

**Charles University in Prague**  
**Faculty of Education**  
Department of English Language and Literature

B. A. THESIS

***A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens in the Context of  
Victorian Society**

Author: Markéta Beřková

Supervisor: Doc. PhDr. Anna Grmelová, CSc.

Prague 2012

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Doc. PhDr. Anna Grmelová, CSc. for her advice, help and guidance throughout the writing of this thesis.

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is completely my own work and that no other sources were used in the preparation of this thesis than those listed on the Works Cited page.

Prague 2012

Markéta Beřková

## **Abstract**

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to examine the image of 19th century England in Charles Dickens's novella *A Christmas Carol* (1843). The Theoretical Part focuses on nineteenth century society in England and on Dickens's own life and experience which influenced his work. This part pays attention to several areas which occur in the *Carol* and examines them as a real-life phenomena. The Practical Part analyzes *A Christmas Carol* as a genuine literary work and explores the individual characters, themes and motifs and interprets them.

### **Key Words**

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, Victorian England

## **Abstrakt**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je prozkoumat obraz Anglie devatenáctého století v novele *Vánoční koleda* Charlese Dickense (1843). Teoretická část se soustředí na anglickou společnost devatenáctého století a Dickensův vlastní život a zkušenosti, které ovlivnily jeho dílo. Tato část se věnuje několika oblastem, které se objevují ve *Vánoční koledě*, a zkoumá je jako problémy skutečného života. Praktická část je analýzou *Vánoční koledy* jako literárního díla a zabývá se jednotlivými postavami, tématy a motivy a jejich interpretací.

### **Klíčová slova**

Charles Dickens, *Vánoční koleda*, viktoriánská Anglie

## Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. THEORETICAL PART .....	4
II.1 Dickens’s Views and Background.....	4
II.2 Class.....	6
II.3 Family .....	6
II.4 Education .....	8
II.5 Standard of Living.....	9
II.6 Health.....	10
II.7 Death.....	11
II.8 Women.....	12
II.9 Christmas .....	13
III. PRACTICAL PART .....	16
III.1 A Christmas Carol.....	16
III.2 Ebenezer Scrooge.....	18
III.3 Jacob Marley.....	20
III.4 The Ghosts and Gothic Features .....	21
III.5 Other Characters .....	22
III.6 Christmas in the <i>Carol</i> .....	23
IV. CONCLUSION.....	26
V. WORKS CITED .....	28

## I. INTRODUCTION

First published in 1843 *A Christmas Carol* became one of the most beloved Christmas stories ever written and its characters symbols of human qualities. In his novels and stories Charles Dickens dealt with social issues and difficulties of the poor which was something that he himself experienced as a child. Dickens's novella combines harsh criticism of society on one hand with hearty celebration of Christmas on the other.

This thesis will focus on the reflection of the nineteenth century Britain in *A Christmas Carol* as well as on *A Christmas Carol* as a genuine literary work. The main aim of the thesis is to make a clear connection between Dickens's novella and the time and experience in which it was produced. The main topics of the thesis are society and work conditions, the quality of life in Victorianism, Christmas and, regarding the characters and allegorical nature of the story, moral values and Christian virtues cannot be left out either. As *A Christmas Carol* is a literary work the relationship between its structure and themes must also be included. These are for example memories, moral transformation and also ignorance and want. Special attention will be paid to Gothic features, a device which helps to transform the main character and provides the story with an eerie atmosphere. Another thing that deserves mentioning is the fact that Dickens's *Carol* helped to revive celebrating Christmas in Britain and it also points out the importance of family.

As mentioned above the thesis will also pay attention to the characters. Each character has its specific features and a fixed place within the story and all of them represent certain human qualities. The character of Ebenezer Scrooge will be contrasted with the character of Tiny Tim on the basis of their exclamations "Bah! Humbug!" and "God bless us every one!" The relationship between Scrooge and the three ghosts will be mentioned too.

The title of this thesis suggests that the Victorian era had some impact on the literary work. One of the aims of this thesis is to explore to what extent is *A Christmas Carol* influenced by the times in which it was produced. Another issue related to this is Dickens's criticism of society at that time.

As the nineteenth century was the time of great changes the thesis will look at how (or if) these changes affected lives of ordinary people and how it is reflected in the story. To mention at least one of the examples from the book, the home of the Cratchit family is the

source for a wide research. Not only because of their social status which will be mentioned in the chapter on society but also because they represent everything what Scrooge does not. This human side of the story will be discussed later in the thesis.

Special attention will be devoted to Scrooge's transformation as it is the main theme of the novella. His journey which takes just one night takes him to various places and each of them has its symbolism and meaning. It presents a variety of people and with their contribution Scrooge realizes what is important in one's life.

*A Christmas Carol* is still popular at present so the thesis will take a brief look at this fact too. Why does the Carol still have something to offer to a twenty first century reader? And what is it? Is it really the sentimental fact that money is not everything and that we all should be good not only at Christmas time? Or is it something else?

As has been mentioned above the main aim of the thesis is to connect Dickens's novella with the nineteenth century and this cannot be done without exploring the *Carol* as a literary work (and it would be also difficult to study the *Carol* profoundly without considering the time in which it was written).

Charles Dickens was born in 1812, at the beginning of the second decade of the nineteenth century and he grew up during the reign of three kings of the House of Hanover until Queen Victoria took the reign in 1937 (Morgan et al. 432). He lived through the years after the Industrial revolution and before formation of modern Britain. Although Britain became the most powerful country in the nineteenth century with the industrialisation growing rapidly and middle classes rising, after Napoleonic wars the situation was not so bright (McDowall 132). Many people lost their jobs as factories did not have to produce as much as before and at the same time the prices increased too (McDowall 132). In this sense the migration from country fields to city factories and the end of war caused huge unemployment and misery. At that time the welfare system was not developed much. Although there were efforts to help people in need through the operation of workhouses the reality was harsh and the help was not organised and so not much effective (McDowall 132). "And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge "Are they still in operation?" (Dickens, *ACC* 12). When the two portly gentlemen visit Scrooge to gain some money for the charity he is inquiring whether prisons and workhouses still exist as he considers them the right place for the unlucky ones. He is convinced that the taxes he has to pay is enough and does not want to spend any more money on the "idle people". The idle people were in

fact children without parents, homeless people or those who could not find work. Child labour was not unusual and it influenced Dickens directly. When he was twelve years old his father's debts became no longer bearable and he was sent to debtor's prison with his family (Standiford 3). To pay his lodgings Dickens started working in a blacking warehouse and it was this sad experience that made him so interested in problems of society years later. The character of Scrooge may seem a bit exaggerated at times but it is the opposite to Dickens's own views of society and charity.

## II. THEORETICAL PART

### II.1 Dickens's Views and Background

Charles Dickens was a realist writer who continuously criticized English society for lack of empathy and its oblivious and indifferent attitude towards the poor. Not only in *A Christmas Carol* he depicts nineteenth century London as a dark, dirty place where children are abused and neglected and individuals have to struggle for survival. In the *Carol* it is the Cratchit family who deal with financial difficulties. Dickens's father's financial trouble caused not only his son's early employment but also a brief school attendance (Allen 159). However, he was able to find a job first as a law clerk and later as a court stenographer and journalist (House 23). His work experience formed his beliefs and opinions on society and made him a kind and conscious person who, despite the harsh reality, never lost hope. In his speech from 1841 he remarked: "I felt that the world was not utterly to be despised; that it was worthy of living in for many reasons" (Dickens, *Speeches*).

Concerning history and time in his works Humphry House points out that Dickens's works "contain so little that is typical of the years in which most of [his] work was done" (18). The main difference is the fact that Dickens's characters travel by coaches and carriages but Dickens, basically, traveled by trains. Walter Allen says that "the railways killed the picaresque novel [...] and changed the face of England" (170). In his earlier works Dickens looks back at old England, the one he remembered from his childhood and the one which, at that time, stood only at the beginning of formation of new, modern England. House says that "he had no exact historical sense, no desire to make his stories into accurate period records, and no particular fear of anachronisms" (21). However, according to House, time in his novels is tidy and punctual (21). The *Carol* is set in London but no exact date is given. It most probably takes place in the year of its publication. However, exact time is not very important in the *Carol*. The time in the novella is divided into past, present and future as it is represented by the ghosts and the important thing is what goes with these periods. Concerning the character of Scrooge it is the life of an individual that matters, his memories and conscience rather than historical dates.

Dickens experienced a poor background during his childhood but gained great success that enabled him to learn about two different worlds. One is the world of the poor and the

other is the world of money and politics. Not only in the *Carol* he creates several worlds within one main world. The characters in the *Carol*, for example, come from higher middle class, middle class and lower class. His criticism of society was not as original as it may seem today but his celebrity status allowed him to draw the general public's attention to problems of society (Allen 160). Allen mentions that "his success [...] cut across all social classes" (160) and that is what happens also in his novels. An important thing is that he regularly organized public readings and so he was in direct contact with his readers. However, social criticism is not the main theme of the *Carol*, it is merely symbolic. Although Scrooge represents the general opinion about the poor the more significant themes in the novella are charity and family.

As mentioned above Dickens's childhood was not a happy one. Although he was a middle class child his father's debts caused him much trouble which he later transformed into his novels, as Allen says "it left a wound in him that never healed" (165). Another wound that never healed is that his mother, after he was taken away from the blacking factory, wanted to send him back (House 165). This experience may have affected his female characters. In the *Carol* woman is the center of the family but her part is conventional and just peripheral. His unhappy childhood also formed his notion about the importance of family and education. Allen mentions his childlike vision of characters and the sense of abandonment (165). He may have felt as abandoned as Scrooge all his life but the difference is that his character does not admit that he lacks something in his life when the story opens. His characters, including Scrooge, bear some attributes of sad reality but are comic and a bit unrealistic at the same time. "He was a man of little education writing for a public more poorly educated than himself" says Allen and Wilson adds "Dickens [...] was possessed by the belief that all the crime, the misery, the inequality, the violence that he so hated and feared in contemporary society were the result of lack of education" (182). Dickens considered it unfair that the poor and disadvantaged had to bear the flaws of society the most. This strong belief came from his childhood when there was not anybody who would have cared about him. However, before the blacking factory experience his life was not as dim as it may seem. While living in Chatham Dickens was educated by his mother and it was her who awakened his first desire for knowledge and reading (Wilson 43).

## II.2 Class

As mentioned earlier the characters in the *Carol* come from different social classes. Scrooge is an owner of a counting-house, a well-situated person as far as money is concerned. However, his peculiar character does not allow him to enter any community or any class. Scrooge's nephew Fred is probably a middle class gentleman although Scrooge, when confronted with Fred's good Christmas humour, uses the word "poor" as the reason why Fred should not be so merry. The Cratchit family represents England's poor who suffer under the control of the powerful ones.

"Questions of class are fundamental to nineteenth century British history" (Hewitt 305). Fred realizes this hierarchy too when he says that at Christmas people "open their shut-up hearts freely and think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave" (Dickens, *ACC* 10). The *Carol* reality as far as the classes are concerned is not as dark as it may seem. Although they live modestly and their home is very humble the Cratchits find joy elsewhere than in money. And as Dickens suggests in the character of Scrooge money itself cannot bring happiness. Another thing is that, although workhouses are still in operation in the *Carol*, there are people who realize that such help is not enough and that charity and empathy is the key to humanity. However, at Christmas everyone celebrates regardless the class. In the *Carol* it is the Lord Mayor who "gave orders to his fifty cooks" but also the little tailor "whom [the Mayor] had fined five shillings" (Dickens, *ACC* 13). Thus, untypically, the social classes do not play such an important role in the *Carol*. Dickens rather points out that it is up to an individual to come to terms with one's own situation and discover the joy of Christmas time.

## II.3 Family

Family and friends gatherings are an important part in the novella as they present characters which are no longer alive or present in Scrooge's life but still they bear great significance. Through his magical visitations Scrooge slowly realizes that he replaced family and friends for money. Family was as significant to Victorian society as to Charles Dickens himself. Several families occur in the novella and the importance of family, as acknowledged above, is one of the main themes.

Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's devoted clerk, supports his large family and tries hard to raise his children and secure them. He even gets a job for his son. The Cratchit family corresponds with the traditional model of the family. The father is the head of the family and the mother is a housewife whose task is to take care of the children and the house. "[T]he working-class wife was typically responsible for cooking, cleaning, washing and sometimes making the clothes, marketing, budgeting" (Nelson 16). Dickens depicts the Cratchits as a closely knit family and this can be seen when they all participate in preparing Christmas dinner. Nobody is overlooked or neglected and everyone lends a hand. Their home is in Camden Town, a place where Dickens himself lived for a short period of time. Another connection with Dickens's own life is the relationship of Scrooge's father to his son. It is implied that Scrooge as a boy was neglected and that his unhappy childhood caused his fear and reluctance to keep any relationships.

The theme of family may have come from Dickens's own experience but it also corresponds with the general notion of family as it occurred at the end of the eighteenth century and continued throughout the following one. Many great changes and inventions in technologies took place, the life became faster and people became more informed about the outer world (Nelson 2). These events could not have gotten around family life (Nelson 2). Another factor was the image of the royal family members. The predecessor of Queen Victoria, William IV and his wife, Queen Adelaide, "were eulogized as having been excellent models for middle-class family life" (Nelson 5). Nelson also mentions that "Victoria, too, soon established herself as a monarch middle class in spirit if not in station" (5). Victoria's family image strengthened after the death of Prince Albert when she "embarked upon an ecstasy of mourning, secluding herself as much as possible from the public gaze" (Nelson 5). Not only in Queen Victoria's case the family was perceived as an escape from the outer world. As the world became more open, the family was supposed to be more intimate. It was also understood as a stable unit as far as economy and trade are concerned.

What can happen to an individual when there is no family is depicted in the main character. Scrooge, neglected by his own family, finds a way out of his inner uncertainties in work and, subsequently, money.

As can be seen in the case of the Cratchit family, nineteenth century families were larger than today's average families. That was because of high infant mortality and no methods of family planning.

The Cratchits have six children including a disabled son. Cratchit's eldest daughter Martha is an apprentice at milliner's, eldest son Peter is supposed to follow in his father's footsteps and become "a man of business". Whether any of the children is educated is not mentioned. However, Peter Cratchit, at least, seems to be literate.

## II.4 Education

As mentioned earlier Dickens considered education a fundamental condition for a proper and decent life. He himself was educated with considerable breaks and in the *Carol* the only mention of education is when Scrooge observes his younger self at a boarding school. However, for some the Victorian parents it was more profitable to send their child to work rather than to school (D'Cruze 256). Furthermore, the cost of education was much higher than an average family could afford (Gardner 353). Public schools and universities were reserved for upper class sons and tutors were teaching upper class daughters (Gardner 353). So, as Gardner points out, "the acquisition of learning was always a hard struggle" (353). Education for working class children was, like in Dickens's own case, not much organized and systemized and the main points of learning were reading (the Bible mostly), writing and the sums (Gardner 354). However, it implies that there was a true appreciation of education as children who were forced to start working at very early age were sent to school if it was possible (Gardner 353). Nevertheless, the desire for literacy and education in general was rather triggered by popular demands than desire for a decent job. Such perception of education is characteristic for the end of the century (Gardner 355). Later in the century the school attendance became compulsory and more teachers were trained as the schooling system was undergoing radical changes (Gardner 356). Education was not available for everyone, however, at the beginning of the nineteenth century there was not any lack of schools and illiteracy was not as common as it may seem (Gardner 360). Nevertheless, the quality of all these schooling institutions was arguable (Gardner 360). In Dickens's times it was rather his talent and will that helped him to move up on the social ladder (from a neglected child labourer to a respected author) than an improved schooling system. Furthermore, school, no matter how better it was than labour, "might not offer an environment of great intellectual challenge" (Gardner 359). As Wilson points out schools are a frequent setting in Dickens's novels (228). He himself experienced private education when attending William Giles's School in Chatham and Wellington House Academy in

London and so his stories take place at middle class private schools (Wilson 228). However, in 1843 Dickens first visited a ragged school near Holborn (Wilson 228). As he was interested in the poor in real life he was expressing a bigger concern about the children beggars and those who were living on the edge of poverty. Ragged schools started as the only schooling opportunity for the most impoverished and “to give a few hours of instruction to the young flotsam of the streets by a few devoted, mostly self-educated young men in 1820s” (Wilson 228). The experience from Holborn left a deep impression on Dickens and he started to write about ragged schools in *Household Words* and elsewhere to attract the attention of the public and to accuse the system from being completely indifferent (Wilson 228). Dickens’s own education was started by his mother and it was followed by the Chatham period with his family and later at a boarding school which, as Wilson mentions, was one the happier periods of his childhood (43). However, when living in London with his parents he felt a great desire for study (Wilson 49). His wish became true but only for a short time and much of his knowledge was a result of great interest and self-study.

## **II.5 Standard of Living**

Homes of several families occur in *A Christmas Carol* and, despite the fact that their description is quite poor, it provides some insight to a nineteenth century housing. The Cratchits, for example, live in a four-roomed house in Camden Town, not a luxurious place to live, obviously. The borough of Camden Town started to develop at the end of the eighteenth century and expanded in the 1820s (Wilson 45). As Dickens wrote the *Carol* in 1843 it is likely that at that time Camden Town was still on its way from a small bunch of buildings to a modern city center and was a part of the overall urbanization of Britain (Gunn 241). London in the *Carol* reality is a bustling city full of shops and merry people and its image is much influenced by the overall Christmas atmosphere of the story. However, Gunn calls Victorian city a “battlefield” and this point of view corresponds with Dickens’s own personal history (Gunn 241).

One could think that a developing city might be an attractive place to live. Nevertheless, London and other cities in the nineteenth century were far from such environments. They were full of smoke and bad smells and housing was expensive and often unavailable for

labourers (Morgan 394). However, there were efforts to improve the situation. One of the most noticeable figures in this process was Prince Albert and his “model cottages” which were introduced at the Great Exhibition (Pike 233). Prince Albert was President of Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes and it was his own initiative to create a model house with emphasis on basic conveniences such as privacy and hygiene (Pike 244). Another Victorian vision of a decent home is a separate house for a family which allows its dwellers “to cut [themselves] off from all communication with the outward world, even in the midst of great cities” (Pike 235). Such perception goes hand in hand with the Victorian family ideal but it is questionable whether people could really afford it.

“Early Victorian society was a cruel jungle – most cruel for the plain poor” says Wilson (48). Dickens portrays the nineteenth century London in his novels with all its flaws and dirt. However, in *A Christmas Carol* his intention is not primarily to criticize the horrible housing conditions. Although he mentions places like workhouses and prisons and thus he points to problems of society he does not attack housing deficiencies. The Cratchits do not seem to be happy about their situation but still they can keep a decent home. Although they represent the England’s poor their financial situation could be much worse.

## **II.6 Health**

The quality of life is closely related to health and medical care. In *A Christmas Carol* it is implied that the nineteenth century health service was much dependent on one’s financial situation. Tiny Tim suffers from a unspecified disease and he is likely to die. However, when Scrooge takes care of him and helps his family with money his state improves quickly.

In industrial cities where slums were expanding it was easy for diseases to spread among the poor labourers (Morgan et al. 394). As far as health is concerned epidemics were the biggest threat to city people and this includes the higher classes as well. If housing was bad hygiene was even worse (Morgan et al. 394). The better-off were able to build their own sewerage and water supply and they even purveyed street illumination but their improved hygiene system polluted water supplies of their impoverished neighbours (Morgan et al. 394). So if an epidemic broke out it was very likely to hit not only the poor

ones. The higher classes were at danger as well. However, there were efforts to make things better. In the fifties Medical Officers of Health were appointed to supervise water supplies, sewerage and sanitation and also observance of construction regulations (Morgan et al. 396). The aim was to provide clear water and “to make sure that new housing was less crowded” (McDowall 140). These efforts were made during Queen Victoria’s reign and they became known as the Public Health, something that was still unknown not many years earlier (Pike 271). The characters of Ignorance and Want are not only symbols of indifference. They also represent children living in an unhealthy, filthy environment.

Another character whose fate is much related to health care in Tiny Tim. Dickens’s intention is to alert society and warn about the world in which an innocent child can die although its illness is curable (Standiford 181). Tiny Tim’s medical treatment is not described and even the disease he suffers from is not specified but it is very likely to be caused by malnutrition and lack of vitamins. Nevertheless, Tiny Tim’s illness is cured and his health improves soon. The character of Tiny Tim is most probably inspired by Dickens’s “sickly young” brother Fred whom he called “Tiny Fred” (Standiford 181). Some suggest that both Tim and Fred suffered from rickets, “common affliction of that time in cities where smog frequently blocked sunlight, the natural source of vitamin D” (Standiford 181).

## **II.7 Death**

Death is closely related to health and in the nineteenth century cities it was as ubiquitous as in *A Christmas Carol*. It is also one the main themes of the novella and constitutes a gloomy counterpart to Christmas merriment. Both Scrooge and Tiny Tim are dead in the fourth stave. Actually, the whole fourth stave is focused on death and the character of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come strikingly resembles the character of Death as it very often portrayed in films and other artworks. The third Christmas Spirit is far more horrifying than the previous two. “[A] solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist among the ground, towards [Scrooge]” (Dickens, *ACC* 57). Scrooge even tells the phantom that he fears it more than the previous two and the churchyard scene in which Scrooge finds his own grave is a horror climax of the stave.

For the most part of the story Tiny Tim is on the edge of death. In this character Dickens combines the image of an innocent child with the fact that such person is constantly living under the threat of death. Not only in this particular case “[w]e are shown how just as in the midst of life we are in death” (Wilson 183). This ambiguity is essential for *A Christmas Carol*. Wilson also adds that “[Dickens’s] world is never quite out of the shadow of Death” (11).

The shadow of death was also stretching over polluted cities (Waddington 413). It is not surprising that death rates in nineteenth century England were very high and life expectancy was generally shorter than today. However, during Victoria’s reign the situation improved resulting in “the overall fall in mortality” (Waddington 427). In *A Christmas Carol* there is a slight contradiction in the description of Christmas London and the appearance of Ignorance and Want. These two characters imply that living in a city is life-threatening but Dickens’s description of London in most part of the novella is rather focused on the Christmas spirit than criticism of unhealthy environment.

## **II.8 Women**

The position of women in the world dominated by men is a frequent topic even today. Women characters in the *Carol* are traditional symbols of home regardless the social class. This includes Mrs. Cratchit and Scrooge’s old love Belle. Richardson says that “[w]hile public life was increasingly seen as an exclusively main domain characterized by the manly virtues of action, determination and resolution, the domestic setting was where women’s virtues of gentleness, tenderness, piety and faith could and should most fully be developed” (175). McDowall adds that “a wife was legally a man’s property, until nearly the end of century” (137). However, such conceptions are primarily attributed to middle classes. The nineteenth century is also known as the time of working women and children as well. In the *Carol* it is Martha Cratchit who represents young working class women. Nevertheless, Dickens do not pay much attention to her character and this omission makes women characters rather uninteresting and conventional.

## II.9 Christmas

In the nineteenth century Christmas in Britain differed from what we know today. The cheerful celebrations depicted in the *Carol* were rather rare if there were any. However, the Victorian Christmas started the tradition of celebrating this holiday with all its attributes such as the Christmas tree, cards, dinner and gift giving. The lore came from Germany as Queen Victoria's husband Albert, who was sympathetic with the British and their situation, brought the tradition to his new home (Standiford 117). In 1848, five years after the publication of the *Carol*, a drawing of the royal family gathered around a Christmas tree was published (Standiford 117). The gradual process of reviving the tradition of celebrating Christmas goes hand in hand with the changes in whole society. Although Christmas is a Christian, religious holiday the Victorian concept is more about family unity, gatherings, charity and the overall secular, joyful spirit rather than praying to God and rejecting worldly delights in order to be a good Christian.

“There were no Christmas cards in 1843 England, no Christmas trees in royal residences [...] no Christmas turkeys, no department-store Santa or his million clones [...] no weeklong cessation of business affairs through the New Year, no orgy of gift-giving, no ubiquitous public display of nativity scenes [...] no holiday lighting extravaganza” Standiford (103) sums up the differences between early Victorian Christmas and the one into which the newly discovered traditions transformed. However, despite the consumerist nature of today's Christmas, the basic Christian virtues connected with Christmas season survive until today. The Christmas holiday was treated with even less enthusiasm than Easter and the Church considered it pagan although it did not pay much attention to it (Standiford 104). One of the reasons why Christmas was not as popular in the past as it is today is that it has its roots in pagan celebrations and thus it is inconsistent with the Christian nativity concept (Standiford 105). In the seventeenth century Christmas was even banned by law for a few years and in the Massachusetts colony in America, for example, it was illegal (Standiford 109). However, in due course celebrating of not only Christmas but also other festivals was permitted and even Benjamin Franklin was “speaking out in favor of seasonal celebrations like Christmas” (Standiford 111). Despite this relaxation of rules there were still worries that any celebration could result in uncontrollable binge and sin and these fears may have been justifiable (Standiford 108). Absence at work because of Christmas was something unthinkable (Standiford 112). “Pepys writes of working on

Christmas Eve, and even on Christmas Day as well, though he did attend church services in the morning and evening. He also partook of the custom of a hearty Christmas meal, including such dishes as roasted pullet, a mess of brave plum pudding, a shoulder of mutton, and mince pie” (Standiford 112).

Such bans and regulations mentioned above were not much encouraging for those who wanted to keep Christmas. Moreover there was not such a bundle of unified traditions and customs as it is today and as it was in the Victorian era in a rather humble version. Nevertheless, there still were games and public performances including the character of Father Christmas (Standiford 113). They were a combination of religious tradition and folk culture (Standiford 113). This implies that celebrating Christmas at home was something very unique.

*A Christmas Carol* was published right before Christmas of 1843 and its immediate success implies that Dickens with his simple morality tale resonated with expectations of the public and his readers. After hunger, workers revolt and reality of dirty workhouses the story full of joy, family unity and feasting must have been a welcomed change. Before Dickens’s *Carol* Christmas had been mentioned in the works of the American writer Washington Irving who advocates the basic principles such as family and love (Standiford 116). In the *Carol* there is only a little mention of gift-giving but both Irving and Dickens in their writings recollect this tradition. Irving considers it one of the joys of Christmas and Dickens remembers his childhood toys. “Christmas in his own home, with his own family, was a peak celebration of high spirits and good will for Dickens” (Wilson 12). It appears that Charles Dickens liked any opportunity to get together with his family. Such image together with the celebration of Christmas in the *Carol* looks like a real idyll. However, Dickens’s recollections of Christmas include his fear of toys such as a tumbler with its “lobster eyes” or an “infernal snuff-box, out of which there sprang a demoniacal Counsellor” (Wilson 9). Such memories are evidence of Dickens’s ambivalent relation to Christmas. On one hand he praises its virtues and morals but on the other hand he connects it with his inner horrors which may root from his childhood. This is reflected in the *Carol* in the opposition of Christmas merriment and the apparition of the ghosts. It implies that even if we are good there is still something to fear of, a shadow or some dark force which can punish us. “Christmas means the breakdown for a season of the restraints imposed by normal social life, a sort of psychological release” says House (52) and comes up with a question whether it is possible to remain charitable the whole year, not just at Christmas

when one usually cannot escape the Christmas spirit. Scrooge, at least, fulfilled the expectations and demands of the ghosts and after his transformation he can serve as a shining example of after-Christmas behaviour.

The idealized image of family and friend gatherings, celebrating and feasting as presented in the *Carol* may have rooted in Dickens's childhood. It symbolizes everything he had not when he was a child, it is a way of dealing with the fact that he had to support his parents financially as a child labourer. However, he showed quite a benevolence when supporting his parents in his adult life (Standiford 122). Writing *A Christmas Carol* might have been an escape from what he was experiencing with his father whose constant incompetence in dealing with money and making use of his son's popularity caused Dickens much trouble (Standiford 122). "It was as if, in writing the book, he could will into existence a world of universal charity, empathy, and family harmony that he had not experienced in his life" (Standiford 124). Standiford also points out that the *Carol* bears some autobiographical features which help to perceive the main character less unpleasant. "[T]he glimpse of a young Ebenezer, abandoned at his boarding school, is one the many touches that transform the miser from stereotype to sympathetic figure and which in turn gives *A Christmas Carol* such power" (Standiford 206). Christmas is a frequent theme in Dickens's work. After the *Carol* he wrote several other Christmas books and short stories but none of them gained such a success. The fact that the *Carol* has been adapted countless times since its publication and that the name of the main character became a familiar synonym for a mean, tight-fisted person is a strong evidence of the novella's great influence (Standiford 168). As Wilson mentions "[t]he impact of *A Christmas Carol* was overwhelming" (184). However, the profit was much lower than Dickens had expected (Wilson 184).

### III. PRACTICAL PART

#### III.1 A Christmas Carol

*A Christmas Carol* is a short, allegorical novella which was written to support Christmas celebrations in Britain but also to draw attention to the poor and, obviously, there is not a better time to awake sympathy than at Christmas. The novella is divided into five staves. The words *carol* and *stave* refer to the musical notation and correspond with the Christmas spirit which runs through the whole work. Each stave focuses on different periods in Scrooge's life and through his recollections and fears the readers watch the process of his transformation. The first stave presents some of the characters and focuses on Scrooge's present life. However, the reason why Scrooge is such a miser is not mentioned. Dickens uses a rich description of his main character using a lot of unpleasantly sounding adjectives and places Scrooge into several situations in which he has to deal with different people. In a small space, in his counting house, it is shown how he treats strangers (the two portly gentlemen), his employees (Bob Cratchit) and his family (Fred). The second stave stresses the importance of memory as Scrooge is taken back to his childhood and early adulthood. The third stave centers around families and Christmas celebrations. In the fourth stave Scrooge is confronted with his potential future. This future is dark and makes Scrooge beg for forgiveness. The last stave shows Scrooge transformed into a kind, amiable person who "knew how to keep Christmas well" (Dickens, *ACC* 76).

The beginning of *A Christmas Carol* is very straight-forward. The reader is strongly assured that Scrooge's partner Jacob Marley is really dead. The narrator sets the background for what will come later. That is the coming of dead Marley and the three ghosts. Such an introduction tries to persuade the readers that they should free themselves from rational thinking and it anticipates that something magical is about to happen. It also indicates Dickens's childlike vision of the world and it corresponds with the overall nature of the story. *A Christmas Carol* is set in nineteenth century London but the city is not depicted in its greatness. Although there is a vivid depiction of street life with people getting ready for Christmas and shops full of goods the final impression is that of a bordered, picturesque space which has its own pace. Afterwards we are taken into Scrooge's home which is even colder and darker than his counting-house. The other settings include various places such as homes with Scrooge's as the most striking. The space is a significant matter in the *Carol*. It is connected with the motive of journey which

is experienced by the main character. Homes where families and friends are gathered around fireplaces take on various shapes and forms depending on their location and social status. The Cratchits live in a small, plain house in London, Fred and Belle's families seem to be better off as they can afford a proper dinner and Christmas presents and so their homes look more cosy than the Cratchits', the miner's family, on the other hand, lives in a poor hut isolated from outer world. However, all of these places, no matter how attractive they are, are simple symbols of home, obviously, the family unity and also they imply the importance of a proper background for children. In Belle's family there are several children and the Christmas scene is noisy, lively and cheerful and this is the children-side of the Carol. Most of the novella is centered around the character of Scrooge, his unhappy childhood and his transformation and although there is great description of Christmas spirit the mood is often quite gloomy. However, Belle's children represent Dickens's belief that Christmas is something special and magical for children and that children should not be burdened with problems of society as it was happening in real life. "Oh, now all common things become uncommon and enchanted to me. All lamps are wonderful; all rings are talismans" (Standiford 117). These words of Charles Dickens suggest that Christmas is not only a festival but also a time when miracles can happen just like in *A Christmas Carol*.

Some of the events happen in real places such as London and its Camden town, the other places, for example the countryside where Scrooge was raised or the place where he meets Ignorance and Want, functions more as symbols of childhood and despair respectively and so they are not specified with any names.

The time is also an important phenomenon in the *Carol*. The story begins in the afternoon and gradually progresses into night when Scrooge is confronted with the ghosts. He is told that the Christmas ghosts will visit him the three following nights. However, all the visits happen in just one night and it indicates that the ghosts and the supernatural can cause a different flow of time. It also gives Scrooge a chance to celebrate Christmas. The *Carol* is probably set in 1843, the year of its publication, but the exact date is not mentioned. The time can be basically divided into past, present and future, however, the story is not told in chronological order. It begins in the present then looks back to past events which are more or less recent, returns to the nineteenth century London and then the main character is taken to probable future. Furthermore, the events of the three middle staves happen in just one night, no matter if they had already happened or if they are about to happen in the future. The order of narration seems very complicated but regarding the

main theme of the story it is completely understandable. Present-day Scrooge has to remind himself of his earlier self and to avoid Marley's fate he has to look into the future. Then he is able to redeem himself when there is still time. In some cases the time can be misleading. The events of the future which are described in the fourth stave will probably not happen as they depend on Scrooge's behaviour. So Tiny Tim who is dead in the fourth stave will survive and Scrooge will not die alone. Such handling of events implies that what will happen is up to our decisions and will.

### **III.2 Ebenezer Scrooge**

Ebenezer Scrooge is an aged owner of a London counting-house. Money is not only his job but also his life. In the first stave he is described as “a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire” (Dickens, *ACC* 8). He never lets any kind of joy enter his life. He keeps the same routine every day and it makes his life easier. He resembles a machine for which anything else than work is pointless. The reason of his unfriendly behaviour is not specified, however, it is indicated that in his childhood he was neglected by his family, his father especially, and the only close person, his sister Fan, died years ago.

Scrooge can hardly be considered a bad person. Although he refuses to help other people or to keep any relationship the quickness with which he transforms is quite surprising. It takes just one night and he only needs to be reminded of things which happened and can happen. He is not so spoiled inside, he had just created a sort of a case in order not to be ever hurt again. Little by little he not only realizes that he should be more sympathetic with the Cratchits and other poor people but he also becomes aware of the fact that he is very likely to die alone in the future. The transformation is much based on fear. It is soon revealed that Scrooge is a very sensitive person. The change of his personality is not only a matter of horror. His memories and Christmas joy contribute to the alteration as well. When he observes Fred's Christmas party he finds the games amusing and it makes the reader wonder why he has been avoiding such affairs for so many years. House describes the change as a “destruction of all his habits and the whole framework of observation and policy he had applied to life” (53).

Scrooge is a man of business and is very disciplined. When dealing with people he is brief and clear and prefers to be left alone. He is a law-abiding citizen, a part of the system. He is convinced that the state is responsible for the poor and so he refuses to pay any extra money. However, it would be a simplified conclusion to say that he is an evil character. Scrooge does not do any harm to anyone, the fact that he does not want to spend his money on strangers can be understandable. His reluctance to be a charitable person may have its roots in his childhood as he might feel that when he was a child nobody had ever helped him. Kindness and sympathy is something unknown for him as he has displaced any human virtues and positive feelings with work and greed. The character of Scrooge is quite exaggerated. He is more a caricature which may be terrifying for passers-by in the novella but for the readers and Fred's friends he is rather a grotesque, bizzare old man who deserves sympathy because he is alone.

Scrooge is a tough man in his heart and at first sight as well. He is described directly with a number of adjectives (*wrenching, grasping, scraping*) but also indirectly through the description of his counting-house and his home. His interaction with other people is also very important for understanding the character. When dealing with the two portly gentlemen he is not able to understand that there are people who were, in a way, less fortunate than he. The fact that he constantly rejects his nephew Fred may come from his belief that Fred caused Fan's death and, possibly, Fred also reminds Scrooge of his beloved sister and that is something he cannot stand. He may be such a weak person that his traumatic experience from the past made him displace all the troubles with hard work. It is probably his way of dealing with problems.

"Bah, humbug" is Scrooge's catchphrase and it characterizes his attitude towards any kind of joy and human relationships. As Standiford mentions "[it] has become a favorite rejoinder to any declaration that strikes a listener as ridiculous or overly sentimental" (142). It is a complete opposite to Tiny Tim's catchphrase "God bless us every one!". Tiny Tim is not only a poor working class child, he is even disabled which makes the readers and the new Scrooge feel sorry for him. His illness is another device of exaggeration. It is Dickens's method of escalation to warn the society what can happen if the basic Christian virtues such as sympathy, mercy and kindness disappear. New Scrooge becomes a second father to Tiny Tim and Dickens, in this example, proposes the idea of universal charity. It is just a simple moral lesson. However, the problem with Scrooge is not that he is just mean, it is the fact that the only thing he does is collecting money and not spending any of

it. His peculiar habits are described right at the beginning of the story. It seems that he does not feel anything, that he is completely emotionless. He treats himself badly and the others even worse. “Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk’s fire was so very much smaller” (Dickens, *ACC* 9). This is only one of the examples. However, Scrooge’s intention is not to make his clerk ill or to hurt anybody’s feelings. As Fred’s party sees it the only one Scrooge is hurting is himself. The perception of the main character is full of contradiction. His recommendation to “decrease the surplus population” by not donating any money is shocking not only for the two portly gentlemen but it is very rational from the economic point of view. On the other hand he still employs a clerk even though he has to pay him a salary. He thus becomes a benefactor of the Cratchits in spite of the fact that it is the last thing he would ever wish to do. This employment just shows that Scrooge is not able to manage the amount of work and not carrying out all the duties would result in money loss. This seems to be the only reason why he keeps a clerk. In comparison with Scrooge’s former employer Fezziwig Scrooge is every employee’s nightmare. Fezziwig is depicted as a hearty person who is able to free himself from his everyday duties and enjoy Christmas. In a way Scrooge seems to be a perfect citizen as he is hardworking and obeying all the rules and laws of the system. Scrooge’s world view is that everybody is responsible for himself. He is completely indifferent and unconcerned with other people’s difficulties. Regarding the process and the results of his transformation Scrooge can hardly be denounced. In fact he is a very weak person as emotions are concerned but extremely disciplined as he was able to create and keep his ascetical habits.

### **III.3 Jacob Marley**

Scrooge’s relationships before the transformation are all the same. However, the fact is that the other people irritate him and make him behave rudely so that the only thing he wishes is to be left alone. His relationship with Jacob Marley is worth mentioning as the first because it is this man who gives Scrooge the chance to redeem himself. Although he has been dead for seven years he appears unexpectedly and warns Scrooge about future events and the danger of his behaviour. Scrooge and Marley’s partnership must have been very important to Scrooge as he “never painted out Old Marley’s name” (Dickens, *ACC* 8). After he got rid of everyone who felt some affection for him Marley must have been the only person and the only security in Scrooge’s life. They are two miserable characters

living in a symbiosis and so similar that after Marley's death Scrooge "answered to both names" (Dickens, *ACC* 8). Although Scrooge is called Marley's friend at the beginning of the story it is difficult to perceive their friendship in the word's usual meaning. Their relationship rather resembles mutual help that is benefactive for both of them. Moreover, in the description of Scrooge's relation to Marley words such as *executor*, *assign* or *residuary legatee* are used and they imply that their partnership may have been a sort of bureaucratic deal. Scrooge is also Marley's "sole mourner" but, given the description of his character, it does not seem plausible that he would ever plunge in the act of mourning.

### III.4 The Ghosts and Gothic Features

The device which Dickens uses to reform his main character is much based on fear. The three ghosts symbolize the continuity of Christmas but not in the historical aspect but they are rather reminders of Scrooge's own personal history. The first represents the memory and the second is a symbol of Christmas spirit. These two are quite definite in their meaning as they present events that had already happened or are happening in Scrooge's present. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is a little more complicated character. He is a symbol of death, fear and the future, however, in the *Carol* the future is not definite. He only represents a possibility which can be changed.

*A Christmas Carol* is not a horror novella, however, it features some of common horror attributes. The presence of supernatural characters is typical for gothic novels. Such characters are very often accompanied by special atmosphere which is created by the description of sounds, dark or shadows. The settings usually include deserted, cold places such as old castles, ruins and graveyards. Furthermore, gothic stories are very often set in the countryside and they also make use of its landscape and hostile weather such as storms, thunders or mist. However, Dickens takes only some of the typical gothic features and uses them in an urban area, in the center of a large city. In the *Carol* the mysterious castles and ruins are replaced with Scrooge's "gloomy suite of rooms". The whole description of his home is rather depressing and a special attention is paid to the door knocker which, at first sight, is a completely unexceptional object but turns out to be a herald of the upcoming events. Thus a simple door knocker gains its own significance as a symbol of Marley's visit. Marley is accompanied by many other ghosts, all miserable like himself. Many of

Scrooge's usual working tools which are all connected with money are used as clear symbols of his spoiled character. "Cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel" are all attached to Marley's chain. The heaviness of Marley's tragedy is not only depicted in his heavy chain. The horror is in the fact that he himself made it when he was still able to make things change. "I wear the chain I forged in life [...] I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on my own free will, and on my own free will I wore it" (Dickens, *ACC* 19). The dreadful noise of the chain is another gothic device. Together with the spontaneous ringing of the bells in Scrooge's dim house it creates an atmosphere typical for gothic stories. However, his rooms are not so dark because of some supernatural powers. It is the result of his greedy nature as "darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it" (Dickens, *ACC* 16). Marley's appearance is another interesting matter. Not much is known about him before he turns up as a spectre. When he visits Scrooge seven years after his own death he becomes a typical horror character. He is dressed as usual, has the same voice and face but the difference is that he is transparent and there is also some distance between former Scrooge's partner and the ghost as the specter asks his living fellow who he was in life. He resembles a dead body when he takes off the bandage and his jaw drops down. Marley's arrival and Scrooge's fear that in the future he could share Marley's fate as a fettered, devastated ghost imply that in the *Carol* reality there is a belief in some kind of afterlife. Otherwise Scrooge would have no much reason to change his personality. However, there is no religious background and Dickens only encourages his character and even the readers not to be indifferent. It is suggested that virtuous, kind people pass away freely and those like Scrooge cannot free themselves even after death and that is, together with dying on one's own, understood as the greatest punishment. As far as gothic or horror stories are concerned, Scrooge seems to be familiar. "[He] then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains" (Dickens, *ACC* 17). Nevertheless, he considers the ghost an illusion.

### **III.5 Other Characters**

The range of characters in the *Carol* is greatly varied. In the past, the present and the future it includes Scrooge's family (Fred, Fan and also his father indirectly), his clerk with a large family and other characters that enter Scrooge's life in its different periods. As *A Christmas Carol* is a straightforward allegory the main characters have their specific

meaning. The Cratchits are the working class, Fred symbolizes Christmas celebrations and the three ghosts are symbols of Scrooge's inner horrors and his sad history. However, they also represent the future which is not given yet. The other characters, such as the miners, the sailors or Belle's family are reminders of Christmas traditions and they express Dickens's belief that it is possible to keep Christmas regardless the financial situation.

### **III.6 Christmas in the *Carol***

Christmas spirit is, obviously, ubiquitous in *A Christmas Carol*. Celebrating takes on various forms and shapes and it is much dependant on finances. The narrative starts on the Christmas Eve and ends the following day and except Scrooge it seems that everybody is celebrating it somehow. Scrooge, being resistant to any kind of joy, reminds a seventeenth century puritan as he is sitting in his counting-house and is reluctant to stop working for a while. Nevertheless, he seems to be the only one of such a nature as the rest of the city is finishing the Christmas preparations. The Christmas spirit is embodied in the character of Fred, Scrooge's nephew, who tries to persuade his uncle that Christmas is not a humbug but an opportunity to meet and enjoy themselves. The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge back to his childhood, to another Christmas season and there, too, people wish merry Christmas to each other. Only the boy is neglected by his family. At Fezziwig's warehouse the holiday is celebrated with a big party. "No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up [...] before a man can say Jack Robinson" says Fezziwig and soon after the warehouse is embellished, full of music and people (Dickens, *ACC* 31). Not only singing and dancing are described, there is also a vivid description of smells and colours of food and drink at Fezziwig's party but also elsewhere. The shops are overflowing with goods, the tables bend under all the mince pies, plum pudding and roasted turkeys. The grocer's, the poulterer's, the fruiterer's, all of these offer plenty of goods and it is a question whether this was a realist image of Christmas London or rather an exaggerated vision of how it should be. Nevertheless, the poor working class could hardly afford any of those.

"The joy, and gratitude, and ecstasy" (Dickens, *ACC* 36). The celebration of Belle's family is centered more around the children. They get presents and show their emotions and their Christmas is, again, very lively, noisy and full of merriment. Christmas at the

Cratchits is also family-centered in contrast to Fezziwig's. As they are poor there are not any presents and not much laughter. However, in their situation they still can afford a proper Christmas dinner despite Mrs. Cratchit's fears that there would not be enough for the whole family. The dinner and also whole family together (it is unimaginable that any of the family members would be absent at Christmas dinner) is reflecting the thinking of Victorian society. The Christmas celebrations in the *Carol* do not include only eating lots of seasonal food. Its integral part is charity represented by the two portly gentlemen and also the religious side of the holiday. "But soon the steeples called good people all, to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes, and with their gayest faces" (Dickens, *ACC* 42). The Cratchits, despite Mrs. Cratchit's objections, show their gratitude to Scrooge when proposing a toast. The narrator describes them as "not a handsome family", "not well dressed", "[but] they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another" (Dickens, *ACC* 49). Dickens's sympathy with the unlucky ones occurs here again.

Fire is mentioned several times in the *Carol*. It symbolizes the warmth of home where everybody is rushing to from cold streets. It is also the place around which the families gather or where ragged men in the street warm their hands and it is also in shopping windows. And as Scrooge and The Ghost of Christmas Present "went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in the kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms, was wonderful" (Dickens, *ACC* 49).

Fred's party is more a friends gathering rather than a family event. There is singing, again, and also playing games because "for it is good to be children sometime, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself" (Dickens, *ACC* 53). Here it is implied how Christmas, although everybody should share its spirit, is focused on children (in Dickens's case recollections of Christmas triggered his imagination and influenced his work greatly). Fred expresses his pity for Scrooge as his wife and guests laugh at what he is saying. Fred still thinks that there is some hope for Scrooge but the others perceives his uncle as some kind of caricature which can never change.

Celebrating Christmas is possible everywhere and this what the Ghost shows Scrooge when he takes him "to a bleak and desert moor" (Dickens, *ACC* 49). "A place where miners live" answers the Ghost Scrooge's question as to where they are (Dickens, *ACC* 50). It is a place far from any decorated shops or a church, yet people here keep Christmas in their own way, singing Christmas songs in a poor hut despite the merciless nature of the

place. Even the sailors, far from home and uncertain about their fate, mumble Christmas songs. After the transformation Scrooge becomes a part of Christmas celebrations and is aware of all of its traditions. He pays for a big turkey for the Cratchits, attends his nephew's dinner and donates a big sum of money to charity and as it is described at the very end of the story he embraces Christmas virtues in his everyday life.

All of the traditional Christmas attributes occur in the *Carol*. Singing carols, meeting up with family members and friends, charity, Christmas dinner and seasonal food, the firelight, church service, gift giving, playing games etc. Standiford remarks that these elements which Dickens uses to portray traditional Christmas celebrations are not his own inventions but they have appeared earlier at various festivities (144). Nevertheless, Dickens's aim was to make them a proper part of Christmas, to create a set of traditions without which there cannot be a real winter holiday.

The merry atmosphere of Christmas celebrations is constantly disrupted by Scrooge's fears, regrets and visions of dark future. In addition this fact is supported by the presence of the ghosts. The Ghosts of Christmas Past and Present do not seem much terrifying but the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come and, especially, Marley and his poor fellows are horror characters who make the story not only a little scary but, what is more important, less idealistic. It makes Scrooge and the readers less confident about all the merriment. It is a way of making the excessively cheerful Christmas story a little more sober. Furthermore, there is a warning personified in the characters of Ignorance and Want that not only we should be merry at Christmas time but we also should think of other people.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

*A Christmas Carol* is a well-constructed work in which Dickens links his personal views, which were affected by his childhood experience, with the overall nature of the nineteenth century society in England. As *A Christmas Carol* is an allegory and thus it presents its characters and motifs as symbols that are supposed to have universal meaning they originate in harsh reality. Dickens exaggerates at times but the fact is that he only describes the reality in which he grew up and which became an essential subject in his works. In this sense Dickens is generally considered a realist writer. However, in the *Carol* his intention is not to give an account of all the flaws in the society. His novella is more likely to be perceived as a Christmas story which, at the time of publication, was supposed to remind the traditions which were almost forgotten. For today's readers the *Carol* still carries the message of the basic Christian virtues which have not changed much and are familiar even to secular spheres. The theme of religion is only peripheral in the *Carol*. Dickens mentions God, church and heaven several times but these mentions refer to charity and sympathy. When the sick Tiny Tim says "God bless us every one" it is obvious that it is not God who should help him. The *Carol* is full of allusions to the real world. Dickens directly mentions the Poor Law, the workhouses and another great work of art, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. However, his intention is to evoke a certain atmosphere and encourage the readers to be more sympathetic. Thus social criticism seems to be only a background for the actual Christmas story. Nevertheless, the main theme of the novella, the moral transformation, could not do without the corruption and greed which were present in the real world. It is impossible to separate Dickens's social criticism and the story because they complement each other.

As far as the characters are concerned Allen mentions that "[w]hen [Dickens] attempts to draw character not as the child sees it but as the adult does, as neither comic nor melodramatic, [...] he fails" (164). In the case of *A Christmas Carol* this point of view is rather peripheral. The character of Scrooge is not supposed to be realistic. He is a symbol and at the beginning he is the evil character of the story. He gains sympathy step by step as readers get familiar with his personal history. Scrooge's motivation to change is partly selfish because he is afraid of dying alone. Nevertheless, he is willing to help everyone who is in need. The psychology of this character is developed more in comparison to other characters. Still the events from Scrooge's past and his fear of death are symbols as well and they serve a moral lesson.

*A Christmas Carol* presents England as it was in the early Victorian era with its social problems, deficiencies and poor morals. However, Dickens's novella combines reality with a heart-warming story of transformation which conveys author's personal beliefs and thus becomes partly autobiographical. Although some the characters are not very realistic they are easy to remember as they present universal qualities which were valid not only in the Victorian era.

## V. WORKS CITED

- Allen, Walter. *The English novel: a short critical history*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986.
- D’Cruze, Shani. “The Family.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 253-272.
- Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol and Other Stories*. Westminster: Modern Library, 2000.
- . *Speeches: Literary and Social*. Adelaide: The University of Adelaide Library, 2010. Ebooks@Adelaide. Web. 18 June 2012.
- Gardner, Philip. “Literacy, Learning and Education.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 353-368.
- Gunn, Simon. “Urbanization.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 238-252.
- Hewitt, Martin. “Class and the Classes.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 305-320.
- House, Humphry. *The Dickens World*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Humphries, Jane. “Standard of Living, Quality of Life.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 287-304.
- McDowall, David. *An Illustrated History of Britain*. Harlow: Longman, 2001.
- Morgan, Kenneth O. et al. *Dějiny Británie*. Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2011.
- Nelson, Claudia. *Family ties in Victorian England*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007.
- Richardson, Sarah. “Politics and Gender.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 174-188.
- Standiford, Les. *The Man Who Invented Christmas*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2008.
- Weddington, Keir. “Health and Medicine.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 412-429.

Wilson, Angus. *The World of Charles Dickens*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972.

**List of abbreviations**

ACC – A Christmas Carol (Dickens)



