

**A Christmas Carol**  
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**Lecture 35**  
**Gothic Structure and Time Consciousness**

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## Week 7: A Christmas Carol

Lecture 7E: Gothic Structure and Time Consciousness

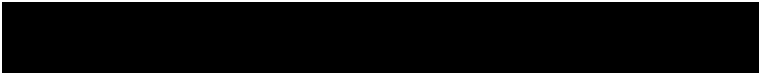
Image source: [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Christmas\\_Carol](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol)

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Hello and welcome to Week Seven's lectures on A Christmas Carol. In today's lecture session, I am going to talk about the structure of this novella and its time consciousness, and how these two aspects relate to the notion of the Gothic.



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## Allegory and morality



- “The apparitions are inescapable. ‘Show me no more!’ Scrooge cries to the Ghost of Christmas Past. What he sees is a punishment to him. ‘But the relentless Ghost pinioned him in both his arms, and forced him to observe what happened next’ (Stave 2). The phantom as literary device enables Dickens to explore the social and moral issues central to his fiction: – poverty, miserliness, guilt, redemption.”
- Text source: John Mullan, 2014. <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/ghosts-in-a-christmas-carol>
- Image source: [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Christmas\\_Carol#/media/File:Scrooges\\_third\\_visitor-John\\_Leech,1843.jpg](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol#/media/File:Scrooges_third_visitor-John_Leech,1843.jpg)

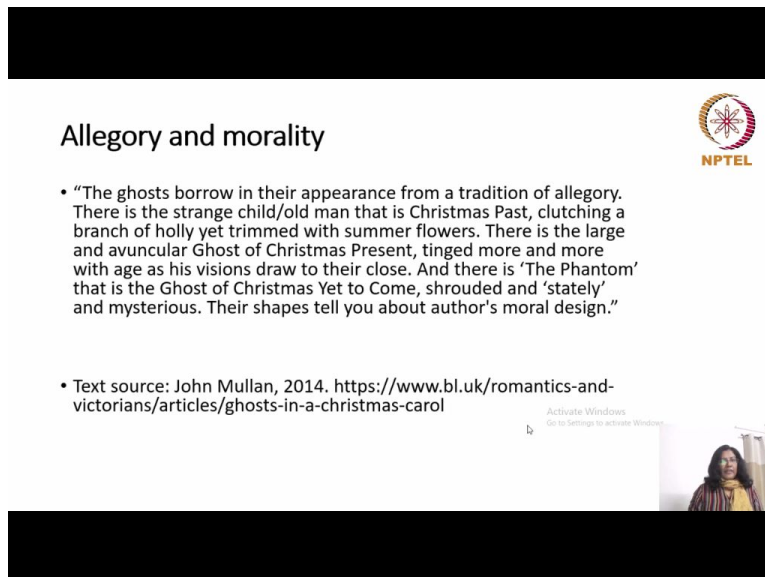


“The apparitions are inescapable. Show me no more, Scrooge cries to the Ghost of Christmas Past. What he sees is a punishment to him. But the relentless Ghost pinioned him in both his arms and forced him to observe what happened next. The Phantom as literary device enables Dickens to explore the social and moral issues central to his fiction- poverty, miserliness, guilt, redemption.”

In a sense, Scrooge is trapped by these ghosts. When the ghost of Christmas past shows him the things and events that have happened to him, he wants to see more of it. He wants to stay in the past, enjoy the nostalgia, enjoy the passivity and the inaction in a way. However, the ghost wants him to look at observe what happens next, what are the things that are going to come towards him?

Therefore, the ghost as a literary device, as a literary weapon, as a literary event and function in this novella is extremely useful to Dickens to help him explore several social and moral issues which are important to him and to his society. And they are the poverty, the need that is there in society, the miserliness, the inability to share, the guilt of the individual, and the transformation that the individual undergoes, once the heart is reformed.

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The slide features a black header bar at the top. Below it, the title "Allegory and morality" is centered. To the right of the title is the NPTEL logo, which consists of a circular emblem with a stylized figure and the text "NPTEL" underneath. The main content of the slide is a bulleted list of text. The first bullet point is a quote from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" describing the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come. The second bullet point is a citation for John Mullan's 2014 article. At the bottom right of the slide, there is a small, partially visible video thumbnail showing a woman speaking, with a Windows watermark overlaying it.

### Allegory and morality

- “The ghosts borrow in their appearance from a tradition of allegory. There is the strange child/old man that is Christmas Past, clutching a branch of holly yet trimmed with summer flowers. There is the large and avuncular Ghost of Christmas Present, tinged more and more with age as his visions draw to their close. And there is ‘The Phantom’ that is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, shrouded and ‘stately’ and mysterious. Their shapes tell you about author’s moral design.”
- Text source: John Mullan, 2014. <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/ghosts-in-a-christmas-carol>

“The ghosts borrow in their appearance from a tradition of allegory. There is this strange child/old man that is Christmas past, clutching a branch of holly, yet trimmed with summer flowers. There is a large and avuncular Ghost of Christmas Present, tinged more and more with age as his visions draw to their close. And there is the Phantom that is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, shrouded and stately and mysterious. Their shapes tell you about the author’s moral design.

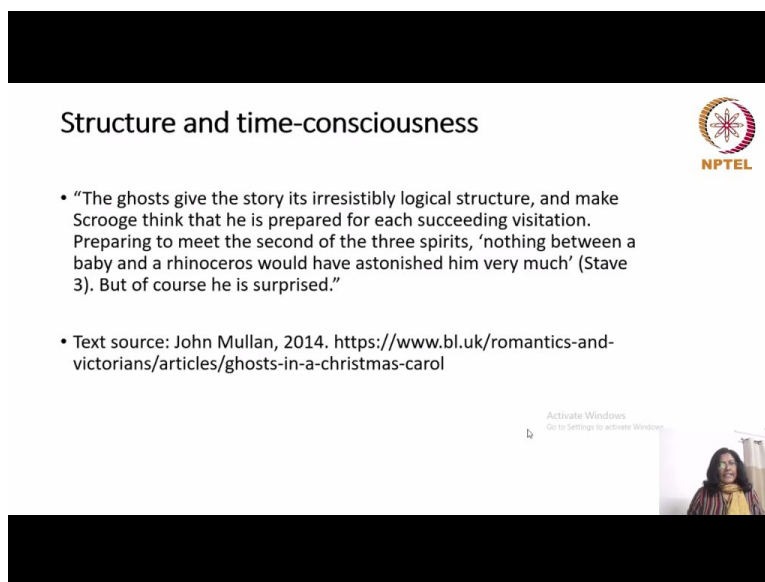
We saw in the previous lectures, as to how the ghosts are a combination of contrary aspects, especially in terms of the ghost of Christmas past, it resembles both the child and an old man implying that Scrooge as a child is going to be shown by this ghost.

And we see how the figure of Scrooge ages and becomes an old man. So that kind of hybridity is embedded in the image of the ghost of Christmas Past. We see the holly, which is trimmed with some flowers, so contrary aspects are put together. There is this ghost of Christmas Present, which is very friendly towards the young. And even this ghost is ageing as, as his visions come to a close.


So there is a combination of contrary and alternative factors, embedded in a symbolic way in relation to the representation of the ghost. And the ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, is also mysterious in a sense that it is stately disgrunt. And yet there is a suggestion of the funeral about its representation, it's stately, but it's kind of mysterious bleak. And there is a sense that things may not turn out for the better if Scrooge doesn't change.

So what is implied in these representations- symbolic sketches of these ghosts and these allegorical representations of these ghosts is the vision of the author, the author's moral design. And all these ghosts have been structured to impart a particular message to Ebenezer Scrooge and to the readers.


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Structure and time-consciousness



- “The ghosts give the story its irresistibly logical structure, and make Scrooge think that he is prepared for each succeeding visitation. Preparing to meet the second of the three spirits, ‘nothing between a baby and a rhinoceros would have astonished him very much’ (Stave 3). But of course he is surprised.”
- Text source: John Mullan, 2014. <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/ghosts-in-a-christmas-carol>



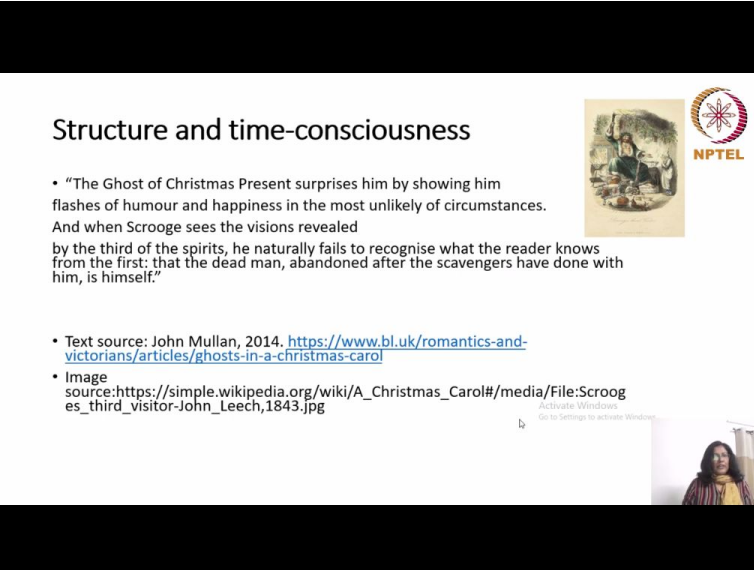
“The ghosts give the story it’s irresistibly logical structure, and makes Scrooge think that he is prepared for each succeeding visitation. Preparing to meet the second of the three spirits, nothing between a baby and the rhinoceros would have astonished him very much, but of course, he is surprised.”

We have seen how Ebenezer Scrooge is prepared for these visitations, by the initial presence of Marley's ghost. So Marley's ghost prepares him for these other visitations. And once he has seen

the ghost of Christmas Past, Scrooge is prepared. He is ready to meet any kind of spirit. And he believes that nothing would surprise him.

And of course, yet he is surprised. So there is an element of surprise, but there is not an element of extreme shock. And that is what makes these supernatural presences benign. There is no repulsion on the part of Scrooge when he is visited by these ghosts and who show him the past and the present and things to come.

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**Structure and time-consciousness**

- “The Ghost of Christmas Present surprises him by showing him flashes of humour and happiness in the most unlikely of circumstances. And when Scrooge sees the visions revealed by the third of the spirits, he naturally fails to recognise what the reader knows from the first: that the dead man, abandoned after the scavengers have done with him, is himself.”
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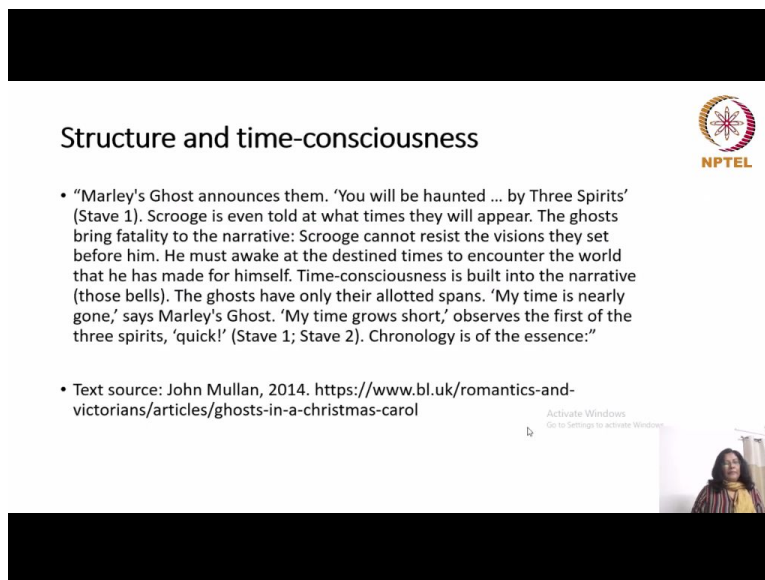
“The ghost of Christmas Present surprises him by showing him flashes of humour and happiness in the most unlikely of circumstances. And when Scrooge sees the visions revealed by the third of the spirits he naturally fails to recognize what the reader knows from the first, that the dead man, abandoned after the scavengers have done with him, is himself.”

What is significant about these ghosts is the fact that they have this comic face to them. They can make Scrooge smile. They show him visions which makes him feel comfortable. So this idea of the comic, the grotesque prepares Scrooge’s mind in such a way that he is unable to really be disturbed by his future death. This possibility of Scrooge’s death and a death, which is not really mooned over by the many. So when he sees the vision of the dead man, who is left in that

churchyard by the scavengers once they finish their task, initially Scrooge is just unable to realize that, that dead man is himself.

So this is one of the effects of the ghost's representation and the way they function. The fact that they function in a mild manner, in a not very disturbing manner, makes Scrooge engage with these visions and change his mind gradually.

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**Structure and time-consciousness**

- “Marley’s Ghost announces them. ‘You will be haunted ... by Three Spirits’ (Stave 1). Scrooge is even told at what times they will appear. The ghosts bring fatality to the narrative: Scrooge cannot resist the visions they set before him. He must awake at the destined times to encounter the world that he has made for himself. Time-consciousness is built into the narrative (those bells). The ghosts have only their allotted spans. ‘My time is nearly gone,’ says Marley’s Ghost. ‘My time grows short,’ observes the first of the three spirits, ‘quick!’ (Stave 1; Stave 2). Chronology is of the essence:”
- Text source: John Mullan, 2014. <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/ghosts-in-a-christmas-carol>

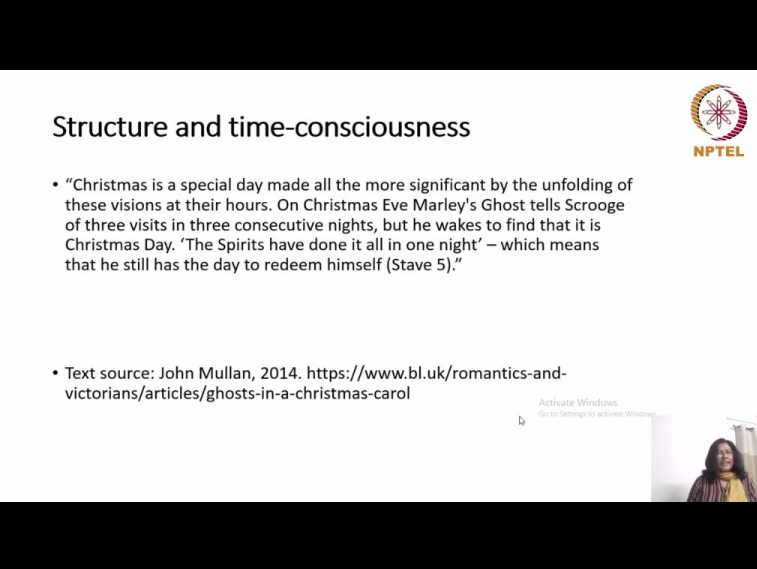
“Marley’s ghost announces them- you will be haunted by three spirits. Scrooge is even told at what times they will appear. The ghosts bring fatality to the narrative. Scrooge cannot resist the visions they set before him, he must awake at the destined times to encounter the world that he has made for himself. Time-consciousness is built into the narrative. The ghosts have only their allotted spans. ‘My time is nearly gone’, says Marley’s ghost. ‘My time grows short’, observes the 1st of the three spirits, ‘quick!’, the chronology is of the essence.”

Chronology is extremely important for this novella. We can see how the appearance of all the ghosts is neatly structured. Marley’s ghost prepares Scrooge for the other three ghosts. And Scrooge is told at what time each of these ghosts would appear. And he has to get up and participate in the visions that they set before Scrooge’s eyes. There is no escape for Scrooge. He

has to perform all these things at the destined time. And even the ghosts are time-bound. Marley says, Marley's ghost says, I have to go and my time has come. My time is nearly run-out.

And the first of the three ghosts, the ghost of Christmas Past says that 'quick, be quick about it'. So what is being made aware to Scrooge and to the readers is that time is slipping by, and it is high time that the readers and Scrooge change their mind so that reparations could be done while there is time. So the lack of time is a scary notion in itself. Scrooge at one point realizes that if he doesn't behave in a timely manner, there will be bleakness and gloom forever.

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Structure and time-consciousness

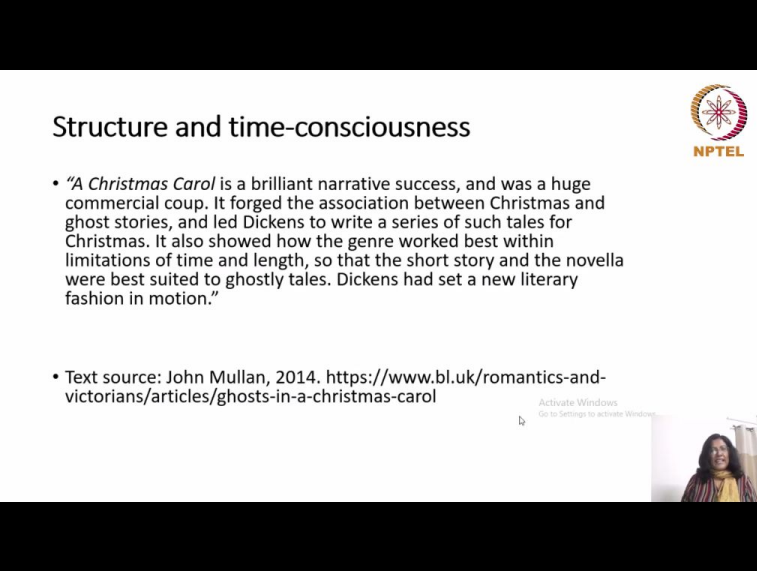
- "Christmas is a special day made all the more significant by the unfolding of these visions at their hours. On Christmas Eve Marley's Ghost tells Scrooge of three visits in three consecutive nights, but he wakes to find that it is Christmas Day. 'The Spirits have done it all in one night' – which means that he still has the day to redeem himself (Stave 5)."
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“Christmas is a special day, made all the most significant by the unfolding of these visions at their hours. On Christmas Eve, Marley's Ghost tells Scrooge of the three visits in three consecutive nights, but he wakes to find that it is Christmas Day. The spirits have done it all in one night, which means that he still has the day to redeem himself.”

What happens is that all these ghosts visit Scrooge in one night, so that all their work is done on that one particular night for Scrooge so that he redeems himself, transforms in himself, and finds salvation. So that is really significant because it is fast-forwarded for Ebenezer Scrooge. So the

suggestion is that everybody has to get their act together in a really quick manner so that something can be done for the betterment of those who are needed in society.

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**Structure and time-consciousness**

- “*A Christmas Carol* is a brilliant narrative success, and was a huge commercial coup. It forged the association between Christmas and ghost stories, and led Dickens to write a series of such tales for Christmas. It also showed how the genre worked best within limitations of time and length, so that the short story and the novella were best suited to ghostly tales. Dickens had set a new literary fashion in motion.”
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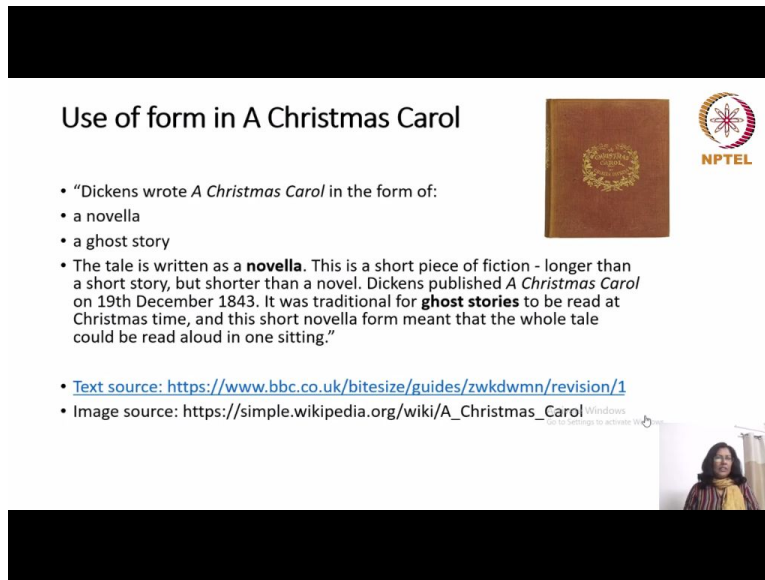
As we have pointed out time and again that this novella was a big hit with the audience. It was a bestseller. It was a commercial coup, according to John Mullan. And Dickens had set in motion the very close association between ghost stories and Christmas festivity. And Dickens has also taught the readers that a relatively short narrative is best suited for the ghostly genre. And with A Christmas Carol, Dickens had set in motion a new trend, a new narrative trend in English literature.



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Use of form in A Christmas Carol

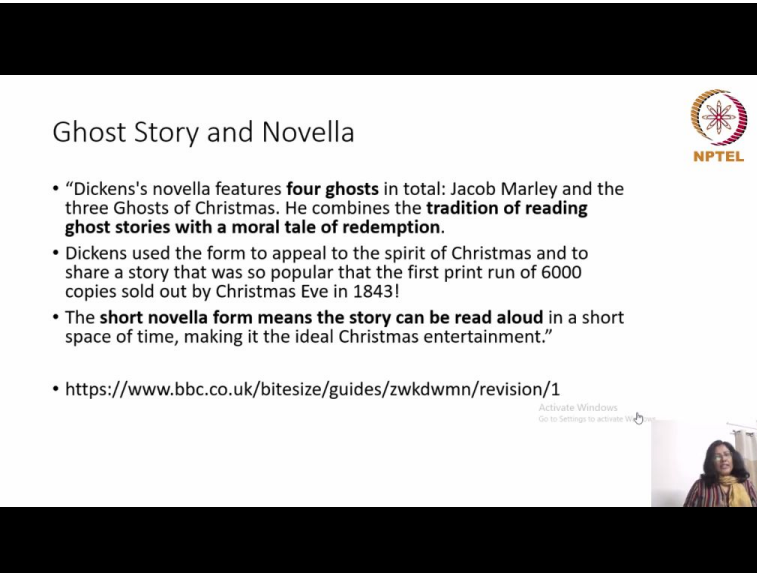
- "Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in the form of:
  - a novella
  - a ghost story
- The tale is written as a **novella**. This is a short piece of fiction - longer than a short story, but shorter than a novel. Dickens published *A Christmas Carol* on 19th December 1843. It was traditional for **ghost stories** to be read at Christmas time, and this short novella form meant that the whole tale could be read aloud in one sitting."
- Text source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zwkdwmn/revision/1>
- Image source: [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Christmas\\_Carol](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol)




Now let us take a look at the idea or form that had been used by Dickens in A Christmas Carol. We know that A Christmas Carol was written in the form of a novella- it's an extended short story or a smaller novel, and it is in the ghost story mode. So the tale is written as a novella and it means that it is a short piece of fiction. As I said, longer short story but a shorter novel. Dickens published A Christmas Carol on 19th December 1843. It was traditional for ghost stories to be read at Christmas time, and this short novella form meant that the whole tale could be read aloud in one sitting.

The last point of the slide is interesting because it underlines the concept of reading a story at one sitting and perhaps reading it aloud for an audience. Therefore, a performativity perspective comes into the picture when the story is being read aloud to a large group of people. The message is immediately communicated to a bigger group of people at one time. Therefore, this ghost story, which means that it's a grouping narrative is very thrilling and therefore hooks the audience into its tale. By using that kind of ghost story mode, Dickens is intending to pack a lot of power in that story and disseminate its moral lesson in a quicker manner as possible.

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Ghost Story and Novella



- “Dickens’s novella features **four ghosts** in total: Jacob Marley and the three Ghosts of Christmas. He combines the **tradition of reading ghost stories with a moral tale of redemption**.
- Dickens used the form to appeal to the spirit of Christmas and to share a story that was so popular that the first print run of 6000 copies sold out by Christmas Eve in 1843!
- The **short novella form means the story can be read aloud** in a short space of time, making it the ideal Christmas entertainment.”

• <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zwkdwmn/revision/1>

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“Dickens’ novella features four ghosts in total, Jacob Marley and the three ghosts of Christmas. He combines the tradition of reading ghost stories with a moral tale of redemption.”

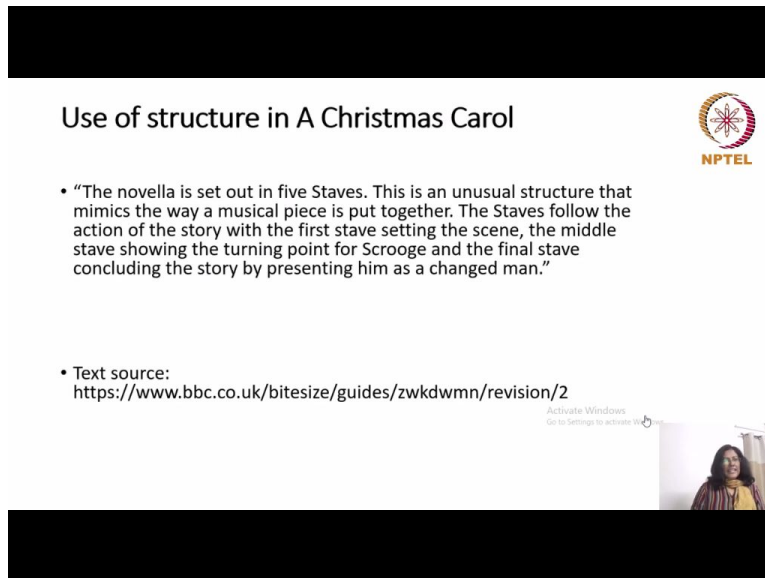
As we have discussed, the ghosts in these stories are not intended for an evil purpose, quite the opposite, these ghosts have a moral purpose when they had the effect on the mind or the psyche of Ebenezer Scrooge. They want to redeem him and therefore, these ghosts in such a narrative are ideal during Christmas time, where charity is emphasized by sharing, and generosity being one of the key aspects of this festivity.

“Dickens used the form to appeal to the spirit of Christmas and to share a story that was so popular that the first print run of 6,000 copies sold out by Christmas Eve in 1843.”


So this point has been highlighted before, but it is important for us to remember that this spirit of Christmas was really appreciated by the British really public. And as I pointed out, it was a massive hit with the audience with the entire print round get off 6,000 copies getting sold in 1843 on the Eve of Christmas.

“This short novella form means the story can be read aloud in a short space of time, making it the ideal Christmas entertainment.” So this is entertainment as well as a moral tale. It is a cautionary tale, but it can be highly entertaining as well because of its Gothic mode.


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Use of structure in A Christmas Carol



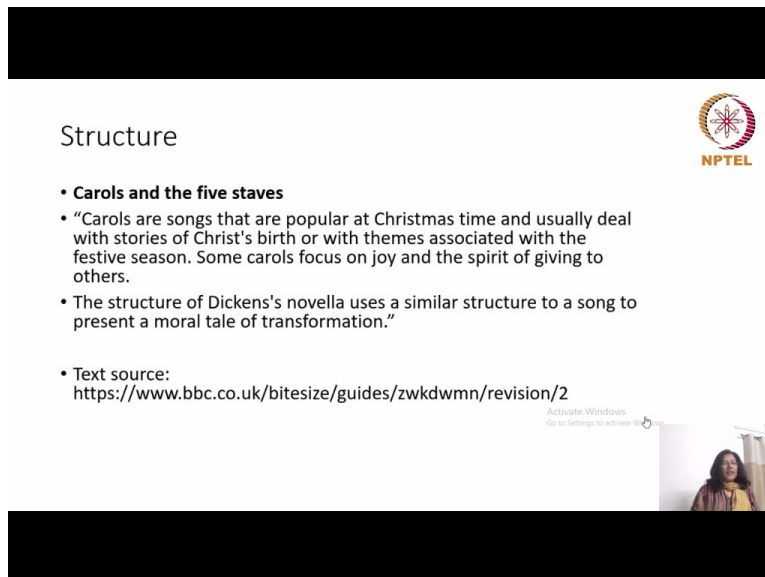
- “The novella is set out in five Staves. This is an unusual structure that mimics the way a musical piece is put together. The Staves follow the action of the story with the first stave setting the scene, the middle stave showing the turning point for Scrooge and the final stave concluding the story by presenting him as a changed man.”
- Text source:  
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“The novella is set out in 5 Staves. This is an unusual structure that mimics the way a musical piece is put together. The staves follow the action of the story with the 1st stave setting the scene, the middle stave showing the turning point for Scrooge and the final stave concluding the story by presenting him as a changed man.”

As you can see the structure of the story mimics the musical composition. It is like a piece of music, and the story is neatly structured with a beginning, which sets out the introduction of the story. The middle point shows us the climax, the turning point where Scrooge would probably change for the better. And the final show us illustrating that idea of transformation in Ebenezer Scrooge.

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The slide is titled "Structure" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. It contains three bullet points: the first is "Carols and the five staves"; the second is a quote: "Carols are songs that are popular at Christmas time and usually deal with stories of Christ's birth or with themes associated with the festive season. Some carols focus on joy and the spirit of giving to others."; the third is another quote: "The structure of Dickens's novella uses a similar structure to a song to present a moral tale of transformation." Below the quotes, it lists a text source: "Text source: https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zwkdwmn/revision/2". In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman speaking, with a watermark that says "Activate Windows Go to Settings to activate Windows".

Structure

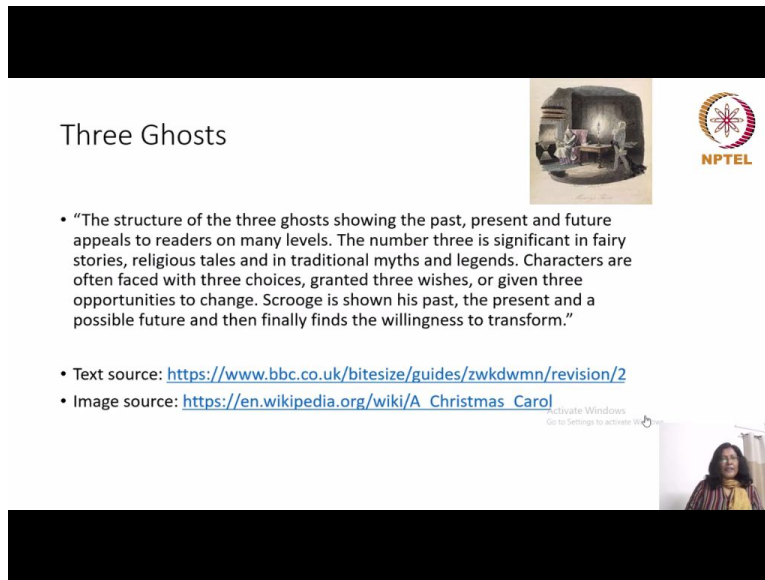
- **Carols and the five staves**
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- The structure of Dickens's novella uses a similar structure to a song to present a moral tale of transformation."

Text source:  
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“Carols are songs that are very popular at Christmas time. They are sung in communities by communities and they usually deal with stories of Christ’s birth over themes associated with the festive season. Some carols focus on joy and the spirit of giving to others. The structure of Dickens’ novella uses a similar structure to a song to present a moral tale of transformation.”

So Dickens very strategically and shrewdly makes use of the structure of a carol and communicates a particular message during Christmas time. And we know that carols are usually about Christ’s birth or they sing about the joy of giving or the spirit of generosity. Dickens uses that form to communicate a very important lesson at the time when Great Britain is in a bit of a crisis with the rapid pace of industrialization.

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### Three Ghosts

- “The structure of the three ghosts showing the past, present and future appeals to readers on many levels. The number three is significant in fairy stories, religious tales and in traditional myths and legends. Characters are often faced with three choices, granted three wishes, or given three opportunities to change. Scrooge is shown his past, the present and a possible future and then finally finds the willingness to transform.”
- Text source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zwkdwmn/revision/2>
- Image source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Christmas\\_Carol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol)

“The structure of the three ghosts showing the past, present and future appeals to readers on many levels.” This kind of structure does work quite a bit on the beginning, middle and end; past present and future.


“The number three is significant in fairy stories, religious tales, and in traditional myths and legends.” The number three kind of sticks to the mind quite powerfully. When you say three things it immediately stays on the mind.

“Characters are often faced with three choices, granted three wishes or given three opportunities to change.” So three is a good trope and literary narratives in myths, in legends and even in religious narratives.

“Scrooge has shown his past, the present, and a possible future, and then finally finds the willingness to transform.” So he has been told certain things in the ‘form of three’ and the number three, the three narratives have a powerful impact on Scrooge and make him transform. He willingly transforms.

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How important is the overall structure of this novella?




- “the structure links to **the theme of Christmas** by reflecting the shape of a typical carol
- it has a clear **beginning, middle and end** through which we see a character's transformation
- the **structure of three** ghosts, showing the past, present and future, appeals to readers
- Scrooge's **redemption** in the **final stave** leaves the reader with a sense of both completion and possibility”

• Text source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zwkdwmn/revision/2>

• Image source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Christmas\\_Carol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol)

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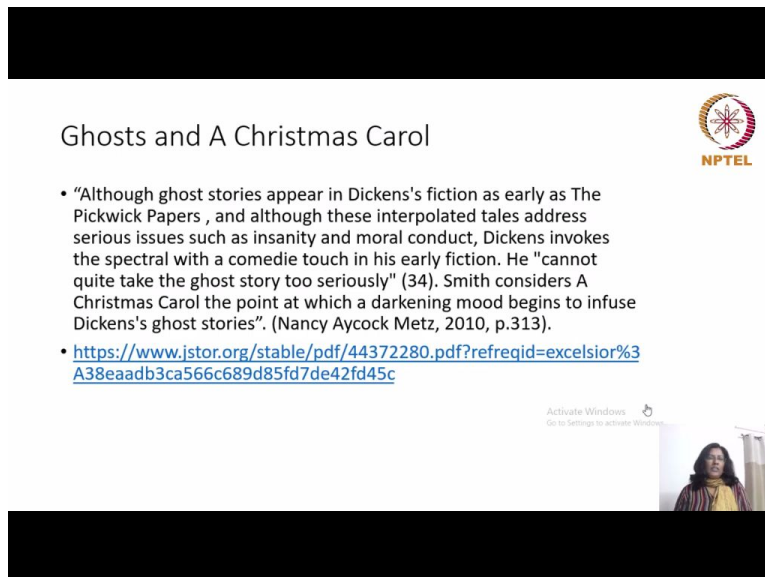


How important is the overall structure of this novella? The structure is important because it is linked to the theme of Christmas, the carols, singing, the spirit of Christmas, the spirit of giving. It is important because it reflects the shape of a typical carol, a typical Christmas song. “It has a clear beginning, middle and end through which we see a character’s transformation.” So the readers are shown the transformation that had worked on Ebenezer Scrooge.


“The structure of the three ghosts showing the past, present and future appeals to the readers.” And we did see in the previous lecture that the Victorian readers were very sentimental. They were quickly moved to tears. Moral tales had a huge appeal for them. “Scrooge’s redemption in the final stave leaves the reader with a sense of both completion and possibility.”

There is great satisfaction at the end of the tale. There is great happiness, because of the possibility of change, of change really happening in terms of the individual and therefore the faith that change will happen across society. So that gives a lot of comfort to the readers.

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Ghosts and A Christmas Carol



- “Although ghost stories appear in Dickens's fiction as early as The Pickwick Papers , and although these interpolated tales address serious issues such as insanity and moral conduct, Dickens invokes the spectral with a comedie touch in his early fiction. He "cannot quite take the ghost story too seriously" (34). Smith considers A Christmas Carol the point at which a darkening mood begins to infuse Dickens's ghost stories". (Nancy Aycocock Metz, 2010, p.313).
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/44372280.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A38eaadb3ca566c689d85fd7de42fd45c>

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Now some concluding thoughts on the idea of ghosts in Dickens’ work.

“Although, ghost stories appear in Dickens’ fiction as early as the Pickwick white papers and although these interpolated tales address serious issues such as insanity and moral conduct, Dickens invokes the spectral with a comedic touch in his early fiction.” With a comedy touch in his early fiction, “He cannot quite take the ghost story too seriously. Smith considers A Christmas Carol, the point at which a darkening mood begins to infuse Dickens' ghost stories.”

There are several points in relation to Dickens’ use of Gothic narratives or ghostly narratives. Firstly, he refers to the ghostly narrative circulating in society, and he refers to them in his fictional world to make a point.

Secondly, he also talks about these ghostly narratives to discuss ideas on insanity and moral conduct- the behaviour of people in terms of morality. However, we clearly see that there is a close association between comedy and Gothic treatment in Dickens. Even in A Christmas Carol, there is the element of the grotesque or the bizarre. When some of these ghostly spirits appeal before the Ebenezer Scrooge, he is not terribly and deeply disturbed. He does have a kind of a humorous response as well when he looks at all these ghostly bizarre images at times in the narrative. Therefore, the point is that it is a belief that Dickens cannot really quite take the ghost story too seriously. He does have to make it comic. Yet, with A Christmas Carol, one can see a

dark trajectory to the ghostly narrative as well. There is darkness seeping into the narrative of the Gothic, which had been so far comic and lighthearted. But from A Christmas Carol onwards, there is a deep, profound, and dark mood to these Gothic perspectives.

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Ghosts and A Christmas Carol

- “In A Christmas Carol and afterwards, Dickens explores “how consciousness is formed in a money-based economy” (34)...Smith shows how the encounter with Marley’s ghost “makes visible what capitalism tries to render invisible, namely the labour which is inherent to, and so sublimated within, the process of commodity production (Nancy Aycock Metz, 2010, p.313).”
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/44372280.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A38eaadb3ca566c689d85fd7de42fd45c>

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This is a point that we did discuss and it's good to kind of finish up with this point. In the previous lectures, I talked about how the Gothic narrative in A Christmas Carol is significant in terms of exploring the economic narrative in society and which is being refracted through the narrative of Dickens in A Christmas Carol.

So the ghosts are ideal to touch upon the money-based economic issues that the society is undergoing, and for which Dickens is offering a fictional, a literary, and an individualistic response.



Though we do also understand that story is laying bare, the problems that are brought about by economy, by the lack of money to put it precisely, the story is also offering a solution of throwing money at the problem by making an individual, highly charitable and giving. So the Gothic narrative in A Christmas Carol is highly pertinent and highly valuable in the ways in which it deals with the pressures in society and attempts to alleviate them.

Thanks for watching. I'll continue in the next session.