



## **Significance of the Insignificant**

In recent years, some English Literature GCSE and A-Level exam questions have asked students to focus on areas of a set text that perhaps diverge from the "main" thematic or character-based concerns of the text.

It is important teachers note that exam boards make explicit the fact that questions and extracts can come from ANYWHERE IN A TEXT - therefore, skipping over the seemingly insignificant is not necessarily a sensible idea.

Learning time is limited, and it is logical to spend quality time on "key" sections of a text. To that end, we have provided brief analysis of '**insignificant scenes of significance**' for a number of GCSE texts, so that these scenes can be explored comprehensively but efficiently by pupils.

These scenes are also incredibly useful for demonstrating whole text knowledge - whilst key scenes may be rich in material, these brief scenes are excellent for highlighting the development of theme or character, and may even awaken an examiner to a new and original point that hasn't been made by pupils again and again!

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## The Significance of the Insignificant in Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol' Stave 1

In this novella, is there anything insignificant? I was very intrigued by this idea when responding to The Quotation Bank and this changed my re-reading of the novella. This interest had been piqued earlier when someone on Twitter remarked that the AQA extract might be on the miners and how would students respond to this.

Dickens focuses on very precise description of setting and landscape which, while not being the 'big hitter' sections which often become exam extracts, they are significant as part of the texture of the text.

### Stave 1

The cold became intense. In the main street at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowing sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the windows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed. Poulterers' and grocers' trades became a splendid joke; a glorious pageant, with which it was next to impossible to believe that such dull principles as bargain and sale had anything to do. The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor's household should; and even the little tailor, whom he had fined five shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and bloodthirsty in the streets, stirred up tomorrow's pudding in his garret, while his lean wife and the baby sallied out to buy the beef.

This encapsulates some of the key ideas in the novella: the motif of cold, the poor and the destitute and the motif of abundance and commerce. We are presented with a tableau of Victorian life: the gas-pipes for supply to rich households, the brazier to warm the employed and unemployed alike, (the lack of regard for safety also!) The workers and the poor ragged men and boys who manage to find a source of warmth, create a tableau of cold Victorian street life. Throughout the story, Dickens gives the reader glimpses of life outside the main focus of the novella. These scenes would be familiar to Victorian Londoners and Dickens is at pains to ensure that Victorian street life is present throughout.

**The motif of cold:** We are all familiar with the motif of cold and Scrooge, here Dickens describes extreme cold throughout the novella, potentially linked to 'There were 7 severe winters in this period: 1813/14, 1815/16, 1819/20, 1822/23, 1829/30, 1837/38 & 1840/41. There was a great deal of ice on the Thames during most of these winters, but the ice does



not seem to have been strong/thick enough for people to walk from one side to the other.’<sup>1</sup> Dickens here focuses on one specific item of street furniture, ‘The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowing sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice..’. The intense cold freezes the public water supply and the plug is presented through a personifying adverb and adjective. The solitude, sullenness and misanthropy are deliberate, direct links to Scrooge and his presentation earlier in Stave 1, the freezing of the public water supply is indeed misanthropic as the inhabitants here would be deprived of their water supply.

The reality of the cold winters seen here in the ‘congealed’ water plug and the desire of the ragged men and boys to warm themselves, hints at the suffering of the houseless and those living in slum buildings, without disturbing the reader unnecessarily. However, Dickens’ focus is on the redemption and salvation of Scrooge, not a direct and didactic description of the destitute. Yet in the often over-looked sections of the novella, the poor and destitute make their presence felt as a constant undertone. The reader must then make the link from Scrooge’s ‘counting-house’ to those who may become houseless when they cannot pay their debts.<sup>2</sup>

One of the issues I have with the novella is Dickens’ sentimental approach<sup>3</sup> to some aspects of poverty in contrast to the scene with Ignorance and Want. In not wanting to put his readers ‘out of humour’ the story does not delineate in detail the overwhelming presence of poverty and destitution at time of writing; however, this poverty is present in the sections of the novel which may be passed over in exam preparation. In Dickens’ non-fiction writing e.g. ‘Nightwalks’ he comments on the number and presence of the ‘houseless’ of which these men and boys may be part.

The intense cold is contrasted with warmth, which we know is a major motif of the novella. Here we see the ‘ragged boys and men’ who are ‘warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture’. The intensity of the cold is linked with the intensity of the abstract noun, ‘rapture’ emphasising the joy of finding physical warmth in the severe cold of mid-winter. Dickens continues this in the image of ‘The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the windows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed.’ Remember that Fred arrives with ruddy cheeks in Stave 1 also. Again intense warmth and colour are emphasised, here directing the reader’s attention to the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pascalbonenfant.com/18c/geography/weather.html>

<sup>2</sup> The fate which has terrified Caroline and her husband in Stave 4, ‘We are quite ruined?....He is past relenting. He is dead.’

<sup>3</sup> Preface

I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

Their faithful Friend and Servant,  
C.D.

December, 1843.





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scenes of plenty. Several times Dickens conveys the splendour and abundance of the shops and their seasonal offerings which contrast with his gruel and the Cratchits' under-sized Christmas dinner. When the novel was written England was experiencing a period retrospectively known as the 'Hungry Forties', yet Dickens shows us abundance for sale in the shops, the abundance represented by the Ghost of Christmas Present and his cornucopia, once again perhaps to keep his reader comforted and not 'out of humour'.

Perhaps there is a sly dig at the rich and those with power as he tells us that the Lord Mayor 'gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor's household should;' The hyperbole of the 'fifty cooks' is significant as it emphasises extravagance and greed.

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## The Significance of the Insignificant 'A Christmas Carol' Stave 2: Scrooge's school.

They left the high-road, by a well-remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola, on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes; for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables; and the coach-houses and sheds were over-run with grass. Nor was it more retentive of its ancient state, within; for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthy savour in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candle-light, and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the paneling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with a softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears.

A longer extract to consider this time. Dickens' precise description of setting is as prevalent here as before. Opposition is used to emphasise the deficiency and dearth of Scrooge's school life. The concatenation<sup>1</sup> of noun phrases emphasises the miserly nature of the school. Dickens uses both pre and post modification; for example, 'large' pre-modifies 'house' with the post-modification of 'but one of broken fortunes'. This linguistic construction allows Dickens to present precise but elaboration descriptions of places. One may infer from 'broken fortunes' that Scrooge's own father could be 'tight-fisted' when it came to paying for Scrooge's schooling. Dickens chooses to describe the school building in monetary terms ('broken fortunes'), aligning with the central motif of acquisition, hoarding and parsimony. The building is neglected and symbolises the lack of investment in its pupils as well.

<sup>1</sup> group of things linked together or occurring together in a way that produces a particular result or effect



The noun 'mansion' indicates grandeur along with 'little weathercock-surmounted cupola'. It may be an over-reading to consider the history of the weathercock - that the cockerel is a symbol of Christianity; Peter's denial of Jesus before the cock crows three times; and as the cockerel greets the dawn, the symbol of light triumphing over dark - in a story with three Ghosts of Christmas and the final triumph of the redemption of Scrooge. It may also symbolise direction - that childhood experiences can influence the direction of one's life. The weathervane indicates that the wind changes direction, as does Scrooge. The bell here links with the bells announcing Marley's disruptive entrance into the story in Stave 1. Whilst this may be tenuous, Dickens' detail is always part of the necessary fabric of his stories.

The potential grandeur of a mansion is thwarted by nature, the weather brings wind and rain, all sources of destruction to human-made constructions. The windows are 'broken', the walls 'damp and mossy' and the gates 'decayed'; grass overruns the stables and fowls move about the stables. The outside of the school shows neglect showing a lack of care for the building which alerts us to the potential lack of care for the pupils. Dickens moves the reader inside, which is as dispiriting as the outside. The inside is dreary, cold and vast; this is not a physically or emotionally warm and nurturing establishment. The choice of 'earthy savour' is interesting. This is the smell of a 'covetous worldling' in 'The Intercourses of Divine Love' (1683)<sup>1</sup>. Scrooge is the covetous worldling of the novella. How far is Scrooge's covetousness linked to his physical and emotional starvation as a child? The 'earthy savour' signifies the intrusion of the cold earth into the building; the cold earth which an unredeemed Scrooge will meet, alone and unaccompanied, if he does not change his ways.

This coldness extends to the lack of food for the young growing boys, the lack of parental warmth, particularly the motherly warmth we see in Mrs Cratchit, leading to an emotionally stunted Scrooge, who rejects every affection; the 'poor forgotten self as he used to be' becomes the poor forgotten corpse, stripped of his meagre possessions by Mrs Dilber et al in the vision conjured by The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The mansion has a 'chilly bareness' and has a 'bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks.' The deliberate repetition of 'bare' and its different forms emphasises the absence of any comfort in the physical environment. The fire is 'feeble' which links to the single coal allowed to Cratchit in his office cell in Stave 1. Scrooge's inner and outer coldness has its origins in his childhood, which the narrative device of the Ghosts and their time travelling, reveals to the reader.

The final paragraph of this extract reiterates the loneliness and isolation of the young Scrooge, left behind when his peers go home to the family celebration of

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<sup>1</sup> The Intercourses of Divine Love Betwixt Christ and the Church ... as Metaphorically Expressed by Solomon in the Second Chapter of the Canticles: Opened and Improved in Several Lecture-sermons Upon that Whole Chapter ... By J. C. D. D. I.e. John Collinges.





Christmas. Dickens' style is typified by repetition, the use of 'not' is no exception. The sequence of 'not' subordinate clauses culminates in the boy Scrooge's tear of abject loneliness. The 'squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!' of Stave 1 is the product of a cold and lonely childhood of rejection. The application of attachment theory of today would be a fascinating lens to read the novella through.

Our old friend the water-spout from Stave 1 is re-used here. Now it is 'half-thawed water-spout' which may symbolise Scrooge's half-formed character. The young Scrooge feels emotional, he cries as many lonely children would do and his emotions are not yet "frozen". We, like Scrooge, gaze on his cold, bare childhood in the 'mansion of dull red brick'; red brick being a utilitarian construction material suggesting the utilitarian approach take to his education which seems to have informed his approach to life.

Coste et al (2016) state that 'Far from being backdrops, however, these landscapes complement what they frame or foreground in subtle and complex ways<sup>1</sup>. Therefore one can see that the description of the school and its surroundings foreground and is a frame for the formation of Scrooge's emotional character.

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<sup>1</sup> Coste, Huguet, Vanfasse (2016) Dickensian Landscapes: introduction. Représentations: la revue électronique du CEMRA, Centre d'Études sur les Modes de la Représentation Anglophone 2016, Dickensian Landscapes, pp.1-7. hal-01422040





## The Significance of the Insignificant - A Christmas Carol Stave 3

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door and barred the Spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas Holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, until they left a children's Twelfth Night party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was grey.

This is from the end of Stave 3 before the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come makes its initial appearance. Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present have journeyed far in both time and space. Each scene has shown togetherness, warmth and celebration and Spirit's blessed presence. Here Dickens summarises their journey with each visit 'always with a happy end'. This emphasis on happiness is linked to the preface<sup>1</sup> where Dickens does not want to put his readers out of humour and to 'haunt their houses pleasantly' therefore the poverty and suffering of Victorian London appears largely absent. The presence of the Spirit and his blessing, which salves each person he visits no matter what their suffering, reinforces the Christian tradition of faith, comfort and blessing symbolised in the celebration of Christ's birth; despite the Ghost being seen as 'imported from folklore and legend, not the Christian gospels.'<sup>2</sup>

The peace bestowed by the Ghost, however, will not solve the inequities and inequalities of Victorian society, which were sometimes seen as God's work; for example, in Cecil Frances Alexander's 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'<sup>3</sup>. Alexander was married to an Anglican Bishop and also helped the poor and disadvantaged, yet she sees this social order as created by God which is stated in verse 3 (a verse now often omitted from the

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<sup>1</sup> I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.  
Their faithful Friend and Servant

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-a-christmas-carol>

<sup>3</sup> *Hymns for Little Children* (1848)



hymn), a belief endemic in Victorian society and one which is commented in 'A Christmas Carol' but which is explored less explicitly than other Dickens' novels.

*The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them high and lowly,  
And ordered their estate.*

The 'lowly' people observed, like the Cratchits, are 'patient', 'cheerful' and have 'greater hope' which one may consider a sentimental and unrealistic portrayal of Victorian life and its unequal society. The truth of this unequal society simmers under the surface of the novella; seen through Marley's eyes in Stave One, as his fellow ghosts wish to help their victims, but are condemned to witness the outcomes of their avarice. Furthermore Dickens perpetuates the trope of forbearance; that 'struggling poor' must be 'patient in their greater hope'. I would argue that Dickens lacks courage in his social criticism in this text; he avoids the truly bleak existence of the poor and destitute in his desire to not offend his readers, once again presenting the idea that in poverty there can be joy, and that hope is the solution to suffering. We may even consider that believing in a Christian God through Victorian Anglicanism becomes a form of oppression. These juxtapositions present a series of dichotomies to the reader, which underlie the novella.

*Dickens dwelt on the terrible sights he had seen among the juvenile population in London's jails and doss-houses and stressed the desperate need for educating the poor. This occasion seems to have put into his mind the idea for a [Christmas Eve tale] which should help to open the hearts of the prosperous and powerful towards the poor and powerless but which should also bring centrally into play the theme of memory that, as we have seen, was always so strongly associated with Christmas for him. (Michael Slater)<sup>1</sup>*

Dickens, therefore, must take care to ensure that the sympathy of the prosperous reader is engaged in order to effect a change in them and encourage them to '... make some slight provision for the Poor and Destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts...."<sup>2</sup> However, no matter how much charity is given by the rich to the poor, through charitable institutions, this alone will not reduce inequality; neither politically nor socially. However, Dickens aim is to alert the prosperous reader to the unfair social stratification of their time and encourage them to act against this.

Dickens also points out the vanity of man against the greater order of the Christian world ('vain man in his little brief authority') reminding the reader that life is finite and may change suddenly; as his childhood security did. The allusion to 'Measure for Measure' is interesting

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-a-christmas-carol>

<sup>2</sup> ACC Stave 1





as it emphasises the conceited man's ignorance of the wisdom of Christian redemption, as Scrooge's ignorance of self is challenged.<sup>1</sup> The triplet of 'almshouse, hospital and jail' highlights the places the destitute, the sick and the criminal will find themselves; places of despair and discomfort. Yet the blessing can only be bestowed on those dwelling whose doors are not barred. Scrooge and the reader must open their metaphorical doors, and their hearts to Christian benevolence and beneficence. Dickens once again subtly reinforces the reality of Victorian society to his reader, just as the Ghost teaches 'Scrooge his precepts'.

The second paragraph emphasises the elastic nature of time in the hands of the Ghost of Christmas Present; 'It was a long night, if it were only a night'. The three visitations arrive at

different times in the early hours of Christmas morning and they manipulate the forward march of time in order to teach Scrooge the lessons leading to his redemption. In this experience, Scrooge is aware of the extraordinary time journey he undertakes, where one night encompasses the whole of the Christmas holidays, until Twelfth Night. Dickens also shows us that Scrooge 'remained unaltered in his outward form'. He does not age externally, but the reader understands that Scrooge's change is internal and that the extended time journey is needed to effect this change. In contrast, the Ghost 'grew older, clearly older' and Dickens' use of repetition and the adverb 'clearly' signposts the significance of this; that 'he [Scrooge] noticed that its hair was grey' further emphasises this to the reader. Whilst the Ghost controls time, he must age to show that his time with Scrooge is over. The blessings, abundance and jollity are about to be lost as the third and final journey looms; the mood changes sharply after this extract as 'Ignorance and Want' are revealed. The subtle presence of the poor, the destitute, the sick and criminal culminates in the hideous symbolism of the 'two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable'. There is no comfort for the reader here, lulled by the previous warmth of the Ghost of Christmas Present, whose final message is proclaimed, "**...Deny it!" cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "Slander those who tell it ye. Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse. And abide the end."**

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<sup>1</sup> But man, proud man,  
Drest in a little brief authority,  
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd;  
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,  
As make the angels weep. *Measure for Measure Act 2 Scene 2*



## Stave Four – A Tale of Two Beds: Dickens and Death in *A Christmas Carol*

### Scrooge's deathbed

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round it in obedience to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge's part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side.

Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for this is thy dominion. But of the loved, revered, and honoured head, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand was open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse a man's. Strike, Shadow, strike. And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal!

No voice pronounced these words in Scrooge's ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed. He thought, if this man could be raised up now, what would be his foremost thoughts. Avarice, hard-dealing, griping cares. They have brought him to a rich end, truly.

He lay, in the dark empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child, to say that he was kind to me in this or that, and for the memory of one kind word I will be kind to him. A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearth-stone. What they wanted in the room of death, and why they were so restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not dare to think.

"Spirit," he said, "this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go."

### Tiny Tim's deathbed

He left the room, and went up-stairs into the room above, which was lighted cheerfully, and hung with Christmas. There was a chair set close beside the child, and there were signs of some one having been there, lately. Poor Bob sat down in it, and when he had thought a little and composed himself, he kissed the little face. He was reconciled to what had happened, and went down again quite happy.

It is 'A Tale of Two Beds' that provides an interesting area of study in Stave Four of *A Christmas Carol*. Stave Four is dominated by two fairly obvious references to death: the silent, hooded Ghost of Christmas Present and the "stone upon the neglected grave" are the 'standout' moments in the penultimate stave of the novella. But in the imagery of two beds, both occupied by a recently deceased character, Dickens provides more potent images than the "pointed hand" our silent spirit uses to guide Scrooge through his bleak





future. He also fires a warning to readers that would undoubtedly strike his intended "sledgehammer blow"<sup>1</sup> to a society fascinated with death and their own mortality.<sup>2</sup>

The first bed is Scrooge's own. Readers know this but Scrooge's ignorance prevent him from seeing the truth just yet. It is described as "bare" - making it explicitly clear where Old Joe's customers got their wares just moments before - but also reflecting the lack of warmth or affection Scrooge generates in others. This is reinforced as his body is described as "unwatched, unwept, uncared for..." in Dickens' typically unsubtle, confrontational style that we see throughout this novella. That lack of subtlety is achieved in two ways. Firstly, through the repetition of the prefix "un" Dickens is able to hammer home his message that Scrooge has none of the love or care we would expect a man to receive in death, and further use his story as a cautionary tale for his readers.

Furthermore, using a tricolon in "unwatched, unwept, uncared" intensifies the void of affection in this moment of death as it shows just what is missing from Scrooge as a consequence of his miserly ways. As we move through this part of the sentence, the absent 'thing' also intensifies which plainly communicates the lack of affection felt for Scrooge and illustrates the rising anger Dickens feels towards Scrooge and men like him. In writing like this, Dickens' anger at society is evident. He leaves no room for uncertainty or alternative fates; your death will be an extremely lonely one if you follow the example of Ebenezer Scrooge. His intention is to shame readers and force them to see the injustice he feels running through Victorian England in 1843. The prospect of a lonely death, implying nobody cares for you, is the 'punishment' Dickens serves up.

The room itself is "very dark, too dark" - a simple but effective vocabulary choice that Dickens employs throughout the novella to add its gothic, ghostly appeal - and, after a little sermon from Dickens on the matter of "the life immortal!" and how kindness offers us some protection in the afterlife, we learn that something truly horrifying waits in this darkness. Dickens writes: "*A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearth-stone. What they wanted in the room of death, and why they were so restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not dare to think.*" Scrooge may not dare to think why they are so "restless and disturbed" but it is crystal-clear to readers what the cats and rats desire. Ironically, Scrooge as a corpse provides support to the hungriest in society in a way that the living Scrooge never did!

The second bed is occupied by Tiny Tim. Like much of the imagery in *A Christmas Carol*, the contrast is both obvious and deliberate. Here we have a room that is "lighted cheerfully" and the "chair set close" to the bed to juxtapose with Scrooge's darkness and isolation. That there are "signs of someone having been there, lately" emphasises just how loved Tiny Tim was, and how little people cared for Scrooge as he "lay, in the dark empty house, with not a man..." visiting him after death; except to steal from him, obviously! The

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20171215-how-did-a-christmas-carol-come-to-be>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2000/04/05/death.html>





intimacy around Tiny Tim's death is emphasised by Dickens as Bob Cratchit "kissed the little face" of his son. It is a poignant but beautiful farewell to Tiny Tim (that makes his 'resurrection' in Stave Five all the more powerful!) and a clear message from Dickens to his readers; your actions in life should mirror the Christian spirit, hearty cheer and eternal optimism of Tiny Tim rather than the miserly isolation of Scrooge. If not, a grisly and lonesome end awaits your body while your soul will carry the "chains..forged in life" for eternity!

This message and the images used in their death beds is mirrored in their final resting places. Bob Cratchit says to his wife, "it would have done you good to see how green a place it is", suggesting beauty and life and love will follow Tiny Tim in death, as his burial sounds 'perfect' in comparison to Scrooge's burial site. Scrooge finds himself resting in a place "overrun by grass and weeds" in a "neglected grave" implying the neglect in his final moments will carry on for eternity.

The difference between the two beds is about as subtle as the rest of *A Christmas Carol*. That lack of subtlety can be used to criticise Dickens but it does allow him to convey a powerful message in a straightforward, understandable fashion. Dickens did not have the time or the inclination to be subtle about a very real social issue. The six week 'frenzy' in which he wrote the book is fuelled by a very real fear that time is running out for the poor and vulnerable in society. By using their death beds, Dickens aims to appeal to the very human (and particularly Victorian) obsession with death and its rituals. By making them such contrasting final moments, he makes it clear which path readers should choose.

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