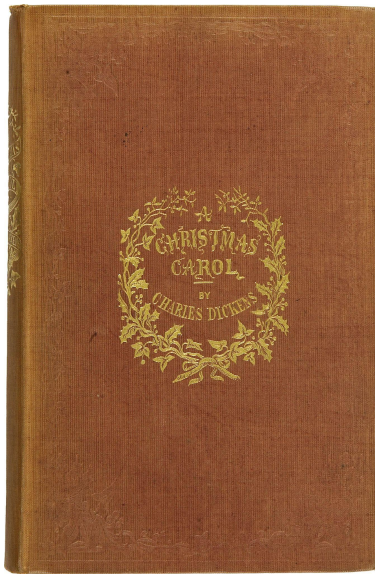


Celebrating 180 Years of a Christmas Carol Part 1

By Art Kilmer

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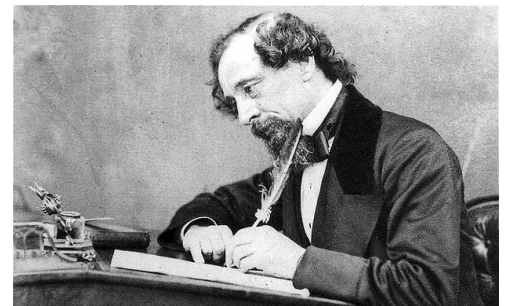
Merry Christmas everyone! I hope this season has been a good one for you. I hope that you are surrounded by the beauty of the Christmas lights, decorations, friends, and family. One of my favorite parts of Christmas is participating in traditions. One tradition my daughter and I have is sitting out on our porch swing at night, snuggled underneath a quilt, and we enjoy the Christmas lights of the neighborhood. Sometimes I'll play some Christmas music, and sometimes we'll sing our favorite carols. We don't do it every night, but it is something we do a couple of times during the season.



Another tradition I have is reading Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* every year. And this year, that marvelous book turns 180 years old. It's amazing that such a short novel has managed to continue its cultural and holiday impact since it was first published in 1843. I think it can get overlooked when discussing classic Victorian literature. But there's no denying the fact that Dickens' "ghostly little story" continues to have the impact he wanted to this very day.

In 1843, Dickens wanted to write something that would speak out against the horrible conditions of child laborers, poverty, and more. And the conditions were truly awful. At first he had planned to write a pamphlet or lecture on the conditions and what should be done about it. But the more he thought about it, he realized that the best way to deliver a "sledge-hammer" blow was through the power of storytelling.

So for 6 weeks, Dickens set to work writing a Christmas Carol. He'd write throughout the day, and then spend his evenings walking through the city of London. When it came time to publish, he wanted something beautiful, well made, but affordable for everyone. Though he wanted the message to be for those who could enact change, he also wanted to be sure that the poor and working class could afford to read a story written for them.



The book was published on December 19, 1843, and it was immediately a best-seller. The first edition became completely sold out by Christmas Eve. By the following Christmas it had gone through 13 editions. Due to a lack of stringent copyright laws, stage plays were immediately created, much to the author's chagrin. Since then, it has never gone out of print. It has been adapted for stage, radio, television, movies, and even podcasts. There seems to be no shortage of adaptations even to this day. There are even Christmas Carol themed board games and video games!



The book is a unique one. It's a cozy holiday story; but it also carries a profound message. One such moment comes when Scrooge is with the Spirit of Christmas Present, and the Spirit reveals the children Ignorance and Want beneath his robe. We're told that these children are man's, and that they represent our doom. Dickens could see the devastating impact on a society when children are lost to want, without the basic necessities to survive. But the Spirit warns Scrooge that Ignorance is more dangerous. In fact, ignorance is Scrooge's problem. Remember at the beginning of the novel when two gentlemen show up collecting for the poor, and they tell him that the poor would rather die than go to the workhouses. Scrooge says:

"I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned--they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides--excuse me--I don't know that."

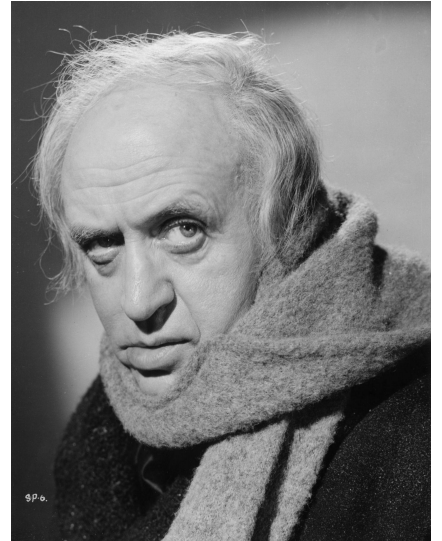
"But you might know it," observed the gentleman.



"It's not my business," Scrooge returned. "It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

And that's the story of A Christmas Carol - Scrooge goes from ignorance to wisdom, and chooses compassion. Scrooge is changed by what he witnesses in his past, present, and future; his redemption at the end of the story is all the more sweeter for it. It's themes like this that make the book an enduring classic. It's themes still resonate with us today.

Do you have a tradition to read or watch A Christmas Carol every year? What are your favorites? I'll have another post before Christmas where I will talk more about my favorite Characters, adaptations, and quotes from the book. I'd love to hear yours! Reach out to me at cozychristmaspodcast@gmail.com and let me know.



Until next time, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us, everyone!

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