
A detailed look at the role of emotions in "A Christmas Carol"

"I wear the chain I forged in life... I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will, I wear it." Jacob Marley's words allude to the harrowing impact that emotions such as remorse have on the human psyche, as he is forever bound to the Earth by the chain formed from his own avarice. Charles Dickens' novella 'A Christmas Carol', silhouetted against the backdrop of Victorian England, a time period rife with greed and inequality amongst the differing social classes, not only explores the impact of remorse, but also a plethora of other emotions. As the intricacies of the plot unfold, the essential tensions of the text are unveiled through the emotional entanglement of grief and loneliness. In spite of its emotional intensity, however, 'A Christmas Carol' is, at its core, an allegory for how joy is the emotion which supersedes all others.

The novella echoes the impact that grief has on catalysing the amelioration of human morality. Dickens utilises the interactions between Ebenezer Scrooge and Belle as the vehicle through which he expresses such a belief in tandem with exploring the ramifications of leading a miserly life. Indeed, the breakdown of Belle and Scrooge's relationship cautions the reader that an all-consuming lust for money can warp an individual to the point that it creates psychological rifts between themselves and those to whom they should be closest. Scrooge's grief from his realisation of having lost Belle to "another idol [which] has displaced [her]" is nonetheless one of the catalysts that allowed him to undergo a metamorphosis from a man with a "tight-fisted hand at the grindstone" to someone who is jovial and generous. The aftermath of the deterioration of Scrooge and Belle's relationship shows how the impact of the resulting grief can result in significant improvement in attempting to rectify wrongdoings. Furthermore, the Ghost of Christmas Present incites "penitence and grief" on the part of Scrooge, bringing forth the realisation of what an embittered, miserly man he has become. Such grief impacted Scrooge to the degree that he becomes intrinsically driven to make changes to his lifestyle.

It is not only the influence of grief that is explored through the novella; Dickens goes beyond mere narrative to give valuable insights into the power of loneliness. As a man who is "solitary as an oyster", the loneliness which permeates several facets of Scrooge's life shows the impact that isolation has on the human spirit, as Scrooge devolves to become no more than a "covetous old sinner" as a result of his tendency to be deliberately emotionally distant to those who surround him. A personification of memory, the Ghost of Christmas Past presents Scrooge with visions of the early onset of his seclusion, as "a solitary child, neglected by his friends" preferring the company of books to the company of humans in his boyhood; such imagery underscores the impact of loneliness in the long-term. Scrooge, emphatically "quite alone in the world" well into adulthood, is eventually confronted by the notion of remaining unremembered and unmourned upon his passing, thereby serving to instil fear within the reader of how

loneliness instigated by isolation can have deleterious implications even beyond the grave.

Loneliness is not the sole emotion poignantly painted through the narrative, as remorse, too, is suggested to have equal if not greater impact on the human spirit. The spectre of Jacob Marley, having “no rest [and] no peace”, is plagued by the repentance which beleaguers him to the degree that he is eternally trapped in the physical plane of existence. It is through Marley’s characterisation as being inundated by the “incessant torture of remorse” that Dickens explicates how grievance can take precedence over one’s wellbeing and the degree to which it can potentially escalate. Scrooge eventuates to be as regretful as Marley upon seeing the visions of the enigmatic Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The Ghost not only instils fear with its silence, but also by its symbolism of a march of time towards an undeniably fixed end. As a 19th century audience fixated with the idea of death and the afterlife, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come would further perturb the reader with its pessimistic predictions of the future. In presenting Scrooge with the vision of “a dark empty house, with not a man, a woman or a child” accompanying him as he passes away, Scrooge’s remorse consumes him and makes him realise that “men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends”, disturbing the reader through the implication that the decisions that they make in the present may also follow them to the grave. It cannot be said that exclusively negative emotions such as remorse are evocatively explored through ‘A Christmas Carol’, as what truly lies at the heart of the book is the overriding influence of joy.

Charles Dickens’ ‘A Christmas Carol’ is, indeed, an allegory for the impact emotions may have on human wellbeing. Through the emotional undercurrents that lie at the core of the novella, Dickens confronts the reader with the notion that upper class society may not be able to change their morally vacuous ways until they feel remorse for the ramifications of their actions, or lack thereof. In the words of Jacob Marley, “No space of regret can make amends for one life’s opportunity misused.”