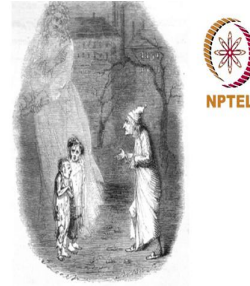


A Christmas Carol
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Lecture 33
The Dark Narrative; The Ghostly Children

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Week 7: A
Christmas
Carol



Lecture 7C: The Dark Narrative; The Ghostly Children

[Image source: http://www.opportunityinstitute.org/blog/post/a-christmas-carol-sending-the-poor-to-prison/](http://www.opportunityinstitute.org/blog/post/a-christmas-carol-sending-the-poor-to-prison/)



Hello, and welcome to week seven's lectures on A Christmas Carol. In today's lecture, I will be talking about the nature of the dark narrative. I will be discussing the nature of Gothic settings, and I will wrap up by talking about the nature of ghostly children in this novella.

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A Christmas Carol

- *"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."*

Charles Dickens

[Image source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/160018592995503557/](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/160018592995503557/)



Charles Dickens had said, “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.” These words are by Charles Dickens and they sum up the nature of this book.

They point out the benefits that this book would bring to the lives of the people who read it and employ the message that this book advises to his readers. Therefore, he says, the ghostly nature of this book is something which need not be put down because the ghostly nature is something that is going to bring munificence, benefit, and charity to those who need it.

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A Christmas Carol



- “THESE ARE CHARLES DICKENS’S WORDS to his readers in the introduction to his novella *A Christmas Carol*, first published in December 1843. The Victorian English author seems to have been concerned that his readers might be put off, or even disturbed, by such a dark tale in the middle of the Christmas season. It may seem strange to modern readers to think about *A Christmas Carol* as a “dark” story, but this classic story contains all three elements of a typical dark narrative: horror, terror, and the Gothic.”
- Text source: The Dark Narrative of Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* by Tyler Beane http://thecresset.org/2011/Advent/Beane_A2011.html



“The words that we saw are part of the introduction that Dickens wrote to his novella, *A Christmas Carol*, which was published in December 1843. The Victorian English author seems to have been concerned that his readers might be put off or even disturbed by such a dark tale in the middle of the Christmas season. It may seem strange to modern readers to think about *A Christmas Carol* as a dark story, but this classic story contains all three elements of a typical dark narrative, horror, terror and the Gothic.”

We need to realize that Dickens is slightly apprehensive about the idea of ghostly visitations in a book that is written during the time of Christmas. He is slightly apprehensive and anxious about the reception of the book, which is why he wants to contextualize, say something more about the function of the ghosts that he uses in this work and these ghosts are good spirits that are trying to seek transformation in a central character who is capable of

generosity deep down and therefore, the spirits are good spirits which is why Dickens says that we need not be offended by these spiritual presences even during this festive season.

We do not usually associate A Christmas Carol with darkness, with bleakness, but we need to understand that this classic novella contains components which are traditionally associated with the Gothic, with the dark narratives, such as horror, terror and the Gothic. So there are Gothic tropes present in this novel. Readers might be horrified by some of the graphic descriptions of certain terrible things and there is terror as well which makes the readers think deeply about the way life is led in these are times. So let us see how exactly this novella is Gothic.

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A Christmas Carol



- “The ghosts, except perhaps for the Ghost of Christmas Past, all take on tangible, horrifying appearances at one point or another. The main character, Scrooge, experiences terror in his times of waiting for the ghosts to appear. As for the Gothic, the entire story is written in the style of a Gothic ghost story. Dani Cavallaro, author of *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror, and Fear* (Continuum 2007), goes so far as to suggest that with this novella, Dickens makes Christmas “coterminous with darkness” (41).”

- Text source: The Dark Narrative of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* by Tyler Beane http://thecresset.org/2011/Advent/Beane_A2011.html
- Image source: <https://www.dickenslondontours.co.uk/a-christmas-carol-films.htm>



“The ghosts, except perhaps for the Ghost of Christmas Past, all take on tangible, horrifying appearances at one point or another. The main character Scrooge experiences terror in his times of waiting for the ghosts to appear. As for the Gothic, the entire story is written in the style of a Gothic ghost story. Dani Cavallaro, author of *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror, and Fear*, goes so far as to suggest that with this novella Dickens makes Christmas coterminous with darkness.”

So there are clear cut suggestions in the tale would suggest that the narrative belongs to the Gothic mode. Scrooge when he is waiting for the ghost to appear, he has been warned by his dead clerk who himself appears as a ghost and cautions him that Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future will visit him. And while Scrooge is waiting for the ghosts to appear, he is terrified. So that also very strongly anchors this story within the Gothic mode.

And the critic Dani Cavallaro suggests that because of all these associations that Dickens brought into the culture through his work, *A Christmas Carol*, there is a kind of implication that Christmas in itself becomes deeply associated with the idea of darkness. So these are some of the subtexts and textual cues that are made apparent to us when we read *A Christmas Carol* and its criticisms.

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Christmas and Ghosts



- “In the Victorian period, Christmastime often produced many ghost stories, thus infusing Christmas tales such as *Carol* and other works by Dickens with gothic elements (Moore 2). In his “Introduction to the Gothic in Western Culture,” Jerrold E. Hogle defines elements of the genre, all of which appear in *Carol*. For example, the narratives usually take place in old, antiquated, or ruined dwellings such as a prisons, castles, or graveyards.”
- (Ashten Roberts, 2016, p.5)
- Image source: <https://www.dickenslondontours.co.uk/a-christmas-carol-films.htm>



“In the Victorian period, Christmastime often produced many ghost stories, thus infusing Christmas tales such as *Carol* and other works by Dickens with Gothic elements. In his introduction to *Gothic in Western Culture*, Jerrold E. Hogle defines elements of the genre, all of which appear in *Carol*. For example, the narratives usually take place in old, antiquated or ruined dwellings, such as prisons, castles or graveyards.”

We need to understand that there is a tradition in the Victorian period, where there is an association between Christmas and Gothic tales. So that tradition is something which the contemporaries of Dickens would be very familiar with. Jerrold E. Hogle in his book *Gothic in Western Culture* lists out the set of Gothic attributes in narratives which are prisons, castles and graveyards, ruined buildings, rundown mansions, so the setting is crucial. And in *A Christmas Carol*'s case, we do have Gothic ambience in the settings that Dickens sketches for us in the novella.

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Gothic Settings



- “Gothic settings represent an important aspect of the genre because not only does the setting have to maintain this dreary and obsolete or haunting aura, but it must also contain or hide some repression or secret from the past (Hogle, p.2).”

• (Ashton Roberts, 2016, p.5)

- Image source: <https://www.dickenslondontours.co.uk/a-christmas-carol-films.htm>



“Gothic settings represent an important aspect of the genre because not only does the setting have to maintain this dreary and obsolete or haunting aura, but it must also contain or hide some repression or secret from the past.”

Settings are crucial because settings are important in provoking fear and anxiety, both to the inhabitants of that setting as well as to the readers who read about them. Furthermore, the settings are also useful because they connect the past and the present, and Gothic is brought about by the eruptive, disruptive presence of the past in the present.

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Gothic Settings in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*



- “In Carol, Scrooge’s home is described as “a gloomy suite of rooms” that was “old . . . and dreary” (Dickens 48, 49). Scrooge lives in a dilapidated building that once belonged to his deceased business partner, Marley. Hogle explains that the mysteries from the past within settings like Scrooge’s abode can take various supernatural forms such as ghosts, altered beings, or the undead (2).”
- (Ashton Roberts, 2016, 5)



Now, let us take a look at the nature of the Gothic settings in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

“In Carol, Scrooge’s home is described as a gloomy suite of rooms that was old and dreary. Scrooge lives in a dilapidated building that once belonged to his deceased business partner Marley. Hogle explains that the mysteries from the past within settings like Scrooge’s abode can take various supernatural forms, such as ghosts, altered beings, or the undead.”

You can very clearly see that the nature of Scrooge's home is Gothic and tone. It is very gloomy, it is dark, it is very old, it is very bleak and it belongs to the dead partner of Ebenezer Scrooge. Therefore, it is very ‘reasonable’ to see Marley's ghost visiting Scrooge and warning him of the further spirits that are going to visit him.

And it is also important for us to see the connection between the past and the present. The past embedded in the identity of Marley, the ex-partner of Scrooge, comes to the present, visits the present, in order to make changes in the present, transform Scrooge in the present. So there is a connection between the past and the present and that is made possible in a narrative sense through the settings as well. Therefore, the presence of Marley's ghost does make sense in a way because the home belongs to Marley, the dead partner of Scrooge.

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Gothic Settings in Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*

- “In Scrooge’s own home, Marley visits him in the form of a ghost to prepare him for the visitation of the three Christmas spirits. Through these supernatural elements, gothic fiction allows a text’s characters and readers to consider “some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural” (Hogle 4).”

- (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 5)
- [Image source: http://www.opportunityinstitute.org/blog/post/a-christmas-carol-sending-the-poor-to-prison/](http://www.opportunityinstitute.org/blog/post/a-christmas-carol-sending-the-poor-to-prison/)



“In Scrooge's own home, Marley visits him in the form of a ghost to prepare him for the visitation of the three Christmas spirits. Through these supernatural elements, Gothic fiction allows a text’s characters and readers to consider some of the most important desires, quandaries, sources of anxiety from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural.”

Even though the home originally belonged to the dead partner Marley, it has now become Scrooge's home. Therefore, when Marley visits Scrooge, we say that the spirit of Marley visits Scrooge in his own home. And there is a purpose, there is a symbolic function to these supernatural elements because, through these supernatural pretences, the writer is trying to make sense of an individual's desires, complications that he/she faces and the variety of anxieties that the individual is experiencing. And all these desires, the complexities and the anxieties can be either internal, psychological, or it could be social and cultural.

So the Gothic is a very useful vessel or medium in which he tries to make sense of the various pressures on the individual. And here the centre of interest for us is Ebenezer Scrooge who is occupying, who has made the home of his dead partner, his own home now and he is being visited by the dead partner's ghost and he also further informs him that he will be seeing other supernatural elements which will try to recover Scrooge from the ruinous path that he is traversing.

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Gothic Settings in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*



- "In fact, Ridenhour describes one of the most defining characteristics of the gothic genre as its creation of tension between the past and present (4). The slow revelation of the past to Scrooge allows him to transform throughout his journey and assimilate each truth he has repressed within the novella. For example, he must revisit his own past to reclaim his lost ideas of morality and youthful innocence. Also, he must come to terms with his and society's poor treatment of the impoverished and needy."

- (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 5-6)



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We do know that in the Gothic, there is always a tension between the past and the present. There is somehow the idea that the present is trying to make reparations for certain things that had happened in the past. There is also the idea that the present is trying to make the past new in some way, or accommodate the past in the present. So, there is constant tension and conflict between the traditions of the past and the new traditions of the present.

In this novella, the spiritual presences take Scrooge to his past, so that he learns and assimilates the repressed truths from the past and tries to transform himself in the present. He has to regain ideas of morality and he has to revisit his own youthful innocence, he has to get back that innocence so that he can look at the world anew and be a moral citizen of the society. Only when he comes to terms with his own past and his own morality and innocence, Scrooge is able to relate to the society's treatment of the needy and the very poor. So the ghosts do perform a crucial function, wherein an individual is recovered from within so that he is able to be charitable or generous to the other members within the society.

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The Gothic Child

- "While the basic tropes described by Hogle and Ridenhour have been accepted as staples of the genre, critics like Georgieva have recently begun to analyze the gothic child as another important element of the gothic. While Georgieva recognizes that depictions of the "murderous" or "vampirised" child in twentieth-century literature has recently engaged critics, she argues that the gothic child actually originates in the literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and emerges as a specific trope of the genre (x-xi)."
- (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 6)
- Image source: <http://www.opportunityinstitute.org/blog/post/a-christmas-carol-sending-the-poor-to-prison/>



“While the basic tropes described by Hogle and Ridenhour have been accepted as staples of the genre, critics like Georgieva have recently begun to analyze the Gothic child as another important element of the Gothic. While Georgieva recognizes that the depictions of the murderers or vampirised child in 20th-century literature has recently engaged critics, she argues that the Gothic child actually originates in the literature of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and emerges as a specific trope of the genre.”

What is being emphasized in this set of criticism is that we do know all the traditional tropes of the Gothic- the dilapidated mansions, the strange settings, entrapped victims, usually young women. So we understand the list of traditional tropes associated with the Gothic, but the Gothic child is something which is not being studied to a great extent. And she mentions that the origin for this Gothic child goes back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and it is an important Gothic trope.

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The Gothic

- “Rather than offering a precise definition of the gothic child, Georgieva uses a wide range of texts to close read a myriad of characters that she considers to be “gothic children” such as Frankenstein’s monster and the vampire children in Dracula. To Georgieva, a gothic child does not have to even technically be a child. In other words, even a memory of a child counts as a gothic child to Georgieva.”
- (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 6)
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“Rather than offering a precise definition of the Gothic child, Georgieva uses a wide range of texts to close read a myriad of characters that she considers Gothic children, such as Frankenstein's monster and the vampire children in Dracula. To Georgieva, a Gothic child does not have to even technically be a child. In other words, even a memory of a child counts as a Gothic child to Georgieva.”

So this particular critic does read a range of fictional text to study the trope of the Gothic child. And for her, Frankenstein's monster or creation, and the vampire children in Dracula are part of this Gothic child trope. In fact, for Georgieva, a Gothic child does not even have to be really a young person. Even the memory of a child can have Gothic resonances for this particular critic.

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The Gothic Child



- “A character may become a gothic child if it fuses opposite characteristics like youth and old age, if it resembles a parent, thus reminding the parent of his or her own suppressed youth, if it faces a traumatic experience, or if it is ghoulish.
- So, even though the monster is not technically a child, Georgieva considers him a gothic child because he represents the child of Frankenstein. As another example, she considers the children that vampire Lucy bites in Bram Stoker’s Dracula as gothic children because they incite fear into the readers.”
- (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 6-7)



“A character may become a Gothic child, if it fuses opposite characteristics like youth and old age, if it resembles a parent, thus reminding the parent of his or her own suppressed youth, if it faces a traumatic experience or if it is ghoulish.”

So these are the ways in which one can make sense of the trope of the Gothic child. If a child has the attributes of both the youth and the old age, then it is a Gothic child. There is a hybrid youth and old age and if the child resembles a parent and thus reminding the parent of his/her own suppressed youth, then that is also Gothic in tone because the parent is taken back in time.

And, for example, if it is ghoulish in appearance, there is a spectrum of characteristics which can structure this Gothic child trope. And if you have read A Christmas Carol, the Ghost of Christmas Past is evenly like a child and an old person. So there is hybridity there where youth and old age if combined can suggest a Gothic child trope.

“So even though the monster is not technically a child, Georgieva considers him a Gothic child because he represents the child of Frankenstein.” So we do not necessarily think about the monster as a child even though he is the child of Frankenstein, the scientist. So this is how the trope is built up.

“As another example, she considers the children that vampire Lucy bites in Bram Stoker’s Dracula as Gothic children because they incite fear into the readers”. So these are some of the examples of this particular eerie, really disturbing Gothic trope.

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The Victorian Child

- “...as Naomi Wood observes, many Victorian writers idealized the child as superior to adults through their innate innocence (116). These writers considered the child as one not yet tainted by the sinful adult world and actually somewhat immune to the corruptive nature of society through his or her angelic status (116).
- (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 7)
- Image source: <http://www.opportunityinstitute.org/blog/post/a-christmas-carol-sending-the-poor-to-prison/>



“As Naomi Wood observes, many Victorian writers idealize the child as superior to adults through their innate innocence. These writers considered the child as one not yet tainted by the sinful adult world and actually somewhat immune to the corruptive nature of society through his or her angelic status.”

Now, let us talk about the context of the Victorian child because that would be helpful for us to understand the role of the Gothic child in Dickens’ A Christmas Carol. In the Victorian period, the child was seen as a being that is very superior to the adult because the child is innocent. It has not been tainted by this corrupt society. There is purity in the child because it has not yet entered the adult world. The child is seen as a pure being that is immune to the corrupt society. Therefore, the child had an angelic status. It was associated with God's beings, with angels.

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Depiction of the Child



- Carol represents an exemplar of a fantastical novel through its unrealistic illustrations of various characters and events. Wood argues that fantastical depictions of child characters figured the child as “an angelic emblem both of uncorrupted nature and of spiritual truth beyond the material” (116). The youthful characters within Carol reveal truths to Scrooge and the readers through often spiritual or fantastical means.

- (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 7-8)



“Christmas Carol represents an exemplar of a fantastical novel through its unrealistic illustrations of various characters and events. Wood argues that fantastical depictions of child characters figured the child as an angelic emblem both of uncorrupted nature and of spiritual truth beyond the material. The youthful characters within Carol reveal truths to Scrooge and the readers through often spiritual or fantastical means.”

A Christmas Carol is not just a Gothic novel. It is a fantastical novel because it has unrealistic representations of a society of characters and of events. And Dickens does represent the child as an angelic emblem. The child and Dickens’ work becomes a representation of the pure nature of higher truth and something that is above the material necessities of society. So, in Carol, the child is used to tutor and transform Scrooge, and readers are given a lesson in spirituality through the usage of child characters.

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Children and Gothic

- Interestingly, Wood finds that Victorian writers such as Dickens often included the death of an angelic child within their works, and this depiction became a staple of the gothic genre (117). In *Carol*, the death of little Fan and Tiny Tim's impending doom affect Scrooge's transformation. Also, these child characters are represented as angelic—Tim is associated with religious goodness, and Fan ardently admires and cares for her brother, Scrooge. Within this fantastical, Victorian text, Dickens certainly employs an understanding of the child as angelic (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 7-8)

Image source: <http://www.adg-europe.com/?promos=a-christmas-carol>



“Interestingly, Wood finds that Victorian writers such as Dickens often included the death of an angelic child within their works, and this depiction becomes a staple of the Gothic genre. In *Carol*, the death of little Fan and Tiny Tim's impending doom affect Scrooge's transformation. Also, these child characters are represented as angelic, Tim is associated with religious goodness and Fan ardently admires and takes care of her brother Scrooge. Within this fantastical Victorian text, Dickens certainly employs an understanding of the child as angelic.”

We do see that the death of the child is a common trope within Dickens, Little Nellie is a classic example. In *A Christmas Carol*, there is the death of Little Fan, the sister of Ebenezer Scrooge and there is a suggestion that Tiny Tim is going to die unless Scrooge mends his ways and does something for the child and the family. So these characters- Little Fan and Tiny Tim are embodied as pure souls or angelic beings. Tim is very clearly a boy who is representing religiosity, and the higher truth and spirituality, and Fan, of course, loves her brother. She does take care of the child Scrooge and we generally get the sense that the children represent everything that is good, pure and soulful. And the main idea is that there is an angelic presence in these beings.

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The Children of A Christmas Carol



- “Laura C. Berry studies the child in the Victorian novel and concludes that they are represented as innocents who often become victims of society. She argues that while angelic children were evident in fiction, the innocent child negatively affected by society was also a topic of real-world discourse (4). The gothic child characters of Carol frequently illustrate the discourse Berry outlines of the Victorian child. (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 7-8)

Image source: <http://www.adg-europe.com/?promos=a-christmas-carol>



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So, some very crucial points are mentioned here on the slide. Firstly, we do understand that child in the novel is angelic and innocent. Secondly, these children also become victims of society. They are negatively affected by the corrupt nature of society, the greed of society, and the obsession with materiality. And this greed and obsession with materiality are some of the characteristics of Ebenezer Scrooge. As we know, the Gothic child of Carol is something that is easily representing the idea that it is both innocent and victimized by society.

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Gothic Children of *A Christmas Carol*

- “For example, Tiny Tim demonstrates a sense of innocence and even self-determination through his spiritual devotion but is a victim of his family’s financial welfare. Want and Ignorance also symbolize victimization by societal issues. Interestingly, child innocence mitigates the association between the gothic and guilt, sin, or crime; that is, the innocence of the child diffuses the crime and guilt typically associated with and revealed by the gothic”. (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 8)



Image source: <http://www.adg-europe.com/?promos=a-christmas-carol>



“For example, Tiny Tim demonstrates a sense of innocence and even self-determination through his spiritual devotion but is a victim of his family's financial welfare. Want and Ignorance also symbolize victimization by societal issues. Interestingly, child innocence mitigates the association between the Gothic and guilt, sin or crime; that is, the innocence of the child diffuses the crime and guilt typically associated with and revealed by the Gothic.”

Several interesting points are illustrated here on the slide. Firstly, yes, there is innocence in Tiny Tim. There is also the status of a victim in his identity. Because of his family's finances, he is affected, in terms of his health, he is on the verge of death. In addition to Tiny Tim and Little Fan, we have other representations of children in *A Christmas Carol*, and those children are Want and Ignorance. These are symbolic representations of particular ideas in society- Want representing the deprivation in society, and Ignorance representing the lack of knowledge in society and these are represented as children.

So, while there is innocence, the victim heard there is also Want and Ignorance being represented by children and this is brought about by the negligence of the society. Therefore, though these children are horrifyingly represented, that is Want and Ignorance, there is this idea that we do not really find fault with the children because they are children and are innocent by default. Therefore, the Gothic nature is diffused. The guilt and sin and crime that is associated with these children are diffused or marginalized because the core ideas of purity and victimhood are the ones that really illustrate the nature of the child in that time.

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Gothic Children of *A Christmas Carol*



- “though one might assume that gothic characters would not be innocent, the children of Carol are simultaneously gothic and innocent. Both the gothicness and the innocence enable the gothic children to help Scrooge on his process of moral restoration. The gothic child’s gothicness is somewhat tamed by its innocence. Rather than simply terrifying Scrooge, the gothic children, therefore, can also emotionally affect him.”

• (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 9)

• Image source: <http://www.adg-europe.com/?promos=a-christmas-carol>



“Though one might assume that Gothic characters would not be innocent, the children of Carol are simultaneously Gothic and innocent. Both the Gothicness and innocence enable the Gothic children to help Scrooge on his process of moral restoration. The Gothic child’s Gothicness is somewhat tamed by its innocence. Rather than simply terrifying Scrooge, the Gothic children, therefore, can also emotionally affect him.”

Though there is a sense that the Gothic child may not be innocent in *A Christmas Carol*, there is a strong emphasis that even though the children are Gothic in nature, they are very innocent, they are still ironically pure. Therefore, the Gothic aspect of these children in combination with their innocence prompt Ebenezer Scrooge to change his attitudes towards society.

So, in a way Scrooge is brought back to his salvation by the innocence of the Gothic child. Instead of scaring Scrooge, the Gothic children have a positive effect on the emotions of the central male character, Scrooge.

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Gothic Children and Transformation



- “Tim, Want, and Ignorance, especially, demonstrate the negative treatments of society without inciting horror in Scrooge that causes him to run terrified. Instead, these characters produce sympathy in him for their victimized states, thus inciting his transformation.”
- (Ashten Roberts, 2016, 9)
- Image source: <http://www.adg-europe.com/?promos=a-christmas-carol>



“Tim, Want and Ignorance, especially demonstrate the negative treatments of society without inciting horror in Scrooge that causes him to run terrified. Instead, these characters produce sympathy in him for their victimized states, thus inciting his transformation.”

Therefore, in *A Christmas Carol*, the Gothic presences do not really terrify Ebenezer Scrooge and by implication, they do not terrify the readers who are reading this work, because both the readers and Scrooge understand very profoundly that the children, despite their Gothic subtext, are essentially angelic souls. And therefore, instead of running away from them in fear, Scrooge tries to do his bit. In trying to help these children, he transforms himself so that he can bring some kind of change into the society around him, and so that the children would also be helped.

Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.