

AQA English Literature GCSE

A Christmas Carol: Character Profile

The Ghosts



The Ghost of Christmas Past

Character Summary

The Ghost of Christmas Past is the first of the three Spirits which appear to Scrooge. The Ghost takes him to observe various scenes from his past, which allows the reader to **empathise** with Scrooge. This is because Dickens often adopts a **sympathetic tone** during the stave, causing the reader to understand **how Scrooge's past has shaped his character in the present**.

Furthermore, Dickens illustrates that Scrooge is capable of change, as he did not always display a **misanthropic attitude**. This gives the reader the **hope** that Scrooge can return back to his previous mindset. Dickens alludes to his transformation by revealing that the Spirit's visit has a **"softening influence"** on Scrooge, driving the narrative forward towards his redemption.



https://muppet.fandom.com/wiki/The_Ghost_of_Christmas_Past

Appearance

Dickens emphasises the status of the Spirit through its **appearance** and **mannerisms**. It wears a tunic **"of purest white"** which emphasises its purity and innocence. This gives the Spirit an impression of **moral authority** which highlights its **didactic purpose** within the text. The white tunic also alludes to the **biblical image** of Jesus who wears white and acts as a moral compass for Christians, transmitting the Christian message of goodness to humanity. The Spirit acts as a reassuring force for Scrooge as its voice was **"soft and gentle"**. Its gentle description and calm demeanour contrasts to the suffering of Marley, the first Ghost the reader is introduced to.

It is also interesting to note that Dickens describes the Ghost using **contradictions**, detailing that it looked **"like a child"** but also **"like an old man"**. He continues with **juxtaposing ideas** – the Ghost holds **"fresh green holly"**, a symbol of winter, but has a dress trimmed with **"summer flowers"**. These **paradoxical descriptions** illustrate the impossibility of the Spirits existence, emphasising the supernatural theme. Alternatively, it could be argued that the Spirit encompasses all of Scrooge's past, from his youth to his old age, and so this is reflected in its appearance.

In addition, the **"bright clear jet of light"** that the Spirit emits develops the **motif of light** which runs throughout the text. Here, it **symbolises enlightenment** and **Christmas spirit**. This ultimately presents the Ghost as a positive and comforting influence, despite the fact that a reader might expect the Spirits to be sinister due to the **gothic genre**.



Purpose

It can certainly be argued that the role of the Ghost is to **guide** Scrooge towards his redemption by choosing to take him to **significant** and **provocative** moments from his past. Dickens writes that the Spirit **“waved its hand”** while it said **“Let us see another Christmas”**, suggesting that it is indeed in control of the events Scrooge witnesses and holds a God-like power.

The Spirit prompts Scrooge to reflect on his actions by using **deliberately leading comments**. For example, after Fezziwig's party, it mocks Scrooge's delight, calling the party **“a small matter...to make these silly folks so full of gratitude”**. This portrays the Spirit as **wise**, because it is evident that this comment was used to make Scrooge realise the error of his ways. Ultimately, this causes Scrooge to reflect on his actions, pushing him towards his eventual redemption.

Power Dynamic

It is interesting to note that Dickens explores the **power dynamic** between Scrooge and the three Spirits – presenting an **evolution of this relationship** as the novella progresses.

- Scrooge begins by **challenging the authority** of the Ghost of Christmas Past. He questions **“what business”** brought the Spirit to him and continues this defiance by claiming that **“a night of unbroken rest”** would have been more beneficial for him.
- When the Spirit takes him to see Belle, Scrooge becomes pained, commanding the Spirit to **“Show (him) no more!”**. The Spirit **retains its power** however as Dickens writes that **“the relentless Ghost pinioned him in both his arms and forced him to observe what happened next”**.



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- This tension builds until the end of the stave, where Scrooge **releases his frustrations** in a physical struggle with the Spirit. Although, Dickens **interrupts the narrative** with the narrators voice, who wonders **“if that can be called a struggle”** because the Ghost showed **“no visible resistance”**. This firmly places the Ghost in a powerful position **above** Scrooge, despite his efforts to challenge its authority.

- During the struggle, Scrooge attempts to put out the light that the Spirit emitted, perhaps because he was unable to handle the **truth** and **hope** that it symbolised. This implies that while Scrooge has begun to change, his journey is far from complete. Furthermore, Dickens reveals that Scrooge **“could not hide the light”**, emphasising the power of **reflection** and **self-discovery**.



Key Quotes

- “fell upon the heart of Scrooge with a softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears”

This illustrates to the reader that Scrooge’s past had a significant impact on him, emphasising the importance of reflection. The phrase “*a freer passage to his tears*” implies that his tears were previously stopped from flowing. It can be speculated that due to a lack of reflection Scrooge was experiencing an **emotional block** of sorts. Perhaps this contributed to his **miserly and apathetic personality**, presenting the idea that if Scrooge had reflected on his past he may have been a very different individual.

The Ghost of Christmas Present

Character Summary

The Ghost of Christmas Present is often seen as the **personification** of Christmas spirit, a representation which is furthered by the scenes he chooses to show Scrooge. The Spirit takes Scrooge to see the different ways Christmas is celebrated, from the humble Cratchit celebration to the lively party at Fred’s house. It can therefore be said that the Spirit’s purpose is to highlight the importance of Christmas spirit to Scrooge. This is illustrated when Dickens uses the **rule of three** to describe the Spirit, outlining that it had a “*kind, generous, hearty nature*”. Here, Dickens explores the values that are central to the idea of Christmas spirit, emphasising the **moral** and **positive** aspects in addition to religious themes.



https://muppet.fandom.com/wiki/The_Ghost_of_Christmas_Present

It is interesting to note that Scrooge makes a connection between the Spirit and God, claiming that ‘**blue laws**’ were observed in the Spirit’s “*name, or at least in that of (its) family*” (see Context: Religion and Christmas’). This presents the Spirit as having the same **moral authority** as the Ghost of Christmas Past, highlighting its own **didactic purpose**.



Appearance

The Spirit is described as a **“jolly Giant”** who was wearing a **“green robe”** and had a **“holly wreath”** on its head, drawing on traditional ideas of Father Christmas. This furthers the idea that the Ghost is meant to represent the Christmas spirit.

Dickens develops this concept of Christmas by using a **semantic field** of generosity, describing the Spirit’s hair to be as **“free as its genial face”** and continuing by describing its **“open hand”** and **“unconstrained demeanour”**. These adjectives **directly contrast** the list Dickens uses in the opening stave where he describes Scrooge as a **“squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner”**. This highlights how generosity is a key part of Christmas spirit, implying that Scrooge needs to develop this trait in order to fully reform.

It is also interesting to note that Dickens gives the Spirit a **“glowing torch”** which was **“not unlike Plenty’s horn”**. This continues the **motif of light** that was also illustrated by the Ghost of Christmas Past, presenting **light as symbolic of positivity** and **Christmas spirit**. Furthermore, **“Plenty’s horn”**, also referred to as ‘cornucopia’, is a symbol of **abundance** in Greek and Roman mythology.

Dickens describes the Ghost as carrying an **“antique scabbard”** which had **“no sword in it”** and was **“eaten up with rust”**, suggesting it had not been used for a long time. This is significant as it shows the reader that there is no place for conflict during the festive time, instead appearing as a **symbol of peace**. The fact that the scabbard is present but empty suggests that while conflict may have existed it should be **removed and forgotten**. This ultimately presents Christmas as a time for love and happiness, a message that the Spirit foregrounds during his time with Scrooge.

Purpose

The Ghost of Christmas Present is arguably used as a **mouthpiece** for Dickens’ views on social reform as this is a theme which is heavily explored during the stave. Therefore, while its purpose with regards to the plot is to guide Scrooge towards his redemption, it **transcends this role** in order to present a **social commentary** to readers.

The Spirit is introduced to the reader as sitting on a **“kind of throne”** made of an excessive amount of food. This immediately acts as a **challenge** to the **Malthusian view** that there are not enough resources available to go around, instead highlighting that there is an abundance of supplies. The Spirit is therefore presented as **aware of social issues** – a portrayal which continues throughout the stave.

This is most notably seen when Scrooge questions the Spirit about the fate of Tiny Tim, to which the Ghost replies by mocking Scrooge’s words about the **“surplus population”**. He continues with a lengthy and somewhat **vexed discourse** about social injustice, challenging Scrooge on why he believed he had the authority to **“decide what men shall live”** and **“what men shall die”**. It could be argued that Dickens’ own frustration towards this attitude is revealed through the Spirit’s speech, perhaps suggesting



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that his exasperation is also **directed at readers**. Therefore, it could be said that Dickens uses the Spirit as a tool to convey his own ideas about **social reform**.

This is reinforced by the two children, Ignorance and Want, who appear under the Spirit's robe. The Spirit's tone becomes more **"sorrowful"** highlighting his distress at their presence. This is furthered when he **laments** **"Oh Man! Look here. Look, look down here"**. Dickens uses **vocative diacope** (a type of repetition where a word is repeated for emphasis) to develop his despair. This heightens the issue of poverty in society, presenting it as a pressing concern which readers shouldn't ignore, ultimately prompting them to **actively** take part in **social reform**.

Power Dynamic

- Scrooge moves away from his defiant attitude with the Ghost of Christmas Past. His relationship with the Ghost of Christmas Present takes on an entirely **different dynamic**, highlighting that he has started to change.
- When the Spirit first appears, he tells Scrooge to come into the room. Dickens writes that Scrooge **"obeyed"**, highlighting his strangely **submissive** attitude.
- This is made more apparent by the Ghost's dominating behaviour. The first phrase he uses is the **imperative**, **"Come in!"** which he follows with the command **"Look upon me!"**. The use of **exclamations** and **imperative commands** allows the Spirit to assert his dominance. While this behaviour does **mirror the authority** of the first Spirit, this Ghost appears more powerful, as Scrooge obeys his commands rather than challenging them.
- The Ghost uses this power to teach and guide Scrooge towards his reformation. This is seen when it mocks Scrooge's earlier words about the **"surplus population"**, causing him to see the error of his ways. This drives him forward towards his redemption and so pushes the narrative along.
- Dickens highlights the effect that the Spirit has on Scrooge by describing his reaction to its message. After the lengthy discourse about social reform, Dickens writes that Scrooge was **"bent before the Ghost's rebuke"** and began **"trembling"** **exemplifying his regret**. This consequently reveals that Scrooge is becoming more **self-aware** and **socially conscience**, highlighting the **power** and **influence** of the Spirit.

Key Quotes

- **"Sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch"**
Sprinkling incense was a way of making disagreements vanish and spreading **good spirits** in the Victorian times. This Ghost emphasises that it is working to spread positive spirits to the **"to a poor one most"** because they have a greater need. This presents the Ghost as aware of social issues and as a force which **actively endeavours** to do good. It could be argued that the Spirit acts as an



example to readers particularly because it uses incense to repair relationships. This presents the idea that readers too can **emulate the Spirit's behaviour**, pushing them towards social reform.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come

Character Summary

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come is the last Ghost that visits Scrooge and is very different from its predecessors. It approaches Scrooge **“slowly, gravely, silently”**. This **triple adverb** immediately changes the tone of the narrative, introducing an **ominous** and **sombre** quality to the stave. This effect is heightened by the fact that the Spirit is a **personification of death** – its appearance mirrors classical depictions of the ‘Grim Reaper’.



https://muppet.fandom.com/wiki/The_Ghost_of_Christmas_Yet_to_Come

The Phantom is used by Dickens to visibly exemplify the idea of **accountability** and the fact that **actions have consequences**, both of which are themes which run throughout the novella. By showing Scrooge his own death the Spirit gives him a final push towards **complete redemption**, one which causes him to fall **“upon his knees”** and desperately hold his hands up in **“a last prayer”**.

Appearance

The Spirit is described as wearing a **“deep black garment”**; its presence seemed to **“scatter gloom”** and its figure was surrounded by **“darkness”**. Here, Dickens uses a **semantic field of blackness**, which contrasts the previous two Spirits as they were both associated with **symbols of light**. This is interesting, as the motif of light was used to represent positivity and Christmas spirit. Therefore, the **absence of light** suggests that Scrooge’s future will be **bleak** and **unpromising**, presenting the idea that he needs to repent and exhibit Christmas spirit in order to prevent these consequences.

Dickens also describes how the Ghost’s clothes **“concealed its head, its face, its form”** and outlines the **“mysterious presence”** it has. This introduces the idea of **anonymity**, perhaps to allude to the **uncertain** and **indefinite** nature of the future. It is also interesting to note that instead of speaking the Spirit **“pointed onward with its hand”**. This is the only interaction Scrooge has with the Spirit which is significant as its hand may represent the **hand of time**. This emphasises



both the **importance** and **power** of time, presenting the idea that Scrooge's amoral actions will have repercussions.

Purpose

The purpose of this Spirit is to show Scrooge the **dark consequences** of his actions. The Ghost illustrates to Scrooge what his fate will be if he does not use this opportunity to **repent**.

Dickens uses **prolepsis** (a flash forward) to show Scrooge the reactions of various people in the event of his death. This is a **dramatic technique**, as it could be argued that the reader is equally as interested and affected by Scrooge's future, due to the connection they have built with his character.

Nobody seems negatively affected by Scrooge's death which emphasises the messages the Spirits are trying to relay to him.

- The charwoman, one of the characters that Scrooge watches in the pawn shop, says that **"he frightened everyone away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead, ha, ha!"**. This essentially means that the isolated lifestyle Scrooge chose to lead left him similarly isolated in his death. As a result his belongings could be taken by whoever wanted them, rather than being protected by those who cared for him. The charwoman finishes this assertion with a laugh, revealing that people are not just indifferent to Scrooge's death but are happy about it as they can finally profit from his wealth.
- Dickens reinforces this through the character of Caroline. Her family owed Scrooge money, but following his death they can **"sleep with light hearts"**, highlighting the happiness and relief that followed his death.



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This stave illustrates the importance of **social responsibility** as if Scrooge had been nicer to those around him he would have been looked after and cared for in death.

Power Dynamic

- Dickens reveals that Scrooge **"feared the silent shape"** when referencing his relationship with the Phantom – the last time he felt fear was when Marley's Ghost left him with a **"terrible sensation"**. This is significant as by **drawing parallels** to Scrooge's old personality the reader is able to see and appreciate how much he has changed.
- The fear that Scrooge feels, in addition to the Spirits silence, forces him to become more forthcoming in the final stave. This prompts Scrooge to **actively take control** of his redemption. The reader witnesses this through Scrooge's willingness to go with the Spirit. He says that he is **"prepared to bear"** the Spirit's company and will do it with a **"thankful"**



heart". This highlights how he is more open to the idea of redemption, signifying his change.

- Scrooge has a struggle with this Spirit, similar to his fight with the Ghost of Christmas Past. However, this time Scrooge managed to **"detain"** the Spirit because he was **"strong in his entreaty"**. Unlike the past, which is unchanging, Scrooge can hold his ground against the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. This is perhaps to symbolise the fact that Scrooge can **control his future** if his will is strong enough, **illustrating his approaching transformation**.
- However, Dickens reveals that despite Scrooge's strength the Spirit was **"stronger yet"** and **"repulsed Scrooge"**. This assertion ensures that the Spirits keep their **powerful status** above Scrooge. Furthermore, it highlights that while Scrooge has some control over his future he **cannot escape his eventual death**. Ultimately, this emphasises that it is important to lead a good life and leave a lasting legacy, as death is inescapable.

Key Quotes

- **"shrouded in a deep black garment"**
The use of **imagery** in this phrase resonates with both Victorian (contemporary) and modern-day readers, who likely find the image similar to that of the **Grim Reaper** - a widely recognised **symbol of death**. The black colour of the garment is further described as being **"deep"**, developing the Phantom's solemn presence.
- **"Read upon the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE"**
The **adjective** **"neglected"** is used both during the life of Scrooge as well as his death. Therefore, the reader is able to see the unchanging timeline of Scrooge's life. The way that Scrooge lived in life is how he died, a type of **poetic justice** (irony, getting what is deserved).
- **"Hear me! I am not the man I was"**
A fear of the future is what persuades Scrooge to change his ways. The **exclamation mark** underlines the way in which the scenes have resonated within him, highlighting his eagerness to change.

