

The Impact of Dickens' "Christmas Carol" on Society

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A Christmas Carol was written in 1843, and it touched readers' hearts then and continues to do so today, although now it is not just through the written word but through stage and film adaptations, audio versions via CD and radio. Many people know the story of how a miserable man – Scrooge – who did not have any feelings of humanity or kindness towards others was shown the error of his ways by the Ghosts of Christmas and by the end of the story not only is filled with the spirit of Christmas Goodwill but became a better human being altogether.

First of all let's start with a Trivial pursuit question! How many ghosts are there in A Christmas Carol? Most people answer three: The Ghosts of Christmas past, Christmas present and Christmas future/yet to come. However the 'official' answer in quizzes is four – including Marley of course. But when Marley leaves and Scrooge looks out of the window he sees many 'spectres' outside. And don't forget the ghostly hearse going up the stairs as Scrooge enters his house!

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Although nowadays we think of a 'carol' as being a Christmas song, the definition of the word is a song of joy or praise. So the title A Christmas Carol must signify a joyful song about Christmas or the Christmas ideal. By the end of the story this certainly becomes true. The 'Carol' imagery is carried on throughout the story, with staves used instead of chapter headings. This was definitely an interesting/unusual literary device for the time. [Something that Dickens' friend Wilkie Collins – and other authors in other ways – would later do in a different way by laying out one of his novels like a play in 'Acts'] But almost revolutionary for an author like Dickens to do this in 1843.

Let's look at the three Christmas Ghosts a little more closely:

- The Ghost of Christmas Past

Sounds somewhat like a candle which at the end their 'trip' together Scrooge snuffs out. It was a Christmas custom to light a candle on Christmas eve. This Spirit shows the reader the reason for Scrooge's actions but does not excuse him

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- The Ghost of Christmas Present

A representation of Father Christmas*. Victorian Father Christmases were dressed in any colour robes. This ghost shows Scrooge what he is missing by his actions but also offers a warning in the shape of the two children: Ignorance and Want Dickens' warning about the effects of the squalid conditions of the Industrial Revolution and exploitation of labour could have on the very poor

- The Ghost of Christmas Future

An awful warning and also reminiscent of Old Father Time. And in fact he foretells Scrooge's unmourned and lonely death unless he mends his ways.