

Stave One

Marley's Ghost

Introduction to Scrooge on Christmas Eve

Summary

We are told that Marley, Scrooge's business partner, is dead and that Scrooge organised the funeral, being the 'sole' beneficiary of Marley's will. Even seven years later, Scrooge has not painted out his name on the door of the business. The **narrator** tells us that Scrooge was 'tight-fisted' – mean with his money, and he was 'cold'. The narrator goes on to tell us that no one in the town – even the dogs – liked him. It is Christmas Eve, the weather is cold and Scrooge is in his 'counting house' with the door open to watch his clerk. Despite the cold, the clerk only has a fire consisting of one lump of coal to warm him. (A modern reader would be surprised by the opening sentence describing Marley. We know that the novella is about a character called Scrooge.)

Narrative voice

In *A Christmas Carol*, the narrator talks directly to the reader. In the opening of the novella, the narrator conversationally addresses whether a 'coffin-nail' is the 'deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade'. This type of narration is called **intrusive** because the narrator speaks directly to the reader, comments on what is happening and can be seen as another character in the novella. However, we do not ever see or meet the narrator; we only hear the **voice**. This is a **limited omniscient narrator**: 'omniscient' because the narrator knows what Scrooge is thinking and feeling, so can see inside his head, but 'limited' because the narrator does not see inside any of the other characters' heads. This is significant because it enables the reader to follow Scrooge's thoughts and development.

Look at the text below from the opening page of **Stave One**:

The narrator speaks directly to the reader, asking them a question.

“Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years.”

Notice the use of 'I' and the conversational speech pattern of 'I don't know how many...'. This is informal talk between friends.

DEFINE IT!

beneficiary – someone who receives goods, money or land from a will

omniscient – all-knowing, all-seeing

DO IT!

Find a further example of how the narrator addresses the reader in this opening of Stave One. What is the **effect** of this form of narration?

STRETCH IT!

Research the term 'fourth wall'. How could you apply this to the narration in *A Christmas Carol*?