

Edexcel English Literature GCSE

A Christmas Carol: Character Profile

Marley's Ghost

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Marley's Ghost

Character Summary

Marley's Ghost is the **first apparition** who appears to Scrooge. He warns Scrooge that if he does not change his ways he too will experience the damning consequences of his sinful behaviour in the afterlife.

Dickens establishes the friendship between Scrooge and Marley from the opening of the novella. The narrator says that they were **“partners for I don't know how many years”** which highlights to the reader that they have a **time-honoured** relationship. He develops this further by likening their characters, revealing that Scrooge **“answered to both names”**. Therefore, it can be argued that Marley's characterisation reflects onto Scrooge. As a result, the descriptions of his **isolation** and **suffering** inform the reader about Scrooge's fate if he doesn't take action and repent.



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

Marley's character is also important as he **outlines the structure** of the novella. He warns Scrooge that he will not be the only Ghost to visit, informing him that he will be **“haunted...by Three Spirits”**. He goes on to tell him to **“Expect the first to-morrow, when the bell tolls One”**. This establishes a **timeline of events** which adds a sense of structure to the **chaotic supernatural events** that Scrooge experiences, informing both the reader and Scrooge of what to expect from the novella. This could be interpreted as a **dramatic technique**, as readers expect and anticipate upcoming events which increases the tension.

Context

Marley's Ghost can be seen as a physical representation of the Christian belief system of heaven and hell and the importance of repentance and redemption. He is shown by Dickens to be in **purgatory**, a state of limbo in between death and heaven where the souls of sinners go until they have repented their sins and can go to heaven.

Purgatory is a place of immense suffering and **“incessant torture”**. The suffering Marley is facing is shown by Dickens to be a **direct consequence** of his attitude towards people during his life. His Ghost is described as having chains **“made of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds”**, all items connected with his job. Indeed, Dickens clarifies that these are the **“chains (he) forged in life”**, reinforcing the idea that he is suffering due to his own actions.

The fact Marley has clearly caused his own suffering would perhaps cause the reader to view his character **unsympathetically**. This lack of sympathy is furthered by the **animalistic imagery** used by Dickens to describe the chain which is **“long, and wound about him like a tail”**. The **simile**



“like a tale” **dehumanises** Marley and the **reptilian image** created is repulsive to the reader which prevents the reader from sympathising with him. Furthermore, it presents the idea that his sins are suffocating him and are having visually **detrimental effects on his humanity**.

Purpose

Marley's Ghost has multiple purposes within the novella. Firstly, Dickens uses his character to introduce the reader to **religious** and **supernatural themes**. He is the first Ghost to appear to Scrooge, an arrival which is made more dramatic by the narrator's repeated assertions that “**Old Marley was dead**”. This heightens the impact of the supernatural theme as it is unexpected. He also establishes the concept of **religious justice**, as Dickens presents the idea of **accountability** through his character.



<https://www.deviantart.com/danidraws>

By introducing the religious ideas of purgatory, justice and accountability, Dickens attributes another role to Marley's character. He can be seen as a **deterrent** (discouragement and warning) as he exemplifies the repercussions Scrooge will face if he fails to change.

It is interesting to note that the reason his warning resonates with Scrooge is due to their close relationship. Dickens describes them as “**partners**” and reveals that Scrooge saw Marley as an “**excellent man of business**”. Taking into account Scrooge's fixation with wealth and business, this can be seen as **high-praise** which highlights their **superficial yet close relationship**.

Dickens also uses Marley's character to act as a **catalyst for Scrooge's change**. He instils feelings of fear in Scrooge, evidenced by the “**terrible sensation**” he feels after Marley's visit. This ultimately offers Scrooge a chance at redemption, as this fear is what initially drives his desire to change.

Relationships with other characters

The relationship between Scrooge and Marley is the only relationship of Marley's that the reader is made aware of. Dickens writes that “**Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner**”. The **repetition** of “**sole**” highlights Marley's isolation and dependence on Scrooge, while the **possessive pronoun** “**his**” illustrates how Marley was equally as important to Scrooge. This emphasises how vital their companionship was to each other. Dickens may be trying to portray the idea that even miserly old men like Scrooge need companionship in life. Despite the fact that their relationship may be perceived as dysfunctional, Scrooge was never completely alone until after Marley's death.



It is possible that Dickens intended to show the reader that relationships are crucial. It could be speculated that the lack of companionship in the lives of Scrooge and Marley caused their bitter attitudes.

Key Quotes

- ***“I wear the chains I forged in life”***

This declaration holds a double meaning as it is meant both **literally** and **figuratively**. Literally, in that Marley was the modern-day equivalent of an accountant or bookkeeper. This meant that his work involved writing **“deeds”** and **“ledgers”** and so he physically made these things in his life. The phrase is also meant figuratively as he is now held captive for eternity because of the way he acted in his life.

- ***“no rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse”***

The two **short** and **simple** sentences create a sense of **tension** by increasing the pace. In addition, it mirrors the trapped and claustrophobic feelings Marley is experiencing in purgatory. Furthermore, Dickens **subverts the rule of three** in the first sentence. By stopping after two clauses Dickens leaves the sentence feeling unfinished, causing the reader to feel uncomfortable. This may perhaps be to mirror Scrooge’s uncomfortable feelings towards the ghost, allowing the reader to empathise with his character.

- ***“Mankind was my business”***

This phrase reflects Dickens’ ideas on **social responsibility** - the idea that we are all accountable to each other and that it is our duty to help one another. When the two Portly Gentlemen ask Scrooge for charity money in the opening stave, he replies that he will not donate because it is not his **“business”**. Here Dickens highlights the importance of being **socially conscious**, as Marley realises too late that he should have focussed on **“mankind”** rather than business and finance.

