

Sample Answer

Read the following extract from 'A Christmas Carol' (Stave Four, page 80)

In this extract, Scrooge has just seen his own gravestone and is pleading with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come to confirm that the future can still be changed.

'Spirit!' he cried, tight clutching at its robe, 'hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

'Good Spirit,' he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it: 'Your nature intercede for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!'

The kind hand trembled.

'I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!'

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed and dwindled down into a bedpost.

Starting with this extract, how does Dickens present the idea of redemption?

Write about:

- How Dickens presents the idea of redemption in this extract
- How Dickens presents the idea of redemption in the novel as a whole
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[30 marks]

AO4 [4 marks]

AO1: Bold opening which sets out a strong line of argument

Sample Answer

As a key theme, Dickens uses many methods to convey the idea of redemption throughout the text. It is a theme which is presented in the novel's structure as a whole, through the precise mirroring of actions in Stave Five from Stave One, yet Dickens also uses micro-structural methods such as his use of syntax to convey it.

AO1: Contextualise extract in the theme

This extract is crucial in the exploration of the theme because it shows Scrooge's commitment to action. This is evident in the tripartite list in his declaration 'I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me.' This clearly shows that he has absorbed the lessons of all three spirits, while his use of modal verbs in 'will' and 'shall' also demonstrate his commitment to the future as well as the extent to which he has changed. Dickens also highlights the idea here that redemption is something to be earned by work yet to be done. It is clearly not enough that Scrooge has a new attitude; the verb 'strive' emphasises that there is effort still to be made, with its connotations of having to work relentlessly to achieve something.

AO2: Convincing explanation of effect of language

AO2: Subject terminology

At the beginning of this extract, however, Scrooge's speech is far less fluent as Dickens again uses sentence structure to make his point. The phrasing of 'I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse' is somewhat clumsy but shows that Scrooge has already changed, while also capturing the complex timeline that Scrooge is negotiating at this point. This awkwardness shows how far Scrooge has come and how willing he now is for redemption, since in his earlier utterances he was always certain and definite. 'Bah! Humbug! Accurately sums up his earlier attitude with its short, direct and unwavering certainty.

AO2: Subject terminology

AO2: Thoughtful contrast drawn with earlier use

Dickens uses the Ghosts as a plot device to bring about Scrooge's redemption. This can be seen in the extract with the adjective 'kind' used to describe the Ghost's hand. Qualifying the Ghost in this way makes its intention clear and contrasts with earlier terrifying or judgemental presentations of this and the other spirits. Interestingly, although Dickens has Scrooge adopt a religious pose 'in a last prayer', he does not explicitly connect the Ghosts to a Christian religious context, even though this would have been the social norm for the period he was writing in. The idea of redemption is therefore connected to a wider vision of humanity – that anyone is capable of change, independent of religious belief.

AO2: Subject terminology

AO2: Thoughtful contrast drawn with earlier use of language (literary context)

The idea of the various Ghosts as instruments of redemption is introduced by Marley's Ghost, who explains that he offers Scrooge 'a chance and hope' to escape the punishment he faces of making up after death for not 'walk[ing] abroad' during his life. This conversation, although it terrifies Scrooge, establishes from the start the idea of the three main Ghosts as a redemptive force, with Marley as able to somehow argue on Scrooge's behalf. The powerful abstract nouns 'chance' and 'hope' presents this opportunity of redemption as valuable and also as something Scrooge is lucky to be offered.

AO2: Strong and detailed analysis of language

The construction of the whole novel emphasises the theme of redemption above all else, since the final Stave mirrors the first in multiple ways, from the transformation of the weather which is now 'clear' with 'no fog' to Scrooge's systematic correcting of all of his earlier misdeeds. This careful step-by-step correction of his behaviour ensures that Scrooge is worthy of the redemption he gains, while the final comments from the narrator demonstrates that the change in him is permanent. This provides for a satisfying and definitive ending, which befits the form of a fireside tale.

AO1: Very strong overview here, with detail in the quotations as well – convincing knowledge of the text

As one of the key themes, redemption is presented in various ways throughout the novel, but its importance is reinforced structurally through the plot's organisation, the novel mirror pattern and through the varying sentence forms.

AO3: Reference to the literary genre

Comment: Very High Level
A convincing answer which takes a specific argument and presents evidence for it, both from the extract and the novel as a whole. There is a range of knowledge demonstrated, across and beyond the text, which is articulated well and exemplified using well-chosen quotations.