



# MARLEY'S GHOST

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## CHARACTER SUMMARY

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Jacob Marley is a significant character.

- In fact, Marley's Ghost is the first apparition who appears to Scrooge.
  - He warns Scrooge that if he does not change his greedy and selfish 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 that may also indicate Scrooge having developed such well-set habits and views that they may be especially difficult to break or change.
          - Dickens develops the focus on their relationship further by likening their characters, revealing that Scrooge “answered to both names”.
            - Therefore, it can be argued that Marley's characterisation reflects that of Scrooge
              - And, as a result, the descriptions of his isolation and suffering foreshadow Scrooge's fate if he doesn't take action and repent.

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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARLEY'S NAME

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Dickens often chose names for his characters that conveyed meaning, and even Marley's name illuminates his purpose and power.

- Philip V. Allingham explains that most ‘dismiss [Marley's first name] as just another vague allusion to the Old Testament’, saying the name is common enough to appear in the ‘nineteenth century English-speaking world’.
  - After all, ‘the biblical Jacob was
    - a sharp trader,
    - a keen bargainer,
    - and – as Scrooge would say – a good man of business.’
      - However, Allingham's observation of the ‘word's archaic association of “Jacobus”, a gold coin of the Restoration period’ is what is most striking.
        - If Dickens intends for Jacob Marley's name to allude to this, it means Marley is inextricably linked with implications of finance forever.
          - His name taints him from birth with associations of
            - economics
            - and commerce
              - and continues to do so in death, even after he has experienced his epiphany and realised that ‘mankind [was his] business.’

- ‘Marley’, too, is of significance.
  - ‘Marl’, a term dating back to the mid-14th century, is ‘clayey soil used for fertilizer’.





- As Allingham explains, ‘in Scotland, Cheshire, and Warwickshire, “Marley” meant “a marble”’,
  - and he even goes so far as to say this definition could stretch to the idea of a headstone or tombstone.
    - Marley’s name, therefore, holds hold both the connotations of money, wealth and business as well as death
      - And, therefore, it creates an inextricable link between all these ideas.
        - Marley will ‘[fertilize] Scrooge’s little-used imagination and long-dormant conscience as his body has fertilized the earth those seven years.’

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## MARLEY’S STRUCTURAL FUNCTION

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Marley’s character is also important as he

- outlines the structure of the novella
- acts as a foreshadowing figure that creates a question as to whether or not Scrooge will learn the lesson Marley is trying to teach him
- create an impetus for Scrooge to change
  - 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”,
        - thus establishing 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.
          - Marley’s introduction right at the beginning of the text could be interpreted as a dramatic technique, as readers
            - expect
            - and anticipate upcoming events
              - which increases the tension.

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## MARLEY’S RELATION TO CONTEXT

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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”.

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## THE CAUSE OF MARLEY’S SUFFERING

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The suffering Marley is facing is portrayed by Dickens to be a direct consequence of his selfish 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
          - that is, perhaps, compounded 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.

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## MARLEY’S PURPOSE

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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 and ironic by the narrator’s repeated assertions that “Old Marley was dead” which emphasizes the significance of the supernatural theme within the novella.
  - He also establishes the concept of religious justice,
    - as Dickens illustrates the idea of accountability through his character.
      - 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.

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## THE PURPOSE OF MARLEY’S RELATIONSHIP WITH SCROOGE

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It is interesting to note that the reason his warning resonates with Scrooge is because of 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, Scrooge seeing Marley as an "excellent man of business" can be seen as high-praise which highlights a juxtaposition in their relationship
  - On the one hand, it is superficial
  - On the other, however, it is a close relationship.
    - However, it could be argued that Marley's character is also most suitable to act as a catalyst for Scrooge's change because they are, in many ways, a reflection of each other.
      - When Scrooge sees Marley, he can, essentially, see a future projection of himself because they are so similar.
        - Therefore, Marley instils feelings of fear in Scrooge about the damning future he has waiting for him, as evidenced by the "terrible sensation" he feels after Marley's visit.
          - At the same time, however, Marley's visit also offers Scrooge a chance at redemption,
            - And the fear Scrooge feels is impetus he needs to drive his desire to change.
              - The question that remains to be answered throughout the rest of the novella is whether Scrooge chooses to end up like Marley or change his own fate.

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## MARLEY'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CHARACTERS

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The relationship between Scrooge and Marley is the only relationship of Marley's that the reader is made aware of.

- Moreover, 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" emphasises Marley's isolation and dependence on Scrooge,
    - while the possessive pronoun "his" suggests Marley was equally as important to Scrooge.
      - The compounding effect here is to highlight the vital importance of their companionship to each other,
        - However, the irony is that despite Scrooge seemingly wanting to distance himself from other members of society, Dickens may be suggesting that even miserly old men like Scrooge need companionship in life
          - Additionally, despite the fact that their relationship may be perceived as dysfunctional, Scrooge was never completely alone until after Marley's death.
            - Which seems to imply that it is human nature to connect to one another and at the core of Scrooge's redemption is his journey to reconnect to those around him.
              - It could also be speculated that the lack of companionship in the lives of Scrooge and Marley is one of the causes of their bitter attitudes.

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## KEY QUOTE: "I WEAR THE CHAINS I FORGED IN LIFE"

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Marley's 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 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.

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## KEY QUOTE: “NO REST, NO PEACE. INCESSANT TORTURE OF REMORSE”

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The two short and simple sentences create a sense of tension by eliminating all distractions and forcing the reader to focus on the repetition of the word ‘no’ and the central meaning

- that the things every human wants – rest and peace – are completely non-existent in his current state and, contrastingly, the something every human fears – torture – never ends.
  - Furthermore, the two short sentences mirror the trapped and claustrophobic feelings Marley is experiencing in purgatory.
    - They explain the awful state that greed and selfishness lead to in simple terms to everyone reading can understand.

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## KEY QUOTE: “MANKING WAS MY BUSINESS”

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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 – ironically - 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 material business and finance.

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## DICKENS'S VIEW OF WEALTH

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While Dickens enjoyed the large amount of money he earned as a writer and speaker, he did not allow his wealth to affect his view of the world or his interactions with others.

- Dickens believed there should be equality amongst people
  - He was unable to understand how some could be so wealthy while at the same time others were dying of starvation.
    - According to Michael Rosen, Dickens was interested in showing his readers how the poor were directly affected by the actions of the wealthy upper-class (44–45).

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## A CHRISTMAS CAROL: A SCATHING CRITIQUE ON VICTORIAN SOCIETY

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Although viewed by many as a heart-warming story of Christmas cheer and happiness, *A Christmas Carol* is also very much a scathing social commentary on Dickens's time.

- the Cratchits, who hardly have enough money to...
  - feed,
  - to shelter,
  - and to clothe their family,
    - are at the mercy of Scrooge,
      - who until his transformation remains emotionally removed from the troubles of the less fortunate.

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## THE RICH HAVE MUCH TO LEARN FROM THE POOR

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Rosen argues that instead of depicting poor members of society as drunks with unwise spending habits,

- as was common during the 1800s,
  - Dickens shows readers that wealthy people such as Scrooge have much to learn from the poor (2).

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## AN OUTSPOKEN SOCIAL CRITIC

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Dickens was an outspoken social critic

- He attacked the Poor Law in *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol*
- He also attacked the notoriously brutal Yorkshire schools in *Nicholas Nickleby*
  - 'My past pursuits have led me to a familiar acquaintance with numerous instances of extreme wretchedness and deep-laid villainy... In the haunts of squalid poverty I have found many a broken heart too good for this world'

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## SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Dickens was also an advocate of social responsibility.

- He believed each member of a society should be aware of and concerned for the well-being of others,
  - whether or not they were personally involved with them.
    - in *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens writes, "it is required of every man . . . that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and, if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death" (29–30).
      - Marley's words represented Dickens's own views of personal responsibility.
        - According to Dickens, if people were to go through life only concerned with their own well-being and prosperity, then they were certain to be punished in the after-life for not living as they should have.





- Once again, Dickens's works offer a clear and illuminating reflection of the author himself. =

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## THOMAS CARLYLE AND CHARLES DICKENS

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Thomas Carlyle (1795 - 1881) was a Philosopher, political thinker, historian, biographer, translator, novelist and essayist

- he was hailed as the voice of the age.
- He railed against the oppression of workers in industrial society
  - Charles Dickens's works are infused with Carlyle's ideas.
    - In *David Copperfield* (1850), the narrator wonders whether he will be the hero of his story. *Hard Times* (1854), a diatribe against the factory system, is dedicated to Carlyle. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) was inspired by Carlyle's French Revolution.

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## UNDERSTANDING DICKENS MEANS UNDERSTANDING HIS WORKS

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Although Dickens had not originally intended for *A Christmas Carol* to be performed onstage, his public readings inspired many other renditions of this classic tale which have continued to be produced to this day.

- during the last onstage performance of his works, Dickens gave a...
  - heart-felt
  - and tearful exit saying,
    - "From these garish lights . . . i vanish now for evermore, with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful, affectionate farewell" (Rosen 8).
      - He was never seen in public again and died three months later leaving behind a legacy few have managed to equal.
        - Dickens may have erased some of the details of his life when he lit what is now known as "the bonfire," but through the letters that do survive and especially in works such as *A Christmas Carol*, readers still can see an in-depth and personal view of his life.
          - Ultimately, however, it is simply true; understanding Dickens means understanding his works. the two are inseparable, just as Dickens had intended them to be.

