91-8.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay, which was originally presented as a lecture in May, 1937, Berrow reacts negatively to A Christmas Carol.

There has been much said this evening in praise, I might almost say in adulation, of Charles Dickens. Just by way of a change 1 want to offer a few words of criticism. In case some of you might consider these words as something of the nature of an attack, I should like to point out, though there is really no need to do so, that a man who stands in such an impregnable position as Dickens does not fear attack. But a little criticism may not be amiss.

I should like to give some honest opinions on *the* Christmas Book; and by *the* Christmas Book I mean *A Christmas Carol,* the best known of all the Christmas Books, the one that everybody knows□ Dickens readers and others□the one on which young people so often cut their Dickens-teeth.

You will understand that these are my personal opinions. It is probable that a large number of you will disagree with me; if you do I hope you will get up and say so. Discussion is the life-blood of study, and we are a study-circle. Discussion is as good for the intellect as confession is for the soul.

Well, my candid opinion of A *Christinas Carol* is that it is the best of a rather poor lot of stories. In fact, when I consider that it was written by a giant and a genius like Charles Dickens, I think it is the poor best of an exceedingly poor lot.

To begin with, it is humourless. By that I do not mean that it isn't funny or witty□although it most decidedly isn't either□but I mean that it is, to my mind, devoid of that impalpable flavour that may permeate any book, grave or gay, serious or frivolous; that impalpable flavour that almost instantly puts the reader on good terms with himself and with the author. Humour is that quality in literature that gives content.

Humour has nothing to do with farce or wit. If you look up the word in any good dictionary you will find that it gives some such definition as this: "Disposition of mind or feeling; frame of mind;" and so forth. It is the quality in a book that gains your immediate sympathy with the author, the aims and objects of his writings, and all that he stands for as expressed in his work. In a word, humour, in a book, makes you good-humoured.

But A *Christmas Carol* does not give me content, and it does not make me good-humoured; I'm afraid it only irritates me. I have the queerest impression that, though Dickens set himself to write a happy story, he was not altogether a happy man when he wrote it.

My second grievance is that it is childish. The story may not be, but the style is. The opening paragraphs, for instance, give me the impression that Dickens was not writing for intelligent grown-ups, but for rather backward children. In the first page or two he

seems to be hammering home a few points into the fickle and wandering mind of a backward child. By the time he has finished with the matter, it is quite clear to even a half-witted Troglodyte that, firstly, Marley was dead, and, secondly, that Scrooge was aware of the fact.

In this opening Dickens is, of course, making a bid for the reader's sympathetic attention to his tale; he is striving for that humour I have just spoken of. But honestly, he does not get my sympathetic attention. I think he fails lamentably.

This is very strange when we consider the glorious openings to some of his other books. Consider, for example, that brilliant discourse on the Chuzzlewit family tree; the account of that meeting that is our introduction to the Pickwick Club; the swing and the rhythm of the account of Veneering's first dinner-party. Veneering's dinnerparties were actually rather dreary affairs to attend; but to read about them is sheer delight, a delight which brings a smile to our lips and a sudden gush of warmth to our hearts whenever we come upon the name of Veneering And that smile is not a smile of sympathy and affection for Veneering and Company, but a smile of sympathy and affection for Dickens and his handling of Veneering and Company. I have to admit that the name of Scrooge brings me no such joyous glow of recognition. I have no smile to summon up for his handling of the firm of Scrooge and Marley (deceased).

But my chief quarrel is with the story as a story. It has, of course, a moral, as I well know. But I hate morals hurled at my defenceless head with the vigor and mercilessness with which this one has been hurled. I prefer to extract the moral from a story for myself. And, having decided to write a moral story for Christmas, Dickens decided also to lay it on with a trowel. You don't gild lilies. You paint 'em. You gild refined gold□see Bible. He painted the lily.

A *Christmas Carol* is a story about Christmas and the awakening of the Christmas spirit in the stony breast of a miser and a skinflint through the medium of supernatural agencies. It is saturated with an exaggerated Christmas fervour; it is larded with soggy and indigestible lumps of sickly sentiment; and it is□or, rather, it is meant to be□made terrible and hair-raising by the introduction of three ghostly apparitions. Of these I say simply this* they may have raised the hair of our fathers and mothers, but I do not think they curdle the blood in our veins to any great extent. In these days we are, to use a colloquialism, more hard-boiled. And there is the inevitable impossible and sanctimonious infant in the person of Tiny Tim. I am sympathetic towards Tiny Tim because he was a cripple, but had he been a hale and hearty child I should have looked almost with kindness on any person who had made away with him.

Dickens, by the way, was never very happy with children. Look at Little Nell, with her graveyard complex; Paul Dombey, with his philosophical discourses on the subject of the wild waves' conversation; Kit Nubbles, with his unnatural conscientiousness; and others. To say the least of it, his child characters were more than a little smug They were angels. We all know very well that children are most decidedly not angels. I have not any children, but if I had and they started speaking and acting like Little Nell, or Little

Paul, or Tiny Tim□even if they were cripples□I should have a doctor in right away, and suggest a good hearty blood-letting.

These harsh words are not directed against an author who struggled and fought and passed on to have his place taken by others who came after him. They are directed against the gigantic, irreplaceable figure of the greatest man in English literature, probably the greatest man in the literature of the world. Consequently they are spoken more in sorrow than anger, and without prejudice. They are the candid opinions of one who knows very well that there are those who will spring to the defence of a man, who, incidentally, does not need any defending.

Feeling as I do about the *Christmas Carol,* I rather wonder how Dickens ever came to write it. I have a theory about that, but first I should like to digress a little. I am, in my way, a very humble member of Charles Dickens's profession, and I have often been asked the' question: Why does a man write books? Well, there are several answers He may write a book for money. He has only to write two or three to see the fallacy of that particular answer. He may write a book to gain fame. But there again, apart from a few literary giants, the average author's literary fame□if any□is terribly evanescent and lost in the multitude.

As a matter of fact, the real reason why a man, or a woman, writes fiction is that there is a sort of poison in the blood that wells up and demands outlet m the form of literary expression. The man has to get nd of it or burst. That is a rather forceful way of putting it, but that is the idea. And if he is a born story-teller, no sooner does he get rid of one lot of poison than another wells up inside him. There are, of course, people who feel the urge to write but who never do write. In their case the poison is not so virulent. It wells up, simmers for a time, giving them a kind of mental indigestion, and then dies down again, and they go on with their jobs as usual. There are also pangs in mental creation....

But there are also pleasures. I personally get a lot of fun in concocting those slight, if bloodthirsty, yarns of mine. True, the mechanical process of typing three hundred or so pages is apt to grow rather wearisome, but the pleasure is there. A man writes what pleases him, and his writing gives him pleasure. That, of course, I need hardly point out, does not mean to say that it will necessarily please his readers. On the other hand, in my short experience, I have found out that there is a great deal of truth in Emerson's dictum: that a man who writes to please himself, pleases everybody; and a man who writes to please other people, pleases nobody.

Now, in the case of *A Christmas Carol,* I feel that Dickens set out to please other people, and not altogether to please himself. The wnting of the *Carol* was not so much a pleasure to him as a task. Christmas had come round again, the next issue of his magazine was to be a Christmas number, therefore a Christmas story had to be written. And he wrote it, not because he wanted to write it, but because convention demanded that it should be written. And so he did not do himself justice.

I put forward another point to be considered at the same time. Dickens was in the hey-day of his production□I do not say powers, because his powers never waned□in the flood-tide of his popularity.

He was, I feel sure, an eminently modest man, as all truly great men are, but he was beginning to realise that he was a force in the land. The whole country was laughing uproanously at the antics of Pickwick and his disciples. It had wept over Oliver Twist, followed with breathless interest the adventures of Nicholas Nickleby, devoured *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge,* and had plunged into *Martin Chuzzlewit.* Dickens had discovered that he could sway the nation, and so, when Christmas time of 1843 came round, he decided to sway the nation with a Chnstmas Moral Story. I can see him in his study, at the well-known desk with the sloping surface, driving a dogged pen and muttering-

"I'll make them feel good-will to all men; by Heaven, I will!"

He did the same the following Christmas, with *The Chimes,* and again I get that impression of dogged determination, of the accomplishment of a task. He begged for sympathy□not for himself, but for others□and at the same time, to give force to his message□I might almost say his lecture, his sermon□he made the flesh creep. Or he tried to.

And in placing this condition upon himself, in writing to order, as it were, the creating of a moral story containing nothing that would bring the semblance of a blush to the cheek of the young person and a vast amount of what was good for that same young person, I think we find something of the reason why these Christmas Books, again to my mind, fall far short of his usual brilliantly high standard.

There is not an atom of bitterness in what I have said. These books detract in no way from the huge enjoyment we all get in reading his other works. But I want to remind you, by way of conclusion, that we are Dickens students, and not just blind Dickens worshippers. We should never forget that, though he was a giant, a genius, a mob in revolt, as Chesterton once so aptly and pithily described him, he was also a very human man, subject to very human faults and frailties.

Source: Norman Berrow, "Some Candid Opinions on *A Christmas Carol, "* in *Dickensian,* Vol. XXXIV, No 425, December, 1937, pp 20-4

Adaptations

One of the most highly regarded versions of *A Christmas Carol* stars Ahstair Sims as Scrooge, directed by Brian Desmond Hurst. Released in 1951, it is available from VCI Home Video.

Another praiseworthy version of the novel is the 1984 made-for-television movie with George C. Scott, David Warner, and Edward Woodward. It was released on video by Twentieth Century Fox in 1999.

In December of 1999, TNT and Hallmark Entertainment premiered a new movie version with Patrick Stewart, Richard E. Grant, and Joel Grey starring. It was directed by David Jones.

Michael Caine plays Scrooge, Kermit the Frog plays Bob Cratchit, and the Great Gonzo plays Charles Dickens in *The Muppet Christmas Carol,* released on video in 1997 from Jim Hen-son Video Co.

Scrooged (1988) is a humorous adaptation of Dickens' novel, with Bill Murray as a television executive. The movie was directed by Richard Donner and is available from Paramount Home Video

This story has been adapted to the stage, screen, and television so many times that there is an entire book on the subject. *A Christmas Carol and its Adaptations,* written by Fred Guida, includes scenes from old kinescope films and foreign productions It was published by McFarlane and Co. in 1999

Topics for Further Study

Write a synopsis for an updated version of *A Christmas Carol,* using people who are in the news or who are famous in your community.

Try to find out about music that would have been popular at the time of the novel. In particular, try to get a copy of "Sir Roger de Coverley," which Fezziwig dances to. Pick a popular song that you think is like the old music, and explain the relationship between the two songs.

Research the significance of Christmas to charitable organizations, explaining how much their income from donations increases during December and what they do to prepare for it.

Write a short story about Tiny Tim as a grownup, explaining how the crippling disease he had as a child was cured because of his father's rich benevolent employer.

Examine the traditional use of ghosts in Victorian writing and write a paper explaining how their use here is common or uncommon.

Compare and Contrast

1843: The world's first Christmas cards are sent out by Henry Cole, a director of a London museum.

Today: Millions of Christmas cards are sent out each year by families and business, but many people are replacing paper cards with animated Internet cards.

1843: The squalid courts and cheap food shops of a London area dubbed "Porridge Island" are cleared away for a development area called

Trafalgar Square, in honor of Lord Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar.

Today:

Trafalgar Square is one of London's main tourist attractions; unfortunately, it is also famous for its enormous pigeon population.

1843: Samuel B. Morse begins construction of a telegraph wire between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore using money appropriated by Congress.

Today: Telephone communication is instantaneous, but millions of miles of wires are being replaced with fiber-optic cables for even quicker Internet transmission.

1843: Documents are copied by hand. The first prototype of a typewriter is invented, but is not very practical.

Today: Computers can accurately turn printing or spoken words into typed documents and then alter their appearance in countless ways before they are printed.

1843: A new child labor law in Britain prohibits employment of boys or girls under the age of ten in coalmines. In Massachusetts, a new law limits children under twelve to working no more than ten hours a day.

Today: Developed countries pressure third-world countries to enforce child labor laws, while at the same time taking advantage of then-cheap production costs.

1843: Cologne authorities suppress the newspaper published by socialist Karl Marx, which decries the exploitation of the working class. The following year Marx meets Friedrich Engels, with whom he was to write *The Communist Manifesto* in 1847.

Today: Many of the Marxist governments of the twentieth century, based on communist ideas from Marx and Engels, have moderated their views and adapted some capitalistic practices

What Do I Read Next?

One of the most poignant Christmas stones ever written is Truman Capote's "A Christmas Memory" (1966), which is often included in fiction anthologies and included in his collection *A Christmas Memory, One Christmas [and] The Thanksgiving Visitor* (1996), available from Modern Library.

Charles Dickens was the author of several commercially and critically popular novels. One of his best is *The Tale of Two Cities,* originally published in 1859. Set against the background of the French Revolution, the story follows the adventures of Sydney Carton, and his eventual self-sacrifice for the sake of his friends. It is also available on CD-ROM from Quiet Vision in 1999.

Published in 1999, Patricia Davis' novel *A Midnight Carol* chronicles the story of how Dickens' novel came to be: thirty-year-old Charles Dickens, his debts piling up and a fifth child on the way, somehow writes his most popular work.

Daniel Poole's *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew* (1993) describes the trials and tribulations of daily life in nineteenth-century England in an informative and amusing way.

Further Study

Hardy, Barbara, "The Change of Heart in Dickens' Novels," in *Victorian Studies,* Vol V, 1961-62, pp. 49-67

Examines the recurring theme of change m Dickens' works

Kaplan, Fred, *Dickens: A Biography,* The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

Among the many biographies of the author available, this is clearly one of the most insightful and readable.

Page, Norman O., *A Dickens Companion,* Schocken Books, 1984

Page, a specialist in Victorian literature, offers a cornucopia for students of Dickens plot synopses, character listings, and chronologies.

Poole, Mike, "Dickens and Film' 101 Uses for a Dead Author," in *The Changing World of Charles Dickens,* edited by Robert Guiddings, Barnes [and] Noble Books, 1983, pp 148-62.

Because this book has been adapted to film so often, it is interesting to look at how Hollywood has interpreted his work.

Stone, Harry, *"A Christmas Carol-* Giving Nursery Tales a Higher Form", in *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making, Indiana University Press, 1979, pp. 119-45*

Stone explores the fairy tradition of Victorian England, and his reading of this novel is interesting in its depth of social and biographical background

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Pool, Daniel, *Dickens' Fur Coat and Charlotte's Unanswered Letters: The Rows and Romances of England's Great Victorian Novelists,* HarperCollins Publishers, 1997, p. 178.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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