

'A Christmas Carol' - A look at how Dickens presents the Cratchits as a poor but happy family

Dickens uses different techniques to create the feeling of a happy family, even though the Cratchits are very poor. In the Cratchit family, everyone helps and works as a team. For example, 'Miss Belinda changes the plates.' This makes the family seem like a unit and suggests that everyone has a sense of belonging, symbolising the central message of the book: we all need to be part of a community.

In the scene in the centre of the book, the Cratchits are eating Christmas dinner, while Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present watch them. The family eat their goose and then move on to the second course and the atmosphere is full of happiness and excitement, as the family wait for Mrs Cratchit to bring out the pudding. The pudding is highly symbolic because although it is only small, the family take great pride in it and it shows effort and hard work. This suggests that Dickens wants us to know that the family are delighted with simple things. It implies the opposite of Scrooge, as earlier on in the novella, Scrooge tells Fred that anyone who celebrates Christmas should be 'boiled in his own pudding' and have a 'stake of holly' put through his heart.

Dickens then describes a 'great deal of steam!' His use of exclamation marks shows us how much excitement was in the room and what the atmosphere was like. 'A smell like a washing day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating house and a pastry cook's next door to each other, with a laundress's house next door to that!' This quote suggests to the readers how warm and inviting the Cratchits house is, even if it is, as we suspect, cold, damp and dreary: a typical Victorian, lower class dwelling. The technique Dickens uses, to appeal to our sense of smell, makes us feel like we are really in the Cratchit home.

'Mrs Cratchit enter[s] flushed, but smiling proudly.' This suggests the family is easily pleased, and also how Mrs Cratchit is delighted with the pudding she has created, 'blazing in half of half-a quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly...' It reminds us of the light on the head of the Ghost of Christmas Past. This symbolises hope and the pudding also lights up the room, like the Ghost of Christmas Present did at Scrooge's house. The atmosphere is positive and good humoured. 'Nobody said or thought it was a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.' This detail emphasises what a united family they are and how they are so down to earth. They would never expect anything more than what they are given, because they are so positive and all feel secure and like they belong. This detail also creates the impression of gratitude for the blessings that they do have, even if there are only a few.

The family all help to clear up dinner and they are orderly and neat, and work as a team. 'Apples and oranges were put on the table.' Although only a small portion, the fruit symbolises goodness and health. 'A shovel full of chestnuts on the fire.' Again, this is not much either, but it does not matter. It is the attempt to decorate the home that makes everyone grateful. 'The family display of glass. Two tumblers, and a custard cup without a handle' - this little family are proud of the effort they make. The middle class may have riches and ornaments and 'golden goblets', but the Cratchits would prefer to have their gold in the form of their happy family, instead of the wealth of the middle class. Dickens is

showing us that it is not just money that makes people happy, is it the love people share for each other.

Bob then says, "A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!" This toast suggests the importance of family and what a privilege it is to have a safe, loving home. We infer that, as long as you have a united family, you have people who love you no matter what your wealth amounts to. In all these ways Dickens presents us with a poor yet very happy family.

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