

- 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.

There are a lot of Dickens' autobiographical details in the story. Because the young Dickens experienced so much hardship and poverty during his early life, his writing about social inequalities is often based on his own past. It could be that the Cratchit's house is modelled on the small house at 16 Bayham Street in Camden Town where Dickens lived at the age of ten and the six Cratchit children mirror Dickens' brothers and sisters – Tiny Tim may be based on Dickens' youngest, poorly brother who was known as Tiny Fred'. Dickens was a pupil at Wellington House Academy, Hampstead Road, London which may be the model for the school Scrooge went to. It is set in

a little market-town . . . with the bridge, its church, and winding river.

Johnson in *About 'A Christmas Carol'* (Dickensian 1931) identifies this description as referring to Strood, Rochester, and the river Medway, where Dickens spent part of his childhood. Johnson also noted that Dickens erased the word castle from the original manuscript, an apparent reference to Rochester Castle. [Michael Patrick Hearn, *The Annotated Christmas Carol*, 88] Like Scrooge, Dickens had a sister called Fan[ny]

The women in *A Christmas Carol* are unusual for Dickens, who often had a 'silly' woman in his novels who probably represented his mother, Elizabeth Dickens. Think of Mrs Nickleby, Dora Copperfield, Bleak House etc although these are often balanced by a strong woman like Agnes Copperfield, Betsy Trotwood etc. But in *A Christmas Carol* the women are quite pro-active: Fan, Belle, Mrs Cratchit all speak up for themselves. Even the laundress and the cleaning women have a certain something! Victorian readers would have picked up 'hints' about the 'interesting condition' of Mrs Fred:

'Scrooge's niece was not one of the blind man's buff party, but was made comfortable with a large chair and a footstool' and 'Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started. Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he wouldn't have done it, on any account.'

The children in *A Christmas Carol* are more typical of the 'Dickens' type of child', although like Rose in *Oliver Twist*, Tiny Tim does not die. However Tim is like many 'too good to be true' children in Dickens novels who do usually die: Paul Dombey, Little Nell. Tim is rather like Oliver Twist in that he seems to have an almost angelic streak. Dickens is playing up to the Victorian 'ideal' that children were born good or bad, and Tim again like Oliver Twist and Paul Dombey seems to have been born able to spout words of pious wisdom!

Bear with me here, because I am going to talk about another little quirk of mine: Evidence of Time Travel in the story! The chronology of the story does not 'work' if we try to be sensible! Scrooge and Marley don't part until 2 o'clock on Christmas morning and the first Ghost is not 'due' until one o'clock the next day [Boxing Day], the second at one o'clock on the 27th and the third at midnight on the 28th. Scrooge does say

'Couldn't I take 'em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?' hinted Scrooge

However Scrooge awakens at two o'clock and then at all the other times and finally awakes on Christmas morning, crying

'It's Christmas Day!' said Scrooge to himself. 'I haven't missed it! The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like.'

Another 'hint' for time travel: When the Ghost of Christmas past takes Scrooge to see himself as a child at school we read:

The panels shrunk, the windows cracked; fragments of plaster fell

This is the sort of 'effect' which suggests the image of 'unbuilding' of the apartment which surrounds Scrooge, taking it back in time in fact. This effect has been used in other novels and films, particularly by H. G. Wells in *The Time Machine* (1895) and in film versions of that book.