

A Christmas Carol: A Coming of Age experience in the older generation

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A Christmas Carol, published by Charles Dickens in 1843, is a novella that focuses on the main protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, and his emotional journey from his bitter and cruel persona who rejects any ideas of generosity to a reformed character who learns the meaning of social responsibility and the importance of charity and helping the less fortunate. Through Scrooge's inward journey, fueled by the visitation of four ghosts, Dickens encapsulates a 'coming of age' experience in a person of the elder generation.

The novella opens with Scrooge being depicted as an infamous frugal miser who loathes the festivities of Christmas and the charitable and compassionate nature of the season. He believes that anyone, 'who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.' This coldhearted attitude Scrooge possesses is inflicted upon many members of society including his work colleague, Bob Cratchit, a struggling member of the Victorian lower class, who suffers the most from Scrooge's ill treatment through the miserable working conditions he is forced to stay in and as another victim to the close-fisted, selfish nature of his employer.

Scrooge's journey begins on Christmas eve after a foreboding warning from the apparition of his old working partner, Jacob Marley, who encourages the necessity of a change in Scrooge's ways and warns him of the eternal consequences of his actions, showing him the 'chains' that weigh him down after death that represents the immoral and callous actions he engaged with throughout the life. Marley warns Scrooge that three ghosts are going to haunt his sleep tonight to save him from a similar fate.

The first appearance is the ghost of Christmas past who escorts Scrooge on a journey through his youth to shed light on how his actions and priority of lust for money over love resulted in his inability to find love with childhood sweetheart, Belle. This evokes the first glimpse of emotion in Scrooge and potential for change. The ghost of Christmas present illuminates to Scrooge the harsh reality of the social conditions of the people he neglects the most, the Cratchit family. It is at this stage in the novel Scrooge meets Tiny Tim, Bob's son who is crippled, whose courage and positive attitude despite his circumstances has a profound effect on Scrooge. Scrooge is also offered a brutal outlook into the severe poverty and bleak existence through the appearance of two starving children 'Ignorance' and 'Want'. The last ghost of Christmas yet to come gives Scrooge the terrifying insight to a world after his death and the relief people feel that his actions cannot affect them any longer. It is at this point in the novel that Scrooge vows to change if the spirit can change his fate and offer him a second chance to become a better person.

Scrooge awakens on Christmas morning a completely reformed character after his unearthly experiences throughout the night. His attitude towards life and the people around him has been transformed through his newfound festive spirit. Scrooge's promise to be a better member of society and use his monetary wealth to other people's advantage is illustrated beyond his actions on

Christmas day as his vow to 'honor Christmas in his heart' providing charity and service to the poor and treating those around him, including Tiny Tim and the rest of the Cratchit family, with humility and kindness.

Charles Dickens, born in Portsmouth in 1812, is an author whose famous coming of age novels such as *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* can be seen to draw on his own experiences of Victorian poverty as the main protagonists are subjected to the harsh reality of the prevailing circumstances the contemporary lower class were faced with such as workhouses and deprivation. However, whilst *A Christmas Carol* addresses these aspects of Victorian society, Dickens uses them as a device to enhance the importance of Scrooge's coming of age journey as his eventual self-discovery results in the improvement of the suffering society around him, making his 'coming of age' even more profound.

A Christmas Carol demonstrates the theme of coming of age diversely and uniquely as it shows that personal journeys of education and emotional growth are not limited to the younger generation, as the genre of bildungsroman primarily focus on the transition from childhood to adulthood. Scrooge's inward journey of self-reflection and improvement and his significant transformation due to this shows that he embarks on a coming of age experience in later life.