Christmas Carol Essay, Research Paper

"A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, is a story that is rich in

metaphors that ultimately questions the morals and ethics of the author?s

society during the time of hislife, the industrial revolutionized society. In

the story, the main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, is a greedy, rich accountant

who is visited by his old business partner ghost, Jacob Marley. Marley’s ghost

tells Scrooge that he may face a penalty of becoming a lost soul if he continues

to value money more than anything else in his life. He also foretells that

Scrooge will be visited by three other ghosts that will give him the chance to

redeem himself, and he can break an iron chain of greed that he has woven. Each

time a ghost visits Scrooge, he will become more aware of the failures of the

society he lives in. The ghosts will also let Scrooge see his contributions to

those failures. As Dickens writes the story of the three visits, we are able to

out more about Scrooge?s inner self-character. We learn this about him as he

finds out about his own fellow man and his community. The crux of the story is

alluded to in the ingenious metaphors Dickens creeates to illustrate his own

reflection on Nineteenth Century society. In the beginning of the story, Scrooge

and his assistant Bob Cratchit are working at Scrooge’s counting house on a very

cold night, Christmas Eve. Scrooge?s offices are nearly freezing, because of

the dreadful weather. They depend on using coal to keep warm. Scrooge is

satisfied with a very small fire that he barely keeps going. More than that he

thinks is unnecessary warmth. On the other hand, Bob Cratchit’s fire is nothing

but one dying morsel of coal. "Scrooge had a very small fire, but his

clerk’s fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal." The

irony in only using a small piece of coal is that they both had two entirely

different reasons for not using more coal. Bob Cratchit is Scrooge?s

impoverished assistant, who can’t afford to buy more coal to kindle up warmth in

his office. If he had enough money to improve his working condition, he would.

On the other hand, Scrooge had more than enough money to buy coal for his office

and Bob’s. He didn’t find that necessary. Dickens makes reference to this as he

shows how Scrooge doesn’t find it necessary to build up more warmth in his

office, or even to offer to keep his assistant’s office warm, when he writes

"But he (Bob Cratchit) couldn’t replenish it (the fire), for Scrooge kept

the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the

shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part."

The situation is much deeper than it appears. Dickens has not only created a

spiteful and stingy character, but he creates a Scrooge whose very body is cold.

The fact that Scrooge doesn’t mind that his office is cold reveals that he is

both physically and mentally a cold person. Throughout literature the use of hot

and cold plays as two basic metaphors for love and hate: loneliness. Scrooge

doesn’t need warmth as a result of being a malevolent and bitter person. He

doesn’t have family or friends to share his love and heart with, so he developed

into a person who was numb to his own warm feelings. The only emotions that are

left are the bitter ones he has for his society. Dickens uses Marley’s chains as

a metaphor as well. We should pay attention to what Marley and Scrooge were

known for. Scrooge and Marley were both concerned about their money more than

anything else that Dickens writes about. The two were so concerned about earning

money, that the two didn’t care how they got it. Each of them wanted to be

alone. The chains that were "forged in life" by Marley were chains of

guilt and sin. These chains were fashioned while Marley made money at other

people’s expenses, and were linked out of his lack of concern for what he did in

life. Marley, like Scrooge, knew well of the poverty most people suffered. Their

sins were that they showed no sympathy for unfortunate people. They both hid

their sympathy in order to repress their guilt. Dickens writes more about

Marley’s greed when he describes Marley. "His body transparent: so that

Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two

buttons on his coat behind." "Scrooge had often heard it said that

Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now." And

"the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin,

which wrapper he had not observed before?" Dickens has illustrated a

phantom who one can see right through, has nothing let in his body, and needs a

handkerchief to keep his jaw from dropping "down upon his breast!"

When examining the different elements that made up Marley’s Ghost, it becomes

clear Dickens was amplified how greedy Marley really was. The bandage that

Marley must keep wrapped around his head is the first connection to greed. As a

part of his punishment, Marley needs the bandage wrapped around his head or his

mouth will drop to his chest. It symbolizes how Marley consumed things without

stopping, everything that entered his possession. Having no bowels is a way of

saying that nothing left Marley’s possession. Dickens got across that Marley let

everything in, but gavenothing. In addition to Scrooge being cold both

physically and mentally, there is the matter of fog that seems to pursue him

like the rats that followed the Pied Piper of Hamlin. Wherever Scrooge goes,

Dickens manages to strengthen his description of Scrooge as being surrounded

with a gathering of deep, endless fog. This is more than a descriptive tool, but

also a deep metaphor that sums up what’s wrong with Scrooge. The fog serves as a

wall for the character. It is not only a blinding vapor, but also a blanket that

shelters him from other people. It keeps him separate and remote from the rest

of the world he travels about day to day. Ultimately, Scrooge is charged with

creating the fog. He keeps himself away from the world, even though the world

reaches out him. The fog isolates him from the warmth of human compassion, from

himself and others around him. This is evident when Dickens writes,

"Foggier yet, and colder! Piercing, searching, biting cold?. Even when

Scrooge was approached by Christmas carolers, ?he seized the ruler with such

energy of action, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog

and even more congenial frost." In this sense, Dickens used the fog to act

as a door that slammed after the singer left. It covered everything around

Scrooge’s office including the keyhole. It isolated Scrooge from the outside

world, and kept him in the place he loved most, his office. "Meanwhile the

fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about with flaring links,

proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on

their way." "All he could make out was, that was still very foggy and

extremely cold, and that there was no noise of people running to and fro, and

making great stir, as there unquestionably would have been if night had beaten

off bright day, and taken possession of the world." Again Dickens used fog

and cold to detach people from Scrooge. Fog was the separation, and cold the

disposition in which it isolated Scrooge. Another metaphor Dickens uses is the

church bell. "The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was

always peeping slily down at Scrooge out of a gothic window in the wall, became

visible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous

vibrations afterwards?" The ancient tower of the church bell is what

Dickens used to embody the church and its values. The fact that it is a tall

tower, reaching into the clouds suggests that it has some kind of spiritual

significance. Dickens described the tower as "always peeping slily down at

Scrooge." Perhaps this is because Scrooge was doing something very wrong by

shutting off his connection to the outside world, and the church knew it. It

seems to stand in back of Scrooge, "peeping slily" at his continuous

seclusion. The bells that "struck the hours and quarters in the clouds,

with tremulous vibrations?" serves as a reminder for Scrooge. It is

reminding him that everything is being observed. Dickens also uses light and

darkness as a creative tool when he talks about the ghosts, and the atmosphere

of the story. Like fog and frost, darkness is also found everywhere Scrooge is.

Darkness in literature is every selfish man?s personal cloud. It shadows them

from other people who see them, and it keeps their sight limited. The darkness

for these characters is like a hallway that has no entrances. The only exit they

use is one that leads to solitude. Darkness also interrupts the memories Scrooge

doesn’t want to think about, memories that Scrooge has "chained up?, and

left in the deepest and darkest parts of his mind. The memories became so dark

for Scrooge that he had decided to hide everything that had once been good in

his life to numb his emotions and interest in humanity. Light, on the other

hand, is most detectable when Dickens writes about the Ghost of Christmas Past.

"Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed

were drawn." The light that Dickens writes about is springing from the

Ghost’s head. The Ghost of Christmas Past serves as a heart-felt guide to his

memories, and the light represents Scrooge’s emotions to what he was feeling

about his well-suppressed memories. Scrooge prefers to be left in the dark,

rather than be exposed to light. This is evident when he attempted to repress

his recollection of the past, especially the feelings of his past. "Scrooge

could not have told anybody why, if anybody could have asked him; but he had a

special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; and begged him to be covered."

The Ghost of Christmas Past had a hidden significance also. With memory

uncapped, Scrooge is taken to his past where his joy, pain, and loneliness are

all rejoiced. The Ghost takes him to his celebrations, friendships, and even his

love affair. It’s from seeing his past that Scrooge becomes in touch with inner

emotions that he had as a child and young adult. It’s with these emotions that

Scrooge’s present insensitivity is smothered, and Scrooge feels the first basic

human joy in a long time. In the end, Dickens reflects his views on what his

society became to the reader through his rich command of language, and unique

technique of bringing metaphors to life. Through his performance in writing

skills he was able to tell us the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, and his redemption.

Scrooge is reborn after his encounters with four ghosts who showed him how to

remember, recognize, and live with intuition. The three Ghosts of Christmas

Past, Present, and Future showed Scrooge how to remember the good things in his

life, cherish and share what he has, and lastly live humbly with the intent with

being remembered as a good person. I think that Dickens was trying to tell us,

and the people of his time especially, that if we live in the past, present and

future, and keep those three factors alive, than we can be reborn just like

Scrooge was.