



DICKENS' PURPOSE 2018

Why Dickens Wrote

notes taken from *various sources*

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EARLY LIFE

Charles John Huffman Dickens was born on 7 February 1812 to John and Elizabeth Dickens.

- due to unstable family conditions, Dickens suffered through a difficult childhood filled with worries that far surpassed those of an average boy.
 - o Even as a young child, Dickens found comfort and peace through the use of his imagination.
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OBSERVING THE UNDERPRIVILEGED AT A YOUNG AGE

When Dickens was ten years old, he began to make daily trips along the Thames to visit his parents' friends.

- rather than showing interest in the large buildings of London and the wealthy inhabitants, these trips to London sparked Dickens's interest in observing the lives of the underprivileged.
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DICKENS' EXPERIENCE OF CHILD LABOUR

Dickens's interest in members of the poor working class was not purely a result of observation.

- in spite of his more than moderate income, throughout Dickens's youth, his father, John, remained deeply in debt.
 - o At twelve years of age, while his sister Fanny was attending an expensive music academy, Dickens was put to work at Warren's Blacking Factory,
 - he spent ten hours a day gluing labels on jars of shoe polish in order to create additional income for his family.
 - Dickens suffered both emotionally and physically from the experience
 - o He worked longer and harder than any twelve-year old ever should, and he was left with no time for normal childhood activities.
 - Still, his experience at the factory greatly contributed to the man and writer he would later become.
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SYMPATHY FOR CHILDREN AND THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

Sympathy for children and a constant concern for the underprivileged dominate most of his fictional writings.

- *A Christmas Carol* (1843),
 - *Bleak House* (1853),
 - *Hard Times* (1854),
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- and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)
 - these are a few examples of Dickens at his best and most socially concerned.

PRAISE FOR A *CHRISTMAS CAROL*

Although many of Dickens's novels and short stories continue to be highly praised, *A Christmas Carol* has truly captured the hearts of readers

- it is here that one finds a shadow of the young Dickens.

HOW SCROOGE RESEMBLES DICKENS

- Dickens created for Scrooge a childhood that greatly resembled his own,
- and many of Dickens's characters are renditions of his family members and friends.
 - Not only was Scrooge sent off to a boarding school and separated from his immediate family
 - as Dickens was,
 - he also had a sister whose name was a near match for Dickens's own.
 - Scrooge's sister, Fran, represents Dickens's sister, Fanny.

WHAT FRAN REPRESENTS

Fran represents for Scrooge what Dickens's own sister represented in his life.

- Fran is “the lovely sister-wife who represents the ideal woman and completion of the self”.

THE ABSENCE OF DICKENS' MOTHER IN A *CHRISTMAS CAROL*

there is no mention of Scrooge's mother in *A Christmas Carol*,

- and Dickens's own relationship with his mother remained strained throughout most of his life.
 - She was the original proponent of sending the twelve year old Dickens to work,
 - and even after his father was released from prison, Elizabeth forced Dickens to continue working.
 - He was apparently never able to forgive her for the way she robbed him of his childhood,
 - as Kay Puttock has noticed: “When speaking of his mother, he was prone to add, ‘May God forgive her’” (3).





THE IMPORTANCE OF DICKENS' SISTER, FANNY

Fanny provided Dickens with the love and the affection he needed and desired,

- attentions he had never received from his mother.
 - Just as Fanny represented love in Dickens's life, Fran symbolizes familial love in Scrooge's life,
 - and his memory of this relationship plays a significant role in his redemption.
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DICKENS'S VIEW OF WEALTH

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

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

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

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’
-

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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. =

THOMAS CARLYLE AND CHARLES DICKENS

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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EDUCATION: THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF THE POOR





As part of his solution to the problem of the poor, Dickens maintained a keen interest in education throughout most of his life.

- He believed the only way to fight against poverty was through education.

IGNORANCE AND WANT: BRITAIN'S MOST CRITICAL PROBLEMS

Dickens identifies the twins who travel with the Ghost of Christmas Present in *A Christmas Carol* as 'Ignorance' and 'Want.'

- these two children represent what Dickens felt were the most critical problems facing Britain,
 - and he relates his position through the voice of the Ghost of Christmas Present:
 - “this boy is ignorance. this girl is Want. beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow i see that written which is doom, unless the writing be erased” (Perdue 9).

THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

Although his own formal education was sparse and erratic, Dickens knew the value of education

- and recognized literacy's direct impact on his life.
 - He was an advocate for and the most well-known supporter of Ragged Schools,
 - which were designed to provide education to those who were financially unstable.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RAGGED SCHOOLS

While these schools lacked solid teaching staffs and sufficient materials needed for proper education, they offered education to those who would have never been able to afford it otherwise.

- in an 1844 speech, Dickens articulated his views on education:
 - “if you would reward honesty, if you would give encouragement to good, if you would stimulate the idle, eradicate evil, or correct what is bad, education—comprehensive liberal education— is the one thing needful, and the one effective end” (qtd. in Litvack 1).
 - to Dickens, these schools were the key to keeping children from experiencing the difficulties he had faced as a child.
 - Education was also the key to fixing a society that in his view had all but crumbled to pieces.
 - As he so clearly conveys in *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens felt that knowledge was the only hope for a better society, one that might fulfill its destiny as an agent of Christian goodness.





PUBLIC READINGS OF A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Public readings were another way in which Dickens was able to bring joy to his readers.

- between 1853 and 1870 Dickens performed nearly 500 public readings of his works.
 - these readings were one of Dickens's greatest joys.
 - instead of relying on elaborate costumes and props like many other authors and actors, Dickens presented most of his works completely free of anything but his sparkling personality and passion for performance.
 - *A Christmas Carol* was first performed in December 1853 and was amongst Dickens's favorite pieces to read.
 - According to Tom Viola, Dickens's performances left audiences
 - weeping,
 - laughing,
 - and cheering (6).

HOW DICKENS' STYLE MAKES SERIOUS THEMES ENTERTAINING

Dickens is always hoping to get us interested in the evils of an industrialising society:

- horrendous working conditions in factories
- child labour
- vicious social snobbery
- the degradation of the poor
- the reckless scramble for money
- and the maddening inefficiencies of government bureaucracy...
 - In theory we recognise that these – and their modern versions – are worthy themes.
 - But when we are honest with ourselves, we admit that they don't sound very inviting as things to read about in a novel in bed or at the airport.
 - Dickens's discovery was that the big ambitions to educate his society about its failings and to spur social reform didn't have to be opposed to what his critics called 'fun' –
 - racy plots,
 - a chatty style,
 - clownish characters,
 - weepy moments
 - and happy endings.
 - He rejected the idea that we have to make a fatal choice between being worthy but dull or popular but shallow.
 - He set out to educate via entertaining – because he so well understood how easy it is for us individually and collectively to resist certain tricky but important lessons.





- Dickens is significant because he was working out – for his own time – how to do something that’s crucial for ours: how to be entertaining about serious things.

UNDERSTANDING DICKENS MEANS UNDERSTANDING HIS WORKS

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.

