



How does Dickens present the theme of Redemption in “A Christmas Carol”

Redemption is a key theme within “A Christmas Carol”, the story focuses on the redemption of Scrooge and how society betters for it. Dickens portrays Scrooges journey as one of going from greed to compassion, from isolation to family, from being a “tight fisted hand at the grindstone” to saying “I’ll raise your salary”. Overall, I believe Dickens wanted to convey his views on what being redeemed meant to him

personally, and the views that he considers to be Scrooges redeeming factor.

One of the ways that Dickens represents redemption is through the change shown in Scrooge’s behaviour towards a key character, his clerk Bob Cratchit. A significant change is shown between the beginning and end of the novella in how Scrooge treats Cratchit, at the beginning he is stingy, cruel and cold-hearted towards him, but by the end he becomes kind, empathetic and warm.

This change is shown when comparing two quotes from their interactions: “a poor excuse for picking a man’s pocket every 25th of December.”(stave 1) and “I’ll raise b your salary, and endeavour to help your struggling family”(stave 5). The major difference between these two quotes is that it shows the dramatic change within Scrooge. He has become more kind and compassionate, something his old self would have laughed at. This is emphasised when considering how stingy with money Scrooge usually is, being “a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone”. Through showing the utter reversal of one of Scrooges key personality traits, it helps to ingrain the true and genuine change that he has gone through.

In addition to this change, another can be seen.

This is in how he becomes empathetic towards Cratchit’s conditions of living. He becomes aware of the poor state of the family and how they are dealing with what they have. This is highlighted by the use of an adjective “struggling”. It makes it sounds as though he gained more empathy for the family. By doing this is helps to solidify the change made and makes that clear to the reader.

Furthermore, this change is more apparent when considering that even for an annual holiday, Scrooge was still unhappy about letting his clerk off, and believed he shouldn’t be paid for the day.

“every 25th of December”, by not referring to it as Christmas as most would have he desensitises the holiday and the beliefs that come with it.

He ignores the meaning of Christmas, compassion and family, and sees it purely through the eyes of a businessman. This is a common theme portrayed by Dickens throughout the novella, the treatment of the



poor by the rich, AKA Scrooge and Cratchit. Victorian London was renowned for having massive problems with homelessness and a very small middle class. This resulted in the building of workhouses, large factory-esque buildings that took in all kinds of people and made them work in extremely dangerous and abusive conditions, for very little money or food. These were later abolished due to human-rights becoming prominent. A view shared by many of the rich, including Scrooge, was that the poor were a burden on society and the cause of their own misery, it was their responsibility to stay out of destitution and if they were to fall into the pit of poverty then they were to accept the consequences and go to the workhouses. As Scrooge says himself “if they would rather die, then they had better do so, and decrease the surplus population”.

Another way that Dickens presents the theme of redemption is through the possibility that Scrooge's new-found morality is not authentic. Dickens does this to show how Scrooge has not truly changed and was merely creating false promises upon fear. This could be interpreted as a representation of the two-faced aspect of charitable work in the Victorian era and how much of the money and resources that were to be donated to the poor were swindled and cheated by the rich. This is represented through the characters of Mr Smith and Mr Jones, the two are described as “portly gentlemen”, the ability to over-indulge in food was a representation of being rich in the Victorian era and serves as irony for the reader, since they are able to eat lots whilst the poor starve. It is highly likely that they would have swindled the food that was supposed to be for the poor in order to benefit themselves.

Dickens describes the ghost of Christmas future as “a solemn phantom, draped and hooded, like a mist along the ground.” by calling the spirit a phantom, a word that emphasises the blood-chilling aspect of a spirit more than say ghost or spectre, it places the reader in Scrooge's shoes so that they may gain a further understanding of the gravity of the ghost's presence.

In addition to this, Dickens uses the simile “like a mist” to convey/reinforce not only a more chilling atmosphere, but also a key point in what the ghost of Christmas future represents; that the future is unknown. As said by the ghost of Christmas present; “if things do not change, he will die”. By having the future not set in stone, it means that Scrooge could have proclaimed his new-found morality and simply have not done anything about it.

Within the extract, Scrooge is heavily concerned about the future when it affects him. Seeing the grave, Dickens says that he “cried, upon his knees”, this, when compared to other interactions foreshadowing death; for example the predicted death of tiny Tim (stave 3) or the discussion of his unknown death via the businessmen, shows that he is more concerned with himself rather than others.

This is repetition of a common theme used to portray Scrooge as a stingy, solitary miser who has little patience or empathy for others. This helps to perpetuate the stereotype of the rich during the Victorian era as selfish and cold, with no regard for the welfare and rights of the poor. This stereotype is largely true though, major cities like London had extremely high unemployment and homelessness rates, with the rich viewing the poor as nothing but an obstacle in the way of their economic prosperity.

An additional way Dickens portrays the theme of redemption is through the change in Scrooge's behaviour towards his family, or more specifically Fred; his nephew. Over the

course of the novella, a clear change can be seen in Scrooge's views on family. At the beginning of the novella he is impatient, cruel and cold, but by the end of the story he is actively seeking out family to be with them. This change is made more significant when analysing how isolation is one of Scrooge's key behaviours. Within town he is renowned for being "as solitary as an oyster". This attitude stays true even for family as when Fred visits him to ask for his attendance at a family dinner for Christmas, he impatiently sends him on his way, refusing to be with him for dinner, "a merry Christmas uncle!"..."bah humbug!". This cold shoulder that Scrooge displays could be explained through his childhood. In stave two Dickens reveals that Scrooge was neglected by his father and due to this would have to stay at school during Christmas time, "alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays".

In contrast to this, upon seeing his child-sister in a vision created by the ghost of Christmas past, he feels remorse over how he has treated Fred as he is the only remnants of his deceased sister, "Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind".

Despite this previous stinginess, a blatant difference can be seen in Scrooge at the end of the novella. He makes an effort to see and be friendly towards his remaining family. This can be seen in the quote "Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness!" Dickens uses the manipulation of speech and tone on the word wonderful to emphasize the euphoria within the atmosphere. By breaking up the word he makes it seem more light and joyous. In parallel to this, the line is also at the end of the interaction between the family and so acts as a sort of happy conclusion to the story of Scrooge's belonging.

Finally, a last way that Dickens portrayed redemption is through the representation of Victorian society through Scrooge. In my opinion, Dickens uses Scrooge to represent the values and journey he believes society should adopt. This use of a character as a mouthpiece can be seen in "an inspector calls" as well, in which JB Priestley uses the inspector to voice his opinion on socialism and how capitalism undercuts the working class people of our society. Similarly, Dickens uses the Cratchit family to voice what he believes to be the true meanings of Christmas. He pairs their innocence and the innocence of tiny Tim with their unwavering morals in the face of hardship to portray how society should embrace Christmas in its fullness.

In addition, Scrooge's journey can be seen as a moral enlightenment in the ways of compassion and togetherness. He goes from completely rejecting charity workers and asking "are there no prisons" to saying "I'll raise your salary" to his clerk who he previously treated horribly. This helps the reader to empathise with those less fortunate and reconsider the way in which they treat them. By doing this Dickens is helping to spread morality and make us question our views on the treatment of the poor.

In conclusion, in my opinion, Dickens uses Scrooge's journey of redemption as a prop to show us how to treat society better and how to review and question our treatment of our neighbours.

By LP