

A Literary Manipulation of Dicken's "Fantasy" in *The Christmas Carol, The Chimes, and the Cricket on the Hearth*¹

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate selected fantasy short stories by Charles Dickens. The study focuses on "impulse for fantasy," which leads Dicken's readers to a captivating world of other reality. Dickens, as a Victorian figure, had always redefined and defined the fantastic method to expose and probe the world of reality. The imaginary/alternate world therefore shaped, gives expression to its new reality creatively manipulated and adapted to expose the truth of the actual world.

INTRODUCTION

In literature, the Victorian era was characterized by realism, with the novel serving as the primary form. Every field - mechanical, social, religious, political, economic, scientific, and intellectual - underwent dramatic transformation during this period. The industrial revolution, with its rapid expansion and development, influenced every part of British life; literature from this time period reflect the restless spirit of the time. The realistic novels portray the Victorian world's doubts, struggles, and fenestrations regardless of whether they are didactic, tedious, or boring. As a result, Victorian writers felt compelled to move to a different mode - fantasy - in order to attract the reader's interest and communicate their displeasure with the modern world.

Various scholars have characterized fantasy in different ways, depending on how it has been utilized in literature. Fantasy is generally acknowledged and appreciated as a genre that incorporates magic, even if it defies classification. All that is remarkable and impossible within the scope of realistic fiction, including supernatural occurrences and persons, mysterious places, the construction of other worlds, time travel, dreams, hallucinations, and everything else. Fantasy as a genre predates the Victorian era, in fact, it is as old as literature itself. With the passage of time, however, its form and modes changed (Stone, 7).

Fantasy components were used in the creation of imaginative worlds with supernatural beings and individuals with amazing magical powers in early fantasy texts such as fairy tales, folklore, mythologies, and morality plays. Fantasy was adapted in play and poetry by Sydney, Spenser, and Shakespeare during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as in prose writings by Bunyan and a few other writers. Fantasy found an ideal medium for expression in the seventeenth century with the creation of the book genre. The gothic resurgence credited to Horace Walpole - with the publication of his novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), in the middle of the eighteenth century - gave the staple materials for the fantasy works produced in the nineteenth century. Aside from that, not much progress was made in the fantasy mode. People's interest in children's literature was piqued only with Edger Taylor's translation of *German*

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Popular Stories (1823-26), and fantasy reached its most creative phase with the publication of Edward Lear's *Book of Nonsense* (1846).

While surveying the literary horizons of the Victorian age, one comes across a number of notable authors that used fantastical mode/elements in their works. A few notable names stand out for their innovative use of fantasy and contribution to the genre. Their specific approach to adopting and adapting the dream mode for the presentation of their personal dedication and emotional conditioning elevates it to the status of a distinct art form. Among these writers, and perhaps the most famous one is Charles Dickens (Stone, 8).

Dickens and Christmas Books:

Dickens was his generation's outstanding social realist. He began his profession as a journalist before transitioning to novel writing. As with his journalism, his novels reflect the era's stresses and perplexities. He awoke the consciousness of his readers without repulsing them with his work. He possessed the ability to make his readers both laugh and cry through his work. The combination of humour and sadness in his narrative style enables him to represent the most heinous circumstance and character "in a manner that is horrifyingly vivid to a sensitive adult yet unlikely to injure a young" (Dyson, 14) naïve reader. Dickens sensibility incorporated into the audience for whom he wrote. He absorbed their joys and sorrows and absorbed them into himself. As an artist, he uses comedic, tragic, and satirical elements to heighten the emotional effect of his narrative. His genuine intention in writing was to use his work as a vehicle for morality and justice. As a writer, he aimed to reform society's basic self-centeredness, prejudices, and inequity against the poor and underprivileged.

The pitiful, hideous characters, such as Master P'icir in *A Christmas Carol* and the beast waif in *The Haunted Man*, provide insight into the authors' own boyhood and family background. During such difficult times, literature, particularly the children's stories he read, comforted and sustained him. He was a firm believer that books might also be used to save others. Dickens' writings are constantly on the quest for solutions to the issues of problems of life. As a result, he changed the novels to include a societal vision beyond mimesis, which resulted in the development of a world of speaking shadows: a world of prophetic and gothic vision.

The Christmas texts emphasize the value of home and family love while also teaching spiritual and moral principles. The Christmas works emphasize the value of home and family love while also teaching spiritual and moral principles. Dickens did not want his Christmas stories to be didactic, so he used imagination to deliver his message. To do honor to the goal of his writings, he used all literary styles to express himself including supernatural stories, allegories, satire, fables and burlesques.

A Christmas Carol: In Prose. Being a Ghost Story of Christmas:

The story's protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, is an elderly man. I own a warehouse. Scrooge and Marley was the name of his firm. Marley, his lone friend, comrade, and partner, had died on Christmas Eve seven years before. But his name remained "years later, over the warehouse door" (34). As the only owner of the company, Scrooge used both the name Marlev and his own. He is portrayed as a typical Victorian businessman. Isolated from society, devoid of humanity - absorbed in the skill of creating misery. Everyone knows who he is, but no one ever bothers to welcome him. This did not bother Scrooge because he preferred to be alone. He is a man devoid of emotion, not even for his only nephew, Fred. He neither wanted nor visited him throughout the Christmas season. He saw Christmas celebrations as a waste of time and money, and those who participated as fools. That is how he feels about poor folks like Fred and his clerk. Crotchet, Bob. Christmas was simply a time to pay bills (with no money) and settle other concerns. Scrooge, who is miserly and greedy, refuses to do charity for the poor and needy>. He underpays Bob and refuses to give him a holiday, even on Christmas. He leads a lonely existence, apathetic and unconcerned about the plight of others.

Scrooge was returning to Marley's former chamber (where he lived) on Christmas Eve when he noticed Marley's face on the front door knocker. Later that night, he spotted a phantom hearse on the stairwell. These strange incidents terrified him so much that he doubly locked himself - all doors and windows in the house - something he had never done before. Despite all preparations, he is confronted by Marley's spirit at night while sitting alone. The ghost assures him that he would soon be visited by three Spirits of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come. As a result, he would begin his time travel.

Christmas Carol is a work of fiction. Dickens begins the book with a description of Marley's death and then shifts to a mention of Hamlet's father's ghost. This scene prepares the readers for the strange happenings that will occur later

in the novel. The author used aspects from gothic literature to create spectacular effects in the story. The following are the basic characteristics of gothic literature: setting in a castle or some dreary, gloomy place; an atmosphere of suspense and mystery; the use of ancient prophecy, visions, omens, dreams, portents; supernatural events and creatures; highly charged and overwrought surprises and emotions; the metonymy of horror and gloom. Dickens made use of nearly all of these elements. The novel's overwhelming mood of mystery, surprise, and horror is accentuated by the portrayal of foggy weather and darkness.

The mythical creatures and happenings occupy an important role in the plot. The spirit of Marley and the Spirits of Christmas Past become fantasy agents who aid in the progression of the story. Dickens used these phantoms as a means of depicting the realities of his day. Dickens has used the complete gothic apparatus to create an atmosphere of dread and terror. Surprising and unusual events accompany supernatural components, therefore the novel is rife with them.

Dickens used the fantasy style to depict the harsh truths of Victorian era in a way that did not damage the readers. The protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, depicts the materialistic Victorian culture; he had spent his entire life pursuing money and power, sacrificing the joys of friendship and relationship. Marley had been his lone companion and friend. The image of Marley's ghost is a work of art, a wonderful representation of the Victorian attitude of materialism. Dickens portrays Marley's ghost as follows:

The same face: the very same face. Marley in his pig-tail, usual waistcoat, tight, and boots . . . The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought, in steel. Lyle's body was transparent: so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind. Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now. (Dickens, *Carol* 44)

The thorough account is a commentary on the Victorian era as a time of enormous economic and material wealth, but which also brought about a moral and spiritual degradation in people's attitudes and lives. Capitalists/industrialists represented by Marley and Scrooge grew preoccupied with generating monetary gains, which led to the exploitation of their workers.

The Chimes:

Toby Veck, often known as Trotty, is an old, destitute ticket porter who stands by the church in all weathers, good or bad, to make his living. Dickens' regular tactic of introducing unpleasant persons heightens the vileness of evil by contrast it with the innocence and virtue of others. His affinity for noble sentiments manifests itself in spectacular occurrences. The melodramatic intent explains the success of reaching out to people (both affluent and poor) who had grown accustomed to their way of life and were resistant to change. The harsh and rude comments of the Gentlemen dissipate the happy couple's fleeting moments of delight, leaving them in a condition of unabated powerlessness and gloominess. Meanwhile, one of the gentlemen, the Alderman, instructs Trotty to deliver a letter to Sir Joseph Bowley, a politician, and pays him sixpence for the service.

The Chimes, while not as well-known as *A Christmas Carol*, is technically more advanced in its operation and portrayal of fantasy aspects. The gothic details used in *A Christmas Carol* are also present in this novel, although the story is told in a more realistic manner. After the reader is halfway through the book, the fairy tale components, the interplay of the supernatural and the magical, arrive. Nonetheless, Dickens has taken care to establish the atmosphere for it. From the start of the story.

The wind is described as follows:

the night-wind has a dismal trick of wandering round and round a building of the sort, and moaning as it goes; and of trying, with its unseen hands, the windows and the doors; and seeking out some crevices by which to enter. And when it has got in . . . it wails and howls . . . gliding round and round the pillars . . . then flings . . . and creeps along the walls, seeming to read, in whispers, the inscriptions sacred to Dead. At some of these, it breaks out shrill, as with laughter; and at others, moans and cries as if it were lamenting. It has a ghostly sound too. (Dickens, *Books* 81)

The representation of the wind, with its wailing, moaning, and shouting, sets the stage for something out of the ordinary to occur. The atmosphere's aural and visual impact generates a sense of dread, mystery, and tension, preparing the reader for their encounter with the supernatural during the course of the novel (Ford, 11).

The Chimes is a sociopolitical satire that concludes with an appeal for human kindness. It demonstrates the wrongs committed against impoverished and underprivileged people such as Trotty, Meg, Lillian, Will Fern, Richard, and others by Victorian England's bourgeoisie society. Dickens satirizes his era's inhumane, corrupt, unjust, and social, judicial, political systems through the use of characters such as Sir Joseph Bowley, Mr. Filer, Alderman Cute, and a red-faced gentleman. Will Fern's episode vividly depicts prejudices and injustices: humiliation and insults that choked the poor's own life and existence via the might of the affluent and powerful.

Through the use of fantastical elements and the creation of an alternate reality, Dickens wishes to convey a message by posing the question: What would happen in the future if a society (as described) stayed unchanged? Dickens critiques the inhuman industrial system through the figure of Trotty (representing the working class); a system synonymous with exploitation and tyranny; where poor laborers worked long hours for low pay.

The Cricket on the Hearth:

It is a straightforward story about a carrier, John Perrybingle, and his wife Mar, whom he affectionately refers to as Dot. Despite the fact that John is far older than his wife, the pair is introduced as living a happy, contented life with their tiny child. While arriving home from work one day, John is approached by an elderly, deaf man whom he brings home to provide him with shelter for the night. The couple is visited that evening by Caleb Plummer, a toymaker, and then by Tackleton, a toy trader. Tackleton has arrived to inform them of his impending marriage to May Fielding (Dot's friend) three days later, as well as to invite them to a party the following evening, where he will spend time with his would-be bride and her mother. Caleb, the toymaker, is introduced as a devoted father who lives with his blind daughter Bertha in a small cracked nutshell of a wooden house. He has infused her dismal environment with the vivid colors of life with careful care. The brutal reality of their shameful existence does not need to be revealed to her at any point. He has painted a fantasy house filled with domestic joy and bliss for her unseen eyes with the magic of words. The blind girl is over her heels in love with the ill-tempered Tackleton, whom she regards as their benefactor, a benevolent, tender, and honest guy who provided them with work and a lovely home to live in. She is, however, heartbroken upon learning of his impending marriage.

The night when everyone was having a good time at the party. Tackleton shatters John's bliss by revealing Dot (his wife) in a room with the 'stranger': the old, deaf stranger was actually a young gorgeous man disguised as an old, deaf stranger. John's pleasure is shattered by the finding, as he feels deceived. When he returns home and is unable to sleep, he considers murdering the stranger. However, when the evil notion grows and threatens to overwhelm his goodness, the cricket on the hearth assumes the form of a fairy to guide him back to what was right and good/true. The fairy sends him visions of Dot as a loving, devoted wife, so discouraging John from committing a crime. The following day, when John goes for work, Caleb and Bertha arrive to console Dot, having learned of her accusation. While they are conversing, a young man enters the house whom Caleb recognizes as his son Edward, who had traveled to South England to train as a sailor and was presumed dead. Edward explains them that he was the disguised stranger who had arrived; that he had married May because they were in love; and that Dot had been assisting them. Tackleton and John are then confronted with the full truth. When John admits his error and makes apologies with his wife, they reunite as a happy family. In the evening, everyone gathers to celebrate Edward and May's wedding. It was a joyous occasion for everyone.

Cricket on the fireplace, according to English tradition, is a symbol of domestic love and contentment. Dickens' familiarity with folklore and legendary beliefs led him to utilize the cricket as a metaphor for domestic life. It adapts to the atmosphere of the room. When the atmosphere is filled with the delights of love and togetherness, its voice trills strongly throughout the house, but when the household is in a state of despair and grief (as a result of John and Dot's misunderstanding), it becomes mute "The style and music were completely altered. The Cricket, too, had come to a halt. The room, for some reason, was not as pleasant as it had been" (169).

The fairy (Cricket) shows John images of blissful family life that he owes to Dot as a faithful, sincere, and dedicated wife via the use of its magical and beneficent powers. This assists him in recognizing the truth and clearing

the cobwebs from his head, illuminating his life once more with delight "the moon burst forth and shone brightly in the sky" (212).

Though *The Cricket on the Hearth* is a celebration of domestic light, it does allude to some of Victorian England's contemporary problems. By 1830, northern England had become increasingly industrialized, while commerce and trade took place in the south. London was the commercial capital of the world. Dickens takes use of these events in the story of Edward (Caleb's son), who traveled to South England to pursue a career as a sailor. Tackleton's attitude toward Caleb, the toy merchant's employee, reflects the harsh, egotistical, and heartless attitude of industrialists toward their people. There is an indirect reflection of the government's initiatives and corrective actions for public welfare, such as health plans and immunization programs to combat epidemics and infant mortality rates associated with industrial expansion and pollution.

CONCLUSION:

The Christmas Books commemorate the Christmas Spirit and the

Christian values of love, joy, and compassion for all. They are careful and compelling in their efforts to instruct the populace in the art of ethical living and humane conduct. They are a critique of both the protagonist's (individual's) actions/behavior and the society's responsibilities to the ordinary man. They emphasize the importance of Christian qualities in the individual's and society's lives. Dickens is able to juxtapose the actual world and the amazing 'other' world of supernatural beings (ghosts, spirits, goblins, and fairies) through the use of fiction. His deft fusion of fantasy and realism, subtle sarcasm and conventional wisdom endows the Christmas Books with persuasive power. As a writer, he traverses two realms - the real and the fantastic - in order to expose the harsh and painful reality of existence, to cast a pessimistic outlook on humanity's fate, and to emphasize the importance of making the actual world a better place to live.

Dickens' use of fantastical scenarios bestows artistic and thematic brilliance on the storytelling. The fantasy genre has been shown to be an excellent tool for documenting society's vices and providing an indirect social commentary on contemporary events throughout the Victorian era. The Christmas Books are based on hard facts - nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, a mechanical and affected mode of existence, humiliating childhood experiences - in order to elicit sympathy for the poor and downtrodden, and to effect an ethical and emotional transformation through the revival of Christmas traditions and the evocation of the Christmas spirit of love and generosity. Dickens has allowed his romantic imagination free rein in the Christmas Books in order to capture the readers' attention and interest while also expressing his reformatory enthusiasm and doing honor to the work at hand - presenting life as it is and as it should be.

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