

ESSAYS ON
Charles Dickens's
A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Presented by the Students of
English 498
Senior Seminar

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Editor's Note

THE STUDENTS OF ENGLISH 498, THE SENIOR SEMINAR, were asked in the fall of 2010 to write short, scholarly articles in conjunction with a radio production of Charles Dickens's immortal *A Christmas Carol* (1843). This broadcast, a re-creation of Orson Welles's 1938 version of the *Carol*, was performed on the evening of 7 December, in the Fine and Performing Arts Center on the campus of Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina. These essays are the result of an immense amount of effort on the part of my students, and I present the results of their work here with great pride as both their editor and their professor.

Charles Dickens: His Life and His Work

ELIZABETH NISSLY

IN SEPTEMBER 1860, CHARLES DICKENS SET FIRE TO EACH AND every personal letter he possessed. Dickens had feared the details of his private life would soon become public knowledge. In order to prevent this unwanted exposure, he decided he must dispose of all personal records. As Fred Kaplan explains “[Dickens] had no belief in or commitment to the idea of a public record about private matters. His books would speak for him. All other voices should be silenced. His art, not his life, was public property” (18). It is entertaining to imagine how Dickens might feel if he were alive today. During the last two centuries, there have been countless books, articles, and websites dedicated to his work and to his personal life. The always dramatic Dickens would surely not be disappointed by the attention his life and works continue to receive. Beyond speculation, it is safe to say that Dickens successfully accomplished what he set out to do, to put so much of himself into his work that there is no understanding the life without the works, nor the works without the life.

Charles John Huffman Dickens was born on 7 February 1812 to John and Elizabeth Dickens. Due to unstable family conditions, Dickens suffered through a difficult childhood filled with worries that far surpassed those of an average boy. Even as a young child, Dickens found comfort and peace through the use of his imagination. According to Kaplan, Dickens spent a significant amount of time daydreaming and reading books he found in his father’s study (18–32). When Dickens was ten years old, he began to make daily trips along the Thames to visit his parents’ friends. Kaplan asserts that rather than showing interest in the large buildings of London

and the wealthy inhabitants, these trips to London sparked Dickens's interest in observing the lives of the underprivileged (36). But Dickens's interest in members of the poor working class was not purely a result of observation. In spite of his more than moderate income, throughout Dickens's youth, his father, John, remained deeply in debt. At twelve years of age, while his sister Fanny was attending an expensive music academy, Dickens was put to work at Warren's Blacking Factory, where he spent ten hours a day gluing labels on jars of shoe polish in order to create additional income for his family. Kaplan suggests that Dickens suffered both emotionally and physically from the experience (38–42). Dickens worked longer and harder than any twelve-year old ever should, and he was left with no time for normal childhood activities. Still, his experience at the factory greatly contributed to the man and writer he would later become. Sympathy for children and a constant concern for the underprivileged dominate most of his fictional writings. *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *Bleak House* (1853), and *Hard Times* (1854), and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) are just a few examples of Dickens at his best and most socially concerned. Although many of Dickens's novels and short stories continue to be highly praised, *A Christmas Carol* has truly captured the hearts of readers and become an immortal piece of literature. It is here that one finds a shadow of the young Dickens.

Dickens created for Scrooge a childhood that greatly resembled his own, and many of Dickens's characters are renditions of his family members and friends. Not only was Scrooge sent off to a boarding school and separated from his immediate family as Dickens was, he also had a sister whose name was a near match for Dickens's own. Scrooge's sister, Fran, represents Dickens's sister, Fanny. Fran represents for Scrooge what Dickens's own sister represented in his life. Kaplan reports that Fran is "the lovely sister-wife who represents the ideal woman and completion of the self" (19). There is no mention of Scrooge's mother in *A Christmas Carol*, and Dickens's own relationship with his mother remained strained throughout most of his life. She was the original proponent of sending the twelve year old Dickens to work, and even after his father was released from prison, Elizabeth forced Dickens to continue working. He was apparently never able to forgive her for the way

she robbed him of his childhood, as Kay Puttock has noticed: “When speaking of his mother, he was prone to add, ‘May God forgive her’” (3). His sister Fanny provided Dickens with the love and the affection he needed and desired, attentions he had never received from his mother. Just as Fanny represented love in Dickens’s life, Fran symbolizes familial love in Scrooge’s life, and his memory of this relationship plays a significant role in his redemption.

While Dickens enjoyed the large amount of money he earned as a writer and speaker, he did not allow his wealth to affect his view of the world or his interactions with others. Dickens believed there should be equality amongst people and was unable to understand how some could be so wealthy while at the same time others were dying of starvation. According to Michael Rosen, Dickens was interested in showing his readers how the poor were directly affected by the actions of the wealthy upper-class (44–45). Although viewed by many as a heart-warming story of Christmas cheer and happiness, *A Christmas Carol* is also very much a scathing social commentary on Dickens’s time. The Cratchits, who hardly have enough money to feed, to shelter, and to clothe their family, are at the mercy of Scrooge, who until his transformation remains emotionally removed from the troubles of the less fortunate. Rosen argues that instead of depicting poor members of society as drunks with unwise spending habits, as was common during the 1800s, Dickens shows readers that wealthy people such as Scrooge have much to learn from the poor (2). Dickens was also an advocate of social responsibility. He believed each member of a society should be aware of and concerned for the well-being of others, whether or not they were personally involved with them. In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens writes, “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” (29–30). Marley’s words represented Dickens’s own views of personal responsibility. According to Dickens, if people were to go through life only concerned with their own well-being and prosperity, then they were certain to be punished in the after-life for not living as they should have. Once again, Dickens’s works offer a clear and illuminating reflection of the author himself.

As part of his solution to the problem of the poor, Dickens maintained a keen interest in education throughout most of his life. He believed the only way to fight against poverty was through education. Dickens identifies the twins who travel with the Ghost of Christmas Present in *A Christmas Carol* as Ignorance and Want. These two children represent what Dickens felt were the most critical problems facing Britain, and he relates his position through the voice of the Ghost of Christmas Present: "This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased" (Perdue 9). Although his own formal education was sparse and erratic, Dickens knew the value of education and recognized literacy's direct impact on his life. He was an advocate for and the most well-known supporter of Ragged Schools, which were designed to provide education to those who were financially unstable. While these schools lacked solid teaching staffs and sufficient materials needed for proper education, they offered education to those who would have never been able to afford it otherwise. In an 1844 speech, Dickens articulated his views on education: "If you would reward honesty, if you would give encouragement to good, if you would stimulate the idle, eradicate evil, or correct what is bad, education—comprehensive liberal education—is the one thing needful, and the one effective end" (qtd. in Litvack 1). To Dickens, these schools were the key to keeping children from experiencing the difficulties he had faced as a child. Education was also the key to fixing a society that in his view had all but crumbled to pieces. As he so clearly conveys in *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens felt that knowledge was the only hope for a better society, one that might fulfill its destiny as an agent of Christian goodness.

Public readings were another way in which Dickens was able to bring joy to his readers. Between 1853 and 1870 Dickens performed nearly 500 public readings of his works. These readings were one of Dickens's greatest joys. Instead of relying on elaborate costumes and props like many other authors and actors, Dickens presented most of his works completely free of anything but his sparkling personality and passion for performance. *A Christmas Carol* was first performed

in December 1853 and was amongst Dickens's favorite pieces to read. According to Tom Viola, Dickens's performances left audiences weeping, laughing, and cheering (6). Although Dickens had not originally intended for *A Christmas Carol* to be performed onstage, his public readings inspired many other renditions of this classic tale which have continued to be produced to this day. During the last onstage performance of his works, Dickens gave a heart-felt and tearful exit saying, "From these garish lights . . . I vanish now for evermore, with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful, affectionate farewell" (Rosen 8). He was never seen in public again and died three months later leaving behind a legacy few have managed to equal. Dickens may have erased some of the details of his life when he lit what is now known as "the bonfire," but through the letters that do survive and especially in works such as *A Christmas Carol*, readers still can see an in-depth and personal view of his life. Ultimately, however, it is simply true; understanding Dickens means understanding his works. The two are inseparable, just as Dickens had intended them to be.

Great Expectations: The Contemporary Reception of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*

JOSH LOHSE

AT THE TIME OF ITS FIRST PUBLICATION IN 1843, A LARGE number of contemporary critics seemed already to believe that Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* would become some sort of cultural icon, although none of them could have predicted the extent to which this fate came to pass. Reviewers seemed confident that the Christmas story was astonishingly well written and that it would connect with its audience in a major way, as Dickens's work always had, and they were absolutely right. Since its release in 1843, the story of Scrooge and the three spirits has turned into more than just a popular holiday story; it has become an essential part of Christmas. For example, John Forster, Dickens's great friend and first biographer, writes about the immediate success of the book: "Never had a little book an outset so full of brilliancy of promise. Published but a few days before Christmas, it was hailed on every side with enthusiastic greeting. The first edition of six thousand copies was sold the first day" (85). This success proved to be just the beginning for *A Christmas Carol*, and the great expectations predicted by Forster would be fulfilled, and then some, and on both sides of the Atlantic.

In London, most critics found the book delightful, and praised Dickens for the charming characters he placed in the story. The novelist William M. Thackeray seemed particularly delighted by Dickens's newest work, writing, "Rush to the Strand! And purchase five thousand more copies of the Christmas Carol!" (qtd. in Dickens 232). Thackeray advised fellow critics

to keep any negative thoughts to themselves because he felt the tale would become a widespread public icon; a negative review could do nothing to hurt the success of Dickens's stories in Thackeray's mind: "No skeptic, no Fraser's Magazine,—no, not even the godlike and ancient Quarterly itself (venerable, Saturnian, big-wigged dynasty!) could review it down" (qtd. in Dickens 231). Similarly, Thomas Hood praises Dickens in the January 1844 edition of his *Hood's Magazine*: "It was a blessed inspiration that put such a book into the head of Charles Dickens; a happy inspiration of the heart that warms every page" (qtd. in Dickens 224). In the *Morning Chronicle* (19 December 1843), Charles Mackey commends Dickens's use of language and his ability to bring readers through Scrooge's transition within the story: "All this is given with Mr. Dickens's peculiar vigour of detail and colouring; until, at last, the affrighted man, upon contemplating his own dark, solitary, unwept gravestone, starts in his sleep and awakes 'a wiser and a better man.' The transition in the stave first is perfectly charming" (qtd. in Dickens 230). Overall, reviewers were pleased with the writing and the characters presented in the tale, and more important to Dickens perhaps, they encouraged their readers to buy a copy of Dickens's Christmas story, if for no other reason than for the pure delight of reading it.

But critics also felt that the story contained more than vivid language and likeable characters; the story possessed the power to change hearts. Mackey, in fact, opens his *Morning Chronicle* review with his expectations of the effect that *A Christmas Carol* might have. "Mr. Dickens has here produced a most appropriate Christmas offering, and one which, if properly made use of, may yet, we hope, lead to some more valuable result in the approaching season of merry-making than mere amusement" (qtd. in Dickens 230). Mackey goes on to discuss the importance of the message contained in Dickens's story, one centered around charity and humility: "A spirit to which selfishness in enjoyment is an inconceivable idea—a spirit that knows where happiness can exist, and ought to exist, and will not be happy itself till it has done something towards promoting its growth here" (qtd. in Dickens 230). By the end of the first paragraph, Mackey calls out his readers, asking them to practice Dickens's message in their lives, and to embrace the "Christmas Spirit."

Mackey was not alone in his opinion that *A Christmas Carol* had transcended entertainment. An anonymous reviewer in the influential *Athenaeum* echoes Mackey's thoughts, writing of the book's profound effect on its readers, and suggesting that the story will undoubtedly bring about change in reader's hearts: "[*A Christmas Carol* is] a tale to make the reader laugh and cry—open his hands, and open his heart to charity even towards the uncharitable" (qtd. in Dickens 223).

The reviewers were not the only ones to notice the effectiveness of *A Christmas Carol* as a vehicle of social conscience. John Forster writes that Dickens was bombarded with letters from happy readers daily. "Such praise expressed what men of genius felt and said; but the small volume had other tributes less usual and not less genuine. There poured upon its author daily, all through that Christmas time, letters from complete strangers to him which I remember reading with a wonder of pleasure" (89). These letters rarely if ever praised Dickens's use of language or his character development. For the general readership, the *Carol* was more than a charming book; in it Dickens had captured the essence of Christmas. Forster adds that the letters were "not literary at all, but of the simplest domestic kind; of which the general burden was to tell him, amid many confidences about their homes, how the *Carol* had come to be read aloud there, and was to be kept upon a little shelf by itself, and was to do them all no end of good" (89).

This view of *A Christmas Carol* as more than just another charming story was to last a very long time. Decades later, Forster looked back on the impact of *A Christmas Carol*, and the widespread acceptance the story received following its release: "There was indeed nobody that had not some interest in the message of the Christmas Carol. It told the selfish man to rid himself of selfishness; the just man to make himself generous; and the good-natured man to enlarge the sphere of his good nature" (89). By the early twentieth century, critics such as Adolphus William Ward were still looking back on the time, writing that Dickens had stirred up a powerful feeling of "benevolence" and that *A Christmas Carol* had "never lost its hold upon a public in whom it has called forth Christmas thoughts which do not all centre on 'holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs,

sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch” (60). Now at the beginning of the next century, it is not difficult to recognize that the longevity of this opinion of Dickens’s has attained immortal status. Christmas would not be the holiday that it is without *A Christmas Carol* and its social message of charity and good will.

Initially, however, the response to *A Christmas Carol* was not universally positive. The reviewer in the *New Monthly Magazine*, for instance, gave *A Christmas Carol* some of the highest praise it received, while at the same time pointing out a large flaw in the actual packaging of the book: “One thing only it lacks, to make its power in this respect universal. We have no objection to its gilt leaves, its gay cover, and its genteel typography but these form a chevaux-de-frise about it that keeps it from the poor” (149). Forster also writes about the expensiveness of Dickens’s Christmas stories: “Of course there was no complaint of any want of success: but the truth really was, as to all the Christmas stories issued in this form, that the price charged, while too large for the public addressed by them, was too little to remunerate their outlay” (87). The cost of the book was a substantial complaint regarding the first printing of *A Christmas Carol*, which Dickens initially had printed in a fine binding that created an expensive price tag. The contradiction between the cost and the message was obvious, especially to Dickens, who did not make as much money from it as he would have liked. Later editions of the book were constructed with the budget of modest households in mind. The resultant lower cost granted average readers access to the tale, and allowed it to reach the wide audience that would ensure its immortality.

In addition to the minor and correctable complaints about cost, not all of the contemporary reviews of *A Christmas Carol* were positive. For example, an anonymous review published in *Bell’s Weekly Messenger* (30 December 1843) claims the story is ridiculous: “Nothing can be more absurd than the fable itself and the whole of its groundwork: it is the veriest brick and mortar, puerility and absurdity, of the idlest fairy tale” (qtd. in Dickens 129). The reviewer goes on to complain that Dickens had attempted to cover up the absurdity of his story with beautiful language: “[H]is fancy no sooner comes to some perch upon some beam or rafter of this vile scaffolding, than

his imagination waves his magic wand, and all the gorgeous splendour of poetry is called up and produced before the eye of his reader” (qtd. in Dickens 129). In general, those few Scrooges who disliked *A Christmas Carol* felt that it was too jumbled and mixed together to create a solid narrative or an overall standpoint. Bah Humbug!

Although the British audience almost universally adored *A Christmas Carol*, readers in the United States were less enthused. Penne L. Ristad blames Dickens’s 1842 visit to America: “Dickens’s *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842) had wounded national pride. Americans were also smarting from his treatment of them in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which was currently being serialized” (136). But bygones will be bygones, as Ristad reports: “By the end of the Civil War, copies had circulated widely. ‘Dickens’, noted the *New York Times* in 1863, ‘brings the old Christmas into the present out of bygone centuries and remote manor houses, into the living rooms of the very poor of to-day’” (136). Ristad also points out several early American reviews that praised the book. “The *North American Review* asserted: ‘His fellow-feeling with the race is his genius.’ John Greenleaf Whittier thought it a ‘charming book . . . outwardly and inwardly!’” (136–37). Although the expectations were fulfilled at a slightly slower pace, the result was the same in both Britain and America. By the end of the century, *A Christmas Carol* was accepted as a customary tradition of Christmas.

According to George H. Ford, Dickens was keenly aware of the reception that *A Christmas Carol* was receiving. Of reviews in general, Dickens himself confessed, “When I first began to write, too, I suffered intensely, from reading reviews, and I made a solemn compact with myself, that I would only know them, for the future, from such general report as might reach my ears. For five years I have never broken this rule once, I am unquestionably the happier for it” (qtd. in Ford 50). Ford is quick to point out, however, that although Dickens may have professed to ignore the critics, he certainly never really looked down on them: “Moreover, if Dickens did try to ignore reviews it was not because he considered them to be powerless or unimportant (at least until his later years). To what extent reviewers are responsible for the success or failure of a book was to the Victorians, as to us, a lively question” (50). And it

is Forster who offers what might be the most valuable advice pertaining to criticism on *A Christmas Carol*: “Criticism here is a second-rate thing, and the reader may be spared such discoveries as it might have made in regard to the Christmas Carol” (92). The story remains a classic, and regardless of the personal avoidance Dickens may have had when it came to reviews or the occasional negative comment, from the day it was published, the majority of people exposed to *A Christmas Carol* were aware that Dickens had created a special work, one that would live on for a very long time. The great expectations of Dickens’s contemporaries soon became undeniable immortality.

Charles Dickens the Revolutionary Reader: *A Christmas Carol* on Stage

CHRIS ROLLINS

CHARLES DICKENS REVOLUTIONIZED THE CONCEPT OF public reading in nineteenth-century England. According to the reports of his contemporaries, Dickens—in his performing prime—was a sight to behold. In one report, a writer in the *Freeman's Journal* (1869) epitomizes Dickens as a public figure and a literary phenomenon: “It can honestly be said that Mr. Dickens is the greatest reader of the greatest writer of the age” (qtd. in Collins *liv*). If his writing gave him fame and riches, it was the dramatic arts that provided Dickens with an outlet for his creative spirit.

Throughout his career as a journalist and a novelist, Dickens spent a substantial amount of spare time (and money) indulging in the dramatic arts. Acting, writing for the stage, managing theatre performances, adapting his novels to plays, acting and traveling with his own amateur troupe, and performing public readings of his novels, Dickens pursued dramatic glory tirelessly—even to the detriment of his health. Yet Dickens’s career as a thespian has eluded common knowledge. His novels have stood the test of time tremendously well, and remain central cultural presences, especially in the context of his immortal *A Christmas Carol* (1843). But critics have been uninterested in Dickens’s time in the limelight, and the universal readership aware of Dickens know nothing of this essential aspect of his working life. Following the same trajectory it had found in written form, *A Christmas Carol* was Dickens’s most popular performance piece, and it serves as a window through which one can get the rare view of both Dickens the writer and Dickens the dramatist.

In short, Dickens's public readings revolutionized the literary world. When he would read, or, more accurately, perform *A Christmas Carol*, his audiences were consistently and continually astonished at how vividly Dickens embodied each of the characters—Scrooge's iconic phrase "Bah! Humbug!" came into common use at least in part because of Dickens's very own lively recitations on stage. Because of his unique mix of style and literary inspiration, audiences entered the theatre with vague expectations and left each show awestruck at his performance. John Glavin explores some of the contemporary sources of inspiration Dickens would have drawn from in developing his craft and accredits Dickens's distinctive style to "roots in Dickens's deep drive to recover the psychic and social potential latent in monopolylogue performance" (103). Monopolylogues (or one man dramatic performances featuring several characters) were not as central to Dickens's approach to reading as the definition would suggest, but the form did serve as a source of dramatic style, a style most evident in Dickens's performances of *A Christmas Carol*: his particularly crafted stage settings and lighting drew crowds out of their theatre seats and brought them into Scrooge's dimly lit bedroom on Christmas Eve.

It is surely not surprising that Dickens's first public reading was a performance of his *A Christmas Carol*, which took place on 27 December 1853. This first reading lasted over three hours; audiences had weeks before seen Dickens's amateur acting troupe perform in the same theatre, but had no idea of what to expect in a reading from him. Following the first show and its radical success, the *Carol* came to be one of his most popular readings, and underwent extensive editing and cuts over the years to accommodate the performances. In addition to completely removing certain sections of the novella, underlining important passages, and making notes for himself on stage directions and specific character traits, Dickens edited the text to adjust the style of narration. Ferguson comments on the scale of revisions Dickens implemented to his text: "[T]he narrator's part, though not entirely eliminated, was extensively cut down and depersonalized for the readings" (737). Because of the overall dramatic qualities of Dickens's performances and specifically his acting out of each character,

he minimized the role of the narrator to “distance himself from the part most readily assumed to be his—that of the authorial narrator” (738). Distancing himself from the role of the author proved successful as one of the many strategies Dickens used in generating what Fitzsimmons calls his “universal appeal.” He did everything possible to the text of *A Christmas Carol* to ensure that his first performance was a powerful, character-driven success, and continued editing it for the stage until his final days.

When he would perform on stage, Dickens held a copy of whatever text he was “reading” from; according to Ferguson, however, the general perception was that “[Dickens] could almost certainly have performed without the text open in front of him” (734). Apart from the text to read from, Dickens’s stage settings were simplistic, but achieved a precisely calculated effect. Fitzsimmons holds that the setup for Dickens to perform a reading “could not have been simpler,” with a reading desk in the center of the stage, a dark cloth behind him, and a series of bright lights all around him (36). Fitzsimmons marvels at how precisely these few settings were arranged; Dickens was so particular about the lighting during his performances that he toured with his own “gas man” to adjust the gas lighting perfectly. The reading desk was designed specifically to accommodate Dickens, and the backdrop was designed with the intention of drawing his motions and facial expressions clearly for the audience to see. After ten years of performing *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens’s stage settings had become more than dramatic tools—they had become a meaningful part of the story itself.

Towards the end of his career as a public reader, Dickens agreed to tour America once more, having been there twenty-five years earlier. Between December 1867 and April 1868 Dickens performed 75 readings in the United States. Although Dickens’s attitude towards Americans was not entirely positive given his negative portrayal in his travel book *American Notes* (1842), the result of his first trip to the United States, as Fitzsimmons notes, “his name was as well known in America as it was in Britain and he was given a tremendous reception” during this second trip to America (104). The first tickets for these final American performances went on sale Monday, 18

November 1867 (before Dickens had even arrived). The queue began to form at 7:30 pm on Sunday the 17th. At 8 am on Monday morning, the line was over half a mile long in sub-freezing temperatures; the box office opened at 9 am that day and sold tickets nonstop for 11 hours until they sold out. The first reading Dickens performed in America was to a sold out crowd of two thousand. Dickens read *A Christmas Carol* to what Fitzsimmons describes as an awestruck crowd of Bostonians who were clueless as to what to expect; he captured their full attention within seconds and maintained it for hours (104). Unlike his first visit to the United States, which had caused hurt feelings on the American side after the publication of his travelogue *American Notes* (1842), this trip was an unequivocal success.

After his performance in Boston, Fitzsimmons reports that it was for the first time in his career that Dickens remained on stage to deliver a goodbye speech, leaving the crowd to linger with his final words: “from these garish lights I vanish now for evermore, with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful, affectionate farewell” (179). This reading of his Christmas classic, sadly, was to be Dickens’s last. Two years later, Dickens’s curtain came down for good—he died at his desk while writing a new novel, but although he has stepped out of the limelight, the author’s legacy remains clearly lit in the dozens of novels he wrote throughout his life. His time-honored classic *A Christmas Carol* will continue to sing its song of compassion as long as there is Christmas, and it is important to remember that the beloved story found its most inspirational manifestation on stage while Dickens was alive—being delivered by the man himself, as he performed it.

Avarice as Corollary to Fear in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*

FRANK GAMMON

NO OTHER WRITER IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE HAS SEIZED the popular imagination and shaped the experience of the Christmas holidays as Charles Dickens. Specifically, his work *A Christmas Carol* (1843) has become so intertwined with celebrations of Christmas, that the two seem, indeed, inseparable. The immense popularity of this work is due in part to Dickens's unique command of language, a keen awareness of literary tradition, and an ear finely tuned to the tenor of his times. In effect, Dickens in *A Christmas Carol* draws on the populist message of New Testament Christianity writ small upon a single community with the aim of prescribing community-based solutions to the macroeconomic crisis of the eighteen forties. Central to this endeavor is the identification of the root cause of the conditions described as the "hungry forties." Towards this end, *A Christmas Carol* was written by Dickens to illustrate the important distinction between the symptom of avarice, the sickness of fear, and the ways in which they impact Scrooge and the world he inhabits.

According to Dickens, the social symptoms that most affected Victorian England in the 1840s were greed and its corollary, poverty. However powerful and destabilizing a force greed may have been for Dickens, he viewed it as a functionary of individual fear left un-tethered and untended. Dickens populated his novella with characters that best exemplified the damage done by the unmitigated fear of the English aristocracy. In *A Christmas Carol* Dickens characterizes fear as a human failing rather than a conscious misdeed. Dickens created the character of Ebenezer Scrooge to embody just such a human failing.

In Scrooge, Dickens creates a character not inherently evil, but one sufficiently concerned for his economic well being so that, according to Lee Erickson, he strives to maintain a condition as close to absolute liquidity as can be managed (2). These efforts derive from the possibility that he will, barring adequate restraint, accumulate debt without having the funds immediately available with which to resolve it. In Scrooge's single minded campaign against unnecessary spending he also maintains a coldness of heart and hearth. Much like Dante Alighieri's depiction of Satan in the *Inferno*, (1314) who is forever encased in ice, Scrooge is frozen first and foremost by a rejection of love. His family and fiancée have all been pushed aside in his quest for wealth. Unlike Dante's Satan, however, as Stephen Bertman has noticed, Scrooge can achieve salvation (3). But he can achieve this redemption only by conquering his fear and by reaching out to his fellow man. Scrooge's fear reflects the realities of the economic climate in which he finds himself. However, this fear also comes at a price. Allowing himself to be reduced to little more than an economic function, or as it is put by Edgar Johnson, "nothing other than a personification of economic man" (273) Scrooge, in other words, has lost his sense of humanity. Ironically, in doing so, he also quarantines himself from the only possible cure for his condition: involvement in the affairs of humanity.

The philosophies of political economy in vogue during the nineteenth-century—to which Dickens was very much opposed—exemplified and indeed codified, the symptoms of acquisition and maintenance of individual wealth that result from the disease of fear. Individuals obtain wealth through the wholesale marginalization of entire sub sets of society. According to Johnson, "The purpose of such a society is the protection of property rights. Its rules are created by those who have money and power, and are designed, to the extent that they are consistent, for the perpetuation of money and power" (272). However, these symptoms—as much as they are exhibited in a capitalist society as a whole—must ideally be addressed on an individual level. In the interest of communicating the symptoms of the disease in a manner easily understood, Dickens offers the reader Scrooge, whom Johnson calls a "curiously fragmentary picture of human nature, who

never performed any action except at the dictates of monetary gain" (273). Being perpetually disconnected from the larger human reality, Scrooge confirms his fiancée Belle's assertion that he has sacrificed human vulnerability for the seemingly unassailable position of automatic self interest. This dichotomy represents a false choice as self interest unimpeded by social concern contributes to a progressively deteriorating condition for the wealthy and the poor both individually and collectively. Scrooge mistakes the symptom of greed for the remedy of his ultimate fear, one that he shares with the rising middle class of Britain, financial failure. While his retreat from the human world corrects his immediate personal economic concerns, this retreat only serves to diminish the utility of his economic security as it effects a further fragmentation on a personal and, by figurative extension, a societal level. From this perspective Scrooge eschews family and friendship, and in the bargain, a good deal of his own identity, which results in something of a psychological and moral paralysis. As with any disease, the longer Scrooge allows the underlying disease to remain unchecked, the more listless and unresponsive he becomes.

Scrooge's moral paralysis as a representation of upper class blindness to conditions below them poses a very real danger for a nation in the grips of an economic depression such as dominated the decade of the 1840s in Britain. In the character of Scrooge, Dickens creates a composite of Victorian English businessmen and the fears that dominated their thinking in the hope that they would recognize a dilemma paradoxically far ranging in its effects and uniquely their own. Victorian businessmen—representative of all people enmeshed in the world of business—feared the specter of insolvency, which serves as a ubiquitously destabilizing force in hard times such as those of the 1840s. Surely, had Dickens lived to see the economic turmoil of the 1930s, he would have recognized the forces of fear and paranoia at work in the Depression-era culture that serves as the context for Orson Welles's radio adaptation of the *Carol*. Indeed, in broader economic terms, Erickson argues that the character of Scrooge prefigures one of the points made in John Maynard Keynes's deeply influential *General Theory of Employment Interest and Money* (1936), in which Keynes declares that "of the maxims of orthodox finance none, surely, is more

antisocial than the fetish of liquidity.” Keynes goes on to claim that this Scrooge-like refusal to spend or invest capital brings about “disastrous, cumulative, and far-reaching repercussions” (qtd. in Erickson 2). Erikson describes this behavior as hoarding, which he views at bottom as the product of fear, the specific emotional component that Dickens uses to humanize Scrooge in the hopes that wealthy English businessmen would be more likely to empathize with his story and emulate the redemptive renunciation of fear and greed.

Although Scrooge fears financial instability, he also fears quantifying his losses in human terms. He fears that any empathy with or pity for the less fortunate, may result in a distaste for exploitation followed by a hunger for companionship and brotherhood. Empathy and camaraderie are antithetical to individual profit. Consequentially, any response to poverty, for the Scrooges of the world, must by necessity involve divestment of the human dimension. Scrooge solves the ills of poverty by condemning the poor to the work houses, to the tread mills, and finally, to the prisons. In doing so, he turns a blind eye towards the role that the wealthy play in shaping the lives of the poor, as well as the destiny they both share. However, Scrooges failure to connect poverty to the disintegration of society, according to Johnson, amounts to “the most disastrous shortsightedness” (272). Johnson contextualizes this notion with a passage from *A Christmas Carol*, in which the Ghost of Christmas Present reveals the phantom children Ignorance and Want: “They are Man’s and they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased.” And when Scrooge asks if they have no refuge, the spirit ironically echoes his own words: “Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?” (274). Scrooge has once again failed to see that the fate of the poor and his own are intertwined. In robbing the poor of their essential humanity, he condemns himself along with them to a life hardly worth living.

As go the people, so goes the nation. This double-bind poses a question central to *A Christmas Carol*. Can any good whatsoever, possibly come from man’s inhumanity to man? Dickens answers a resounding no. Inhumanity to man simply

breeds more of the same. In grappling with this larger problem or cause, Dickens addresses the symptoms of the disease. As Dickens demonstrates in Scrooge's retreat from humanity, to treat a disease without any consideration for the contributing factors merely maintains a condition of infirmity. But Dickens also sees hope. In Scrooge's redemption, Dickens shows the way to escape the vicious cycle of fear and greed, one that requires uprooting the fear that makes greed and poverty possible. Dickens insists that to accomplish this objective, society would have to undergo a fundamental transformation. To cure the myopia of the wealthy in their acquisition of wealth, Dickens offers Scrooge, whose visitation by the past, the present, and the future of human conditions serves as a call to vision, one that would cure both symptom and disease.

They Were the Worst of Times:
The Hungry Forties, the Great Depression, and
Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*

ANDY WILLHIDE

CHARLES DICKENS PUBLISHED *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* (1843) IN a decade commonly known as the “Hungry Forties.” During this time, many poor families were forced to move into cramped urban neighborhoods and to hold low-paying factory jobs. The social conditions in Britain created a sharp division between the lower and the upper classes. Spurned by his humble upbringing and a worsening situation provoked by government-mandated reform, Dickens, from the beginning of his career, used his influence to raise awareness of the problems that threatened the social fabric of Britain. The scathing commentary that serves as the thematic core of *A Christmas Carol* remains (with a similarly devastating backdrop) a real presence in Orson Welles’s 1938 radio broadcast of Dickens’s tale. Many of Dickens’s sentiments about inequality and charity strike the same chords with the audience, but Welles’s chronological disconnect from Dickens’s commentary allows him to concentrate on the joyful modern identity of Christmas and to inject more religious overtones in order to connect with a different type of audience.

During the 1840s, the structure of British society changed dramatically. In 1839, a slump in trade and the first of several consecutive bad harvests prompted widespread unemployment and the transformation of rural villages into suburban neighborhoods. As urban population rapidly increased, the British government’s Corn Laws unfairly controlled the price and distribution of grain, exacerbating the problems of lower

class working families. The revolutionary temperature raised by the condition of the working poor was quickly approaching dangerous levels. For the struggling majority, basic everyday needs were prized luxuries and disease and pollution threatened in every flooded and waste-ridden street.

Several years before *A Christmas Carol* was published, the British government passed the New Poor Law Amendment Act (1834). While the Act was designed to provide more government-funded accommodation to the masses of poor people now inhabiting the cities of Britain (particularly London), the laws only served to further divide the upper and the lower classes, and to separate the “deserving” from the “undeserving” poor by changing their limitations on those who were eligible for governmental assistance. Moreover, the poor who were deemed deserving of government care were placed in conditions which were, remarkably, lower than the typically attainable standard of living for the lower class.

As a result of these insufferable conditions, government programs acquired a shameful reputation for what they were doing to London’s lower classes. For Michael Grogan, the character of Scrooge represents the “inevitable legacy of state-sponsored abuse: the freedom to be wholly self-interested, the ‘wish to be left alone’, and the need for individual reform” (155). The government’s “solution” to poverty highlighted a troubling personality among London’s upper-class lawmakers. The aristocracy typically did not reside in London during the putrid summer months (Toland 45). The streets were rampant with waste and with rats, and since coal was the primary energy resource, it was one of the most polluted cities in the world. The poor were ill-equipped to contend with harsh year-round conditions, while the aristocracy avoided the view of the poor and the conditions surrounding their plight altogether.

Dickens shows this sentiment in Scrooge’s conversation with the charity spokesmen near the beginning of *A Christmas Carol*: “I wish to be left alone . . . I don’t make merry myself at Christmas and I can’t afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there” (Dickens 12). One spokesman responds with the grim truth, that “Many can’t go there; and many would rather die” (12). While Scrooge

claims to support the government's programs for the poor, his position as a wealthy businessman reflects on the greater aristocracy, whose limits in perspective on the suffering in London prompted a haphazard excuse for a remedy to poverty.

Dickens further explores this limited perspective with perhaps his most profound social commentary: the appearance of the Ghost of Christmas Present, when Scrooge sees Man's two children, Ignorance and Want. They hide beneath the robes of the ghost, who appears tall and lanky, with graying hair but smooth skin, while the children appear "[y]ellow, meager, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility" (103). While the Ghost himself has graying hair but appears young (as the holiday itself is old, but its spirit is relatively new), the two children are a gruesome image of London poverty, a physical representation of mankind's inadequate relationship with the world. The Ghost makes special mention of the boy, Ignorance, "for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased" (103–04). The Ghost foretells a grim future unless mankind's Ignorance (for Dickens, the aristocracy's attitude toward the poor) is remedied.

These two figures highlight the problems in London's commodity culture of the Hungry Forties, divided into the Haves and Have-nots, and filled with a disconcerting lack of empathy for the less fortunate. In addition, they help convey a primary dichotomy of *A Christmas Carol*, the distinction between fact and wonder, or as Audrey Jaffe refers to it, "sympathy and business" (255). The attitudes of Ignorance and Want portend a grim future and distort the image of wonder or sympathy (exemplified in their appearance as children). Illustrated in the character of Scrooge, Dickens sees the world as increasingly immersed in the ideology of heartless aristocratic business, where people are merely objects or tools and the desire for material wealth has exceeded the demand for individual empathy.

By 1938, *A Christmas Carol* had become a treasured cultural artifact that represented the most revered foundations of the modern Christmas. Amid the trauma of the Great Depression, producer Orson Welles and author Howard Koch applied Dickens's social commentary to a new era, adapting a version of *A Christmas Carol* for radio broadcast. Apart from the obvious

edits for time purposes, Welles's production displays vastly stronger religious overtones, with an introduction that outlines the entire story of the birth of Jesus narrated by Welles to "affirm the glory of our God by the laughter of our children" (4). This abject religiosity reflects the audience that Welles was trying to reach just as it highlights the intentions of the corporate sponsors (NBC and Campbell's Soup), who were surely happy for Welles and Koch to morph Dickens's tale into a less secular and a more 1930s America-friendly story, one that featured a celebratory preface to lighten the mood and to concentrate on the unshakable values of a strongly Christian beleaguered audience in desperate need of a respite from their personal travails. Koch and Welles refer to Christmas as a holiday with storytelling traditions, in which Dickens fits right alongside the story of the birth of Jesus. In the introduction, Welles speaks through Dickens as narrator, quoting the angel of the Lord: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (3). Such a direct reference to Christian doctrine is largely absent in Dickens's version of the tale.

Though Dickens does not completely avoid religious allegory in *A Christmas Carol*, his methods are much more covert and secular than those displayed in the radio broadcast. Critics such as Jane Vogel denote the character of Tiny Tim as a Christ-like figure, whose namesake Timothy, a youthful disciple of St. Paul, was likewise physically unwell and compared to a child of Christ (70). While Dickens uses Tiny Tim's symbolism to connect religious values to his real social issues, Welles uses religion to elaborate on more hopeful, comforting sentiments, as well as on the traditions of modern Christmas.

In order to craft *A Christmas Carol* to fit these more orthodox themes, Koch softens Dickens's social critique by leaving out the Ghost of Christmas Present's Ignorance and Want, and he omits several details relating to the value of material possessions. For example, in Welles's version, Scrooge does not buy a turkey for the Cratchits at the end of the story, and there is no mention of his nephew's party during his visit with the Ghost of Christmas Past. While the bird serves as a symbol of Scrooge's completed transformation, in the absence of Dickens's wealthy aristocratic audience, such an outright connection between materialism and the holiday spirit would only serve to dampen the joyful

feeling of Welles's interpretation, whose audience was mostly deprived of the means to purchase a fine Christmas dinner for their families, much less gifts for family and friends.

Embedded in these materialistic and religious differences, the tone reflects the intended reception of their respective audiences. While Dickens wished to raise aristocratic awareness about a critical poverty crisis in the streets of London, The Campbell Playhouse-sponsored re-interpretation had about a hundred years of hindsight to reflect on the identity of Christmas and on the connotations of this "holiday spirit." By de-emphasizing Dickens's social commentary, Koch was free to highlight the joys of Christmastime in the context of Christian values in order to raise spirits in a difficult era. With this enhanced religiosity, Koch was able to smooth the edges of Dickens's harsh criticisms in *A Christmas Carol* while maintaining its major theme, the need for individual empathy as the defining ingredient of Christmas.

Charles Dickens's Victorian *Christmas Carol*

WHITNEY FISHER

AFTER THE 1843 PUBLICATION OF CHARLES DICKENS'S *A Christmas Carol*, Christmas as the Victorians knew it changed drastically. For children, parents, adults, and especially persons of business Christmas had begun to change into something other than simply a celebration of Jesus's birthday. Also increasingly, the holiday featured a celebration of pagan traditions, and some of those traditions still exist today. The ways that Dickens incorporates the customs, the décor, and the cuisine that Victorians adopted to celebrate Christmas reflects the changing identity of the holiday as a time of good cheer and compassion and not simply as a day of religious observance.

Victorian homes were often decorated with “magical” plants and a Christmas tree. Michelle Hoppe relates that mistletoe, holly, and ivy were thought to be magical plants, with the holly a protector against witchcraft, ivy a symbol of immortality, and mistletoe a pagan talisman that was not allowed in church (par. 4). In *A Christmas Carol*, the Ghost of Christmas Present transforms Scrooge's room to contain “crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy” (47), and the shops were decorated with “holly sprigs and berries” (10). England was the first country to use mistletoe, and according to Hoppe, the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe is a “purely English custom” (par. 4) and for each berry on the plant, a kiss was given or received. If the plant had four berries, only four kisses could be traded and no more (par. 4).

A Christmas Carol has many instances of caroling, something very popular during the Victorian era. Dickens refers to a caroler with a “scant young nose” singing “*God bless you merry*

gentleman! / *May nothing you dismay,*” but Scrooge “seized the ruler with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror” (10). Many of the Christmas carols sung today are indeed a product of the nineteenth century. On Christmas Day, families attended mass, worshipping by reading scripture and by carol singing. Bob and Tiny Tim spend Christmas Day at church, their presence at which Tiny Tim hopes will remind parishioners of the time when “lame beggars walk and blind men see” (55).

A tradition that came into being during the Victorian era that would be very familiar now is the tradition of Christmas trees. There is no mention of Christmas trees in *A Christmas Carol*, and perhaps this absence results from the fact that Christmas trees had only been introduced two years prior to the publication of the novella. Prince Albert, Queen Victoria’s German husband, introduced the Christmas tree to Britain in 1841. Other citizens followed suit of the royal family and started decorating their own trees to display in their homes. Trees like the ones found in homes of today first appeared in sixteenth-century Germany, but the trees were not decorated. Adding decorations to the Christmas tree began in the 1600s, still in Germany. The tradition reached the Americas along with German immigrant in the 1700s. After the death of Queen, Victoria, the Christmas tree became less popular in Britain, but after a revival of “Dickensian nostalgia” (*Christmas Traditions*) in Britain during the 1930s the tradition was revived and continues.

As for Christmas dinner in Victorian times, most people in northern England ate roast beef, whereas people in the south mainly ate goose. Dickens incorporates all of the conventional Christmas fare of his day with the arrival of the Ghost of Christmas Present. The room is filled with “turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat . . . plum-puddings . . . immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch” (47). The poor usually celebrated Christmas with a dinner of rabbit, yet the Cratchits dine on goose. As for the Queen, her Christmas dinner consisted of both beef and swan. Only at the end of the nineteenth century could families afford to have turkey (*Historic UK*) but Ebenezer Scrooge has the means to purchase a “prize turkey” (94) for the Cratchits. The Christmas pudding is another very special tradition for British families.

Donald Bell's explains the methodology behind the making of a Christmas pudding in *Homemade Dessert Recipes*. The recipe of a true Christmas pudding traditionally has thirteen ingredients, representing Jesus and the twelve apostles. Each family member would take a turn stirring the pudding from east to west on "Stir-Up Sunday," the Sunday before Advent (five Sundays before Christmas), to symbolize the journey of the Magi as they followed the star of Bethlehem. They always used a wooden spoon to symbolize the wooden manger of Jesus, and the flaming brandy was used to represent Christ's passion (par. 2).

In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens describes the pudding Mrs. Cratchit has made with great care, and with great anxiety:

Too nervous to bear witnesses—to take the pudding up, bring it in. Suppose it should not be done enough! Suppose it should break in turning out! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back-yard, and stolen it. . . . [A]ll sorts of horrors were supposed. . . . In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered: flushed, but smiling proudly: with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top. Oh, what a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said. . . . [E]verybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family (57).

The elaborate description of the amount of brandy (a quartern is a quarter of a pint) shows just how poor the Cratchits are, since they could only afford so small amount of brandy (one ounce).

Another important tradition of Christmas that was established during the Victorian era was that it was to be a worker's holiday. Laborers were allotted two days off: Christmas day, December 25, and Boxing Day, December 26. Boxing Day was the day when church poor boxes were opened and the gifts inside were distributed to the poor. The tradition is still celebrated, but now, according to Vicky Stayton, gifts are given to tradesmen as thanks for their yearly services (par. 4). In *A Christmas Carol*, Bob Cratchit receives only Christmas Day off. He does not receive Boxing Day, and indeed Scrooge is unhappy with giving him Christmas off. It was not until 1871

that Christmas was widely recognized as a labor holiday, and even then it was not required that workers be given a day off to celebrate (Barrow).

It is a well known fact that Santa Claus, or Father Christmas as the British know him, is based upon a real person, Saint Nicholas, a bishop who, according to the St. Nicholas Center, took literally the words of Jesus, to “sell what you own and give the money to the poor” (par.1). The notion of Santa Claus evolved from St. Nicholas, who also leaves gifts for everyone at Christmas time. In *A Christmas Carol*, there is no mention of Santa Claus, yet the Ghost of Christmas Present may be a symbol for Santa Claus. Barrow contends that before 1880, Father Christmas or Santa Claus was shown in a green coat (par. 1), and Dickens describes his Ghost to be “clothed in one simple deep green robe” (47). This similarity may or may not be a coincidence.

In the age of Victoria, Christmas was mostly celebrated on Christmas Eve. In the twenty-first century, due to large families or families who live far away, Christmas may be celebrated on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, or in the days before or after Christmas. Victorians would drink mulled ale or elderberry wine and eat yule cake and a “dice of cheese marked with the sign of the Cross” (Pimlott 135). As for Christmas Eve festivities, the Yule log would be set on fire, and there would be sword dancing or perhaps “ceremonial hunting of wrens” (Pimlott 135). The holidays including Christmas up until Twelfth Night were a time for adults to relax and to regain their childhood spirit and innocence by having fun. In *A Christmas Carol*, the adults at Fred’s party poke fun at Scrooge, saying they “have no patience with him” (65). They danced and enjoyed some music, but “they didn’t devote the whole evening to music” (67). They played blind-man’s bluff and a game called forfeits, in which guests would have to perform playful tasks such as skipping about the room in order to have personal items returned to them that they had forfeited, “for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas” (67).

Christmas has evolved into a moveable holiday, with families traveling to the other side of the state or country even, to visit family members they may see only once or twice a year. Christmas has changed in other ways. Workers expect time off,

mulled wine has been replaced with other forms of Christmas cheer, and the foods have taken on a different set of flavors. But some things have not changed since the Victorian era, one of them being our annual visitation by the ultimate Ghost of Christmas Past, *A Christmas Carol* itself. Christmas would simply not be Christmas as we know it without it.

Charles Dickens, Frank Capra, and
A Christmas Carol:
The Everlasting Power of Influence.

MAX KATH

THE RIPPLE EFFECT THAT CHARLES DICKENS'S CLASSIC *A Christmas Carol* (1843) has had on popular culture staggers the mind when one considers the variables that should work against it. Most works of literature that become canonized are not guaranteed to remain classics, and chances are that they will not last past their initial canonization. We live in a modern culture whose attention span has been so severely lowered it is a wonder that the written word still lives on to this day, but it does. This literary longevity is due, in no small part, to the rise of the motion picture, and, specifically, to the adaptation of the written word to the silver screen. The ability to morph across media technologies at least helps to explain why a classic like *A Christmas Carol* has thrived since its initial publication, as Paul Davis suggests:

For although the *Carol* began as a written text, it has been passed down orally from one generation to the next, in the thirties and forties, we knew the story through Barrymore, Ronald Colman, and the Roosevelts. Children today see animated television versions or encounter Scrooge McDuck before they learn to read. The *Carol* has inverted the usual folk process. Rather than beginning as an oral story that was later written down, the *Carol* was written to be retold. Dickens was its creator, but it is also the product of its re-creators who have retold, adapted, and revised it over the years. (3)

By subverting the written tradition of the *Carol*, the motion picture (both film and television) has kept the collective conscious of the *Carol* alive in the minds of millions of people. Unfortunately, these millions may never read *A Christmas Carol*; however, the story inescapably becomes part of their lives simply because of its influence on directors adapting well known stories and the themes they contain into a form intended for the mass, modern audience. The fact that *A Christmas Carol* has become such large part of Christmas tradition shows the power that an individual work can have on not just popular culture, but on American culture in all of its manifestations.

Because the *Carol* has been adapted so many times by numerous filmmakers often a good amount of overlap occurs when it comes to telling the story. The inevitability of this overlap aside, it does limit the ability to get a fresh perspective from the work. Audiences can easily grow tired of the same story being told over and over again, so filmmakers create movies that will be simultaneously recognizable as well as fresh and intellectually stimulating. One of the more popular adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*, the 1951 version directed by Brian Desmond Hurst and starring Alistair Sim, exudes more darkness than some of its predecessors. According to A. L. Zambrano, Scrooge as a character personifies darkness, whose “meanness is manifested in his every breath,” and “everywhere there are reminders of human misery—the beggar pleading for money, the ragged tubercular children coughing in the background as the undertaker, laundress, and charlady meet to divide Scrooge’s meagre possessions” (317). By making these rather bleak “changes” to the story the filmmakers create a recognizable world for the viewer without betraying the wonderment of the original story. Although many critics consider this version a definitive adaptation of the original, artistic license has been used by other filmmakers to tell completely different stories while relying on the archetypal characters and themes of *A Christmas Carol* without sacrificing any of the cherished moments expected by the audience.

The archetypes from *A Christmas Carol* have become so well known that many people are unable to not think about them when viewing movies where the characters embody them so well. Frank Capra’s 1947 film *It’s a Wonderful Life* stands

as a perfect example of this kind of embodiment. Capra's classic film features one of James Stewart's most memorable performances, a timeless lesson about mortality, and the effect that one person can have on the lives of others. The film is based on the 1943 short story "The Greatest Gift" by Phillip Van Doren Stern, which, according to Davis, has "few resemblances to the *Carol*" even though the film does feature a great deal of similarity to the themes and concepts from Dickens's text: the appearance of spirits to guide the main character, the same character being able to witness the impact his life has on those who surround him, and, ultimately, the main character afforded the opportunity to come to the realization that there is an importance to the traditions that surround the holiday and his own life (164). According to Davis, "More than any other director of the period, Capra helped American audiences laugh away the Depression by articulating an American mythology. His films became the visual textbook for a nation understanding itself" (164). Capra's interest in remediating the nation's woes continued after World War II helped to end the Depression. *It's a Wonderful Life* premiered a year after the end of the war, making it a vital work in the rebuilding of the post-war American identity, so it makes perfect sense that Capra would channel Dickens's story for his own purposes.

For one thing, Capra's world was similar to that of Dickens's: both saw great poverty in their country for extended periods of time, both felt the need to create something substantial in order to express their frustrations, and they both saw the value of humor to help ease the pain of living in these times. As Russell Baker contends "movies probably can never be more than entertainments for the child imprisoned in the oldest of us" (qtd. in Paroissien 70). Baker in this passage does not necessarily offer a solely negative reading of *A Christmas Carol*. Instead he focuses attention on the individual self-concern imbedded in both film and story. The elements of satire and social commentary work to the advantage of both works, but if the piece put the audience's minds at ease for a few hours then it has done its job. Audiences may not like Scrooge, and they may disagree with Bailey's decision to kill himself, but they know that these two men have come to represent a certain aspect of themselves that normally would not be brought out cathartically in less influential texts.

The argument can also be made that *It's a Wonderful Life* portrays a darker theme than *A Christmas Carol* because the main character seems to be so much more afflicted than Scrooge. George Bailey has hopes and dreams, but sees them crushed at every turn, thus making him both depressed and bitter. However, the greatest difference, according to Davis, between Scrooge and Bailey lies in that Scrooge has a tendency to be an outsider, whereas Bailey comes off as "one of the people" (167). This difference creates an interesting point of view for the audience; instead of being given a character that is despicable and cold hearted they are given someone just like them, an everyman who has just as many problems as they do. So when the audience sees Bailey's human shortcomings, they immediately identify with the character and his plight, which is not to say that Capra neglected to provide his audience with the evil foil. In this role, Mr. Potter serves as the manifestation of greed that marks the pre-redeemed Scrooge. Further, the role of Potter was played by Lionel Barrymore, an actor who Capra's audience knew as the voice of Scrooge, since he routinely played the part in radio adaptations of the work (and was in fact originally scheduled to play Scrooge in Welles's production of the *Carol*). By having Bailey become lost inside his own bitter depression Capra created a character that could give the audience an instantly recognizable and relatable human point of reference, one that, of course, made James Stewart the perfect selection for the role. Like Scrooge, Bailey is saved, but unlike Scrooge he is saved not from greed but from the circumstances of his life. When he returns to his home at the end of the film holding onto a copy of *Tom Sawyer*, his innocence has been restored, having realized that suicide will only cause more harm to those he loves. Like Scrooge, his place in the world of human connection is fully restored.

To say that Capra was a patriotic man would be an understatement; in fact many critics and historians believe him to be the most patriotic director of the golden era filmmakers. Davis observes that "[*It's a Wonderful Life*] revived the residual image of America as an international child outside the corrupt quarrels of the adult nations of the Old World" (168), which strengthens the idea that, while the story of *A Christmas Carol* may not be the main focus of Capra's vision, its themes are.

Dickens was very unhappy with the state of British society when he wrote *A Christmas Carol* and took it upon himself to create a tale that could simultaneously satirize the world as he saw it and give those who read the story a sense of hope. Capra embraced this idea when making *It's a Wonderful Life*. He loved the country so much that he took it upon himself to try and ease its woes by creating a work of art that would help them forget about their troubles, however briefly. Capra's "adaptation" of *A Christmas Carol*, like Koch and Welles's earlier radio adaptation of it in 1938, relies upon the way that *A Christmas Carol* had become a universal presence in the cultural consciousness. Indeed, the traditions of Christmas would be greatly different if *A Christmas Carol* had not existed, George Bailey tells us that much, every Christmas.