

**A Song of a Crippled: Exploring the Character Tiny Tim from *A Christmas Carol* by  
Charles Dickens**

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**Abstract**

Popularly recognized for being a gothic novella that is renowned for the presence of ghosts in a traditional Christmas setting, Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, created a stir for its portrayal of the protagonist Ebenezer Scrooge and his journey towards a better life. This paper concentrates on one particular character from the novella who left a drastic impact on the protagonist. The character chosen for the study is Tiny Tim, the disabled boy with a divine vocal and urge to support his family stands as a motivation for others. Narrative prosthesis, a theory that describes how disability is used as a device in literary narratives and film is used for analysis. Also labeled as children's literature, *A Christmas Carol* covers other themes that also leads a way for the reader to have an impact. This paper would also focus on the novels impact as children's literature. Set during the occasion of Christmas, a festive atmosphere surrounded with joy and laughter, the physical inability of Tim leaves us to question his inner self. The paper would lay stress to the inner turmoil and struggle of a physically challenged person.

**Keywords:** Disability, Children's Literature, Gothic, Narrative prosthesis and physically challenged.

**Introduction**

The world of Gothic literature is familiarized by well pioneered novels belonging to world literatures. From the early era of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* to the contemporary *Silent Companions* of Laura Purcell, the shift in genre is massive. Though it retains the traditional elements; the setting and characters belong to the modern era. Gothic, as a broader term interconnected with other genres and areas to enhance the interdisciplinary perspective of a

fiction. *A Christmas Carol* an eminent work by Charles Dickens accords with this context. Published in 1843, this novella continues to be prominent and acclaimed forever across borders. Vastly celebrated for its depiction of morality, emotions, selflessness and the merriment of Christmas, it also deals with solitude, agony, disability, past trauma wounds and regrets. This research elucidates the disability perspective of the novella. Disability refers to “a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person’s ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions” (“*Disability*”). As mentioned above, it can be any impairment, physical, mental or cognitive, the condition chosen for this study is physical disability. Tim, a physically challenged character is analyzed for study.

Though the work, *A Christmas Carol* is widely recognized for its way broader elements like gothic, psychology, religion, horror and others, this paper analysis the health condition of the select character. Fondly referred to as Tiny Tim, his role as a secondary character in Ebenezer Scrooge’s life played a pivotal point for his transformation. Every secondary character in this novella influence Scrooge for a transition from his old self. The character of Tim is chosen for research as he stands as an epitome of happiness and positivity irrespective of his personal state. Physical disability is the basic focus and limitation of this paper. The child Tim is both a symbol of hope and aspiration. Victorian era has been credited to its vast exploration with respect to themes, “Although poetry and plays were important in Victorian cultural life, the period is known as the great age of the novel.” (Bowden). Writers tended to bring in various concepts and ideologies as per the development in the society, these influenced the writing style and paved way for new transformations. Major writers were able to connect with their audience, a group which now included the commoners and not just the elite, “because the steam printing press made the production of texts much cheaper and because railroads could distribute texts quickly and easily, the Victorian period was a time when new genres appealed to newly mass audiences” (Bowden). The focus was not just on the wealthy and elite but rather it also spoke of the working class and of people below poverty. Influence of societal values leading to life changing instances is the prime focus of this paper, the emotional distress and the calamities it invokes is also explained.

### **The Gothic Ghosts**

A major symbolism of Gothic literature is the presence of ghosts, spirits, ghostly figures or a presence that is unknown and unseen. Evidently, the title *A Christmas Carol* has high implication to the celebration of Christmas. While this festive setting and presence of ghosts give the impression of being directly opposed, both have an equal correlation with specific characteristics of its own. This Gothic Christmas tale along with ghosts has an eerie setting, gloomy nature, impending mysteries, unending apparitions, uneasy feelings and triggering negativity. A link between virtues and gothic features is generated making those traits to be pointing towards

something beyond just aesthetics. Visual elements in Gothic plays is an added element as, “The narrative is enhanced by the readers’ perceptions, experiences and inventiveness as they actively interact with the visual components.” (Akhtar and Qazi 312). The three ghost – past, present and future stay accountable for Scrooge’s conscience through the decades. These manifestations are personifications of his remorse, caution and repentance. This intricate link leads him to realize the presence of Tim as a new person. These apparitions get him an encounter with Tim twice at two different period, once for his actions and the next the final aftermath. Though he hasn’t had any sort of proper conversations with Tim, that minute exposure proves to be highly valuable. Even before the ghost makes any remark or comments on his gestures, Scrooge is himself able to identify his folly. Tim is the parallel of admonition for Scrooge to recall the attributions of rationality, feebleness and empathy. The connecting factor between Scrooge’s spectral exposure and rational reality is Tim, his death is the final code for self-realization. Admire the festive ideality, the pain and suffering he feels at the presumed death of Tim which is although an apparition brings out the humanity buried deep down within Ebenezer Scrooge. Familiarly referred as the elderly miser, Scrooge has indeed a kind spirited heart deep down. The traumas of the past made him to build a solid armor around his affectionate nature. Initial stage of the novel portrays his attitude to Christmas as a result of the above during Christmas eve, “Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker’s-book, went home to bed.” (Dickens 12).

### **Narrative Prosthesis**

Narrative Prosthesis, a term coined and defined by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, reasons that disability often serves as a metaphorical device or a narrative crutch. Disability being used as the catch or crux of a narrative is the core concept of the above terminology. Mitchell a Professor of English and Snyder a disability specialist, through their work interpret how disability is utilized as a metaphor. The novel is set around 1840’s, an era filled with tuberculosis, whooping cough, measles and other ailments. Many researchers have tried to decode the reason behind Tim’s condition. Though the working class and below poverty people were having issues with living conditions, being clustered together in cramped crowded atmosphere, the basic reason behind his disorder has always been speculative. Dickens usage of such corporeal disfunction also signifies the maladies faced by the people belonging to the Victorian era. People were even affected by more than one disease, “Sixty percent of children in London had rickets, and nearly 50% had signs of TB. Tiny Tim likely had a combination of both diseases.” (Chesney). A vital force in Scrooge’s conversion is Tim, though his impairment and fragile condition did not affect Scrooge initially, his reformation occurs agitated by Tim’s death. Though any medical reference to his condition is not addressed in the novella, the very presence of his malady stirs a positive outcome in the protagonists. His character is portrayed in a sense where the disability is not just used for pity but allows him to be a dignified human. His well

notable lines, “God bless Us, Every One!” (Dickens 112) illustrates his humanity irrespective of others behavior.

### **Children’s Literature**

In a general sense, *A Christmas Carol* is also reviewed as a traditional Christmas tale for children, gaining the novella an affirmation to be a part of Children’s Literature. Portrayal of Tim, a child is henceforth even more relatable to children in a border way. The presence of super natural elements and character attaining self-actualization validates it as a morality narrative. Realistic depiction of these presence triggers active participation of children, “This process of active meaning-making deepens children’s comprehension of the story and aids their intellectual and emotional development.” (Akhtar and Qazi 312). Principally, the aim of this genre’s works lay in delivering a positive outcome and learning values. Tiny Tim is the emblematical representation of merriment, finding contentedness in poverty and upholding virtues.

Comparatively, the childhood of Ebenezer Scrooge is filled with abandonment and sorrow. The constant trauma he faced as a kid leads him to be a cold-hearted person, emotionally detaching him from everyone. He has a lethargic response to emotional situations. These intricacies help in understanding his later life, the parameters he has are results of his childhood. They also highlight the reason for certain elderly people’s rude behavior; it might be an effect of hard childhood. These two characters serve as the moral binaries of the novella. The old miser’s selfishness runs parallel to the poor Tim’s humble nature. As the plot progresses, the shift in characteristics is evidently noticeable, which is the ultimate climax of any Children’s literature, realizing faults and encountering a change in behavior.

### **Sentimentalism**

Sentimentalism, a terminology that gained recognition through Victorian authors, it was a striking feature with notable prominence. The ethos behind Victorian writer’s sentimentalism was heart-rending. They felt, “A popular culture of tears may serve an intuitively therapeutic purpose requiring simple triggers rather than artistically complex occasions.” (Bell). Tim is a representation of this sentimentalism, he’s an optimist, upright person and pure irrespective of his alignment. Dickens did not create a fragile, disheartened character instead a young boy who embraced his defects and imposes optimism. Though these solid metaphors, Dickens raises undercurrents of strong emotions, finding positivity in agony. Redemption, one among the key factors of this novella is attained through Scrooge’s reflection of his behavior towards the secondary characters. Among them, Tiny Tim has a pertinent part, his presumed death is something intolerable to Scrooge. Though they have never had any proper conversations and he’s just a by-stander that Scrooge witnesses every day, his demise stimulates feelings which Scrooge never knew he possessed. Tim was a concrete personification of simple truth, “Tiny Tim is original before and after. Before charity? Literal death. And after charity? Life. It’s an

intoxicating story.” (Catchpole). Narrative arc is pivotal in a plot, it’s instrumental in constructing the story, here Scrooge’s emotions are put to rest with the rising action – witnessing the death of Tim. Predominant works of Dickens stress on ill-treatment of children and the societal acknowledgement on the same. Here, in the novella, though Tim is not subjected to abuse, his deteriorating health acts as a catalyst for elicit emotions of vulnerability in readers.

### **Tim’s Psychology**

The space for processing his trauma or agony of past is not provided for Scrooge. Each and every joyfulness associated with the festive atmosphere he comes across in the present was precisely the circumstances denied for him. The ghost of past, present and future are strainingly sort of the inner turmoil of Scrooge that’s been rooted down for ages. Though the novella personifies his psychological agitations, it cannot be considered so for the secondary characters. Irrespective of not delving into the psychological state of Tim, the narrative deeply delineated it through his characterization. The subtext provides necessary glimpse at his internal conflicts. His striving effort to partake in church, demeanor of joyfulness and his plight to help his family are certain factors that replicate the way he tries to be normal as others. A question of emotional resilience is raised imploring people to think beyond what is narrated in the plot. Understanding the psychology behind a child’s behavior is a much-researched area. Though no concrete statements can be formed for every characteristic, the sincerity of Tim’s actions can be vividly seen. Across ages, disability was not a common factor that was openly accepted by everyone in the society. They were always considered a burden devoid of having a regular life unlike others. Writers utilized these concepts as a mechanism for implementing feeling of pity on readers coming across disabled characters. The ancient Victorianism overlooked children with physic like Tiny Tim; they were continually banished to the margins. Yet, Charles Dickens deals with him with importance, embodying Tim as emotional character in prime focus. A descriptive into his inner self and turmoil provides the narrative to offer a reader to cope their presumptions on disability. He acts as a catalyst for confronting people about having general assumptions and represent a medium to rectify the same. Dickens breaks the stereotypical features and sketches a strong minded and independently abled character in depicting Tiny Tim.

### **Conclusion**

Irrespective of highly denoting sentimentalism, this character fascinates beyond conventions. Disability as s a narrative device, kindle ethical code not just in Scrooge but also on readers. People across time and borders has highly been influenced by Tiny Tim’s persona that many tributes were established on his name. The Victorian society enjoyed the depiction of him and the acknowledgement was hugely ecstatic. Even the field of medicine was completely hyped, “New hospital wards were name after him. ‘Tiny Tim’ beds were paid for with charitable donations.” (Catchpole). Dickens crucially acted on a capitalist framework; he dissects the values

and productivity of Victorian implications. He challenges Scrooge's by provoking his moral ethics and questioning his identity in the society he lives.

Charity was contemplated to be a social responsibility and the people in power held it in high regards. Impacted by Dickens character, "Charities bearing his name were created. The Queen of Norway even started sending presents annually to disabled children in London hospitals, signed 'with Tiny Tim's love'." (Catchpole).

Though *A Christmas Carol* is a gothic novella, the elements of disability and society paves way for analyses with an interdisciplinary perspective. Tim is a bitter and painful reminder of social inequity, filled with haunting innocence.

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