

Explore the ways Dickens presents the character of Bob Cratchit throughout the novel.

In your response you should:

- explore how Dickens present Bob Cratchit in the extract
- explore how Dickens presents Bob Cratchit in the whole novel (40 marks)

With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

"You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, sir."

"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound?"

The clerk smiled faintly.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work."

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. "But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning."

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas Eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, to play at blindman's-buff

GRADE 9 MODEL ANSWER

In the extract, Dickens uses Bob Cratchit to symbolise the poor working conditions of the working classes in the Victorian era. Bob's office is referred to by the noun 'Tank' which has obvious connotations of claustrophobia, imprisonment and containment. The fact it is in upper-case heightens its sense of restriction. This links to an earlier quotation describing Bob's office as a 'dismal little cell' which emphasises the gloominess of his working conditions. Interestingly, Dickens could be using the nouns 'cell' combined with 'Tank' as a metaphor for how the rich factory owners keep their workers imprisoned in a cycle of poverty through low wages and long working hours. Despite Bob's challenging working conditions, he still manages to retain an optimistic spirit as shown through the verb phrase 'smiled faintly'. The verb 'smiled' connotes Bob's loyalty towards his employer embodying the diligent spirit of the working classes. This contrasts with the adverb 'faintly' which reminds the readers that his perceived happiness is feeble and a brave attempt of the working classes to make the most of their difficult situation.

Dickens also uses Bob to symbolise of the true spirit of Christmas and the importance of family. In the extract, we first gain an impression of Bob's cheerful and enthusiastic yuletide spirit when he 'ran home...as hard as he could pelt' and slid on the ice 'twenty times in honour of Christmas'. This hyperbolic language shows Dickens believed Christmas was a time for celebrating with the family. He also uses hyperbolic language to show Bob's thankfulness towards his wife by describing the Christmas pudding through the adjective 'wonderful' and later using a superlative to describe it as her 'greatest achievement'. At the time Dickens was worried about the alienating effects of capitalism on individuals and how it valued profit over everything else. By presenting such a happy scene at Christmas, Dickens uses the Cratchit dinner scene to model how he wanted all families to celebrate Christmas.

Dickens presents Bob's grief over Tiny Tim's death to stir the emotions of his affluent readership and show them the consequences of what could happen when the upper classes do not take responsibility for looking after the working classes. In Stave 3, Bob is described as holding Tiny Tim 'upon his shoulders'. This personifies how children were a financial burden that working class parents had to carry. The fact he is 'crippled' highlights the financial issues affecting working class parents such as Bob. The fact Bob is described by the adjective 'slower' contrasts with the earlier description of him liking to 'pelt' home quickly in Stave 1. Again Dickens could be using this as a metaphor to show how the lives of the working classes are hampered by the neglect of the upper classes. Perhaps the most powerful scene in the whole book is when the normally jovial Bob 'breaks down' and repeats the adjective 'little' 3 times to emphasise his grief and suffering over Tiny Tim's avoidable death. Dickens purpose is clearly to invoke feelings of guilt, sympathy and vulnerability in readers to rouse the upper classes from their selfish slumber in order to encourage them to shoulder their responsibility and contribute more towards the poor in society.

Overall, Bob is presented as a caricature of benevolence who epitomises the struggles of the working classes, the true Christmas spirit and the importance of family. Witnessing Bob's grief over Tiny Tim's death is perhaps the strongest catalyst which brings about the transformation in Scrooge's character which in turn, Dickens hoped, would bring about a transformation in the way the upper classes treated the working classes in the Victorian era.