**AIM HIGHER - The Significance of Ghosts: Science, Religion and Social Criticism by Niki Brodin Larsson (Lund University, 2013)**

*Read through the extracts below taken from Larsson’s study and carefully and highlight anything that could relate to the significance of Jacob Marley and the theme of religion.*

In *A Christmas Carol*, the natural explanation for Ebenezer Scrooge’s first meeting with his deceased partner, Jacob Marley, is that he is having a hallucination. The first time Scrooge sees Marley is when he is about to enter his house. It is dark and late at night, and Dickens writes of the fog and frost around the doorway. When Scrooge is about to unlock the door, the face of Marley suddenly appears in the knocker (41-2). The hallucination soon disappears but the horrific image stays with him and sets his nerves on edge (42). The vision of Jacob Marley could be seen as a hallucination caused by Scrooge’s memory of his deceased colleague and the darkness and the heavy fog around the doorway.

In relation to *A Christmas Carol,* it could easily be argued that Scrooge falls asleep when he sits down by the fire with his gruel to think over the events of the day, and starts dreaming. In this altered state of mind, the memory of Marley and the spirit of Christmas, combined with Scrooge’s concerns about the future, become the substance of his dream. In his dream, Scrooge is unable to control what he sees, but tells Marley that he does not rely on his own senses. He tries to be rational, but in the dream his rational thoughts do not have any power over the unconscious part of his mind, and it is in this dreamy state that Scrooge is able to communicate with the ghosts or spirits that come to visit him in his sleep. The natural explanation of the apparitions in this story is that Jacob Marley is all a dream and that his memories and concerns appear to him as part of this dream.

The Christian explanation for ghosts clashes with the scientific one; the ghosts cannot possibly be the soul of a deceased person as well as being part of Scrooge’s psychological tension at the same time. These contradicting ideas were what people had to deal with in the nineteenth century and what Dickens appears to carefully balance in these ghost stories.

By reinforcing certain Christian beliefs Dickens was able to give the Victorian readers the spiritual reassurance they needed. Some people think that Dickens aim was but to present the Christmas message as clearly as possible to a reader. A *Christmas Carol* confirms the Christian convictions that there is an afterlife, that the soul is immortal, and that people, after death, will be judged for the way they have lived their life. This story reassures Christian readers that Christmas is sacred and that to condemn Christmas is blasphemous. There is also the important theme of repentance and the ned to be forgiven for your sins in life.

In *A Christmas Carol* the Christian explanation for the ghosts’ appearances would be that the soul is immortal and that there is an afterlife. On the first page Dickens assures the reader that Jacob Marley is dead, but that he will appear again. Therefore, with his emergence Jacob Marley proves that there is an afterlife, even if he himself is condemned to walk the earth among other sinners to repent In this story, there is clear evidence for the Christian faith regarding the immortality of the soul.

The Christian belief that people who have lived a wrongful life will be punished after their death is clearly shown in *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens believed in the Judgement and the spirits who visit Scrooge are sent to save him from damnation; if he fails to repent he will suffer the consequences after death, as Marley does. When Jacob Marley first appears before Scrooge, Scrooge observes that he is wearing a heavy chain around his waist made of “cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel”. When Scrooge asks Marley about the chain he answers that he forged the chain when he was alive and that Scrooge’s own chain is even longer and heavier Marley confirms the Christian belief that the way you live your life has an impact on your life after death. He explains to Scrooge that “it is required of every man ... that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world ... and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!” Marley speaks here of the punishment [purgatory] of those who have lived a wrongful life and of how the soul is condemned to wander earth to witness all the troubles and sorrows of mankind.

1. What scientific explanation does Larsson offer for Marley’s appearance in the novella?

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2. What Christian explanation does he say there is for the appearance of Marley’s ghost? And, what message do you think Dickens has for his readers?

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3. To what extent is Jacob Marley a symbol of Christianity?

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