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Temporality in Early Nineteenth-Century Christmas Writing

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2014

Thesis submitted to Trinity College Dublin for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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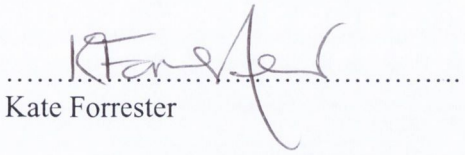

Kate Forrester

Summary

This thesis analyses the representation of time in Christmas writing published during the first half of the nineteenth century. At a time when the experience of temporality began to shift dramatically due to the innovations of the industrial revolution, Christmas was also becoming a cherished annual moment for the British public. This thesis argues that the festive literature which appeared between 1819-1857 uses Christmas as a temporal milestone; a vantage point from where the reader is encouraged to survey and contemplate time past, present and yet to come. Beginning by establishing the centrality of Christmas as a national reading event, each subsequent chapter examines a different Christmas text, or group of Christmas texts, in order to highlight precisely how the perplexing issue of temporality was being articulated in print each December.

The following study draws together a broad range of both well known and less-familiar Christmas texts, in addition to a number of cultural and historical sources from the nineteenth-century periodical press. Simultaneously, it sheds light on the numerous sub-genres of Christmas print, such as historical writing on Christmas, Christmas fairy tales and festive fireside literature; material that has received very little critical attention to date. A study of temporality in Christmas literature would not be complete without an analysis of Charles Dickens's enduring Christmas book, *A Christmas Carol* (1843). The second chapter is devoted to an exploration of temporality in the *Carol*, but the momentous influence of Dickens's best-loved Christmas work can be seen throughout the project. Taking into account the sparse amount of scholarship in the field of Christmas literature, the thesis concludes by gesturing towards further research that would prove valuable in shedding more light on this highly significant and influential area of nineteenth-century print.

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Revisiting the Nineteenth-Century Christmas: A National Reading Event

In December 2012, an article entitled 'Holiday Nostalgia, Served Warm' in the *New York Times* referred to the nostalgic pull of Christmas time, and its long-lasting association with nineteenth-century Britain. The writer, Rosie Schapp, begins by admitting, 'I am a Dutch-German-Hungarian-Polish-Russian-Jewish-American woman. Yet every December, I turn into a 19th-century British gentleman'.[1] Confirming that the nineteenth-century British Christmas is a continued source of fascination and entertainment for modern celebrants, Schapp's article suggests that many cosmopolitan New Yorkers indulge their nostalgic and Anglophilic tendencies at Christmas time, enjoying a 'faux-English Christmas repast' by drinking wassail and re-enacting a Dickens-style celebration.[2] The association of Christmas with nineteenth-century England has become something of a cliché in modern times, with organizations commercializing its nostalgic appeal. The city of Portsmouth, Charles Dickens's birthplace, holds a ticketed 'Victorian Festival of Christmas' each year, and similar re-enactments of old-fashioned festivities can be found at Muncaster Castle in Cumbria and Gawthorpe Hall in Lancashire. Even in North America, traditional Victorian-style celebrations take place each December in the picturesque Canadian village of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and in Washington State a hugely popular 'Victorian Country Christmas Festival' is annually hosted. While festive forms of entertainment have evolved over the past two centuries it is clear that modern audiences are still enthralled by Christmas past, specifically the Christmas of the 1800s. As December approaches each year, British families continue to decorate their homes with fir trees, hang wreaths of holly, sing Christmas carols and send festive greeting cards; a series of well-loved pastimes through which we knowingly follow in the footsteps of our nineteenth-century ancestors.

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[1] Schapp, Rosie, "Holiday Nostalgia, Served Warm," *New York Times*, December 11, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/12/dining/wassail-delivers-british-nostalgia-in-a-warm-punch.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

[2] Ibid.

Such customs, while evocative of the nineteenth-century Christmas, often neglect to incorporate the once cherished ritual of festive reading. The ritual of reading at Christmas time might have dwindled since the 1800s, but in December 2006 Neal Hoskins suggested, in an article for *The Guardian*, that the bookshop remains an important place at Christmas: 'with bright light burning on these short last days of the year, bookshops are piled high with choices, while publishers dream of overnight hits and rejoice (or despair) at the table'.[3] The convention of publishing material for the seasonal book-buying market was a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Television specials and film screenings might have now overshadowed the once popular custom of gathering together to read at Christmas, but this article insinuates that seasonal literature is still a cherished part of the modern festival. As Hoskins details his own winter wanderings around Foyles bookstore, he faces a perplexing question: 'as a result of all this, a thought struck me. What do we actually read at Christmas time these days?' The first answer he offers to this question is telling, reminding the reader of the enduring legacy of the nineteenth-century Christmas book trade. According to Hoskins, these days the first item on our Christmas reading list is still 'anything by Dickens'.[4]

Dickens may be the best-known Christmas writer from this period, but evidence of a wider trend of festive reading can be found in a copious number of nineteenth-century newspaper and journal articles. Countless books suitable for the festive season were reviewed and advertised as publishers seized upon the reading habits of the public to establish Christmas as a national reading event. In December 1847, a writer for *The Critic* considered the implications of the bourgeoning Christmas book market, when 'Christmas books crowd thickly around us' and 'authors have obtained a strange knack of writing purposely for a festive season'.[5] Contemporary commentators realised that the nineteenth-

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[3] Neal Hoskins, "Reading round the Christmas tree," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2006, http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2006/dec/07/readingroundthechristmastr.
[4] Ibid.
[5] "Gossip of the Literary World," *The Critic* 6, no. 154 (December 11, 1847): 382.

century surge in Christmas print was a phenomenon that had irrevocably transformed the British book market, and were also aware that astute writers were adding momentum to seasonal book buying by writing Christmas-specific content. As the abundance of festive print from this period reveals, Christmas provided booksellers with a unique commercial opportunity, while simultaneously prompting potential customers to use the Christmas moment as a time for reading and reflection.

Readers were inspired to contemplate a wide range of issues through the books, articles, poems and stories they read at Christmas. Many writers used the festive period to highlight the social and moral duties of their reader. By drawing attention to complex matters of poverty, charity, domesticity, hospitality, spirituality and Christian teaching, Christmas print consistently engaged with the issues that were shaping contemporary public debate. Alongside these social and moral concerns, the annual holiday also prompted writers to consider other, more abstract and metaphysical subjects, such as the deep complexities of temporality. A significant amount of popular Christmas reading material published during the first half of the century expresses a keen interest in temporality, and an intense self-consciousness of humanity's place in time. Indeed, the nineteenth century was a period preoccupied by the enigmatic workings of time and often, amid the Christmas celebrations, we are invited to take a moment to reflect upon Christmas as a temporal landmark. In 1843 for instance, the *Illustrated London News* impressed readers with a duty to be mindful of time at Christmas, 'as the world with sure progress, thus wends its way towards eternity, its living crowds can neither afford to neglect the future nor to forget the past; and nations – like the heathen Janus – must have two faces – looking back upon what is buried – forward upon what is to spring forth'.[6] During the first half of the nineteenth century, Christmas was being recognised as an annual moment when

[6] "The Old Year and the New," *Illustrated London News* 3, no. 86 (December 30, 1843): 417.

the nation took a collective pause to gather together, celebrate and reflect on the passage of time.

In this dissertation, I intend to open a dialogue centred on the representations of time in the Christmas writing published between 1819-1857. My interest lies in uncovering how Christmas print from the first half of the century uses temporality as a means of responding to, and interacting with, the growing anxieties of an industrial age of progress, change, and a widespread sense of social dislocation. It becomes clear that Christmas print did not only contribute to the celebration of the British festival, it also addressed questions of cultural identity. For a generation in the midst of transition, the annual return of Christmas made writers and readers more inclined to dwell on the deep ontological implications associated with the passage of time. In 1842, the *Illustrated London News* thoughtfully noted that during the festive season one is inclined to 'retro-glance [...] upon the time that has slipped from under our feet' as 'the departure of years, like that of old friends, brings with it a train of reflection, wholesome in its nature and humanizing in its influence upon the heart'.[7] As we will see, Christmas texts often invite individuals to reflect upon previous Christmases, or comment on the experience of festive time as time set apart from the monotony of daily life, when ordinary order is temporarily suspended and we are inescapably caught in the liminal moment of passing from one year to the next.

By the early nineteenth century, Christmas already had a fragmented history. Its celebration and social purpose in England had endured a series of alterations, punctuated by changing attitudes towards the festival's significance. An underlying reason for Christmas's unstable position in English history was its ancient association with paganism, and its roots in Winter Solstice celebrations. Looking back to the Roman Empire, historians have noted that numerous aspects of the Saturnalia, a festival that took place each year in December, are connected to the modern Christmas. In southern Europe, the

[7] "The Close of the Year," *Illustrated London News*, no. 34 (December 31, 1842): 529.

Saturnalia marked the passing of the old year and the arrival of the new. It was a time for feasting, drinking and the exchange of gifts, when ritual fires were lit and evergreens hung to mark the return of the sun and gratify the gods.[8] According to historian John Golby, Saturnalia festivities were also 'a reversal of everyday life so that men would dress as women, women as men and the rich men would acts as servants',[9] generating a sense of temporary, festive release from the ordinary order of life. Meanwhile in northern Europe, the Scandinavian Yule Festival was also a lively commemoration of the Winter Solstice. Yule fires blazed to remedy the winter darkness of the sunless northern skies, and participants celebrated the promise of the sun's return with much feasting, dancing and drinking. With the advent of Christianity however, the early church faced the problem of trying to reconcile the Christian faith with these popular pagan celebrations.

Around the fourth century AD, Christians decided to commemorate the Nativity despite the relative lack of evidence that Christ was born in December. The church's move was a strategic way to respond to Winter Solstice festivals by investing them with new Christian meaning, rather than simply prohibiting festivities to which many people had become fondly attached. As Golby notes, 'when faced with pagan or other religious activities,' the policy of the early Christian church was 'the politically astute one of attempting to transform these activities and give them Christian significance rather than abolishing them and perhaps causing disorder'.[10] Thus, long before the dawn of the nineteenth century, Christmas's identity was already being re-formed by the church's adaptation of earlier winter rituals predating the birth of Christ. Throughout the nineteenth century however, there remained great interest in the pagan history of Christmas celebrations, and writers frequently referred to the Saturnalia in order to highlight the far more refined sensibilities of their own age. For instance, in 1843 the *Illustrated London News* characterised Christmas as the time 'when Christianity exults in its Saturnalia, not

[8] John Golby, "A History of Christmas," *Popular Culture* 1, no.1 (1981): 13.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 14.

like the Saturnalia of the ancients, profaned by vice and sullied by sensuality, but a Saturnalia characteristic and typical of the purity of Christianity itself'.[11] And as we will see, many of the rowdy ancient festivities were tamed and sanitised when they were incorporated into the Victorian celebration of Christmas.

The transformation of Christmas's identity and the evolution in how it was observed continued for centuries. After the Norman Conquest, throughout the Middle Ages and up until the seventeenth century, the 'Twelve Days of Christmas' gradually became 'established as the major annual holiday of the year'.[12] In rural England Christmas marked a break from the everyday, as it fell at a time when work naturally came to a halt in the harsh winter weather. Festive games of skittles or cards were played, and there were visits from bands of travelling actors known as 'mummers' who appeared in costume and staged plays that usually involved 'a dramatic presentation of death and resurrection'.[13] Christmas boxes and New Year's gifts were exchanged, and lavish feasts were hosted by landowners or those with large households.[14] The ancient roots of the festival remained highly visible. As in the Saturnalia, evergreens were still used to decorate homes and, similarly, the yule log tradition of the Scandinavian festival was dragged into the hearths of England on Christmas Eve. According to this custom, the log would be lit using the brand from the previous year and was intended to burn for the whole twelve days of Christmas to prevent bad tidings for the coming year.[15] With the seventeenth-century Reformation and increase in Puritanism, Christmas celebrations came under close scrutiny. Christmas's lingering associations with paganism were not its only offence according to many Puritan reformers, who also believed that Christmas was too closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church. The reformers claimed that Christmas had become far too boisterous in encouraging and embracing uncouth secular behaviour such as drunkenness, dancing,

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[11] "London, Saturday December 16 1843," *Illustrated London News* 3, no. 84 (December 16, 1843): 391.
[12] Golby, "A History of Christmas," 14.
[13] J.M. Golby and A.W. Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2000), 24.
[14] Golby, "A History of Christmas," 14.
[15] Simon Carter, *Christmas Past, Christmas Present* (London: Geffrye Museum Trust, 1997), 7.

gambling and feasting. The Puritans' literalist approach to the Bible provided no justification that Christmas should be celebrated and no proof that the date of Christ's birth was 25 December. As a result, 'not only did they refuse to recognize Christmas, but they made strenuous efforts to ban the festival'.[16] In 1647, the Puritan dominated Parliament of England passed legislation that prohibited the celebration of Christmas, and in later years further laws were introduced to forbid church services on Christmas Day, ban the hanging of evergreens and the eating of plum pottage, and require shops and businesses to remain open.[17] The prohibition of Christmas festivities resulted in revolt, and disturbances occurred when those flouting the ban faced the Puritan enforcers. In 1657, for example, the chapel of Exeter House in the Strand was surrounded by soldiers and the congregation arrested for taking communion on December 25.[18]

With the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Christmas was also restored; however, it had waned in popularity during its exile and was not the same lively festival it once had been. In *The Book of Christmas* (1836) Thomas Kibble Hervey informed his nineteenth-century readers that although Christmas survived its Puritan persecution, 'in none of its ancient haunts did the festival ever again recover its splendor of old,' and 'the ancient customs [...] one by one, fell more or less into disuse'.[19] Though Christmas had indeed altered after its Restoration, David Parker argues that the Puritans are often accused of doing more harm than, in all probability, they actually did. Instead, he suggests that Christmas began to be celebrated differently because of great social changes and shifts in sensibility: 'Puritan antagonism accelerated change [...] but even without the indignities it suffered at Puritan hands [...] it seems reasonable to suppose, Christmas would have become more private and domestic'.[20] Clearly, Christmas was experiencing another transformation in English society at this time. Numerous customs from earlier Christmas

[16] Golby, "A History of Christmas," 14.
[17] Carter, *Christmas Past, Christmas Present*, 12.
[18] Ibid., 13.
[19] Thomas Kibble Hervey, *The Book of Christmas* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 76-9.
[20] David Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens* (New York: AMS, 2005), 53.

celebrations, particularly those inherited from the Middle Ages, were now seen in a new light and considered too outmoded and disorderly to revive. For instance, the custom of electing a Lord of Misrule to preside over a household's boisterous Christmas celebrations was now considered far too indecent to re-enact. Parker may be justified in pointing towards other social and cultural factors that contributed to the decline in Christmas celebrations, but he does seem to underestimate that the cultural shift in attitudes was largely inherited from Puritanism. Fashions might have changed but the Puritans were responsible, at least to some extent, for this new, more conservative approach to Christmas.

By the eighteenth century, festivities had become very restrained and celebrations were largely unenthusiastic. Golby has noted that in the forty-seven years from 1790-1836, the London *Times* rarely referred to Christmas. For twenty of these forty-seven years, 'Christmas is not mentioned at all, and for the remaining twenty-seven years reports are extremely brief and not very informative'.[21] This silence may have inspired concern among early nineteenth century writers, including poet Robert Southey and critic and essayist Leigh Hunt, regarding the state of Christmas in England. In 1807 Southey observed, 'all people say how differently this season was observed in their fathers' day, and speak of old ceremonies and old festivities as things which are obsolete'.[22] In 1834, Hunt commented that most of the 'principle points connected with Christmas [...] are now losing their lustre, only to give way, we trust, by and by, to better evidence of rejoicing'.[23] Hunt's observations are much more hopeful than Southey's earlier comment, which suggests that things had clearly changed in the almost thirty years between the two comments. While there was evidence of what Tara Moore terms 'a lapse in the Christmas celebration' in the decades following the Restoration,[24] many modern scholars have argued that although the

[21] Golby, "A History of Christmas," 15.
[22] Robert Southey, *Letters from England* (New York: David Longworth, 1808), 3:115.
[23] Leigh Hunt, "Christmas Eve and Christmas Day," *Leigh Hunt's London Journal* 39 (December 24, 1834): 305.
[24] Tara Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 11-2.

vigour with which Christmas was celebrated had clearly diminished, Christmas itself had not disappeared.

John Golby and A.W. Purdue, and Dickens scholar Paul Davis, have convincingly argued that Christmas's decline was perhaps more apparent than real. They claim that the migration of huge numbers of people from the English countryside to the industrial cities led to a lack of certainty regarding how the season, which had previously been intrinsically connected to a rural way of life, should be celebrated in this new urban environment. Moreover, Parker argues that the real reason why many eighteenth-century sources show indifference towards Christmas is simply because during this period 'making much of Christmas ceased to be fashionable'.[25] By the turn of the century fashions were changing once again to make way for different celebrations. Christmas was once more in a state of transition, evolving to meet the needs of a new century. By this period in the history of Christmas, a consciousness of change combined with the preoccupations of a newly emerging industrial and urban society to transform Christmas into an event that would reflect the culture of the times. This is seen in part of Southey's reflection on the state of Christmas, where he later admits that reason behind the perceived decline in seasonal festivities 'is obvious. In large towns the population is continually shifting' which resulted in people becoming detached from their local traditions, while 'in the country, estates are purchased by new men [...] who have no family customs to keep up, and [...] who have no feeling connected with the times and seasons'.[26] These social and geographic shifts would ultimately inspire the Victorians to reshape Christmas in a way that would respond to a new set of social needs. And in 1843, only nine years after Hunt had written about the reasons why Christmas-keeping had diminished, Charles Dickens penned his famous *A Christmas Carol*, a text that presented readers with their first fictive account of an urban

[25] Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, 68.
[26] Southey, *Letters from England*, 116.

Christmas in London and which still remains an integral part of the Christmas reading and viewing experience for modern audiences.

The unmitigated success of Dickens's *Carol* shows that it was clearly a seminal text in the evolution of the Victorian Christmas print market. However other authors had been flirting with Christmas writing during the 1820s and 1830s. In 1819, American writer Washington Irving dedicated a lengthy section of *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon* to the description of an English country Christmas in the fictional grounds of Bracebridge Hall. This text is likely to have inspired Dickens's Christmas chapter in *Pickwick Papers* (1836), as I will explain in greater detail in Chapter One. In addition to Christmas fiction, the first few decades of the century were marked by a particular interest, among antiquarians, in publishing histories of Christmas. Volumes such as William Hone's *Ancient Mysteries Described* (1823) and Thomas Hervey's *The Book of Christmas* (1836) examined Christmas customs and uncovered their origins for inquisitive readers, forming part of a backward-glancing trend of exploring the Christmas past which can also be detected in a large number of periodical articles from the same time. By 1838, Samuel Griswold Goodrich, writing under the pseudonym Peter Parley, attempted to describe how the English understood Christmas at the very beginning of the Victorian era:

> If you were to ask me what English people mean when they speak of Christmas, it would puzzle me to tell you, for it seems to me that Christmas is, in their minds, made up of religious feeling, of acts of charity, holiday, and fire side enjoyment; of church going, alms giving, and family gathering. Christmas carols, and pleasant acquaintance, crackling faggots, and farm house fare; bunches of holly, and boughs of mistletoe; smoking joints, and foaming jugs;

> laughing, story telling, and blind man's buff, are all contained in the word Christmas.[27]

From this passage it appears that in 1838, Christmas was still largely associated with rural rituals of celebration, but by the time Dickens was writing the *Carol* five years later, the imagery of Christmas had changed substantially. Dickens seems to hint at the significance of this sudden geographical shift when the third Spirit visits Scrooge and, 'they scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it'.[28] This was a momentous transition in the history of seasonal festivities, indicating that Christmas was keeping pace with the changing times, and being consciously reinterpreted in a way that would resonate with the preoccupations and realities of Victorian life. In each chapter of this dissertation, it will become evident that writers were responding to the crisis in Christmas confidence by inviting readers to access their own age from different perspectives. In Chapter One, we will see how some writers were enabling their readers to regress into fictive accounts of ancient Christmas celebrations, so that they would better appreciate the improvements of the present age. Likewise, in Chapter Three, I will explore how other writers permitted their readers to briefly escape into the make-believe space-time of the festive fairy tale, before reminding them of their duty to present day reality.

Indeed the reader's obligation towards the continued advancement and improvement of the present age conforms to the characterisation of the Victorian period as an era of great progress and transformation in the makeup of society and industry. Yet in a more unfavourable sense, it was also a time when the uncomfortable realities of displacement were felt. The years preceding the publication of Dickens's *Carol* were marked by a great deal of social and political change. The controversial Reform Bill of

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[27] Peter Parley [Samuel Griswold Goodrich], *Tales About Christmas* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1838), 4.
[28] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, in *A Christmas Carol and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Slater (London: Penguin, 2003), 96. All further references to the *Carol* will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.

1832, which gave greater Parliamentary representation to the growing industrial cities at the expense of the older boroughs, uncovered tensions between the Bill's supporters who wanted to further industrial development, and opponents who wanted this rapid progress to be curbed. Advances in the use of machinery, steam power, and railways were further indications of change. As Thomas Carlyle argued in his 1829 essay 'Signs of the Times': 'it is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word'.[29] Similarly the residential shifts from rural to urban landscapes, as mentioned above, were a result of work being relocated to the booming industrial towns and cities; a social change which understandably suffused the generation with a sense of unfamiliarity and dislocation. The negative consequences of these changes have been explored by Richard Altick, who claims that the move from village to city 'produced a crisis in popular culture,' largely because when the villager was transformed into the factory worked he was estranged from the familiar traditions and homely habits of his previous way of life.[30] This was particularly damaging because the individual felt alienated in the midst of the city, a feeling that bred the belief that their personal individuality had been lost, 'and perhaps worst of all' it gave rise to 'the overwhelming loneliness the individual man and woman felt in the midst of the crowd'.[31]

Although the *Carol* offered readers an aspirational vision of how Christmas could be celebrated in the city, the effects of urban alienation are brought to light in the figure of Ebenezer Scrooge whom Dickens characterises as a man who 'edge[d] his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance' (35). However, one of the successes of the *Carol* is Dickens's ability to restore the isolated, city-dwelling individual to a sense of connection with the rest of humankind, and enable him to participate in a new, urban enactment of Christmas. Robert Malcolmson has noted that

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[29] Thomas Carlyle, "The Signs of the Times," *Critical Miscellaneous Essays* (New York: D. Appleton, 1864), 188.
[30] Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 95.
[31] Ibid.

before the nineteenth-century shift to urban centres 'the fundamental social basis for several of the calendar festivities was the relatively small, tightly-knit rural community,' and most importantly, it was by participating in this community that individuals 'developed their basic sense of social identity'.[32] That the shift from country to town influenced the celebration of Christmas during the nineteenth century is clear in many of the texts examined in this dissertation. Moreover, from a temporal perspective we often see the country Christmas being associated with an idyllic past, while the urban Christmas offers a celebration of modern social and industrial progression. In the *Illustrated London News* Christmas supplement for 1853, one writer claimed that the only way to see Christmas, 'surrounded by all its poetical associations, is to spend it in the country. In town it is tricked out in the last new fashions – very pretty to look at, yet in nowise romantic. But there are old, out-of-the-way nooks in England, which, lying from off the great high roads, seem to have been forgotten by the grand reformer, Time'.[33] Approaching Christmas as an annual moment to escape the pressures of urban life, nostalgic writers claimed that Christmas was best celebrated away from the city where it could still be found with all of its quaint, old-fashioned trimmings firmly intact.

The innovations of the Victorian Christmas transformed its celebration and, as popular culture continues to inform us each December, created numerous traditions that are still observed today. Perhaps most famously, it was during the first half of the nineteenth century that England was introduced to the German Christmas tree. After Queen Victoria's marriage to Albert in 1840, a Christmas tree became part of the royal family's celebrations. In 1848, an illustration of the royals and their children gathered around their Christmas tree appeared in the *Illustrated London News* (Figure 1), popularising the custom throughout the country.

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[32] Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 52.
[33] "Christmas-Eve at an Old Farm-House," *Christmas Supplement of the Illustrated London News* 23, no. 660 (Christmas 1853): 587.



Figure 1. Illustration of 'The Royal Christmas Tree.' *Illustrated London News* (1848)

The emphasis on the German nature of the Christmas tree was highlighted in a 'sketch' that accompanied the illustration, to 'throw some light upon the festive purposes for which they are employed in Germany'.[34] The people of Manchester however, had been familiar with Christmas trees since the 1820s when the custom had spread from the city's German community to its local inhabitants.[35] By 1851, the German Christmas tree was achieving such great heights of popularity across England that one was displayed at the Crystal

[34] "The Christmas Tree at Windsor Castle," *Supplement of the Illustrated London News* 13, no. 350 (Christmas 1848): 410.
[35] Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 114.

Palace's Great Exhibition.[36] As Joe Perry has explained in his study of Christmas in Germany, 'German customs were particularly successful in the international marketplace for holiday goods, texts, and feelings. The "German" Christmas tree and its associated rituals was an export product'.[37] During the nineteenth century, Christmas in Germany was, like the English Christmas, being reinterpreted as a response to similar social and cultural changes. It is interesting to note that the German 'reinvention' of Christmas also emphasised home, family and privacy, and German celebrants increasingly 'enacted sentimental scripts of domestic intimacy around the Christmas tree'.[38] The family Christmas celebrated beside the fir tree had become a persuasive image for many Victorians, particularly as the illustration of the royals at Windsor Castle had represented the tree as a unifying domestic tradition. All the same, Victorian writers frequently referred to the short life span of the withering Christmas tree, using it as a visible manifestation of Christmas's equally brief visit. The Christmas tree symbolised family reunions and idealised domestic celebrations, but as one poet reflected, the wilted branches of the tree also 'claim, in the tale of their soft farewell, / Of a deeper change than their own to tell'.[39] The effect of time's passage upon the aging tree clearly mirrored the 'deeper changes' in the human families and individuals that gathered beside the tree with each returning Christmas.

The fir tree was of German origin, but other Christmas ephemera such as the festive card and the Christmas cracker, were English inventions. The Christmas card was first produced commercially in 1843 at the request of Sir Henry Cole. The design of this card (Figure 2) focused on a family gathered together enjoying a festive meal, and on each side of this central image, seasonal themes of Christmas charity were addressed in illustrations depicting the feeding and clothing of the needy.

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[36] "The Street Carol," *Supplement of the Illustrated London News* 19, no. 537 (Christmas 1851): 753.
[37] Joe Perry, *Christmas in Germany: A Cultural History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 30.
[38] Ibid., 15.
[39] D., "The Christmas Tree,' *Good Words* 1 (December 1860): 790.



Figure 2. The first Christmas card, designed by J.C. Horsley for Sir Henry Cole (1843)

Christmas crackers were also a Victorian innovation, designed by confectioner Tom Smith in 1847, with their crackle and spark mimicking (and domesticating) the ancient fire festivals long associated with Christmas.[40] Carol singing was another custom that regained momentum during the Victorian age. Carols, which had largely disappeared from festive celebrations after the Puritan repression, recovered their popularity by mid-century with many pre-Reformation hymns being collected by antiquarians. By the second half of the century many writers were composing new carols, such as Christina Rossetti who famously wrote 'In the Bleak Midwinter' (1872). The enduring figure of Father Christmas also became significant during the nineteenth century, although it cannot be claimed that he was a Victorian invention. In fact 'Old Father Christmas' appeared centuries earlier in Royalist pamphlets defending Christmas customs, where he represented the Christmas spirit of goodwill.[41]

[40] Simon Callow, *Dickens' Christmas* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2003), 139.
[41] Carter, *Christmas Past, Christmas Present*, 30.

In his cultural history of the American Christmas, Stephen Nissenbaum reveals that although many people assume the figure of Santa Claus is an Americanized version of an imported Dutch tradition, the Santa Claus devised in New York during the nineteenth century was 'a conscious reconstruction of that Dutch ritual – an invented tradition'.[42] The American Santa Claus emerged in New York during a period when Christmas was being threatened by public violence, disorder and aggressive behaviour, as the city 'underwent an explosion of poverty, vagrancy, and homelessness'.[43] Troubled by widespread impropriety at Christmas, many respectable New Yorkers expressed interest in restoring the festival's 'old' customs. One such group of 'antiquarian-minded' New York gentlemen were the Knickerbockers, who took their name from Washington Irving's satirical text *Knickerbocker's History of New York* (1809).[44] As Nissenbaum explains, the Dutch figure of St. Nicholas is mentioned twenty-five times in the *History of New York*, although he is not associated specifically with Christmas. Yet in 1822, influenced by the 'amusing caricature of the old-time Dutch gentry who inhabited Irving's New Amsterdam',[45] Clement Clarke Moore wrote 'A Visit from St. Nicholas,' a poem that elaborated on the old Dutch customs, but most importantly presented St. Nicholas in a new light.[46] In Moore's poem St. Nicholas was radically re-presented as a working-class figure and bringer of gifts, 'a grateful, nonthreatening old-style dependent,' who released upper-class

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[42] Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle For Christmas* (New York: Random House, 1996), 64.
[43] Ibid., 53.
[44] Ibid., 57-64.
[45] Ibid., 71.
[46] There is some controversy regarding the authorship of 'A Visit from St. Nicholas.' While Clement Clark Moore is still widely acknowledged to be the poem's author, the family of war veteran Henry Livingston, Jr. have claimed that he was the true author. The Livingstons argued that the Moore family's governess heard a recital of the poem and asked for a copy. It has also been suggested that Livingston had a much more cheerful temperament than Moore, and that the style of the poem matches Livingston's work more closely. In 2000 Don Foster, a Professor of English at Vassar College in New York, added to the debate by agreeing with the Livingstons. See: Bruce David Forbes, *Christmas: a Candid History* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2007), 84-5. In a more recent article however, Stephen Nissenbaum has responded vigorously to Foster's claim against Moore. He attacks Foster's technique of literary analysis and uses historical evidence to argue that Moore is the true author of the poem. See: Nissenbaum, "There Arose Such a Clatter: Who Really Wrote "The Night Before Christmas"? (And Why Does is Matter?)," *Common-Place* 1, no. 2 (January 2001).

New Yorkers 'both from the fear of harm and the pressure of guilt'.[47] Of course, Moore's version of St. Nicholas altered over time into the Santa Claus we recognise today, and one of the most influential contributors to the modern image of Santa Claus was cartoonist Thomas Nast, whose famous 1881 illustration (Figure 3) created an enduring image of the white bearded, gift-bearing Christmas figure.



Figure 3. Thomas Nast's 'Merry Old Santa Claus.' *Harper's Weekly* (1881)

[47] Nissenbaum, *The Battle For Christmas*, 84-5.

As this peculiar background indicates, the Father Christmas popularised in nineteenth-century England was a combination of American, Dutch and English traditions,[48] only distinguished from Santa Claus in festive illustrations by wearing a robe instead of a belted jacket and trousers.[49]

The influx of new and revisited Christmas customs during the nineteenth century has sparked debate among scholars investigating claims that the Victorians 'invented' Christmas. The majority of academics agree that the fundamental characteristics of the present-day Christmas were established in the nineteenth century; however, Christmas was not so much 'invented' by the Victorians rather, it was *reinvented* by the Victorians. In *The Making of the Modern Christmas* (1986), Golby and Purdue argue that during the nineteenth century, Christmas was 'extensively reworked and reinterpreted [...] to meet the needs of modern urban society; yet, like every vital tradition, it is built upon foundations which, like rock formations, contain layers from different ages'.[50] What the Victorians did was give Christmas a new centrality in the year,[51] and 'renovate and refurbish'[52] the festival by combining new traditions with sanitised replications of old customs from Christmas past. Significantly, Golby and Purdue recognise that the Victorians were highly selective in their construction of Christmas, and observe that the nineteenth-century festival cannot be considered a revival of old Christmas, as it 'drew selectively upon many Christmases past; it was a symbiosis of an idealised past with the preoccupations of Victorians themselves'.[53] While the Victorians did not invent Christmas, they were certainly inventive in their refurbishing of it. Their version of the festival combined the real social and cultural preoccupations of their own age, with an ideal version of a Christmas that probably never existed.

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[48] Golby and Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas*, 75.
[49] Carter, *Christmas Past, Christmas Present*, 30.
[50] Golby and Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas*, 19.
[51] Ibid., 13.
[52] Ibid., 49.
[53] Ibid., 44

David Parker is another critic who has addressed the widespread assumption that the Victorians, or more specifically Charles Dickens, 'invented' the modern Christmas. In *Christmas and Charles Dickens* (2005), Parker rejects claims that Christmas was ever in a state of serious decline prior to the nineteenth century. While the festival was 'neglected by many opinion-makers and leaders of fashion,' he argues that the celebration of Christmas 'never died out among the majority of the population' and the Victorians simply 'rekindled seasonal rejoicing only among a minority. No rekindling was needed for the majority'.[54] Parker claims that the development of Christmas customs in the early nineteenth century, such as the pantomime and seasonal storytelling, affirm that the festival was flourishing, as key Christmas practices were being adapted to suit the times. Turning to consider the role of Charles Dickens in the shaping of the modern Christmas, Parker argues that there is no truth to claims that Dickens himself 'invented' Christmas, and insists that what he did was simply intensify its celebration.[55] According to Parker, Dickens seized the opportunity to bring together 'the cultural richness of Christmas with literature worthy of it' by producing texts 'commensurate with [Christmas's] significance in national life'.[56] Although he does spend some time looking into the history of the English Christmas, Parker's main focus is the contribution that Dickens made to the canon of Victorian Christmas literature. Indeed, despite the vast amount of Christmas print published during the nineteenth century, much of the current research in this area has focused on Charles Dickens's festive writing. I will be revisiting this body of critical material on Dickens and Christmas in subsequent chapters.

Other notable works which have engaged with the history, development and social significance of Christmas in the nineteenth century include Stephen Nissenbaum's *The Battle for Christmas* (1996) and Neil Armstrong's *Christmas in Nineteenth-Century England* (2010). As we saw in the earlier discussion of Santa Claus, Nissenbaum's work is

[54] Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, x.
[55] Ibid., 17.
[56] Ibid., 108.

a detailed account of the transformations that shaped the American Christmas. *The Battle for Christmas* uncovers the carnival origins of Christmas in the United States, and reveals how nineteenth-century Americans shifted the focus of the festival in order to emphasise domesticity and consumerism. Nissenbaum shows how earlier Christmas celebrations had been marred by drunkenness and aggression, when the poor used the festive moment as an opportunity to demand food and drink from the wealthy inhabitants of American cities. In response to this appropriation of Christmas as a rowdy, disruptive time, Nissenbaum reveals how middle-class political conservatives effectively kidnapped Christmas and tamed its traditions. A background to Christmas in nineteenth-century Britain can be found in Armstrong's recent work which explores the popularity of Christmas as an national English festival. This history of Christmas explores the origins behind the festival, and demonstrates how many of the traditions associated with Christmas were developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Armstrong looks at the nineteenth-century Christmas as the product of a period characterised by both continuity and change, and in the preface to this work he acknowledges how Christmas is ultimately shaped by the society that produces it: the festival 'might act as a prism through which the evolution of English society and its ideals, morals and values [...] could be illuminated'.[57] Armstrong's work is a valuable source of Christmas scholarship and as A.W. Purdue's review notes, it places the development of Christmas in the context of the century as a whole rather than limiting observations solely to the Victorian period, a feature that makes the work stand out in the field.[58] The text also encourages further discussion regarding how festive developments and innovations in the nineteenth century influenced, and continue to influence, Christmas's identity in successive years. Purdue also notes, however, that histories of Christmas are 'well-trodden ground' and suggests that though it is a very well

[57] Neil Armstrong, preface to *Christmas in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), xiii.
[58] A.W. Purdue, review of *Christmas in Nineteenth-Century England*, by Neil Armstrong, *Times Higher Education*, 23 December, 2010, www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=414655.

researched and informative text, Armstrong's history 'adds no new or overarching thesis to the ongoing debates about the development of Christmas'.[59] These ongoing debates include considerations about how and why the Victorian version of Christmas developed, and to what extent the nineteenth-century Christmas was a continuation of, or departure from, 'old Christmas' past.

Aside from social and cultural histories of Christmas, perhaps the only thorough investigation of Victorian Christmas literature is Moore's *Victorian Christmas in Print* (2009), which offers a detailed overview of Christmas texts and consumer trends in Victorian England. Moore's work uncovers the explosion of Christmas writing that emerged in the Victorian period, and analyses how this influx of festive print subsequently strengthened the association of Christmas with reading. Tracing the development of publishing trends and literary consumerism, Moore spends time unravelling the vast corpus of Christmas print produced during this period, such as novels, ghost stories, periodicals, children's books and poetry. At the heart of Moore's text is an analysis of how Victorian Christmas print can be read as a site of English identity formation, which simultaneously 'entered into the performance of the holiday,' by 'proliferating a certain version of urban Christmas – plum pudding, mourning the lost, holly, and hearth-love'.[60] While this extensive analysis of Christmas literature is a valuable source, filled with pertinent observations and insightful ideas, due to the vast scope of the project it does tend to catalogue nineteenth-century references to Christmas, rather than offer any sustained critical engagement with the works referred to. Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's review of Moore's book highlights this problem, and notes that while Moore's text offers 'a good general overview of a subject long overdue for the serious treatment it receives here,' it suffers from the sheer amount of material it deals with: the book has a 'tendency to make

[59] Ibid.
[60] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 2-3.

large claims with insufficient demonstration or qualification'.[61] *Victorian Christmas in Print* does, however, provide a very thorough overview of Christmas literature and is an invaluable reference source for further studies in the field. As Kooistra admits, Moore's volume 'set[s] the stage for Christmas studies yet to come'.[62] The work begun by Moore indicates that there remains a definite space in the field of nineteenth-century literary studies, left almost untouched, for a closer examination of Christmas literature. This dissertation will draw a carefully selected range of festive texts together in order to investigate Christmas as a literary event, and examine the underlying contextual preoccupations that helped to shape its development.

The celebration of Christmas is remarkable from a literary point of view, due to the vast amount of festive literature produced each December. Christmas was a radical turning point for the British publishing industry during the nineteenth century. Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* sold 6,000 copies within days of its release, and only five months later its seventh edition had sold out. While Dickens's second Christmas book, *The Chimes* (1844) never achieved the same popularity as the *Carol*, Dickens still made a net profit of £1,065 from the first edition of 20,000 copies released on 16 December 1844.[63] Understandably, the seasonal surge in book sales, evident from the early 1840s, attracted the notice of publishers and in turn influenced the commercial connection between Christmas and print. Prior to the 1840s, books had been published during spring, but with the realisation of Christmas as a lucrative market, the publishing season was relocated to late autumn in anticipation of festive book buying. In his study of Victorian publishing trends, Simon Eliot notes that by the late 1840s the number of titles published in the October-December period had reached the same heights as the spring season, 'not by much, but by enough to indicate the arrival of that more important book publication season in the industrial world –

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[61] Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, review of *Victorian Christmas in Print*, by Tara Moore, *Victorian Studies* 53, no. 1 (Autumn 2010): 133.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Paul Schlicke, *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 94-8.

Christmas'.[64] After this shift had been established in the 1840s, it had huge significance for the rest of the century as 'the size and importance of the Christmas season (October-December) grew dramatically in the period from 1850 to 1890'.[65] Evidently, the Victorian Christmas was more than 'a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time',[66] it was also a commercial event, finely tuned to the vulnerabilities of a generous Christmas spirit. It is likely that another factor influencing the popularity of festive print at this time was the increase in income and literacy in urban areas, where a 'rapidly growing population meant a hugely expanding market for books and newspapers'.[67] This shift in the seasonal focal point of the publishing market, combined with the popularity of Christmas reading material, attests to the growing Victorian fascination with the festive season in print.

The canon of Christmas literature was not, however, limited to texts dealing explicitly with Christmas Day, or even the Christmas season. During the first half of the century Christmas was already being recognised as a widely significant event for publishers and booksellers. In the 1820s and 1830s gift-books and scrap-books flooded the literary marketplace, and blatantly encouraged Christmas consumerism by promoting literature as the ideal festive gift. Among the festively titled Christmas works were gift-books, such as *Blossoms of Christmas* (1825) and *Christmas Box* (1828-9). Similarly styled juvenile scrap-books, which combined stories, poems and educational articles in one volume, were also published for Christmas. Two of the best-known Christmas scrap-books published during the 1830s were Frederic Shoberl's *Forget Me Not; a Christmas, New Year's and Birthday Present* (1833) and L.E. Landon's *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* (1832-8). The popularity of the gift book for Christmas fluctuated throughout the

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[64] Simon Eliot, "Some Trends in British book production, 1800-1919" in *Literature in the Marketplace*, ed. John O. Jordon and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 33.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Dickens, *Carol*, 36.
[67] "Aspects of the Victorian Book," British Library, accessed 26 May, 2013, www.bl.uk/collections/early/victorian/pr_intro.html.

following decades, and its evolution is a phenomenon that clearly demonstrates how the Christmas book market was constantly being modified and refined in order to maintain its popular appeal and strong consumer base. In 1849 the *Illustrated London News* revealed that the 'old-fashioned' Christmas gift book was in decline as the public were weary of 'Books of Beauty'.[68] By the 1850s however, newly packaged collections of literature, with decorative bindings and elaborate wood engravings were being released for the Christmas season, providing a means through which publishers were able to expand into the popular market.[69] Moore, surveying the expansion of Christmas consumerism, has noted that after the 1840s 'the Christmas book label had broadened to embrace a wider flood of volumes put forth for the holiday season'.[70] The aesthetic charm of the decoratively bound festive book was clearly a marketing device, suggesting to would-be gift buyers that these texts had a dual function: to be read and to be looked at. Over the following decade the refashioned gift book rallied, revealing the hugely influential marketing power of the British Christmas book market. In November 1860, the illustrated gift books received great praise,[71] but only three years later in 1863 the *National Magazine* referred to these books as volumes that contained nothing of merit between their covers: 'weighty productions no less so by their contents than their covering of barbaric gems and gold: brilliant enough. Alas! that it should be on the outside only'.[72] When they finally lost their charm, these decorative gift books also lost their commercial viability and far fewer of them were published during the 1860s.[73]

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[68] "Christmas Books," *Supplement of the Illustrated London News* 15, no. 405 (Christmas 1849): 426.
[69] Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, "Poetry in the Victorian Marketplace: The Illustrated Princess as a Christmas Gift Book," *Victorian Poetry* 45, no. 1 (2007): 49.
[70] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 99.
[71] One writer for the *Examiner* complained 'although it wants nearly two months to Christmas, some wise publishers are early in the field, and already the illustrated gift books that have superseded the old form of annual, begin to flow into the shops.' "Christmas Books," *Examiner* 2753 (November 3, 1860): 694. This comment pre-empts our own obsessions over the ever-expanding Christmas season, which now begins as early as October.
[72] "The Monthly Mirror of Fact and Rumour," *National Magazine* 13, no. 75 (Jan 1863): 144.
[73] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 10.

The ghost tale is another genre that became closely associated with Christmas reading during the nineteenth century. Although this dissertation will focus only on one Christmas ghost tale in detail, *A Christmas Carol*, it is worth briefly considering the influence that this supernatural genre had on the ever-expanding Christmas book market. There are many festive ghost narratives dating from the Victorian period, and the genre's popularity continued to grow throughout the century, becoming particularly widespread during the second half. Pre-Victorian ghostly tales included 'The Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton,' a chapter which formed part of the Pickwickians' celebration of Christmas in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*. And Dickens's later Christmas books, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Chimes*, and *The Haunted Man* (1848) also use ghostly agents to administer life-altering lessons to their flawed protagonists. Moore suggests that by the second half of the century the festive ghost had changed from being a benign, redemptive spirit who entered narratives in order to 'alter reality' and 'bring about a Christmas utopia of reunion' (as seen in Dickens's Christmas books).[74] In later tales, the Christmas ghost became less concerned with moral correction and human redemption. She attributes this shift to the fact that by the second half of the century the ghost genre had expanded, and writers and publishers were more interested in simply providing 'a plentiful supply of good seasonable ghosts and kindred horrors' for festive audiences.[75]

During the latter half of the century, writers such as Charlotte Riddell, Maurice Davies, Rhoda Broughton and Margaret Oliphant, were contributing to and expanding on this genre, writing terrifying stories intended for Christmas consumption.[76] The connection between Christmas entertainment and ghostly tales continued to resonate with festive audiences well into the twentieth century. M.R. James, for instance, used the already well-established connection between Christmas and the ghost story, as his tales themselves

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[74] Ibid., 83.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Charlotte Riddell, "Uninhabited House" (1875) and "The Old House in Vauxhall Road" (1882); Maurice Davies, "A Night in a Ghost-Chamber" (1873); Rhoda Broughton, *Tales for Christmas Eve* (1873); and Margaret Oliphant, "The Lady's Walk" (1882). See Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 81-98.

originated in festive fireside storytelling to schoolboys.[77] Due to its outstanding popularity among Victorian readers, the phenomenon of the Christmas ghost genre has already received far more critical attention than any other sub-genre of Christmas print. Julia Briggs, in her exploration of the English ghost story, has pointed towards the significance of the Christmas moment, arguing that 'the association of ghost stories with Christmas is itself of great psychological interest' as there is 'a ritualistic character in this reviewing of the dark side of life in surroundings of warmth and security from which the cold, dark solitary world outside has been deliberately excluded'.[78] In *Gothic Literature* (2009), Jarlath Killeen suggests that 'Christmas became the key point of the year for the publication of ghost stories, because Christmas was precisely that moment when Victorians had to confront the cultural past most directly'.[79] Andrew Smith is another scholar who has considered the latent meaning behind Dickens's Christmas ghosts in his cultural history of the ghost story.[80] While there is still much critical work to be done on this highly significant field of festive print, this dissertation will not explore the genre in depth. Any thorough examination of this body of literature would demand an analysis of influential texts such as those by Charlotte Riddell and Maurice Davies noted above; however, as the publication dates of these texts indicate, the Christmas ghost genre was continuing to flourish well into the second half of the century, and Moore has even suggested that ghost story publishing in books and periodicals reached a high point as late as 1873.[81] The scope of my analysis will focus primarily on the first half of the nineteenth century; for this reason I have chosen to examine this genre of seasonal writing in a future study.

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[77] Darryl Jones, introduction to *M.R. James: Collected Ghost Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), viiii-x.
[78] Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors* (London: Faber, 1977), 41-2.
[79] Jarlath Killeen, *Gothic Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 130.
[80] Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 44-5.
[81] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 83.

The ghost genre and gift-book market were not the only places where the thirst for Christmas reading material was recognised by publishers. The periodical press soon became a particularly popular place to publish Christmas stories or festive articles. Throughout the century journals such as Dickens's *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* introduced 'Special Christmas Numbers' which were released in time for festive consumption. These publications often contained double the reading of an ordinary number despite the fact that, like the Christmas gift-books and scrap-books, they often had little or no explicit Christmas content. Regardless, their presence in the Christmas market demonstrates that the festive period was clearly a moment when people were encouraged to read, and the extra reading material printed for the season was eagerly devoured. As this dissertation will argue, the Christmas reading experience was also a significant temporal event. The literature published for Christmas was self-consciously time-specific. The annual arrival of these texts signalled the approach of Christmas to both booksellers and bookbuyers.

In 1851, a writer for the *Examiner* remarked, 'Christmas has not only a dinner of its own, but a feeling very much its own' and, most importantly, 'it has also a literature of its own'.[82] The body of literature for Christmas was a product of the nineteenth-century refashioning of the festival. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will focus on texts published during the early to mid nineteenth century, when Christmas was becoming established as a viable and profitable time to publish literature.

In addition to the critical analyses of the literary and historical significance of the nineteenth-century Christmas, Daniel Miller's collection of essays in *Unwrapping Christmas* (1993) explores the modern celebration from an anthropological angle. Miller's volume explores the performance of Christmas in diverse social contexts, and offers glimpses into 'The Rituals of Christmas Giving,' 'Materialism and the Making of the

[82] "Books for Christmas," *Examiner* 2290 (December 20, 1851): 804.

Modern American Christmas,' the kitsch consumerist culture of Japan's youth, and the rejection of Christmas consumerism in Trinidad. One essay that stands out from this collection is Adam Kuper's 'The English Christmas and the Family: Time out and Alternative Realities.' Here, Kuper demonstrates how Christmas has become embedded into English culture as 'a structural transformation of a particular vision of everyday social life' and claims that it has flourished 'because the opposition which it constructs within an everyday reality has meaning: a significance fed by the increasingly secular, utilitarian, Gradgrind England of everyday experience'.[83] Kuper's claim that Christmas's transformative effect is something that is nurtured and indeed 'fed' by the very dissatisfactions of ordinary life, which Christmas is perceived to alleviate, is an issue that this dissertation will explore. Furthermore, Kuper strives to find explanations as to why the Victorian Christmas, despite dramatic shifts in family dynamics, has remained 'essentially stable, while other great Victorian rituals, such as funerals or Sunday church-going, have been eroded or jettisoned'.[84] The conclusion Kuper reaches is that Christmas's longevity derives from its ability to offer a 'time out' for 'alternative values' as the title of his essay indicates. The 'time out' is the 'structural opposition' that distinguishes Christmas time from everyday life, and the 'alternative values' embraced during this time include: being at home with the family, taking time off work, avoiding quarrels and demonstrating generosity, particularly to children, the elderly, the lonely and the disadvantaged.[85] It is this temporal distinction between Christmas and ordinary life that ultimately encourages and enables the temporary transformation of reality at Christmas. This theory of Christmas time, as a moment distinct from 'ordinary-time,' will become crucial in the development of this dissertation.

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[83] Adam Kuper, "The English Christmas and the Family: Time out and Alternative Realities," in *Unwrapping Christmas*, ed. Daniel Miller (Gloucester: Clarendon, 1993): 173.
[84] Ibid., 167.
[85] Ibid.

The Christmas season is often used in nineteenth century literature for moral purposes: to encourage charity, reveal the struggle of the poor, commend altruism, appeal to Christianity, and exemplify the virtue of benevolence during a period which, according to Thomas Carlyle was 'dying of inanition'.[86] But another striking feature conveyed in a great deal of nineteenth-century Christmas writing is its concern with the perplexing question of time. We see this concern with temporality expressed in a number of ways. In Dickens's *Carol*, time is embodied by three supernatural spirits representing time past, time present, and time yet to come, while Alfred Tennyson's arresting elegy, *In Memoriam* (1850), uses the annual return of Christmas as an emotional way of marking time's passage and comparing the 'then' and 'now' of life. Alongside social concerns, many texts are infused with a time-consciousness characteristic of their age. Jerome Buckley has outlined the Victorian anxiety towards the changing experience of time in *The Triumph of Time* (1966), where he demonstrates how the people who lived through the nineteenth century consciously recognised that they were living in an age of rapid change, and exhibited a preoccupation with time and all the devices that measured it. According to Buckley, the Victorian sense of time was one of unnerving perpetual motion, where the speed of change was constantly increasing, the limits of space and time were extending, and social life was underpinned by a search for purpose and coherence.[87] It was during the nineteenth century that great advances in railway travel took place, shortening the time taken to travel from destination to destination. And with railway travel and the timetable came the standardization of time in 1847, when all clocks were synchronized to Greenwich Mean Time and Britain became the first nation to establish a time zone.[88] Alongside strictly defined working hours in towns and cities, the Victorians experienced a social shift in the representation of time as it became uniform, and something to which everything and everyone was increasingly required to conform. The Victorian period witnessed the

[86] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (New York: William H. Colyer, 1843), 13.
[87] Jerome Buckley, *The Triumph of Time* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), 2-15.
[88] Ibid., 53.

invention of the electric telegraph, enabling messages to be sent across great distances in a matter of seconds, and transforming the newspaper industry's ability to report up-to-the-minute events.[89] Photography was also an innovation of the age, contributing to the sense of immediacy by creating instant portraits of people and scenes.[90]

Altick notes that it was this 'new concept of time which had the most profound effect upon the Victorian spirit,' demanding a huge 'psychological adjustment' as the 'shadow creeping across a sundial was replaced by the minute hand of a pocket watch as its owner anxiously compared it with a railway timetable'.[91] In *Dombey and Son* (1846-8) Dickens makes the same observation, writing, 'there was even railway-time observed in clocks, as if the sun itself had given in'.[92] In 1852, a festive story published on Christmas Day in *Eliza Cook's Journal* exemplified how the railroad had transformed the Victorian perception of time and revolutionized Christmas celebrations. At the beginning of the tale, entitled 'The Three Christmases,' the reader is introduced to Beatrice and her husband who live in London. Beatrice desperately wants to visit her parents over Christmas, and her husband delightedly tells her that this year she will be able to: 'lass; the road's shorter than ever. The new railway – blessings on the iron line! – has brought Holmfield within six hours of London now [...] It's only a ride of about five miles from there to the farm. Yes! that's the thing'.[93] After the journey has been taken, the writer remarks, 'it was a long journey; but a hundred and fifty miles by railway is a small matter now-a-days'.[94] The story's characters celebrate the new technology of the railroad and rejoice in its ability to make happy Christmas reunions more accessible. From another angle however, the new pace of life and consciousness of speed that characterised the Victorian experience became a source of mental and physical exhaustion. Matthew Arnold was one, among others, who

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[89] Ibid., 9.
[90] Richard Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 97.
[91] Ibid., 96-7.
[92] Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (London: J.M. Dent, 1941), 204.
[93] "The Three Christmases," *Eliza Cook's Journal* 191 (December 25, 1852), 130.
[94] Ibid.

complained of the 'sick hurry' of life,[95] and as Altick writes, the great paradox was that the more time-saving technology the Victorians' invented, the less time they seemed to have.[96]

Temporality had also become an issue at the forefront of scientific and geological studies, with Charles Lyell publishing his *Principles of Geology* between 1830 and 1833. This popular work addressed the scientific theory which showed that the shape of the earth had been formed by geological mechanisms extending from the present moment into the unfathomable depths of 'deep time.' Understandably, this alienating view of a history so remote and intangible contributed to the Victorian preoccupation with the mysteries of time. Furthermore, Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution, announced in 1858, added to the 'revolutionary expansion' of time in the Victorian mind.[97] It is no surprise that the nineteenth century was frequently recognised during the period, by figures including John Stuart Mill and Prince Albert, as an 'age of transition.' It was a period when temporality suddenly unfixed assumptions that had previously been believed to be true, so that 'objects hitherto apparently stable had begun to lose their old solidity',[98] and people became ever more conscious of their position in time. This mindset was evident from the very beginning of the Victorian period as John Stuart Mill, commenting on the 'Spirit of the Age,' claimed in 1837:

> mankind are now conscious of their new position. The conviction is already not far from being universal, that the times are pregnant with change; and that the nineteenth century will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance, in the human mind, and in the whole constitution of human society.[99]

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[95] Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas*, 97.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., 98.
[98] Buckley, *The Triumph of Time*, 5.
[99] John Stuart Mill, "The Spirit of the Age (1831)," in *The Spirit of the Age: Victorian Essays*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (New Haven: Yale University, 2007), 52.

Sue Zemka's study *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (2012) attests to the significance of temporality in nineteenth century print culture. Zemka focuses specifically on the Victorian attitude to the 'moment' in this work, but also explores how literature and temporality influenced the reader's experience of consuming serialised novels, and how labour and the economic influence of industrialisation altered the Victorian perception of time. By focusing on innovative industrial forces and the new Victorian precision in measuring time, Zemka argues that importance was attached to the momentary event as mechanism of change. Zemka's central concern in her study is 'to trace the gap that emerges in the nineteenth century between embodied experience and abstract time'.[100] According to Zemka 'abstract time' is represented by standardised clock time, which emerged in the Victorian age. She claims that during the nineteenth century, industrialisation affected the social consciousness by bringing about a wider distribution of abstract time through factory clocks and railway timetables.[101] This recognition of the gulf that was emerging in the Victorian age, between the embodied experience of time and abstract time, is something that also permeates the nineteenth-century Christmas. Indeed, in 1853 one writer for *Punch* grumbled that Christmas interrupted the order of 'neutral' abstract time. This 'Old Bachelor' complained at the upheaval the festive period produced on the order of everyday life, suggesting that 'Christmas time' seemed to be an excuse for lax standards and a carefree frivolity that he found offensive: 'this invasion of one's habits and comforts is most heart-rending; and the only excuse I have been able to receive to my repeated remonstrances has been, "Oh, Sir, you must really make some allowances; pray recollect it is Christmas time." Hang this Christmas time!'.[102] The bachelor's complaints echo the general worries of many about what the labouring classes did in their 'leisure' time. As E.P. Thompson has written, 'in mature capitalist society all time must be

[100] Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15.
[101] Ibid., 2.
[102] An Old Bachelor, "It is Lucky that Christmas Does Come but Once a Year," *Punch* 24 (1853): 17.

consumed, marketed, put to *use*; it is offensive for the labour force merely to "pass the time"'.[103] Also disapproving of the disruption caused by Christmas time, Dickens's Scrooge dismisses its significance seeing it only as an infringement on the regularity of business; as he remarks in the first stave of the *Carol*, Christmas is simply 'not convenient' (40).

However, much of the Victorian fascination with Christmas lay in the consciousness that Christmas time broke free from the lifeless monotony of abstract time, and enabled the individual to rediscover temporality as 'embodied experience,' something that had diminished in the workaday world of industrialisation. When Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit, leaves the workplace on Christmas Eve, his joy at leaving behind the abstract time of the working day in favour of the embodied experience of Christmas time is instantly expressed, as he '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' (41). The distinction between Christmas time and ordinary time is also found in Irving's *Sketch Book*, as the fictional narrator muses, 'there is something in the very season of the year that gives a charm to the festivity of Christmas. At other times we derive a great portion of our pleasures from the mere beauties of nature,' but at Christmas 'our thoughts are more concentrated'.[104] Later, in 1845, William Thackeray similarly marvelled at how the world seemed to visually transform during Christmas time. In a Christmas Eve article for the *Morning Chronicle*, he walked the streets of London where he observed 'many [...] pleasant Christmas phenomena' and 'could not but remark what an hilarious air the town wore'.[105] For these commentators, there seemed to be something about Christmas time that distinguished it

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[103] E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, no. 38 (December 1967): 90-1.

[104] Washington Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Other Stories; or, The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 159-60. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.

[105] William Thackeray, *Contributions to the Morning Chronicle*, ed. Gordon N. Ray (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 86.

from ordinary, or abstract, time. Moreover, the reader is invited to participate in the scene, to 'walk the streets' with Thackeray, or 'go down a slide' with Bob Cratchit. It is this festive energy that locates much Christmas writing within Zemka's category of the 'embodied experiences of time, registered on a scale of feeling',[106] differentiating Christmas from abstract time which is measured by dials and numbers. The peculiar experience of temporality at Christmas will be examined in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. As Leigh Schmidt has already observed in *Consumer Rites* (1995), questions about 'how cultures structure time and celebration have long been recognized as crucial ones',[107] and it is the fascinating connection between Christmas and time that will form the basis of this study.

Nineteenth-century writers often noticed that Christmas was a point in the year when temporal consciousness was heightened, and by 1860 one writer for *Good Words* was observing that Christmas had itself became a means of measuring time: 'Christmas behind Christmas, and Time, with his palsied, restless hand [...] busy blotting them every one out of his book. They will soon be no more than a vague blur in the past, a misty spot in the haze that divides it from the present'.[108] This wonderful image responds to the Victorian concern regarding time's perpetual advancement and the brevity of the present. The uncontrollable vision of Christmas after Christmas arriving and departing with an increased sense of speed entreats the reader to pause and appreciate the season, as it will all too soon be nothing but a 'misty spot in the haze.' On Christmas Day 1852, an article appeared in *Household Words* entitled 'Time and the Hour,' in which the writer takes the opportunity 'to speak of Time,' and express his own 'theory of time'.[109] As the article begins, the writer comically explains to the reader that he owns a broken watch; it is very unattractive, 'a hideous, turnip-shaped affair, with a tallow face, begrimed with fat mis-

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[106] Zemka, *Time and the Moment*, 88.
[107] Leigh Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 12.
[108] "Christmas Memories," *Good Words* 1 (December 1860): 785.
[109] "Time and the Hour," *Household Words* 6, no. 144 (December 25, 1852): 357.

shapen letters',[110] and it is also useless for time-keeping. The strange watch, however, inspires the writer to think about temporality: 'suppose that I philosophise upon it – that I view it [...] as it is, in its relations to time and the hour – to human energies and failures and successes – to the march of intellect and the life of man'.[111] For the remainder of the article the watch's owner argues against figurative ways of speaking about time, explaining, 'Time does *not* fly. He has no wings, no poised foot, no power of locomotion. Time is, and was, and will be, the same – unchanged, unchangeable, immutable. Don't make of time an ogre [...] Take him as he is; calm, tranquil, unmoved by the course of centuries, and ages, and years'.[112] In this passage the watch-owner argues that 'Time' does not possess a personality, though simultaneously contradicts his own argument by referring to time using the personal pronoun 'he'.[113]

The writer of 'Time and the Hour' is keen to remind his Christmas readers that although they may experience time subjectively, it is ultimately an objective reality and not something that man can control, regardless of the many devices and schemes he might invent to measure its progression. Rather, the emphasis of this passage falls on the *stability* of time; it is unchanging and unchanged, unmoved by centuries, ages and years, a powerful consideration for a generation troubled by the feeling that they were the victims of the 'quickening pace of time's erosion'.[114] Later in the article, the watch owner points out that the contemporary understanding of temporality is essentially an artificial construct that has polluted Time's true identity:

> Clocks and watches gave us hours and minutes; and now we have the presumption to call this purely business-like agreement and convention [...]

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[110] Ibid., 356.
[111] Ibid., 357.
[112] Ibid.
[113] This is also directly contradicted by the Mad Hatter's Tea Party in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), where the Hatter tells Alice: "If you knew Time as well as I do [...] you wouldn't talk about wasting *it*. It's *him*.' Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 63.
[114] Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: the Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1830-1890* (London: Longman, 1993), 25.

> Time; and we have the assurance to say that, because the hour runs, Time runs too; and that because the sand slides through the pin-like aperture [...] that Time slides, passes, too.[115]

It is unsurprising that an article philosophising about temporality should be published on Christmas Day. The annual recurrence of Christmas presented the individual with a temporal marker in the year. As this article suggests, at Christmas time people were inclined to pause and reflect on how their circumstances might have altered since the previous Christmas. The writer of this article addresses the perplexing nature of temporality, and invites his reader to consider, on Christmas Day, if time really does exist in the same way that contemporary representations of it might suggest.

Two decades earlier in *The Book of Christmas*, Hervey had framed the introductory chapter of his work as a similar philosophical inquiry into the mechanisms of time. Here we find further evidence that a curiosity about temporality came to the forefront of the thinking mind during the Christmas moment. As in the *Household Words* article, the true identity of time evades Hervey's attempts at definition and eludes comprehension: it is unintelligible, 'vague, abstract, and unimaginable [...] formless and mysterious'.[116] Later in this chapter Hervey provides a more solid reasoning to explain why he feels that Christmas is so closely connected to temporality. He argues that Christmas provides a mile-stone on the journey of life, 'beside which man is called upon to pause,' enter into 'houses of refreshment, by the way-side of existence' and, 'after a sweet communion, and lusty festival, and needful rest' is able to 'go forth upon [his] journey new fortified against its accidents, and strengthened for its toils'.[117] As these lines imply, the Christmas season itself is intrinsically linked to the intricacy of time. It is a passing occurrence, a fleeting moment of the year, a brief point of temporary transformation and a time of escape and release from the routine of everyday life. Yet Christmas, with its repetitive symbols and

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[115] "Time and the Hour," 357.
[116] Hervey, *The Book of Christmas*, 1.
[117] Ibid., 10-11.

rituals, simultaneously reassures the celebrant that it will return in twelve months. The coming year may hold uncertainty, but the annual Christmas moment is an enduring temporal moment that promises comfort and hope each December. With each returning Christmas, the individual also enters a liminal period where they are more inclined to reflect on the past and think about the future. As the *Illustrated London News* commented in 1853, 'such retrospective associations inspire a people with hopefulness, strengthen their moral feelings, call forth their gratitude, and fortify their resolutions' and for these reasons, 'this season of the year is distinguished from all others'.[118]

The festive preoccupation with temporality has continued to intrigue modern audiences. Many popular seasonal songs inform listeners that Christmas time is something distinct from ordinary time.[119] As Andy Williams sings, Christmas is 'the most wonderful time of the year,' when there will be 'tales of the glories of Christmases long, long ago' (Edward Pola and George Wyle, 1963). Other Christmas songs, such as the Wham classic 'Last Christmas' (George Michael, 1984), dwell on the passing of time, and the lyrics of the Pogues' 'Fairytale of New York' focus on memories of the past and hopes for the future, as the singer 'can see a better time / Where all our dreams come true' (Jim Finer and Shane MacGowan, 1987). Furthermore, in her annual Christmas Day broadcast, Queen Elizabeth II frequently alludes to the sensation that Christmas time is something distinct from ordinary life, and cherished all the more for this reason. In 1955 she confided to her audience: 'I always feel that just for these few minutes, the march of history stops while we listen to each other, and think of each other, on Christmas Day,' before recognising that the festive moment is only a temporary pause in the year, as 'Christmas passes by, and time resumes its march'.[120] The national definition of Christmas time is something that the

[118] "Christmas Moralities," *Supplement of the Illustrated London News* 21, no. 600 (Christmas 1853): 569.
[119] See: 'Wonderful Christmastime' (Paul McCartney, 1979), 'Do they know it's Christmas Time?' (Bob Geldof, 1984) and 'Christmas Time (Don't let the Bells End)' (The Darkness, 2003).
[120] Queen Elizabeth II, "Christmas Day Broadcast, 1955," The Official Website of the British Monarchy, accessed May 27, 2013,

Royal broadcast is often keen to address, and in exploring what Christmas means today, the Queen's language frequently echoes the values of the Victorian Christmas. Over the years, Queen Elizabeth has suggested that Christmas is a welcome escape from the harsh realities of a troubled world (1961), a time for reflection and renewal (1998), and a moment to take stock by reflecting on the past and making resolutions for the future (1999). Occasionally, the Christmas broadcast dwells on the timelessness of the season. In 1962, for example, the Queen claimed that Christmas 'never seem[s] to grow stale,' and referred to the festival as 'a firm landmark in the stormy seas of modern life'.[121] And in 2006, she revealed that the celebration of Christmas was one thing that had resisted change in her life, admitting that it remained a time when she resolved to put aside the anxieties of the moment. The Queen's speeches suggest that the Christmas season is still understood as a moment of heightened temporal awareness in the year, encouraging modern thinkers to consider the question of time and our consciousness of it.

Many of these festive messages reveal a Christmas mentality inherited from writers of the Victorian age. In 1992 and 1998, the televised broadcast echoed the words of Thomas Hervey who referred to Christmas as an annual mile-stone, when the Queen similarly depicted Christmas as a 'sign-post' inviting the individual to pause and think further than the 'hectic daily round.' Later, in 2002, the message again alluded to Christmas as a '[moment] to take stock before moving on to face the challenges which lie ahead'.[122] Charles Dickens had already articulated the sense that Christmas leads the individual to consider time, and reflect on their personal past from an adult perspective, in his 1850 essay 'A Christmas Tree,' where he thinks about 'what [...] we all remember best

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www.royal.gov.uk/ImagesandBroadcasts/TheQueensChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcast1955.aspx.

[121] Queen Elizabeth II, "Christmas Day Broadcast, 1962," The Official Website of the British Monarchy, accessed May 27, 2013, www.royal.gov.uk/ImagesandBroadcasts/TheQueensChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcast1962.aspx.

[122] Queen Elizabeth II, "Christmas Day Broadcast, 2002," The Official Website of the British Monarchy, accessed May 27, 2013, www.royal.gov.uk/ImagesandBroadcasts/TheQueensChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcast2002.aspx.

upon the branches of the Christmas Tree of our own young Christmas days, by which we climbed to real life'.[123] And in 1987, Queen Elizabeth similarly observed that 'sooner or later we all become aware of the passing of the years, but every now and then we get a sharp reminder that time is moving on rather quicker than we expected.' In the same speech she went on to consider, as Dickens did in an earlier essay 'What Christmas is as we Grow Older' (1851), that 'there is no point in regretting the passage of time. Growing older is one of the facts of life'.[124] In 1980, the Queen significantly recited a Christmas passage from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* where the New Year Bells:

> Ring out false pride in place and blood,
>
> The civic slander and the spite;
>
> Ring in the love of truth and right,
>
> Ring in the common love of good.[125]

She asked modern audiences to listen to the words and think about them as they celebrated Christmas in their own homes. It was in 1957 however, during her first televised Christmas address, when the dawn of modern technology led the Queen to consider time, change and progress, and her words seemed to mirror the concerns expressed by Victorians in the midst of their own industrial revolution a century before:

> that it is possible for some of you to see me today is just another example of the speed at which things are changing all around us. Because of these changes I am not surprised that many people feel lost and unable to decide what to hold

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[123] Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Tree," in *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003), 232.

[124] Queen Elizabeth II, "Christmas Day Broadcast, 1987," The Official Website of the British Monarchy, accessed May 27, 2013, www.royal.gov.uk/ImagesandBroadcasts/TheQueensChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcast1987.aspx.

[125] Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ed. Robert H. Ross (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 105: 2281-4. References are to section and lines. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.

> on to and what to discard. How to take advantage of the new life without losing the best of the old.[126]

As in the nineteenth century, the temporal pause offered by the Christmas moment has continued to draw attention to the perplexities of time and change. Christmas leads the individual to compare one celebration with another, and trace the shape of their lives through a series of festive moments. This temporal approach to Christmas was initially articulated in nineteenth century writing, visible in texts such as *A Christmas Carol*, *In Memoriam* and Elizabeth Sara Sheppard's *Round the Fire* (1856), alongside countless Christmas articles from journals and magazines. Indeed, Christmas does act as a landmark, or milestone in time, where life's changes are assessed and evaluated according to the mood of each successive year. And as the post-Victorian vision of Christmas exemplifies, the relationship between Christmas and temporality appears to be something that continues to resonate with modern audiences. As Queen Elizabeth claimed in 1992, the 'continuity' of Christmas 'is a great source of comfort in a world of change',[127] and it is this sense of the festive continuity that endures despite the changes of time, which paradoxically leads many to casually remark that Christmas feels 'timeless.'

The Christmas reading experience and nineteenth-century perception of time are the two issues underpinning the textual and thematic focus of this study. The four chapters that follow are organised thematically and chronologically. They each address how a specific Christmas text, or group of Christmas texts that form a sub-genre of festive literature, express a preoccupation with temporality which seems to be brought into sharper focus by the Christmas moment. The first chapter of this dissertation considers the significance of Christmas past in an age dominated by the forward motion of progress. Neil

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[126] Queen Elizabeth II, "Christmas Day Broadcast, 1957," The Official Website of the British Monarchy, accessed May 27, 2013, www.royal.gov.uk/ImagesandBroadcasts/TheQueensChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcast1957.aspx.

[127] Queen Elizabeth II, "Christmas Day Broadcast, 1992," The Official Website of the British Monarchy, accessed May 27, 2013, www.royal.gov.uk/ImagesandBroadcasts/TheQueensChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcasts/ChristmasBroadcast1992.aspx.

Armstrong suggests that there has long been a literary tradition of writers lamenting the loss of Christmas past,[128] and as we have already seen from Robert Southey's acknowledgement that Christmas was being celebrated differently in 1807 than it had been in former ages, the nineteenth century was no exception. Writers and readers, particularly during the early decades of the century, were fascinated by Christmas past. In this chapter I will look at the various literary forms that fetishised 'Old Christmas,' beginning with the cataloguing of old Christmas customs in texts such as Thomas Hervey's *The Book of Christmas*, before moving onto the fictionalization of Christmas past in works including Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* and Washington Irving's *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon*. Finally, I will turn to explore the emotional power of the personal past and memory, concentrating on the Christmas moments in Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, a text which documents how the experience of Christmas alters over time, and inevitably leads the individual to compare their personal present with their personal past.

The second chapter concentrates on Dickens's seminal festive work *A Christmas Carol*, approached as a narrative that makes manifest the close relationship between Christmas and time. As the misanthropic Scrooge is transformed one Christmas through three supernatural encounters with the Spirits of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet to Come, Dickens seems to suggest that a true understanding and appreciation of the festive season is closely tied to an individual's awareness of temporality, and their ability to look back into the past, embody the present, and act with a consciousness of the future. Through a close analysis of this text, I will argue that it is not only Scrooge's relationship with Christmas that is redeemed, but also his relationship with space and time. At the beginning of the narrative Scrooge's life is dominated by secular – or clock – time, but by the end of the novel, after his encounter with the supernatural Spirits, he approaches time as a lived, or embodied, experience. In the process he becomes

[128] Armstrong, *Christmas in the Nineteenth-Century*, 3.

reconnected with a sensory awareness of temporality that does not depend on reading the time from a clock.

The third chapter also deals with Christmas texts of a supernatural nature. In this chapter I will turn to the festive fairy tale and examine how the fairy tale, like Christmas itself, offers the reader an encounter with time and space removed from the constraints of the real world and the laws of secular temporality. In this chapter I will analyse a range of Christmas fairy tales, but focus primarily on Charles Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth* (1845) and William Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring* (1855). Through an exploration of this sub-genre of Christmas literature, it becomes clear that the seasonal fairy tale frequently encourages audiences to temporarily exchange their investment in the present for a brief venture into a supernatural realm where time is freed from the constraints of reality. While the Christmas fairy tale does offer a form of escapism for festive readers, and can be aligned with the Victorian experience of Christmas as a conditioned space during which time takes on fantastic dimensions, this chapter will show how these fairy tales frequently draw their audience's attention to the very unreality of their narratives and acknowledge the fact that the seasonal escape is only temporary. After Christmas is over and the fairy tale draws to a close, the normal order of temporality also resumes and everything must 'relapse into the sober courses of every-day life'.[129]

The final chapter will consider the domestic experience of Christmas in the mid-nineteenth century, and examine the representation of the Victorian hearth in festive works from this period. Fireside tales for Christmas frequently appeared in the festive market, and were usually associated with the ritual of storytelling at Christmas. In this chapter I will use a number of seasonal texts to demonstrate the centrality of the hearth in Christmas writing, before focusing on Elizabeth Sara Sheppard's *Round the Fire: Six Stories* (1856). Using Sheppard's text, I will ague that in nineteenth-century print Christmas is often

[129] Thackeray, *Contributions to the Morning Chronicle*, 87.

approached as a liminal moment in time, a hinge between the old year and the new and the past and the future. The ritual of fireside storytelling brings this liminal quality of Christmas time into focus, as the storytellers in Sheppard's text dwell upon life-shaping events from their own past and use the fireside as a space for personal reflection. In this chapter I will consider how the fireside tale frequently conveys a sense of mature and philosophical reflection, and highlights the significance of framing these tales in a comfortable and reassuring domestic space which provides a feeling of safety in the present moment, essential for the fireside narrators as they unfold their personal tales.

By emphasising the importance of festive print, this study attempts to renew and inspire critical interest in nineteenth-century Christmas writing, paving the way for further work in the field. In each chapter I argue that at Christmas both readers and writers were made more acutely conscious of time and its passage. Often overlooked, the canon of nineteenth-century Christmas writing is a rich source for analysis in itself. A closer examination of these texts reveals that writers were using the national reading event of Christmas as an opportunity to address numerous social and cultural concerns. As we look back into the Christmas writing from this period it is only fitting that we should begin by analysing how and why many nineteenth-century writers were busy doing the same thing; looking back to Christmas past, in an age of progress.

Chapter One: Christmas Past, Christmas Present: History, Writing and Memory

During the first half of the nineteenth century, many festive writers were intensely preoccupied with the relationship between Christmas and the past. Informative texts which traced the festival's lengthy national history, usually by examining and cataloguing old customs and their origins, flourished in the seasonal marketplace where writers were keen to assert that the celebration of Christmas dated from a distant and remote time. As one writer for *Chambers's Journal* insisted in 1848, since 'time immemorial Christmas has been the most prominent festival in the calendar'.[1] At the same time, fictional narratives frequently borrowed the imagery of a generically medieval "old-fashioned Christmas" to generate scenes of Christmas comfort for their readers, enabling them to vicariously experience the old customs of a festival which, during this part of the century, was altering to meet the needs of a 'new, more industrial and urban society'.[2] Social historians, such as Golby and Purdue, have shown how Christmas began to change during the early nineteenth century, when an 'increasing nostalgia [...] pervaded accounts of Christmas festivities and gave impetus to the foraging out and collecting, by folklorists and antiquarians, of Christmas legends and archaic practices'.[3] However, while writers continued to refer to "old Christmas" throughout the century, it would be difficult to argue that they wanted to restore Christmas past wholeheartedly. In 1845, one commentator for the *London Journal* referred to the 'half-lament that Christmas *now* is not quite as it used to be'.[4] Though some were concerned about a deviation from what they perceived as time-honoured customs and traditions, others, in line with the nineteenth-century preoccupation with social and cultural advancement, wanted to 'update' these traditions to meet current needs.

Befitting the progressive spirit of the age, many old customs were being set aside due to their incompatibility with the demands of the changing present. One writer, in 1839,

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[1] "Christmas in the Olden Time," *Chambers's Journal* 417 (December 27, 1851): 413.
[2] Golby and Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas*, 42.
[3] Ibid., 36.
[4] "The Christmas Season," *London Journal* 2, no. 44 (December 27, 1845): 247.

faced up to what he felt was a necessary alteration in the celebration of Christmas: 'I regret it, but it is the necessary consequence of an altered state of society and a denser population. The same customs and habits, which are graceful and beneficial among a strictly rural population, are absurd and injurious in towns and cities'.[5] As noted in the Introduction, it was felt that the unrestrained traditions of old-fashioned communal celebrations and the encouragement of "misrule" should not be preserved in towns and cities where 'yule logs were unsuitable for modern fire-places'.[6] Eager to praise the more refined celebrations that had begun to take place at Christmas, the *Illustrated London News* noted in 1842 that many members of the city had attended 'exhibitions of national diversion and instruction,' where:

> they demeaned themselves in a manner less boisterous, roaring, and tinged with meaningless and brutal intemption, than on any previous occasion for many years. The indication was perhaps a trifling one, but it harbingers a civilizing spirit, and heralds in the advent of improving times.[7]

The tensions between the different approaches to Christmas past in a self-defined age of progress and transition will form the focus of this chapter. While a remarkable volume of writing preoccupied with revisiting a picturesque Christmas from the "olden time" was printed throughout the nineteenth century, many of these texts also display an intense self-consciousness about their position within the present. As they were turning back to examine or remember the festivities of past times, many writers also seem to imply that the past cannot be dwelt on for too long because man's duty was to the present. This was an attitude encouraged by Thomas Carlyle in 1829, as he announced, 'happy men are full of the present [...] the present is an important time; as all present time necessarily is'.[8]

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[5] "Old Father Christmas," *The London Saturday Journal* 2, no. 51 (December 21, 1839): 399.
[6] Golby and Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas*, 56.
[7] "London, Saturday, December 31," *Illustrated London News* 34 (December 31, 1842): 534.
[8] Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times" in *Critical Miscellaneous Essays* (New York: D. Appleton, 1864): 187-8.

References to Christmas past can be found in a large number of festive works. Perhaps most famously, the first of the three spirits to visit Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* is the Ghost of Christmas Past, who begins the work of reforming Dickens's protagonist by showing him 'the shadows of the things that have been' (57), compelling him to revisit scenes from his own past. Scrooge's reactions to these visions from his past alternate between joy and grief. At his old school Scrooge rejoices to see familiar faces, yet only a few lines later he begins to sob (57). Similarly, at Fezziwig's party he loses himself in the energy of the festivities, but afterwards when he is shown his former fiancée Belle enjoying a Christmas with her husband and children, he 'cannot bear it' (68). In the final scene from this stave, Dickens describes how Scrooge 'wrestled' with the Ghost's face, which now resembled 'fragments of all the faces it had shown him' (70), but despite his attempts to fight against it, the Ghost could not be defeated. This alternating relationship with the past, which is sometimes struggled against and at other times rejoiced in, reflects a tension that had already been emerging within much Christmas print preceding the publication of the *Carol*. Catherine Waters has noted that the *Carol* was a landmark in Christmas literature, because its focus was 'on the delineation of present social duties rather than on the evocation of nostalgia for a lost past. Its setting is the cottage rather than the manor house'.[9] Indeed, the shift away from the old manor house Christmas is something pioneered by the *Carol*. Prior to this, Washington Irving's Christmas chapters from *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* presented readers with a highly fictionalized version of Christmas 'in something of the old fashioned style' (168), and a similar Christmas is depicted in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, as the Pickwickians escape London to spend the holiday at Dingley Dell. Paul Davis has argued that, 'in the British imagination, Christmas was associated with the manor house, peasant revels, and

[9] Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 66.

baronial feasts'.[10] On closer examination, however, it soon becomes apparent that the fictive return to the manor houses of bygone Christmases in these texts is not achieved without an element of anxiety related to the pressures of the present, and the awareness that in many ways old local customs had now become incompatible with the changes of the modern world.

Alongside the fictional narratives of old country Christmases, there was another side of Christmas past that fascinated seasonal audiences. A concern with tracing and illuminating the origins of Christmas customs was a popular pursuit for many writers, particularly in the first half of the century. As early as 1830 one writer for *The Tatler* observed how 'the antiquities of Christmas, its origins, old customs, rustic usages, and mention by the poets, have been so abundantly traced in various publications of late years, that we should have nothing to say on the subject'.[11] In 1843 Francis Palmer similarly observed, 'we have abundant record of the manner in which Christmas was observed in earlier times',[12] and in 1858 comments continued to be made about the present 'zeal for antiquarian investigation'.[13] Buckley notes that a Victorian 'concern with origins, with the aetiology of things [...] carried over to the whole moral and intellectual life of the time',[14] and the origins of Christmas were no exception. While numerous periodicals throughout the century would dedicate a few pages to the cataloguing of Christmas customs and their origins, Thomas Kibble Hervey's *The Book of Christmas* was a large volume dedicated specifically to this purpose. The popularity of the text is demonstrated by its publication history: new editions were printed from 1836 at regular intervals until 1852, before emerging again in the 1880s.[15] Moore suggests that the repeated publication of Hervey's text throughout this period represents part of 'an early nineteenth-century swell in

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[10] Paul Davis, *The Life and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 13.
[11] "Christmas Day," *The Tatler*, 97 (December 25, 1830): 385.
[12] Francis Palmer, "Christmas Day," *Bentley's Miscellany* 14 (July 1843): 619.
[13] "Life in Old Ireland," *The University Magazine* 52, no. 310 (October 1858): 439.
[14] Buckley, The Triumph of Time, 20.
[15] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 18.

Christmas folklore,' which also 'attest[s] to the publishers' faith in consumers' desire for more Christmas education'.[16] There is much evidence to suggest that a desire for more Christmas education went hand in hand with a renewed interest in Christmas folklore during the early nineteenth century. The third chapter of this thesis will examine how the period also witnessed a growing national interest in collecting folk and fairy tales, and a similar impulse to gather and preserve old Christmas customs in print can be discerned in much nonfiction writing regarding the festival's history. In *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (2008), Jason Harris traces the emergence of folklore as a distinct discipline in the Victorian period, noting that 'the Victorian Era experienced an intensification of interest in folk narratives that was part of a longer cycle of interest in folklore,' an interest that manifested itself primarily through the collection and rewriting of oral narratives.[17] Harris reveals that folklorists were frequently engaged in gathering legends from the rural working class, and goes on to argue that 'the rural network of folklore was a vibrant force that manifested a distinctive alternative voice to the emerging modernism of industrial progress and urbanization'.[18] This association between folklore and a rural, pre-industrial Britain links into the frequent identification made between Christmas and a rural, pre-industrial past. With its quaint local traditions and ancient customs, Christmas itself became a kind of folkloric repository for nineteenth-century antiquarians.

We see the overlap between Christmas and the nineteenth-century interest in folklore through the urgent collection of Christmas carols in the 1820s, which was part a wider preoccupation with collecting and preserving fragments of local traditions. Local carols were collected and recorded by figures including William Hone and William

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[16] Ibid., 11.
[17] Jason Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 38.
[18] Ibid., 10-15.

Sandys,[19] and from the 1840s collected carols were often combined with, or sometimes labelled as, Christmas poetry, and published in volumes that traced the history of a lyrical Christmas, frequently up to the present day. Thomas Wright's *Specimens of Old Christmas Carols* (1841), Henry Vizetelly's *Christmas with the Poets* (1851) and Joshua Sylvester's *A Garland of Christmas Carols* (1861) exemplify the ongoing popularity of this genre. In Sylvester's compendium some of the collected carols are still familiar to us today, including 'I Saw Three Ships,' 'God rest you Merry Gentlemen,' 'Joy to the World,' 'Hark! the herald Angels sing,' 'Whilst Shepherds watch'd,' and 'The Holly and the Ivy.' However, the majority of the carols Sylvester records are now largely unrecognisable. Carols in praise of the Boar's Head, with titles such as 'The Boar's Head in Hand bring I' and 'The Boar is dead,' feature alongside so-called 'numeral carols' including 'Man's Duty; or Meditation for the Twelve Hours of the Day' and other, now unfamiliar, narrative carols such as 'The Carnal and the Crane.'

Some of the reasons why these collections enjoyed such popularity are explained by folklore scholars who draw attention to the collective power of folk imagination in the nineteenth century, which 'often transcended, ignored, or dissolved ideological borders'.[20] The folk imagination seemed to have an appeal as an 'alternative culture' apart from the rationality of everyday life, a culture which 'persisted into the nineteenth century, even in urban districts, which so many folklorists were certain would lose all their traditions to industrial intrusions'.[21] Jennifer Schacker and Moore have also argued that the nineteenth century was dominated by a 'quest for national identity',[22] and go on to explain that many Victorians felt that their national identity could be discovered by looking back into the past and collecting unique specimens of English folklore, exemplified in this instance by festive carols and poems. Alongside the quest for national identity, an overarching desire to

[19] William Hone's *The Every-Day Book* (1825), and William Sandys *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern* (1822 and 1833).
[20] Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic*, 14-5.
[21] Ibid., 8.
[22] Jennifer Schacker, *National Dreams* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 2.

discover 'a formative history' of Christmas which might provide a sense of coherence and meaning in the present,[23] is certainly evident in these catalogues of old Christmas. As with the fictive accounts of Christmas however, we see that even these nonfiction works struggle to reconcile the past they attempt to uncover with the unstable present from where they navigate history. Hervey admits as much in his *Book of Christmas* when he writes about the sensations associated with the New Year moment, a point when the individual is prompted to contemplate the past and present in a similar way. He confesses that at this temporal juncture 'we are in a state of divided feelings',[24] and as he goes on to explain why he thinks they are in this state, his language conveys a hesitant sense of duty to the present and future:

> occasionally [...] there will come a thought across us, in these hours, which *cannot* be made to harmonize with the feelings we are seeking to encourage, - and has the unpleasing effect of discord. It is felt, at times, for instance, to be a sort of indecency that we should be looking out merrily for the new year, when the old one is perishing by our side. (202)

Hervey reveals that engaging in the present moment and looking onward to the future are 'the feelings we are seeking to encourage,' but admits to experiencing an unpleasing sense of 'discord' in these new year hours, apparently brought about by a struggle to reconcile this forward focus with an inescapable awareness of the past. In his opinion there is 'a sort of indecency' at neglecting the past and concentrating only on the future. The temporal moment of the new year vividly pulls the individual in two apparently conflicting directions, making him feel uncertain about where his loyalties lie. Hervey describes this inability to 'harmonize' the impulse to look back with a commitment to look forward as an 'oppressive sensation,' which produces silent inward meditation at the midnight hour when 'the glasses are full; - but so is the heart' (203).

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[23] Gilmour, *The Victorian Period*, 25.
[24] Hervey, *The Book of Christmas,* 201. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.

As noted earlier, the majority of Christmas print interested in the festival's historical past was published during the first half of the century. By the second half, when Christmas had passed through its moment of transition to become more securely re-established within Victorian society, old Christmas was sidelined and the tenuous relationship between past and present, which had previously dominated the market, became less distinct. In 1840 Leigh Hunt had been convinced of the 'Inexhaustibility of the Subject of Christmas,' asking readers: 'What? do they suppose that everything has been said that *can* be said, about any one Christmas thing?'[25] By 1868, however, it seemed that, for some at least, the subject of Christmas *had* been exhausted, as one writer for *Punch* complained 'everything has been said about Christmas and New Year that can be said, from the meaning of the word Yule [to] the antiquity of plum-pudding'.[26] In the 1870s, instead of looking back to an old-fashioned Christmas, writers were radically calling for 'a new-fashioned – very new fashioned Christmas'[27] and simply stating: 'we cannot [...] in the present, bring back the olden times'.[28] Similarly, the earlier preoccupation with tracing the origins of Christmas customs became a subject for satire. One *Punch* article entitled '"Crackers" for Christmas' (1859) gently mocked the sober intellectualism of the genre, inventing a set of comic origins for Christmas customs which had been frequently examined in texts such as Hervey's. Adopting the same informative tone, the writer playfully reveals: 'it is not generally known that Christmas Trees were first discovered growing in the Sandwich Islands, and that the fruit they bear consists of sliced roast beef and bread-and-butter, enveloping a bit of hot plum-pudding-stone as kernel'.[29] *Punch*'s parodies clearly reveal how widespread this approach to Christmas past had been in the festive market of previous years.

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[25] Leigh Hunt, "Inexhaustibility of the Subject of Christmas" in *The Seer; or, Common-Places Refreshed* (London: Edward Moxon, 1840), 78.
[26] "Twelfth Night Thoughts (Desultory)," *Punch* 54 (January 18, 1868): 29.
[27] "An Old Fashioned Christmas," *Fun* 14 (December 16, 1871): 259.
[28] "Merry Christmas – Past and Present," *Bow Bells* 23, no. 593 (December 8, 1875): 540.
[29] "'Crackers' for Christmas," *Punch* 37 (December 31, 1859): 264.

Alongside the visualisation of a national past, remembering old Christmases from one's own lifetime was also incorporated into much seasonal literature. In the *Carol* for instance, Scrooge is not reformed by being introduced to the origins of Christmas customs or seeing Christmas scenes from a remote past; instead, his transformation begins when he revisits and remembers his own past Christmases. Indeed, the nineteenth century was the age of the English autobiography.[30] Intellectual figures including John Stuart Mill, John Ruskin and Harriet Martineau published autobiographies, while numerous fictional works from the period had autobiographical overtones, such as Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849-50) and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853). In a similar way, many Christmas texts focus on personal reflection and the consciousness of change within one's own lifetime. Frequently the celebration of Christmas seems to prompt memory, and lead the writer back to a personal past where their own Christmases are revisited. The reason for this connection between Christmas and memory can be understood through the work of Charles Taylor, who refers to the 'nodal points' of human culture, which draw attention to 'a sense both of the continuing background and changing forms' of life.[31] Christmas is one of these nodal points which, through its annual recurrence, naturally leads individuals to think about continuity and change through time. This is particularly relevant in a nineteenth-century context where, as many scholars have already documented, an awareness of great change and lost continuity were two realities that dominated contemporary thought. As large numbers of people moved from the countryside to booming industrial towns and cities, the great shifts in working patterns, living conditions and the pace of urban life simultaneously created an overarching sense of estrangement from the previous, rural way of life. Christmas, however, provided a moment of familiarity, a brief opportunity to regain a semblance of continuity amidst these great social and cultural changes. The publication of *A Christmas Carol* appears to mark the

[30] Buckley, *The Triumph of Time*, 97.
[31] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 767.

point at which the articulation of Christmas memories and the personal past gained momentum in seasonal literature. When the Ghost of Christmas Past introduces itself to Scrooge, Scrooge enquires if the past it represents is Christmas's "Long Past?" to which the spirit replies "No. Your past" (55). Dickens critics, such as Malcolm Andrews, explain that this spirit represents memory, and indeed personal memory would come to inspire a number of Dickens's later Christmas writings from this period including *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848), where the protagonist is visited by a spectre who has the power to cancel out his memories; 'A Christmas Tree,' in which Dickens reminisces on Christmases from his own childhood; and 'What Christmas is as we Grow Older' (1851), an essay which explores Christmas, personal memory and change over time. Compared with the texts that either fictionalize or catalogue the origins of a distant national past, the literature concerned with Christmas and the personal past is similarly torn between progress and nostalgia. While memory could return the individual to a bright, picturesque past, in many texts the memories of past Christmases are troubling as they draw attention to the passing of time and, encapsulated within this, change and irretrievability. Often these texts reflect on the smallness of man within a vast cosmos of perpetual time. This is perhaps best seen in Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam* where the poet refers to 'the clock,' which 'Beats out the little lives of men' (2: 7-8). In this text, Christmas acts as a nodal point where continuity and change are brought to the foreground of the poet's mind, amid the strain between the personal and the cosmic, and growth and change, visible in the wider context of the work.

In his study of the representation of the past in Victorian literature, Raymond Chapman suggests that 'opposed attitudes to the past were a part of the diverse and often mixed feelings with which the Victorians regarded their own time' which he terms 'An Age of Uncertainty'.[32] The following chapter will explore the diverse and mixed feelings

[32] Raymond Chapman, *The Sense of the Past in Victorian Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 1.

towards Christmas past occupying the thoughts of many writers at this time. In the first section I will look at the impulse to historicize Christmas, demonstrated by the publication of nonfiction volumes concerned with cataloguing the origins of old Christmas carols and customs. While I will refer to a number of texts, this section will focus on Hervey's *Book of Christmas*, as the author spends a vast amount of time debating the relevance of the past for the present age, and at certain points even seems reluctant to leave the present. Moving on from the cataloguing of old Christmas to the fictionalizing of old Christmas, the second section will examine the relationship between history and fiction in Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* and Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*. After considering some of the similarities and differences between these authors' Christmas narratives, my analysis will focus on Irving's text in order to show how the narrator frequently questions the motives behind his host's revival of an old-fashioned Christmas, and ultimately challenges his festive reconstruction of the past by asking how it can be used to improve the present. The final section of this chapter will consider Christmas and the personal past in Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. By looking at the work as a whole, I will uncover the overarching sense of strain expressed by the poet's attitude toward the past, the present, progress and memory. The section will then look in detail at the three Christmas poems of *In Memoriam*, revealing how subtle motifs of progress, change, continuity and discontinuity, are brought into focus at the festive moment.

Callow has argued that nostalgia for a vanished age was an essential part of the Victorian Christmas,[33] and while this may be true to some extent, the nineteenth-century approach to Christmas past is far more complex than merely a desire for a lost, simpler time. Though many writers looked back to earlier Christmases in order to recreate scenes from a 'vanished age,' they were unable to relinquish the hold of the present. An inescapable self-consciousness of the writers' own age of progress lingers in many of these

[33] Callow, *Dickens' Christmas*, 21.

works, and the past quickly becomes a means though which an awareness of the present is conversely heightened. Whether old Christmas was being used to trace a national history, create picturesque fictions or function as a point from where an individual could remember their own personal past, it is rarely stable and frequently recognises its own fallibility. To see this complex relationship between the past and the present more clearly, I will refer to Svetlana Boym's distinction between 'restorative' nostalgia and 'reflective' nostalgia. According to Boym, restorative nostalgia attempts to transhistorically reconstruct the past, while reflective nostalgia 'dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity'.[34] A restorative approach to old Christmas can be briefly glimpsed in a number of these texts; however, it becomes clear that nineteenth-century writers were far more reflective in their representations of Christmas past. Reflective nostalgia, as Boym explains, is 'more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irretrievability of the past and human finitude. *Re-flection* suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis. The focus here is not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation of history and passage of time'.[35] In this passage, Boym addresses one of the central reasons why many nineteenth-century writers were more reflective than restorative in the way they dealt with Christmas past: they were unwilling to sacrifice the 'new flexibility' progress offered, and feared that a return to old customs, which were now incompatible with the times, would lead to the 'reestablishment of stasis,' or perhaps a Carlylean state of 'fatal paralysis'.[36] As this study will attempt to demonstrate, the nineteenth-century attitude towards old Christmas was more of a meditation on history and the passage of time, rather than an attempt to revive or reconstruct old, outmoded customs.

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[34] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xviii.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 15.

1.1 Cataloguing Old Christmas

In her study of antiquarians and historians in Victorian England, Philippa Levine suggests that the nineteenth-century fascination with the past in print was 'peculiarly preoccupied with posterity' and moreover, driven by the 'urge to preserve and to pass on a heritage'.[37] A similar interest in history has been noted by a number of scholars including Peter Allan Dale, who claims that the study of the past had taken a 'vigorous hold on the national mind' by the late 1820s.[38] Intersecting with this widespread interest in English history, Moore has also suggested that a 'particular historicizing of Christmas' was influencing the festive print market at the same time.[39] Indeed, the amount of attention given to historical Christmas customs during the first half of the century is astounding: following Hone's lead, collections of old Christmas carols and poems were compiled by Thomas Wright, Henry Vizetelly and Joshua Sylvester. Furthermore, articles that historicized Christmas by investigating the origins of old traditions were published year after year in a vast number of periodicals. Reading material dedicated to 'Ancient Customs' (1823) 'Christmas Customs' (1826), and seasonal 'Manners and Customs' (1840) appeared in *The Mirror monthly magazine*, and 1843 an article entitled 'Christmas Day' in *Bentley's Miscellany* explained, among the origins of numerous other customs, the winter solstice roots of Christmas and the meaning of the word 'yule.' A fascination with the history of Christmas can also be seen in *Chambers's Journal*, where an article examining 'Christmas in the Olden Time' was printed in both 1848 and 1851. Even into the 1870s the interest in Christmas customs and their origins remained a source of great interest, as winter editions of *Chambers's Journal* continued to provide readers with accounts of 'Christmas Customs in Ye Olden Time' (1870) and 'Christmas – Its Customs and Associations' (1876).

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[37] Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4.
[38] Peter Allan Dale, *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 2.
[39] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 12.

Referring to the Victorian interest in history, critics such as Peter Bowler have asked 'why should an age of progress have been fascinated by the past?'[40] While the multitude of texts preoccupied with old Christmas and the preservation of ancient customs in print attest to the popularity of this genre, they also raise questions as to why Christmas past was a source of such fascination to an innovative society occupied with progress and improvement. A number of scholars have argued that the turbulent upheaval associated with change was precisely the reason why many Victorians imaginatively regressed into a past that appeared simpler and more stable: as David Lowenthal writes, they sought refuge in a 'pre-industrial rustic calm'.[41] Buckley refers to a similar need to 'find beyond the flux of things some token of stability',[42] and Chapman also attests to the Victorian 'regret [...] for the passing of a quieter, slower way of life',[43] in the midst of an impersonal, industrial present.[44] From this angle it is easy to see how a polarity might have emerged, as Catherine Arscott notes, 'between a corrupt and troubling present and a mythical, reassuring past'.[45] While these explanations are valid and exemplified in much Christmas print, the Victorian fascination with the past simultaneously refused to sacrifice its awareness of the present. Instead, a tension between the past and present exists in many festive works from this period, where authors debate the value and purpose of looking back into a historical past. One poem, written in 1847 by Charles S. Middleton, and published in *The Mirror*, illustrates this strain very well. The opening lines admit that the past has disappeared: it is 'all shadow; oh where is it gone?' yet the present is equally perplexing: 'the present, what is it?'[46] Though Middleton shows no aversion to the past, other writers saw the past as a

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[40] Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 2.
[41] David Lowenthal, "Nostalgia tells it like it wasn't" in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, eds., Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 21.
[42] Buckley, *The Triumph of Time*, viii.
[43] Chapman, *The Sense of the Past*, 153.
[44] Ibid., 13.
[45] Catherine Arscott, "Victorian Development and Images of the Past" in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, eds., Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 47.
[46] Charles S. Middleton, "The Past, The Present, and The Future," *The Mirror monthly magazine* 19, no. 9 (April 1847): 256-257.

distraction and attempted to divert their readers away from it. As early as 1835, Sharon Turner was instructing readers of the *Saturday Magazine* that retrospect 'is pleasing, but it offers no just grounds for exultations. We are superior'.[47] In the same way, two poems from *Household Words* entitled 'Now' (1853) and 'The Present' (1855) employed similar techniques to convince readers that they should be faithful to their own age. The writer of 'Now' argues that the past is 'nothing / In the face of the stern today.' Regression will only 'detain' the individual, and he should not 'look back, save to learn the lesson / Of a nobler strife to-day'.[48] Similarly, the writer of 'The Present' insists: 'Do not crouch to-day, and worship / The old Past, whose life is fled.' The past is 'cold and dead,' while 'the Present reigns our monarch' to be honoured 'for she is mighty!'[49]

In line with this enthusiasm for the present, it is also interesting to note that the first issue of *Punch* in 1841 stated: '*Punch* [...] makes the most of the present, regardless of the past',[50] exemplifying that the urge to look back was being reacted against at the same time that it was being celebrated by others. John Stuart Mill noticed the beginnings of this tension in 1831, when he observed, 'mankind are then divided, into those who are still what they were, and those who have changed: into the men of the present age, and the men of the past'.[51] It becomes clear that many nineteenth-century writers approached Christmas with a similar double consciousness of temporality. Altick has already investigated this idea, explaining how novelists 'produced a stereoscopic effect, that of two time-planes: "then" in the foreground, "now" in the background, or vice versa. Past and present could be seen simultaneously and compared for whatever purpose the novelist had in mind'.[52] Though this section of my study will not deal with novels or novelists, the fluctuating

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[47] Sharon Turner, "The Past and the Present," *The Saturday Magazine* 6, no. 161 (January 3, 1835): 7.
[48] "Now," *Household Words* 8, no. 192 (November 22, 1853): 302.
[49] "The Present," *Household Words* 12, no. 290 (October 13, 1855): 252.
[50] "The Moral of Punch," *Punch* 1 (July 17, 1841), 1.
[51] Mill, "The Spirit of the Age," 51.
[52] Richard Altick, *The Presence of the Present* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 163.

time-planes of "then" and "now" can also be clearly detected in nonfiction catalogues of old Christmas.

In 1823, William Hone compiled a collection of 'Christmas Carols now Annually Printed' in an attempt to preserve the vestiges of the festive custom of carol singing which, he feared, was under the threat of extinction. Introducing this section of his work, Hone reveals that many people had begun to speak of carols as 'not belonging to this century,' and writes that no one had attempted to collect these 'fugitives' which he believed would 'at no distant period become obsolete'.[53] Hone's remarks indicate how modern times had already affected these specimens of Christmas past; they were no longer said to belong to the present time, and under the march of progress it was believed that they would soon become completely redundant. In his introduction, Hone writes: 'this Collection I have had little opportunity of increasing except when in the country I have heard an old woman singing an old Carol, and brought back the Carol in my pocket with less chance of its escape, than a tune in my head'.[54] The process he describes sheds light on the nineteenth-century interest in collecting and cataloguing old Christmas customs. There was a belief that if the material related to bygone Christmas traditions could be put into writing, printed and published it would not be able to 'escape' the social consciousness so easily. Thus, printed volumes recording old customs and traditions could act as tangible mementos of Christmas past, preventing the irrevocable loss of an old English festival which, it then seemed, would otherwise fade away without trace. Yet it is also possible that by documenting these old traditions, the collectors were actually contributing to their historicization. Other folklore collectors from the period such as Thomas Crofton Croker and William Wilde, acknowledged that the very act of collecting oral texts would hasten their destruction. As Wilde wrote in his preface to *Irish Popular Superstitions* (1852), 'these legendary tales and Popular Superstitions have now become the history of the past –

[53] William Hone, *Ancient Mysteries Described* (London: William Hone, 1823), 97.
[54] Ibid., 99.

[...] Will their recital revive their practice? No! Nothing contributes more to uproot superstitious rites and forms than to print them; to make them known to the many instead of leaving them hidden among, and secretly practised by the few'.[55] On some level therefore, there is an implication that these old Christmas customs, collected and printed by antiquarians, were being designated as historical records for an age that would add 'new elements to the festival and [reinterpret] it in the light of their own preoccupations'.[56]

In many volumes which catalogue the history of Christmas, it is possible to see the influence of these early mentalities shaping the way the past was dealt with. Levine has pointed out that the 'radical alteration in perceptions of time and speed' during the Victorian period meant that 'history was to acquire powerful human appeal as the intellectual mechanism whereby time could be measured and evaluated'.[57] An intellectual approach to a measured and evaluated past can be seen in collections, like that of William Hone, which catalogue the festival's lyric history through poems and carols. A prime example of this is Henry Vizetelly's volume *Christmas With the Poets*, which uses the historical epochs of Christmas as textual markers to guide the reader through a collection of chronologically organised poems dating from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century. One reviewer acknowledged, 'a more fitting memorial of Christmas could not have been designed than this volume,' before going on to claim that Vizetelly's text 'binds the past with the present'.[58] Indeed, Vizetelly arranges the poems from the past in a way that was consistent with the Victorian fondness for ordering, measuring and categorizing time. He pays close attention to this in his work, arranging the poems and carols by date, and sometimes even subdividing them beyond this: for instance, under 'Christmas Carols from the Anglo-Norman Period to the Time of the Reformation,' the poems are further organised by genre, such as 'Boar's Head Carols' and 'Carols in Praise of Ale.' A

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[55] William Wilde, preface to *Irish Popular Superstitions* (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1852), vi.
[56] Golby and Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas*, 49.
[57] Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional*, 3.
[58] "Christmas with the Poets," *The Literary Gazette* 1772 (January 4, 1851): 17.

preoccupation with time is also apparent in Joshua Sylvester's later collection *A Garland of Christmas Carols*, as this writer organises and dates his work in a similar way, with the explicit intention of producing 'a delightful scene of order'.[59] The fascination with origins, interest in chronology, and tendency to date and organise history evident here, demonstrates a Victorian desire to bring order to Christmas past. The format of these catalogues provides a contrast to Thomas Carlyle's vision of history as an 'ever-living, ever-working Chaos of Being' that was both 'boundless' and 'unfathomable'.[60] Instead, a coherence is brought to the past in these works, and although this coherence was largely an artificial construct that grouped poems with similar content around a generally vague and unreliable time frame, it worked to reinforce the Victorian 'dream of order,' which A. Dwight Culler refers to as 'a partly historical, partly mythical vision'.[61]

Contemporary readers were aware of the artificiality associated with looking back at old Christmas customs through carefully structured volumes, but they still believed that 'they [had] a charm about them worth all that [was] artificial'.[62] Another reason why many nineteenth-century thinkers were so concerned with the idea of order is likely linked to its ability to generate sequences. By conscientiously ordering materials in a certain way, sequences would become visible, thus creating a sense of forward motion or, put more simply, a feeling of progression. Bowler claims that 'the idea of progress was imposed upon history to create the sense of order that the Victorians craved. In a very real sense they *invented* the past [...] within a conceptual scheme that satisfied the cultural demands of the age'.[63] The sense of progress then, emerges from an ordered vision of the past, and interestingly this way of approaching history was praised by contemporary reviewers of

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[59] Joshua Sylvester, *A Garland of Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1861), x.
[60] Thomas Carlyle, "On History," in *Critical Miscellaneous Essays*, 221.
[61] A. Dwight Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 154.
[62] V., "Christmas-Keeping," *The New Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 7 (January 1821): 614.
[63] Bowler, *The Invention of Progress*, 3.

these Christmas volumes. For example, referring to the structural organization of Vizetelly's *Christmas with the Poets*, a writer for *The Literary Gazette* commented:

> The selections have been judiciously made, each poem being in some degree typical of an epoch, and they thus afford an agreeable medium for tracing our progress from the rude boisterous hilarity of the Anglo-Norman period to the "nobler modes of life," and the "sweeter manners and purer laws" of the present time.[64]

Here we see that progress was not denied by the backward glance to Christmas past. Instead, editors thoughtfully organised their texts, highlighting how the festival had developed and changed for the better. As this reviewer notes, the ordering of the past provided an 'agreeable medium' through which contemporary readers could trace their own progress. This is also seen in the final division of Vizetelly's volume, 'Christmas Verses of the Nineteenth Century,' where he remarks how 'the picturesque ceremonies and rude festivities that distinguished the Christmas of bygone times have passed away, and, for ourselves, we can regard the loss of them without regret. We are too thankful to have lighted upon a more civilized age'.[65] This final section of Vizetelly's collection, where the reader is brought to the present moment, is almost like a crescendo at which he pauses to celebrate the progress that has been made since the Anglo-Norman times. In fact Vizetelly's volume itself became a physical symbol of progress, as the first edition was used to represent illustrating and printing techniques at the Great Exhibition of 1851.[66] The passing away of rude festivities, and the emergence of a 'more civilized age' are changes to be thankful for in this section of Vizetelly's work. Ironically, however, his admiration of the present and thankfulness that the past has departed is undermined by the content of some of the poems he includes in this section. An uncomfortable strain between the past and present is particularly evident in Thomas Miller's 'Christmas Comes But Once a

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[64] "Christmas with the Poets," *The Literary Gazette*, 17.
[65] Vizetelly, *Christmas with the Poets*, 142.
[66] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 122.

Year.' Here, the poet rejects the past by stating 'those old times are dead and gone,' but then struggles against his own words, admitting that the past continues to 'linger' around Christmas, when 'still around these good old times / We hang like friends full loth to part'.[67]

While these collections of poetry reveal a curiosity regarding the historical background of Christmas, Hervey's *Book of Christmas* is perhaps the most comprehensive nonfiction study of Christmas past to be published in the nineteenth century. Hervey's detailed catalogue of old Christmas customs gives the impression of being an antiquarian handbook of the festival, both joining and representing this period's preoccupation with the origins of Christmas past. As noted in my Introduction, *The Book of Christmas* was reprinted at numerous intervals during this period, and it is interesting to note that even though the volume is now unfamiliar to the majority of modern readers it was republished again by Wordsworth Editions in 2000.[68] While *The Book of Christmas* promises, in the author's preface, to provide 'a full, detailed, and connected history of this festival, its ceremonies and traditions' (v), we will see that in reality the text's treatment of the past is mitigated by an inescapable consciousness of the present, as Hervey frequently cautions the reader against regressing too far. Like the collections of poetry, Hervey's *Book of Christmas* is also a carefully structured history of Christmas past. In this text, the old customs of Christmas are organized according to the twelve days of the festival, and Hervey traces his Christmas history day-by-day, from Christmas Eve through to Saint Distaff's Day on January 7. In the introduction, Hervey might be referring to the value of arranging his work in this way when he writes: 'by the multiplied but regular system of recurrences thus obtained, order is made to arise' (7). Yet this phrase simultaneously implies a degree of artificiality, as Hervey admits that order is *made* to arise and there is a sense it has been imposed rather than being naturally present.

[67] Vizetelly, *Christmas with the Poets*, 152.
[68] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 156.

In Hervey's text, we see that the emphasis on Christmas past is likewise challenged by the voice of the present which emerges from the pages, creating a tension between the act of looking back and the ubiquity of progress. Contemporary reviewers praised the *Book of Christmas*, claiming that it was a 'very agreeable book on a very agreeable subject',[69] which 'ought to be – every English family's fire-side companion'.[70] Significantly however, one review from *The Mirror* praised Hervey, not for compiling a comprehensive history of Christmas, but for approaching the past in a way that was well balanced with the present times, remarking:

> Happily for his task, Mr. Hervey [...] does not propose to substitute the gas and lime light for that of Christmas candles, nor would he lengthen the shortest day by inflicting on his company a cut-and-dried lecture on the profit of a little knowledge, or the peril of ignorance. But he falls into the Christmas pleasure of cutting and carving from antiquity and setting the results in very attractive metal.[71]

This response to *The Book of Christmas* indicates that Hervey was not a proponent of restorative nostalgia, as the reviewer notes that the volume does 'not propose to substitute' present progress for a return to the past. Instead, these remarks indicate that Hervey presents a vision of a past that has been shaped to satisfy the social and cultural demands of the present. The writer recognises that Hervey cuts and carves 'from antiquity' and sets what remains from the past in 'very attractive metal'; a metaphor which infers that the selective and carefully constructed *Book of Christmas* produces an 'attractive' past rather than an accurate or realistic representation of it. In this way, *The Book of Christmas* becomes a product of the nineteenth-century impulse to use the past in order to enhance present values. Hervey's work is very much an exercise in Boym's reflective nostalgia, as he meditates on how Christmas past can enrich Christmas present. For a generation

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[69] "Review. – *Book of Christmas. – Clerical Guide*," *The Gentleman's Magazine* (February 1836): 184.
[70] "The Book of Christmas," *The Monthly Magazine* 21, no. 122 (February 1836): 183.
[71] "Manners and Customs," *The Mirror Monthly Magazine* 28, no. 811 (December, 1836): 421.

occupied with progress and development, participating in reflective rather than restorative nostalgia was the most productive way to approach Christmas's history and antiquity. Indeed, as Pierre Nora has observed, the 'knowledge of the past is less a question of our empirical grip on the past than on our apprehension of the past as we represent it through the lens of the present'.[72] And as we will see, it is primarily the lens of the present that determines and shapes Hervey's work.

The opening of *The Book of Christmas* forms an extended meditation on history and 'Time, abstractedly considered' (3), characteristic of Boym's notion of reflective nostalgia. In the first lines we encounter Hervey engaging with a series of perplexing prepositions: 'to give a language to time, for the preservation of its records, and the utterance of its lessons, has been amongst the occupations of man, from the day when first he found himself in its mysterious presence, down to these latter ages of the world' (2). The preservation of time past through the medium of language is at the heart of this genre, as Hone's earlier comments also imply. However, Hervey simultaneously shows a double-consciousness in his opening remarks, balancing the impulse to preserve the past against an awareness of time's passage and the present moment. All of his observations in this sentence ultimately emphasise the present, as the passage gradually leads the reader to consider 'these latter ages of the world.' The opening paragraph goes on to mourn earlier generations who 'left no monuments' for the present generation, and reprimands others who reared inscrutable 'crowded memorials' that 'no man can translate' (2). In these lines Hervey stresses the need to create ordered and comprehensive histories that will be able to benefit present and future societies. By looking into the future, he also seems to participate in the nineteenth-century tendency to merge 'backward and forward looks,' whereby Victorians 'imagined their own present one day becoming the object of the same sort of

[72] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1:xii.

scrutiny, fascination, and misinterpretation to which they subjected the past'.[73] A sense of instability can be detected in the intricacies of Hervey's introduction, where his desire for ordered histories and comprehensible monuments is set against an awareness that time has always 'defied the skill of man to map out its surface and write his memorials upon its impalpable bosom' (3). Here, Hervey seems overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task ahead of him. At one point he imagines two rivers being mapped: one is a 'material ocean' on a geographic map, the other a 'silent river' representing time, which is constantly in motion and difficult to pin down. The silent river, he writes, is measured by a 'crowd of imaginary latitudes and longitudes, intersecting each other at all points,' and he challenges the reader to 'ascertain, at any moment, by observation, his relative position on the great stream of time' (3). Yet the vision of this map is complex and unclear. The temporal longitudes and latitudes cross over and intersect with one another at all points, and even more confusingly they are 'imaginary' lines, intangible and abstract. Moreover, when the individual's position in time is eventually ascertained, it is upon an ever-moving, ever-changing and incomprehensibly vast 'stream of time' (3).

These comments are most likely best seen as a response to the groundbreaking discoveries of 'deep time' occupying the minds of many writers during this period. Deep time revealed a natural history so vast that it was beyond the comprehension of many early Victorians. Not only is Hervey's metaphor of time's 'silent river' complex and vague, like the newly emerging theories of deep time, it renders the individual powerless upon its obscure surface and disorientated amid its changing currents. As geologist Charles Lyell had written in 1827, 'all discoveries which extend indefinitely the bounds of time must cause the generations of man to shrink into insignificance'.[74] Despite this uneasy reflection

[73] Kelly J. Mays, "Looking Backward, Looking Forward: The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror of Future History," *Victorian Studies* 53, no. 3 (2011): 446-7.
[74] Charles Lyell, "Memoir on the Geology of Central France; including the Volcanic Formations of Auvergne, the Velay, and the Vivarais, with a Volume of Maps and Plates," *Quarterly Review* 32, no. 72 (October 1827): 474.

on time and history, Hervey admits that looking back to the past is something that appeals to man. Towards the end of the introduction, he claims:

> There is something in the mind of man which attaches him to ancient superstitions, even for the sake of their antiquity, - and endears to him old traditions, even because they are old. We cannot readily shake off our reverence for that which our fathers have reverenced so long, even when the causes in which that reverence originated are not very obvious or not very satisfactory. (13)

Hervey's attraction to Christmas past seems to be justified by a deep reverence for antiquity that even surpasses his rationalist rejection of its superstitious basis. He sees the past as something that man is naturally attached to, but then instantly moves away from this digression by advising his readers that it is a duty of the present age to preserve the records of vanishing observances 'ere it be too late' (13). If man attends to this duty, Hervey claims, he 'will do good and acceptable service, in his generation' (13). This alternating approach to time past leads both the reader, and Hervey himself, to examine the nineteenth-century preoccupation with old Christmas customs more closely, and ask what value the past has for the advancement of the present age.

Nevertheless, at times Hervey seems disillusioned by the present. He complains that the 'utilitarian spirit of the day [...] would have no man enjoy, without being able to give a reason for the enjoyment which is in him' (10). This complaint leads him to commend the old-fashioned way of celebrating Christmas for its '*convivial* character' which Hervey sees as an 'antidote to the cold and selfish spirit which is tainting the life-blood and freezing the pulses of society' (10). The fear that the pulses of society would be frozen by a utilitarian society deprived of Christmas cheer is also mirrored in the personification of Dickens's unfeeling Scrooge, a character identified by 'the cold within him [which] froze his old features' (34), and even seen in *Hard Times* (1854) where the

severe schoolmaster Thomas Gradgrind believes 'facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else'.[75] In the same way that Dickens's *Carol* requires Scrooge to return to the past in order to achieve a new perspective on the present, Hervey seems to suggest that society would benefit from looking into the past instead of constantly looking at itself. Thomas Carlyle had expressed his dissatisfaction with the state of society in the 1830s, as he remarked that there was never 'so intensely a self-conscious society' as that of the present generation, where 'all things must be probed into, the whole working of a man's world be anatomically studied'.[76] This clinical vision of a society distracted by self-examination could perhaps find relief in Hervey's volume which, he claimed, would 'show a people in its undress, acting upon its impulses, and separated from the conventions and formalities of its every-day existence' (9). In theory, Hervey's approach intends to challenge the self-conscious affectation of the present generation; however, in reality, the text is often so preoccupied with its own mechanisms, purpose and position within contemporary society that it begins to take a self-conscious shape itself. In this way *The Book of Christmas*, to some degree, emerges as a product of the very social introspection that it seeks to reject.

An example of Hervey's self-consciousness can be seen in his cautious and overqualified approach to the past. Any remarks he makes regarding old-fashioned Christmas customs are expressed carefully and with a great deal of reservation, although it is, of course, possible that this could simply be a historian's natural caution. Nonetheless, many writers during this period were likewise observing that a complete restoration of Christmas past would be incompatible with the refinements of the present. Hervey states his interest in reflective nostalgia by agreeing that the indulgences of old Christmas are 'not to be maintained [...] far less re-established' (16) in the present day. A great deal of time is spent educating the reader in how the volume should be approached, while

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[75] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (London: Penguin, 2003), 9.
[76] Thomas Carlyle, "Characteristics," in *Critical Miscellaneous Essays* (New York: D. Appleton, 1864), 302.

reminding them of their duty to their own age. This is largely achieved by stressing that the past is now incompatible with modern advances. Hervey writes that the 'fooleries' of old Christmas 'could not be gravely proposed as worthy amusements for a nation of philosophers' (30) and comments that 'former pranks would be very unbecoming' in an advancing age which, perhaps ironically, '"knows so much as it does"' (30). Instead, he desires to 'furnish [readers] with a programme of some of the more important ceremonies observed by our hearty ancestors' without distracting them from their duty to progress, and without wishing to set many of these now incompatible traditions 'on their legs again' (16). Though Hervey looks to the past in order to find meaning in the present, he defends his interest in history by reassuring readers that the old customs he will trace are 'without [...] force enough to act as drags on the progress of society towards improvement' (9). From the very beginning of *The Book of Christmas* Hervey hopes that something can be 'saved from the wrecks of the past for the service of the present' (8), and later shows concern that if we concentrate too much on the past, 'the present becomes, hour after hour, more and more of a void' (113). The reason behind his apprehension is glimpsed as Hervey acknowledges that the past cannot be fully trusted. As seen earlier in his introduction, Hervey seems to be aware that looking back to the past is obscured by uncertainty. He recognises, 'it is only in these latter ages of the world, that a measurement [of time] has been attained' (6), and considers, 'had the same machinery existed from the commencement of time (with the art of printing to preserve its results), - the history of the past might be perused with its discrepancies reconciled, and many of its blanks supplied' (7). The discrepancies and blanks of the past imply that a full and unreserved history of Christmas is unattainable; incidentally, this undermines the text's opening pledge to provide 'a full, detailed, and connected history of this festival' (v). As we can see, a sense of uncertainty and instability permeates *The Book of Christmas*. On the surface, its opening claim to be a 'history of this festival' which would make an 'agreeable literary gift' (v)

seems benign and cheerful, however its content is apprehensive, unsettled and constantly occupied with the question of how the past can be approached by a self-conscious, and equally uncertain present.

Clearly, Hervey spends as much time discussing the present as he does the past in *The Book of Christmas*. Throughout the first half of the work we see that he is reluctant to leave his own age, a clear indication that this work is engaging in a form of reflective, rather than restorative, nostalgia. At one point he jokes: 'our readers need scarcely to be told that it must be a man of a very strong mind [...] who should love to make a jack-pudding of himself, in these days, - when all his fellows are walking about the world, with telescopes in their hands and quadrants in their pockets' (30). In this light-hearted passage Hervey explicitly states that regressing to the past in an age of advancement would not only be incompatible with the present, it would be ridiculous. Instead, he attempts to create a balanced approach to the past, permitting his readers to briefly visit a few carefully constructed images of old Christmas. The imagery of Christmas past is of great significance in this text, which is accompanied by a series of full-page illustrations by Robert Seymour. The lively illustrations foster a very different sense of the book if they are taken alone, as Hervey's philosophical ponderings are nowhere to be found in Seymour's vibrant, and often comic, artistry. Moore has likewise claimed that the illustrations take centre stage in *The Book of Christmas*, which she believes 'consigned [Hervey's] text to a subservient position'.[77] Furthermore, she remarks that 'the dialogue between the two genres, text and image, pulls Christmas in two different directions: the past and the present,' as Seymour illustrates in the Regency tradition while 'Hervey writes like a Victorian'.[78] This distinction can be seen if we compare Seymour's illustration of 'Country Carol Singers' (Figure 4) against his depiction of 'London Carol Singers' (Figure 5).

[77] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 12-3.
[78] Ibid., 14.



Figure 4. 'Country Carol Singers' illustrated by Robert Seymour for *The Book of Christmas* (1836)



Figure 5. 'London Carol Singers' illustrated by Robert Seymour for *The Book of Christmas* (1836)

The country singers represent an idealised vision of Christmas past. They are well-dressed men and women singing in a quaint village scene, surrounded by snow-covered foliage with a church in the background. In stark contrast, the London carol singers are a dirty and dishevelled group including a baby and a small boy, who sing with contorted faces and gaping mouths as they hold onto drooping carol sheets. Likewise, Seymour's illustrations of the 'Christmas Market' (Figure 6), and domestic Christmas gatherings such as the 'Christmas Dinner' (Figure 7) and 'Twelfth Night' (Figure 8), are depicted in a hearty old-

fashioned style that carelessly encourages readers to escape into the idyllic scenes, while Hervey's more reserved text instructs them to exercise caution.



Figure 6. 'Market - Christmas Eve' illustrated by Robert Seymour for *The Book of Christmas* (1836)



Figure 7. 'Christmas Dinner' illustrated by Robert Seymour for *The Book of Christmas* (1836)



Figure 8. 'Twelfth Night' illustrated by Robert Seymour for *The Book of Christmas* (1836)

Though there is a friction between past and present and text and image in *The Book of Christmas*, approaching the past in the same way that one would approach a picture is a strategy Hervey frequently promotes. Before he begins to describe the customs of Christmas past, he writes:

> to be very candid with our readers, we believe we may as well confess at the onset, - what will be very apparent to them before we have done, - that many of the Christmas observances [...] are to be recommended to their notice rather as a curious picture of ancient manners, than as being worthy of imitation by us who "are wiser in our generation" (29)

The proposition that the past should be approached as a 'curious picture' allows Hervey to persuade his readers that the past is harmless, so long as it stays within the borders of its own frame and context, and is monitored using the wisdom supplied by progress. In line with this approach, we see that Hervey is convinced that the past possesses the 'intrinsic beauty' of the 'picturesque' (13), which sets it apart from the detached 'pretensions and chilling pedantry of these sage and self-seeking days' (17). Another instance where Hervey

refers to the picturesque quality of the past, is when he sadly acknowledges that 'the picturesque effects of a society – its strong lights and deep shadows – are rapidly passing away; as the inequalities of surface from which they were protected are smoothed and polished down' (17). Here, Hervey refers to the way in which wild or unruly Christmas customs were being "tamed" to fit in with the spirit of the present age, a transformation that both Waters and Nissenbaum have already explored.[79] Yet it is interesting to see how Hervey frames the domestication of Christmas in terms of the contemporary attitude towards time. According to Hervey, the picturesque qualities of a society exist in its rugged edges and the inequalities of its surface, yet in contrast to this rustic image he observes how the modern age seems to be in the process of imposing a destructive uniformity on both time and society. The contemporary impulse to smooth and polish away the marks of time was also commented on by Carlyle, who feared that modern 'Pedantry' would neglect to consider the intricacies of the past, and would instead make 'Past Time [seem] all one infinite incredible grey void'[80] of flat uniformity.

Despite his concern that the picturesque past is being gradually eroded away, Hervey's central concern in this text is to ensure that his reader's interest in the past does not eclipse their duty to the present. Ironically, it becomes clear that the present is Hervey's main concern in this "historical" text. Though an investigation into Christmas past is at the basis of the work, Hervey never loses sight of his own time. Instead, he hopes that by 'mingling the customs of modern times with those of the past, in our pages – as, in many respects, we wish our readers would do, in practice' (173), *The Book of Christmas* would encourage reflective, rather than restorative, nostalgia. Understandably, Hervey's meditation on Christmas, time and change would have been compelling reading material for nineteenth-century readers perplexed by the significance of the past, in an advancing age of progress and uncertainty.

[79] Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, 71; Nissenbaum, *The Battle For Christmas*, 90-131.
[80] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 36.

1.2 Fictionalizing Old Christmas

Though the impulse to catalogue the historic origins of Christmas was popular during the first half of the century, a number of writers approached "old Christmas" from another angle. Authors such as Washington Irving and Charles Dickens fictionalized Christmas past, using its receding customs and the appealing imagery of old-fashioned hospitality as a framework for lively festive scenes which imaginatively restored the archaic celebrations. Irving's Christmas chapters from *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* are written from the perspective of his imaginary narrator Geoffrey Crayon, forming a section of his fictive travel notes as an American tourist in England. In these chapters, Crayon is invited to spend the Christmas holiday at Bracebridge Hall, a country house where the customs of an old English Christmas are meticulously upheld by the host, Squire Bracebridge. Similarly, Dickens's later account of Christmas in the *Pickwick Papers* follows the Pickwick group as they travel to the countryside to spend an old-fashioned Christmas at Dingley Dell. In her study of the American Christmas, Karal Ann Marling explains that some eccentric literary personalities in New York claimed that Dickens's representations of Christmas in both *Pickwick* and the *Carol* were not British, but strictly American. In 1900 Stephen Fiske, a New York literary man, claimed that Dickens had 'stolen the Christmas described in *A Christmas Carol* from American holiday rituals observed during his 1842 tour of the United States'.[81] Fiske had reached this conclusion by studying Dickens's biography and discovering, suspiciously, that the writer only began to celebrate Christmas in the years after his American tour. As Marling points out, the main problem with Fiske's theory is that Dickens's trip had not overlapped with Christmas and the writer had never even been in America during December. Nonetheless, Fiske insisted that Dickens 'must have heard of the annual holiday that we inherited from our Dutch

[81] Karal Ann Marling, *Merry Christmas: Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 122.

ancestors and developed and improved'.[82] Though Fiske's argument has since been discredited, later critics suggested, more plausibly, 'that Dickens might have borrowed his Christmas from Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book*'.[83] Indeed, the *Sketch Book* was hugely popular in both Britain and America, and was one of the first pieces of imaginative writing by an American to achieve critical acclaim from British reviewers. Furthermore, the five Christmas chapters of the *Sketch Book* were often published independently from the rest of the work as separate volumes to be bought as Christmas gifts, usually entitled *An Old-Fashioned Christmas Eve* or *Old Christmas*.[84]

From one angle therefore, it could be argued that the old Christmas described in *Pickwick* and 'borrowed' from Irving is, to some extent, mediated through an American author's romantic version of a kind of Christmas about which he knew little. In the summer of 1817 however, Irving had paid a visit to Sir Walter Scott, whose work he greatly admired. Irving biographer Andrew Burstein writes, 'we can only guess at what direction Scott gave him' during this visit,[85] but it is interesting to note that a few years earlier Scott had himself dedicated a section of his epic-poem *Marmion* (1808) to a fictive sixteenth-century Christmas celebration. Although the Christmas of Scott's poem is far more historically remote than the Christmas Irving would go on to describe, he does refer to a number of festive customs, such as the parading of the boar's head, the drinking of 'wassel,' the hanging of mistletoe, and the appearance of mummers with their 'traces of ancient mystery',[86] which Irving would also incorporate into his Christmas writing. In one part of the poem, Scott writes that there 'Still linger, in our northern clime / Some remnants of the good old time'.[87] These lingering traces of the 'good old time' are what interest Irving most of all as he writes about Christmas. As Marling suggests, Scott's

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 123.
[85] Andrew Burstein, *The Original Knickerbocker: the life of Washington Irving* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 117.
[86] Walter Scott, "Introduction to Canto Sixth," *Marmion*, l.75.
[87] Ibid., ll. 86-7.

Christmas introduced 'the requisite Christmas apparatus that Irving would later pretend to discover, alive and functioning, in Bracebridge Hall'.[88] Nissenbaum has also suggested that for American audiences struggling against increasing instances of Christmas misrule, Irving's representation of the past formed part of a broader expression of 'nostalgia for the "old customs" and "ancient usages" of New York, and particularly for the forgotten spirit of the old Christmas season'.[89] While eminent nineteenth-century New Yorkers, such as merchant and civic leader John Pintard, were inspired by Irving's Christmas and sought to 're-create an old-time' celebration, Nissenbaum acknowledges that the Bracebridge 'Christmas did not exactly offer a practical model for anyone who was tempted [...] to celebrate Christmas in this fashion'.[90]

Though they were writing fiction, in many ways Irving and Dickens were also participating in the historicizing of Christmas. Their narrative descriptions of characters drinking from the wassail bowl and bringing in the yule log, enlivened and fictively restored these old customs in an entertaining and accessible way. Ian Hesketh has suggested that 'the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a general blurring of the boundaries between the historical and the fictional',[91] and according to one reviewer in 1836, Irving's text 'contrived to dovetail' the 'interesting and amusing essays on the carol-customs of old Christmas' with fictional 'scenes and sketches, which led us from time present back to the "merry Christmas" time of other days'.[92] Interestingly, in Irving's text the framing storyline is set in the present, and the narrative depicts a rural family participating in a stylistic revival of festivities from an earlier time. This re-creation of Christmas in an old-fashioned style carries fictive overtones in itself. In one sense the visual appeal, warmth and innocence represented by the reconstruction of the past allows

[88] Marling, *Merry Christmas*, 125.
[89] Nissenbaum, *Battle for Christmas*, 56.
[90] Ibid., 61.
[91] Ian Hesketh, *The Science of History in Victorian Britain: Making the Past Speak* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), 2.
[92] "The Book of Christmas," *The Monthly Magazine* 21, no. 122 (February 1836): 182.

the reader to experience a form of escapism from the present, as they imaginatively access a time and space removed from immediate reality. In another way however, the awareness that these celebrations are temporary, fictional escapes from the present reality creates a self-consciousness which fragments the festive scenes. As a result, the author feels the need to subtly critique what he sees and ultimately return his readers, and characters, back to real time and the real world, where the past is something to be reflected upon rather than restored.

The ways in which these fictive narratives influenced contemporary attitudes towards the past can be seen if we briefly look at how they were translated into real-life Victorian Christmas celebrations. For their 1848 annual Christmas party, the Manchester Mechanics Institution recreated the atmosphere of an old-fashioned Christmas in the city's Free Trade Hall, and there is a sense that the Institute's 'reenactment' of old Christmas might have been influenced by Irving's similar version of nostalgia. One reporter for the *Times* claimed that their attempt to 'embody the rude, hearty, hospitable, and joyous revelry and pageantry of the olden Christmas time in England' was a success, and added 'to a very considerable extent the exhibition of last night was a reproduction of those former years.' Although this initially appears to be an exercise in Boym's restorative nostalgia, the Institute's recreation of Christmas past was not unqualified. In keeping with the Victorian commitment to the present, the writer also notes that 'in the details there were very many improvements introduced' before concluding that in 'elegance and finish' the celebration 'far exceeded those of any former occasion'.[93] By introducing 'improvements,' elegance, and finish to the old-fashioned celebration, the Mechanics Institution also fictionalized history. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs argues that through the act of imaginatively re-enacting the past, the present generation becomes more

[93] "Revival of Old Christmas Gambols," *The Times*, January 11, 1849.

conscious of itself and the reality that it is constructing its own past.[94] In the report on the Mancunian's new-fashioning of old Christmas, there is an awareness that the past that is being re-enacted is also being reconstructed to fit in with the demands of the present generation which, as Halbwachs notes, 'represents the past to itself in different ways: it modifies its conventions'.[95] The fictional reconstruction of history is something we see emerging in these texts. While they offered some degree of escapism and amusement for many nineteenth-century readers, ultimately the writers emerge from their old-fashioned festivities in order to return to reality and, as we will see in Irving's case, question how the past can be used to improve the present.

Irving refers to the refashioning of history in an earlier chapter of the *Sketch Book* entitled 'The Art of Bookmaking,' where he speaks of 'his own penchant for picking apart old-stories and breathing new life into them'.[96] In this essay the narrator visits the British Museum where he sees authors consulting 'sequestered pools of obsolete literature [...] wherewith to swell their own scanty rills of thought' (63). Reflecting on this process, he considers the relationship between modern literature and old texts which:

> undergo a kind of metempsychosis and spring up under new forms. What was formerly a ponderous history, revives in the shape of a romance – an old legend changes into a modern play, and a sober philosophical treatise, furnishes the body for a whole series of bouncing and sparkling essays. (64-5)

This is particularly relevant to the subsequent depiction of Christmas in the *Sketch Book*, as Burstein explains that while the author was in the British Museum he had also copied down a poem from a Christmas pamphlet dated 1652.[97] Likewise, Marling affirms that Irving had done a great deal of research on his subject, and 'his notebooks are peppered

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[94] Lewis A. Coser, "Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1877-1945," in *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 24.
[95] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 173.
[96] Burstein, *The Original Knickerbocker*, 136.
[97] Ibid., 141.

with extracts from old documents on Christmas'.[98] If these old pamphlets and documents did inspire Irving to write the Christmas chapters of the *Sketch Book*, then he too was participating in the process of using the past, through the form of old literature, to create new narratives that would appeal to his contemporary audience. Though fictional narratives of old Christmas were popular throughout the century, like Hervey's *Book of Christmas*, these texts often struggle to reconcile the past with the present, and an overarching tension between the two can be discerned. Chapman suggests that the popularity of historical fiction 'often lies in its romantic distancing from the present [...] the past is not quite real; it offers a blank screen for the projection of anxieties and longings without relating them to the cold light of immediacy'.[99] From this angle, the past provides refuge for the reader, who reads the historical narratives knowing that they are 'not quite real,' but still manages to find solace through the fact that they are briefly sheltered from the 'cold light of immediacy.'

These observations imply that there is a friction between the real and the imaginary in historical fiction, a friction that can also be found in narratives of old Christmas. While a number of critics, including Fred Guida, Harry Stone and Tom Killick[100] have argued that Dickens's Christmas chapter in *Pickwick* owes a great deal to Irving's earlier narrative of the Bracebridge Christmas, when the two are compared more closely a number of significant differences become apparent. By 1843, Dickens's *Carol* would celebrate a modern Christmas in London, but in *Pickwick*, David Bevington claims, 'past and present are blended' and Dickens instructs his readers 'how to celebrate Christmas in the old-fashioned way'.[101] Indeed, Dickens's text has a much greater sense of immediacy about it

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[98] Marling, *Merry Christmas*, 125.
[99] Chapman, *The Sense of the Past*, 11.
[100] Guida, *A Christmas Carol and its Adaptations* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 19; Harry Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 1979), 78; Killick, *British Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 158.
[101] David M. Bevington, "Seasonal Relevance in *The Pickwick Papers*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16, no. 3 (December 1961): 226.

than Irving's narrative. Juliet McMaster identifies the world of *Pickwick* as 'a world under pressure, charged, explosive, effervescent [...] a world in hectic motion, activated by characters galvanized with a frantic energy'.[102] The atmosphere of the Dingley Dell Christmas scene is arguably a more subdued episode in the text, but it still retains a sense of energy and motion that clearly distinguishes it from the dreamy stasis of Irving's Christmas at Bracebridge Hall. Marling has suggested that although there is an overlap in the festive imagery used in the Christmas episodes of the *Sketch Book* and *Pickwick*, the mistletoe, holly, wassail, coaches and inns of the *Pickwick* episode express 'none of the quasi-liturgical ceremony of the Bracebridge Christmas. Irving's Squire wants to bring the past back again – to repair a rupture in history – while Mr. Pickwick and his friends merely enjoy the cyclical feelings that the holiday brings'.[103] Marling's observation that Irving's work promotes a far more restorative vision of the past than the *Pickwick* Christmas is justifiable, however, her suggestion that the Pickwickian's merely enjoy Christmas for its cyclical feelings is not as convincing. As we will see later, the Pickwickians are themselves antiquarians of a sort, and although the *Pickwick* Christmas is certainly far less self-conscious in its appropriation of old Christmas customs, the episode still retains a peculiar reverence for Christmas past. Throughout the Christmas chapters of the *Sketch Book*, Irving's narrator diligently explains the history behind the Christmas customs he encounters. The fictionalized customs are loaded with expressive language that draws attention to the grandeur of an old-fashioned Christmas, and the events that take place are repeatedly followed by a brief qualification of their antiquity. For instance, the Squire's servants are encouraged to hold parties provided everything is 'done conformably to ancient usage' (172), and later, when the mummer's stage an old-fashioned play, they enter to the sound of a drum beat 'according to ancient custom' (203). In contrast, Dickens focuses less on labelling customs as 'ancient' and delving into their origins, and instead the

[102] Juliet McMaster, "Visual Design in Pickwick Papers," *Studies in English Literature* 23, no. 4 (Autumn 1983): 608.
[103] Marling, *Merry Christmas*, 129.

Christmas episode in *Pickwick* functions more as, what Maria H. Fein terms, a 'celebration of innocence [and] benevolence [...] associated particularly with the celebration of family'.[104] And moreover it is, as Fred Guida has noted, 'the context, and the setting, and the prevailing mood' of the scene that marks the interlude at Dingley Dell out as 'a Christmas classic'.[105]

In the Christmas number of Dickens's text, the Pickwick group leave London to holiday in the county, and in Irving's *Sketch Book*, the old-fashioned Christmas is similarly removed from the modern cityscape. Before the Christmas celebrations commence, Crayon prepares his readers for a narrative change by instructing them to 'lay aside the austerity of wisdom, and [...] put on that genuine holiday spirit' (163). Crayon's Christmas is framed as a shift away from the reality and pressures of the modern world. Earlier in the *Sketch Book*, he depicts London as 'that great Babel,' a 'gigantic monster' where the sun is 'obscured by murky clouds of smoke' and pedestrians are constantly 'hurrying forward with anxious countenances' (93). Away from the city, the Bracebridge celebrations allow Crayon to access an enchanting vision of the rural past where everything seems wholesome, healthy and bountiful; at one point he terms it 'an epitome of country abundance, in this season of overflowing larders' (194). Similarly, the *Pickwick* Christmas stands out as a fundamentally rural celebration. Davis claims that 'the idea of putting the old English Christmas into modern urban dress germinated in *Pickwick* where the urban Pickwickians clumsily cavort through a country Christmas'.[106] And Guida has also noted that Dickens was writing *Pickwick* at a time when 'the face of the nation was being unalterably changed by the onslaught of railroads and industry, the book looks back fondly on an England that was quickly slipping away: a more rural England,' and he finds a

[104] Maria H. Fein, "The Politics of Family in *The Pickwick Papers*," *ELH* 61, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 363.
[105] Guida, *A Christmas Carol and its Adaptations*, 17.
[106] Davis, *The Lives and Times and Ebenezer Scrooge*, 25.

'feeling of genuinely warm nostalgia [...] particularly evident in *Pickwick*'s famous Christmas interlude at Dingley Dell'.[107]

For the purpose of this study I have chosen to pay attention to the domestic Christmas Eve scene at Dingley Dell, firstly because this episode is often thought to have been inspired by Irving's earlier Christmas narrative, and secondly because Dickens introduces this section of the text with a direct reference to the antiquity of the Wardle family's seasonal gathering. In this scene, the family assemble 'according to annual custom on Christmas Eve' in the large kitchen, continuing a tradition that had been 'observed by old Wardle's forefathers from time immemorial'.[108] Despite these references to the longevity of the Dingley Dell Christmas celebrations, Dickens infuses his writing with an impression of immediacy that is less apparent in Irving's *Sketch Book*. In the *Pickwick* Christmas, hanging mistletoe still forms a part of the old-fashioned festivities, but here the focus is on the immediate activity of its hanging rather than the historical origins of the decoration. Dickens's writes that Mr Wardle 'had *just* suspended, with his own hands, a huge branch of mistletoe, and this same branch of mistletoe *instantaneously* gave rise to a scene of general and most delightful struggling and confusion' (395).[109] Following the hanging of the mistletoe, other old Christmas customs are integrated into Dickens's Christmas narrative. Hervey admitted in his *Book of Christmas* that he was 'a little anxious about Snap-dragon' (15), worrying that this traditional Christmas Eve game, which involved fishing for raisins in a bowl of flaming brandy, might soon vanish. In the *Pickwick* Christmas however, Dickens does not express any concern for the welfare of this old practice, instead he simply states that at Dingley Dell there was a 'great game at snap-dragon' (397). The wassail bowl enters the *Pickwick* scene in much the same way. After the game of snap-dragon has finished, the group 'sat down by the huge fire of blazing logs

[107] Guida, *A Christmas Carol and its Adaptations*, 17.
[108] Charles Dickens, *Pickwick Papers* (London: Collins, 1953), 395. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.
[109] Italics added.

to [...] a mighty bowl of wassail, something smaller than an ordinary washhouse copper, in which the hot apples were hissing and bubbling with a rich look, and a jolly sound, that were perfectly irresistible' (397). As we might expect, the parallel scene in Crayon's narrative is attended with a lengthy note explaining that 'the Wassail Bowl was sometimes composed of ale instead of wine; with nutmeg, sugar, toast, ginger, and roasted crabs' (197). Crayon even goes on to highlight other names it is known by, quote part of a seventeenth-century poem, and refer to a traditional song, providing readers with a detailed background which he admits to have sourced from *Archaeologia: or, Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity* (350). Dickens's introduction of the wassail bowl has no background information to inform readers of the meaning behind the old custom, and instead the emphasis is on the energy of the scene itself rather than the historical past it refers to. The bowl simply contains the 'hissing and bubbling' hot apples, and creates a vision that is 'perfectly irresistible,' leading Mr. Pickwick to conclude: 'this [...] this is, indeed, comfort' (397). Instead of conjuring old customs in order to prompt a history lesson, Dickens leads the reader to believe that the wassail is there simply for the enjoyment it gives the characters in the present moment. Guida has similarly noted, 'the Christmas that the Pickwickians enjoy is filled with warmth – in every sense of the word – and overflowing with good food (and drink), fun and fellowship',[110] as Dickens clearly places his emphasis on the fictive creation of festive cheer.

Although the subtle integration of mistletoe hanging and wassail drinking in *Pickwick* is far more informal than Irving's highly pedagogical Christmas episode, an overarching interest in history, tradition and antiquarianism does permeate both texts. The Pickwick society is after all, rather like Irving's narrator, explicitly in search of local customs and old-fashioned traditions; they are a kind of prototypical folklore society, and the novel is generated by the society's interest in investigating England's folkloric past. In

[110] Guida, *A Christmas Carol and its Adaptations*, 19.

the opening pages of the text we discover that the purpose of the Pickwick Club is to enable Mr. Pickwick to extend his travels, carry his speculations into a wider field, and enlarge 'his sphere of observation, to the advancement of knowledge, and the diffusion of learning' (21). Moreover, at one point in the novel, great emphasis is placed on Mr. Pickwick's antiquarian skills when he finds an ancient inscription on a stone. We are informed that this 'immortal discovery [...] has been the pride and boast of his friends, and the envy of every antiquarian in this or any other county' (154). And later on we are again reminded of the significance that 'he – he, the chairman of the Pickwick Club – had discovered a strange and curious inscription of unquestionable antiquity, which had wholly escaped the observation of the many learned men who had preceded him' (155). But, of course, Pickwick gets it wrong – the inscription on the stone is nothing but the etching of an idle villager named Bill Stumps – and Dickens's satire is directed at such antiquarian activity. Nevertheless, we see the interest in antiquity emerge again in the traditional Christmas celebrations at Dingley Dell. While the old Christmas of *Pickwick* is not a framed as a highly ceremonious occasion, as it is in the *Sketch Book*, it does convey a reverence for old festive traditions. The mention of 'annual custom[s]' which date back to familial 'forefathers,' (395) and 'invariable custom[s]' intended to 'usher Christmas in' (397) bolster the Christmas episode with a consciousness of tradition, and imply that the Pickwickian's are participating in part of a larger festive legacy.

The seasonal reverence of *Pickwick* is combined with an affection for old customs, and a familiarity with annual traditions that enables Dickens's reader to relate to the Christmas scene far more casually than Irving's reader. This distinction is best seen in the generational contrast between the old lady and the younger girls in the Christmas episode. When we first encounter the old lady of Dingley Dell she is associated with formality and tradition, 'seated with *customary state* in the front parlour' (386).[111] She is a formidable

[111] Italics added.

character and quickly tells Mr. Pickwick 'young people was very different when I was a girl,' to which he replies, 'that's the reason why I would make much of the few that have any traces of the old stock' (387). Here Pickwick pleases the old lady by aligning himself with the 'old stock' rather than the new generation. After the hanging of the mistletoe, the contrast between these two generations becomes particularly evident. Mr. Pickwick:

> took the old lady by the hand, led her beneath the mystic branch, and saluted here in all courtesy and decorum. The old lady submitted to this piece of practical politeness with all the dignity which befitted so important and serious a solemnity, but the younger ladies, not being so thoroughly imbued with a superstitious veneration for the custom [...] screamed and struggled, and ran into corners, and threatened and remonstrated, and did everything but leave the room (395-6)

This passage seems to imply that the young generation are apathetic towards the solemn veneration of old Christmas customs and traditions, and we see a struggle regarding how this particular Christmas custom is, or should be, observed. When Mr. Pickwick takes the old lady under the mistletoe, the passage mimics the seriousness of the Bracebridge celebration, though admittedly it is possible to detect some Dickensian hyperbole and satire beneath the elevated register. In stark contrast, the screaming and struggling of the flirtatious girls as they are chased around the room is lively and animated. Their disinterest in pomp and ceremony enables Dickens to show an old Christmas tradition in a more informal light. The young girls respond to the hanging of the mistletoe naturally, they are not restrictively 'imbued' with a 'veneration' for the custom and, as a result, they are not inclined to enact a response that is prescribed "according to ancient custom". By highlighting the contrast between these generations, Dickens escapes representing the old Christmas customs at Dingley Dell as lifeless rituals fetishized by antiquarian researchers and stifled by historical scholarship.

While Dickens and Irving navigate their Christmas fictions differently, in other ways their approach to the past is very similar. Both writers affirm that the past is comforting and appreciate its ability to provide a brief escape from reality. As Mr. Pickwick suggests, the old-fashioned Christmas at Dingley Dell revolves around comfort, and likewise Dickens introduces the chapter by writing 'Christmas was close at hand [...] it was the season of hospitality, merriment and open-heartedness' (379), dwelling on Christmas's connotations of human warmth and kindness. This attitude towards the festive season as a time when humanitarian virtue is brought into sharper focus, overlaps with the peculiar appeal of the past for many readers in the 1830s; as Chapman has observed, 'the past seemed to contain more real humanity, in which better personal relations were possible than in the age of the 'cash nexus''.[112] Thus, we can see how the conflation of Christmas with the past heightened the Victorian desire to access a time that seemed to be more tranquil than the impersonal present. In *Pickwick*, hospitality is conveyed through Dickens's appetizing description of 'irresistible' hissing apples and bubbling punch, and in Irving's Christmas at Bracebridge, Crayon repeatedly draws attention to the tradition of hospitality associated with Christmas past. Imagining an old manor house celebration before he arrives at Bracebridge Hall, Crayon envisions 'ample boards groan[ing] under the weight of hospitality' (160). Similarly, his preconception of an English Christmas 'derive[s] from days of yore' when it was 'the season of regenerated feeling – the season for kindling [...] the fire of hospitality in the hall' (162).[113] This hospitable vision of an old-fashioned Christmas has been examined by Burstein, who writes that Irving 'meant to infuse Christmas with meaning [...] to combine history with good fellowship, good cheer,

[112] Chapman, *The Sense of the Past*, 13.

[113] We see a similar vision of old-fashioned hospitality in George Eliot's later depiction of Christmas at Raveloe in *Silas Marner* (1861): 'for what were these if not to be merry at appropriate times, [...] passing well-tried jokes, urging your guests to eat and drink too much out of hospitality, and eating and drinking too much in your neighbour's house to show that you liked your cheer?' George Eliot, *Silas Marner* (London: Vintage, 2010), 16.

and a vitality suited to a close-knit society. Christmas, in other words, needed a story'.[114] The 'story' that Irving gives Christmas however, is not as idyllic as it might first appear. In the same way that Hervey is reluctant to allow his reader to regress too far into the past, both Irving and Dickens ultimately return their readers, and characters, back to real time when Christmas is over. Clearly, the Christmas fiction of restorative nostalgia quickly becomes an exercise in reflective nostalgia. When the festivities at Dingley Dell come to an end Dickens writes: 'we wish to inform the reader [...] that the different members of the party dispersed to their several homes' (420). This return to reality is emphasised in the subsequent chapter, as Dickens immediately begins with a description of the busy business district of Temple in London, where 'there may be seen constantly hurrying with bundles of papers under their arms, and protruding from their pockets, an almost uninterrupted succession of lawyers' clerks' (422). Similarly, in Irving's *Sketch Book* the chapter following the Bracebridge Christmas is entitled 'London Antiques.' As in Dickens's text, when Christmas is over, Irving ensures that the reader is removed from the 'dreamy, ritualized world [...] of soft-focus medieval fancy-dress',[115] and firmly returned back to 'the commonplace prosaic world' (205).

In Irving's *Sketch Book* however, the ultimate return to real time is prefigured by an overarching tension between the past and present that dominates much of the narrative. While Dickens, by 1836, was 'blending' the past and the present, Irving's earlier narrative seems to exhibit a friction between the two. One of the reasons why Irving is more preoccupied with contemplating the dynamic between past and present in these chapters is probably because Crayon, who sees himself as a social commentator, narrates the Christmas episodes in his 'observer persona'.[116] Before he goes to spend the holiday at Bracebridge, Crayon outlines the state of Christmas in modern day England. Here he writes that 'modern refinement' has 'worn down society into a more smooth and polished,

[114] Burstein, *The Original Knickerbocker*, 140.
[115] Callow, *Dickens' Christmas*, 146.
[116] Burstein, *The Original Knickerbocker*, 140.

but certainly a less characteristic surface' (161), a metaphor that Hervey would also use in his *Book of Christmas*. Other observations made by Crayon in this passage also tie into Hervey's later concern that festive happiness and pleasure were being sidelined by a utilitarian society. As Crayon likewise suggests, Christmas customs have now 'become matters of speculation and dispute among commentators' as 'the world has become more worldly. There is more of dissipation, and less of enjoyment' (161). Crayon sees the vanishing spirit of old Christmas restored in the celebrations at Bracebridge Hall, but while these old-fashioned celebrations are laced with the good cheer, hospitality and the comfort of 'times wild and picturesque' (161), they are also scrutinized by Irving. As Crayon journeys to the Hall with Frank, Squire Bracebridge's son, he is told: 'my Father, you must know, is a bigoted devotee of the old school,' a 'tolerable specimen' of an old English country gentleman, and overall, 'a strenuous advocate for the revival of the old rural games and holiday observances' (169). Though the Squire is later presented as the quintessential image of the beaming 'folksy' man, the language Frank uses in this description is unsettling. Words such as 'bigoted' and 'tolerable' generate the image of a narrow-minded individual who has happily cut himself off from the real world in order to restore the past. Nissenbaum also draws attention to these characteristics of the old Squire, whom he sees as 'an antiquarian-minded gentleman who is obsessed with the past, and who wields so much social authority that he is able to recruit the neighboring peasantry to join him in a reenactment, under his direction, of "the holy-day customs and rural games of former times"'.[117]

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of the Squire is that 'he even regrets that he had not been born a few centuries earlier, when England was itself' (170). Irving's Squire is a figure far removed from the progressive attitude of the nineteenth century; he consciously turns away from the present, and even rejects the current state of England

[117] Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 58.

which, in his opinion, has altered beyond recognition and lost its authenticity. Nissenbaum also draws attention to this move from antiquarianism to political theory as he sees the Squire's 'nostalgia [spill] over into a confession of his inability to re-create the genuine rituals of Christmases past',[118] fostering resentment towards the national and political changes that have taken place in his lifetime. In her work on Victorian nostalgia and recollection, Ann Colley refers to this form of nostalgia for a distant past, where 'people look back to events and places they have never lost and simply take what they need from the past out of a "synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios"'.[119] From this perspective, a certain degree of fictive license and even artificiality can be detected in the Squire's old-fashioned Christmas; his attitude toward the present is shaped by comparing it to a past he never lived in, and the customs he seeks to revive are those which convey a sense of majesty appropriate to his status and estate. Though he claims to have enjoyed his childhood, Frank tells Crayon that even when he was a young boy his father would 'direct and superintend our games with the strictness that some parents do the studies of their children' in order to ensure that they were playing games 'according to their original form' (171). With this conversation in mind, the reader is able to anticipate that the Bracebridge Christmas will be a carefully structured and controlled affair, resistant to change or spontaneity, and well versed in the antique precedents that have shaped it into a relic of the past, up to the present day. Marling suggests that Irving's 'Bracebridge Hall is a kind of wishful Shangri-la, a utopia of the imagination,'[120] and indeed, in this text we see Christmas trapped in a kind of suspended animation, or indeed a time warp, in a way that the Dingley Dell Christmas does not seem to be.

While Squire Bracebridge's commitment to old-fashioned customs stems from a desire to recapture the majesty and authority associated with Bracebridge Hall in the past, there are two other characters in Irving's Christmas sequence who bring the wisdom of

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[118] Ibid., 59.
[119] Ann C. Colley, *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1998), 4.
[120] Marling, *Merry Christmas*, 125.

regressing into bygone times into question: Master Simon and the parson. Firstly, the representation of the parson in Crayon's narrative warns the reader of the dangers of retrospection. He is a man Crayon pities as he 'lived but with times past, and knew but little of the present' (187). Though the Squire is also preoccupied with the past, it is evident that part of his disposition is fuelled by a rejection of modernity, showing that he is at least aware of the world outside Bracebridge. The parson, in contrast, is completely oblivious to the present: 'shut up among worm eaten tomes in the retirement of his antiquated little study, the pages of old times were to him as the gazettes of the day; while the era of the Revolution was mere modern history. He forgot that nearly two centuries had elapsed since the fiery persecution of poor Mince pie throughout the land' (187). Crayon's depiction of a man isolated and alone, deluded into believing that the past is the present, and completely unconscious of the progression of time is disturbing. Furthermore, his physical constitution adds to his eccentric personification, as Crayon writes:

> The parson was a little, meagre, black looking man, with a grizzled wig that was too wide, and stood off from each ear, so that his head seemed to have shrunk away within it, like a dried filbert in its shell. [...] He had pored over these old volumes so intensely, that they seemed to have been reflected into his countenance, which, if the face be, indeed, an index of the mind, might be compared to a title page of black letter. (185)

The parson is so far removed from reality that he is objectified rather than personified in Crayon's description, unflatteringly compared to a dried nut in its shell, or a page of indecipherable gothic script. He is also a 'little, meagre' man, which suggests that his obsession with the past has rendered him redundant, as he has 'shrunk away' from the present to 'pore over' his old volumes (185). As Crayon's narrative implies, the parson's fixation on the past is excessive and futile, and as many later Victorians would agree, 'the

meaning of the past' was not solely in its antiquarian value, but in its ability 'to enhance the quality of life in the all-demanding present'.[121]

In contrast, Master Simon is perhaps the most lively and loveable of Irving's characters at Bracebridge Hall, and clearly embodies a reflective rather than restorative approach to the past. Crayon observes that this bachelor 'was a tight brisk little man' with 'a chirping, buoyant disposition, always enjoying the present moment; and his frequent change of scene and company prevented his acquiring those rusty, unaccommodating habits, with which old bachelors are so uncharitably charged' (175). The energy associated with Master Simon contrasts sharply to the stasis inferred by Irving's characterisation of the parson. Simon has an 'irresistible' mode of expression, complemented by his endearing charm, harmless flirtation and ability to make people 'ready to die with laughing' (175). He is both 'the idol of the younger part of the company' (175) and, with his extensive knowledge of history and family genealogy, 'a great favourite with the old folks' (175). For Irving, Simon personifies a synthesis between the old and young and the past and present, something Crayon detects as he remarks that Simon 'seemed to be a kind of connecting link between the old times and the new' (176). Though he can aptly quote from the works of old authors, and participates whole heartedly in the old-fashioned Christmas celebrations, Simon is not overcome by his either his studies, or a desire to meticulously restore the past. Instead, he takes pleasure in the present moment and is loved and admired because of this, far more than the Squire. Later in the same decade, Carlyle would write: 'our grand business undoubtedly is, not to *see* what lies dimly at a distance, but to *do* what lies clearly at hand'.[122] In the *Sketch Book*, Simon's vitality seems to fulfil Carlyle's call to act in the present, opposing the parson and to some extent the Squire whose main occupations revolve around the precise mechanisms of old traditions that now 'lie dimly at a distance.' Simon enlivens the old customs that the Squire has worked so carefully to

[121] Buckley, *The Triumph of Time*, 115.
[122] Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," 187.

restore and orchestrate, and in doing so he releases a contagious energy that leads Crayon to admit: 'There was something extremely agreeable in the cheerful flow of animal spirits of the little man' (183).

Alongside these techniques of characterisation, Irving examines the merits of an old-fashioned Christmas through the conversations in which Crayon engages, and some of the traditional customs he encounters during his stay. It is interesting to note that throughout the Christmas episode, we continue to see Crayon primarily as a narrator of, rather than a participator in, the festivities at Bracebridge. Marling has drawn attention to this contrast between Irving and Dickens's representations of Christmas, as she points out that 'Irving remains the observer, a historian, a stranger at Bracebridge Hall. Dickens is at home in Dingley Dell'.[123] This distinction once again calls attention to the underlying differences between the two narratives. At one point in Irving's work, the Squire reluctantly acknowledges how society has changed, and accepts that some of the old customs he loves have now become hopelessly incompatible with the times. As he describes the state of the modern world all he sees is estrangement from the old ways, explaining:

> The nation [...] is altered; we have almost lost out simple, true hearted peasantry. They have broken asunder from the higher classes, and seem to think their interests are separate. They have become too knowing, and begin to read newspapers, listen to ale house politicians, and talk of reform. I think one mode to keep them in good humour in these hard times, would be [...to] set the merry old English games going again. (190)

Committed to restoring the past rather than reflecting on the past, the Squire resists any form of progress that threatens the unity he sees in an old-fashioned class system. He is disturbed by the fact that the peasants have begun to read newspapers and think of reform,

[123] Marling, *Merry Christmas*, 129.

and believes that he can distract them with some 'merry old English games,' to which Crayon dryly remarks, this 'was the good Squire's project for mitigating public discontent' (190). Nissenbaum has shown that the publication of the *Sketch Book* 'set off something of a debate about whether reviving the old rural Christmas rituals would be enough to restore the fading authority of the English gentry',[124] revealing that the appeal of an old-fashioned Christmas was valued by the upper classes for far more than its hospitable character.

The Squire's project is undermined by Irving, as Crayon goes on to explain how 'he had once attempted to put his doctrine in practice' (190) by keeping an old-fashioned open house during the Christmas holidays. Ironically this exercise only solidified how much the times had changed; the Squire became a victim of his own idealisation of the past and desire to reinstate the rural class system, as the 'country people [...] did not understand how to play their parts in the scene of hospitality: many uncouth circumstances occurred' (190). Restorative forms of nostalgia are clearly shown to be incompatible with the changed times. Not only does this consequence demonstrate how outmoded some of the old customs had already become, Crayon's figurative language hints again at the artificiality of the Squire's re-enactment of old Christmas. It also demonstrates the Squire's misunderstanding of the old moral economy. The country people are behaving exactly as they were expected to in terms of a genuinely old-fashioned Christmas, demanding and taking their dues. The Squire fails to appreciate the topsy-turvey carnival world of the old Christmas, and simply wants a romanticised version of it. Using theatrical terms, Crayon implies that the Squire devises Christmas 'scenes,' rather like a stage director, and takes pleasure in watching the scenes he has choreographed unfold. A few lines later when a band of dancers begin to perform an ancient dance, Crayon notices that 'the Squire eyed this fanciful exhibition with great interest and delight' (190). Here the dance is described as an 'exhibition,' and once again it provides visual delight for the Squire. In the previous

[124] Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 60.

section of this study we saw how Hervey sought to produce a 'curious picture' of old Christmas customs for his readers, and in many ways Irving's *Sketch Book* similarly represents the Bracebridge Christmas as a sequence of artificially constructed visual scenes which form a 'curious picture' of the past, skilfully directed by the Squire.

It is not surprising therefore, that at a number of points during the Bracebridge Christmas, Irving interrupts the narrative flow and Crayon emerges from the fictive world to address the reader and question the purpose of his text. In one passage, he expresses concern that his 'wiser readers, who may not have that foolish fondness for odd and obsolete things to which I am given' might find his narrative 'tedious' (196). Here the reader can see Irving making a distinction between 'the men of the present age, and the men of the past'.[125] Crayon self-deprecatingly terms his fondness for obsolete things 'foolish,' while his readers, presumably men of the reflective present, are flatteringly imagined to be 'wiser.' However, there is evidence to intimate that Crayon, despite his fascination with English antiquities, might actually find the Bracebridge Christmas ridiculous. Nissenbaum has argued that the Christmas scene is 'so self-conscious [...] so close to the edge of silliness – that Irving himself suspected it might ring false to contemporary readers,' and suggests that Irving included a passage where we see some young peasants 'making something of a grimace, and giving each other the wink' when the Squire's back is turned, in order to 'protect his credibility with an 1820 audience'.[126] Likewise, during the Christmas Dinner it is possible to detect another of Irving's hints that the Bracebridge obsession with festive antiquity might be verging on the ridiculous. In this scene, Crayon scrutinizes the ancient family portraits hanging around the room, and claims to 'have traced an old family nose through a whole picture gallery, legitimately handed down from generation to generation, almost from the time of the conquest' (193). In this instance, we see the narrator adopting the intellectual tone frequently used by the Squire in

[125] Mill, "The Spirit of the Age," 51.
[126] Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 60.

his descriptions of the old customs and their origins. This passage in particular echoes the dance scene mentioned above, where the Squire 'prov[ed] that this was a lineal descendant of the sword dance of the ancients' (190). By applying a similar register to trace the origins of an old nose however, Crayon seems to gently mock his host's obsession with the past, and perhaps even points to its absurdity. If we compare this to the closing lines of Irving's Christmas section, it is possible that Crayon might be commenting on his feelings toward the Squire as he remarks: 'it is so much pleasanter to please than to instruct – to play the companion rather than the preceptor. What, after all, is the mite of wisdom that I could throw into the mass of knowledge; or how am I sure that my sagest deductions may be safe guides for the opinions of others?' (204). Irving's narrator evidently aligns himself more with the figure of Master Simon than either the instructive Squire or preceptive parson, as his rhetorical question throws the importance of restoring old Christmas customs into doubt. With this wider context in mind, Crayon also uses his final paragraph to think about his reader once again, and assess the objective of his work: 'enough of Christmas and its gambols: it is time for me to pause in this garrulity. Methinks I hear the question asked by my graver readers, "To what purpose is all this – how is the world to be made wiser by this talk?"' (204). In this passage not only does Crayon term the Christmas sequence 'garrulity,' but he also begins to think about progress.

When Crayon imagines his reflective reader asking how the world can be made wiser through this work, he moves away from the insular world of Bracebridge Hall to contemplate progress and improvement in the reality of the present. His question links into the preoccupation with progress observed by Buckley as a characteristic of the early nineteenth century, which 'seemed in general accord with the prevailing concepts of history and public time [...] and the conviction that the meaning of life lay not in present achievement so much as in continued onward aspiration'.[127] Though Irving introduces the

[127] Buckley, *The Triumph of Time*, p.50.

Christmas narrative with a lament that many old customs are disappearing in England, Crayon seems to suggest that despite the Squire's strenuous attempts to restore an authentic, old-fashioned Christmas, the Bracebridge celebrations feel contrived and out of place in the real world. Crayon admits that he was keen to see the Squire's old-fashioned Christmas because of its novelty, but as the episode draws to a close he seems to modify his objective. He considers how his work might be valuable to contemporary readers who are celebrating Christmas in their own homes. Turning to the concerns of the present, he asks how his text can participate in the 'instruction of the world,' amid the 'thousands of […] pens labouring for its improvement' (204). It is at this point that Irving seems to direct the reader to the 'moral' of his story, by revealing that the Bracebridge Christmas should be approached as a light-hearted work of fiction; a piece of reflective rather than restorative nostalgia. He hopes that by allowing the reader to smile with Crayon at the Squire's elaborate celebrations, and be entertained by his heavily orchestrated imitation of an old-fashioned Christmas, he might 'rub out one wrinkle from the brow of care, or beguile the heavy heart of one moment of sorrow' (204). Unlike the Squire, Irving's intention is not to encourage his readers to reconstruct an old-fashioned Christmas in the present day. Instead, the *Sketch Book* Christmas ends where the *Pickwick* Christmas begins. Rather than regressing further into the past, Irving brings his narrative into the present. Crayon's final hope is a hope that is realised in Dickens's *Pickwick* narrative, that the text might 'prompt a benevolent view of human nature and make my reader more in good humour with his fellow-beings and himself, surely, surely, I shall not then have written entirely in vain' (204).

1.3 Christmas, Time and Change: *In Memoriam* (1850)

In a great deal of nineteenth-century print, Christmas is repeatedly referred to as a festival that has been 'handed down from time immemorial through our ancestors'.[128] 'Immemorial' is a term used in all three of the texts analysed in this chapter so far: Irving refers to the 'Squire' as 'a title which has been accorded to the head of the family since time immemorial' (170), Dickens conveys the antiquity of the Christmas customs at Dingley Dell by noting that they were 'observed by old Wardle's forefathers from time immemorial' (395), and in *The Book of Christmas* Hervey also refers to Christmas's 'immemorial ties' to the past (76). The recurrence of the word 'immemorial' indicates that these texts are far more concerned with approaching the past in terms of history rather than memory. Immemorial is defined, by the Oxford English Dictionary, as 'that [which] is beyond memory or "out of mind"; ancient beyond memory'.[129] Nonetheless, in Hervey's and Irving's texts, the reader is able to glimpse moments where the writers turn introspective, and briefly contemplate a personal past rather than an 'immemorial' past. As the traditional boar's head is ceremonially paraded through Bracebridge Hall in Irving's *Sketch Book*, the Squire admits that he likes this custom as 'it brings to mind the time when I was young and gamesome' (194). Similarly, Hervey's meditation on time and its measurement in the introduction to *The Book of Christmas*, leads him to conclude that the Christmas ceremony establishes 'a set of mnemonics [...] upon which hinges the history of the human heart' (7). Moreover, he notes that 'besides the calendar of general direction and national observance, where is the heart that has not a private calendar of its own! Long ere the meridian of life has been attainted, the individual man has made many a memorandum, of joy for pain, for his periodical perusal, - and established many a private celebration' (7). Observing how Christmas encourages both the nation and the individual to look back, Hervey notes that intimate calendar of personal 'memorandum' is set apart from the more remote 'national' calendar, which offers 'general direction' to the masses.

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[128] "Christmas-Day," *The Times*, December 27, 1834.
[129] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "immemorial," accessed May 30, 2013, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91853?redirectedFrom=immemorial#eid.

Later in the same volume, memory comes to the foreground once again as Hervey explains how rosemary has long been believed to 'strengthen the memory' (110). The ritual significance of rosemary in Christmas celebrations lay in the belief that it would sharpen the individual's ability to remember, and as Hervey writes, 'the fact of its being in bloom, at this season, would naturally introduce the rosemary, with all its fine morals, into the Christmas celebrations' (111).

French theorist Nora has stressed the important of distinguishing between the categories of memory and history: 'history [...] is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past'.[130] While history attempts to reconstruct the past, memory ties the individual to the present, perhaps because 'memory is life, always embodied in living societies and as such in permanent evolution'.[131] From this angle we can see how an interest in memory is consistent with the concerns of a progressive nineteenth-century society. According to Nora, memory is itself subject to change and development, being 'in permanent evolution.' Yet the changeable quality of memory is something that also caused anxiety for many during this period. Nora admits that memory is:

> unconscious of the distortions to which it is subject, vulnerable in various ways to appropriation and manipulation [...] being a phenomenon of emotion and magic, accommodates only those facts that suit it. It thrives on vague, telescoping reminiscences, on hazy general impressions or specific symbolic details. It is vulnerable to transferences, screen memories, censorings, and projections of all kinds.[132]

The vulnerability of the past in the hands of the present is something that Victorian writers often noted. In an 1851 essay for *Reynold's Miscellany*, 'W.B.B.' referred to memory's

[130] Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 1:3.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.

'creative wand' which 'conjures from the past, images obscured but not obliterated'.[133] Others commented on memory's tendency to idealise the past, observing how 'even difficult and distressing circumstances in one's own early history will, after a sufficient interval of time, come to be the subject of pleasing reflection, and almost regret'.[134] In 1853 a writer named W. Wagtail, also found it necessary to make a distinction between memory and history in an essay for *Sharpe's London Magazine*. Here he suggests that the 'scientific and historical' approach to the past consists in 'chronicling, and cataloguing, and labelling, and putting away facts in regular rank-and-file, like bottles in a chemist's shop'.[135] This image echoes the nineteenth-century fixation with ordering the past, as seen in the first section of this chapter. Moving onto memory, Wagtail discusses 'that private sort of memory, which is a kind of familiar spirit to everybody. I hope it is not getting too metaphysical to say, that as each man has a different nature, so has he a special memory of his own'.[136] In contrast to history, which involves labelling and categorising, this writer sees memory as something introspective, unique and intensely personal. Likewise, Nora recognises that memory is part of an individual's emotional identity as, 'we feel a visceral attachment to that which made us what we are, yet at the same time we feel historically estranged from this legacy, which we must now coolly assess'.[137] This tension between the personal past and an ever-progressing present that generates distance and estrangement can be felt in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, which will form the focus of the following section.

One of the most distinctive qualities of seasonal print from the nineteenth century is the emotional intensity associated with Christmas memories. In her analysis of festive verse narratives, Moore notices that they 'overflowed with emotion',[138] and earlier in her work she also discusses how Victorian readers relinquished their 'readerly reserve' at

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[133] W.B.B., "Memory," *Reynold's Miscellany* 14, no. 358 (May 19, 1855): 263.
[134] "The Present and the Past," *Chambers's Journal* 479 (April 3, 1841): 81.
[135] W. Wagtail, "The Tricks which Memory Plays us," *Sharpe's London Magazine* 3 (July 1853): 136.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 1:7.
[138] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print,* 122.

Christmas in order to explore their own capacity for sympathy: 'Christmas reading events unleashed levels of feeling that remained blocked at other times of the year'.[139] If Christmas provided readers with a chance to reconnect with and refine their emotions, it could be argued that festive memories had a similar effect, reuniting individuals with a past that might otherwise remain distant. In 1848, Dickens's final Christmas book, *The Haunted Man*, explored the theme of memory and 'the significance of time past'[140] in its narrative of a man named Redlaw, broken by the death of his sister and troubled by painful memories. One Christmas he is visited by a ghost that is able to grant him the ability to 'forget the sorrow, wrong, and trouble you have known [...] the power to cancel their remembrance'.[141] Redlaw agrees, and his memories are obliterated. However, the consequences of this supernatural 'gift,' which 'diffuses' itself to those he meets, is disturbing and unsettling. The tale ends with Redlaw realising his mistake and struggling to have 'the gift reversed'.[142] As the tale draws to a close, Dickens stresses the value of memory at Christmas, as 'Christmas is a time in which, of all times in the year, the memory of every remediable sorrow, wrong, and trouble in the world around us, should be active with us, not less than our own experiences, for all good'.[143]

The emotional charge of Christmas memory can be also seen in *In Memoriam*, a volume of elegiac poems composed by Alfred Tennyson following the death of his close friend Arthur Hallam in 1833. Though it is not a Christmas lyric, *In Memoriam* does contain Christmas poems and frequently addresses the power of memory, which returns the grieving individual back to an irretrievable past. Moreover, the work repeatedly grapples with the complex issues of 'deep time' and human insignificance. *In Memoriam* is often approached as an example of the paradoxical tension between progression and regression

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[139] Ibid., 49.
[140] Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Vintage, 2002), 303.
[141] Charles Dickens, *The Haunted Man* in *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003), 147.
[142] Ibid., 200.
[143] Ibid., 227.

that we have seen throughout this chapter. Gilmour has identified this quality in Tennyson's work, noting that 'the prophets of progress saw the backward glance of autobiography as regressive, its surrender to introspection as a failure to measure up to the active, public virtues of a new civilisation. The consequence was the kind of strain which can be felt in *In Memoriam*'.[144] Other Tennyson scholars have pointed towards this feeling of strain by highlighting the underlying presence of binary oppositions throughout the poem. One example, which is perhaps most relevant to this study, is the identification of a strain between stasis and progress that Jonathan Bishop has recognised in the poem's 'many images of repetitive motion'.[145] This observation clearly recalls Scrooge's references to the 'useful course' (38) of the Treadmill in stave one of Dickens's *Carol*. As we will see in the next chapter, the Treadmill conjures the image of simultaneous movement and stasis. More significantly however, it was a device used to punish criminals both psychologically and physically, and in Tennyson's work the strain between stasis and movement similarly heightens the internal suffering of the narrator.

Motifs of progress, change and growth are frequently forced to contend against stasis, return and repetition in *In Memoriam*, creating a sense of strain in the poem that is also evident in the representation of time. Scholars have already noted that temporality is of great significance in this text,[146] and Phillip Collins has even claimed that 'no [other] English poem explores so many dimensions of time'.[147] Throughout the poem, the narrator fluctuates between depictions of a vast, unfathomable, cosmic temporality on the one hand, and a much more individual, personal temporality that is often expressed in terms of memory on the other. References to the vast workings of a cosmic temporality can be

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[144] Gilmour, *The Victorian Period*, 27.
[145] Jonathan Bishop, "The Unity of *In Memoriam*," in *Tennyson In Memoriam*, ed. John Dixon Hunt (London: MacMillan, 1970), 228.
[146] James Kissane and James D. Welch have, respectively, explored the "curse of time" and the "landscapes of time" in Tennyson's work: James Kissane, "The Passion of the Past and the Curse of Time," *ELH* 32, no. 1 (1965): 85-109; James D. Welch, "Tennyson's Landscapes of Time and a Reading of 'The Kraken,'" *Victorian Poetry* 14, no. 3 (1976): 197-204.
[147] Philip Collins, "Tennyson In and Out of Time," in *Studies in Tennyson*, ed. Hallam Tennyson (London: MacMillan, 1981): 133.

glimpsed in Tennyson's allusions to 'The deep pulsations of the world' and later in the same section when the speaker hears 'Aeonian music measuring out / The steps of Time' (95:40-42). The adjective 'aeonian,' which is defined as 'eternal, everlasting',[148] is also used at another point in *In Memoriam*, when Tennyson addresses the geological mechanisms of the earth, and envisions how the natural processes of the present world are gradually sculpting the land into its future shape:

> The sound of streams that swift or slow
> Draw down Aeonian hills, and sow
> The dust of continents to be (35:10-12)

Critics such as Isobel Armstrong and Michael Tomko have drawn attention to these cosmic representations of time and change in the poem. They consider *In Memoriam* in light of the work of Charles Lyell and nineteenth-century advances in science, particularly the developing understanding of deep time. Armstrong interprets the 'huge, impersonal movement of geological time [...] as an analogy for the frightful break in continuity occurring with death [...] the geological model makes it possible to reconstruct continuities out of rupture itself'.[149] Indeed, motifs of continuity and displacement, and rupture and reconstruction are evident in both the poem's treatment of the operations of deep time and its depiction of life after the loss of a loved one. Tennyson's elegy has been compared to Lyell's theories of deep time, and it has been argued that Lyell's account of a world that is continually shifting and in a state of constant repositioning also underpins Tennyson's work.[150] These repeated references to deep time and the earth's vast, cosmic workings are juxtaposed against the speaker's comparatively minute experience of temporality. Despite the inherent disparity between the human and the cosmic, the

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[148] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "aeonian," accessed July 19, 2013, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/3119?redirectedFrom=aeonian#eid.
[149] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1993), 253-4.
[150] Ibid., 262-3. Dolores R. Rosenblum has likewise detected similar tensions between fixity and change, and stillness and motion in Tennyson's poem, demonstrating that the operations of cosmic temporality and the influential theories of deep time suffuse the very tone and structure of the work. (Rosenblum, "The Act of Writing 'In Memoriam,'" *Victorian Poetry* 18, no. 2 (1980): 122).

speaker's experience of time and change is represented as being just as colossal as those 'deep pulsations of the world,' and just as incomprehensible to the human mind. As the speaker calls upon his audience to 'Contemplate all this work of Time' (118:1), Tennyson suggests that temporality is something beyond human power and control. Like the mechanisms of deep time and the changing landscape of the earth, all the individual can do with time is contemplate it.

At numerous points during *In Memoriam*, the reader encounters Tennyson's meditation on the vastness of geological time juxtaposed against the comparatively short moments of human effort and affection.[151] In contrast to the fathomless 'eternal landscape of the past,' is the brief, measurable span of 'A lifelong tract of time reveal'd' (46:8-9). Something that characterises the human dimension of time for Tennyson is the individual's relationship with the past. Indeed, the present moment is problematic in *In Memoriam*. Collins suggests that Tennyson purposefully eludes the present in this poem, preferring 'what was distant in space and in time (past or future)',[152] rather like the remote figure of Squire Bracebridge in Irving's Christmas text. As we have already seen, reflecting on Christmas past appealed to many writers during the nineteenth century, as the apparent solidity of bygone time provided comfort and a semblance of steadfastness in an age of great change and upheaval. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge that the narrator's backward glances and references to memory in *In Memoriam* ultimately function as reflective rather than restorative forms of nostalgia. In line with this argument, Irene Hisao argues that the Tennyson's title acknowledges that the work 'was a supreme act of remembering and not a resurrection'.[153] Although *In Memoriam* is a poetic expression of grief and memory, dealing with vastly different concerns to the other festive texts explored in this chapter, Tennyson's work still acts as a meditation on time, the past and memory,

[151] Buckley, *The Triumph of Time*, 27-8.
[152] Collins, "Tennyson In and Out of Time," 148.
[153] Irene Hisao, "Calculating Loss in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*," *Victorian Poetry* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 174.

rather than a genuine attempt to revive or resurrect something than can never be the same in the present.

The personal past that Tennyson discusses in *In Memoriam* is repeatedly associated with the mutable nature of memory. Dickens similarly shows concern that memory might be vulnerable to distortion in an essay where he recollects his childhood memories of Christmas. At the end of 'A Christmas Tree' he writes, 'encircled by social thoughts of Christmas time, still let the benignant figure of my childhood stand unchanged!'[154] In *Victorian Hauntings* (2002), Julian Wolfreys unravels a 'double movement' in *In Memoriam* which, he claims, is described in the poem by the phrase: 'the same, but not the same' (87:14).[155] According to Wolfreys, this doubling 'interrupts any straightforwardly discernable structure' and moreover, is 'a kind of figural palindrome, so that the motion appears to recirculate, to return to its beginning point, to disrupt and thus paradoxically double itself in its own process'.[156] In Tennyson's reflections on the nature of time and memory, and more specifically, in the Christmas episodes of *In Memoriam*, the motion of return, recirculation, disruption and doubling also come into play. Christmas in *In Memoriam* can be interpreted as a temporal moment that is 'the same, but not the same' each time it recurs. For the grieving poet, the festive season becomes associated with the dualities of continuity and discontinuity, fixity and change, and rupture and reconstruction after Hallam's death. In some ways, the Christmases of *In Memoriam* offer a meditation on how festive celebrations alter and gradually evolve over time, rather like Hervey's similar reflections on Christmas customs in his *Book of Christmas*. At other points the narrator seems to feel that his present experience of Christmas is merely an empty reconstruction of a happier past; an artificial celebration where traditional pastimes are continued even though they are now bereft of meaning. Often the poet feels, much like Irving's narrator Geoffrey Crayon, that he is an outsider; a stranger in an equally strange Christmas.

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[154] Dickens, "A Christmas Tree," 247.
[155] Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 61.
[156] Ibid., 62.

Tennyson himself signalled the importance of the recurring Christmas sections in *In Memoriam*, claiming that they functioned as the poem's divisions.[157] Moreover, Christmas was particularly significant to Tennyson, as Hallam had first visited his family at Somersby in the Christmas vacation of 1829.[158] Nevertheless, Christopher Ricks, one of the poet's biographers, instructs scholars to exercise caution with the Christmas poems, suggesting that they should not be used as a means to impose an otherwise elusive unity to the work.[159] However, it is plausible to suggest that the recurring Christmases act as vantage points in the work, enabling the reader to survey time and change. This is best seen if we approach Christmas as one of Charles Taylor's 'nodal points,' a term used to express 'a sense both of the continuing background and changing forms' of human life.[160] As Christmas returns in the narrative, the reader is naturally inclined to compare the "present" Christmas section they are reading against the earlier festive moments of the poem. In this way their remembrance of past Christmases, within the frame of the poem, mimics the speaker's reflections on how his celebrations are now 'the same, but not the same' as they were before Hallam's death. Nevertheless, even if these episodes do act as reassuring temporal markers or nodal points in the vast body of the work, the Christmas sections are by no means exempt from the overarching conflict and strain visible in the work as a whole.

In fact, Christmas in *In Memoriam* seems to highlight the speaker's conflicted experience of continuity and discontinuity. The Christmas episodes are unstable and punctuated by the same sort of discrete repositioning and continual rethinking that Armstrong notices in the poem as a whole. Although the poems echo one another with similar images and sound patterns, Tennyson uses these subtle similarities to reveal how each Christmas is 'the same, but not the same' as the one before it. When the poems are

[157] Christopher B. Ricks, *Tennyson: Second Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 202.
[158] John Dixon Hunt, introduction to *Tennyson In Memoriam* (London: MacMillan, 1970): 11.
[159] Ricks, *Tennyson*, 202
[160] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 767.

compared against one another it is change, rather than stability, that dominates the narrator's experience of Christmas. In Section 28, Tennyson's language and imagery create a sense of uncertainty. The first stanza begins with a superficial image of festive harmony and peace: 'The time draws near the birth of Christ: / The moon is hid; the night is still' (28:1-2), but the tranquility is quickly disrupted in the second stanza as the speaker describes his experience of hearing the festive bells 'Swell out and fail, as if a door / Were shut between me and the sound' (28:7-8). In the following stanza the sense of instability is heightened further as 'Each voice four changes on the wind, / That now dilate, and now decrease' (28:9-10). The volatile sound of the bells is likened to the internal state of the speaker; at one point he writes that 'they my troubled spirit rule' (28:17). In the midst of this scene, where nothing is stable and the sound of the bells swell out only to fail, and dilate only to decrease, it is strange to find undertones of 'peace and goodwill, goodwill and peace, / Peace and goodwill, to all mankind' (28:11-12). Although the poet admits that he almost wishes he was dead and hopes that he will not live to endure another Christmas, the section ends with a revelation that the bells 'bring me sorrow touch'd with joy' while the final line, 'The merry merry bells of Yule' (28:19-20), sounds peculiarly empty in light of the rest of the section. There is something unsettling about the repetition of 'peace and goodwill, goodwill and peace' and the 'merry merry' bells. These festive references could be interpreted as the speaker's attempt to reconstruct some semblance of the past Christmases he knew 'when a boy' (28:18), forming a search for stability in the midst of uncertainty and life altering change; yet the repetition instead conveys a distracted impassivity. In the midst of clamoring bells the tidings sound perfunctory, as though they are being articulated mechanically. The words seem, at first glance, to assure us of the enduring nature of Christmas language which is used each year to wish the individual a 'merry' Christmas and 'peace and goodwill' regardless of the their altered circumstances,

but the repetitive emptiness with which these tokens are expressed in these lines paradoxically indicates a radical discontinuity.

The use of repetition in each of the Christmas sections of *In Memoriam* is the primary device through which Tennyson expresses the sensations of continuity and discontinuity associated with the season. Hisao has noted that 'the story of mourning' in *In Memoriam* 'is a wish that the heart would abandon its circumambulation and replicate the forward impulse of time. Tennyson's repetitions across divisions accentuate the circularity in the other divisions he indicates: Christmas and Christmas and Christmas'.[161] As Hisao suggests, Christmas in Tennyson's poem is itself a repetition that generates a sense of circularity, primarily through the use of language. Yet the repetition employed in these Christmas poems is peculiar. There is only one instance of direct repetition across the three Christmases, seen in the opening of the first and third Christmas sections which both begin: 'The time draws near the birth of Christ: / The moon is hid; the night is still' (104: 1-2). More commonly, the Christmas episodes of *In Memoriam* echo one another through half-repetitions, and near-refrains, instilling in the reader a visceral sense of continuity and discontinuity. When Christmas first appears in *In Memoriam*, 'A rainy cloud possessed the earth' (30:3), but the following Christmas we hear only a half echo of the previous year: this time 'The silent snow possessed the earth' (78:3). A similar technique is used in the speaker's references to the Christmas holly. The first Christmas after Hallam's death, the poet informs us 'With trembling fingers did we weave / The holly round the Christmas hearth' (30:1-2), and the second Christmas of the text is introduced with a repetition of this earlier act, when 'Again at Christmas did we weave / The holly round the Christmas hearth' (78:1-2). The opening adverb 'again' emphasises the continuity inherent in the tradition, yet in the second instance there are no references to the 'trembling fingers' of the first Christmas. By the third Christmas it is difference rather than continuity that is

[161] Hisao, "Calculating Loss," 176.

emphasised, as the poet writes 'Tonight ungather'd let us leave / This laurel, let this holly stand' (105:1-2). This final Christmas clearly illustrates festive rupture. Here, there is a marked absence of continuity with the previous two years as we hear that the poet's father has now also passed away, and a sense of festive dislocation is emphasised through repeated references to the unfamiliar, 'strange' surroundings. As Moore writes,'by the third Christmas the narrator's family have revised their holiday customs since the death of the father has seen them moved into a new home and driven them further from the old associations that kept Hallam with them during the holiday'.[162] Although this third Christmas opens with a direct repetition from the first Christmas, we soon discover that the pealing bells the poet hears this time 'are not the bells I know' instead, 'Like strangers voices here they sound, / In lands where not a memory strays' (104:8-9).

The patterns of fixity and change, and repetition and half-repetition can also be observed in the narrator's references to his family's traditional Christmas pastimes. In the first Christmas we get the sense that participating in the usual Christmas games did not come naturally to the grieving family: 'At our old pastimes in the hall / We gambol'd, making vain pretence / Of gladness' (30:5-7). This 'vain pretence' indicates that the Christmas rituals feel forced and unnatural to the narrator. Rosenblum observes that, 'in the celebratory acts of the first Christmas Tennyson chooses to enact an experience which is at first mechanical,' claiming that the scene itself is an artificial pretence of gladness. However, she also notes that 'the inner core [of Christmas] remains untouched, song and ceremony become activities in the present, a way of shaping life as it goes along'.[163] Although the speaker's grief pervades the first Christmas there is, as Rosenblum notices, a feeling of continuity despite the rupture of loss. When the family gather together, they express the sentiment that this Christmas is 'the same, but not the same' as previous years, when they sing that the dead are 'yet the same' (30:26), and do not 'change to us, although

[162] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 136.
[163] Rosenblum, "The Act of Writing 'In Memoriam,'" 124.

they change' (30:24). The following year a sense of continuity with the past appears to have been restored, as the Christmas pastimes resume their usual place in the festivities:

> As in the winters left behind,
> Again our ancient games had place,
> The mimic picture's breathing grace,
> And dance and song and hoodman-blind. (78:9-12)

The adverb 'again' appears for a second time in this second Christmas, associating continuity and restoration with the celebrations. The stanza gives the impression that the games have relevance once more, and through them the speaker finds it possible to be reconnected to 'the winters left behind.' Yet these Christmas pastimes are simultaneously prefigured by a consciousness that 'over all things brooding slept / The quiet sense of something lost' (78:7-8). Though the trimmings of Christmas might appear to be the same as they always have been, changes in circumstance and the inescapable sense of loss ties them up in a motion of recirculation and doubling. Indeed, as the second Christmas draws to a close, it is this experience of change and changelessness that the speaker expresses, as he describes his own experience of his changing grief, and notes: 'Her deep relations are the same, / But with long use her tears are dry' (78:19-20). His grief is the same, but its expression is not.

It is during the third 'strange' Christmas however, that Tennyson's reference to festive games and traditions seems to resonate with the broader nineteenth-century interest in the origins of old customs and the fictionalising of Christmas past, as explored earlier in this chapter. Unlike the previous two Christmases, the narrator informs us that this time there are no games, dances, songs or pastimes, the festive activities have now been suspended altogether. By modifying his Christmas rituals, the speaker acknowledges the necessity of change, implying that the old customs the family used to participate in have become incompatible with changed times and circumstances: 'For change of place, like

growth of time, / Has broke the bond of dying use' (105:11-12). Instead of enacting Christmas pastimes with 'vain pretence,' as he did in the first instance, the speaker justifies his decision to abandon Christmas rituals from previous years by simply asking: 'who would keep an ancient form / Thro' which the spirit breathes no more?' (105:19-20). In the fictive time established in *In Memoriam*, this would be the Christmas of 1835, but in literal, biographic time, Robert Ross reveals that it was the Christmas of 1837.[164] Consequently, the dating of this section coincides with the publication of Hervey's *Book of Christmas*. As the speaker asks why one would keep up the pretence of ancient traditions in the midst of change, it seems that Tennyson is referring to the contemporary fear that many old Christmas customs were falling away. Perhaps Tennyson is gesturing towards the widespread debate, seen in the first section of the chapter, regarding whether these ancient practices should be preserved or allowed to disappear.

A comparison of the family's participation in their traditional Christmas pastimes over the three years seems to indicate that change is inevitable. Since Hallam's death, it is clear that the festive games had become incompatible with the mood of the season. In the first year the rituals were mechanical actions practiced out of 'vain pretence,' and the next year, although it appeared as though they once again 'had place' in the celebrations, they were followed by a series of searching questions: did the group's participation in these ancient games with 'No single tear, no mark of pain' mean that their grief had 'changed to less?' (78:14-16). Throughout the poem, we frequently see the word 'change' rhymed with 'strange'; at one point we hear that in 'the dust of change, The days [...] grow to something strange' (71:10-11). Earlier in the text the speaker couples change, strange and same, in the lines:

> And I perceived no touch of change,
>
> [...]

[164] Robert H. Ross, *In Memoriam* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 69.

But found him all in all the same,

I should not feel it to be strange (14:17-20).

Of course, the strangeness of change and changelessness is underscored in this poem by Tennyson's allusions to deep time and uniformitarianism. As Armstrong notes, Tennyson's 'dust of change' echoed Lyell's theory that 'simply because of the fact of flux itself it is impossible to see the coherence of geological structure which has itself been formed through the operation of chasms, breaks and gaps in time and space'.[165] The final Christmas of *In Memoriam* seems to recognise that great change has lead to a lack of coherence, and an uncertainty concerning how the festival should be observed, an issue that many of Tennyson's contemporaries were also struggling to comprehend. Though Tennyson offers no final word on the shape that the speaker's future Christmases will take, the New Year bells of the final Christmas provide a stark contrast to the chaotic bells of the first Christmas. The reader is able to sense what Alan Sinfield has described as 'repetition with difference' which 'is the primary strategy of the incremental structure of *In Memoriam*'.[166] As the New Year bells sound in Section 106 of *In Memoriam*, the narrator uses them as a means of expressing his desire for release and change, and they become 'influences which assist the cause of human progress'.[167] The speaker appeals to the bells, entreating them to 'Ring out the old, ring in the new' (106:5). Indeed, the poem alternates between the "ringing out" of that which is old and redundant, such as 'false pride in place and blood' (106:21) and the "ringing in" of qualities that will enrich the present and the future, such as 'the common love of good' (106: 24). The constant switching between ringing in and ringing out mirrors the motion of the bells swelling and failing, and dilating and decreasing in the first Christmas section. It is a repetitive motif that seems to link into the narrator's own thoughts about change and changelessness. In one way the New Year bells are the same bells of the first Christmas, they are 'wild bells' (106:1), as uncontained

[165] Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 262.
[166] Alan Sinfield, *Alfred Tennyson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 115.
[167] "'In Memoriam,'" *Sharpe's London Magazine* 12 (July 1850): 121.

and uncontrollable as the chaotic grief they personified earlier. Yet they are different bells, as in this instance the narrator is in control of them and transforms their purpose, telling them to 'Ring out the grief that saps the mind, / For those that here we see no more' (106:9-10). As Ross suggests, in this poem the speaker seems to restate his determination 'to direct his art to nobler ends than merely purveying his grief'.[168] The bells are changeless, they ring out to 'The flying cloud, the frosty light' (106:2) just as they have at other points throughout the poem, but the narrator now seeks change, and he bids them to 'Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes' (106:19), expressing his need to move onward: 'The year is dying in the night / Ring out, wild bells, and let him die' (106:3-4).

The three Christmases of *In Memoriam* are repetitive but distinct. One of the most striking ways in which Tennyson expresses how the festival is 'the same, but not the same' is through the near-refrain which appears in each Christmas section. The first year we read, 'And sadly fell our Christmas-eve' (30:4); the second, 'And calmly fell our Christmas-eve' (78:4); and the third, 'And strangely falls our Christmas-eve' (105:4). The form is the same each time the line appears, but the adverb changes, and by the third Christmas the tense changes too. Wolfreys highlights that 'this analogical formula is performative in that it builds as it reiterates, and yet resists unity and coherence'.[169] The near-refrain haunts the poem, it returns with each Christmas, albeit expressing something slightly different with each return. In this way it builds as it reiterates, persuading the reader to consider the change and changelessness associated with the season. As we saw in *The Book of Christmas*, Hervey similarly encourages his readers to commemorate the continuity of Christmas in his lengthy history of the festival. Yet at the same time he is keen to emphasise that the past should not take precedence over the present, and attempts to deter his readers from regressing too far into the stasis of changelessness. Likewise, in his depiction of a fictional old-fashioned Christmas, Irving presents his reader with a festive

[168] Ross, *In Memoriam*, 71.
[169] Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, 64.

time warp, where change has been expressly prohibited and each year's celebrations are indistinguishable from the next, prescribed according to ancient tradition from the remote depths of time immemorial. Although Dickens's Christmas in *Pickwick* is similarly focused on old-fashioned customs and provides the reader with a retreat into an old country manor, the Dickensian interest in the present moment is not suppressed. The *Pickwick* Christmas might be fictional and antiquarian, but it sows the seeds of the vibrant Christmas "spirit" Dickens would go on to develop in *A Christmas Carol*. Welch has identified *In Memoriam* as a poem about progress, but he goes on to clarify that 'the poet's idea of progress is not blindly optimistic; the future might be frightening and even destructive. But the way must be "forward"'.[170] While many writers in the first half of the nineteenth century expressed great interest in the past, there was simultaneously an inescapable consciousness of the present moment, and an understanding of the inevitability of progress and change. Although it is clear that the celebration of Christmas did seem to prompt the nation and the individual to look back to bygone times, many writers were keen to ensure that, unlike Squire Bracebridge, their readers did not lose sight of the present when Christmas approached.

[170] Dennis M. Welch, "Distance and Progress in 'In Memoriam,'" *Victorian Poetry* 18, no. 2 (1980): 177.

Chapter Two: Time and Space in *A Christmas Carol* (1843)

Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* is one of the best known and best loved Christmas stories from the nineteenth century. Today it remains a seminal festive text that has become synonymous with the image of the "Victorian Christmas" for many modern readers, whether they have read the novel itself or seen one of its many adaptations in the theatre or cinema. Since its first publication in 1843, the *Carol* has become more than a reading experience. Jerry Juhl's screenplay for the surreal *Muppet Christmas Carol* of 1992 transformed Dickens's novel into a children's musical, and in 2009, Robert Zemeckis turned *A Christmas Carol* into an "I-MAX 3-D Experience" featuring Jim Carrey as Scrooge. In the same year, images from Zemeckis's cinematic adaptation illuminated the streets of London, when screen shots from this multi-million Disney version of *A Christmas Carol* were used in the city's Christmas decorations. While John Ruskin may have claimed in 1870 that the *Carol* was nothing but a Christmas novelty of 'mistletoe and pudding',[1] the amount of popular attention Dickens's text receives indicates that the story has managed to resonate with many generations of readers and viewers. Only three years after its initial publication, one writer for *Punch* revealed how the *Carol* had changed the dynamic of the Christmas book market, commenting that 'the Literature of England promises, or rather threatens, to be inundated this year with a flood of Christmas Books. Every little author is preparing a five shilling volume in imitation of the *Christmas Carol*'.[2] In its sustained enjoyment by audiences worldwide, Dickens's first Christmas book seems able to connect with those who encounter it in a far deeper way than simply promoting Christmas as an excuse to eat, drink and be merry. As Vincent Van Gogh wrote to his brother in 1889, Dickens's Christmas writings contain 'things so profound that one must

[1] John Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton, 19 June 1870, in *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cooke and A. Wedderburn, vol. 37 (London: George Allen, 1903-12), 7.
[2] "Flood of Christmas Books," *Punch* 11 (1846), 210.

re-read them often'.[3] This chapter will explore the representation and experience of temporality as one of these 'profound' themes, central to Dickens's *Carol*. In the very first stave of the text, when Fred visits Scrooge on Christmas Eve, he is confronted with a bitter interrogation from his pessimistic uncle who asks him, 'What's Christmas time to you' (36). In posing this question, Dickens seems to use Scrooge's cynicism to question his reader's personal understanding and relation to the twofold anxiety of the nineteenth century captured in the questions: what is Christmas, and perhaps more disconcertingly, what is time, to you?

As has always been recognised, *A Christmas Carol* is conspicuously about time, functioning as a meditation on the relations between past, present and future, as personified by the three ghosts who visit Scrooge one Christmas Eve. Zemeckis, director of the 2009 Disney adaptation, stated that Dickens's *Carol* is 'one of his favourite stories dealing with time travel',[4] and without doubt, one of the *Carol*'s most distinctive qualities is its distortion of ordinary temporality.[5] Scrooge's physical encounter with the past, present and yet to come, along with the return of the dead and disruption to the fabula order of narrative, highlights the significance of time as both a function and theme of the novel. Clearly, Dickens's 'Ghostly little book' (29) employs the supernatural as a reflection of the capricious workings of time. With the three supernatural agents representing three different temporal dimensions, the story shifts dramatically from one time frame to the other, an effect that contributes to the drama of Scrooge's haunting by continually dislocating the protagonist. More significantly however, the characteristics of each ghost – the distant presence of the past, the unstoppable aging of the present, and the ambiguity of the future – characterise time, and represent it as more than something to be measured. By using supernatural devices to draw attention to time, Dickens seems to be responding to the

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[3] Vincent van Gogh, "To Theo van Gogh. Aries, on or about Thursday, 4 April 1889," Van Gogh Museum, accessed 15 February, 2013, http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let754/letter.html.
[4] "A Christmas Carol," IMDB, accessed 15 February, 2013, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1067106/
[5] Robert Zemeckis is also the director of another film about time travel, *Back to the Future* (1985).

underlying concerns associated with a secular attitude towards temporality. In his exploration of *Time and the Novel* (1972), A.A. Mendilow refers to the fundamental binary of time's form in literature, where 'chronological' or 'clock time' is established against 'psychological' or 'perceptual' time. According to Mendilow, 'chronological time' is measured by the clock face, and is thus the same for everyone, remaining unaffected by personal perception. He claims that this form of time is an artificial, arbitrary convention, developed for social purposes to regulate and co-ordinate actions that involve more than one person. On the other hand, 'psychological time' is the inward private clock through which the individual experiences time by a subjective perception of its value and intensity, alongside the personal sensation of speed and duration of experience.[6] In *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (1989) Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase reaffirm Mendilow's point, and likewise 'propose a distinction between public time and the subjective experience of time'.[7] As they see it, public, or clock time, is different to the subjective realm of private time, primarily because 'our psychological internal clocks know nothing of the mechanical escapement of the pulse of the quartz'.[8]

The distinction between public and private time is of great significance in Dickens's Christmas books and, as numerous literary critics have pointed out, temporality is something of a preoccupation that emerges in much of Dickens's writing. J. Bowen and R. L. Patten have noted in the introduction to their collection of essays on Dickens that 'time [...] is a repeated concern in Dickens's writing, which never seems to take its passage for granted'.[9] Meanwhile, Sue Zemka has explored the 'chronometrics' of *Great Expectations* (1860-1), Elizabeth Palmberg has considered representations of clockwork in *Master Humphrey's Clock* (1840-1) and *Dombey and Son* (1846-8), and time in *Bleak*

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[6] A.A. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), 31-64.
[7] Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase, *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 4.
[8] Ibid., 5.
[9] J. Bowen and R.L. Patten, eds., *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 9.

House (1851-3) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1869-70) have also been examined, respectively, by Patrick J. Creevy and Paul Gottschalk.[10] From a biographic perspective, Ackroyd notes, 'Time reminded [Dickens] of the sea. Of motion. Of necessary progress',[11] a mentality that captures the elusive and uncontrollable nature of time, a due cause for nineteenth-century anxiety. *A Christmas Carol* prefigured Dickens's later novel *Hard Times* (1854), where the image of harsh schoolmaster Mr. Gradgrind's 'deadly statistical clock [...] which measured every second with a beat like a rap upon a coffin-lid',[12] came to symbolise human mechanisation and the repression of "fancy". The dominant social construction of clock time in the nineteenth century supersedes the sensation associated with perceptual time, as is also exemplified by Dickens's characterisation of the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge. For Scrooge, numbers, dials and measurements shape time, rather than human experience. By using a supernatural intervention to illuminate the dimensions of time and reform his protagonist, Dickens comments on the limitations of secular, clock time. Stephen L. Franklin has observed that *A Christmas Carol* is a tale about 'the misapplication of time',[13] and Murray Baumgarten has also pointed towards the centrality of time in *A Christmas Carol* in two short essays, which compare Dickens's Christmas novella to Goethe's *Faust*, and two films starring Bill Murray: *Scrooged* (dir. Richard Donner; 1988 – an 'updating' of Dickens' novel to the 1980s' world of corporate television) and *Groundhog Day* (dir. Harold Ramis; 1993).[14] In both essays, Baumgarten emphasises that 'the reconception of time' is the vehicle through which the protagonists are morally educated. This reconceiving of temporality, according to Baumgarten, releases

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[10] Zemka, "Chronometrics of Love and Money in *Great Expectations*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 35 (2005): 133-156; Palmberg, "Clockwork and Grinding in *Master Humphrey's Clock* and *Dombey and Son*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 34 (2004): 17-50; Creevy, "In Time and Out: The Tempo of Life in *Bleak House*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 12 (1983): 63-80; Gottschalk, "Time in *Edwin Drood*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 1 (1970): 265-274.

[11] Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Vintage, 2002), 246.

[12] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Penguin: London, 2003), 95.

[13] Stephen L. Franklin, "Dickens and Time: The Clock without Hands," *Dickens Studies Annual* 4 (1975), 14.

[14] Murray Baumgarten, "Scrooge and Faust," *Dickensian*, 97.1 (2001), 22-32; Murray Baumgarten, "Bill Murray's Christmas Carols" in John Glavin, ed., *Dickens on Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61-71.

the hero from a 'unidimensional sense of time' to a 'realization of time's flow and the understanding that only by changing within time can one stand outside it'.[15] In identifying the centrality of time in the narrative of the *Carol*, these arguments pave the way for a more detailed examination of precisely how Scrooge's experience of time is reconceived through his interaction with the past, present and yet to come.

Time would continue to occupy Dickens's thoughts in his second Christmas book, *The Chimes*. In this tale the protagonist, Trotty Veck, loses hope in the working class of which he is a part and begins to resent impoverished people, partly because of the bleak newspaper reports he reads. Trotty's downfall is that his heart becomes hardened against his own community after 'exceedingly short-sighted',[16] paternalistic figures of authority persuade him that the working classes do not deserve any rights of their own, and should be punished rather than protected. As Stone explains, 'Alderman Cute believes in putting the poor down; a red-faced gentleman recommends forcing them back to the "good old times:" and Mr. Filer treats them as lifeless columns of charts, averages, and statistics'.[17] As the tale progresses, and Trotty grows increasingly disillusioned with his own people, a supernatural intervention takes place. One December night, Trotty finds himself climbing up a bell tower when he hears the chimes pealing. Here he is haunted by the phantoms of the bells. These phantoms, much like the spirits in the *Carol*, reprimand the protagonist for committing a crime against time. In this instance it is because Veck has lost hope in mankind and submitted to a belief that man is born bad. When Trotty first enters the haunted bell tower, it is 'swarming with dwarf phantoms, spirits, [and] elfin creatures' (125), which we are later told 'take such shapes and occupations as the hopes and thoughts of mortals' (131). Therefore, it is interesting that Trotty observes some of these creatures 'putting the hands of clocks forward, some putting the hands of clocks backward, [and]

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[15] Baumgarten, "Bill Murray's Christmas Carols," 66-68.
[16] Charles Dickens, *The Chimes*, in *A Christmas Carol* (London: Penguin, 2003), 100. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.
[17] Stone, Dickens and the Invisible World, 127.

some endeavouring to stop the clock entirely' (126). In taking the shape of mortal thought, the phantoms act out a preoccupation with controlling time in much the same way that Scrooge continually controls time by reducing it into routine. Later, the Goblin of the Bell reminds Trotty that:

> The voice of Time [...] cries to man, Advance! Time is for his advancement and improvement; for his greater worth, his greater happiness, his better life; his progress onward to that goal within its knowledge and its view [...] Who seeks to turn him back, or stay him on his course, arrests a mighty engine which will strike the meddler dead; and be the fiercer and the wilder, ever, for its momentary check. (128)

This message, that time is for progress, advancement and improvement, could easily be directed at Scrooge, as well as Trotty. By reducing his experience of time to such a great extent, Scrooge is also guilty of committing a crime against temporality and humanity, for which he must too make amends. As in the *Carol*, by the end of *The Chimes* the protagonist's attitude towards time has been transformed. Trotty now respects the formidable power of temporality when he reveals, 'I know that our inheritance is held in store for us by Time. I know there is a Sea of Time to rise one day, before which all who wrong us or oppress us will be swept away like leaves' (157). As Stone explains, in the bell tower, 'Trotty has come to the nest of time; the voice of the bells is the voice of time' and, as in the *Carol*, 'Trotty's enlightenment is effected by being swiftly conveyed through space and time'.[18]

Though Dickens does address wider aspects of temporality in the *Carol*, it is the connection between Christmas and time which is central to the story. Throughout the novel, Christmas is referred to as a space in the year when the pervading conventionalities of time and worldly behaviour can be mediated; as Fred tells his uncle, Christmas is 'the

[18] Ibid., 129.

only time I know of in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut up hearts freely' (36). The Christmas moment offers what the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin describes in his analysis of 'carnival' as an 'escape from the usual official way of life',[19] serving as a break from ordinary temporality, but for Dickens there was something sacred and unchanging about the festive period too. When Christmas comes around, he wrote in an article for *Bell's Life in London* (1835), 'the unkind feelings that have struggled against better dispositions during the year, have melted away before its genial influence',[20] and at the end of the *Carol* we hear a newly-transformed Scrooge cry out 'Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this!' (111). This chapter will demonstrate how Dickens transforms Scrooge's attitude towards time and space throughout the course of this Christmas story, and will examine the significance of the protagonist's altered approach to temporality within the wider frame of his festive reformation. When we first encounter Scrooge in stave one of the *Carol*, he is an isolated and repressed figure who carefully measures, controls and conditions his experience of time and space, yet as the narrative progresses he gradually comes to accept that space and time should not be dominated by mechanistic measurements and reductive routines. Just as the immaterial Christmas spirits 'can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can' (122), time and space break away from control, evade linearity and demand redefinition as the story unfolds. Much like the representation of supernatural time within this text, one reviewer in 1844 remarked that the *Carol* itself was a work that was 'not to be talked about or written of according to ordinary rules'.[21] Scrooge's conception of confined, controlled and unchanging "secular" or "clock" time is overturned by the montage of Christmas scenes from his own past, present and future. As a result, his previous mode of engaging with time is challenged as the spirits introduce Scrooge to "supernatural" or "perceptual" time, an ever expanding landscape where temporality is

[19] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 8.
[20] Charles Dickens, "Christmas Festivities" in *A Christmas Carol* (London: Penguin, 2003), 4.
[21] Blanchard Samuel Laman, "Charles Dickens," *Ainsworth's Magazine* 5 (January 1844), 86.

permeable rather than fixed, and the individual is released from the constraints of time, rather than being repressed by them.

Bakhtin's model of the "chronotope" is useful to incorporate into any discussion of temporality in literature, as it is a term that refers to the 'intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'.[22] Here, Bakhtin's approach to literary studies is designed to measure how fictional time, space and character are constituted in relation to one another.[23] A helpful analogy to understand the chronotope is the cinematic experience, which Robert Stam describes as involving fictive time being visibly played out across a screen, while simultaneously unfolding in the literal time of the theatre.[24] The chronotope, as defined by Bakhtin, is a vital component of literary criticism, a way of understanding how a text's spatial and temporal indicators synthesise into a coherent whole, and a way of seeing how these indicators are used artistically by the writer. G.S. Marson and C. Emerson point towards the emphasis placed on connection in Bakhtin's model, writing that the 'chronotope specifies a "fused" sense of time and space. Time and space constitute a whole, and can be separated out only in an act of abstract analysis'.[25] For Bakhtin, the significance of space and time in literature is undisguised, and he even goes as far as suggesting that the literary chronotope could be said to define genre and determine the image of man in any given text.[26] Significantly, Sue Vice notes that while almost every text has its own chronotope, or set of chronotopes, 'some texts are more fruitful to approach in this way than others, for instance [...] tales of time travel'.[27] The central narrative of the *Carol* hinges on supernatural time travel, with the text bracketed by real time in the first and final staves. The opening images of bleak

[22] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 258.
[23] Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 200-201.
[24] Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 11.
[25] G.S. Marson and C. Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 368.
[26] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 85.
[27] Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, 202.

realism are set against the dynamic energy of the supernatural visitations, and the space-shifting associated with the haunting spirits. With these two distinct representations of space and time forming the structural axis of Dickens's text, two chronotopes simultaneously emerge from the novel: firstly, the secular chronotope of real time, and secondly, the supernatural chronotope of Scrooge's haunting.

The central significance of literary time and space, according to Bakhtin, lies in 'their meaning for *narrative*. They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said, without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative'.[28] From this angle, the two chronotopes of the *Carol* draw attention to visual and physical space, motion and transformation, and as Bakhtin writes, they function as the 'primary means for materializing time in space'.[29] Furthermore, Bakhtin argues that it is not only the spatial-temporal aspects of literature which are constantly being modified and reworked, but also, as Simon Dentith points out, that 'people's basic conceptions of time and space, are to be explained by [...] transformations in their mode of life'.[30] While there is a great deal of spatial-temporal fluctuation in the shifts between real time, past, present and future in the *Carol*, the overarching transformation triggered by the supernatural narrative is Scrooge's personal attitude to his own space and time, which finally results in his commitment to a new, spatially and temporally aware 'mode of life' when he announces his intention to 'live in the Past, the Present, and the Future' (110). Elsewhere, Bakhtin again draws attention to the *personal* relevance of space and time in literature and, in a passage that could be directly applied to Dickens's Scrooge, argues that the issue at stake is 'that special connection between a man and all his actions, between every event of his life and the spatial-temporal world'.[31] Before his transformation, it is obvious that

[28] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 250.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 53.
[31] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 167.

Scrooge lacks any real connection to the world outside of his highly controlled routine. As Baumgarten observes, 'for Scrooge, time is routine, and that routine is centered on money'.[32] Dickens would return to the unnatural image of life being repressed by strictly controlled time frames in *Hard Times*, a novel which deals with the negative repercussions of an education that focuses solely on factual and practical matters, neglecting the significance of imagination, entertainment and fun.[33] The novel is situated in the highly industrial world of Coketown, a place of monotonous toil where time, in its 'direful uniformity',[34] is strictly ordered by work patterns. We find echoes of Scrooge's understanding of time in Coketown, where 'the melancholy-mad elephants, like the Hard Fact men, abated nothing of their set routine, whatever happened. Day and night again, day and night again. The monotony was unbroken'.[35] Efraim Sicher has observed that *Hard Times*, like the first stave of the *Carol*, is a novel dominated by 'Acts of Enclosure,' located in a 'fictional landscape, whose territorial boundaries are marked by [...] oppositions of openness to enclosure'.[36] Yet among the people of Coketown, Dickens reveals that 'exactly in the ratio as they worked long and monotonously, the craving grew within them for some physical relief – some relaxation, encouraging good humour and good spirits, and giving them a vent – some recognized holiday'.[37] Unlike these hard-worked individuals, Scrooge craves no relief from his business or his enclosure, and rebuffs the idea of a Christmas holiday. The secular chronotope of the *Carol* is defined by the protagonist's ignorance and introverted way of life; however, the heightened consciousness of space and time, which transpires through Scrooge's contact with the supernatural chronotope, forces him to confront his unwholesome relationship with strictly ordered time and change his ways.

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[32] Baumgarten, "Scrooge and Faust," 25.
[33] Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2011), 249.
[34] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 90.
[35] Ibid., 247.
[36] Efraim Sicher, "Acts of Enclosure: The Moral Landscape of Dickens' *Hard Times*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 22 (1993), 197.
[37] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 30.

An analysis of the supernatural storyline of the *Carol*, and Scrooge's process of transformation, reveals that the representation of temporality in Dickens's text shifts from being dominated by clock-based measurement in the first stave, to eventually become a perceptive and subjective experience as the story unfolds. While Scrooge's interaction with Christmas is prompted by a supernatural intervention, his emotional response to the festive scenes his visits, coupled with his sensory experience of Christmas, ultimately restore him to feeling. The supernatural chapters of Dickens's novel are intimate and evocative, and imply that Christmas is best experienced through sense perception. The second section of this chapter will argue that Dickens represents Christmas time as something to be experienced and actively engaged in, rather than passively measured. In the *Carol*, Scrooge's physical embodiment of past, present and yet to come, followed by his transformation, reinforce the claim that temporality sculpts individual identity. Furthermore, it is significant that Scrooge's transformation takes place during 'the Christmas Time' (111), when the senses are heightened by festive cheer, and Scrooge becomes a man who 'knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge' (118). It is through his encounter with the supernatural realm of temporality, which is impossible to measure, strips the mortal of any control and obliges him to engage with his emotions, that Scrooge's dramatic transformation is so effectively achieved.

2.1 Secular Time

Bakhtin writes that the temporal aspect of the chronotope is essential to the process of characterisation in any given narrative, concluding from this observation that 'the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic'.[38] This suggests that in some way, fictional characters are always connected to the space and time that surrounds them, and therefore man's image, or his characterisation within a text, is necessarily shaped and developed by

[38] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 85.

the chronotope he inhabits. In *A Christmas Carol* it is evident that time and space are subjectively experienced by the protagonist. In the first stave of the novel, Dickens depicts Scrooge as a figure enclosed by his own highly restrictive and reductive attitudes towards space and time. Mendilow claims that 'everyone in fiction as in life carries his own time-system about with him',[39] and it is evident that Scrooge's time system, at the beginning of the novel, is dominated by his regimented experience of life. Scrooge's experience of time and space is confined by a secular mentality identifiable in the language and imagery of the *Carol*'s first stave, where Dickens introduces the reader to the bleak image of a cynical and unfeeling man. Taylor's explanation of secular time effectively describes Scrooge's experience of life before his haunting:

> Our encasing in secular time is [...] something we have brought about in the way we live and order our lives. It has been brought about by the same social and ideological changes which have wrought disenchantment. In particular, the disciplines of [...] civilized order have led us to measure and organize time as never before in human history.[40]

According to Taylor, secular time is something created by humans and comes to 'encase' them. The self-inflicted imprisonment that stems from a life lived in the confines of secular time finds a parallel in the words of Marley's ghost, who tells Scrooge 'I wear the chain I forged in life' (47), warning him that he will be forever held accountable for the way he currently lives if he does not change. Likewise, Scrooge's secular attitude defines time as something that is continually measured and organised, leading to a lack of emotional rapport with the world, or as Taylor puts it: 'disenchantment'. As Taylor goes on to reveal, secular time only has value in quantifiable terms:

> Time has become a precious resource, not to be "wasted". The result has been the creation of a tight, ordered time environment. This has enveloped us, until

[39] Mendilow, *Time and the Novel*, 31.
[40] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 59.

> it comes to seem like nature. We have constructed an environment in which we live a uniform, univocal secular time, which we try to measure and control in order to get things done. This "time frame" deserves [...] Weber's famous description of a "stahlhartes Gehäuse" (iron cage).[41]

The imagery of the *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, a restrictive secular space where time is quantified by measuring productivity, can be glimpsed in the first stave of the *Carol* when Scrooge puts his clerk, Bob Cratchit, to work in 'a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank' (35) where he copies letters. The secular time environment described by Taylor correlates closely with Dickens's characterisation of Scrooge in the opening of the text. Marley's Ghost similarly laments Scrooge's confined mentality as he calls him 'Man of the worldly mind!' (47), reiterating that Scrooge is encased and enveloped in a secular understanding of time which has worryingly, as Taylor notes above, 'come to seem like nature.'

The interior spaces inhabited by Scrooge during the first stave point toward the restrictive and imprisoning imagery of a secular chronotope, as he is depicted as a cruel recluse, self-confined to the narrow space of his own existence. In this section of the text, the reader is introduced to Scrooge's everyday way of life, which is significantly unaffected by it being 'of all the good days in the year – Christmas Eve' (35). Recurring references to constricted spaces are brought into focus alongside Scrooge's own solitary nature and wilful seclusion from the outside world. And as Baumgarten observes, Scrooge is most frequently identified in film versions of the *Carol* by his 'self-imposed isolation and spiritual alienation'.[42] In an early description of Scrooge, the narrator presents him as 'a tight-fisted hand to the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! [...] secret and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster' (34). The language associated with Scrooge carries connotations of zealous inward motion. The drawn out sequence of verbs suggests that he has drawn his life inward to an excessive

[41] Ibid.
[42] Baumgarten, "Bill Murray's Christmas Carols," 62.

degree, and there is something unwholesome and disturbing about his 'grasping' and 'clutching' which implies that this level of interiority is unnatural. The narrator's catalogue also creates the impression of accumulation, mirroring Scrooge's self-enclosed work ethic. He works with a dull energy, labours to accumulate, and then selfishly hoards his produce, corresponding to the Bakhtinian 'personal and detached human being – "the man who exists for himself".[43] Later in the chapter, Dickens reveals Scrooge's hostility towards charity as something inevitable, largely because the outward motion of generosity would undermine Scrooge's self-enclosure. His refusal to participate in charitable acts is also referred to in the passage above, where the narrator describes Scrooge's 'tight-fisted hand.' The image of Scrooge's clenched fist, closed tightly against the world, is a further indication of his interiority and resentment of charity. In an analysis of Scrooge, Lothar Cerny looks at Dickens's focus on spatial isolation, and comments that 'Scrooge is established as an aggressively tight old oyster, a character who is not for visiting and being visited'.[44] Visiting and being visited are social interactions that would inherently contradict the value Scrooge places upon self-enclosure. It is perhaps because Christmas is conventionally a time associated with open and welcoming spaces, that Scrooge rejects it.

The physical spaces that Scrooge occupies in the opening of the text also add to the sense of constriction. He spends each day 'busy in his counting-house,' which is in an enclosed court, 'of the narrowest' (35). Within his counting house, the door to Scrooge's room is open only so that he can 'keep an eye upon his clerk' who sits in the 'dismal little cell' (35) beyond. When the working day is over and Scrooge is forced to leave this enclosed space and go outside, he does so with dissatisfaction and the narrator notices that he 'walked out with a growl' (41). Yet after he leaves the confines of his office, Scrooge immediately retreats back into another dull, enclosed space, this time it is 'his usual melancholy tavern' (41). Though Scrooge goes to a public house, the time he spends there

[43] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 135.
[44] Cerny, "Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*: Revisiting and Reformation," *Connotations* 7, no. 3 (1997-8), 258.

is far from social: he sits in the tavern alone, reading 'all the newspapers' (41). Ironically, Scrooge's only active form of connection to the outside world is through the isolated activity of reading newspapers indoors. Rather than experiencing the external world, Scrooge reads reports about it and thus reality becomes, in effect, little more than a representation to Scrooge. In *The Chimes*, it is interesting to note that the act of reading newspapers also has negative connotations. When Trotty reads the newspapers he becomes further convinced that man is born bad and even more disillusioned with the working class, admitting, 'it almost goes against the grain with me to read a paper now [...] I don't know what we people are coming to' (93). Significantly, the last thing Trotty does before the ghostly Chimes call him to his transformative haunting, is read the newspaper: 'this same dreaded paper re-directed Trotty's thoughts into the channel they had taken all that day, and which the day's events had so worked out and shaped', and it is in this act of 'being alone again, and reading of the crimes and violences of the people, [that] he relapsed into his former train' (122). The isolated activity of newspaper reading in these two Christmas stories has negative consequence for both protagonists, as Dickens seems to suggest that there is an inherent danger in reading biased accounts of the outside world rather than living in and experiencing it. After Scrooge has finished reading his newspapers, he makes his way to the 'chambers' (41) where he lives, and where his fondness for dingy, lonely spaces remains visible. When Scrooge enters the house and closes his front door, we are told that 'the sound resounded through the house [...] every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own' (42). The door's echo gives a sense of the house's vast dimensions, however Scrooge only goes into three rooms, 'sitting-room, bed-room, lumber-room' within the house 'to see that all was right' (43). As the lumber-room is nothing more than a store for an 'old fire-guard, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker' (43), the only two rooms that Scrooge actually inhabits in his home are the sitting-room and bed-room.

Dickens's representation of Scrooge within his own house emphasises the character's preoccupation with confined interiors and his distaste for external, open spaces, as he likewise restricts his life to a part of a whole.

Scrooge's self-enclosure is damaging in a number of ways, most immediately because his detachment from the outside world and wilful isolation prevent him from noticing portentous signs of the supernatural visitation that is to come. As we have seen, Scrooge only encounters the external world in his brief movements from one enclosed space to another enclosed space and the abstract reports he reads in newspapers. But even before the supernatural events of the text begin to unfold, the chapter is littered with ominous language and imagery, perhaps intended to warn Scrooge and prepare him for the events that lie ahead. While Scrooge is in his counting house, Dickens's narrator writes 'he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breast, stamping their feet upon the pavement-stones to warm them' (35). Despite hearing this stamping, beating and wheezing, Scrooge does not look out of his window. Instead, his attention remains focused on his work, firmly within the walls of his office. Outside however, foreboding imagery continues to pervade the scene, as a ghostly 'fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that [...] the houses opposite were mere phantoms' (35). Not only do the houses become phantoms, but the ethereal fog also enters the enclosed spaces through 'every chink and keyhole'. If the fog represents a ghostly, supernatural presence able to permeate interior spaces from without, Scrooge's blind confinement within his office means he remains ignorant and unsuspecting.[45] The prophetic imagery increases as this episode progresses. Drawing attention to the peculiar occurrences outside, the narrator comments: 'to see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature

[45] Dickens's later novel *Bleak House* (1852-3) also opens with an unsettling depiction of a November fog that covers London. There is 'Fog everywhere' and Dickens describes it 'creeping' and 'cruelly pinching' the people in the streets who 'peep [...] into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds'. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Penguin, 1996), 13.

lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale' (35). It is almost as though nature is mimicking Scrooge as the clouds descend, reducing visibility and enclosing the outer scene. Like Scrooge's characteristic interiority, this reduction of space has the effect of distorting the visible world, and 'obscuring everything,' in much the same way that Scrooge's approach to life has been obscured by his extreme introversion. As the afternoon continues, the parallel outdoor scenes become even more alarming, when 'the fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about with flaring links' (39). The message of impending danger is here conveyed through the unnerving image of people running with urgency through the streets, 'flaring' their torches, but as always Scrooge's attention cannot be drawn away from his work-space.

Significantly, it is at one of the rare instances when Scrooge is exposed to outdoor space that the first supernatural event of the novel takes place. Throughout the opening of the narrative, Dickens repeatedly associates Scrooge with the imagery of locks and keys. In addition to the fog, which pours in through the keyholes, there is the carol singer who comes to the door and 'stoop[s] down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol' (40). As Scrooge despises Christmas visiting, he scares the singer away 'leaving the keyhole to the fog' (40). Scrooge is conscientious to prevent any further intrusions into his space. He angrily intercepts the attempts of any who come close to even the minute open space of the keyhole, the only 'chink' in his entire office that could connect him to the outside world. References to the presence of a 'cell' (35) within Scrooge's counting house, and his endorsement of prisons later in this episode, accentuate his firm belief in the value of locked spaces.[46] Therefore, it is important to notice that when Scrooge's door knocker mysteriously transforms into Marley's face, it occurs not only while Scrooge is in the vulnerability of an outside space, but also while his key is 'in the lock of the door' (41). After this strange event has taken place however, Scrooge's reaction is to 'put his hand

[46] Philip Collins notes that: 'The prison, like Wordsworth's sounding cataract, haunted [Dickens] like a passion.' Philip Collins, *Dickens and Crime* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 14.

upon the key he had relinquished, [and turn] it sturdily' (42), trusting in the mechanics of lock and key, and keen to enter the enclosed space of the house. When he is within the house, Scrooge continues to constrict the space he occupies in ever increasing degrees by closing himself within locked rooms. He fastens the front door behind him, and walks up the gloomy stairs. Here the narrator observes that 'darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it' (43), but it seems that Scrooge's love of darkness is not only because it is 'cheap,' but also because it disguises open space, casting it into a black nothingness, and making the staircase he ascends, which had 'plenty of width' (42) feel more confined. Similarly, after entering his sitting-room, 'he closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in' before eating his gruel by the fire, being 'obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it' (43), thus restricting his personal space even within a single room, to a very small portion of it. The transformation of the door knocker, a device that would ordinarily be used to alert those within the building that there was a visitor who wanted to gain admittance, draws the reader's attention to Scrooge's position and security within his house. This first supernatural turn of the narrative warns Scrooge that someone or something is trying to gain admittance to his home, however he appears willing to ignore this warning, using it only as an excuse to double-lock his doors. As J.H. Clarke has noted, 'the analogy of being locked, indeed even "double" locked, underscores the reality that Dickens' character is physically and emotionally imprisoned. The fact that he, himself, turned the key highlights the dual reality that his incarceration is self-imposed and that it is he who ultimately holds the solution to his own liberation'.[47] Evidently uninfluenced by Scrooge's increased security measures, Marley 'comes as a visitation upon Scrooge',[48] to supernaturally undermine his naïve belief that through anti-social aggression and self-confinement he can remain isolated and removed from external reality.

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[47] J.H. Clarke, "The Metapsychology of Character Change: A Case Study of Ebenezer Scrooge," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 11 (2009), 253.
[48] Cerny, "Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*," 258.

Throughout the opening of the *Carol* Scrooge repeatedly asserts a need for isolation, telling visitors to his workplace 'I wish to be left alone' (39). Likewise, when Fred visits his uncle with Christmas greetings, Scrooge refuses to acknowledge the season, and responds to his nephew by saying 'let me leave it alone' (36). It is clear that Scrooge's spatial confinement is part of a greater social confinement, and his solitary and self-contained lifestyle means that few will attempt to interact with him. Moreover, his isolation from the outside world means that Scrooge is disconnected from the annual occurrence of Christmas. Taylor's earlier description of secular time as a 'resource' which is uniform and univocal, to be measured, organised, and which ultimately envelops the individual in its tight order, or *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, can be closely compared to Scrooge's relationship with time in this section of the text. As Taylor notes, 'secular time is [...] something we have brought about in the way we live and order our lives',[49] and Scrooge's self-created time environment is just as restrictive and reductive as his relationship with space. Scrooge refuses to acknowledge time in any way that is not related to his own personal interests. Not only does he prefer to confine himself to narrow spaces and 'edge his way along the crowded paths of life' (35), he also despises conversation. When Fred visits the counting house, the first words we hear Scrooge utter in response to his nephew's Christmas greetings are 'Bah! Humbug!' (35), a twofold rejection of both Christmas time and Fred's attempt to converse. Engaging in discourse would present too much of a threat to Scrooge, as conversation demands openness and social extroversion. Instead, the pattern of Scrooge evading his nephew's discourse continues, until the point at which Scrooge terminates the intercourse completely by repeating 'Good Afternoon' (37) regardless of Fred's further questions.

Parker has similarly observed how Scrooge's language changes during the course of the *Carol*, 'to begin with, [he] prefers the statistic and the wisecrack to narrative –

[49] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 59.

discontinuous, atomistic, unchained to values. It is only when he consents to "live in the Past, the Present and the Future" that he can regain the humanity he has forfeited'.[50] The motivation behind Scrooge's determination to end the conversation with his nephew is the personal nerve his questions touch; answering them would require him to emerge from his self-enclosed state. Fred asks his uncle why he never visits, before another question: 'what cannot we be friends?' (37). As visiting and being visited by friends is alien to Scrooge, he dismisses the question by simply repeating the immediate time of day: 'Good Afternoon' (37). Through this repetition Dickens insinuates that a strictly measured and uniform time frame is one of the only things Scrooge is able to comprehend. Time is a resource to Scrooge, it is impersonal, ordered, and under his control, or so he thinks. In attempting to issue a similar control over the discourse with his nephew, Scrooge draws attention to the time, and by bringing this temporal reminder into the dialogue he indicates that his is busy and has other things to do. In other words, 'Good Afternoon' means that Scrooge has no time for Christmas, no time for visiting, no time for family, and no time for friends. Furthermore, the repeated 'Good Afternoon' exists in opposition to Fred's 'A Merry Christmas, uncle!' (37). While Fred's wishes extend over a whole season, Scrooge's 'Good Afternoon' is limited to the present day, and the present moment, with no acknowledgement of the festive period whatsoever.

Scrooge's unsettling relationship with time continues to pervade his language in this stave of the *Carol*. When the 'portly gentlemen' (38) appealing for charitable funds pay a visit to the counting house after Fred's departure, Scrooge's language is once again curt and evasive. When one of the gentlemen enquires if he is Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley, rather than offering a direct response to the question, Scrooge reveals his identity by referring to the death of Marley: 'Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years [...] He died seven years ago, this very night' (38). Earlier in the chapter, the narrator informs us that

[50] Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, 177.

Scrooge had never painted over Marley's name, and that he answered to both names because 'it was all the same to him' (34). Here, Scrooge's place in time is only understood in the absence of others. It seems as though he has no real identity of his own when he informs the gentlemen that he is Scrooge by blankly stating the death of his partner, a bare fact that he repeats twice. Earlier in this chapter, Scrooge's lack of human identity is also implied when we are told that 'nobody ever stopped him in the street [...] No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle [...] no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired to way to such and such a place, of Scrooge,' but this 'was the very thing he liked' (34). Similarly, when Fred visits Scrooge he addresses him as 'uncle,' but both Fred's Christmas wishes and Scrooge's identity as 'uncle' are dismissed when he responds to his nephew's greeting with 'Bah! [...] Humbug!' (35). After Scrooge's haunting however, it is possible to see him reassuming his lost identity. In the final paragraphs of the tale, the narrator writes that Scrooge became 'a second father' to Tiny Tim, and 'as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city ever knew' (116). In his interaction with the gentlemen who visit his office, the anniversary of Marley's death 'seven years ago' indicates that Scrooge *is* aware of time passing; however, the last phrase of his response suggests a reluctance to consider the past, as he shifts the temporal frame, bringing the comment back to 'this very night.' Here, Scrooge will only define the past in terms of the present. Later however, Scrooge faces his past during his encounter with the first of the three spirits, the Ghost of Christmas Past, and according to Vincent Newey he also faces one of the 'most potent devices for unlocking and directing the energies of the self – memory'.[51] Before this unlocking of memory takes place however, Scrooge simply sees the past through a bare, quantitative method of measuring time. Time past is reductive and clinical and used only to categorise everything that has gone before. We see that Scrooge compartmentalises time, there are no hazy lines where memories linger and no evidence of

[51] Vincent Newey, *The Scriptures of Charles Dickens* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 24.

any emotional connection to the past. The past, for Scrooge, functions simply as a means of informing strangers that Marley is dead.

As this scene continues, it becomes increasingly clear that Scrooge has a very static understanding of time. His limited perspective becomes even more disturbing as the conversation turns to social questions of poverty and punishment,[52] issues of real concern for both Dickens and his Victorian readers.[53] The language Scrooge uses during his discussion with the gentlemen uncovers a preoccupation with stasis as he asks, regarding the Union workhouses, 'Are they still in operation?' to which the gentleman responds 'They are. Still [...] I wish I could say they were not' (38). The obvious difference between Scrooge and the gentleman lies in their understanding and use of the word 'still.' For Scrooge, it expresses the positive, ceaseless constancy of a perfectly undisturbed system. The gentleman, however, repeats Scrooge's 'still' after his unhappy response that the prisons and workhouses remain in operation. In contrast to Scrooge, he uses the word negatively, referring to a social stasis that should be a cause for concern. Evidently, Scrooge does not share the gentleman's desire for change. The prisons, workhouses and Treadmill are parallel images of his own preoccupation with reducing and controlling space and time. The reference to the Treadmill in particular is one that connotes repetitive, circular motion, conjuring the imagery of simultaneous movement and stasis. The Treadmill was a physical oxymoron of incessant, monotonous climbing and strife against the resistance of a revolving cylinder; it was an endless staircase that reached nowhere at all. After hours of constant motion, prisoners would be in precisely the same place when they finally finished a day's punishment, as they had been when they began climbing.

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[52] Poverty and punishment would become central themes in Dickens's subsequent Christmas text, *The Chimes*.

[53] Philip Collins notes: 'Dickens's lifetime [...] spanned a period of remarkable developments in the criminal law and its administration, in the scale and spirit of punishment, in police organisation and techniques, in the study of the causes of crime, and in attempts to remove or reduce these causes.' Collins, *Dickens and Crime*, 10.

Scrooge's narrow-minded opinions are analogous with his own experience of space and time. He spends each and every day encased within the strict routine he imposes upon himself, which Baumgarten has referred to as 'an endless cycle of unchanging money-making'.[54] In this sense, Scrooge is unlike Trotty Veck, the poverty-stricken protagonist of *The Chimes*, who 'loved to earn his money' not to accumulate wealth, but because 'he delighted to believe [...] that he was worth his salt' (90). Scrooge takes little satisfaction in his occupation and approaches it in the same detached way that he approaches everything else in his life. Work is simply a means to an end, and the end in this case is bringing in money that he can hoard. Likewise there is little, if anything, that differentiates time for Scrooge; instead, temporality is repetitive and static, much like the image of the Treadmill. As Clarke has observed, 'Scrooge obsessively holds to his daily routine [...] numbing himself and living a deadened life'.[55] While the compassionate gentleman tries to draw attention to immediate social concerns, and demonstrates that he is in touch with the Christmas moment by informing Scrooge that the poor and destitute 'suffer greatly at the present time' (38), Scrooge understands time only as a static form, impersonal and unchanging. He rudely dismisses the gentlemen by indicating that his business occupies him 'constantly' (39), another reminder of Scrooge's belief that he has no time for anyone or anything else.

Enclosed within secular time and confined within remote spaces, it is evident that Scrooge has become desensitised to the loneliness commonly associated with isolation. Scrooge's solitude is purposely emphasised by Dickens, and even from the first page of the text his lone status is stressed through the repetition of 'sole,' as we hear that Scrooge was Marley's 'sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend and sole mourner' (34). The use of the word 'sole' clearly echoes 'soul' and thus comes close to insinuating that Scrooge and Marley are one and the same person,

[54] Baumgarten, "Scrooge and Faust," 29.
[55] Clarke, "The Metapsychology of Character Change," 252.

something which is also suggested when Scrooge introduces himself to the two gentlemen by referring to Marley. Likewise, when Marley's Ghost visits Scrooge and we hear how Marley also lived a confined earthly life, refusing to venture into the world beyond the walls of their counting house, the characters are presented as mirror images of one another, as we will see in the following section of this chapter. In the first stave of the *Carol* it is clear that Scrooge has become what Taylor has termed a 'bounded self,' as he is distant and disengaged from everything that exists outside his mind. In this way, Scrooge's 'ultimate purposes are those which arise within [him]'. The 'bounded self' is 'buffered' according to Taylor, and it is because of this that the individual, in this case Scrooge, begins to see himself as invulnerable.[56] The intervention of supernatural time and space is required to break down Scrooge's self-imposed boundaries and buffers. As Parker has explained, 'it is the ghosts who undertake the task of weaning Scrooge from his addiction to a cold, atomistic perception of human behaviour. […] They teach him that men, women, and children are creatures of time – Scrooge himself not least'.[57] The three spirits of Christmas time introduce the reclusive protagonist to a new understanding of space and temporality, as he encounters a radically different supernatural realm, and begins to grasp that time is far beyond the definition and control of the mortal individual.

2.2 Supernatural Time

The *Carol* is a novel where the unchanging is juxtaposed against the transformative. In contrast to the dark image of Scrooge's stasis and self-confinement in the first chapter, Dickens introduces three supernatural spirits who inhabit a radically different spatial-temporal realm, one that is fluid, open and multidimensional. The distinction between these two forms of time can be understood, to a certain degree, through the differentiation Taylor makes between 'secular time' and what he terms 'higher times':

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[56] Ibid., 38.
[57] Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, 184.

> "Secular" time is what to us is ordinary time, indeed, to *us* it's just time, period. One thing happens after another, and when something is past, it's past. Time placings are consistently transitive [...] Now higher times gather an re-order secular time. They introduce "warps" and seeming inconsistencies in profane time-ordering. Events which were far apart in profane time could nevertheless be closely linked.[58]

The supernatural events of the *Carol* have a similar effect of 'gathering' and 're-ordering' time and space. This new form of temporality undermines the 'profane time-ordering' that characterised Scrooge's secular existence. The supernatural time associated with Scrooge's haunting is characterised by inconsistency; it violates the laws of logic and defies measurement. When Marley's Ghost warns Scrooge that he will be haunted by three spirits, he tells him to 'expect the first tomorrow when the bell tolls one [...and] the second on the next night at the same hour' (50), but as the tale unfolds it becomes evident that in the supernatural realm time cannot be understood in such secular terms. At the end of the text Scrooge tells the boy beneath his window 'the Spirits have done it all in one night' (112), contrary to the time frame given in Marley's earlier statement. As Emily Walker Heady has recognised, the supernatural events of the *Carol* are 'located in no clear temporal frame'.[59] Indeed, Scrooge becomes confused by time's inconsistency at other points during the narrative. After Marley's visit, he wakes to hear the bell strike twelve though he knows it was past two when he went to bed. Even before the first spirit appears, secular time has been distorted and seems to have impossibly turned back on itself. Predictably, the worldly Scrooge, who adamantly believes in the truth of clockwork, immediately concludes that 'an icicle must have got into the works' (53). Throughout the supernatural chapters of the *Carol*, real time is mysteriously warped and reordered. Significantly, as Newey points out, supernatural time does not align 'with the regular

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[58] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 55.
[59] Emily Walker Heady, "The Negative's Capability: Real Images and the Allegory of the Unseen in Dickens's Christmas Books," *Dickens Studies Annual* 31 (2002), 10.

conception of temporality as a sequence that assures us of order and significant continuity in our lives',[60] nor does it intend to. Instead, the supernatural chronotope of the *Carol* presents Dickens's protagonist with an unfamiliar and seemingly inconsistent experience of space and time, the complete antithesis of the strictly ordered secular time he is used to.

When Marley's Ghost visits Scrooge in the first chapter of the *Carol*, he draws attention to the damaging potential of living a life constrained by secular time, and stresses the need for Scrooge to change his priorities if he is to escape the disturbing fate that lies before him. Marley's Ghost is a figure who can speak from experience. We are informed that, like Scrooge, he lived his mortal life within the confines of secular space and time, but now he speaks from beyond the grave as a figure forever condemned by his earthly traits of indifference and self-enclosure. The Ghost of Marley draws Scrooge's attention to the dangers of a life confined within worldly space and time. In the afterlife, Marley has been punished for his earthly life, and he tells Scrooge, 'my spirit never walked beyond our counting-house – mark me! – in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole' (48). Scrooge clearly recognises that the traits of Marley's life also 'apply […] to himself,' but the ghost offers no comfort; instead, Marley asks himself 'why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down' (49), a question that reminds us of Scrooge's similar estrangement from society. Marley's Ghost clearly believes that his inability to rest in peace is a product of the earthly life he led, implying that his investment in the dehumanising sphere of secular space and time hardened his heart. An important distinction that emerges between secular and supernatural time throughout the course of the *Carol*, is that while secular time is concerned with the individual, supernatural time is associated with collective imagery. This distinction becomes clear as Marley's Ghost tells Scrooge about the importance of 'common welfare' and insists that 'mankind' should be his business, alongside the selfless attributes of

[60] Newey, *Charles Dickens and the Scriptures*, 51.

'charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence' (49). The experience Scrooge has with the spirits of the *Carol* challenges him to break away from his solitary habits. During his haunting, Scrooge is guided through scenes populated by people, from the school boys of his school days, to Christmas parties with Mr. Fezziwig and domestic celebrations in the homes of Fred and the Cratchit family. Furthermore, as he is dislocated from the familiar isolation of his worldly life, Scrooge is compelled to engage in dialogue with the ghosts who guide him through the realms of supernatural time.

According to Kate Flint, 'the Victorians were fascinated not just with *what* they saw but with *how* they saw [...] by the connection between the physiological fact of seeing and the way in which the psychology of perception influenced one's interpretation [...] and by the type of seeing that took place inwardly'.[61] Baumgarten has similarly suggested that in the *Carol* 'Scrooge must learn by *seeing* time and its meanings',[62] and Parker has noted that Christmas 'is a season calling on people to look. "Look" is a word the ghost [of Christmas present] reiterates'.[63] What Scrooge visually encounters through his supernatural experience is a new perspective on time, space and Christmas, that brings him to the understanding that time has the potential to be creative, generative and productive,[64] rather than restricted and mechanised. During his visit, Marley's Ghost informs Scrooge, 'I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day' (49), a revelation which implies that the supernatural realm co-exists, unseen, alongside the secular world in this text. Likewise, at the end of the first chapter, after Marley has departed, Dickens notifies us that Scrooge experienced his first 'glimpse of the Invisible World' (52), repeating the adjective 'invisible' to suggest, once again, that time and space are doubled in this text. Later in the Victorian period, the coexistence of the material and spirit worlds would become something of an obsession with the rise of spiritualism and widespread interest in the

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[61] Kate Flint, "Visual Culture" in *Charles Dickens in Context*, eds., Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 151.
[62] Baumgarten, "Scrooge and Faust," 25.
[63] Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, 193.
[64] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 206.

occult. Although *A Christmas Carol* is a little early for the main stream of Victorian spiritualism, which first began to emerge in Britain in the middle of the century, Tomalin has noted that Dickens certainly was interested in the alternative worlds presented by dreams and visions. In September 1844, less than a year after the publication of the *Carol*, Dickens himself reported having a dream of his deceased sister-in-law Mary Hogarth and, describing it to his friend John Forster, remarked that it might have been 'an actual Vision!'[65]

Dickens's language in the opening of the *Carol* introduces the reader to the ghostly super-reality that will unfold through the course of the narrative, as can be seen in the very first line, 'Marley was dead: to begin with' (33). This sentence subtly invokes both secular and supernatural forms of temporality, as we see one form of time and space being juxtaposed against, and modified by, another. The initial declarative 'Marley was dead' recalls the secular understanding of time, which is fact-based, fixed and enclosed; however, this seemingly straightforward statement is quickly modified by the intriguing 'to begin with.' The second clause is evocative of supernatural time, which is unfixed and fluid, with the colon offering a visual double-aspect to the sentence itself. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the secular and supernatural begins to take shape during Marley's visit. In contrast to the confined stasis of the secular world Scrooge inhabits, the appearance of Marley confirms that the supernatural realm is characterised by constant, incessant motion. For instance, when Scrooge first sees Marley's face in the door knocker, the narrator tells us that 'the hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot-air, and though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless [...] its horror seemed to be, in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression' (42). Similarly, when Marley's Ghost enters Scrooge's room, we are informed that the spectre was 'provided with an infernal atmosphere of its own [...] for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless,

[65] Quoted in: Tomalin, *Charles Dickens*, 157.

its hair, and the skirts, and tassels, were still agitated as by the hot vapour from an oven' (47). These descriptions of Marley reveal that his condemned spirit is forced to simultaneously inhabit the present world of lost opportunities, as well as the 'infernal atmosphere' of the afterlife. The figure is twice referred to as being 'perfectly motionless' yet constantly 'agitated' by something 'beyond its control.' Despite being motionless, the spectre is not associated with stasis, but with a 'horror' that causes severe discomfort, and in this way Marley's Ghost 'animates Scrooge's conscience, challenging him to think beyond the limited boundaries of his self-centered and tortured existence'.[66]

Towards the end of the first chapter Scrooge, 'desperate in his curiosity' (52), looks out of his window, an action which signals that the supernatural turn of the narrative is already causing him to look beyond his own confined spaces. It is at this moment that Scrooge sees 'the air filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste' seeking to do good, but having 'lost the power for ever' (52). Like Marley, these phantoms uncomfortably straddle the spatial and temporal spheres of both the secular world and the supernatural realm. Their secular habits have, after death, been transformed into chains that bind and enclose the wandering phantoms. Dickens would revisit the metaphor of a chain forged by one's life in *Great Expectations* (1860-1), where Pip reflects how one day can change the course of a life: 'pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day'.[67] Again, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), we also read of 'chains that are for ever forging, day and night, in the vast iron-works of time and circumstance'.[68] The jarring tension of stasis and uncontrollable, enforced motion associated with the wandering phantoms creates a distressing binary, much like the earlier image of the Treadmill, and the similar image in the supernatural episode of *The Chimes*, where Trotty sees 'everywhere, restless and untiring motion'

[66] Clarke, "The Metapsychology of Character Change," 254.
[67] Dickens, *Great Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 60.
[68] Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 119.

(126). In the *Carol*, the distress of the wandering phantoms, or 'misery with them all' is that they are condemned to restless motion and strife, but 'none were free' (52). The phantoms can accomplish nothing, and are powerless to make amends for their earthly way of life. This scene highlights the 'distinction between vision and participation' and the themes of 'temporal distance,' which Audrey Jaffe acknowledges in her analysis of the *Carol*.[69] The fate of these restless phantoms is that they are able to see the ways in which they could help the needy, but the irrevocable temporal distance between life and death means that they are unable to participate in reality. This contradiction of vision and participation is used by Dickens to underline the fortunate position of the spectator, in this instance Scrooge, who is able to witness the despair of the phantoms in their parallel world of misery, and make amends before his own death. He is haunted with visions, but given the opportunity to 'participate' at the end of the novel. Scrooge's awareness of an invisible double world, defined by futile strife and distance, is the first step that Dickens takes in transforming his protagonist's previous views of temporality, in order to ultimately teach him the importance of participating in the outside world. As Dickens would later contemplate, 'you can't shut out the world; […] you are in it, to be of it; […] you get into a false position the moment you try to sever yourself from it; […] you must mingle with it, and make the best of it, and make the best of yourself in the bargain'.[70]

In contrast to Scrooge's linear perception of secular time, the supernatural episodes of the *Carol* deviate from conventional modes of time keeping and convey temporality as something spontaneous and diverse. As the three ghosts of Christmas past, present and future indicate, supernatural time is unrestricted; they are able to replay the past as if it were the present, and vividly foreshadow the unknown events of the future. Furthermore, in his journey with the spirits Scrooge experiences space as something that is continually

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[69] Audrey Jaffe, "Spectacular Sympathy: Visuality and Ideology in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*," *PMLA* 109, no. 2 (1994), 256-7.
[70] Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 436.

shifting and re-emerging in new forms. The Ghost of Christmas Past walks Scrooge through a wall into 'an open country road,' and the narrator notes that 'the city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen' (56). Similarly, the spirit is able to intermittently pause at the most significant moments of Scrooge's history in order to reconnect him to his repressed memories. With the words 'let us see another Christmas,' the spirit navigates through the past, accelerating time so that Scrooge sees his 'former self [grow] larger at the words' (59). The Ghost of Christmas Present also has a peculiar relationship with space, dramatically conveyed as he transports Scrooge to places far and wide within the span of a moment. At one point 'without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor' (85), the next moment they are at a lighthouse, and the next they are on a ship. As Robert Tracey explains, 'Dickens's machinery allows the Spirits to transform reality in an instant'.[71] Unlike the restricted spaces Scrooge occupied in the first stave of the *Carol*, the supernatural chapters of the text are distinctive for providing 'alterations in our understandings of order' as the spirits occupy 'a world of multiple [...] multi-layered time'.[72] This is also the case in *The Chimes*, where in the spirit realm Trotty notices that 'stone, and brick, and slate, and tile, became transparent' (125-6). Aside from reconnecting the unfeeling Scrooge to his own memories and making him aware of the present world he inhabits, these ghosts also work to 'de-homogenize'[73] the flow of secular time to which Scrooge had become accustomed.

Unlike the wandering phantoms that Scrooge observes from his window after Marley's departure, the three spirits of Christmas are intimately connected to time and space. Each spirit holds knowledge of time, and guides Scrooge through a visual, scene-by-scene representation of Christmas past, present and yet to come, prompting him to reconsider his own relationship with temporality. Dickens describes the Christmas spirits

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[71] Robert Tracey, ""A Whimsical Kind of Masque": The Christmas Books and Victorian Spectacle," *Dickens Studies Annual* 27 (1998), 116.
[72] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 712.
[73] Ibid., 714.

in a highly visual way. The Ghost of Christmas Past, for instance, is aesthetically striking, 'fluctuat[ing] in its distinctness [...] composed of dissolving parts' which 'melted away. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again' (55). As Stone has observed, 'the Ghost of Christmas Past combines in his person and in his actions distance and closeness, childhood and age, forgetfulness and memory'.[74] When Scrooge encounters this ghost, its appearance is used to remind him that the past is unfixed and intangible, that it possesses far more depth than simply existing as a catalogue of facts, one being the bare fact of Marley's death which Scrooge referred to in the first stave. The secular understanding of time within which Scrooge had encased himself deprived him of memory, as the 'disciplined routines of everyday life' confined him to meaningless repetition, 'crushing and deadening whatever might be a source of meaning'.[75] Another of this ghost's visual characteristics is the light that streams from its head, making everything visible. As we are already aware, Scrooge loves darkness and its ability to disguise space. The bright illumination associated with uncovering the past already causes him discomfort, evident as he asks the spirit to put his cap on and dim the light. In response, the spirit asks, 'would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give?' (56), echoing the words of Marley's Ghost who similarly chastised Scrooge for being a 'Man of the worldly mind' (47) earlier in the text.

The supernatural attitude to secular, or 'worldly' space and time in the *Carol* clearly mirrors the precepts of basic Christianity. Scrooge is expected to be in, but not of, the world. At the end of the narrative he will continue to live in the secular world, but emphatically not in the secular chronotope. Though he remains in earthly space and time, Scrooge should be spiritually and mentally differentiated from his earthly habits, freed from the repressive confines that have lead to his reclusive behaviour and cynical attitudes. The spirits strive to alter Scrooge's perspective and encourage him to form a personal

[74] Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, 124.
[75] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 718.

connection to his experience of time and space. Like the Ghost the Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present functions as a visual metaphor for how Scrooge should be living in the present; he 'is a figure of ease, plenty, and joy – an embodiment of the meaning of Christmas'.[76] The ghost's 'long and free' curls, his 'open hand' and 'unconstrained demeanour,' are established in sharp contrast to the inward motion associated Scrooge's 'tight-fisted hand' (14). Instead, the ghost is welcoming, friendly and genuine, with his 'capricious breast [...] bare, as if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice' (74). Most significantly, Scrooge is taken aback by the 'remarkable quality [...] that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature, as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall' (78). The spirit's ability to comfortably inhabit any space reminds the reader of Scrooge's converse tendency to restrict himself to enclosed spaces. In his interaction with the spirits, Scrooge is exposed to 'the Dickensian sense of the fluidity of [space and] time'.[77] He learns that temporality is about far more than the numbers on a clock face, and that there is a world to be experienced beyond the locked rooms and dark corners he had previously occupied. As Creevy remarks, 'Dickensian human time is not clock time. One cannot be truly game or mild mechanically or unfeelingly but only tactfully'.[78]

Strangely however, the third and final spirit Scrooge encounters is unlike the ghosts of Christmas Past and Present; instead, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come seems to turn the narrative back on itself, recalling the strictness of secular time rather than the fluid, openness of the supernatural realm. This abstract and mute figure represents the unknown and uncontrollable future, and Scrooge confesses to fear it 'more than any Spectre' (96). It is in the fourth chapter of the *Carol* that Dickens returns both Scrooge and the reader to the imagery of the secular world, in an attempt to express the urgent need for this form of

[76] Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, 124.
[77] Baumgarten, "Scrooge and Faust," 23.
[78] Creevy, "In Time and Out," 64.

temporality to be reconstructed. In its appearance and actions, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come seems to be a metaphor of the clock. It represents the steady movement of time through space, and the future consequences if man's understanding of time lies unreformed. Like the image of a clock's dial, the spirit's 'one outstretched hand' (95) and its 'inexorable finger' (107) guide Scrooge inflexibly in the direction of his fate. Furthermore, the spirit's movements are strikingly regulated and controlled, with a meticulous consistency just like clockwork. We see this as the ghost guides Scrooge to the corrupt city, and the narrator describes how 'the Phantom moved away as it had come towards him [...] bore him up, he thought, and carried him along' (96). In this episode of the narrative, the future aspect of unchanged time is bleak, reminding us of Scrooge's former love of darkness and confined spaces. Like the Scrooge of the first chapter, the phantom does not engage in conversation, it is impersonal, viewing him with its 'Unseen Eyes' (98). As this final haunting takes place, we see that there is a tension between the supernatural foreshadowing of the future, and the inescapable echoes of Scrooge's previous life glimpsed in the first stave of the text. This tension makes the chapter noticeably removed from the reflective scenes of Scrooge's Christmases past and the open joy conveyed in his more recent encounter with Christmas present.

Dickens's representation of the city also seems to recall Scrooge's earlier encasement within the secular chronotope, revealing the dark future that lies ahead if Scrooge does not change. Although the city remains alive, it is a desperately oppressive space. As the narrator notes, 'they scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them and encompass them of its own act' (96). Likewise, the city's corrupt inhabitants underline that this is an image of the *unchanged* future, as the social obsession with measured time continues to define daily life. The merchants 'chinked money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their watches,' (96) and later, as Scrooge searches for his own image among the shadows of the future, the narrator

observes that 'though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself' (98).[79] These references to clockwork should disturb Scrooge, as the measured cycles of secular time recreate the sense of repetitive stasis associated with the first stave, and are once again reminiscent of the Treadmill. This vision of the city functions to draw attention to Scrooge's continued ignorance. Though the first two spirits have awakened him to the positive experience of unconfined time and space, Scrooge still searches for himself by referring to the clock: 'the clock point[s] to his usual time of day for being there' but he is unable to see himself. While his supernatural experience thus far has made him 'resolved to treasure up every word he heard' (98), Scrooge fails to identify the negative connotations of mechanised, secular time. That is, until he enters the aptly enclosed space of the graveyard, 'walled in by houses; overrun with grass and weeds [...] choked up with too much burying; fat with repleted appetite' (108), and finally realises that his own time has been measured.

By the final stave of the *Carol*, Scrooge's perception of time and space has been transformed, and the reader is able to witness him breaking out from the encased confines of the secular chronotope. His first words on the Christmas morning, after he has been returned to reality, reveal his intention to 'live in the Past, the Present, and the Future! [...] all Three shall strive within me' (111). Here Dickens immediately exposes the shift that has taken place in Scrooge's understanding of temporality. Rather than living in the linear construction of 'uniform' and 'univocal' secular time,[80] Scrooge now sees time as something simultaneous and beyond human control. As Franklin notes, at this point in the text, Scrooge 'is commenting, not on periods of time or life, but on the temporal continuum'.[81] Whereas his previous life was dominated by his unchanging routine, after his transformation Scrooge is liberated from his restrictive behaviour as he happily cries

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[79] Trotty Veck is similarly disturbed in *The Chimes*, when he sees a vision of the future from which he is absent, noticing that his name has 'no place in Mrs. Chickenstalker's ledger.' Dickens, *The Chimes*, 145.
[80] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 59.
[81] Franklin, "Dickens and Time," 16.

out 'I don't know what to do!' (111). Furthermore, in contrast to the social exclusion that characterised Scrooge in the opening chapter of the *Carol*, he now begins to compare his happiness to others, exclaiming that he is 'as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man' (111), before emphatically solidifying his newly discovered connection to the outside world with 'A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world!' (111). Showing no reluctance to experience the outside world, Scrooge runs to his window, opens it, and puts his head out into the air, visibly breaking away from the enclosed spaces to which he had previously clung. It is not long before he leaves the confined space of his chambers, the *stalhartes Gehäuse* of the secular chronotope, to 'at last [get] out into the streets' (114). Now, Scrooge fully experiences open space by walking 'about in the streets' (115) and finds pleasure in the external world rather than using it simply as a means to move from one enclosed space to the next.

Writing on Scrooge's transformation, Lee Erickson has suggested that by the end of the narrative Scrooge has changed from being a 'hoarder, in the economic sense of someone who has a strong preference for maximum financial liquidity,' to 'a primitive Keynesian consumer, [who] learns to enjoy spending what [he] has while [he] can'.[82] However, it is also possible to interpret this particular change in Scrooge's spending habits in a negative light. Dickens's ending seems to encourage his reader to embrace the capitalist system that was surely one of the causes of Scrooge's obsession with business at the start of the novel, merely encouraging them to be more expansive in their spending than the protagonist. Caroline Flesher-McCracken has pointed out that 'although *A Christmas Carol* apparently marks off sacred time, recurrently, it sets that time apart for secular spending'.[83] As numerous biographers have documented, Dickens was vocal about the financial rewards of his Christmas writings. In 1847, the first year that he was unable to

[82] Lee Erickson, "The Primitive Keynesianism of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 30, no. 1 (Spring, 1997), 51; 61.
[83] Caroline Flesher-McCracken, "The Incorporation of *A Christmas Carol*: A Tale of Seasonal Screening," *Dickens Studies Annual* 24 (1996), 94.

publish a festive book, Dickens admitted to being 'very loath to lose the money'.[84] From this perspective it is not implausible to suggest that the ending of the *Carol* might be a form of self-promotion, with Dickens encouraging his readers to buy into Christmas in order to increase his own income. While this is a valid consideration, Parker argues that it 'is far from saying that Dickens was simply seizing a marketing opportunity, or that there was nothing new about the book. To speak of it just as a publishing venture is to say very little about the *Carol*',[85] and Flesher-McCracken likewise concludes, 'in *A Christmas Carol* Scrooge gains personal redemption not from getting, as a capitalist narrative would require, but from giving'.[86] In his concluding remarks on Scrooge's altered character, the narrator identifies that 'he became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city ever knew, or any other good old city, town or borough, in the good old world' (116). Scrooge's new relationship with space and time is confirmed through the language of this passage where his rediscovered identity as friend, master and man widens into the ever-expanding geographical space of city, town, borough and world. Considered in comparison to the negative characterisation of Scrooge as a 'man of the worldly mind' with 'worldly hands' that sought to repress the enlightenment offered by Marley's Ghost and the first spirit, the final stave draws attention to Scrooge's new position within and understanding of, space and time. At the beginning of the narrative Scrooge's 'worldly' characteristics were used to criticise his insular self-confinement. After his transformation however, Scrooge is positioned as being, like the spirits that visited him on Christmas Eve, in the secular world but not of it.

2.3 Time and Sensation

When Scrooge is haunted by the three spirits of Christmas in the *Carol*, the doubling of space and time becomes a visual reality. The secular and supernatural realms are placed

[84] Quoted in: Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 297.
[85] Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, 161.
[86] Flesher-McCracken, "The Incorporation of *A Christmas Carol*," 97.

side by side in the narrative, as we see Scrooge survey secular Christmas scenes from an external and invisible, supernatural observatory. Much recent scholarship has been dedicated to the analysis of the visual, cinematic quality of Dickens's writing. John Glavin's collection of essays in *Dickens on Screen* (2003) and Grahame Smith's *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* (2003) examine the aesthetic significance of Dickens's work and its translation onto the cinema screen, while Fred Guida's study, *A Christmas Carol and its Adaptations* (2002), focuses solely on Dickens's best-known Christmas work, examining its sustained popularity in film and television. In his essay, 'Bill Murray's Christmas Carols', Baumgarten writes that the 'reframing of time' which we see in *A Christmas Carol*, is:

> the very stuff of film, which is no small reason, perhaps, why Dickens's tale has become not only much adapted but a household word. It is in film, pre-eminently, that we experience the "new refutation of time" [...] Film reinvents real time as reel time. It not only freezes frames but it can also flow equally well backward and forward.[87]

It is clear that Scrooge's haunting can be approached as a cinematic experience, as his life-changing enlightenment is brought to effect by the new perspective he gains on the world from his position as a spectator. Removed from space and time in order to survey it, Scrooge is offered what Sally Ledger has termed a 'necessary retreat'[88] from his secular confinement. Something that becomes clear as the narrative progresses is the connective power of supernatural time and space. As Scrooge is provided with the means to observe his past, present and future, his inability to participate within the scenes that unfold alters his perspective. The Ghost of Christmas Past tells Scrooge that the visions before him are 'but the shadows of the things that have been [...] They have no consciousness of us' (56), yet when Scrooge sees himself as a lonely child, reading in 'a long, bare, melancholy

[87] Baumgarten, 'Bill Murray's Christmas Carols', 69.
[88] Sally Ledger, *The Christmas Books* (London: Everyman, 1999), xxxiii.

room' (58) he is moved to tears, and 'with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, "Poor boy!" and cried again' (59). In her exploration of visuality and ideology in the *Carol*, Jaffe argues that:

> the mechanism of Scrooge's conversion is [...] spectatorship [...] Dickens's spectacular text seeks to awaken that character's sympathy and direct it to the world beyond representation. As a model of socialization through spectatorship, the narrative posits the visual as a means toward recapturing one's lost or alienated self – and becoming one's best self.[89]

Throughout his haunting, it becomes evident that Scrooge is encouraged to relate to time, rather than know time. His earlier, secular view of mechanised time prioritised knowledge and routine behaviours, but the new relational perspective he achieves after his experience as a spectator prioritises feeling over fact.

The distinction between "knowing" time and "relating" to time can be illuminated if we return to the image of Scrooge in the first chapter of the text. Here, one of the few examples of Scrooge's interaction with the outside world is his daily activity of reading 'all the newspapers' (41). Despite his confined routine, this information suggests that Scrooge does "know" time on some level, yet what he gains from the newspaper is a bare, fact-based knowledge, an insufficient substitute for a personal relation to time. The Scrooge of the first chapter, in addition to being spatially, temporally and socially isolated, is also emotionally dead. He shrugs off the door knocker's ghostly transformation with a 'pooh, pooh!' (42), and when Marley's Ghost appears in his sitting room, he remains in a state of cold denial saying 'it's humbug still [...] I won't believe it' (44). Scrooge actively resists sensation, as we are told that 'he fought against his senses' (44) at the appearance of the ghost, and later in the chapter it becomes clear that Marley can see Scrooge's internal battle, as he asks 'why do you doubt your senses?' (45). The response Scrooge gives to

[89] Jaffe, 'Spectacular Sympathy', 254-5.

Marley's question is that 'a little thing might affect them' (45). Scrooge refuses to trust sensation because, unlike absolute knowledge, the senses are subjective and whimsical. Although he refuses to admit it, Scrooge finds it difficult to repress the fear he feels at this dramatic, supernatural intervention. The narrator informs us that Scrooge tried to 'distract his own attention' because the spectre of Marley 'disturbed the very marrow in his bones' (45). Here it is noticeable that the only responsive part of Scrooge is itself repressed to the hollow interior of his bones. In the following chapters of the *Carol*, where Scrooge is positioned as a spectator of the past, present and future, he gradually begins to engage with his emotions and reconnect with sensation. We see something similar occur in Trotty Veck's supernatural experience in *The Chimes*, when he experiences the spirits of the bell tower, 'not as a reflection but a bodily sensation' (127). The supernatural realm of the text encourages Scrooge to discover what Taylor has described as 'lived time [...] beneath or beyond the objectified time-resource of the disciplined order of civilization,' which is significant here as it is through the supernatural experience of lived experience that Scrooge ultimately 'find[s] a way to break out of the Iron Cage [...] to reconnect'.[90] Indeed, an emotional reaction to the tale was also something Dickens wanted his readers to experience. In a letter to his friend Thomas Mitton, he remarked 'I am extremely glad you *feel* the Carol',[91] and Parker has likewise drawn attention to Dickens's ability to make his reader "feel" the text, observing that 'we are never told Tiny Tim is dead, or that funeral preparations are being made. That is the point. We are just made to see it and feel it'.[92]

One of the prominent stylistic features of the *Carol* is the attention Dickens pays to depicting the Christmas scenes of the supernatural chapters as 'lived time.' Both Scrooge and the reader are encouraged to experience Christmas time through lived sensation in this text, as Dickens's narrative style 'stimulates the sense [...and] fills individual passages

[90] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 720.
[91] Charles Dickens to Thomas Mitton, 6 December 1843, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds., Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 605.
[92] Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, 196.

with odors, tastes, sights or sounds'.[93] Dickens's writing style appealed to many contemporary readers because of the sense of 'lived time' his novels seemed to put forward. In 1870, one writer for *Fraser's Magazine* praised Dickens's ability to:

> describ[e] his own time to itself in a new and striking style; heightening the familiar so as to give it an artistic impressiveness, [...] mingling shrewd sense with a fanciful picturesqueness so as to produce the most unexpected effects out of commonplace materials, and discovering many quaint and strange things lurking in the midst of everyday life.[94]

Throughout the supernatural scenes of the *Carol*, Scrooge's former employer, Mr. Fezziwig, and Scrooge's nephew Fred, are established as models for the protagonist. These men live their lives by the precepts of lived, or perceptual time, rather than the secular restrictions of chronological, clockwork time. Both Fezziwig and Fred exude an awareness of, and connection to, inward sensation which is duly reflected in the way they relate to others. In the third stave of the text for example, Fred's vitality captures a key aesthetic of the tale: inward life spilling outward. Descriptions of Fred are filled with joyful sounds: in this particular chapter he is identified by the sound of his 'hearty laugh' (86) and later, 'holding his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his face into the most extravagant contortions' (87). Fred's laughter is so overwhelming that he must literally hold his sides as it spreads throughout his body. At the end of the novel, it is significant that Scrooge himself becomes associated with laughter. We discover that he has 'a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!' (112). It is the inward meaning of Scrooge's outward laughter however, that reveals the transformation that has occurred. As the penultimate paragraph of the text goes on to explain, Scrooge's 'own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him' (118).

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[93] Michael Hearn, introduction to *The Annotated Christmas Carol* (New York: W.M. Norton and Company, 1976), cix.
[94] "Charles Dickens," *Fraser's Magazine* 2, no. 7 (July 1870), 130.

Even before the spirits visit Scrooge, it is clear that Fred's experience of Christmas time is governed by a supernatural, rather than secular, mentality. In the first stave, when Fred and Scrooge argue over the meaning of Christmas time, Scrooge complains that it is nothing more than 'a time for paying bills without money, a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you' (36). In *The Chimes*, Dickens likewise presents the arrogant Sir Joseph Bowley as a figure who sees the festive season as a time for self-interest and an opportunity to measure his wealth when he remarks, 'at this season of the year we should think of-of-ourselves. We should look into our-our accounts. We should feel that every return of so eventful a period in human transactions, involves a matter of deep moment between a man and his – and his banker' (110). Later in the *Carol*, Scrooge once again associates time with the acquisitive drive of capitalism. When he wakes up after the appearance of Marley's ghost, Scrooge is relieved to discover that the order of day and night had not been radically changed, 'because "three days after sight of this First of Exchange pay to Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge or his order," and so forth, would have become a mere United State's security if there were no days to count by' (53). Christmas is inconvenient to Scrooge because it interferes with the regularity of his business, and he considers himself 'ill used' because he must 'pay a day's wages for no work' (40). In contrast, Fred's understanding of Christmas time is far less restrictive. While Scrooge sees time solely as a means of measuring financial profit and loss, Fred experiences Christmas time primarily through his senses, even his expression 'Christmas time, when it has come round' (36) indicates an awareness of time's natural motion, and the dual sensation of anticipation and recurrence. Furthermore, his description of Christmas as 'a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time' (36) utilises Dickens's characteristic accumulative technique, embedding the space between the two linguistic brackets of 'time' with optimistic adjectives. In this synatactical arrangement,

time becomes affiliated with a different set of values. While the stress of Scrooge's sentiments fall on the repetition of the word 'time,' Fred's language conversely lays emphasis on the words which modify time. As this passage reveals, Fred's individual understanding of temporality is determined and constructed by an inherent sense of connection to self and society. This is a fundamental characteristic of Scrooge's nephew who, as Bob Cratchit tells his grieving family in the third stave of the text, 'really seemed as if he [...] felt with us' (106). For Fred, lived time is a deep-rooted consciousness of the self and others.

As Scrooge revisits his past alongside the Ghost of Christmas Past, Dickens introduces Mr. Fezziwig, employer of the young apprentice Scrooge, as another figure from whom for the protagonist should learn. Like Fred, Fezziwig's outward appearance similarly indicates that he relates to time in supernatural rather than secular terms. When the narrator describes Fezziwig, there is a heightened focus on his capacity for sensation: 'old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice' (61). In this intimate description, it is clear that Fezziwig is not a self-enclosed character. The imagery of the passage exaggerates his actions, which themselves extend outwards, seen once again in the image of Fezziwig laughing 'all over himself.' In a way, Fezziwig seems to be consistent with the Bakhtinian denotation of the grotesque body, a term used to describe a body which, contrary to modern canons, 'is not a closed completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits [...] the world enters the body or emerges from it [...] the body itself goes out to meet the world'.[95] Fezziwig's voice, laughter, and capacious waistcoast are echoed in Bakhtin's description of a body that transgresses its own limits. Likewise, Fezziwig is described as giving

[95] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 26.

happiness (64), and as the ball draws to a close we see him using his time to bid every guest goodnight 'shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out' (64). In many ways, Fezzwig is the model image of an employer properly relating to time, work and play, and indeed even when the party is over, the young Scrooge and co-apprentice Dick are heard 'pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig' (64). However, it is possible to argue that although Fezziwig is a man loved by all around him, 'full of benevolence and joviality',[96] he misuses his position of authority and exploits his own good reputation.

While Fezziwig is depicted as being a wonderfully kind man, it is clear that he also remains a figure of authority. This can be seen in the description of his desk, which is so high 'that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling' (61), and later on in the same scene, his authoritative rule over Scrooge and Dick is heard as he tells them to pull the shutters up, emphasising his command 'with a sharp clap of his hands' (62). From this perspective, Fezziwig's encouraging, excitable nature, and cries of 'Hilli-ho!' (62) might be interpreted as a tactic make the boys more willing to work hard. After being asked to clear away the moveables in order to make room for the party, the narrator informs us that 'there was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away, or couldn't have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on' (62). In this passage, Fezziwig's status as the employer is again affirmed as he 'looks on' while his employees are put to work preparing his own party. The employer's encouragement seems to have the same effect on the fiddler during the celebrations. After Fezziwig cries out 'well done!' the fiddler 'instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet' (63). Although it may not be immediately apparent, it is interesting to note that during the 'carnival time' of the Christmas Ball, when according to Bakhtin there should be 'a suspension of all hierarchical precedence' with everyone 'considered equal',[97] Fezziwig seems to retain his position of authority. Though he is clearly a loveable and respected employer, at one point

[96] Donald Hawes, *Who's who in Dickens* (London: Routledge, 1998), 77.
[97] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

the Ghost of Christmas Past reminds Scrooge: 'he has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money [...] Is that so much that he deserves this praise?' (65). The Ghost's cynicism towards Fezziwig's generosity might deserve consideration as a genuine criticism of the employer in the secular world. The warehouse may be decorated with festive cheer, but neither Scrooge nor Dick leave their workplace on this winter's night. Instead, when the Christmas celebrations come to an end in this scene from Scrooge's past, we discover that 'the lads were left to their beds; which were under a counter in the back-shop' (64), indicating that they even sleep on the ground where they work. Nonetheless, the vision of the young, enthusiastic Scrooge who works for Mr. Fezziwig contrasts sharply to self-contained miser that he has become. We are told that Fezziwig's warehouse is located 'in the busy thoroughfares of a city; where shadowy carts and coaches battled for the way, and all the strife and tumult of a real city were' (61), a situation in the midst of secular, urban capitalism. In a way, Dickens seems to celebrate the bustling, capitalist city in this scene by implying that Scrooge was a better man when he was surrounded by its energy and activity, and living alongside humanity rather than edging his way along its periphery.

Furthermore, Fezziwig is also depicted as a capitalist consumer, willing to spend some of his income on the provisions necessary to host the Christmas Ball. This Ball is a festival for the senses, and the reader is greeted with detailed snapshots of the fiddler plunging 'his hot face into a pot of porter,' a feast of 'Cold Roast [...] Cold boiled [...] mince pies and plenty of beer' (63) and a dancing Fezziwig, who 'cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs' (63). During this episode of the text, Scrooge looses his sense of secular time, and becomes completely absorbed in the festivities. The narrator informs us that 'his heart and soul were in the scene [...] He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation' (64), an agitation perhaps caused by the unfamiliar sensation of *experiencing* temporality rather than viewing it with the restrictive, linear mentality that had defined his life for so long.

Here, Scrooge relives his past as if it were the present, something that Rosemarie Bodenheimer has also observed in much of Dickens's personal writing where, she argues, 'time travelling, or making the past present, seems to have been Dickens's instinctive way of negotiating with his early life. [...] Confronted with a voice from the past, Dickens likes to pretend that the intervening years have been erased or become an unbelievable fantasy'.[98] From this perspective, it can be argued that Fezziwig sees time as a device that first and foremost provides an opportunity to bring pleasure, rather than dictate work. While Fezziwig does consult the clock in this chapter, the focus is placed on the delight he expresses after seeing that it 'pointed to the hour of seven,' and excitedly tells Dick and Ebenezer 'no more work to-night' (64). Juxtaposed against the Scrooge of the first chapter, who 'tacitly admit[s]' (40) that the working day is over, it might be argued that Dickens uses Fezziwig to show his protagonist a balanced understanding of time, acknowledging that there is both a time for work and a time for play, though in this instance at Christmas, the focus is on play.

Although it is possible to uncover a negative reading of the Fezziwig episode, one which could potentially undermine Fezzwig's role as a model for Scrooge's self-improvement, it is difficult to convict Fezziwig as a harsh, secular employer. As we saw in the earlier discussion of the *Carol*'s ending, Dickens does have a positive approach to consumerism and commercialism in the *Carol*, an approach that we might criticize but which Dickens suggests has positive side-effects. In this episode, Fezziwig seems to exemplify how the capital-driven, secular world can be approached in a more humane way. As John Butt has pointed out, in 1843 Dickens's thoughts were running upon 'the duties and responsibilities of employer and employed',[99] and in *Hard Times* Dickens would return to a similar theme; this time through the figure of circus owner Mr. Slearly, who is convinced that 'people must be amuthed [...] thomehow [...] they can't be alwayth a

[98] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "Dickens and the Writing of a Life" in *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 52-3.
[99] John Butt, *Pope, Dickens and Others* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), 133-4.

working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning. Make the betht of uth; not the wurtht'.[100] In contrast to Scrooge, who resents giving his clerk any break from the monotony of routine, Fezziwig provides his employees with an opportunity for release. Writing on the social benefits of carnival time, Taylor suggests that it functions as a safety value, and argues that 'there had to be periodic blow-outs if the whole system were not to fly apart'.[101] In other words, an occasional opportunity for renewal functions as an effective means of reinforcing order.[102] Of course, this 'blow-out' does help to make sure the system stays in place, and if the system is seen as inherently bad, then this might be a reason to complain about the party.

Nonetheless, Fezziwig realises that 'the lads' are humans, not machines, and it is the human aspect of working life that the episode seems to draw Scrooge's attention to. Commenting on the role of the employer, Scrooge tells the Ghost, 'he has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil' (64). Surprisingly, Scrooge recognises that the time spent at work contributes to an individual's personal happiness and emotional constitution. While it could be argued that Fezziwig uses the party to exploit his employees by renewing their work ethic, or to reinforce his own power as an employer, the episode has a positive effect on Scrooge. During the scene, Scrooge wishes he could 'say a word or two' (64) to his clerk, and the effect of the Fezziwig scene remains close to Scrooge after he has returned to the real world. In the closing image of the text we see Scrooge sharing a bowl of 'smoking bishop' (116) with his employee, suggesting that the reminder of Fezziwig's Christmas hospitality has convinced Scrooge to be mindful of the human aspect of work. Even if claims that Fezziwig, and eventually Scrooge, act kindly towards their employees as a means of keeping them within the workplace and increasing their productivity are supported, it would be difficult to argue that Christmas parties and holidays are more inhumane than the

[100] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 45.
[101] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 46.
[102] Ibid., 47.

impersonal, mechanistic approach to work-time visualised in the secular world of the *Carol*'s first chapter.

As seen through Scrooge's transformed attitude towards work, the supernatural events of the *Carol* explore the way man relates to space and time through sensation. Jaffe has convincingly argued that the *Carol* is ultimately a tale 'of the man without feeling in a narrative whose function is to teach him how to feel,' and suggests that this is achieved through 'a strategy that identifies seeing with desiring'.[103] Feeling, seeing and desiring are central to both the supernatural chronotope, and Scrooge's transformation into a man who is able to relate to time. To achieve a genuine transformation, however, the comforting scenes of festive abundance must be balanced against the visceral realities of poverty, corruption and degradation in the secular world; Scrooge can only learn to feel if he is exposed to the sensation associated with both. Throughout the course of this text, it becomes clear that the consciousness of desire is linked to the experience of time as sensation. When the reader is initially introduced to Scrooge, he is a man without the capacity to desire. His routine bound life and confining tendencies have desensitised him from experiencing desire, and the absence of any female characters, and more generally any social interaction, imply that he has become a stranger to sexual desire in particular. It is striking, therefore, to see that Scrooge's sexual feelings only begin to resurface within the open and fluid realm of supernatural time. When the Ghost of Christmas Past reminds Scrooge of his former love interest, Belle, desire begins to emerge in the narrative as the narrator openly yearns to be in the scene he describes and experience intimacy with Belle. Here, the narrator longs to 'have touched her lips; to have questioned her, that she might have opened them; [...] to have let loose waves of hair, [...] to have had the lightest licence of a child, and yet been man enough to know its value' (67). To return to Jaffe's point, this passage makes it clear that in the *Carol* there is 'a distinction between vision

[103] Jaffe, "Spectacular Sympathy," 256-7.

and participation, a distance that produces desire in a spectator'.[104] Here, this is particularly relevant since the narrator is able to see Belle, but because he is not a physical character of the narrative, he remains unable to participate in the action, or physically interact with her.

This reference to sexual desire is significant for the episode that follows, as it marks the first moment where Scrooge relates to the distance of time past by experiencing the sensation of longing. When Scrooge is given a glimpse into Belle's domestic Christmas, he looks upon the daughter of his former fiancée and sadly considers that 'such another creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father' (68). During this vision, Scrooge experiences the disturbing sensation of insatiable desire, as he realises that these scenes from the past cannot be altered, and what could have been will now never be. In light of this realisation, Scrooge becomes so distressed that he cries 'I cannot bear it' (68), and the emotions he begins to experience prove too strong for him to endure. In the preceding scene, where Scrooge is reminded of his parting from Belle, we see him in a similar state of emotional distress. In this vision, Belle breaks off their engagement after recognising that Scrooge was becoming embedded in the secular world. She already sees his worldly behaviour taking form, and tells him 'you fear the world too much' (65). Similarly, Belle notices the alterations in his character and identifies their cause as secular greed. Even at this early point in his life, Scrooge was becoming engrossed by 'the master-passion Gain,' and had already 'changed [...] you were another man' (65). It is ironic that her parting words to the former Scrooge are 'may you be happy in the life you have chosen' (66), words that emphasise his present regret as he watches the scene unfold once more through the lens of an aged man. This emotional vision of his past causes Scrooge to respond with 'show me no more! Conduct me home' (66). Likewise, after he is shown the mature Belle, who could have been his wife, Scrooge demands 'Remove me!' (68), 'Leave me! Take me back!' (70). His consciousness of regret and

[104] Ibid., 256.

futile desire become overwhelming in these poignant scenes from his past, and he repeatedly asks to be removed; however, it is significant that in the latter scene, rather than asking to be conducted 'home' he wants to be taken 'back'. This distinction implies that Scrooge wishes he could return to his past, not only to recover his lost youth, but to become part of the only scene from this stave where he does not see himself: the room 'full of comfort' (67).

Desire is also conjured in the following chapter of the text, with the appearance of the Ghost of Christmas Present, who seeks to introduce Scrooge to the sense of touch. Unlike the appearance of the first spirit which confronted him in his bedroom, in this chapter, Scrooge himself moves to an adjoining room where he sees a ghostly light shining, and it is precisely at the 'moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock [that] a strange voice called him by his name' (72). The process of discovering the second spirit of the *Carol* is linked to Scrooge's touch, and throughout this episode it becomes clear that the sensation of touch is not only connected to desire, but is used to cultivate Scrooge's experience of temporality. In the first description of Scrooge, the narrator refers to his 'tight-fisted hand' (34) hostile to touching or being touched by anything or anyone; yet the spirits of the past and present require Scrooge to engage with them on a tactile level. To access the past, the first spirit tells him to 'bear but a touch of my hand there' (56) laying it on his heart, and second spirit similarly instructs Scrooge to 'Touch my robe!' (74). The recurring references to Scrooge's touch in this third stave of the *Carol* are coupled with an intimate, almost voluptuous, linguistic register that makes this haunting particularly distinctive. As the second spirit guides Scrooge through the Christmas marketplace, Dickens compiles a catalogue of anthropomorphised seasonal foods, which Jaffe argues, carry an 'erotic charge' of 'everyday life polished to a high sheen'.[105] This is perhaps why consumerism and capitalism are seen positively as far as Dickens is concerned: they

[105] Ibid., 258.

engage the senses, without which humans become mechanized, like Scrooge is at the start. The erotic charge is unmistakable in this passage, where Spanish Onions are 'ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed [...] shining in the fatness of their growth [...] winking from their shelves in wanton slyness' (75), and bunches of grapes 'dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might water' (75-6). The Norfolk Biffins are 'squab and swarthy [...] their juicy persons, urgently entreating and beseeching to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner' (76) and the figs, 'moist and pulpy' (76). Textures, sounds and tastes are combined in the edible imagery of this scene, and a mutual rapport is established between the observer and the personified foods; as much as the spectator desires to consume the objects, the objects too desire to be consumed. Despite the lengthy description of the foods in the shops, it is clear that this scene is one observed in passing. Perhaps most significantly, this passing sensation means that the reader does not experience the satisfaction of consuming the food. Instead, the edible imagery serves the narrative purpose of stimulating desire and arousing the senses, and there the foods remain, ripe and ready yet untouched and unconsumed.

The desire stirred by unconsumed food is also linked to the experience of anticipation in this chapter of the *Carol*. It is in this second haunting that Scrooge is able to watch the Cratchit family enjoying their domestic Christmas celebration. While the Cratchits have little in the secular world, their attitude towards Christmas time is used as an example from which Scrooge should learn. This is particularly evident in the mortally ill Tiny Tim who, despite his unfortunate condition, aspires to comfort his community and lead them to Christ through his disability: he 'hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see' (80). Interestingly, in this passage where Tiny Tim reflects on Jesus, the miracles he refers to both involve Jesus restoring sensation to those he touched, in much the same way that the Ghost of Christmas Present

works to restore the emotionally impaired Scrooge to feeling. The Cratchit Christmas dinner scene is of central significance in this episode, as recognised by one writer for *The Critic* (1858) who noted that 'the well-known sketch of the Cratchit dinner [...] conveys the geniality of the situation in a degree it would be impossible to attain without an appeal to the senses'.[106] In this second vision related to food, the Cratchit family dinner table is established as a site where anticipation, desire and satisfaction are plentiful. The Christmas Dinner is an event elevated and much anticipated by the whole family, and it even takes on ceremonial significance when the goose is brought to the table in 'high procession' (80). Davis claims that one of the great strengths of this scene is its celebration of 'the fecundity and fertility that belie the family and infertility of the [...] tradition of despair'.[107] In this engaging, sensory image of festive 'fecundity and fertility,' it is possible once again to detect sexual undertones in the narrator's description of the dinner scene, when:

> At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board. (80)

The narrative pace slows in this passage, as the family take a breathless pause in unison before the bird is carved. For a brief moment it appears as though ordinary temporality has been suspended as the family gather to experience this long anticipated annual event. The family watch on while Mrs. Cratchit prepares to 'plunge' the knife into the goose breast, and after she does so, and a 'long expected gush of stuffing issued forth,' she is gratified by hearing a 'murmur of delight.' The action of the carving itself is not directly referred to, and instead the reader sees the before and after. Sight and sound are coupled together in the 'gush' that produces the universal murmur, itself an indication of the shared satisfaction.

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[106] "Mr. Charles Dickens as a Reader," *The Critic* 17, no. 426 (September 4, 1858), 537.
[107] Davis, *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, 184.

Against the festive backdrop of Christmas time, Dickens repeatedly uses the dramatic technique of interrupting an atmosphere of building tension with a tentative pause. When Mrs. Cratchit disappears to prepare the pudding the anticipation builds again, and is once more followed by the visual awe at the flaming edible spectacle she brings in, closely succeeded by the satisfaction of eating it. Moore suggests that in Victorian Christmas celebrations, 'eating became a way of connecting',[108] and as the Cratchit scene demonstrates, the act of gathering together around a single table and sharing the intimate anticipation of the festive meal creates an image of togetherness from which Scrooge has long been alienated. As the family scene fades to make way for another vision, the image of the Cratchit family, 'happy, grateful, pleased with one another' and most significantly 'contented with the time,' intrigues Scrooge so much so that he keeps 'his eye upon them [...] until the last' (84). After witnessing the quaint domestic satisfactions of the Cratchit home and the playful flirtation of Fred's Christmas party, the reader is already able to see a dramatic transformation in Scrooge. Changing from the heart-hearted, desensitised man of the first chapter, here we see how Scrooge 'softened more and more' (89) as he becomes engrossed in the atmosphere, and 'wholly forget[s] in the interest he had in what was going on that his voice made no sound' (90). Instead of doubting his senses, as he does in his encounter with Marley's Ghost, the visits from the Christmas spirits awaken Scrooge to sensation, and allow him to engage with, and express, his own long-repressed emotions.

While many of the festive visions in the *Carol* emphasise the comfort and joy of Christmas time, the spirits simultaneously balance festive desire against the stark realities of social depravity. While Michael Slater claims that the *Carol* offers a vision of an alternative, more hopeful future, in contrast to 'fuliginous social pessimism',[109] Dickens is careful to avoid presenting his reader with a sugar-coated vision of Christmas. The many delights of Christmas are paralleled against the harsh realities of corruption and

[108] Tara Moore, "National Identity and Victorian Christmas Foods" in *Consuming Culture in the Long Nineteenth century*, ed. T.S. Wagner and N. Hassan (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 143.
[109] Michael Slater, introduction to *A Christmas Carol* (London: Penguin, 2003), xx.

degradation in the secular world at multiple points throughout the narrative. Significantly, it is at the point when Scrooge has regained his sense of feeling that Dickens switches to the unfamiliar imagery of stark depravation. At the end of the third stave, the Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge 'two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable' (92), subverting the comforting celebrations of festivity with a striking image of unnatural corruption. The narrator describes the children with Dickens's characteristic technique of cataloguing their every detail, which makes the reading experience all the more uncomfortable as it effectively undermines its earlier use when the same technique was used to describe an abundance of desirable food. Similarly, the reference to 'touch' in this description, which had previously been used as a part of Scrooge's sensory awakening, has now become vicious. We are told that the children looked as though 'a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds' (92). The verbs are destructive, resulting in sorrow rather than celebration as the disfigured creatures 'cling' (93) helplessly to the spirit. Furthermore, there is a disturbing undertone of sexual double-entendre as the spirit tells Scrooge, 'this girl is Want,' (92) implying both misdirected sexuality and social corruption. Accordingly, the powerful imagery of poverty and degradation at the end of this chapter determines the unsettling tone which frames Scrooge's final haunting.

The image of the prematurely aged and corrupted children of society adds an urgency to Scrooge's perception of time, and it is when the third and final spirit appears that Scrooge articulates his new relationship with time, informing the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, 'the night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me' (96). In the future visions revealed to Scrooge, Dickens once again uses descriptive, sensory language, but in this instance the senses are revolted rather than aroused. At one point the narrator describes an obscure part of town, where 'alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter

reeked with crime, with filth, and misery' (98). Here, the familiar image of festive excess spilling out from itself, as seen in the examples of Fezziwig, Fred and the earlier descriptions of food, is quite literally reversed by the verb 'disgorge.' The language of this stave is instead crowded with images that connote death and confinement: 'iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, were brought. [...] Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones' (58-9). The voluptuous quality of the previous staves has been dramatically altered in this section, replaced by a slippery bleakness. Likewise, the reference to dark secrets being 'bred' has undertones of sexual misconduct. Throughout the course of the text, and this stave in particular, Scrooge becomes aware that an inward connection to time is essential to a full experience of life. As Kathleen Poorman Dougherty has noted, the three ghosts show Scrooge 'the connections between his own life and the lives of others'.[110] At this point in the narrative it becomes clear that a vast transformation has taken place in the protagonist's relation to time, as Scrooge finally expresses an inner awareness of time's progress. Instead of looking to the clock-face for the time, he tells the phantom at the end of the stave, 'something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how' (107).

With the publication of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens composed a Christmas narrative that would become a fixture of the season, to be told and re-told year after year. At the heart of its many retellings remains the message that the human experience of time is a means of emotional restoration and individual regeneration. The misuse of secular time and space which Dickens addressed in the *Carol*, continued to occupy his thoughts during the months following its publication. In March 1844 he wrote to his friend John Forster, 'The more I see of [society's] extraordinary conceit, and its stupendous ignorance of what is passing out of doors, the more certain I am that it is approaching the period when, being

[110] Kathleen Poorman Dougherty, "Habituation and Character Change," *Philosophy and Literature*, 31, no. 2 (October 2007), 300.

incapable of reforming itself, it will have to submit to be reformed by others off the face of the earth'.[111] In suggesting that Scrooge's new perspective on time and space is central to the *Carol*, I have endeavoured to coalesce this text's radical re-forming of time with Newey's explanation of Dickens's 'ideology of connection,' which 'is not a framework of dictates, externally imposed, but something instilled [...] We are inside it and it is inside us'.[112] The three spirits of the *Carol* enable Scrooge to come into contact with an organic understanding of time, transforming the protagonist by revealing truths that he should already know, but which have been eclipsed by his tightly regulated existence in secular time and the dehumanising effects of his isolated and enclosed life. Throughout the *Carol*, Dickens seems to be gesturing towards a vision of Christmas as 'a *temporal whole* that encompasses and unifies the separate episodes of everyday life'.[113] Indeed, as a temporal landmark, Christmas marks 'the preciousness of life in time's round,' and Christmases past, present and yet to come 'are the progress reports of the self in time'.[114] At the end of the *Carol*, Scrooge realises 'Best and happiest of all' that 'the Time before him was his own' (111). As a transformed man, he takes conscious possession of his future, instead of being possessed by the dominating secular forces of routine-based time and measured production. In this first Christmas book, Dickens presents his reader with a transformative vision of Christmas, time and space, which nurtures human connection, stimulates emotions and sensations, and encourages change.

[111] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2:80.
[112] Newey, *Charles Dickens and the Scriptures*, 8-11.
[113] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 129.
[114] Creevy, "In Time and Out," 67.

Chapter Three: Christmas Fairy Tales: Fairy Time and Real Time

During the first half of the nineteenth century the fairy tale became integrated into the festive reading experience, forming in itself a sub-genre of Christmas literature. As early as 1823, Christmas and the telling of fairy stories were being linked together. Edgar Taylor's translation of the Grimm Brothers' tales, *German Popular Stories* (1823), was prefaced by a quote from 'Tom Thumbe the Little' (1621) which encouraged readers to 'imagine me to sit by a good fire, amongst a companye of good fellowes, over a well spiced wassel bowle of Christmas ale, telling of these merrie tales which hereafter followe'.[1] Later, in 1839, Taylor revised the collection and invented an even more elaborate Christmas frame for the stories. In this edition we are introduced to an elderly German storyteller named Gammar Grethel, and the narrator goes on to inform us how 'one Christmas, being in that part of the world, I joined the party; and begged her to let me write down what I heard, for the benefit of my young friends in England. And so, for twelve merry evenings, beginning with Christmas eve, we met and listened to her budget'.[2] What is particularly interesting about this preface is the writer's claim that these tales have been imported to England from Germany. The Christmas custom is thus furnished with a "Germanic" origin myth that works to give the collection an air of authenticity. Taylor's festive framing devices were acknowledged by reviewers who made clear that his volume of German stories would make perfect Christmas reading material for British audiences. The Germanic connection is particularly significant as, according to Joe Perry's study of the German Christmas, domestic images of festivity were central to the shaping of German national identity.[3] During the first half of the nineteenth century, carefully curated images of domestic festivity were of equal importance to the British Christmas celebration, something that will be examined in more detail in the following chapter. One writer for *The Literary Chronicle*

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[1] Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, title page to *German Popular Stories*, trans. Edgar Taylor (London: C. Baldwyn, 1823).
[2] Quoted in Schacker, *National Dreams*, 41-2.
[3] Perry, *Christmas in Germany*, 8.

referred to Taylor's collection as a 'fund of Christmas-holiday entertainment',[4] while the *London Magazine* announced: 'this little book is well timed – for with the wood-fires and long evenings of a merry Christmas-tide, what helps on old drowsy Time so kindly […] as the marvel-Tale?'[5] By 1847, the connection between Christmas reading and the fairy tale had been well established, and even exhausted in William Thackeray's opinion as he wrote in a review for *Fraser's Magazine*, 'I have read Christmas-books until I have reached a state of mind the most deplorable. "Curses on all fairies!" I gasp out'.[6] Alongside translations of French, German, and Danish tales, familiar publications by popular British writers such as Charles Dickens, William Thackeray and Lewis Carroll, solidified the association of Christmas and the fairy tale. Dickens's Christmas book for 1845, *Cricket on the Hearth*, is subtitled 'A Fairy Tale of Home,' and William Thackeray's comic fairy tale *The Rose and the Ring* was also published for Christmas in 1854 (though dated 1855). Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is another tale with strong connections to Christmas reading, as indicated by its publication history. Initially presented to Alice Liddell as a Christmas gift in the winter of 1864,[7] it was then published for Christmas in 1865, and by 1867 the poetical preface 'Christmas Greeting: From a Fairy to a Child' had been added. In 1877 one writer for *Punch* even went as far as suggesting that 'Lewis Carroll, […] as he never appears in print except at this festive season, ought to be known as the Christmas Carroll'.[8]

The fairy tale, like Christmas itself, offered disenchanted Victorians an appealing alternative to growing industrialisation and a brief escape from the anxiety of urban displacement. With their fantasy narratives, fairy tales presented readers with a moment of relief from the pressure and monotony of everyday life. As J.R.R. Tolkien has suggested,

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[4] "German Popular Stories, Translated from the Kinder and Hans Marchen," *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* 188 (December 21, 1822), 810.
[5] "Grimm's German Popular Stories," *London Magazine* 7, no. 37 (January 1823), 91.
[6] William Thackeray, "A Grumble About the Christmas-Books," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 35, no. 205 (January 1847), 111.
[7] Gillian Avery, "Lewis Carroll" in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 88.
[8] "Some Christmas Books," *Punch* 71 (January 6, 1877), 297.

the effect of the fairy tale is 'enchantment [which] produces a Secondary World' or some form of 'alteration in the Primary World'.[9] It is this sustained vision of a fictional Secondary World with a space-time distinct from ordinary reality that characterises the fairy tale genre. In his analysis of nineteenth-century reading trends, Altick notes how people's 'conversion into machine-slaves [...and] concentration in cities totally unprepared to accommodate them',[10] produced a 'deep-seated desire for imaginative and emotional release' during the Victorian age.[11] It is obvious how the fantasy of the fairy tale, far removed from the realities of everyday existence, could respond to this need. As Jack Zipes has observed, the nineteenth-century revival of the fairy tale had 'a great deal to do with alienation',[12] and it was in the midst of daily life becoming more structured and patterns of work more rationalized that the fairy tale re-emerged, providing 'room for amusement, nonsense and recreation'.[13] It is interesting to consider how these contemporary concerns and fairy tale reading trends coalesce with the Christmas moment. Christmas was traditionally associated with Carnival as a time of misrule, a period where ordinary order was reversed and, in the words of Bakhtin, granted 'momentary liberation from all logical links – a form of recreation'.[14] It is this aspect of Christmas, as a playful time of escape and release from daily life, which resonates with the fantasy commonly associated with fairy tale. Max Weber has observed that periods 'characterized by rationalization and intellectualization' are 'above all [typified] by the 'disenchantment of the world''.[15] This comment draws attention to a recurring nineteenth-century concern, which we have already seen take shape in Dickens's representation of Ebenezer Scrooge and his encasement in secular time and space. Considered alongside the views of Altick

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[9] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tolkien on Fairy-stories*, eds., Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: Harper Collins, 2008), 64.
[10] Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 84.
[11] Ibid., 97.
[12] Jack Zipes, *Spells of Enchantment* (New York: Viking, 1991), xxiv.
[13] Ibid., xxiv-xxv.
[14] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 426.
[15] Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds., H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 2009), 155.

and Zipes concerning the nineteenth century sense of alienation, disenchantment, and need for imaginative release, it is clear that the Christmas fairy tale flourished at a time when readers were keen to find a brief respite from daily life.

Eminent critics of the fairy tale have also stressed the importance of considering the context in which the stories were received as the cornerstone of any analysis of the genre. Maria Warner argues that it is 'essential to look at the context in which they were told, at who was telling them, to whom, and why'.[16] This sentiment is further emphasised by Caroline Sumpter, who claims that 'the role of readers, and the significance of reading contexts',[17] is crucial to the study of the genre. Sumpter argues that the Victorian Press popularised fairy tales; however, this study will suggest that the genre's association with Christmas was also a hugely influential factor contributing to its mass appeal. In fact, Sumpter even introduces her own argument by quoting a passage from a Christmas Day edition of *All the Year Round*, which depicts an image of the printing press in the language of a fairy tale:

> the gleaming lights and the roar of the engines make me aware that I am on the threshold of Pressland – the domain of Queen Journalia – a much bepraised and well-abused potentate, who knows not high day nor holiday, to whom gaslight is as good as daylight, whose work goes on ceaselessly from day to day, from week to week, from year to year.[18]

Though Sumpter's work develops links between the Victorian Press and fairy tale publishing, the patterns of simultaneous growth in the popularity of Christmas and the fairy tale during this period also deserves consideration. Schacker has labelled the early nineteenth century a 'formative period'[19] where the interest in folk and fairy tales was renewed. Like the festival of Christmas, the fairy tale had been subjected to a seventeenth

[16] Maria Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* (London: Vintage, 1995), xii.
[17] Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6.
[18] Quoted in ibid., 1.
[19] Schacker, *National Dreams*, 11.

century Puritan suppression in England, and had failed to establish itself during the eighteenth century,[20] a period when Christmas too had experienced a decline in popularity. From this angle, the early nineteenth century can be seen as a 'formative period' for the Victorian ideology of Christmas as well as the fairy tale.

While the synchronised fluctuation in the popularity of both Christmas and the fairy tale is remarkable, they also share a common preoccupation with a 'quest for national identity'.[21] Schacker sees this interest in national identity in the nineteenth century popular tale collection, which offered an opportunity to reflect on the 'nature of "Englishness" in the midst of rapid social, cultural and technological change'.[22] Meanwhile, other scholars have noted that Christmas similarly became a 'new symbol of Englishness',[23] and a 'national expression of English culture'.[24] The shared concerns and revived interest in these cultural and literary opportunities to find relief from the monotony of a sterile, industrial age, culminated in the synthesis of Christmas and the fairy tale, and the formation of a sub-genre which became hugely popular. As we have seen, the emergence of the festive fairy tale was connected to two distinct issues. Firstly, the importance of the kind of fantasy and escapism the fairy tale and the Christmas story provided to an alienated and increasingly mechanized population; and secondly, the use to which these genres were put in the search for a national identity beneficial for the period. It is evident that there is some overlap between these two concerns. For a dislocated community struggling to comprehend their new identity in the urban working world, the fantasy of the fairy tale clearly provided refuge from the harsh realities of modern life. At the same time however, the simultaneous growth of the fairy tale and the English Christmas implies that by briefly escaping the anxieties of industrial life, Victorians could find space for self-reflection. As is the case in a great deal of Christmas literature, the fantasy offered by the festive fairy

[20] Jack Zipes, *Victorian Fairy Tales* (New York: Routledge, 1987), xiii.
[21] Schacker, *National Dreams*, 2.
[22] Ibid., 12.
[23] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 1.
[24] Mark Connelly, *Christmas: A Social History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 32.

tale enabled readers to construct for themselves a more consoling version of English identity, a version that was defined by the fireside rather than the factory.

This study will broadly span the 1830s through to the 1850s, when the Christmas fairy tale was enjoying its hey-day of popularity. However, the majority of texts chosen for analysis here are publications from the 1840s and 1850s, as these were the decades during which there was a consistent and almost uninterrupted stream of new Christmas fairy tales emerging each December. While the fairy tale retained a strong literary presence for the duration of the nineteenth century,[25] by mid-century the *Christmas* fairy tale was being compromised by the growing interest in another supernatural personality: the Christmas ghost. Haunting tales of festive superstition appear as early as the sixteenth century when Mamillius in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* remarks 'A sad tale's best for winter / I have one of sprites and goblins'.[26] David Parker has noted that the custom of telling ghost stories at Christmas 'seems to have spread through society only after 1800'.[27] In her study of Christmas print, Moore documents the rise of the Christmas ghost story and reveals that 'a new spate of magazines and journals of the 1850s turned to the oral tradition of Christmas ghost stories' in an attempt to create new, profitable forms of Christmas print.[28] Furthermore, a growing preoccupation with the occult, alongside the spiritualism movement of the second half of the century, can also be considered contributory factors in the festive growth of the ghost and fading of the fairy. As Moore affirms, in the Christmas marketplace the fairy tale eventually 'gave way to the ghost of spiritualism'.[29]

The Christmas fairy, much like Christmas itself, is not typically a spirit associated with longevity. In the texts that will be explored in this chapter, fairy spirits emerge at times when characters are in an unsettled state of mind, before silently disappearing away

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[25] Elaine Ostry, *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 44.
[26] *The Winter's Tale*, eds., Susan Snyder et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.1.25-6. References are to act, scene, and line.
[27] Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, 104.
[28] Moore, *Victorian Christmas*, 81.
[29] Ibid., 98.

once stability has returned. Fairy appearances therefore, seem to link into the sense of alienation and psychological turmoil identified earlier as a part of living within modernity. In this way, the Christmas fairy acts as an agent assisting individuals in their quest to become more at home in modernity, and once the fairy has managed this, she is no longer needed and slips away. Alternatively, the fairy spirit will be revealed as an illusion at the end of the plot, and the reader will discover that the agent of goodwill has been masked or enchanted into fairy form. As both a product of and contributor to the fancy of festive illusion, the Christmas fairy reflects the essence of the season. At Christmas, reality is briefly transformed and obscured, with time and space removed from the constraints of the real world. Like the illusion of the fairy however, festive time must ultimately draw to a close, and when it does the reader and protagonist are required to rejoin the ordinary course of life. This perspective on the nature of Christmas time and space is consistent with much nineteenth century thought. In an article written for the *Morning Chronicle* on Christmas Eve 1845, Thackeray depicted the festive season in London in a highly visual piece of writing. Here he remarks that Fortnum and Mason's in Piccadilly was a 'perfect fairy-palace', and:

> Anybody who walked the streets yesterday, on one of the finest and most cheerful days of London weather, could not but remark what an hilarious air the town wore [...] and observe many other pleasant Christmas phenomena. To see the butchers' and poulterers' shops was quite a pleasure – the most obese geese, turkeys, and gigantic pantomime joints of beef hung in those hospitable warehouses under the mistletoe boughs – reasoning with yourself, you asked why should those comestibles be fatter now at Christmas than at any other time? [30]

The carnivalesque nature of the description is immediately evident. Thackeray implies that

[30] Thackeray, *Contributions to the Morning Chronicle*, 86.

familiar sights and sounds grow larger and become magically exaggerated at Christmas time, when the entire city takes on a new persona, or 'hilarious air.' Yet Thackeray is ultimately obliged to consider the brevity of the Christmas season and recognise the illusory quality of the Christmas moment, when he remarks that 'all these places and persons, after the present blithesome season is over, relapse into the sober courses of every-day life – the bonbons are eaten up and disappear – the geese shrink to their natural size – the mutton relapses into ordinary cut'.[31] In the same way, the Christmas fairy story frequently encourages audiences to temporarily exchange their investment in the present for a brief venture into the alternative temporal texture of the fairy tale, where time is freed from the constraints of reality and fanciful illusions are, for a short time, permitted.

In *The History of the Victorian Christmas Book* (1987), S.A. Muresianu argues that the reason why the nineteenth century reading public continued to buy anything marketed as Christmas reading material, without discrimination, is 'tied to both illusion and reality'.[32] She explores this idea in terms of George Orwell's suggestion that popular literature functions to 'sustain the illusions that a society creates about itself,' arguing from this point that the Christmas book 'both generated and sustained a number of illusions flattering to a Victorian society'.[33] The Christmas fairy stories that will be examined in this chapter, however, seem to possess an illusory quality that undermines Muresianu's generalisation. While the fairy tale does offer a form of escapist illusion and undeniably nurtures idealistic ideologies of family, home, industry and material contentment, the genre is simultaneously a highly self-conscious form, which recognises that "illusion" is closely connected to "delusion". While it may generate a number of flattering illusions, I will suggest that the fairy tale is unable to sustain them, as it is all too aware that it is the product of temporary festive fancy. In this way the Christmas fairy tale is caught in a conflict between fantasy time and real time, a conflict that echoes the writing concerned

[31] Ibid., 87.
[32] S.A. Muresianu, *The History of the Victorian Christmas Book* (New York: Garland, 1987), 172.
[33] Ibid., 8.

with Christmas past explored in Chapter One. There, I argued that while many writers were preoccupied with representing old-fashioned Christmases from times past, they simultaneously displayed an intense self-consciousness about their position within the present. This tension between the different approaches to Christmas past in a self-defined age of progress and transition also comes into play in the consideration of illusion, reality and Christmas temporality in the festive fairy tale. While the reading public enjoyed the festive release offered by magical Christmas tales, a persistent self-consciousness of the genre's inherent unreality can frequently be detected within the tales themselves.

The following chapter will examine the underlying tension between Christmas fantasy and reality in the festive fairy tales published during the first half of the nineteenth century. The first section will consider the nineteenth-century attitude towards the fairy tale and will look at how various British writers self-consciously navigated between the inherently unrealistic genre of the fairy tale and a perceived duty to return their readers to present reality. This analysis will demonstrate how the fairy time of Christmas, and the opportunity it provides for a brief escape from the monotonous conventions of real time, is ultimately negated in these tales by their persistent preoccupation with moral teaching and explicit confessions of unreality. The second section will turn to Charles Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth* as a 'Fairy Tale of Home' dislocated by illusion. This section will consider the dreamlike qualities of illusion and reality in Dickens's third Christmas book and suggest that at certain points the story, and the characters within it, become entangled in a struggle between fantasy and reality. As Elaine Ostry has already observed, *Cricket*'s ending indicates that 'the narrator has woken up from his fancy, or dream, and seen it for the illusion it is'.[34] This narrative tension is something Thackeray seemed to recognise in his review of *Cricket*, where he described the text and its characters as 'half-recognised realities'.[35] The final section of this study will look at Thackeray's own comic Christmas

[34] Ostry, *Social Dreaming*, 101.
[35] Thackeray, *Contributions*, 91.

tale, *The Rose and the Ring*. In Thackeray's tale, time frequently exhibits elastic qualities of being illogically compressed or extended with ease in order to accommodate narrative demands, thus creating a comic and self-conscious effect of illusion. Despite the escape offered through Thackeray's nonsensical fairy tale, I will show that *The Rose and the Ring* still fluctuates between fantasy time and real time. Thackeray's self-aware narrator frequently breaks the fictive illusion by playfully drawing attention to the text's self-generating 'exaggerations and contradictions'.[36] In this text, however, the tension between fantasy and reality is largely benign due to the story's comic dimensions, and its determination to flagrantly undermine the Victorian oeuvre of moral Christmas fairy tales in favour of 'uncompromising holiday fun'.[37]

3.1 Fairy Tales and Christmas Reading (1835-1857)

During the 1840s and 1850s, both Dickens and Thackeray were protesting against the misuse of the fairy tale, which they believed was being turned into a vehicle for dry, moral teaching. Dickens's article, 'Frauds on the Fairies,' published in an 1853 number of *Household Words*, argued that 'the world is too much with us' and urged writers to leave 'this precious old escape from it, alone'.[38] Dickens's *Hard Times* is more or less a novelistic treatment of this subject in its depiction of a society that represses fancy in favour of fact. The hostility towards imaginative writing was a concern that was also being voiced some decades earlier, as the reviewer of Edgar Taylor's volume in 1823 commented: 'it is the vice of parents now-a-days to load their children's minds with useful books [...] and to torture young thought with a weight beyond its strength. Why should little children have grown-up minds?'[39] Thackeray likewise grumbled that contemporary fairy-tale literature had become far too entangled in didacticism. In 1847, his

[36] U.C. Knoepflmacher, "The Balancing of Child and Adult: An Approach to Victorian Fantasies for Children," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37, no. 4 (1983), 500.
[37] "The Literary Examiner," *Examiner* 2446 (December 16, 1854), 797.
[38] Charles Dickens, "Frauds on the Fairies," *Household Words* 8, no. 184 (October 1, 1853), 97.
[39] "Grimm's German Popular Stories," 91.

dissatisfaction with the self-righteous tone of the Christmas fairy tale in British literature was made explicit, when he wrote a review for *Fraser's Magazine* entitled 'A Grumble About the Christmas-books.' In this review, Thackeray expressed irritation at the sentimentality of festive print, suggesting that this 'new branch of English literature' was 'streaky with benevolence, and larded with the most unctuous human kindness'.[40] As Thackeray's review demonstrates, the Christmas fairy tale risked generating negative responses and completely undermining its own moral intentions if the reader felt they were being preached at. The British preoccupation with festive fairy morality received a mixed reception during the nineteenth century. Sometimes tales were praised for the sound teachings they offered, but on other occasions they were accused of betraying the harmless ideologies of light-hearted Christmas fancy. As Harris has observed, many Victorian fairy-tale writers were 'earnest about their ideologies and aesthetics but often uneasy with the marvels of the medium',[41] resulting in an inherent tension between form and content which is discernable in many Christmas fairy stories. For Thackeray, the use of the Christmas fairy tale as a vehicle to deliver a moral message was too much, as he complained: 'Perdition seize all Benevolence! Be hanged to the Good and the True! Fling me every drop of the milk of human kindness out of doors, horrible curdling slops away with them!'[42]

As noted in the previous chapter, Dickens's novel *Hard Times* shows the devastating consequences of a world deprived of fancy, where the emphasis on fact is 'a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations',[43] and stories about fairies are termed 'destructive nonsense'.[44] In this novel, Dickens is keen emphasise the relentlessness of real time, as 'the Hours did not go through any of those rosy performances, which foolish poets have ascribed to them at such times; neither did the

[40] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 111.
[41] Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic*, 38.
[42] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 111.
[43] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 10.
[44] Ibid., 52.

clocks go any faster, or any slower, than at other seasons'.[45] Instead, time progresses with monotony, rather like Dickens's earlier depiction of the Treadmill in *A Christmas Carol*. In response to the depressing linearity of industrial time, Dickens frequently brings a fantastic quality to his descriptions of it. As Valentine Cunningham has noted, in a number of instances the language of *Hard Times* peculiarly combines the real and the fantastic. Alongside the novel's machinery, statistics and mathematical figures, its great factories are described as being 'illuminated like Fairy palaces',[46] and the movement of a steam-engine makes the narrator think of 'the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness'.[47] According to Cunningham, this overlap between 'metaphor and metonym' is 'instructive, for what it announces is the inevitability of imaginative figures, of metaphor, the fact that there is no final separation of the metaphoric from the metonymic, no writing without the intrusion, the invasion, of the one into the other'.[48] This inevitable overlap between the fantastic and the real is something that can also be seen in many Christmas fairy tales from the period. As Stephen Prickett observes in his study of Victorian literature, fantasy does not always function as an escape or refuge.[49] While the festive fairy tale offered the reader some degree of temporary escape into a world of fantasy, all too often the escape is compromised by an unrelenting consciousness of its own illusory quality and the intrusion, subtle though it may be, of reality.

The peculiar relationship between real time and fantasy time is central to much Christmas literature. The concept of the 'Secondary World' of fairy-tale time and space famously originates in Tolkien's essay, 'On Fairy Tales',[50] where he suggests that the fairy tale deals with certain human desires, one of which 'is to survey the depths of space and

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[45] Ibid., 106.
[46] Ibid., 66.
[47] Ibid., 27.
[48] Valentine Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 139.
[49] Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1979), 40.
[50] Maria Nikolajeva, "Fantasy Literature and Fairy Tales" in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 152.

time'.[51] Accordingly, the Secondary World of the fairy tale satisfies this desire by opening 'a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe'.[52] Tolkien's approach to the fairy tale focuses on the escapism and shift in perspective it offers. Arguing that belief in the magical and unreal Secondary World comes naturally, Tolkien simultaneously observes its instability, and suggests that within an instant disbelief can shatter the illusion, break the spell, and exile the reader.[53] Likewise, writing on the chronotope in the *Dialogic Imagination* (1975), Bakhtin observes that the distinction between the 'actual world as a source of representation and the world represented in the work' must never be forgotten; however, the line dividing these two categories should also not be considered 'absolute and impermeable'.[54] Bakhtin finds that the actual world and the represented world are 'indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction'.[55] It is this 'mutual interaction' between the illusions of fairy time and the reading context of the nineteenth-century Christmas that will form the basis of the following study. As a rare opportunity to experience a more fanciful version of reality, Christmas offers a context which briefly brings the audience closer to the enchantment of the fairy tale; however, I will suggest that it is simultaneously a moment of heightened critical awareness. Behind the Christmas fairy tale is a consciousness of the illusion, one which teases readers by allowing them to escape into a world of fantasy with the full knowledge that after a short time they, like the obese geese described by Thackeray, will have to relapse back into the ordinary.

The strange coupling of fantasy time and real time in the fairy tale appears to have been instigated by the works of Hans Christian Andersen in the 1840s. In this Danish writer's festive stories we see a preoccupation with illusion and reality taking shape, as the

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[51] Tolkien, *Tolkien On Fairy-stories*, 34-5.
[52] Ibid., 48.
[53] Ibid., 52.
[54] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 253.
[55] Ibid., 254.

concerns of Secondary and Primary worlds are purposely intermingled. Andersen's fairy tales were available in translation from 1846 and, as Sumpter has claimed, they marked 'a seminal moment for fantasy literature in Britain, the point at which the literary fairy tale achieved an unprecedented popularity'.[56] Biographer Jackie Wullschlager notes that 'the perceived virtues of Andersen [...] awakened more interest in fairy tales. The first imitation of Andersen's specific nursery world came rapidly: *The Enchanted Doll* by Mark Lemon, editor of *Punch*, and Frances Browne's *Granny's Wonderful Chair*'.[57] The influence of Andersen's work on the *Christmas* book market is seen as both Lemon and Browne's subsequent fairy stories were published for the Christmases of 1849 and 1857, respectively. Furthermore, other Christmas writers such as Dickens and Thackeray were great admirers of Andersen's fairy tales. Thackeray interrupted his Christmas grumble by introducing the exception of Andersen's works, asking 'what man can go on grumbling in the presence of such an angelical spirit as Hans Christian Andersen?'[58] Dickens also expressed admiration towards Andersen, and their friendship is well documented as the Danish writer came over to England to meet Dickens in 1847. Although, as Tomalin notes, Andersen could speak little English and was quite tiresome to accommodate, remaining with the Dickens family for five weeks and 'largely outstaying his welcome'.[59] Nonetheless, Andersen appears to have been oblivious to Dickens's increasing impatience, dedicating his Christmas book, *A Christmas Greeting to my English Friends* (1847), to the English writer.[60] In the dedication Andersen wrote, 'my thoughts are daily in dear England, where [...] my many friends transformed for me reality into a charming story'.[61] The sensation of reality being transformed into a story is a description synonymous with Andersen's Christmas stories. 'The Fir Tree' and 'The Little Match Seller' may be magical

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[56] Sumpter, *The Victorian Press*, 6.
[57] Jackie Wullschlager, *Hans Christian Andersen: The Life of a Storyteller* (London: Penguin, 2001), 293.
[58] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 125.
[59] Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 281.
[60] Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 296.
[61] Hans Christian Andersen, dedication of *A Christmas Greeting to my English Friends* (London: Richard Bentley, 1847), iii.

tales for Christmas, but they convey something deeper than the preoccupation with illusion or precarious escapist fantasy that can be detected in their British equivalents. Rather than the fairy story transforming reality, Andersen invests his fairy tales with realistic concerns. As Wullschlager has remarked, Andersen 'took perverse pleasure in presenting his bleak vision in the guise of a cosy Christmas story to be unwrapped beneath the candle-lit branches'.[62]

'The Fir Tree' is a story told by a personified tree that is always longing for some inexplicable thing beyond the present, and is troubled in a search for identity and meaning. Eventually it is cut down and taken to be a Christmas tree, but afraid of the unknown, it fails to enjoy the new experience it has been longing for. Left and forgotten in an empty room after Christmas is over, the tree begins to realise how much it misses the forest, but there is no chance for return. The tale ends bleakly, with the tree being cut up and used for firewood, only realising how much it enjoyed Christmas as it dies. It has been suggested that 'The Fir Tree' is a fantasy 'tragic and self-pitying in its witty self-recognition',[63] and indeed the personified tree does generate empathy in its deep confusion about reality and ontology, as it asks 'what's the meaning of this? [...] What am I to do here? What is to happen?'.[64] Earlier in the text, the tree echoes human concerns and inward conflicts about life, time, and being, as it wishes that it could be a Christmas tree while it is still in the forest: 'Oh! I'm suffering, I'm longing! I don't know myself what is the matter with me!' (123) The illusion of the fairy tale is stained by these profound questions, and a struggle against reality is clear in the tree's belief that 'there must be something grander, something greater still to come; but what?' (123).

A similar theme is visible in 'The Little Match Seller,' one of Andersen's most famous works. This story is about a poverty-stricken girl who is selling matches one winter

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[62] Wullschlager, *Hans Christian Andersen*, 249.
[63] Ibid., 247.
[64] Hans Christian Andersen, *Fairy Tales* (London: George G. Harrap, 1916), 125. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.

night. Desperately cold, she strikes the matches for warmth and the flames transform into cosy festive visions. In the final vision her dead Grandmother takes her to heaven, at which the little girl freezes to death. The visions the girl sees are clearly fantastic illusions that suddenly diffuse back into reality, leaving her with 'only the remains of a burned match in her hand' (178). The penultimate vision she sees is of 'a beautiful Christmas tree' decorated with 'coloured pictures,' but significantly, as the girl reaches her hand towards the image, once again 'the match went out' (178) and the festive fantasy is uncovered as nothing more than a temporary illusion. The Christmas visions briefly experienced by the child create a cosy and comforting atmosphere, but all too soon give way to the final tragedy of the girl's death, in which Andersen suggests that the final festive vision has become a reality but a bitter sweet one in that it requires the girl to die in order to achieve it. Wullschlager argues that 'this coziness is as much a part of Andersen's outlook as the inner rage and terror that reacted against it'.[65] We can see this in the girl's stark observation, 'now some one is dying' (178), a line that prepares the reader for the story's ending. There is no comfort to be found in Andersen's Christmas narratives. In this story, the fairy that comes to the rescue is essentially death, which fulfils the girl's desire to escape her harsh reality. In 1847, Thackeray had admitted, 'Hans Christian Andersen so affects me',[66] and it was perhaps because of his transformation of the fairy tale, and ability to invest this genre with real, emotional truths, that Andersen's tales were met with unmitigated popularity.

Meanwhile on English shores, Andersen's British counterparts were simultaneously producing a range of highly didactic fairy tales for the festive season. The objection Thackeray had made against moralistic fairy tales in his 1847 grumble was clearly a reaction to the British Christmas tale's evolution into a mouthpiece for morality and self-improvement. If light-hearted festive texts were engulfed by overt didacticism, Thackeray

[65] Wullschlager, introduction to *Hans Christian Andersen Fairy Tales* (London: Penguin, 2004), xl.
[66] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 125.

feared that the fairy tale would simply nurture feelings of disengagement and objectification. Disengagement and objectification are terms used by Charles Taylor to describe a loss of meaning: 'to objectify a given domain is to deprive it of normative force for us, or at least to bracket the meanings it has for us in our lives [...] But I want also to speak of it as "disengagement", because it involves a withdrawal of a certain sort'.[67] Thackeray's criticism of the moral fairy tale suggests that by sidelining fantasy and escapism, these works were bracketing the release from reality that formed a great part of the fairy genre, and the Christmas season itself. As Thackeray observed, 'honest and fine as this writing is, surely [at Christmas] it is out of place'.[68] While the British fairy tale for Christmas often succeeds in transporting the reader to a Secondary World, disengagement frequently arises from the writer's withdrawal from the fantasy to explain the tale's moral, creating an awkward transparency that Thackeray evidently resented. Harris however, has argued that the 'overt didacticism' was a technique actively used by Victorian writers as part of a rhetoric that aimed 'to minimize the unreality of fairy tales' in order 'to avoid charges of being [...] both absurd and immoral',[69] charges often used by Puritans who attacked the genre. Therefore, the disengagement and disbelief that Thackeray experienced when he read and reviewed the Christmas fairy tales was, most likely, the precise intention of writers who feared that society would become distracted from reality and lost in an absurd fairy world.

The British preoccupation with minimizing the unreality of the fairy tale comes into focus through a brief comparison of the ending of a German Christmas story with a later British adaptation of the same tale. In 1816, E.T.A. Hoffmann wrote a Christmas fantasy tale entitled 'Der Nußknacker und der Mausekönig' ('Nutcracker and Mouse King'). In 1835, a British adaptation of Hoffmann's text by 'W L T' appeared in the

[67] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 283-4.
[68] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 121.
[69] Harris, *Folklore*, 38.

Monthly Repository.[70] This 1835 text was entitled 'The Nutcracker: Second Fantasy Piece After Hoffman' and follows the same plot as Hoffmann's text, with the German characters Marie, Fritz and Godfather Drosselmeier renamed Mary, Frederick and Godpapa Pivot. The plot revolves around a young girl who becomes attached to toy nutcracker one Christmas Eve. The nutcracker comes to life, and after a series of complicated fairy tale episodes it is finally revealed that Nutcracker is an enchanted human: the mysterious Godfather Drosselmeier's nephew. In Hoffmann's complex narrative, and its 1835 British adaptation, both the reader and Marie/Mary become increasingly confused and disorientated, as it is unclear whether what they are reading, or experiencing, is real or imaginary. The tale repeatedly, and at times incomprehensibly, drifts between day and night, sleep and consciousness, and similarly alternates between Mary's belief in the reality of her experiences and her family's accusations that she merely has an overactive imagination. As Zipes points out, the narrator of the text 'toy[s] with the readers because he will soon use his careful realistic mode to depict the inner world of Marie as though she were actually experiencing everything that she sees, whether it be in her mind or outside her'.[71]

The technique of blurring the boundaries between the real and imaginary can also be observed through the strange figure of the Godfather, who is frequently associated with watches and clocks. The insinuation is made, at various points during the narrative, that this peculiar man holds power over time and is able to manipulate its workings in the Primary World. We are told early in the story that 'godpapa was a very ingenious man; he understood watchwork, and it was said could even make watches'.[72] Yet Pivot is likewise cast as a strange, fairy-tale character, as we are informed that 'the locality of his right eye [he] covered with a great black patch; and, having no hair, he wore a splendid, patent,

[70] The first English translation of "Nutcracker" did not appear until 1847.
[71] Zipes, introduction to *Nutcracker and Mouse King* (London: Penguin, 2008), xxiii.
[72] W L T., "The Nutcracker: Second Fantasy Piece After Hoffman" *Monthly Repository* 9, no. 97 (January 1835), 9.

white periwig'.[73] Later in the story, Pivot is again connected with time in the first of Mary's supernatural "visions" in which she sees him perched on top of the clock on the wall in place of the gilded owl. In this scene, the clock 'ticked louder and louder, but did not strike',[74] indicating the narrative's departure from the ordinary course of time. As the story progresses, and particularly when Mary suffers from a fever, the days and nights blur into one another and the reader loses track of narrative time. The imagery and language of the clock, however, return during one of the realistic family scenes of the tale when Mary is sick in her bed. While visiting his goddaughter, Pivot enigmatically sings the 'pretty song of the clock-maker' in which we hear: 'the pendulum must swing – the hour must strike, must strike, swing – swing – strike – strike – ding-dang, ding-dong'.[75] The tale's repeated emphasis on the peculiar transformation of the clock becomes another means through which the representation of time is warped, and the boundaries between fantasy and reality become incomprehensible.

Touching on this inherent and intended tension between the inner world and the outer world in Hoffmann's festive narrative, Perry writes that 'Nutcracker' became a canonical tale which 'marked a key moment in the development of Christmas and, moreover, in the history of the senses and emotions'.[76] At the end of the original tale the Nutcracker is revealed to be an enchanted human who has fallen in love with Mary, and eventually he resumes his human form and they get married. Despite this happy ending, the closing words of the text perpetuate the strange and enigmatic quality of the tale. At the end of Hoffmann's narrative, we are told, 'even at the present day, Mary is still queen of that beautiful country, where [...] in a word, all kinds of wonderful and extraordinary things may there be seen by those who have eyes sharp enough to discover them'.[77] As Zipes notes, this ending emphasises 'eyes and perception of wonder, and clearly the

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 13.
[75] Ibid., 17.
[76] Perry, *Christmas in Germany*, 23.
[77] E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The History of a Nutcracker* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1847), 77.

question of vision [...] how to envision and realize desire and not dampen curiosity as one matures within the confines of an orderly middle-class society'.[78] Indeed, at the end of the Hoffmann text, the narrator purposely refrains from disclosing the unreality of the tale to the reader and leaves them to wonder. However, in the 1835 British adaptation, the story's ending is noticeably different and there is a clear and undisguised intention to dampen the reader's curiosity. In this version we read: 'whether [Mary] still reigns queen at Alicumpane Castle, must be left to the brilliant imagination of the courteous reader. It is my own private opinion that she is the happy wife of a celebrated and most respected barrister, who resides near Bedford-square'.[79] The narrator's 'private opinion,' which the reader is clearly supposed to believe, shatters the fantasy and returns the reader to the Primary World of realistic time and space. Unlike the text's original ending, where the fantasy depends upon the reader having the right eyes to see and distinguish between the fantastic and the real for themselves, the British conclusion by 'W L T' is far more prescriptive. The fairy tale is explicitly insinuated as the product of a 'brilliant imagination,' a faculty that is quickly sidelined so that the emphasis of the ending falls upon the narrator's realistic explanations.

The British apprehension towards creating fantasy worlds that might distract the reader from their present reality can be observed in a number of Christmas fairy tales from the period. Appearing in the same year as Andersen's translated collection, the Brothers Mayhew's Christmas fairy tale *The Good Genius* was published in 1846,[80] and illustrated by George Cruikshank. Some critics claimed it was 'a truly wholesome and charming production [...] a genuine Christmas fairy tale, and of the delightful kind',[81] but it also received negative reviews. Forming the basis of Thackeray's unforgiving Christmas grumble, *The Good Genius* was introduced as 'a work of prodigious benevolence,

[78] Zipes, introduction to *Nutcracker*, xxvii.
[79] W L T, "The Nutcracker," 29.
[80] Though it was postdated 1847: see Moore, "Starvation in Victorian Christmas Fiction," 492.
[81] "New Christmas Tale," *The Times*. December 17, 1846.

stupendous moralisation, frequent wisdom, and rather a clumsy and doubtful fancy and humour,' which he satirically suggested the Brothers had written 'from their monastery' owing to its self-righteous moral tone.[82] *The Good Genius* is a tale about a woodman named Silvio who is granted anything he wishes by a fairy Queen Bee. Initially, he tells her that he is content with his life, and wishes only for a few repairs to his modest home, but as the tale progresses and Silvio falls in love with a Princess, he gradually asks for more and more until he is furnished with his own kingdom and all the riches of royalty. Though he is given everything that he asks for by the fairy Bee, Silvio grows dissatisfied, falls into laziness, and finds himself in trouble.[83] At the end of the story the Bee saves Silvio from death, and reveals that she is the 'Spirit of Patient Industry',[84] educating the reader and protagonist 'that gain by any other method is illusory'.[85] Thackeray's criticisms of the Mayhews's text stemmed from the sense that 'under the pretence of giving [...] a fairy story' the writers lure the reader into 'an abundance of doctrine'.[86] *The Good Genius*'s failure to offer holiday release is also attested to in Moore's analysis of the text, where she suggests that the entire tale is an 'allegory about English life and industry in a fantasy world of Orientalism'.[87]

Indeed, the Mayhews's fairy tale, with its excess of oriental imagery, attempts to offer a form of escapism through the magical and exoticized setting it creates. The reader, however, is frequently reminded of the tale's allegorical nature; this is made particularly apparent through the array of didactic parables that punctuate the story and disrupt the narrative. Though these fables are disguised as part of the story's 'Eastern manner' (135), they draw attention to the moral intent of the tale, and perforate the fairy tale illusion. In particular, 'the sage's parable about Romance and Reality' (37) is striking in its

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[82] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 118.
[83] In this way, the Mayhew tale echoes the Brothers Grimm fairy tale "The Fisherman and His Wife."
[84] Brothers Mayhew, *The Good Genius that Turned Everything into Gold or The Queen Bee and The Magic Dress: A Christmas Fairy Tale* (London: David Bogue, 1847), 192. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.
[85] Muresianu, *The History of the Victorian Christmas Book*, 161.
[86] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 120.
[87] Moore, "Starvation in Victorian Christmas Fiction," 494.

commentary on the dangers of indulging in the illusion of 'Romance,' which is shown to bring nothing but misery. This fable touches upon the underlying unreality of both the Secondary World of fairy tale and the escapism of an idealised Christmas, as the reader is given an imaginary scenario in which Romance rules the world instead of Reality, and uses 'her horn of pleasing visions' (38) to cover the world in Beauty. The moral comes in the sage's words: 'Beauty feeds not life [...] Delight gave way to Misery' and at the end of the parable we see 'what a gorgeous cheat was the ruling of Romance' (38). Romance is clearly depicted as fickle and unreliable while Beauty is empty and unproductive and, as this parable draws to a close, the reader is left with the image of 'sober-minded Truth' uprooting Romance's 'fruitless flowers' (38). In this instance, the allegory seems to critique the seasonal genre it is a part of, and perhaps also attempts to explain why Christmas merriment must only offer a temporary escape from reality. By withdrawing the reader from the narrative, *The Good Genius*'s moralistic parables seem to create a form of Taylor's 'disengagement' and blatantly objectify the story's moral purpose.

The Mayhews's parables function to enlighten the characters, and strive to provide new perspectives on the Primary World of the text. *The Good Genius*'s representation of fairy tale temporality is also interesting to consider in this respect as it frequently works to reveal moral truths or offer new perspectives on the "real" world. A striking example of this can be seen in Silvio's experience of time, which alters dramatically after he has been provided with riches by the fairy Bee. At the beginning of the book when Silvio is an industrious woodcutter, he 'hardly knew a year had slipped by' (27), as his life of patient industry and honest work made 'time [fly] along so swiftly' (24). After being magically promoted to Kingship however, Silvio's experience of time is very different. In the luxury and ease of courtly life time begins to drag, and Silvio holds banquets and balls for the express purpose of 'hurrying along that old dawdle, Time' (81). Clearly the illusory means that enabled Silvio to instantly gain his kingdom and status disrupt the experience of

temporality he enjoyed in his previous life of forestry. Time is not elastic, but simply elongated, very unlike Thackeray's supernatural use of fairy-tale time which we will see in *The Rose and the Ring*. Linking into Silvio's shifting experience of time, a number of fairy-tale scholars have noted that one of the genre's chief characteristics is its ability to produce new perspectives on reality. Warner has identified how the fairy tale creates 'pleasure in the fantastic [and] curiosity about the real' as it 'helps us to see the actual world to visualize a fantastic one'.[88] In *The Good Genius*, this occurs in the latter part of the tale when the fairy Bee gives Silvio 'a peep behind the curtain of Nature, so that [he] may have an insight into the mechanism of the Heavens and the Earth' (139). Words such as 'insight' and 'discover' underline this episode's preoccupation with revelations, as the fairy unravels the reality that Silvio thinks he knows. At the fairy's summons, Silvio's preconceptions are challenged as he sees the Primary World through the lens of the Secondary World:

> the world beneath him dwindled into a star, and the stars above him swelled into worlds [...] Then she took him down with her deep into the Earth [...] And instantly he lived the time when Man was yet unborn [...] And again ascending to the surface, the Fairy opened to him the affinities of things (139-40)

By constantly altering Silvio's position, the fairy reveals the mysteries of the world and, more importantly, enables Silvio to transform his grasp on reality by allowing him to visualise it from new perspectives.

Regardless of the magical release from the Primary World that occurs at various points in *The Good Genius*, the fairy's moralising voice consistently interrupts these fantasy scenes to dilute the magical visions with words of wisdom.[89] Towards the end of

[88] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, xvi.
[89] Seventeenth-century French writer Charles Perrault's versions of folk-tales, such as "The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods," "Little Red Riding Hood," and "Bluebeard," also 'tack on' a moral at the end of the stories,

the narrative, the fairy uses her powers to enable the Princess to communicate with Silvio even though they are separated by a long distance. Once again, her supernatural power over time and space is demonstrated as she chants: 'Let space disappear, / And Time be compelled to stand!' (172). Despite the fairy's magical manipulation of time, her moral tone is never far behind, and the 'fairy lecturer'[90] soon reappears with a wise sermon. When the Princess hears that her husband is about to be executed she begins to cry, only to be reminded, in the true spirit of industry, 'Folly cries, you know, while Wisdom tries' (174). These remarks bluntly prepare the reader for the moral of the story, and when the moral eventually appears, after the tale's conclusion, the Mayhews take over from the fictional Bee to offer their own teaching. The "moral" informs the audience that conventional fairy tale feelings of 'surprise and wonder' function only to create 'a more than ordinary interest in the objects that elicit them,' implying that *The Good Genius* intentionally manipulates the conventions of the genre in an attempt to 'apply these feelings to the inculcation of Industry' (193). In effect, these admissions explicitly reveal that the tale is, as Thackeray phrased it, 'a ponderous allegory' about reality.[91]

Although Mark Lemon's *The Enchanted Doll* is a Christmas fairy tale far less didactic than *The Good Genius*, throughout the course of the narrative the reader is likewise reminded of the tale's fictive nature. Alongside his recognition of the overtly didactic rhetoric of certain Victorian fairy tales, Harris writes that techniques 'such as the "aside" of the narrator and direct address towards a youthful audience, suggest authorial discomfort with the fairy-tale narrative' and 'betray self-conscious doubts of the validity of their subject matter'.[92] These narrative traits, frequently employed in Lemon's text, withdraw the reader from the imaginary Secondary World and reduce the unreality of the tales. As one reviewer of *The Enchanted Doll* peculiarly expressed, 'it is real and yet

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usually in verse form. Given Perrault's influence on the fairy-tale genre, it could be argued that these moral interruptions are to be expected.

[90] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 120.

[91] Ibid., 121.

[92] Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic*, 59.

unreal'.[93] The plot of Lemon's tale revolves around a magical doll that grows in size to mirror the internal bitterness and jealousy of its misanthropic owner Jacob Pout. A large part of the fairy tale is dedicated to transporting the reader to a picturesque, rural London at Christmas time, and in the story's Christmas episode Lemon alters the tense and addresses the reader directly. Here, the reader is invited to 'take an imaginary stroll' and attend a Christmas party at Alderman Kersey's house: 'I am sure he will be glad to welcome us'.[94] Later, Lemon draws on the reader's senses to convince them that they are in the narrative world as he asks 'can you not smell the spiced wine that is steaming?'[95] In this self-confessed 'imaginary' world, the text's unreality is highlighted by the conscious attempt to stimulate the reader's imagination, coupled with the "aside" and direct address of the narrator. The surrounding narrative of the magical doll is suspended in this chapter to make way for festive descriptions of Christmas pies and dancing. It is only when the protagonist steals away from the scene that the narrative is forced to resume. In this moment however, the narrator once again addresses the reader, and suggests:

> you had better remain with the pleasant people at Alderman Kersey's, and join in the carol which will be sung at midnight to usher in the coming Christmas-day. Besides, there will be other games of blind man's buff, hot cockles, and forfeits, and [...] snapdragon and hunt the slipper. I will follow Jacob Pout, and tell you all that happened in the next chapter.[96]

In this fairy tale, as in *The Good Genius*, the narrative works in a way that completely contrasts with Bakhtin's comic chronotope. Bakhtin describes how the dimensions of everyday life and time in the comic chronotope are 'fantastically exaggerated' and 'lose their limited personal ordinariness'.[97] Yet in *The Enchanted Doll*, the fiction that Lemon creates is a strikingly realistic Christmas scene, where the dimensions of ordinary life

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[93] "The Enchanted Doll," *Examiner* 2159 (June 16, 1849), 373.
[94] Mark Lemon, *The Enchanted Doll* (London: The De La More Press, ca.1895), 46.
[95] Ibid., 53.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 219.

remain intact. Rather than fantastically exaggerating reality through magical intervention, the section of the narrative in which Lemon invites his reader to imaginatively participate, is nothing more than a description of Christmas that would already have been accessible to many middle-class readers in their own homes.

As we have seen, the British reluctance to situate the reader within the imaginary world of the Christmas fairy tale is a recurring theme, and becomes particularly clear when one looks at how these festive fairy tales draw to a close. As we saw in the British adaptation of 'Nutcracker,' many authors were hesitant to leave their reader in the ambiguous space between fantasy and reality, preferring to remind them of the real world at the end of the narrative. Likewise, in Carroll's *Alice's Adventure's in Wonderland*, the tale is revealed to be a summer daydream, and in another Christmas fairy tale, Frances Browne's *Granny's Wonderful Chair*, reality is resumed at the end of the text as the narrator explicitly admits that the enchanted world of her book has disappeared. In the final lines of Browne's text we read that 'great wars, work and learning have passed over the world since then, and changed all its fashions',[98] and the reader is directed towards reality: 'fairies dance no more. Some say it was the hum of schools – some think it was the din of factories that frightened them'.[99] The references to schools and factories bring us back to Dickens's representation of Coketown in *Hard Times*, and are clearly intended to return the reader to the tangible world of their daily lives, by breaking the festive illusion and reaffirming their duty to the present. The fairy tale genre and its unstable relationship with unreality creates tension within these tales. As Harris points out, many writers of the period were 'uncomfortable with the obvious fictive quality of the fairy tale genre' and as is evident within many of these festive texts '[the] authors simultaneously are liberated and

[98] Frances Browne, *Granny's Wonderful Chair* (London: J.M. Dent, 1963), 149-150.
[99] Ibid., 150.

constrained by the ambiguous cultural role' of the genre to which they were contributing.[100]

3.2 Cricket on the Hearth (1845)

Cricket on the Hearth was Dickens's third Christmas book, composed while he was living in Genoa, and published for December 1845. It achieved greater commercial success than either *A Christmas Carol* or *The Chimes* and emerged from the season his best-selling Christmas text.[101] The popularity of Dickens's story is evident from both its sales figures (the first edition of 16,500 had sold out by New Year's Eve)[102] and the surge of theatrical attention it received, with dramatic versions running simultaneously in seventeen theatres during the Christmas season of 1845.[103] Thackeray's literary review in the *Morning Chronicle* also attests to *Cricket*'s remarkable impact on the reading public, as he noted that 'many thousand copies of "Cricket on the Hearth" have been sold, and it is not a week old. You hear talk of it in every company [...] at dinner everybody had read it; everybody was talking about it'.[104] Perhaps it was the growing interest in literature for Christmas or, more specifically, Dickens's affiliation with the season and the anticipation of his annual contribution to the Christmas book market that made *Cricket* an instant bestseller; however, it is also likely that the subtitle 'A Fairy Tale of Home' contributed to its popular appeal. Dickens's *Cricket* was the first British Christmas tale to explicitly associate itself with the fairy story. Published in the period when, as Schacker notes, the popular tale collection and fairy legend had emerged 'as a form of popular reading material in

[100] Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic*, 60.
[101] Elisabeth Gitter, "The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth*," *Studies in English Literature* 39, no. 4 (1999), 675.
[102] Moore, *Victorian Christmas*, 23.
[103] Glancy, introduction to *Charles Dickens Christmas Books*, xv.
[104] Thackeray, *Contributions*, 87-8.

England',[105] Dickens's story appealed to both the festive and fairy genres of literary interest.

Dickens's fascination with the fairy tale and incorporation of the genre's motifs within his writing has been the focus of numerous studies. Ostry's *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale* (2002) suggests that Dickens used the fairy tale as a means of communicating social ideas,[106] and Stone's *Dickens and the Invisible World* (1979) is similarly preoccupied with the 'fairy-tale focus of Dickens' creativity'.[107] Drawing attention to the nineteenth century as an age in which man was being turned into a machine, Stone shows that Dickens felt the need for fairy stories to be cherished and allowed to do 'their beneficent work of nurturing man's [...] feeling and fancy'.[108] More significantly, Stone also claims that 'Dickens felt no difficulty connecting such tales with Christmas'[109] and suggests, 'the Christmas books draw their innermost energies from fairy tales'.[110] Dickens's article 'Frauds on the Fairies' adds depth to Stone's claims. Writing to preserve the tender fancy of the fairy tale and protect it from becoming a vehicle for undisguised moral teaching, Dickens argues that this literary form should be cherished. The points raised in his defence of the fairy tale can also be aligned with the social benefits of Christmas time. Dickens applauds the fairy tale's ability to 'enchant' weary workers who are in need of 'rest' and restoration from the demands of working life,[111] and links the flourishing of fancy with the growth of a strong, powerful nation, a national consciousness which we have already seen emphasised in the nineteenth-century affirmation of Christmas as a symbol of Englishness. It is in the final lines that the social role of the fairy tale, and Christmas, as the means to experience a much needed release from reality, can be closely

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[105] Schacker, *National Dreams*, 1.
[106] Ostry, *Social Dreaming*, xii.
[107] Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, xi.
[108] Ibid., 5.
[109] Ibid., 37.
[110] Ibid., 119.
[111] Dickens, "Frauds on the Fairies," 97.

observed, as Dickens recognises: 'the world is too much with us, early and late. Leave this precious old escape from it, alone'.[112]

While it is evident that Dickens celebrated the release and escape offered by both the fairy tale and Christmas, it is interesting to see that the majority of *Cricket*'s contemporary reviewers struggled to identify precisely where the success of this festive story lay. One reviewer for *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* commented 'the charm is a concealed charm' which 'steals unobserved into the reader's mind, who is pleased he knows not why'.[113] Similarly, Thackeray's review in the *Morning Chronicle* tells of a clergyman who 'confessed that he had been whimpering over it all the morning. He didn't know why, he could not point to any special passage, but the general effect'.[114] Such responses suggest that *Cricket* tapped into something inwardly known and felt by society, but precisely what it was remained difficult to articulate. Likewise, if reviewers did draw attention to any specific characteristics of *Cricket* in their commentaries, the focus was on the text's sound moral character or pleasing aesthetic quality. A writer for the *Dublin University Magazine* praised 'those bright and happy pictures' created by Dickens: 'we see the honest carrier coming in steaming with the frosty rime of a winter's night, his little wife Dot, the cheerful and homely hearth, and the kettle boiling and bubbling away'.[115] Similarly superficial in their commentary, the writer of the *Chambers* review, using a word play which invokes the final lines of *Cricket*, writes: 'nothing remains for us but to hope that [Dickens's] future publications will be at least as harmless and innocent'.[116] Some modern reviewers have taken these insubstantial responses to *Cricket* into consideration. Philip Hobsbaum claims that it was the 'powerful stock responses [...] elicited by the steady repetition of words like 'snug, 'hearth', 'cosy', 'home'' that enticed the Victorian

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[112] Ibid., 100.
[113] "Mr Dickens's New Christmas Tale," *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* 107 (January 1846), 45.
[114] Thackeray, *Contributions*, 88.
[115] "Christmas Books," *Dublin University Magazine* 29, no. 169 (January, 1847), 135.
[116] "Mr Dickens's New Christmas Tale," 48.

reader.[117] After making this observation however, Hobsbaum questions whether this was the genuine meaning sought by Dickens, when he remarks that 'the story is evanescent'.[118] Although *Cricket* is laden with powerful and enticing domestic imagery, Hobsbaum notes that at the end of the text everything that has been created quickly vanishes away. This vanishing, illusory quality of *Cricket* has been recognised by other critics including Ackroyd and Ostry, who uniformly agree that Dickens acts like *Cricket*'s Caleb Plummer, father to blind Bertha, who 'spreads fancies around to beguile us and to keep us from the pain'.[119] As these reviews and interpretations suggest, there is something indescribable about the *Cricket*. While the text provides readers with a fictive and festive release from reality, Dickens frequently implies that everything we have been lead to believe in might just be an illusion, a temporary escape, or an ostensible dream. Unlike the didactic strain of other British fairy tales such as *The Good Genius*, Dickens's destabilisation of the Secondary World is more implicit than explicit. Challenging the view that *Cricket* is harmless, innocent, simple and primitive,[120] this analysis will reveal that the text is permeated with a disturbing awareness of its own unreality, and will suggest that this awareness creates an internal friction as the characters become conscious of the distance between the real and the unreal.

In Dickens's *Cricket* the reader meets Dot Peerybingle and her older husband John, who are newlyweds with a baby. We are also introduced to the poor yet dreamy toymaker Caleb Plummer, who lies to his blind daughter by pretending that they live in luxury and ease to shield her from the truth of their poverty and hardship. One winter's night, John brings a mysterious old man into the Peerybingle house upon his return from work. This apparently deaf and confused old man is in reality their old friend Edward (son of Caleb) who has been away in South America. Edward has disguised himself so that he might

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[117] Philip Hobsbaum, *A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 92.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 265.
[120] "Mr Dickens's New Christmas Tale," 48.

prepare his family for his unexpected return and marry his sweetheart May, who has meanwhile become engaged to Caleb's cruel employer Tackleton. Edward reveals his true identity to Dot who keeps the secret from her husband, knowing that he would unintentionally reveal the truth. Tackleton however, becomes suspicious of Dot and, seeing through Edward's disguise, he hints to John that his wife is being unfaithful. Believing that his wife has betrayed him, John is visited by a fairy who defends Dot and tries to persuade him that she has not been untrue. By the end of the narrative, all of the story's confusions and misunderstandings are resolved. Edward and May marry, Tackleton undergoes a moral transformation, Caleb admits his lies to Bertha, and Dot is absolved from John's suspicion. Nonetheless, *Cricket* ends on a very ambiguous and unsettling note. The narrative concludes with a joyful party scene, however in the final lines we read:

> But what is this! Even as I listen to them, blithely, and turn towards Dot, for one last glimpse of a little figure very pleasant to me, she and the rest have vanished into air, and I am left alone. A Cricket sings upon the Hearth; a broken child's toy lies upon the ground; and nothing else remains.[121]

The illusory quality of dream time and the temporary release from reality that *Cricket* provides are interesting to consider, particularly as Ostry has argued that Dickens's narrative is a dream, ending with an ambiguous awakening.[122] The dream theory of *Cricket* is convincing, even more so if the opening of the second chapter is compared against the story's 'ambiguous' ending. In the second chapter, we hear that Gruff and Tackleton's toymaking business had 'made toys for a generation of old boys and girls, who had played with them, and found them out, and broken them, and gone to sleep' (188). Already in this passage there is the sense of an illusion being uncovered as the toy is 'found out' before it is broken and the children go to sleep. There is also a strange coupling of childhood and

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[121] Charles Dickens, "Cricket on the Hearth," in *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 242. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.
[122] Ostry, *Social Dreaming*, 101.

adulthood, as the figures are peculiarly referred to 'old boys and girls.' Although *Cricket* is sub-titled 'A Fairy Tale of Home' the central theme of presumed infidelity indicates that it is an adult, rather than childish, fairy tale. In these lines, it seems as though sleeping and dreaming have displaced the toy and become the preferred mode of play. Likewise, in the text's concluding passage the visual motif of the broken toy returns, once again implying that an illusion has been uncovered. Here we read that everything has 'vanished [...] a broken child's toy lies upon the ground; and nothing else remains' (242). In this ending of there is a sense of vanishing away: the broken child's toy might imply that the fantasy of childhood has been shattered, adulthood has been reached, and with this there is a bleak recognition that nothing else remains but reality. In this ending it is almost as if the order of events from the first passage has been reversed; instead of going to sleep we wake up, see the broken toy, and are reminded of finding something out, or of uncovering an illusion. This time however, the illusion is not merely the pretence of a toy, it is that of the entire story.

In addition to the above passages, *Cricket* is strewn with references to sleep, fluctuating consciousness and dreaming, associated most frequently with Caleb Plummer. Caleb is perpetually depicted in a 'dreamy manner' (191), with 'the fixed look of a sleepwalker' (194) and 'a wandering and thoughtful eye which seemed to be always projecting itself into some other time and place' (178). By creating a world of false illusions for Bertha, Caleb is torn between the consciousness of reality, of 'how different the picture in her mind, from [his]' and a simultaneous inability to escape the illusion, 'having confused himself about himself and everything around him' (192). Dickens's interest in dreaming has been noted by Warrington Winters, who observes that the 'state of mind, in which we dream and at the same time know that we are dreaming, had been described by Dickens as early as 1837 in an expository passage in *Oliver Twist*'.[123] In this

[123] Warrington Winters, "Dickens and the Psychology of Dreams," *PMLA* 63, no. 3 (1948), 986.

passage, where Oliver falls to sleep after reading his books, Dickens writes about a kind of sleep during which, 'we have a consciousness of all that is going on about us, and if we dream at such a time [...] reality and imagination become so strangely blended that it is afterwards almost a matter of impossibility to separate the two'.[124] If this passage is linked into a reading of *Cricket*, a new perspective emerges from the text. The lines from *Oliver Twist* are echoed in Dickens's characterisation of Caleb as a man who is aware of the illusion in which he has become entangled, but unable to fully comprehend the reality of what he is doing. Yet this awareness of illusion is as much a reflection on the reader as it is on Caleb and the other characters contained within the 'dream' context of the story. As Ostry observes, in this fairy tale, 'the utopia that Christmas offers is elusive' and the characters are 'illusive'.[125] *Cricket* is a festive fairy story which pretends to portray a utopia, but as we draw closer to the characters and read the book in terms of the 'solitude and darkness' found in the ending,[126] we begin to uncover 'ambiguities [...] and even Dickens's own ambivalence' towards the precarious Christmas illusion of fancy.[127] As James Marlow comments, while Dickens hoped to 'instil in his readers a refreshed mood for the holiday season,' *Cricket* insinuates that Dickens was, like the characters within the text, of two minds: 'on the one hand, he wished to reconcile mankind [...] to the world; on the other, he felt the need to escape the world'.[128]

As we have seen from his words in 'Frauds on the Fairies,' Dickens viewed the fairy tale as an escape, yet in *Cricket* the fairy tale elements are peculiar and often disturbing. The text begins with the personification of inanimate objects, a technique common to the fairy tale. In the Peerybingle home kettles 'lean forward with a drunken air, and dribble' (166) and clocks are 'little' and 'waxy-faced' (165). And as the story

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[124] Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Penguin, 1994), 986.
[125] Ostry, *Social Dreaming*, 91.
[126] Ibid., 101.
[127] Ibid., 78.
[128] James E. Marlow, "Memory, Romance and the Expressive Symbol in Dickens," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 30, no. 1 (1975), 20.

develops, magical characteristics are given to ordinary creatures when we witness household crickets appearing 'in fairy shape' (186). While anthropomorphism is a well-known convention of the fairy story, something that is often overlooked in analyses of *Cricket* is that while inanimate objects are made real, the real is frequently made, in Dickens's own words, 'artificially dazzling'.[129] When John Peerybingle is first described to the reader, whimsical similes are used to describe how 'the thick mist hung in clots upon his eyelashes like candied thaw; and between the fog and fire together, there were rainbows in his very whiskers' (169). The introduction of Tackleton, Caleb's merciless employer, is delivered in a similar manner. Tackleton is not described as a man, but 'a domestic Ogre' (180) with 'a screw in his body' (181), thus immediately stylized as the villain of the fairy tale. Perhaps predictably, the technique of rendering the real inanimate is most commonly connected to dreamy toymaker Caleb. When he looks at the disguised grey-haired man in the Peerybingle home, Caleb sees him not as a man but as a toy, moreover a toy that Hoffmann had already written a Christmas tale about in 1816: 'a beautiful figure for a nut-cracker; quite a new model […] he'd be lovely,' or 'a firebox […] Unscrew his head to put the matches in; turn him heels up'ards for the light; and what a firebox for a gentleman's mantel-shelf, just as he stands!' (184). Here, Caleb's words clearly highlight the underlying tension between fairy tale fancy and external reality.

The reversed anthropomorphism and projection of fantasy create an unusual effect, blurring the boundaries between what is supernatural and what is real. Caleb's imagination would be echoed in another of Dickens's Christmas texts, 'A Christmas Tree,' where he describes looking at the 'jolly broad-faced little men' hanging on the tree, and describes them to be 'much more agreeable in appearance than many real men – and no wonder, for their heads took off, and showed them to be full of sugar plums'.[130] In one way, these instabilities between the real and the pretend serve the purpose of making reality seem

[129] Dickens, "A Christmas Tree," 231.
[130] Ibid.

imbued with the fantastic and wonderful. The reader is comforted and offered reassurance that their experience of the alienating reality – a reality that mechanises and reduces the individual into what Ruskin referred to as 'mere segments of men – broken into small fragments and crumbs of life' – could be transformed.[131] Instead of existing as a mere segment of a man, Caleb's perspective suggests that the individual could be transformed into a kind of magical toy. While Caleb's technique of switching from the real to the illusory heightens the playful fairy tale atmosphere, the blurring of boundaries between the real and fictive also adds a disturbing dimension to the text. In representing the supposedly 'real' characters in the language of rainbows, ogres, nutcrackers and fireboxes whose heads screw off, Dickens mixes the fantastic and the somatic. By aligning the characters of *Cricket* with the imagery of toys and fairy tales, the fictive illusion is intensified and the basic distinctions between reality and unreality are made ambiguous and unsettling. Indeed, as Gaby Wood writes in her exploration of mechanical toys, 'mixed in with the magic and the marvel is a fear: that we can be replicated all too easily, and that we are uncertain now of what it is that makes us humans'.[132]

Caleb and Bertha are further embedded within this obscure vision of the fairy tale as *Cricket*'s narrative develops, made particularly evident in Dickens's depiction of their home. In the second chapter, father and daughter are placed within the context of a fictional tale when the narrator tells us that they 'lived all alone by themselves, as the Story-books say [...] in a little cracked nutshell of a wooden house' (188). Considering this 'entrée' to the chapter, Stone remarks that it 'forms a fitting opening for the strange storybook world' of the text.[133] The allusion to fiction, and more specifically to the fairy-tale storybook, once again creates an ambiguity between what the reader perceives to be real and illusory. As the interior of the Plummers' home is described, this "strangeness" comes into sharper focus. The living room is a 'strange place' (189) cluttered with the

[131] John Ruskin, *On the Nature of Gothic Architecture* (London: Smith, Elder, 1854), 10.
[132] Gaby Wood, *Living Dolls* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), xiv.
[133] Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, 130.

handiwork of the toymaker. There were 'houses in it, finished and unfinished, for Dolls' (189) alongside 'various other samples of his handicraft [...] Scores of melancholy little carts which, when the wheels went round, performed the most doleful music. Many small fiddles and drums and other instruments of torture [...] it would have been hard to count the dozens upon dozens of grotesque figures' (190). Moreover, to blind Bertha the room itself is a further product of the toymaker's handiwork, as she lives 'in an enchanted home of Caleb's furnishing, where scarcity and shabbiness were not' (188). The image of Caleb's room is at once fascinating and disturbing. The description of the toys is interspersed with unsettling language. Innumerable 'grotesque figures' crowd the room in a 'melancholy,' 'doleful' attitude, and it is 'in the midst of all these objects,' or 'instruments of torture' (190), that Caleb and Bertha sit. Recalling *Cricket*'s subtitle, 'A Fairy Tale of Home,' only adds to the sense of distortion and disturbance apparent here. In this scene, Caleb's fictional home contains more fictional homes, for dolls 'established in their sphere' and 'beyond the possibility of getting out of it' (190).

The sense of enclosure ties into Wood's observation that 'a child's desire for a doll to come to life may become, in adulthood, a fear',[134] a fear that would later become a reality in Mark Lemon's *The Enchanted Doll*. In *Cricket* we witness Caleb treating his daughter in the same way that he treats his toys. Motivated by a fear that Bertha will come to life and rupture the illusion he has created, Caleb has established her within a fantasy sphere from which she cannot escape. Later in the text, before he admits the truth to Bertha, he shows a lingering reluctance to leave behind the make-believe world when he hugs Dot 'as a child might have hugged one of his own dolls' (226). Enclosure and entrapment are also unexpectedly formed by Dickens's "fairy tale" references to toys and enchantment. Living within a fictional world populated by grotesque toys, it is perhaps understandable that Caleb's dreamlike inability to distinguish reality from illusion should

[134] Wood, *Living Dolls*, xiv.

be nurtured. Later on in the text, we see the narrator becoming similarly persuaded that the toys could be real, as he imagines them watching and responding to the events that unfold in Caleb's room when the characters gather together for a picnic. In this scene, 'the dolls and toys [...] stared [...] as if they were listening to the conversation' (203) and as the chapter ends, the narrator writes, 'in the faint light and silence, the imperturbably calm dolls, the agitated rocking-horses with distended eyes and nostrils [...] might have been imagined to be stricken motionless with fantastic wonder' (213). In the setting of Caleb's room, Dickens makes visible the fairy tale that surrounds the characters, and simultaneously affiliates the position of the reader with the dolls who are observing the narrative taking shape. Here we see a toymaker's home cluttered with make believe, with toys that serve the specific purpose of furnishing and encouraging childish illusions.

The fairy tale is also made visible in the text's opening chapter, where the narrator establishes some of *Cricket*'s central illusory images. Amongst the personified kettles, crickets and clocks, the fictive nature of the tale is emphasised when the narrator conditions the response of his audience in the midst of this domestic vision, suggesting that they 'might have understood it like a book' (167). Writing on *Hard Times*, Cunningham notes a similar dichotomy as he observes how one of the text's 'major discernable overt functions [...] is that it's written to undermine the literal, the factual, the metonymic, the purely worldly way of reading the world, and to urge in place of any such harsh vision or practice the counter-importance of the fanciful, the figurative, the metaphoric, the fictional mode of seeing'.[135] In *Cricket*, the admission of the narrative's fanciful and figurative way of seeing can be seen most explicitly in the kettle's song. Though this song is supposedly 'a song of invitation and welcome to somebody out of doors' (167), the tone undermines the expectations generated by this definition: 'it's a dark night, sang the kettle [...] and, above, all is mist and darkness, and below, all is mire and clay; and there's only one relief

[135] Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol*, 133.

in the sad and murky air; and I don't know that it is one, for it's nothing but a glare [...] and the ice it isn't water, and the water isn't free; and you couldn't say that anything is what it ought to be' (167). The kettle's song of invitation seems to introduce the reader to the fantasy of the text, rather than welcoming John Peerybingle to his home. The revealing line, 'you couldn't say that anything is what it ought to be' brings the narrative tension between the literal and the figurative into focus. The only relief that the kettle expresses is that meanings are unfixed in the world of *Cricket*. The representation of time in the Peerybingle home is similarly torn between realism and the fantasy of the fairy tale illusion where nothing is 'what it ought to be.' As Zemka has suggested in her study of time, Victorian culture was increasingly contending 'with a growing separation between durational time and a sensationalized and punctualist present' where 'temporality not only organizes embodied sensations but also contains hidden meanings'.[136] In the first paragraph of *Cricket* we are introduced to the Peerybingles' Dutch clock, but only a few lines later the narrator expresses an uncertainty about what time it was when the Cricket first began to chirp, despite measuring the minutes 'by the little waxy-faced Dutch clock in the corner' (165). He claims that 'the clock hadn't finished striking [...] before the Cricket joined in at all!' but only a few moments later admits 'I am not naturally positive. Everyone knows that' (165). The speaker's uncertainty is then further obscured as he resumes his narrative authority and asserts that he has ultimate control over the fictional time he narrates: 'the fact is, that the kettle began it, at least five minutes before the Cricket gave any sign of being in existence. Contradict me, and I'll say ten' (165). The narrator's words imply that very little in the world of *Cricket* can be measured accurately, and his attitude simultaneously draws attention to the fictive nature of the tale, as he establishes his own narrative authority over the order of events, regardless of their accuracy.

[136] Zemka, *Time and the Moment*, 13-4.

Furthermore, the Peerybingles' Dutch clock is repeatedly referred to using figurative language and seems to tell a story of its own. Forming the focus of Daniel Maclise's full-page illustration for Chirp the First (Figure 9), the clock is characterised by a 'convulsive little Haymaker [...] jerking away right and left with a scythe in front of a Moorish Palace' where he mows down 'imaginary grass' (165).

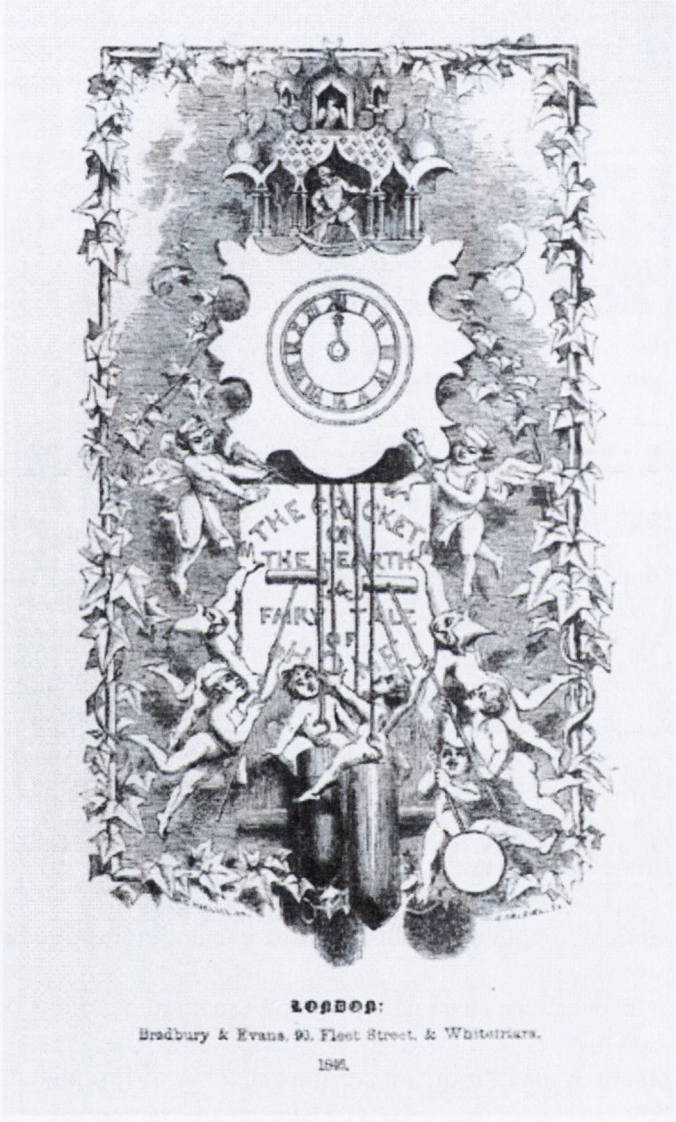

Figure 9. Daniel Maclise's full-page illustration for *Cricket on the Hearth* (1845)

The Haymaker is also clearly aligned with Father Time who also holds a scythe in order to remind us of time's transitory nature. The visual imagery of the clock leads the narrator into another tale, when he describes that its haymaker 'had his spasms, two to the second,

all right and regular. But, his sufferings when the clock was going to strike, were frightful to behold; and when a Cuckoo looked out of a trapdoor in the Palace, and gave note six times, it shook him, each time, like a spectral voice – or like a something wiry, plucking at his legs' (166). The storytelling associated with the clock distracts the reader from its usual function of telling the time, as the clock clearly has a sub-plot of its own within this fairy tale. A few lines later we read that 'it was not until a violent commotion and a whirring noise among the weights and ropes below him had quite subsided, that this terrified Haymaker became himself again. Nor was he startled without reason; for these rattling, bony skeletons of clocks are very disconcerting in their operation' (166). Here, the narrator associates real time with horror, as the striking of the hour is compared to a 'spectral voice' and the clock described as a 'rattling, bony skeleton.' The language used here clearly echoes Dickens's earlier depiction of the fearful Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come in the *Carol*. Moreover, clocks and the way they measure time is something that the narrator finds 'very disconcerting.' The figurative, story-like language associated with the clock is also visually apparent in Maclise's illustration, where the image of the clock is obscured by a number of fairies swinging upon its weights and ropes. In the same way that the story of the haymaker distracts us from the reality that the narrator is describing a clock, when we look at Maclise's illustration the last thing we notice is the time.

Although they are encased within the illusion of festive and figurative fairy time, at various points throughout the story the characters of *Cricket* seem to become conscious of their unreality. As Prickett has argued, 'if the nineteenth century was fascinated by its dreams and nightmares, there is every indication that many of the dreamers were well aware of what dreams were made of'.[137] A close reading of *Cricket* uncovers moments of realisation, where the characters' 'suspended presence of mind' (183) is briefly counteracted and they show a tentative awareness that there is something beyond the fairy

[137] Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*, 41.

tale. It is worth nothing that some of the characters in *Cricket* explicitly admit that they are deluded: John is referred to as a man of 'innocent delusions' (175) and Caleb similarly recognises 'I'm always deluding myself' (192). Even Bertha seems partially aware of the illusion her father has created. Caleb's false portrayal of Tackleton leads Bertha to grow fond of their harsh employer, and after being told that Tackleton intends to marry May, Bertha's distress is visible. She asks her father if May is fair, but as Caleb details May's beauty and is about to tell Bertha about her eyes, 'he stopped; for Bertha had drawn closer round his neck, and, from the arm that clung about him came a warning pressure which he understood too well' (196). It is strongly implied that Bertha is already aware of the reality of May's beauty, but she has heard enough from her father and prefers the illusions he creates for her to these painful truths. The image of Bertha with her arm around her father's neck, informing him with a 'warning pressure' that she wishes to remain deluded, is disconcerting. As Gitter has suggested, 'the sentimental surface of [Bertha's] portrayal in *The Cricket on the Hearth* does not altogether obscure the traces of the grotesque that cling to her'.[138] This scene suggests that Bertha is partially conscious of her estrangement from reality, and Caleb too feels in this instance as though she sees what he is doing despite her blindness, as he 'dropped his eyes, as if she could have read in them his innocent deceit' (196).

The struggle between illusion and reality is also discernible in Dickens's characterisation of Dot, most conspicuously in the opening chapter of *Cricket*. Later in the text, after the arrival of the disguised Edward and the suggestion that Dot is being false to her husband, we can understand why she may show signs of being agitated and uncomfortable. When her husband mentions 'that old gentleman' the narrator observes that Dot was 'again so visibly and instantly embarrassed!' (199). Though Dot is innocent, her anxiety stems from the illusion of Edward's disguise that she strives to maintain. From the

[138] Gitter, "The Blind Daughter," 685.

reader's very first introduction to Dot, however, the narrator suggests that she is distracted by something else, even before Edward has entered the narrative. In the story's opening scene, there is much to indicate that Dot is unsettled. Putting the kettle on the fire 'she lost her temper, or mislaid it for an instant' (165) and splashed herself with water: afterwards she is unable to secure the kettle's lid, though it is the kettle that is accused of being 'topsy-turvy' (166) rather than Dot. Likewise, when the kettle sings its doleful song of welcome, the narrator remarks that 'Mrs Peerybingle knew it, perfectly, as she sat musing by the hearth' (167). This is the first explicit indication of Dot's awareness that nothing 'is what it ought to be' (167). The tension of the scene hinges upon Dot's anticipation of John's arrival, but in her silent solitude beside the fire, the discerning reader is unsure if she is looking forward to her husband's arrival or not. In a critical moment, before John arrives, Dot 'lighted a candle, glanced at the Haymaker on the top of the clock […] and looked out of the window, where she saw nothing owing to the darkness, but her own face imaged in the glass' (168). In this passage Dot seems to be aware of the real world beyond the room she inhabits. She glances at the clock, which itself represents fairy-tale time, before looking out of the window into darkness. If Dot's actions here signify an attempt to see beyond her own unreality, it is revealing that she sees 'nothing' due to the darkness outside. This unsettling passage implies that there is nothing beyond the illusion of the story for these characters, as Dot sees only a reflection of herself and the room she is within. In his analysis of *Cricket*, Scott Moncrieff acknowledges the peculiar relationship between fantasy and reality in this text, observing:

> Dickens liked to escape from the material world into the realm of ogres, godmothers, and fairies, but it was crucial for him to relate this world to the realistic world of his novels. When he failed to do so […] he failed as an artist.

> A crucial pattern of his work is the juxtaposition of the fanciful with the realistic and ordinary.[139]

The juxtaposition of the fantastic and the ordinary continues in this chapter, as Dot is reunited with her husband and the sense that something is disturbing her emerges again. After John tells her that he loves her 'she laid her hand, an instant, on his arm, and looked up at him with an agitated face, as if she would have told him something. Next moment she was down upon her knees before the basket, speaking in a sprightly voice, and busy with the parcels' (173). In this instance, Dot is on the verge of disclosing something significant to her husband, yet neither John nor the reader ever discover what it is. Perhaps she wishes to relate to her husband the realisation that struck her when she was moved to look out of the window before his arrival, and explain that nothing 'is what it ought to be.' Instead, she remains silent and busies herself with chores – after all her husband is himself painfully aware that he is 'a man of slow perception' (185), and as her later decision to conceal the truth about Edward demonstrates, he is 'too clumsy in all artifice' (233) to understand. Yet Dot's sense of something beyond the immediate scene remains visible in her actions: perpetually distracted and 'absorbed in thought, she stood there, heedless alike of the tea and John [...] until he rose and touched her on the arm' (175). It is the following section however, which demonstrates the subtle shift that has taken place within Dot as she laughs 'but, not as she had laughed before. The manner and the music were quite changed. The Cricket, too, had stopped. Somehow the room was not so cheerful as it had been. Nothing like it' (175). Here, the reader senses that a change has already taken place in the Peerybingle home. The passage reads as though a radical discovery has already been made at this stage in the narrative, although the plot has barely even begun to take shape. Perhaps, as Thackeray would write in his 1845 review of *Cricket*, in the midst of this

[139] Scott Moncrieff, "The Cricket in the Study," *Dickens Studies Annual* 22 (1993), 151.

enclosed, illusory world, Dot and the rest of the characters have already become 'sort of half-recognised realities'.[140]

In this section of *Cricket*, we see Dot in a state of disenchantment, aware of the transparency of ordinary reality. To use Taylor's words, Dot experiences a realisation which 'unsettles and breaks through [her] ordinary sense of being in the world, with its familiar objects, activities and points of reference.' Instead, Dot's 'ordinary reality is 'abolished' and something terrifyingly *other* shines through.' In this way, Dot reaches a state of consciousness which Musil describes as "der andere Zustand" (the other condition)'.[141] Tackleton seems to be the only other character to touch upon "der andere Zustand" in *Cricket*. Distanced from the dreamy characters of the tale, Tackleton represents harsh realism. Though, in the opening of the text, we also see Tackleton characterised as a 'domestic Ogre' (180), a term which immediately creates tension as he is cast into a fairy-tale role regardless of his own disenchantment. While the kettle's song implies that the only relief is in illusion, the disenchanted Tackleton finds his 'relief and safety valve' in inventing toys 'suggestive of a pony-nightmare' (180). He is 'ill-conditioned' (180) to *Cricket*'s narrative world of dreamlike illusion, expressed by his indifference to the notion of "home," which he sees purely in spatial terms, just 'four walls and a ceiling!' (182). Furthermore, Tackleton suggestively draws John's attention to the possibility that the life and home he inhabits are part of a larger unreality: when saying goodbye to John he wishes him 'pleasant dreams!' before adding, 'we're exactly alike, in reality, I see' (183). These remarks leave John 'puzzled, and made uncomfortable and uncertain, in spite of himself' (183). By drawing a distinction between dreams and reality, Tackleton unhinges *Cricket*'s enclosed world of illusions and seems to draw John into a new state of consciousness. As the first chapter draws to a close, the narrator describes John being filled with 'a vague, indefinite uneasiness' at the 'insinuations of the Toy-

[140] Thackeray, *Contributions*, 91.
[141] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 5-6.

maker' (185), though these insinuations are never clarified fully in his mind. Within the fairy-tale world of *Cricket* however, Tackleton's realism ultimately gets the better of him. When it is revealed that May has married Edward, who was her 'prior engagement,' Tackleton is forced to resign himself to the reality and admit 'oh it's all right. It's quite correct' (236) before he leaves. The only way Tackleton can be reintegrated into the scene is if he reconciles himself to the fairy-tale world and repents of his destructive realism. When he does return, his language indicates that he has been converted, as he says 'I have had time to think of it [...] I'm sour by disposition; but I can't help being sweetened' (239). By using the figurative language of 'sour' and 'sweet,' Tackleton assumes the conventional terminology of the fairy tale and is subsequently permitted to join the wedding celebrations. This connection is made explicit as the narrator wonders 'what had the Fairies being doing with him, to have effected such a change!' (239). Tackleton's conversion also makes him seem more like a Pantomime villain, who usually "comes around" to fun and frolics by the end of the show, escaping punishment for his earlier misdeeds, and as Ruth Glancy notes, 'as in the pantomimes of the day, such transformations were expected of a Christmas book'.[142] Because Tackleton's transformation is such an enormously improbably plot device, it could be the case that Dickens felt the fairy-tale world impossible to maintain by the close of *Cricket*, and from this point onwards we see the tale slowly creak to the destruction we find in the closing lines.

The contrast between the world of the fairy tale and the reality to which the reader must soon return, are once again juxtaposed in the final chapter of *Cricket*. Here, the disguised gentleman reveals himself to be Edward, and Dot is vindicated from her apparent adultery; however, a sense of illusion and pretence continues to pervade even these scenes of revelation. During Dot's explanation in the final chapter, she speaks in the third person

[142] Ruth Glancy, *Student Companion to Charles Dickens* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 65.

about herself and in this way creates a narrative out of the truth. When she attempts to explain her peculiar ways to her husband, she admits that she enjoys 'pretend[ing] that we are a humdrum couple […] it's only because I'm such a silly little thing, John, that I like, sometimes, to act a kind of Play with Baby, and all that: and make believe' (234). Pretence and reality vie against one another in Dickens's Christmas fairy tale, where confusions, misunderstandings and illusions permeate the narrative, complicate the plot and obscure the character's perceptions. At one point in the narrative, Dot tells Caleb and Bertha, 'there are great changes in the world: great changes: and we can't do better than prepare ourselves for anything' (231), a line which reiterates the underlying tension between reality and fantasy and reminds the reader of the kettle's recognition that nothing is 'what it ought to be.' Some scholars have drawn links between Dickens's fairy tale imagery and the 'dissolving view' of the magic lantern show in which a second image, almost magically, replaced the first on an illuminated screen.[143] The ending of *Cricket* is a good example of one of Dickens's dissolving views, which 'in its time-shift illusions […] emphasizes changes in light and atmosphere'.[144]

As the fairy tale comes to a close, the illusion dissolves into reality, yet the reader is left disorientated. Moncrieff writes that *Cricket*'s ending 'is beautifully enigmatic, but clearly creates an abrupt change in tone from the end of the story proper. It suggests something about the artist's relation to his creation, and carries some […] wistful regret at leaving it […] The broken toy suggests a counterpoint to any unqualified celebration'.[145] Thackeray too sensed the abruptness of *Cricket*'s conclusion, yet chose to emphasise the light-hearted fairy-tale quality of Dickens's text, advising readers who might be perplexed at the story's peculiar ending, 'reconcile yourself to this tone. Believe that the book is a

[143] Gitter, "The Blind Daughter," 686.
[144] Joss Marsh, "Dickensian 'Dissolving Views': The Magic Lantern, Visual Story-Telling, and the Victorian Technological Imagination," *Comparative Critical Studies* 6, no. 3 (2009), 334.
[145] Moncrieff, "Cricket in the Study," 150.

Christmas frolic'.[146] While Dickens's third Christmas book is in many ways a light-hearted comedy of errors, the text's ending problematizes Thackeray's assertion that *Cricket* is a Christmas frolic. Though Dickens firmly believed that the fairy tale should not be misused as a vehicle for moral teaching, in *Cricket*, as Glancy has suggested, 'the simple, stylized tale of deceptions and revelations, of ogres and fairies, is actually concerned with very serious adult issues'.[147] The question of where and how the individual draws the boundaries between the worlds of make belief and reality are clearly two of the serious issues raised in Dickens's third Christmas book. Throughout the narrative, Dickens blends fantasy and realism, and the reader frequently senses that the story is neither wholly unreal nor completely removed from the domestic world they know and experience. As a Christmas fairy tale therefore, the *Cricket* seems to imply that the festive season possesses the same illusory quality that we find in the unreal world of the narrative. While the reader participates in their annual Christmas celebration, they are aware that the festivities they are enacting are temporary diversions from an underlying reality that will resume after New Year's Day.

3.3 The Rose and the Ring (1855)

Aside from Dickens, William Thackeray was one of the most influential figures to shape nineteenth-century Christmas literature. As a reviewer of festive print since 1837, he was familiar with the essential traits of the genre,[148] and contributed six of his own stories to the Christmas market between 1847 and 1855: *Mrs Perkins' Ball* (1847), *Our Street* (1848), *Doctor Birch and His Young Friends* (1849), *The Kickleburys on the Rhine* (1850), *Rebecca and Rowena* (1854), and *The Rose and the Ring* (1855). In his 1845 review of *Cricket*, Thackeray alluded to Dickens's story as 'a good *Christmas* book, illuminated with

[146] Thackeray, *Contributions*, 90.
[147] Glancy, *Student Companion*, 63.
[148] Muresianu, *The History of the Victorian Christmas Book*, 101.

extra gas, crammed with extra bonbons',[149] and Thackeray's numerous seasonal reviews provide a useful avenue to explore this writer's own opinions regarding what makes 'a good *Christmas* book.' Thackeray applauded Dickens's *Cricket* for its 'little plot, so charmingly unnatural',[150] but as we saw in the introduction to this chapter, in 1847 he made his dissatisfaction with the Christmas fairy tale explicit in his 'Grumble About the Christmas-books.' Using this critical platform to advocate his own thoughts about what made a good Christmas book, Thackeray wrote: 'as in pantomimes so I say in Christmas stories, those fire-side Christmas pantomimes, which are no more natural than *Mother Goose*'.[151] Thackeray praised the fantasy and escapism offered by Christmas books, but was frustrated by many writers who felt the need to frame their Christmas tales with moral sermons. By aligning the Christmas story with pantomime, Thackeray suggested that sentimentality should not be the mark of a good festive tale. Instead, the release offered by Christmas should be mirrored by its reading material which, as 'pleasant, rouged, grinning, junketing, pantomimic business [...] is not intended to be natural'.[152] Fantastical illusions, Thackeray felt, would be obvious to the reader, and if a moral message was absolutely necessary, 'what you want is not to be struck by the resemblance, but to be impregnated with the idea'.[153]

As we have seen in the opening of *The Rose and the Ring*, Thackeray suggests that his Christmas fairy tale should be approached as a fireside pantomime. Pantomimes were a hugely popular Christmas entertainment during the Victorian period, and each year detailed reviews of the many staged productions filled newspaper columns. One writer for *The Mirror monthly magazine* commented in 1849: 'Pantomime and pudding, mistletoe and mirth, holly-berries and burlesque, are, or should be synonymous'.[154] Ackroyd notes

[149] Thackeray, *Contributions*, 88.
[150] Ibid., 90.
[151] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 111.
[152] Ibid., 116.
[153] Ibid., 117.
[154] "Dramatic and Musical Mirror," *The Mirror monthly magazine* 5, no. 1341 (January 1849), 60.

that Dickens also had a childhood love of pantomime.[155] Throughout his life he annually attended the Christmas pantomimes and repeatedly referred to them in his writing. In 'A Christmas Tree,' Dickens recalls his early memories of Christmas and writes about the pantomime's ability to transform childish reality into a world of fantasy, a description that could also be applied to the appeal of the fairy tale:

> the Pantomime – stupendous Phenomenon! […] when Everything is capable, with the greatest ease, of being changed into Anything; and "Nothing is, but thinking makes it so." Now, too, I perceive my first experience of the dreary sensation – often to return in afterlife – of being unable, next day, to get back to the dull, settled world; of wanting to live for ever in the bright atmosphere […] and pining for a Fairy immortality along with her.[156]

Thackeray also refers to the festive appeal of pantomime in his Christmas writing. In a piece entitled 'Round About the Christmas Tree' (1861), he acknowledged that 'very few men in the course of nature can expect to see *all* the pantomimes in one season, but I hope to the end of my life. I shall never forego reading about them in that delicious sheet of the *Times* which appears on the morning after Boxing-day. Perhaps reading is even better than seeing'.[157] Reading about the pantomimes was a cherished Christmas tradition for Thackeray and, as Moore has noted, both 'Dickens's and Thackeray's reactions border on worship'.[158] Thackeray cherished the pantomime for its bright, light-hearted atmosphere, confessing, 'we don't like […] dark scenes in pantomimes'.[159] He also found the pantomime endearing for its inherent inconsistencies, admitting, 'some trifling liberties are taken with history, but what liberties will not the merry genius of pantomime permit himself?'[160] In its spectacular fantasy and carnivalesque traits, the close links between

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[155] Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 28.
[156] Dickens, "A Christmas Tree," 238-9.
[157] Thackeray, "Round About the Christmas Tree," in *Roundabout Papers* (London: J.M. Dent, 1914), 140.
[158] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 116.
[159] Thackeray, "Round About the Christmas Tree," 142.
[160] Ibid., 143.

pantomime and the Christmas moment are heightened. Caroline Radcliffe observes how 'pantomime invokes confusion and paradox, emphasising the ambiguous nature of the stage characters in their chaotic, topsy-turvy world' and goes on to note, 'when viewed as an aspect of the carnivalesque, pantomime becomes an arena for the replacement of order by chaos'.[161] The temporary escape of the pantomime, with its bright colours and magical ability to briefly transform reality was appealing as Christmas entertainment, but as Jim Davis points out, it was not only 'an all-pervasive form of popular entertainment, but also functioned as a way of seeing, even as metaphor, in shaping perceptions of the contemporary world in just as forceful a way as had long been credited to melodrama'.[162] Evidently, the overlap between the Christmas fairy tale and the Christmas pantomime lies in their shared interest in using a Secondary World as a means of shaping the reader or viewer's perception of reality.

The Rose and the Ring was the last of Thackeray's Christmas books, and in the Prelude to the story Thackeray reveals that it was conceived during a Christmas spent in Rome, where 'you could not even get a magic lantern or buy Twelfth-Night characters [...] with which our young ones are wont to recreate themselves at the festive time'.[163] With its comical illustrations and fairy tale plot, *The Rose and the Ring* provided festive entertainment for Thackeray's daughters and many other English children who spent Christmas in Rome. Here it was 'received with extreme pleasure' creating a 'considerable sensation' (314), and this positive reception persuaded Thackeray to publish the story for the general reading public the following year. In the final lines of the Prelude, Thackeray welcomes the reader to his festive pantomime in a statement that seems to summarise his own criteria of what 'a good *Christmas* book' should be: 'for a brief holiday, let us laugh

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[161] Caroline Radcliffe, "Dan Leno: Dame of the Drury Lane" in *Victorian Pantomime*, ed. Jim Davis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 118.
[162] Jim Davis, introduction to *Victorian Pantomime*, 2.
[163] Thackeray, "The Rose and the Ring," in *The Works of W.M. Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), 313. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.

and be as pleasant as we can. And you elder folks – a little joking and dancing and fooling will do even you no harm' (314). Thackeray's Christmas fairy tale was well received by contemporary reviewers who shared the author's views on festive literature. A review in the *Examiner* applauded its 'sense of fun' claiming that it was the 'wittiest and most wonderful extravagance',[164] the *Athenaeum* termed it 'a most sensible piece of nonsense',[165] while the *Critic* predicted that 'it will probably, be the most *popular* of the Books of the Season'.[166] The author who had previously expressed the need for a form of pure Christmas fantasy, without disguised moral sermons and sentimental values, had succeeded in creating a fairy tale that, according to Muresianu, managed to achieve the willing suspension of disbelief, and in doing so is invested with 'more genuine Christmas spirit than any of the other Christmas books'.[167]

While some criticisms have been levelled at Thackeray's fairy tale,[168] it is clear that *The Rose and the Ring* is an extraordinary Christmas story in its blatant celebration of fantasy, and ability to transport its audience to a magical space and time utterly removed from reality. At the end of the tale, Thackeray resists the need to explicitly withdraw the reader from the illusory world. There is no suggestion that the story was a dream and no final paragraph to awkwardly illuminate the story's intended moral, as these were devices that Thackeray associated with the books he had ridiculed in his Christmas grumble. Muresianu has argued that *The Rose and the Ring* is not cautious about creating a world of imaginary facades, and claims that the story's significance lies in this unguarded indulgence in illusion, 'its deliberate eschewal of realism for fantasy, and its equally

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[164] "The Literary Examiner," *Examiner* 2446 (December 16, 1854), 797.
[165] "The Rose and the Ring; or, the History of Prince Giglio and Prince Bulbo: a Fireside Pantomime for Great and Small Children," *Athenaeum* 1416 (December 16, 1854), 1519.
[166] "The Rose and the Ring; or the History of Prince Giglio and Prince Bulbo," *Critic* 13, no. 329 (December 15, 1854), 667.
[167] Muresianu, *The History of the Victorian Christmas Book*, 138.
[168] One reviewer warned Thackeray not to 'fritter' his talent away on Christmas tales that 'can never be praised, however they may be tolerated by the kindly sentiments of the season.' "The Rose and the Ring; or, the History of Prince Giglio and Prince Bulbo," *Eclectic Review* 9 (February 1855), 245.

deliberate refusal to mix the fairy tale and realistic modes'.[169] One of Thackeray's contemporary reviewers, Mrs. Oliphant, also remarked upon this visible shift in his Christmas writing, informing readers: 'those who look for one of Mr. Thackeray's wicked and witty comments upon the world in general will be sadly disappointed in this book'.[170] Although the fantastic and illusory world of fairy tale is at the centre of *The Rose and the Ring*, it can be argued that the type of comedy Thackeray uses in this tale does, in fact, remind the reader of the story's unreality. Many reviewers located the success of *The Rose and the Ring* in its comic brilliance, claiming that laughter 'would be kept up like a well-managed shuttlecock, without dropping once until the end',[171] but it is precisely this self-conscious laughter that draws attention to the superficial world of *The Rose and the Ring* with its caricatures, contradictions and elements of parody and farce. By ridiculing his own Christmas fairy tale within its very pages, Thackeray extends his mockery to its uptight predecessors and draws attention to the genre's inherent artifice by celebrating it. Whereas Dickens's *Cricket* gently implies that things are not 'what they ought to be' and leads the reader to seriously consider the tale's themes of illusion and pretence, Thackeray's entire tale is a vast illusion, so ridiculous that it cannot be taken seriously.

Gail Sorensen has noted that Thackeray frequently parodies the conventions of the fairy tale genre itself, investing his story with conspicuous "literary" touches,[172] and U.C. Knoepflmacher similarly observes how Thackeray 'gleefully [exploits] the frictions that result from a wide and arcane set of references. Although he retains the lineaments of a fairy tale, these vie with allusions to a Victorian present'.[173] This comic displacement and distortion ultimately remind the reader of the tale's unreality and impossibility. As Knoepflmacher's suggestion affirms, *The Rose and the Ring* has a comic 'friction' which

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[169] Muresianu, *The History of the Victorian Christmas Book*, 132.
[170] Mrs. Oliphant, "Mr. Thackeray and his Novels," *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* 77, no. 471 (January 1855), 88.
[171] "The Literary Examiner," 797.
[172] Gail D. Sorensen, "Thackeray's The Rose and the Ring: A Novelist's Fairy Tale," *Mythlore* 57 (1989), 37.
[173] U.C. Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 106.

is in part derived by its juxtaposition of the familiar and the ridiculous: an effect which eventually renders everything ridiculous, especially reality. Thackeray's Christmas fairy tale has none of the subtlety of Dickens's *Cricket* where illusions are ambiguous; instead, the fairy tale unreality is consistently visible and explicitly associated with the comical absurdity of pantomime. The etymology of "pantomime" accentuates the peculiar relationship that Thackeray's text has with reality, as it derives from the Greek "pantomimos," which literally means 'imitator of all things'.[174] Some time later, in 1874, John Ruskin joked that he could not distinguish between the pantomime and reality.[175] In *Fors Clavigera* Letter 39, after attending performances of *Cinderella* and *Jack in the Box*, he wrote:

> I begin to ask myself, Which is the reality, and which the pantomime? Nay, it appears to me not of much moment which we choose to call Reality. Both are equally real; and the only question is whether the cheerful state of things which the spectators, especially the youngest and wisest, entirely applaud and approve at Hengler's and Drury Lane, must necessarily be interrupted always by the woeful interlude of the outside world.[176]

Ruskin's commentary clearly voices the strange relationship between Christmas fantasy and ordinary life that had already been articulated far earlier in the 1840s and 1850s. By imitating the conventions of the fairy tale and making the familiar obscure, *The Rose and the Ring* generates a self-aware form of comedy, and produces laughter in its fairy tale consciousness that nothing is quite as it should be. In her brief consideration of Thackeray's writing, Moore remarks, 'as pantomime-inspired fiction, *The Rose and the Ring* is a pantomime far more comical than any other 1850 Christmas book [...] Christmas books by other authors typically champion social virtues with gravity, but Thackeray's

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[174] James Donald, *Chamber's Etymological Dictionary* (London: W. & R. Chambers, 1867), 361.
[175] Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, "'Arcadias of Pantomime': Ruskin, Pantomime, and *The Illustrated London News*" in *Victorian Pantomime*, ed. Jim Davis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41.
[176] *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*, ed. Dinah Birch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 170.

holiday novels offer comical escapes'.[177] In his Christmas grumble, Thackeray had playfully asked his readers a rhetorical question: should festive literature emulate 'great blundering realities to inculcate great, stupid, mortal apophthegms?'[178] Comically reflecting on the absurdity of Christmas entertainments being appropriated by 'blundering realities,' Thackeray's 1847 grumble set the stage for the conspicuous unreality and pantomimic imitation of all that would be generated by *The Rose and the Ring*.

The complicated plot of *The Rose and the Ring* takes place in the imaginary Kingdoms of Paflagonia and Crim Tartary,[179] where Thackeray traces the fortunes of four young characters: Princess Angelica, Prince Giglio, Prince Bulbo and Princess Rosalba. At the opening of the narrative we discover that the spoilt Princess Angelica is engaged to Prince Giglio. Some time ago, Giglio had given Angelica a fairy ring which, unbeknown to the characters, magically transforms its wearer, making them appear irresistibly attractive. The fickle Angelica quickly falls for another man: Prince Bulbo, who likewise wears a fairy rose to make himself appear more attractive than he truly is. Breaking off her engagement with Giglio, Angelica hastily throws away the magic ring. After passing through numerous hands the ring is eventually given to Angelica's maid, Betsinda, who is subsequently adored by all the men of the household. Threatened by Betsinda's beauty, Angelica decides she must be driven out of the house. As she wanders alone in the forest, Betsinda meets an old woodman who recognises her as Princess Rosalba, the rightful Queen of Crim Tartary. He tells her that her parents were betrayed when she was a small child, and she was left alone to wander in the forest. Subsequently, a series of adventures take place among these four characters: Bulbo is mistaken for Giglio and almost executed, Rosalba strives to be reinstated in her rightful role as Queen of Crim Tartary, and Giglio escapes Paflagonia to be educated at the University of Bosforo. At various points throughout the narrative a Fairy named Blackstick visits the characters, and frequently the

[177] Moore, *Victorian Christmas*, 66.
[178] Thackeray, "A Grumble," 116.
[179] Crim Tartery is also likely to be a reference to Crimea, in light of the Crimean War of 1853-1856.

story revolves around the illusion and delusion associated with the fairy rose and ring. By the end of the narrative, the newly educated Giglio and virtuous Rosalba discover that they do not need to wear the magical rose or ring to be in love with one another. Meanwhile the ignorant Angelica and Bulbo must wear the fairy items in order to be happy and contented in their relationship.

As noted earlier, according to Bakhtin comic forms offer a conspicuous release from the everyday. Bakhtin's model of the comic chronotope in literature reveals how everyday life is completely transformed in order to generate comedy in literature. This transformation is created by the exaggeration of the familiar and subsequent loss of ordinary reality. The comic image shines through 'everyday nuances' and 'transfigure[s] them',[180] in a 'reworking of everything that is private and everyday'.[181] This reworking of the ordinary and fantastic exaggeration and transfiguration of familiar dimensions is apparent in the comedy of *The Rose and the Ring*, indicating, as Bakhtin's theory suggests, a departure from reality and a loss of 'ordinariness.' Indeed, much of Thackeray's comedy in this text derives from his manipulation of language, which consciously adopts the fairy-tale tone, transforming the familiar through patterns of exaggeration and distortion. For instance, the opening description of Angelica replicates the language of fairy tale through its heightened use of superlatives, describing her with 'the longest hair, the largest eyes, the slimmest waist, the smallest foot, and the most lovely complexion of any young lady' (322). In echoing the recognisable register of the fairy tale, Thackeray makes it clear that ordinary reality has been suspended and the reader is entering the world of make believe. As the narrative develops, these fairy tale allusions are incorporated into a broader scheme of linguistic play. One of Thackeray's definitive techniques in this text is to create a sense of imbalance and disproportion through his descriptions. In many instances we see dramatic events described with remarkable brevity, while simple observations are

[180] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 219.
[181] Ibid., 220.

furnished with comparably extensive descriptions. When the toddler Rosalba wanders into a forest on her own, the narrator casually informs us in two lines: 'the door was open, and she went into the court, and into the garden, and thence into the wilderness, and thence into the forest where the wild beasts live' (328). This matter-of-fact description of a dramatic, life-altering event becomes comic when the narrator extends the description of other, less interesting scenarios. For example, in the seventh chapter's description of a room, we are told that 'all the covers were off the chairs, the chandeliers taken out of the bags, the damask curtains uncovered, the work and things carried away, and the handsomest albums on the tables. Angelica had her hair in papers; in a word, it was evident that there was going to be a party' (351-2). The reader's attention is drawn to the bizarre length of this description by the way the narrator cuts it short to offer a summary. The preparations for the party in this scene are given far more attention than the worrying disappearance of small child into a forest of wild beasts; a comic incongruity we see recurring throughout the text.

In line with Bakhtin's comic chronotope, *The Rose and the Ring* functions as a comedy by exaggerating the already ridiculous, proudly drawing attention to its own fantasy world. Yet as Knoepflmacher and Sorensen have pointed out, there is an underlying self-consciousness within *The Rose and the Ring*, which necessarily creates a friction between the fantasy world of the text and the reality of its composition. Later in the tale, the self-aware narrator again emerges to comment on his own writing style, claiming, 'I could make a chapter out of this if I were like some writers, but I like to cram my measure tight down, you see, and give you a great deal for your money, and in a word they had some bread and cheese and ale upstairs on the balcony of the Inn' (416). Anne Layman Horn has observed how 'Thackeray often takes his readers close to the very act of writing, only to keep them at a distance by reminding them that what they are participating in is

only a fictitious illusion after all'.[182] This is a technique that can be seen in the example above, but in this instance Thackeray also reminds the reader that they have bought into the fictitious illusion by referring to the fact that they have paid for festive entertainment and want to get 'a great deal for [their] money.' Thackeray avoids the need to frame his fairy tale with a dream context, or explicit moral, as he cuts directly through the fairy tale illusion to the reality of Christmas consumerism, before comfortably resuming the story which, as the reader has been reminded, is nothing but an entertaining illusion.

Later in the text, the reader is repeatedly reminded of the fantasy when Giglio goes to battle in his 'fairy armour' on his 'fairy horse' and with his 'fairy sword' (433). In case there is any doubt in the reader's mind, the narrator states the obvious, 'you know, he was a Prince of a fairy tale, and they always have these wonderful things' (443). Self-conscious references to the text's fantasy can also be seen in other instances, for example in the first half of the story where Thackeray incorporates game playing into the fabric of the text. During the royal party scene, the narrator emerges from the narrative to assure the reader that 'they had a very good dinner' which is followed with a suggestion for a reading interval in the form of a game: 'let every boy or girl think of what he or she likes best, and fancy it on the table' (363). The narrator even encourages the reader to emerge from the text through an instructive footnote: 'here a very pretty game may be played by all the children saying what they like best for dinner' (363). By including explicit references to game playing and 'fancy,' Thackeray both draws attention to the fictive transparency of the story and encourages the reader to imaginatively participate in the unreality. In withdrawing the reader from the tale Thackeray reminds them of the fictitious and illusory nature of the story, but by inviting the reading circle to then contribute their own fantasies to the tale, the boundaries between real-life and the fairy-tale world become less well defined. As Knoepflmacher has suggested, *The Rose and the Ring* is a text that 'both

[182] Anne Layman Horn, "Farcical Process, Fictional Product: Thackeray's Theatrics in "Lovel the Widower,"" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26, no. 1 (1998), 138.

question[s] and yet also indulge[s] the improbabilities of make-believe'[183] in a way that seems to be far more fantastic than other fairy tales, such as *The Enchanted Doll*, where the reader is also directly addressed.

In the same way that the comedy of Thackeray's tale offers a form of festive release, the temporal texture of the fairy tale also encourages readers to temporarily escape their understanding of real time and indulge in fairy time. In the *Rose and the Ring*, time frequently exhibits elastic qualities as it is illogically compressed or extended to facilitate the narrative's demands. When Prince Bulbo is about to be wrongly executed, time seems to be extended. While the King, Prime Minister and Captain hold a discussion, Princess Angelica interrupts with 'a hundred thousand plagues upon you. Can't you see that while you are talking my Bulbo is being hung!' (385). Immediately after this the drums sound, indicating that the execution is about to happen. In reality it would already be too late to save Bulbo, but in this absurd fairy tale time is simply extended. Angelica goes up to the King's bedroom to find his keys, comes back down, goes back up for his desk, and comes back for her father to tell her off, 'when you go out of a room, how often have I told you, *shut the door*. That's a darling. That's all' (386), before going up again to get his spectacles, and coming back down. There is time for the King to mend his broken pen and sign a reprieve, before Angelica 'ran, and ran, and ran, and ran […] up Fore Street, and down High Street, and through the Market Place, and down to the left, and over the bridge, and up the blind alley, and back again, and round by the Castle, and so along by the haberdasher's on the right, opposite the lamp-post, and round the square' (386). This sense of urgency is countered by the prolonged and unnecessary description detailing the specifics of Angelica's route, which has the effect of delaying her arrival further. The passage even seems to suggest that she goes round in circles 'up the blind alley, and back again,' creating a comic tension that is well suited to the unreality of the fairy tale.

[183] Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland*, 87.

Although the drums sounded long ago, the elasticity of fairy time enables Angelica to arrive just as 'the executioner raised his axe' (386), or as the caption to the corresponding illustration reads, 'just in time' (387).

In the same episode, Thackeray incorporates other references to the comic fairy-tale time of *The Rose and the Ring*, situating the story within fantastic temporal dimensions while simultaneously creating a farcical form of comedy. The entire episode is framed by breakfast, and indeed throughout *The Rose and the Ring* meal times are referred to as occasions of utmost importance and seriousness. For Victorian readers, mealtimes were a particularly important part of daily life. John Gillis has noted that by mid-century, family meals were seen 'as the pivot of their hectic lives, a fixed point undisturbed by the passage of time and generations'.[184] Moreover, at Christmas mealtimes took on an even greater temporal meaning, as 'the idea of all families sitting down to eat the same food on the day, even at the same hour, was also one of the means by which peoples [...] could imagine themselves as having a common national identity'.[185] In Thackeray's tale, dining scenes are regularly depicted and although the rest of the tale is bizarre and fantastical, it quickly becomes apparent that its fictional mealtimes are strikingly realistic. The opening chapter of Thackeray's tale 'shows how the Royal Family sat down to breakfast' (315), and in this later instance, it is the 'greedy Queen' who introduces the episode by saying 'now let us think about breakfast' (383). It is significant that Bulbo's absence is only noticed because he is late for the breakfast which is perfectly laid out and waiting to be eaten, 'the muffins were smoking – such a heap of muffins! the eggs were done, there was a pot of raspberry jam, and coffee, and a beautiful chicken' but there was 'no Prince Bulbo' (384). Yet Bulbo's absence is soon eclipsed by the activity of eating sausages, which takes centre stage of the dramatic action before the Captain comes in to tell them of Bulbo's fate. The revelation of Bulbo's impending execution is almost prevented by the King's breakfasting,

[184] John Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 94.
[185] Ibid.

which takes priority over everything else, even matters of life and death: 'no business before breakfast [...] Breakfast first, business next' (384). Before she realises that it is her sweetheart who is about to be executed, Princess Angelica shares her father's opinion, telling the Prime Minister, 'don't talk about hanging and spoil my breakfast' (384). When the revelation is finally made and Angelica becomes desperate to save Bulbo, the King remains preoccupied with his breakfasting, suggesting that if there's enough time 'we may as well go on with breakfast' (385) before they try to save the Prince. And once again, after Angelica finally gets her father to sign the reprieve and is about to leave, he argues that her breakfast is of greater importance than saving Bulbo's life, telling her 'you'd better stay, my love, and finish the muffins. There's no use going' (386). It is not only the King whose comic preoccupation with meal times comes to overshadow life-changing events. When Bulbo has been rescued from death, he tells Angelica, 'in the name of peace and quietness, do let us get back to breakfast' (389), and earlier in the text when King Padella finds a piece of the toddler Rosalba's torn clothing and tiny shoe 'in the mouths of two lioness's cubs,' he responds with a simple observation: 'so the poor little Princess is done for [...] well, what's done can't be helped. Gentlemen, let us go to luncheon!' (328). Meal times once again take precedence over the drama of a life and death situation in a farcical distortion of 'ordinariness' where humour is generated, as Muresianu has suggested, from the 'interplay between the conventions of fantasy and those of ordinary life'.[186]

Though these meal times are references to ordinary life, within the ridiculous fantasy of the fairy tale they become vital time markers that take precedence over everything else. While the broader temporal continuum of *The Rose and the Ring* elastically enables the impossible, the story's meal times are emphatically, and comically, inelastic. We see a similar preoccupation with food and meal times in much Victorian children's literature. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the perpetual tea party where

[186] Muresianu, *The History of the Victorian Christmas Book*, 135.

Alice meets the Mad Hatter, March Hare and Dormouse, is a consequence of it always being six o'clock. As the Hatter informs Alice, because it is always six o'clock, 'it's always tea-time',[187] and tea-time takes place in a secondary world away from normal reality. Later in Carroll's story, as in *The Rose and the Ring*, food becomes a distraction from official business. During the trial to discover who stole the Queen of Heart's tarts: 'in the very middle of the court was a table, with a large dish of tarts upon it: they looked so good, that it made Alice quite hungry to look at them – "I wish they'd get the trial done," she thought, "and hand round the refreshments!" But there seemed to be no chance of this; so she began looking at everything about her to pass the time'.[188] In *The Rose and the Ring*, temporality is likewise understood in terms of meals, and is measured by when it is time to eat. Referring to mealtimes in children's fiction, Carolyn Daniel remarks, 'to be a proper (human) subject one must eat in a controlled manner'.[189] It is interesting to notice that in *The Rose and the Ring* it is the more morally reprehensible characters who are associated with excessive, uncontrolled eating and who order time according to their stomachs. The fraudulent King Valoroso with his gluttonous wife, selfish daughter and unfortunate son-in-law are repeatedly associated with food and eating, while the virtuous Rosalba and self-improving Prince Giglio are rarely present at mealtimes. Thackeray's descriptions of the King revolve around his appetite: although he is 'delicate in health' he is nonetheless 'so fond of good dinners' (343) and constantly 'eat[s] and drink[s] too much' (344). Furthermore, the royal family's obsession with consuming makes them oblivious to little apart from their appetites. At one point we are told that 'the king thought so much about his own dinner, and, besides, made such a dreadful noise hob-gobbling in eating it, that he heard nothing else' (363) clearly indicating that eating and mealtimes eclipse the events of ordinary time in Thackeray's text.

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[187] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 64.
[188] Ibid., 96.
[189] Carolyn Daniel, *Voracious Children* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to pinpoint Thackeray's precise meaning in his representations of food, eating and mealtimes, if indeed there is one. Mary Douglas has suggested that food is a code, and claims that 'the messages it encodes [are] found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries'.[190] From this point of view we could infer that Thackeray's representation of the royal family, with their obsessive appetites, is simultaneously a statement about their position within the social hierarchy and their gluttony not only for food but also for power, which in part is true. However, Thackeray's textual 'game,' where he invites his readers to indulge in their own food fantasies and apply them to the tale, contradicts this reading and complicates the representation of food in the tale. Instead, it seems more likely that Thackeray draws attention to his characters' appetites and their explicit enjoyment of everyday foods such as muffins and sausages, to generate further comic incongruity by placing mundane foodstuffs within the magical and bizarre fairy tale frame. The importance of mealtime is elevated far above any other time in this narrative, but the reason why such an emphasis is placed on it remains ambiguous. While food is often significant in the fairy tale, and is frequently used as 'a magical agent allowing the hero to enter the magical world',[191] or transforming the protagonist as in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the emphasis on food in Thackeray's tale, comically, has no fantastic significance or latent power whatsoever.

As we can see, the mode of time keeping demonstrated by the characters of *The Rose and the Ring* also contributes to the fairy tale indifference towards temporal consistency. In this text, time keeping is a novelty rather than an essential function. The temporal unreality of the fairy tale transforms basic actions such as reading the time from a

[190] Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 231.
[191] Maria Nikolajeva, "Food," in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, vol. 1 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 369.

watch, hearing the clock strike the hour, or measuring how long something takes to happen; and by trivializing time keeping, Thackeray heightens the reader's sensation of experiencing the Christmas fairy tale as a release from real time. An example of this effect can be seen when the church bell strikes nine-thirty, and King Valoroso repeats the time by saying 'Bong! Ba-wong! There goes the half hour' (386). The enunciation of time has a comic quality, clearly associating ceremonious time keeping with the ridiculous. Other examples of fairy-tale time can be observed in this Christmas story, as Thackeray playfully fluctuates between fairy-tale language and comic colloquialisms. As in Dickens's *Cricket*, an event can occur 'in a twinkling' (403) and even more ambiguously, 'in a jiffy' (435). At other times however, and for no apparent reason other than to highlight inconsistency and absurdity, time is measured more carefully. This can be seen in the episode where the newly educated Giglio delivers a spontaneous speech that lasted 'for three days and three nights' with the only interval being 'once in nine hours, the Prince paused to suck an orange' (419). Evidently, the characters of Thackeray's tale are largely indifferent to conventional modes of time keeping. This is made particularly explicit in a crucial moment of the narrative, when the King tries to tell the time in order to see if Bulbo can be rescued: 'his majesty looked at his watch, compared it by the clock in the parlour, and by that in the square opposite; then he wound it up; then he looked at it again. 'The great question is,' says he, 'am I fast or am I slow?'' (385). Precise time measurements are elusive in this fairy tale, where there is very little temporal consistency. The King compares three different clock faces and winds up his watch, but even then he is still uncertain of the time. Looking back to Dickens's article 'A Christmas Tree,'[192] we see the watch being represented in a similar light, as a festive ornament that dangles from the tree, 'with moveable hands, at least, and an endless capacity of being wound up'.[193] Likewise, in

[192] In Dickens's "A Christmas Tree," the ornamental watches are among 'various other articles of domestic furniture [...] perched among the boughs, as if in preparation for some fairy housekeeping' aligning this comparison with the fairy tale. Dickens, "A Christmas Tree," 231.
[193] Ibid.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, the Mad Hatter's clock tells the day of the month but not what time it is. Within the fairy-tale world, watches continue to represent time but they stray away from the confines of real time. Instead, the fictive watches unhinge the reader's understanding of time keeping and most significantly, they create a new mode of measuring time that becomes consistent with the inherent irregularities of the genre itself. The reader is aware that trying to make an accurate time reading from either King Valoroso's watch, those that hang from Dickens's imaginary tree, or the Mad Hatter's month-by-month watch, would be a preposterous idea, as time in the Christmas fairy tale loses its ordinary dimensions and is cast into the illusion.

The obscure quality of fairy time in *The Rose and the Ring* is further emphasised by the fictive world of the narrative itself. While more specific than the traditional 'once upon a time,' Thackeray once again combines the realistic with the ridiculous by locating his fairy tale either 'ten or twenty thousand years ago' (319). But as Knoepflmacher has argued, in *The Rose and the Ring*, 'contradictions abound',[194] and no explicit references to temporality can be taken seriously. Later in the text, the illusion of the fairy world is comically undermined by reality, as the characters within the text blunder over the context of the story which is set ten or twenty thousand years ago. When Giglio becomes transfixed by Betsinda, he compares her beauty to all the women in 'Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, nay in Australia, only it is not yet discovered' (371), and Rosalba makes a similar blunder towards the end of the story when she tragically predicts, 'I will live and die unmarried like Queen Elizabeth' (453). While these deliberate contradictions highlight that the story is a ridiculous illusion, they simultaneously and perhaps unexpectedly, affirm one of Zipes's observations on the fairy tale genre and its innate paradoxes. Zipes writes that when reading fairy tales, 'we do not want to form graven images. We do not want utopia designed for us. We want to remain curious, startled, provoked, mystified, and

[194] Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland*, 106.

uplifted. We want to glare, gaze, gawk, behold and stare'.[195] In Thackeray's illogical and conspicuously inconsistent fairy tale, graven images are nowhere to be found. Instead, the anachronisms of the story release 'readers from consistency and logic' and create 'a protean text',[196] which is well aware of, and frequently highlights, precisely how it is flouting ordinary logic.

Finally, and perhaps more significantly, the key themes and central images of *The Rose and the Ring* are blatantly connected to illusion and delusion. The "magic" of Thackeray's fairy tale lies in two objects, an enchanted rose and an enchanted ring, which are instantly able to transform the superficial appearance of their owners, and make them irresistibly attractive. As the rose and the ring continually change hands throughout the narrative, the recurring pattern of illusions being uncovered and artifice revealed become central motifs of the text. As Muresianu has suggested, the story becomes 'a parable about false impressions'.[197] In the first half of the text when Angelica hastily throws away the fairy ring Giglio has given her, the narrator writes, 'as if his eyes had been suddenly opened, he cried out "Ha, what does this mean? Is *this* the woman I have been in love with all my life?"' (353). Angelica's beauty is revealed to be nothing but a magically constructed illusion. Later on in the story we are informed that 'the magic properties of this ring were uncommonly strong, for no sooner had Bulbo put it on, but lo and behold, he appeared a personable, agreeable young prince' (438). The enchanted ring generates instant illusions, much like the fairy tale frame it is encased within. At the end of the story the two couples live happily ever after, but in the case of Angelica and Bulbo the happy ending is facilitated by the fact that Angelica wears the magic rose and Bulbo wears the magic ring. As Knoepflmacher explains, 'unlike the illusionless Giglio and Rosalba, Bulbo

[195] Zipes, *Spells of Enchantment*, xv.
[196] Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland*, 106.
[197] Muresianu, *The History of the Victorian Christmas Book*, 132.

and Angelica require artifice to find the fairy tale happiness they would otherwise not obtain'.[198]

The Christmas moment brings into sharp focus the boundaries between real time and fairy time and also questions the individual's consciousness of the fictive illusion they are participating in. The artifice of the fairy tale is playfully celebrated in *The Rose and the Ring*, where Thackeray draws upon and emphasises the comic release temporarily offered by the festive season. While many British writers, such as the Brothers Mayhew, were cautious about creating a fantasy world that might distract readers from the duties of the present, Thackeray's text markets itself from the onset as a light-hearted frolic that is not intended to be taken seriously or communicate any deep moral truth. In contrast to Dickens's reflective approach to Christmas time in *Cricket*, where his characters question the boundaries between reality and unreality, Thackeray purposely renders his fairy tale transparent and comic. *The Rose and the Ring* repeatedly mentions that it is a fairy tale and its characters often express an awareness of their fictional roles, creating a textual self-consciousness which Dickens navigates in a much more meditative way. Harris has argued that a 'progression towards parody and satire [...] developed after the mainstream acceptance of the fairy tale genre' when 'the Victorians began to mock the fairy tale form itself'.[199] Well-read in Christmas fairy tales and dissatisfied with the majority of them, Thackeray clearly uses his final Christmas text not only as a wholesome piece of holiday fun, but as a vehicle to mock and parody the excessively didactic and anxiously self-conscious Christmas fairy tales that had been dominating the festive marketplace in previous years. In explicitly questioning the boundaries between illusion and reality, these tales draw attention to Christmas as a time set apart from ordinary time. As we will see in the following chapter, at Christmas time temporal boundaries become permeable, and the

[198] Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland*, 94.
[199] Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic*, 37-8.

reader is invited to consider the festive season as a liminal moment for contemplation and self-reflection.

Chapter Four: Fireside Storytelling: Christmas, Ritual and Liminality

> *Christmas – how many images the word calls up: we think of carol-singers and holly-decked churches where people hymn in time-honoured strains the Birth of the Divine Child; of frost and snow, and, in contrast, of warm hearths and homes bright with light and colour, very fortresses against the cold.*
>
> Clement A. Miles, *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition*.[1]

In 1850 a writer for *Bentley's Miscellany* admitted:

> you may do without beef and plum-pudding; even the absence of mince-pie may be tolerated [...] But a huge, heaped up, *over*-heaped up, all attracting fire, with a semicircle of faces about it, is not to be denied us. It is the *lar* and genius of the meeting; the proof positive of the season; the representative of our warm emotions and bright thoughts; the glorious eye of all the room; the inciter to mirth, yet the retainer of order; [...] the universal relish.[2]

According to this writer, a warm, bright, glorious fire was essential to the celebration of Christmas, even more so than plum-pudding and mince-pies. This chapter will examine the significance of the fireside as an aesthetic of nineteenth-century Christmas literature. For many Victorians, the fireside of the family home was integral to the ideal domestic Christmas celebration. Functioning to both affirm and express Victorian ideologies of Christmas, the winter hearth was associated with idealised domestic spaces and emphasised the importance of unity and togetherness. Similarly, the fireside image generated sentimental connotations of festive comfort, warmth, safety and relief from the outside world, made evident through numerous articles, poems and short stories from magazines and periodicals. By mid-century, the preoccupation with the Christmas hearth had found a new mode of expression through the emergence of a seasonal sub-genre of 'fireside stories.' In her study of the Dickensian hearth, Adelene Buckland gestures towards this new branch of literature, acknowledging that 'Dickens's 1840s Christmas

[1] Miles, *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1912), 18.
[2] Robert Bell, "A Gossip About Merry Christmas," *Bentley's Miscellany* 28 (July 1850), 575.

books had contributed to the mid-century Victorian genre of fireside tales, such as Mrs. Ellis's *Fireside Tales for the Young* (1849) and Elizabeth Sheppard's *Round the Fire Stories* (1856)'.[3] Evidently the Christmas fire had become deeply significant to both readers and the marketplace of Victorian Christmas literature. The fireside tales of Ellis and Sheppard, alongside Dickens's extra Christmas numbers of *Household Words* from 1852 and 1853, which were entitled 'A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire' and 'Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire' respectively, highlight the image of the fireside in their titles, affiliating themselves directly with the fireside and solidifying the significance of the Christmas hearth as a site for storytelling. By this stage, the fireside image was not simply something writers would present in a chosen scene, or celebrate in a few lines of their Christmas writing; it had become the overarching frame for entire collections of festive print. The Christmas hearth was still celebrated for its seasonal charm, but now it was also eulogized as the place to gather together, read aloud and share Christmas stories.

Fireside scenes are common in many Christmas stories from this period. In *A Christmas Carol* for example, Dickens draws the tale to a close by placing the newly-converted Scrooge and Bob Cratchit together beside a Christmas fire where they share a bowl of smoking bishop. Significantly, this fireside scene also forms the setting for the text's final illustration by John Leech (Figure 10).

[3] Adelene Buckland, '"Pictures in the Fire": the Dickensian Hearth and the Concept of History," *Romanticism and Victorianism* 53 (February 2009): 1, doi: 10.7202/029902ar.



Figure 10. John Leech's full-page illustration for *A Christmas Carol* (1843)

The final emphasis of the *Carol* clearly couples the visual motif of Scrooge's roaring Christmas fire with the story's message that he has finally learned to embrace the true spirit of the season, however strange it may seem to his clerk. Indeed, Dickens's personal definitions of what Christmas should represent often employed the fireside image as an important point of reference, reaffirming the wholesome values he associated with the season. As he wrote in a letter to John Forster in early 1845, his '*Carol* philosophy' was one of 'cheerful views, sharp anatomization of humbug, jolly good temper…and a vein of glowing, hearty, generous, mirthful, beaming reference in everything to Home and Fireside'.[4] While Dickens elevates home and fireside in his letter, he also draws attention

[4] Charles Dickens to John Forster, early July 1845, in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Jenny Hartley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 157.

to the 'anatomization' of humbug. This strange coupling of a spirit of deconstruction and attack with relaxation and mirth, suggests that the fire is not only a symbol of domestic comfort and harmony but is also a refining fire, a place where an individual's moral character is improved. The refiner's fire is a Biblical image and subject of prophesy in Zechariah 13:9, where it is written that God will bring his people 'through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined'.[5] The Christmas fireside and its connotations continued to interest Dickens in later years. Ackroyd writes that in Dickens's 1854 round of public Christmas readings he introduced 'a new element [...] into its delivery. Before he began to read, he announced that he would be treating his audience as if it were grouped around a Christmas fire'.[6] By treating his audience in this way, Dickens creates a sense of intimacy and unity between himself and his listener, imaginatively transporting them from a vast hall to a cosy, domestic reading circle.

While much seasonal literature of the nineteenth century is rich in both references to, and representations of, the Christmas fireside, the festive hearth was far more than simply an abstract literary image. The celebrated custom of gathering around the fire at Christmas time was a visual ideal that could, and did, extend beyond the imagery of the page, to become a reality in the reader's own home. In one literature review published in 1857 for *The Leader*, a writer suggested that the already iconic Christmas fireside was enhanced further by the practice of reading around it, affirming that festive literature 'at this season [...is] wont to gladden thousands of firesides in Britain'.[7] A reviewer for *The Examiner* made some similar remarks in 1847, assuring his readers that 'when wind and rain beat dark December,' the already 'happy or warm fireside' would 'find itself warmer and happier' when Christmas books were enjoyed beside it.[8] The fireside context of Christmas reading was something Victorian writers continually used to their advantage.

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[5] Zechariah 13:9 (King James Version).
[6] Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 378.
[7] "Literature," *The Leader* 8, no. 402 (December 5, 1857): 1168.
[8] "The Literary Examiner," *Examiner* 2081 (December 18, 1847): 804.

Aware that their seasonal offerings would be read beside the domestic hearth, reflections on the delights of the fire had the effect of narrowing the boundary between fiction and reality and, furthermore, provided confirmation that fireside readers were celebrating Christmas well. The self-reflexivity inherent in the genre was also a powerful form of self-promotion. Homely imagery associated with the fireside became a valuable marketing device for writers who helped to create a vision of the ideal middle-class Christmas. Meanwhile, publishers were also bolstering the association between Christmas and fireside reading by releasing festive titles designed to be enjoyed around the hearth.

More importantly perhaps, by representing the Christmas fireside as an almost utopian space, the reader's gaze was turned inward. Fireside imagery strengthened the appeal of home in an age that, as Altick has noted, 'venerated domesticity'.[9] Referring back to *A Christmas Carol* once again, it is interesting to notice that in the third stave when Scrooge is experiencing the 'present' Christmas, he is shown 'a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire' (85), and as he walks down a darkened Christmas street he sees 'the brightness of the roaring fires [...] the flickering of the blaze [...] and deep red curtains, ready to be drawn to shut out cold and darkness' (84). Dickens's preoccupation with the image of the Christmas fire in this section of the narrative, reinforces its wider significance as a symbol of good Christmas keeping; an example that Scrooge later adopts in the final scene. Moreover, the cheerful fire is also used as *evidence* of good Christmas keeping. The suggestion almost seems to be that it is impossible to keep a good Christmas without a glowing hearth, and any house in which the latter is absent is one in which Christmas is not being properly observed. The fire is closely tied to *ideal* interior spaces. Dickens's blaze illuminates the 'preparations for a cosy dinner' (84) going on inside the houses, and the curtains, which are the same 'deep red' as the fire, are used to enclose the domestic space, separating it from external 'cold and darkness.' In this way the fire

[9] Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 90.

becomes a kind of fortress against the outside world. As John Ruskin would similarly express in 'Of Queen's Gardens' (1865), there was a strong belief that the Victorian home should protect the family from the harsh realities of commerce and business:

> it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it [...] it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in.[10]

Idealised representations of the Christmas fireside were not, however, limited to Dickens's festive visions. In much nineteenth-century Christmas print, similar imagery regularly recurs. As we will see in more detail later, the fireside is frequently established as the epitome of Victorian domesticity, where it reinforces the contemporary determination to separate warm interior spaces from the harsh conditions of the outside world.

The focus on the fireside as a site of festive reassurance that promises the comfort and safety of home, is frequently challenged by another Christmas sub-genre: the ghost story, which is also associated with gathering around the hearth. As Moore has written, 'the Christmas fire was an excellent setting for sharing ghost narratives',[11] and there is an innate paradox in the observation that the fireside could on the one hand represent warmth, cosiness and domestic harmony, and on the other, be associated with 'haunted house narratives [that] attacked the domestic' undermining 'attempts to create a domestic shrine'.[12] Killeen has similarly pointed out that at Christmas time 'people gathered around the hearth – the most homely of places – to read of uncanny violations of domestic sanctity',[13] in a peculiar coupling of the cosy and the destructive. The texts that I will examine appeared in the late 1840s up to the mid-1850s, comfortably situated within the

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[10] John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," in *Sesame and Lilies*, ed. Deborah Epstein Nord (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002): 77-8.
[11] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 82.
[12] Ibid., 92.
[13] Killeen, *Gothic Literature*, 131.

three decades of 1835-1865 that Karen Chase and Michael Levenson have claimed marked the Victorian 'attempt to fix the essence of family'.[14] In this chapter I will be turning away from the supernatural stories examined in the previous two chapters, in order to focus primarily on Christmas works which use the fireside as a space to share realist, rather than ghostly, Christmas narratives. These realist narratives nurture the Victorian emphasis on family and domestic life, and studiously avoid any supernatural presences that might threaten to undermine it. According to Moore, the high point of Christmas ghost story publication came as late as 1873, 'perhaps because of the sensations related to spiritualism'[15] which were widespread during the latter half of the century. Any fireside ghosts that did emerge in the earlier decades of the 1840s-1850s were usually innocuous spirits, associated with mild, redemptive hauntings. In *Tales About Christmas* (1833) for instance, Peter Parley includes a short account of the 'Ghost of Old Blue Stockings' to please his young readers. However, Parley admits that his tale is designed to 'teach you rather to laugh at a ghost story, than to believe it',[16] and at the end of the narrative he again reiterates 'the folly of believing tales about ghosts'.[17] A good example of 'ghostless ghost stories',[18] can be found in the 1859 extra Christmas number of *All the Year Round* entitled 'The Haunted House.' This collection of tales, which includes stories from Dickens, Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Gaskell among others, takes place in 'an avoided house' shunned by locals who fear that is it haunted.[19] One Christmas, a group of friends stay in the house, and agree to come together on Twelfth Night beside the fire and share their experiences. Although the reader expects to encounter a series of chilling ghost stories, there are no real ghosts to be found in this Christmas number. Instead, each individual is haunted only by the ghosts of their own personal past. In Dickens's story for instance, we

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[14] Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6.
[15] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 83.
[16] Peter Parley, *Tales About Christmas* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1838), 157.
[17] Ibid., 172.
[18] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 87.
[19] Charles Dickens, "The Mortals in the House," in *The Haunted House* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1859), 7.

are eventually told that 'no other ghost has haunted the boy's room [...] than the ghost of my own childhood, the ghost of my own innocence, the ghost of my own airy belief'.[20] Likewise, the Christmas number concludes by restating the absence of any genuine supernatural phenomena, as the narrator admits that the group 'were never for a moment haunted by anything more disagreeable than our own imaginations and remembrances'.[21] As Moore notes, a common trend in many ghost stories from this period was to 'conclude by undermining the reality of ghosts when characters discover a completely natural explanation for a supposed haunting',[22] a technique also used to subdue the supernatural in many Christmas fairy tales of the same period, as explored in my previous chapter.

Although the Christmas fireside did become associated with ghost tales during the later Victorian period, the ancient tradition of lighting midwinter fires had long been recognised as a ritual of sanctification. Christmas was historically celebrated as a temporal moment of purification, and this becomes evident in the yule log tradition. Christmas fire festivals had been celebrated for centuries, particularly in Scottish and northern English towns and villages where 'cleansing fires'[23] symbolised the burning out of the old year, and welcoming in of the new. The belief that the winter fire is a symbol of cleansing and purification is something similarly connected to the tradition of burning the yule log. In his study of Christmas rites, Hutton notes that the yule log custom was 'characterized principally as a means of compensation for the various deprivations of the season. It must be plain, however, that at points [it] overlapped with another class of ritual: that concerned with protecting a home from evil'.[24] In *The Book of Christmas*, Hervey had informed readers that 'this log appears to have been considered as sanctifying the roof-tree, - and was probably deemed a protection against those evil spirits over whom this season was, in

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[20] Charles Dickens, "The Ghost in Master. B's Room," in *The Haunted House* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1859), 137.
[21] Charles Dickens, "The Ghost in the Corner Room," in *The Haunted House*, (London: Chapman & Hall, 1859), 218.
[22] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 87.
[23] Margaret Baker, *Discovering Christmas Customs and Folklore* (Buckinghamshire: Shire, 2007), 97.
[24] Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 41.

every way, a triumph' (164). In this way, rather than representing the site for ghostly spirits and ill-luck, the Christmas fireside initially operated as a site for a purging of evil and the sanctification of the home. The custom of burning the yule log was an old festive tradition that readers were both aware of and interested in. More often than not, this tradition was associated with the version of a Christmas re-imagined from the 'olden times' of the Middle Ages, in which the Victorians had a tendency to indulge, as explored in Chapter One. In 1845 for example, an engraving in Charles Knight's *Old England* entitled 'Bringing in the Yule log on Christmas Eve' (Figure 11) celebrated the romantic imagery of this bucolic tradition, and represented it as part of a generic old-fashioned Christmas as shown by the date '1779' engraved below the scene.



Figure 11. William Clowe's illustration 'Bringing in the Yule Log on Christmas Eve' from *Old England* (1845)

Although the yule log was attractive to Victorians because of its antiquity, its festive appeal was also linked to its supposed ability to ward away evil spirits. The log also had a

temporal significance as it marked a time of ritual purification for the domestic space. The activity of 'bringing home [...] the Yule log' itself was, as Peter Brown has indicated, a 'homely kind' of 'family celebrated' custom,[25] once again affiliating the Christmas fire with the ideals of family and home, and designating the festive season as a time set apart for domestic sanctification.

Yet it is also significant to note that the Victorian version of the yule tradition was a radical shrinking of the expansive fire festivals that had previously been part of an ancient, communal tradition. Many writers recognised that the yule log was both a tradition steeped in antiquity, and a ceremony that had been domesticated and tamed to fit into the Victorian hearth. The domestication of the yule tradition can be seen in an 1845 story entitled 'The Christmas Log' written by Suum Cuique,[26] which appeared in *Hood's Magazine and Comic Miscellany*. In this tale Mr. Bartholomew Biggerton is disappointed by the lack of Christmas cheer he sees in the country, where 'old England aint no longer old England',[27] and decides to host a Christmas party in order to rekindle a sense of festivity. As he informs his wife, 'I will hold a little Christmas of our own quite in the olden style. I've got Hone's Every Day Book, and that tells us all about it' (146).[28] Biggerton rejects the taming of the old-fashioned Christmas yule custom, and as part of his celebration he insists upon a 'yule log. We will have a monster' (146). Despite his efforts, the Christmas party is a failure as the group of guests are highly conservative teetotallers. In one last attempt to instil his guests with some festive cheer Biggerton ignites the yule log, but the blaze bursts out from the hearth and burns the carpet, causing everyone to run away. The dramatic conclusion to the party is, however, welcomed by Biggerton who responds by saying: 'never mind the carpet [...] I have driven away those totallers and

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[25] Peter Brown, *The Keeping of Christmas 1760-1840* (York: Fairfax House, 1993), 7.
[26] "Suum cuique" is a Latin phrase meaning "to each his own" or "to each what he deserves."
[27] Suum Cuique, "The Christmas Log," *Hood's Magazine and Comic Miscellany* 3, no. 2 (February 1845), 146. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.
[28] William Hone's *Every-Day Book* was published in 1825-6 and was a miscellany of antiquarian customs and curious manners.

their stiff-backed progenies; hurrah! – we have been gloomy enough to-day, but we *will* be jolly to-morrow' (155). Clearly, Biggerton reacts against the conservative taming of Christmas that he sees around him, and the reader is led to consider the consequences of domesticating ancient Christmas traditions which, in this tale, simply perpetuate festive apathy.

Alongside the cleansing symbolism of the yule log, another side of this tradition reveals a connection between the Christmas fireside and temporal concerns. As Baker notes, the yule log's origins are found in midwinter solstice celebrations, where its wood was used to kindle great solstice fires.[29] A solstice point marks a specific moment in time; it is defined as a 'turning, culminating, or stopping point',[30] a pause in the usual temporality of the year. Of course, according to the church, Christmas is also a celebration marking a different turning point: the birth of Jesus. A writer for *The Quiver* in 1867 referred to the antiquity of traditions marking the winter solstice, terming them 'older than the Christmas festival, or the great event it commemorates'.[31] This Victorian writer regarded the solstice celebration as:

> a harmless and beautiful popular superstition, evidently founded upon truthful ideas, [which] suppos[e] a special limitation to be put upon the powers of evil at the season when the coming of Christ is specially commemorated. The fiction was once prevalent, and still lingers. Rustics dreaded no witches, fairies, demons, or malignant spirits on Christmas nights. They were believed to have no power.[32]

Here we see the writer coupling the ancient pagan solstice celebration with the Christ's birth. The imagery of the yule log, as a replication of the sun's light blazing in the midst of the dark midwinter, clearly coincides with the Christian belief in Christ as 'the true Light,

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[29] Baker, *Discovering Christmas Customs and Folklore*, 16.
[30] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "solstice," accessed May 8, 2013, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/184357?redirectedFrom=solstice#eid.
[31] "Midwinter Folk-Lore," *Quiver* 2, no. 77 (March 1867): 392
[32] Ibid., 394.

which lighteth every man'[33] coming into a darkened world. In Chapter One, I examined the great interest in pre-history which influenced many festive writers during this period, and it is clear that the fascination with Christmas past was also linked to the nineteenth-century interest in the yule log and solstice traditions. As we have already seen, Hervey dwells on the tradition of the 'Yule Clog' in his antiquarian study of Christmas.[34] Emphasising the lengthy history of this custom, Hervey remarks that those who celebrate Christmas by lighting a yule fire 'keep their Christmas after the old orthodox fashion' (163).

The solstice sensation of Christmas as a turning point in the year, a stopping of time, a midway between two states, or an intersecting borderland, is present in many fireside texts from the nineteenth century. The domestic fireside is invested with a far deeper significance than simply functioning as a cosy place to gather together and share stories; instead, it becomes a space where time is brought into sharper focus and individuals are more inclined to reflect upon, and share, their own personal experiences and stories. The fireside is also referred to as a space where time in navigated in Dickens's last completed novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5). Although this is not a Christmas book, it is interesting to observe that Lizzie Hexam frequently sees pictures in the fire, and on one occasion her brother asks her for 'the fortune-telling pictures',[35] suggesting that by looking into the fire one is also able to look into time. The fireside's association with time became particularity evident at Christmas. On Christmas Day 1858, a story entitled 'Home Again!' appeared in *Household Words*. This tale revolves around an emigrant who has returned to his family home after many years. Though his family have died in his absence, memories from his childhood return to him in the Christmas fire, in 'scenes long, long forgotten; but, by some mysterious power, evoked on this night, of all nights in the year. Though the clock in the court was now clanging out harshly nine, it did not break in upon

[33] John 1:9 (King James Version).
[34] The Yule Clog is a regional name for the Yule Log. Yule Clog or Christmas Block were commonly used around the Tyne valley. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, 39.
[35] Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Penguin, 2012), 35.

these welcome visions; and I still see pictures in the red wood embers'.[36] This story suggests that the consciousness of temporality is brought into sharper focus at the Christmas moment, especially when the individual sits beside the domestic fire. As John Matthews claims, in his study of the winter solstice, Christmas and the solstice are times 'of quietude, of firelight' when 'all around us the season seems to reach a standstill – a point of repose' until 'we begin to prepare for new beginnings'.[37]

Offering a space for quiet reflection on the old year and the new, and the past and the future, the Christmas fireside brings about what Taylor has called a 'gathering of time into a unity'.[38] The festive fire as a temporal gathering point is also conveyed through the ancient tradition of lighting the yule log 'with the brand of the last year's log'.[39] By igniting the log with the remnants from Christmases past, the yule fire becomes a symbolic enactment of continuity through changing times. Linking into this temporal aspect of Christmas, the present chapter will examine the representation of the festive Victorian hearth, and explore the liminal quality of time evoked by the fireside strand of Christmas literature. As the festival's association with the winter solstice implies, Christmas has a peculiar temporal position, stationed as a pinnacle moment in time. Whilst it offers a pause from the rush of everyday life, the winter festival at the end of the calendar year is also a space for reflection on the months that have passed. As Moore has written, 'Christmas offered the nation that liminal moment to pause'.[40] Simultaneously, Christmas always falls on the edge of the new beginning held by the impending year. From this perspective, Christmas can be clearly marked as a liminal time, a hinge between past and future. As much fireside literature demonstrates, the light from the yule log burning in the domestic hearth represents a solstice moment of liminality. This liminal quality makes the hearth a transitional zone: the perfect site for a group to gather together and reflect on life and its

[36] "Home Again!" *Household Words* 19, no. 457 (December 25, 1858): 78.
[37] John Matthews, *The Winter Solstice* (London: Thorsons, 1998), 42.
[38] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 195.
[39] Hervey, *Book of Christmas*, 164.
[40] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 78.

changes and differences. In this way the Victorian storytelling circle, warmed by the festive light of the fire, became the ideal narrative context for nineteenth-century Christmas writers.

In the midst of rapid technological and social change, it is no surprise that the Victorian era was frequently recognised by contemporary figures, including John Stuart Mill and Prince Albert, as an 'age of transition,' a shift in the course of time. Sarah Gilead develops this point and, referring to the liminal concerns of nineteenth century culture and literature, argues 'it was perhaps inevitable that a virtual obsession with liminality should characterize Victorian literature: social critics commonly characterize the period as [...] a liminal period in a history of spiritual, moral, and intellectual as well as material progress'.[41] Transition and process are common themes in much Victorian literature, yet these themes become more resonant at Christmas. Frequently in Christmas writing, the preoccupation with liminal moments is experienced as a sensation of passing through time, found particularly in festive poems that address the end of the year. In a December 31 edition of *Household Words* (1853), the imagery of being 'betwixt and between' the old year and the new,[42] and the past and future, is expressed in a poem entitled 'New Year's Eve.' The poet begins to think about temporality, describing how 'Every moment, like a sculptor, / Shapes the marble mass of Time'.[43] His later admission that 'The dull days have made a turning: / Nothing changeless is but Change',[44] recognises the inevitable feeling of transition experienced at the end of the year. Seasonal poems also used the liminal moment of Christmas as an opportunity to pause. Stasis and reflection must have been particularly desired and treasured in a period which was seen as so busy and changeable. Christmas was felt to be the moment when a temporal threshold was crossed,

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[41] Sarah Gilead, "Liminality, Anti-Liminality, and the Victorian Novel," *ELH* 53, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 186.
[42] The phrase 'betwixt and between' is used by Victor Turner to refer to the liminal moment, as we will see later in this chapter.
[43] "New Year's Eve," *Household Words* 8, no. 197 (December 31, 1853): 418.
[44] Ibid.

whether this was expressed through the sensation of transition, the need to find a moment to pause, or a strange feeling of being both within and outside of ordinary time.

The first section of this chapter will consider the nineteenth-century representation of the Christmas fireside. Using a collection of festive texts, I will attempt to illuminate the significance of the domestic hearth and examine the various ideologies that were being connected to the Christmas fireside by Victorian writers. The texts which will be explored in this section are diverse in genre, including a selection of non-fiction articles from the 1850-1853 Christmas numbers of *Household Words*, poems published in Sarah Ellis's *Fireside Tales for the Young* (1849), and three fictional Christmas stories including Catherine Gore's *The Snow Storm* (1845), John Poole's *Christmas Festivities* (1845) and Luke Limner's *Christmas Comes but Once a Year* (1850). In each of these narratives close attention is paid to the Christmas fire which is invested with varying degrees of symbolic significance, whether it is referred to in overtly-sentimental language that borders on hearth worship, or through comic narratives that measure a character's virtue by the brightness of their Christmas fire.

The second section of the chapter will examine the cultural and temporal significance of storytelling beside the Christmas fire. The practice of reading aloud, or exchanging stories beside the Christmas hearth conveyed family unity and domestic comfort for many Victorians. This section will look at the Christmas fireside as a time-space for the performance of family rituals, specifically the Christmas ritual of collective storytelling. Many festive texts refer to the Christmas fire in their suggestive titles, persuading readers to participate in the ritual act of reading aloud beside the fire, and thus prescribing the site for their own consumption. I will argue that that the fireside ritual is established as a means of celebrating the Victorian idea of home and generating an image of domestic utopia, while simultaneously convincing the reader of their seasonal duty to participate in what was being widely regarded as a national reading ritual. Benedict

Anderson has referred to ritual reading as a way of imagining the nation, and explores the 'mass ceremony' of simultaneous reading in which 'each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion'.[45] In terms of Christmas reading, the sensation of participating in a mass reading ceremony gave those who *did* incorporate festive texts into their celebrations, a feeling that they belonged to a larger cultural custom and the affirmation that they were celebrating Christmas in the right way. Moreover, the national reading ritual had a great temporal significance in its implication that the individual was taking part in a synchronized moment of mass reading. John Gillis's essay 'Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth Century Britain' (1989) will complement this section, as Gillis similarly argues that by mid-century, 'a massive accumulation of family [...] rituals gave a new tangibility and meaning to family life among a class that was destined to set the standards for the rest of British society'.[46]

The final section will focus on Christmas as a liminal moment in time and suggest that the space beside the fire functions as a site where temporal concerns are uncovered and brought into sharper focus. This section will introduce Victor Turner's theory of liminality, and examine how moments of transition and the symbolic imagery of crossing thresholds is peculiarly conveyed in the fictional autobiographies of six adolescent girls seated around a Christmas hearth in Elizabeth Sheppard's *Round the Fire: Six Stories* (1856). Through an examination of Sheppard's text, I will look at the role of personal reflection, the reconciliation of past and present, and the significance of the Christmas fireside from where time is navigated. While Sheppard's text repeatedly deals with liminal moments of transition and the often-traumatic upheaval of crossing thresholds, her stories simultaneously stress the importance of these liminal moments, which seem to facilitate

[45] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 35.
[46] John Gillis, "Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth Century Britain," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3, no. 2 (1989): 214.

personal growth and develop maturity. From this perspective Turner's concept of 'communitas,' which refers to an unstructured community where individuals are equal,[47] is also relevant. Turner suggests that the individual requires time apart from their usual obligations to process and adjust to change, and it is during this 'limbo of statuslessness'[48] that members of a group become participants in another transitional process, forming foundations for the new phase they will enter. Sheppard's Christmas text is framed by a group dynamic that can be interpreted as a parallel of Turner's communitas frame of liminal time, with particular focus on the overarching imagery of sharing a fire which 'is a fundamental ritual to bind any community'.[49]

4.1 The Christmas Fireside and the Victorian Home

In 1847, a book reviewer for the *Dublin University Magazine* depicted an appealing Christmas scene:

> It is Christmas time, and our business concerns the present – the present – when bright and laughing faces are crowding round the jolly fire – when those bound by the ties of kindred, though long separated in the various toils and trials of life, for a season forget their struggles [...] and feel their hearts expand and their bosoms grow under the influence of 'the sacred sense of home'.[50]

A temporal marker prefigures this passage, as the writer emphasises that the scene he is about to portray 'concerns the present.' Subsequently, the Christmas of 1847 is represented by relatives gathering together beside a fire, a scene clearly intended to focus the reader's attention toward the 'sacred sense of home,' which many mid-century writers were keen to promote. This triad of Christmas, home and fireside is found in much seasonal literature of the nineteenth century. One example can be seen in stave three of Dickens's *A Christmas*

[47] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 96.
[48] Ibid., 97.
[49] Matthews, *The Winter Solstice*, 43.
[50] "Christmas Books," *Dublin University Magazine* 29, no. 169 (January 1847): 134.

Carol, where 'all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth [...] Then Bob proposed: "A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!" Which all the family re-echoed' (82). In this episode, the activity of drawing around the fireside at Christmas time offers an image of familial unity and harmony, seen especially as the whole family re-echo Christmas greetings to one another. Moreover, the fireside enables the family to experience fulfilment in the present Christmas moment, as we hear that 'they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time' (84). Even after Tiny Tim has died and the Cratchit family are in mourning, they resume their customary tradition: 'they drew about the fire, and talked' (106). And at the end of the scene they continue to promote domestic unity by gathering together and exchanging kisses, an image which indicates that the festive fireside offers a source of stability despite the inevitable changes that each Christmas brings.

Before turning to investigate how the Christmas fireside is represented in festive print, it is important to take a look at the hearth's significance within the broader Victorian ideology of 'home.' The Victorian emphasis on family and home has been a topic of interest to many scholars. In their study of the Victorian family, Chase and Levenson affirm that 'the mid-Victorians were the most "family-conscious and home-centred" society in English history'[51] and suggest that Christmas writing was employed as a specific expression of domesticity: 'the motives of the Christmas books of the early forties, were often to encourage national celebration of the triumphs of privacy'.[52] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall make similar observations, arguing that by the second quarter of the nineteenth century, writers were searching for ways to make the ideal of domesticity 'a lived reality'.[53] The need for domestic ideals to be translated into reality was closely tied into the Victorian search for comfort and reassurance in the midst of great social upheaval.

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[51] Chase and Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, 6.
[52] Ibid., 6-7.
[53] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 180.

As a result, the family was 'propagandized [...] as a repository of stability and firm values'.[54] Indeed, one of the most substantial social and familial dislocations of this period was the 'vast migration of the people from village and farm to the sprawling new factory towns'.[55] This mass geographic relocation, triggered by the industrial revolution, undoubtedly generated feelings of disruption and disorder. Not only did the shift from village to town living result in urban alienation, it also directed a longing for stability and security towards the home, a space where factory time was superseded by family time and the individual could find relief from the monotony of work. The pressure placed upon the idealised image of the domestic realm during this period was immense. With working life dominating the daily existence of the majority of city-dwellers, there was an acute need to establish the home and family life as a separate sphere, a shelter from the outside world and a place of retreat that was 'reassuring in its sameness'.[56] Gillis has traced the Victorian transformation of 'the everyday existence of the house into the symbolic world of the home'.[57] The unification of family and home was nurtured in much nineteenth-century writing. As Judith Flanders explains, in a passage that clearly echoes John Ruskin's vision of home, 'the Victorian house [was] defined as a refuge, a place apart from the sordid aspects of commercial life, with different morals, different rules [and] different guidelines to protect the soul from being consumed by commerce'.[58]

In Christmas writing we see a particular focus on cosy interiors, and the glowing fire of the home. Davis has linked the Victorian Christmas to the nineteenth century search for family, home and stability, by stressing that 'Christmas became the festival of "returning home" from school or from work in the city',[59] which subsequently reshaped Christmas into a domestic celebration. The relationship between Christmas and domestic

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 84
[56] Chase and Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, 89.
[57] Gillis, "Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life," 221.
[58] Judith Flanders, introduction to *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), xxi.
[59] Davis, *The Life and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, 36-8.

ideology in the Victorian period has also been explored by Waters, who argues that it is 'no mere coincidence that the rise of the domestic ideal, and the transformation of the English Christmas in the nineteenth century, were cultural developments that took place together'.[60] Referring to the enclosure of the domestic space, and the celebration of Christmas as a homely affair, Waters quotes from an article in the *Times* (December 25, 1875), where the writer condemns Christmas celebrations that take place outside of the home, warning readers: 'Christmas is threatened by the multitude that choose to honour and observe it in their own way. [...] The devotees reel about the streets, make nights hideous, turn their houses upside down, and crowd the police court'.[61] As Waters notes, by celebrating Christmas 'out of doors,' these individuals symbolically 'rejected the privatised family celebrations of the middle classes'.[62] Clearly, the urban modification of Christmas as a domestic festival to be observed in a quiet, orderly manner beside the family fire was not universally accepted. Nissenbaum has noted similar instances of festive mayhem in the streets of New York during the early nineteenth century, where 'the Christmas season, with its carnival traditions of wassail, misrule, and calithumpian "street theatre," could easily become a vehicle of social protest, an instrument to express powerful ethnic or class resentments'.[63] Although the vast majority of Victorians were embracing Christmas as an opportunity to return home and enjoy a family celebration indoors, the article from the *Times* implies that one reason why writers were working hard to popularise this version of Christmas was fuelled by an anxiety that the 'multitude' would jeopardize the ideal middle-class vision of festive domesticity.

In 1845, Catherine Gore remarked that at Christmas time, the Victorian family should be 'comfortably established, in the English fashion, on the hearthrug of a glorious

[60] Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of Family*, 62.
[61] Quoted in ibid., 70.
[62] Ibid., 70.
[63] Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 52.

Christmas fire',[64] and indeed, the hearth quickly became the symbolic centre of the Victorian home in both festive literature and domestic reality. According to Thad Logan's examination of Victorian interiors, the nineteenth-century parlour was 'a space removed from daily work and reserved for social interaction',[65] a room organized around the focal point of the hearth: 'its "most natural nucleus"'.[66] Lucy Orrinsmith, who wrote a series of home advice manuals during the nineteenth century, advised her readers that 'every effort should conduce to make the hearth the rallying spot of the home, to collect around it [...] the cosiest chairs, the prettiest treasures'.[67] A few lines later she also notes, 'in this chilly climate a natural tendency when entering a room is to seek the hearth, [...] a spot chosen to be cherished'.[68] An instinctive attraction to the fireside and heartfelt recognition of the hearth as a 'cherished' spot, emerge repeatedly within Victorian descriptions of home and Christmas. Returning to the earlier suggestion that the nineteenth-century emphasis on home offered reassurance for a dislocated generation, it is interesting that a number of scholars have argued that the fireside, as a site within the home, also represented a source of stability, comfort and domestic virtue. Caroline Davidson's social history of the Victorian home asserts that 'the hearth was a potent symbol of family, of hospitality, and of life itself',[69] connotations which resulted in a 'British addiction to the sight of an open fire with flickering flames'.[70] Perhaps the most famous Victorian proponent of the English open fire was Ruskin, who saw 'the domestic hearth as the apogee of the domestic temple',[71] a symbolic representation of the nineteenth-century ideal of home and family which was sufficient, in imagery alone, to sustain its popularity. In addition to the British attraction to the sight of a fire, it is likely that the unique appeal of home and hearth at

[64] Catherine Gore, *The Snow Storm* (London: Fisher, 1845), 216. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.
[65] Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13.
[66] Ibid., 113.
[67] Lucy Orrinsmith, *The Drawing-Room* (London: MacMillan, 1878), 32-4.
[68] Ibid., 34.
[69] Caroline Davidson, *A Woman's Work is Never Done* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), 73.
[70] Ibid., 99.
[71] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 380.

Christmas time was prompted, in part, by the climactic conditions of winter. Hervey pointed towards the particular appeal of a Christmas fire in 1836, when 'amid the comforts of the fireside, and all its sweet companionships and cheerful inspirations, there is something like the sense of a triumph obtained over the hostilities of the season' (90). For Hervey the fireside is not simply a comforting spot, it also represents the victory of the interior, domestic space over the outside world. Interestingly, Ian Currie's chronology of famous freezes in England identifies the mid-century winters of 1844-5, 1853-4, and 1855 as being particularly severe. In 1853-4 temperatures in London plunged to -10.3°C, and severe snowstorms in eastern England produced snow drifts over 10 feet deep.[72] In the midst of such fierce winters, it is clear that the warmth of the home and activity of gathering indoors around a Christmas fire would have been both appealing and instinctive.

The contrast between harsh winter weather and the cosy domestic fireside provides the context for Catherine Gore's *The Snow Storm: A Christmas Story* (1845), a narrative that was, perhaps, written in reaction to the bitter winter of 1844. In Gore's tale a social-climbing knight named Sir Richard Ribstone purchases Hacklewood, a hall that has stood empty for many years. Sir Richard decorates the interior of Hacklewood lavishly, spending an excessive amount of money on luxurious renovations to impress his wealthy, city-dwelling acquaintances at his Christmas party. But as his guests journey to Hacklewood on Christmas Eve, a sudden snow storm prevents them from reaching the estate and they are forced to take refuge in a small country cottage: Nessford Holm. Before their unexpected guests arrive, the family of Nessford Holm delight in the wintery scenes outdoors. Aunt Dinah admits 'for my part, I love to see a snowy Christmas-day. It makes the cheer within-doors all the sweeter, to see icicles hanging to the eaves' (59). During the afternoon, the cottage hearth becomes the focus of the Christmas story, as a grandfather and granddaughter spend an hour 'by the fire-side, in mutual reminiscences', after which, Gore

[72] Ian Currie, *Frosts, Freezes and Fairs* (Surrey: Frosted Earth, 1996), 19.

writes, 'the young girl and the poor old man understood each other better, and were closer friends, than they had ever been in their lives' (96). In this instance, the Christmas fire within the family home is a space where relationships are deepened. It is significant that the small Nessford Holm family of aunt, grandfather and granddaughter, are pictured beside the blazing Christmas hearth in two of the story's four illustrations (Figures 12 and 13).



Figure 12. The Family beside the Fire: George Cruikshank's illustration for *The Snow Storm* (1845)



Figure 13. Gathered around the Fire: George Cruikshank's illustration for *The Snow Storm* (1845)



Figure 14. Arrival at Nessford Holm: George Cruikshank's illustration for *The Snow Storm* (1845)

The third of George Cruikshank's illustrations for Gore's volume (Figure 14) shows the stranded Hacklewood guests entering the Nessford Holm cottage, an image clearly depicting the sharp contrast between the 'oppressive cold of the external atmosphere' (125), and the welcoming light of the country cottage.

As the guests move into the cottage, they are reassured by the words: 'you'll find a good fire within!' (125). Gore continues to pivot her description of the cottage welcome around the warmth of the fire, as the 'moment the new-comers caught sight of the cheerful blaze [...] in they hurried, right glad to escape out of the rude gusts that drove the snow into their faces' (130). As this takes place, Aunt Dinah busies herself by 'thrust[ing] another log into the overloaded fire-place' (131) tending to the Christmas hearth which is clearly presented as the heart of the domestic realm. As these scenes demonstrate, the Christmas fireside in *The Snow Storm* represents hospitality and welcome, and is also a place where relationships are deepened and refuge from the harsh conditions outdoors is provided.

Furthermore, the fireside of Nessford Holm becomes a kind of liminal space for the stranded guests; it is a site where their snobbery is tamed and their eyes opened to the simple pleasures of cottage life. Upon their arrival, some of the wealthy urbanites express disgust at the prospect of staying in a cottage. When the Dowager Lady Gumbleton approaches the cottage for the first time, she refers to it as a 'horrid hole' (126), a 'wretched hole' (129). But as the group take shelter in the cottage and are shown warm hospitality by Aunt Dinah and her family, their views begin to change. The fireside becomes a space where they exchange their own personal accounts of the night's adventure and process how their stay at the cottage has altered their opinions of how Christmas is best celebrated. It is here that they reflect on the pleasures they have been surprised to find at Nessford Holm:

> already the merry little party, chirruping under the influence of comfort and good cheer, after the fatigues they had undergone and the risk of passing the night under a hedge, had removed to the fireside, to chat over the strange adventure which fated them to enjoy the best supper they had ever tasted, under the humble roof of a stranger, instead of spending it at Hacklewood, where they were so eagerly expected (140-1).

Significantly, it is in the unexpected, transitional space of the small cosy cottage, rather than the artificial opulence of Hacklewood, that the guests are shown a true festive welcome. Moreover, in this passage the fireside becomes a space where the guests gather together to make sense of the unexpected events of the evening, a pattern that we will see repeated in Sheppard's *Round the Fire*. Gore's text achieved success within the Christmas market, where it was praised for its content and recommended by many reviewers. The *Weekly Dispatch* claimed it would 'arouse generous sympathies, and awaken kindly feelings',[73] and the *Western Times* similarly remarked 'the plot is exceedingly pure, and the book abounds with many humanizing kindly thoughts'.[74] More interestingly however, a reviewer for *Tyne Mercury* connected Gore's fictional scenes to domestic realities, suggesting that *The Snow Storm* delineated 'some of the features of English society common at this festive season',[75] most importantly, the practice of gathering together around a modest Christmas fire.

The Christmas fire is also mentioned in many of the winter editions and early extra Christmas numbers of *Household Words*, particularly between 1850-1853. The first extra Christmas number of *Household Words* appeared in 1851, but in 1850 Dickens had already begun to utilise the seasonal context to shape his mid-December edition. The issue published on December 21, 1850 provided readers with a number of articles exploring the

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[73] "Published by Fisher, Son, & Co.," in *New Years Day, A Winter's Tale* by Catherine Gore (London: Fisher, 1846), 1.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

celebration of Christmas away from the home, including: 'Christmas in Lodgings,' 'Christmas in the Navy,' 'Christmas in India' and 'Christmas in the Frozen Regions.' While this may initially appear to contradict the domestic focus of Christmas celebrations at this time, it had quite the opposite effect. Many of the articles consistently point out that nothing can compare to the English Christmas celebrated at home. Moreover, we see the image of the festive fire frequently being used as a means to recreate, or access, the domestic idyll of the English Christmas. Christmas celebrations in Calcutta for example, clearly evoke the British model of festivity, as:

> fires are burnt in English grates in the months of December and January: and although a handsome bouquet of roses decorates the drawing-room table and the chiffoniers, there is a wintery *feel* about the atmosphere; and as the chairs are drawn round the fire-place, and the whiskey-punch is brewed, the cherished idea of *home* on Christmas Day is suitably and completely realised.[76]

With the exception of the bouquet of roses, this Indian Christmas could quite easily be a Christmas celebration in Britain. The 'wintery *feel* about the atmosphere' coupled with chairs being drawn about a fire-place and the realisation of the 'cherished idea of *home*' act to reaffirm familiar Victorian Christmas ideals.

Similarly, 'Christmas in the Frozen Regions' uses the Christmas fire as an image of latent Christmas domesticity. The writer describes 'men lying asleep, closely housed by huge fires'[77] in the midst of a vast, arctic wilderness. Here the choice of the verb 'housed' once again connects the fireside image with domesticity, particularly as these men are far away from their homes at Christmas. When 'Frozen Regions' draws to a close, there is a second reference to the Christmas fireside. However, this time the writer couples the earlier image of the sleeping men being 'housed' by huge fires with the counterpart of their

[76] "Christmas in India," *Household Words* 2, no. 39 (December 21, 1850): 306.
[77] "Christmas in the Frozen Regions," *Household Words* 2, no. 39 (December 21, 1850): 306.

families at home in England, seated comfortably around their own Christmas fires, but experiencing the absence of loved ones:

> although, at the approaching festive season, many a family circle assembled round the winter's hearth, may have to lament the absence of some relative or much-valued friend from the otherwise joyous scene, let no such family despair, however discouraging their forebodings; for, in the absence of all tidings of our long-missing countrymen, hope still remains.[78]

The Christmas fire of the family is set against the fire in the frozen regions, and works to connect the distant relative or friend to the scene the family are participating within. The 'hope' is that they are stationed beside their own recreated, Christmas fire and thinking of home, in an example of what Moore terms the enactment of 'one-sided emotional exercises rather than physical reunions'.[79] These passages also echo the section of Dickens's *Carol*, where Scrooge is shown Christmas being celebrated beside "English" fires in other parts of the world. In the *Carol*'s third stave, Scrooge visits a group of Miners 'assembled around a glowing fire,' and even in a solitary lighthouse he sees two men who 'had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea' (85-6). Another relevant account of Christmas away from England is found in a *Household Words* number for December 18, 1852. This article on a 'South American Christmas' continues to prove the far-reaching influence of English Christmas traditions, including the festive fire, as we read that 'Christmas retains its old associations, and loved usages: and the Yule log, and midnight waits, the rich spice cake and mellow cheese, recall to the long absent settler many a happy Christmas'.[80] Christmas abroad as a 'recall' of homely English traditions was something of particular significance to the Victorians. Moore has pointed out that Christmas offered the nation a chance to 'wonder how well the offspring continued family traditions,' and in response, the 'fictional emigrant at Christmas' was expected to

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[78] Ibid., 308.
[79] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 78.
[80] "South American Christmas," *Household Words* 6, no. 143 (December 18, 1852): 325.

'reminisce about friends and Christmases of the past, and to worship the English Christmas by regretting one's absence from that brightest hearth-flame'.[81] Without doubt, these accounts imply that the Christmas hearth-flame burned the brightest in English homes and the fireside image, as we have seen, is consistently envisioned as a quintessential aesthetic of the Victorian Christmas.[82]

The representation of the Christmas fire within festivities at home, in England, was also explored in other articles and volumes published during this period. While contributors to *Household Words* were reflecting on the imagery of the Christmas hearth, the mid-century fireside genre had already begun to take shape. Sarah Ellis's four volumes of *Fireside Tales for the Young* (1849) included a range of seasonal stories, poems, and lessons in history, geology and morality that had been selected, as she explains in the introduction, 'with a view to their social and "fireside" amusement'.[83] Ellis's conflation of 'social' and 'fireside' draws attention to the nineteenth-century ideal of the fireside being a shared space. Moreover, this volume is intended for Christmas consumption, as Ellis explains that it has been compiled for young readers who would be glad to receive it 'with each returning Christmas or New Year, as a familiar friend'.[84] While the majority of Ellis's collection does not explicitly refer to Christmas, the fireside is a recurring image in a number of texts, most of which are poems. In her fourth volume of *Fireside Tales*, Ellis presents the reader with a poem dedicated entirely to the hearth: 'The Cottage Fire.' It is through an examination of this poem that we see the numerous connotations of the domestic fireside being celebrated and clarified. In the opening stanzas, an idealised image of home pivots upon the hearth:

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[81] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 78.

[82] This helps explain why the Band Aid song, 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' (Bob Geldof and Midge Ure, 1984) was so popular. In complaining that 'there won't be snow in Africa this Christmas,' there is a sense that what we feel sorry about is that the destitute of the world cannot access a particularly English version of Christmas.

[83] Sarah Ellis, introduction to *Fireside Tales for the Young* (London: Peter Jackson, 1849), i.

[84] Ibid.

The cottage fire! how cheerily

It lights the little room.

When all within is sweet content,

Though all without is gloom.

The floor is freshly sanded o'er,

The hearth is swept so clean,

And all beneath the lowly roof

In nicest order seen.[85]

Although she is unmentioned, it becomes quite clear that it is the female's duty to keep the fire blazing and ensure that the weary labourer comes home to a cheerful sight. In this way the hearth becomes a feminized space, as the woman of the house is the minder of the hearth, ensuring that it is 'swept so clean' and everything in the room is 'in nicest order seen.' As Davidson notes in her history of housework, 'the women of the household [...] bore the main responsibility for maintaining the fire, kept the hearth spotlessly clean and lavished great care on its appearance,' ensuring that it was always in 'pristine condition'.[86] Order was essential within the Victorian home, acting as a visual example to show the contrast of ordered interior spaces against the disordered and uncontrollable outside world. While the 'lowly' cottage of this poem is clearly a humble dwelling, the care bestowed upon the hearth is still of upmost importance. The image of 'sweet content' is echoed throughout the lines, where we witness 'the welcome hour / That brings the good man home',[87] as 'The labours of the weary day / Are all forgotten now'.[88] In this home the cherished fire represents 'The comfort of domestic ties, / The balm of virtuous love'.[89] The symbolic power of the feminized domestic fireside emerges powerfully through these

[85] "The Cottage Fire," in *Fireside Tales for the Young*, 76.
[86] Davidson, *A Woman's Work is Never Done*, 73.
[87] "The Cottage Fire," 76.
[88] Ibid., 77.
[89] Ibid.

lines, and is seen again in the poem's conclusion where a biblical allusion affirms that the hearth should be a space for togetherness:

> As holy writ hath shown,
>
> His Maker saw it was not good
>
> For man to be alone.[90]

In other instances however, the hearth functions as far more than a simple expression of comforting, homely values. In 'What Christmas is as We Grow Older' (1851), Dickens uses the festive fireside as a space to reflect upon time, though admittedly the sentimental language used to describe the hearth remains intact. The article opens with a memory of when Christmas Day joined 'together all our home enjoyments, affections and hopes'.[91] Significantly, it is the fire that becomes the focus of the festive description as Dickens notes how seasonal celebrations 'grouped every thing and every one around the Christmas fire; and made the little picture shining in our bright young eyes, complete' (248). For Dickens, Christmas time is made 'complete' by the act of gathering around the domestic fire. According to Buckland, 'Dickens represented the fire as emblematic of shared experience, of [...] domestic harmony',[92] and in 'What Christmas is as We Grow Older' this becomes particularly apparent as the audience is invited to participate in the scene, to take 'your places round the Christmas fire, where what is sits open-hearted' (250). Yet Dickens's reflective essay is particularly revealing as it both celebrates a domestic version of Christmas and reads as a reflection on age, time and change that takes place around the hearth. As Parker has argued, this text can be read as 'a statement of the understanding of Christmas which [Dickens] had been constructing, and which he saw that readers were accepting'.[93] Mediating upon time and change, the narrator considers 'the

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[90] Ibid.
[91] Charles Dickens, "What Christmas is as We Grow Older," in *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003), 248. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.
[92] Buckland, "Pictures in the Fire," 3.
[93] Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, 275.

things that were to be, and never were' (248), and speaks of the act of festive remembrance as being 'of the time [...] and of the history that reunited even upon earth the living and the dead' (252). At one point he describes the children he sees around him in language littered with temporal references to the future, the olden times and the end of time. Observing his young relatives, the narrator remarks, 'before this boy, there stretches out a Future, brighter than we ever looked on in our old romantic time, but bright with honour and with truth' (250). Yet from his mature perspective he also acknowledges that the young do not think about time in the same way that he does, and goes on to speak of childhood as a period 'when there was no scythe within the reach of Time' (250). Careful to balance these sobering lines with a cheerful festive spirit, Dickens offsets his philosophising by celebrating the hearth as an emblem of shared experience, which explicitly 'welcome[s] everything!' a welcome which is reaffirmed by the assurance that 'on Christmas Day, we will shut out from our fireside, Nothing' (250). Nevertheless, as the sun goes down we see the 'doors and windows closed against the weather' (252). The vision of fencing in the domestic space away from the cold and untamed world outside stresses the importance of taking up those 'cherished places [...] by our Christmas fires' (252). The reason why the Christmas fire is especially important is, as the thoughtful narrator has implied earlier, because although the fire may continue to burn each returning Christmas, ultimately the faces that gather around it will change with time. As Gillis notes, 'even as they help us acknowledge the finitude of time, these special family times [such as Christmas] shield us against its terrors by convincing us, despite the evidence of clock and calendar, of a certain permanence and continuity in all things human'.[94]

Though much sentimental literature articulated the ideological significance of the Christmas fireside, elevated as the 'altar'[95] of the household, it is refreshing to see how some comic texts also seized upon the idyllic image of the Christmas hearth. Even *Punch*

[94] Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making*, 82.
[95] Davidson, *A Woman's Work is Never Done*, 73.

gestured towards the inescapable image of the reading circle beside the festive hearth, by inventing some titles that could be enjoyed as part of a ridiculous 'Round of Political Stories Beside the Christmas Fireside' in 1854. Among these amusing titles were 'A Story About a Statue to Prince Albert by the City Corporation' and 'Several Awful Stories about peace, the violation of treaties, the orthodox faith, &c. &c. By the Emperor of Russia'.[96] Another text where the fireside takes on a comic significance is John Poole's *Christmas Festivities* (1845), in which the narrator is invited to spend Christmas at 'Squire Dribble's estate. Poole's 'Squire Dribble however, is a peevish and selfish man whose scanty Christmas celebrations act as a mirror of his own antisocial behaviour. After arriving on Christmas Eve, Dribble bids his guests goodnight with 'A merry Christmas!' but, as the narrator informs us: 'after so much of it as we had experienced there was something positively awful in the sound'.[97] The 'Squire's miserly refusal to light the fires is used to demonstrate his inhospitable nature. After completing their journey to Dribble hall, which included a long delay due to poor weather, Mrs. Dribble suggests that the guests should take some refreshment in the dining room while the rest of the company retire to the drawing room, however the 'Squire angrily rejects this suggestion because it would require lighting a fire in another room (32). The narrator's bedroom at Dribble Hall further exemplifies the absence of festive warmth, as he describes how:

> the grate was filled with party-coloured shavings [...] I felt, shiveringly, that a fire would have been more in keeping with the season; but as it is impossible for the 'Squire himself to sleep in more than one room at a time, it would have been preposterous to expect that he should have provided so expensive a luxury [...when] it could in no manner contribute to his own enjoyment. (39)

Later the 'Squire seems to suggest that the provision of a fire is conditional upon the grounds of good behaviour. When the narrator wishes to sleep longer on Christmas

[96] "A Round of Political Stories Beside the Christmas Fireside," *Punch* 26 (1854): 19.
[97] John Poole, *Christmas Festivities* (London: Smith, Elder, 1845), 38. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.

morning, against the 'Squire's wishes, he responds, 'you would find it very uncomfortable to take breakfast in your own room *without a fire*' (40), withholding the warmth of a fire in order to manipulate his guests. Cleary Poole's 'Squire is a kind of Scrooge, who also refuses to provide enough coal to keep Bob warm in the office. His tight-fistedness is similarly expressed when, after coercing his guests to take a Christmas walk out in the snow, they return to a bitterly cold drawing-room with a meagre fire as, according to Dribble, 'it is useless to have much fire till one wants it [...] when we return here in the evening, it will be cozy and comfortable' (43). Though the parsimonious 'Squire is wealthy, he is ridiculed by the narrator because of his inhospitable nature, effectively conveyed by his cold, fireless dwellings. Presenting the 'Squire as a comic figure of ridicule, this story ultimately re-enforces the contemporary attitude towards the festive fire by suggesting that a bright, warm hearth is a measure of a wholesome Christmas celebration. Writing on *A Christmas Carol*, Buckland notices that 'a hearty fire is never an index of wealth, but of character. Fires are stoked as an act of generosity *against* the odds of poverty, or left to dwindle *despite* their owners' riches',[98] an observation that can clearly be applied to Poole's 'Squire Dribble where the warmth of the hearth corresponds with the warmth of his inner character.

The fireside as a reflection of character is also found in Luke Limner's playful story *Christmas Comes but Once a Year* (1850), which centres upon the Brown family's Christmas celebrations, gone wrong. This self-confessed 'domestic drama'[99] satirizes conventional Victorian attitudes towards Christmas. Throughout the story we see how time becomes ridiculous at Christmas, when it seems as though 'everybody has lost the day of the week, and come upon what appears an infinity of Saturdays rolled into one – beginning the week with a grand end, - for it is the advent of Christmas!' (12). Rather than idealising Christmas celebrations and inviting the reader to participate in an imagined scene of

[98] Buckland, "Pictures in the Fire," 8.
[99] Limner, *Christmas Comes but Once a Year* (London: William Tegg, 1850), 5. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.

fireside delights, Limner's story is grounded in 'Victoria and reality' (21), where the Plum Pudding, though idyllically illustrated (Figure 15) 'as it ought to have looked' is nothing short of an uncooked disaster, the antithesis of the Christmas dinner which Dickens's poor Cratchit family manage to perfectly enjoy.



Figure 15. 'The Pudding as it Ought to Have Appeared' illustration from *Christmas Comes but Once a Year* (1850)

The Browns' pudding dissolves overnight in the copper leaving the Christmas guests to enjoy a series of 'odds and ends, concocted to meet the emergency [...] in place of the legitimate large pudding' (22). Another disaster follows with the lighting of the Christmas fire:

> Mr. Wellesely drags in the yule-log, much to the detriment of the Brussels, and the annoyance of the guests; for, upon placing it in the grate, it causes everything to be covered in black tadpoles, nearly extinguishing the fire – until it ignites, roasting the company, and making the [wassail] pot a white-heat. (25)

Rather like the misfortunate Christmas fire of Bartholomew Biggerton in 'A Christmas Log,' Mr. Brown's yule log also creates a mess in the house and makes the company uncomfortably hot, an image that comically undermines the conventional symbolism of the idyllic, glowing festive hearth.[100] Underlying this series of disasters however, is the characterisation of Mr. Brown who, whilst he may be prone to mishaps, is a generous, thoughtful and kind-hearted man. As Buckland suggests, the fire's symbolic value is of greatest significance in these narratives, as it represents 'domestic value – signifying the family's innate moral goodness'.[101] Therefore, despite the comic destruction that it causes, Mr. Brown's excessive Christmas fire is still a manifestation of his hospitable nature and love of Christmas. Once again, this comic tale ends up re-enforcing the fireside ideology, as Limner notes in the final paragraph that Mr. Brown was not disheartened by his unlucky series of events, but still remains 'notorious for keeping the festive season!' (101)

In much mid-century Christmas print the fireside is represented as a site of warmth, togetherness, comfort and domestic stability. The time a family spend beside their fire is idealised, and sentimentally elevated as special, sacred time. From this perspective it is easy to see why homes where Christmas fires are kindled are represented as spaces where Christmas is being celebrated well. By investing the fireside with such ideological significance, the domestic hearth was publicly designated as the place where families gathered together to participate in unifying Christmas customs. As the following section will suggest, Christmas time was also a ritual time and the fireside was, likewise, a ritual space where families traditionally gathered together to tell stories.

4.2 Ritual Storytelling and the Christmas Fireside

Imagined scenes of storytelling at Christmas are visible in many seasonal works of the nineteenth century. In Irving's *Sketch Book* the narrator makes 'some general observations

[100] See also, for a disastrous attempt to recreate the perfect Christmas, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* (dir. Jeremiah S. Chechik; 1989).
[101] Buckland, "Pictures in the Fire," 7.

on the Christmas festivities of England' (163) when he is invited to spend the festive season at Bracebridge Hall. Upon entering the Hall, he is struck by the appearance of a 'wide overwhelming fire-place [...] in the midst of which was an enormous log glowing and blazing' (173). Later on he describes 'the gossip knot huddled round the hearth, beguiling the long evening with legendary jokes, and oft-told Christmas tales' (160). In Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* we see a similar representation of the traditional English fireside. In 'A Good-Humoured Christmas Chapter' the Pickwick Club celebrate Christmas at Dingley Dell, and the fireside is the place where 'we wait, until the clock strikes twelve, to usher Christmas in, and beguile the time with forfeits and old stories. Trundle, my boy, rake up the fire' (397). Rarely, if ever, in nineteenth-century Christmas literature do we see Christmas storytelling take place without the accompanying image of a blazing fire. As the mid-century fireside genre confirms, the Christmas fire and the custom of festive storytelling around it remained inseparable.

Communal, fireside storytelling was an old tradition that pre-dated the nineteenth century, and the long history of the custom was most likely part of its appeal. Hervey notes in *The Book of Christmas* that 'the song and the story, the recitation and the book read aloud, are, in town and in village, mansion and farmhouse – amongst the universal resources of the winter nights, now, - as they, or their equivalents, have, at all times, been' (143). From this angle we can see how the fireside context, as a site for consumption, prescribed the content of much festive print; however, I would argue that the relationship between context and content was twofold, as many fireside texts simultaneously worked to prescribe the familial hearth as a site where they should ideally be consumed. The site and the story clearly re-enforce one another, but they also seem to persuade readers that the place where they read is something they should take notice of. As Robert Darnton phrases it, 'the "where" of reading is more important than one might think, because by placing the

reader in his setting it can provide hints about the nature of his experience'.[102] The image of the reader sitting *at* the hearth while reading *about* the hearth leads us to question the nature of their experience. The content of much sentimental Christmas print suggests that the Victorian audience were being subliminally reminded of the social and cultural value of celebrating Christmas in a certain way. Fireside literature, for instance, clearly persuaded its readers to treasure a private, domestic Christmas. Yet it could also be the case that the dizzying experience of reading about the hearth and sitting at the hearth prompted a kind of metaphorical claustrophobia. Indeed, we do occasionally encounter the Christmas fire as an oppressive force: in John Mills's *Christmas in the Olden Time or The Wassail Bowl* (1845) for example, the Christmas blaze becomes excessive, and Mills writes that it 'threw such a heat into the room, that it soon became like a suffocating oven'.[103]

As noted previously, Sarah Ellis, Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Sheppard all used the framing device of the festive fire in the titles to their mid-century Christmas volumes, explicitly suggesting that the fireside is where their texts should be consumed. It is through these examples that we will see the ritual and temporal significance of storytelling beside the Victorian fire being brought into sharper focus. The immense significance of ritual became particularly relevant at Christmas time, which was itself experienced as a liminal moment. By enacting the same rituals year after year, the individual could experience a peculiar consciousness of stasis, change and progress, and as Gillis has demonstrated, at Christmas time the 'rites themselves represented a rite of passage'.[104] Bearing in mind the importance of the domestic realm at this time, it is easy to see why these writers used such suggestive titles to frame their works. Not only do the titles indicate where the texts should be read, they advocate an ideal version of domesticity, and help to establish a Christmas

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[102] Robert Darnton, "First Steps Toward a History of Reading," in *Reception Study: from Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, eds. James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein (New York: Routledge, 2001), 167.
[103] John Mills, *Christmas in the Olden Time* (London: H. Hurst, 1845), 20.
[104] Gillis, "Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life," 215.

storytelling ritual that would secure the sanctity of the festive fireside for years to come. Catherine Bell traces the overlap between repeated ritual practices and the formation of tradition in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) where she argues, 'ritual "invents" tradition in order to afford a sense of legitimized continuity with the past and to experience tradition as fixed. In the fixity of ritual's structure lies the prestige of tradition and in this prestige lies its power'.[105] The 'fixity' offered by ritual and tradition is consistent with the mid-century reaction against the dynamism of industrial change, expressed through attempts to 'create a still centre' in the home 'where things changed as little as possible'.[106] The continuity expressed by ritual is also noted by Roy A. Rappaport, who claims that 'rituals are among the most precisely recurrent of social events'[107] and Barbara G. Myerhoff who acknowledges that rituals enable a group on the one hand to 'dramatize a fictive version of themselves' but also provide 'a sense of individual and collective continuity'.[108] It is this dramatization of the fictive, and emphasis on the continuity and perpetuation of domestic Christmas ideology that the fireside ritual of storytelling seeks to achieve.

By quite literally mirroring the scenes of fireside reading that were contained within these framed texts, Victorian families were dramatizing a fictional version of Christmas, a version that was widely regarded to be the ideal. This activity, in turn, created a comforting sense of continuity where readers were able to feel that they were participating in a reading ritual that made them part of a greater festive tradition and a participant of one of Anderson's 'mass ceremonies' of simultaneous festive reading, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. The value of domestic ritual can also be seen from another angle, as one of its most important aspects is that it acts as a frame,

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[105] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 120.
[106] Flanders, introduction to *The Victorian House*, xxi.
[107] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 221-2.
[108] Myerhoff, "We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page: Fusion, Fictions and Continuity in Secular Ritual," in *Secular Ritual*, ed. Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Comp, 1977), 214.

consciously and deliberately separating ritual time from ordinary time.[109] Ritual's ability to frame or demarcate a specific aspect of life links into the Victorian desire to encircle the domestic sphere and ritualize the space beside the hearth. This can be seen in the 1851 *Census of Great Britain*, where the ideal home was referred to as a space that should be separated from the outside world.[110] As the literature from this period demonstrates, the fireside was invested with huge social and cultural significance. Undoubtedly, one of the chief reasons why the domestic fire was furnished with such importance was due to the fact that the time spent there was being repeatedly framed as sacred, ritual, family time.

The fireside circle of 'family and hearth,' as we have already seen, is closely connected to the festive ritual of Christmas reading, which served to inspire and reinforce ideal images of home and domesticity in an attempt to ensure that Christmas was celebrated privately and politely. For example, in Dickens's fourth Christmas Book *The Battle of Life* (1846), fireside reading is blatantly connected to the nineteenth-century veneration of domesticity. Here, two sisters and their father sit 'by a cheerful fireside' where one of the girls, Marion, reads a book aloud to her family. Soon we hear excerpts from the book she reads, such as: 'oh, Home, our comforter and friend when others fall away, to part with whom, at any step between the cradle and the grave'.[111] Though her voice is 'faltering and trembling,' she continues, 'oh, Home, so true to us, so often slighted in return' before she is told to '"read no more tonight" [...] for she was weeping'.[112] The ritual act of reading beside the fire is complemented by references to a book that directly addresses the home and its ideological value. This combination seems to overwhelm Marion as she states that 'the words seem all on fire',[113] rather like the blazing hearth visualized before her. In many texts, the visual quality of the fire seems to heighten the

[109] Ibid., 200.
[110] In this instance, Victorian readers were reminded that 'the possession of an entire house is, it is true, strongly desired by every Englishman: for it throws a sharp, well-defined circle round his family and hearth – the shrine of his sorrows, joys, and meditations.' Quoted in Chase and Levenson, introduction to *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, xxxvi.
[111] Charles Dickens, *The Battle of Life* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1995), 259.
[112] Ibid., 260.
[113] Ibid.

emotional impact of the literature that is read beside it. Often, by looking into the flames narrators see pictures, which quickly turn into stories. As we saw earlier in the *Household Words* tale 'Home Again!' visions of the past are seen in the fire, and as the narrator explains, 'most vividly do they come floating back upon me now, as I sit looking into the fire making out the minutest pictures. It is as the mouth of a great arched vault, with a high glowing mound of wood embers crumbling down with sudden rustle, and taking all manner of fanciful shapes'.[114] Moore argues that 'descriptions of reading in Christmas books anticipated how Christmas fiction was being consumed',[115] and at Christmas time in particular, the feeling that other people were reading the same texts at the same time created a heightened awareness of shared experience, hence building a community out of the ruins of migration from the country to the city.[116]

Moreover, ritual is closely connected to union. Ritual has been described as a social phenomenon that is not simply about communicating with one another, but communing with one another.[117] The pleasure found in the ritual of domestic reading derived from a temporal consciousness that all readers were participating in a broader, national reading event. This imagined togetherness on a national level allowed individuals to access the sensation of shared ritual time, without having to rupture the enclosed space of their own domestic realm. The awareness that other readers in other homes were holding the same texts at the same time, and encountering the same stories clearly helped to establish 'Christmas as part of the annual ceremony [...] which reminds each fireside that it exists within a universe of privacies'.[118] Though the spirit of Christmas reading encouraged imagined togetherness, it was also crucial that families retained a sense of privacy and detachment from the outside world. Consequently, the act of fireside reading was

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[114] "Home Again!" 78.
[115] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 52.
[116] This is, of course, how Christmas continues to be experienced now. Television Christmas specials in past years have been watched simultaneously by millions of British viewers. In 2012, for example, the Christmas special of ITV's Downton Abbey drew an audience of 10.28 million. See the website of *The Telegraph*; www.telegraph.co.uk.
[117] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 220.
[118] Ibid., 88.

significant as it generated the sensation of being 'made mutual with others in [...] separateness'.[119] In their reading experience beside the fire, Victorian audiences could feel as though they were part of a vaster reading ritual while maintaining and perpetuating the national ritual of celebrating a private, domestic Christmas.

As suggested earlier, the mid-century emphasis on 'home' made fertile ground for establishing ritual acts. Davidoff and Hall have already identified that the Victorian home was the 'stage for social ritual',[120] while Gillis's study on the 'ritualization' of middle-class family life devotes a section to Christmas. Gillis affirms that nineteenth-century Christmas celebrations became domestic rituals, acknowledging, 'rituals are important, not because they are a reflection or representation of some underlying social reality, but because they are their own reality. Rituals do not simply reflect reality, but construct it. They are not simply transmitters of ideas, but ways of knowing and thinking'.[121] In the following section we will see how rites of passage are a class of ritual closely connected to liminality. Victor Turner notes that liminal periods characterised by 'important rituals' are connected to periods when societies pass 'from one cultural state to another. They are essentially the phenomena of transition'.[122] For a nineteenth-century audience, acutely aware that they were living in an age of transition and in the process of passing from one social and cultural state to another, rituals became particularly significant as a way to mark time and experience something reassuringly familiar in the midst of upheaval.

From this perspective, it is interesting to note how the festive rites of Christmas were connected to the season's reputation as a time for reading and sharing stories. This ritual act of storytelling was established within a domestic realm that was being widely experienced as a space outside of ordinary time. Christmas represented both a time for ritual performance, and an annual transition or "liminal threshold" in the year. In the

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[119] Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 209.
[120] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 362.
[121] Gillis, "Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life," 215.
[122] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 99.

framed tales of the fireside genre, we see the reader being invited to join an imaginary fireside group *Round the Fire* or 'by the Christmas Fire,' obliging them to cross an imaginary threshold and situate themselves beside a fictive fireplace. Likewise, the fireside's symbolic power as a site for domestic warmth, unity, ritual storytelling and incorporation can be seen in Irving's *Sketch Book*, where he observes how 'the cheerful fire glanced its rays through the lattice, inviting the passenger to raise the latch, and join the gossip knot' (160). It is particularly interesting that Irving describes the guest as a 'passenger' in these lines, as this is a term primarily used by theorists to refer to an individual in the midst of a liminal process. Turner suggests that liminality generates rituals,[123] and if the ritual of storytelling represented a brief moment of familiar continuity in the midst of transition, then the symbolism of the Christmas fireside as a site for consumption is invested with similar values. In ritual, 'a moment in time is selected and remarked upon',[124] and as we will see below, the moments of time selected and remarked upon in Christmas storytelling are frequently connected to liminal moments of personal transition.

4.3 Christmas and Liminal Time: *Round the Fire* (1856)

In 1856 Elizabeth Sheppard's *Round the Fire: Six Stories* was published, a collection of short stories, or fireside tales, that typified this newly formed genre of Christmas literature. A reviewer for *The Athenaeum* termed Sheppard's stories 'a good windfall from the Christmas-tree',[125] while Richard Hold Hutton and Walter Bagehot recommended *Round the Fire* under 'Recent Works Suitable for Book-Societies'.[126] Sheppard's collection was advertised widely in the press, featuring in *The Critic*, *The Literary Gazette*, *Saturday Review* and the *Examiner* between 1856-7. The volume was also suggested under *The*

[123] Ibid., 116.
[124] Myerhoff, "We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page," 200.
[125] "Round the Fire: Six Stories," *The Athenaeum* 1521 (December 20, 1856): 1570.
[126] "Recent Works Suitable for Book-Societies," *The National Review* 4, no. 7 (January 1857): 238.

Athenaeum's selection of 'Books suitable for Christmas and New Year Gifts' in 1864, eight years after its initial publication. In Sheppard's collection, six girls gather around an imaginary fireside at Christmas time to exchange stories about dramatic events that have occurred in their lives. Unlike the Christmas fairy tales, and later ghost stories, no supernatural spirits appear in this collection. Instead, realism is reinforced by the narrative structure, as Sheppard's fireside tales are presented as "real" stories which *did* happen to the storyteller. With this in mind, the festive fireside is represented as an arena for ritual storytelling and identity formation. The liminal space-time of Christmas provides the potential for transition and offers an opportunity to realign the self and recount the changes over time that have shaped life into its present form. There is a sense of mature and sometimes philosophical reflection in these tales, a tone that displaces the earlier ludic energies of the fireside as a space for fun, frolics and lively entertainment which we find in Irving's *Sketch Book* and Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*. As a liminal time, Christmas takes on a different rhythm. The creative space beside the fire offers a comfortable and reassuring sense of safety in the present moment, where the narrators feel secure enough to unfold their tales. The fireside also provides a contextual point to return to after the narratives have ended, which creates continuity between the stories. In sharing the singular fire, each story contributes to the fabric of memories and experiences that are being resurrected from the past and, in keeping with the symbolic connotations of the Christmas fire examined earlier in this study, Sheppard's *Round the Fire* stories sketch an intimate and empathetic community.

Significantly, Christmas *is* referred to in the majority of Sheppard's stories. While it may not always be the main focus, seasonal references are often used to punctuate the tales and provide some frame of temporal reference within the narrative itself. For example, in Cecile's story 'Baby's Blue Shoes,' the blue shoes of the title are given to Cecile's baby brother as a Christmas gift from their grandmother. Similarly, in Effie's

Story 'The Midsummer Tree,' Effie describes how her acquaintance Lady Lucy 'had been in Germany the Christmas before, and had seen those pretty fir-trees they light up with small tapers at Christmas, and which they hang with pretty things, while they put presents for everyone under the shade of the tree'.[127] Sheppard uses Christmas allusions to provide contextual reference points and create consistency within her frame of festive storytelling, and we repeatedly see the consciousness of Christmas time coming to the surface of the individual narratives. Elizabeth Ermath notes the importance of this technique in realistic narratives, as it serves to heighten the 'intimacy between time and consciousness'.[128] This intimacy implies that individual identity is largely shaped by one's consciousness of temporality at any given period of life. Moreover, time and consciousness are key themes in *Round the Fire*, as Sheppard demonstrates how the past events detailed in the girls' stories have enabled the storytellers to grow and mature.

In order to see the liminal concerns within Sheppard's text, it is essential to consider liminal theory and its relevance to both Victorian literature and the Christmas moment. 'Liminality' derives from the Latin term *limen*, meaning 'threshold,' and is most commonly associated with the theory of anthropologist Victor Turner. Turner describes the liminal moment as being 'betwixt and between' two states: it is a 'necessarily ambiguous' space 'expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions'.[129] Joseph Campbell has also considered how the liminal moment represents 'an interval' in time,[130] and Gregory Mobley has argued that it is a term used for ambiguous 'intermediate states'.[131] According to Turner, liminality is connected to rites, or rituals, and as we have seen, one form of enacted Christmas 'ritual' is the festive act of storytelling. The importance of ritual in liminal theory has been considered by Campbell,

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[127] Elizabeth Sara Sheppard, *Round the Fire: Six Stories* (London: Smith, Elder, 1856), 117. All further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.
[128] Elizabeth Deeds Ermath, *Realism and Consensus: Time, Space and Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 7.
[129] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 81.
[130] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana, 1993), 10.
[131] Gregory Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 28.

who argues that 'enacted rituals' are an essential feature of the liminal interval in time as they prepare the individual for the new phase they are about to enter.[132] Similarly, Turner explains that 'rites' present us with 'a "moment in and out of time", and in and out of secular social structure'.[133] It is here in particular that the overlap between Christmas, literature, and liminality becomes visible, as both Christmas time and literary time provide the individual with a release from reality and a brief respite from the pressures of 'secular' time. The temporal implications of liminal theory have also been acknowledged by Chris Jenks, who notes that liminality is concerned with 'the intricacies of the transitional, non-ordered, space/time outside of conventional space/time',[134] an observation that could also be applied to Christmas as a moment of transition, outside of conventional time. Furthermore, Turner's suggestion that liminality offers society the opportunity for 'periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nation and culture'[135] coalesces with the frequent representation of Christmas as 'a time [...] when the rules that governed people's public behavior were momentarily abandoned';[136] a Carnival time of misrule where transgression was briefly permitted before ordinary temporality resumed.

A number of Christmas scholars have casually referred to the liminal status of seasonal traditions. Moore refers to the 'liminal space of Christmas' as a means through which an individual could 'reconnect emotionally with their homeplace identity'.[137] Similarly, Gillis defines the Victorian Christmas as 'something special – time out of time – liminal time which served important cultural purposes'.[138] The nineteenth-century Christmas was all of these things: a momentary pause, a point to reconnect with home and identity, and a time for cultural reflection; yet, it was also important in a temporal sense, as

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[132] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 10.
[133] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 81.
[134] Chris Jenks, *Transgressions* (London: Routledge, 2003), 43.
[135] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 116.
[136] Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, x.
[137] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 78.
[138] Gillis, "Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life," 227.

a literal moment of transition within the year. Kathleen Stokker identifies this characteristic by observing how Christmas comes 'at the seam of the year' and is a 'ritual time of transition or liminality'.[139] Stationed as a pinnacle moment in time, Christmas offers a pause from the rush of everyday life, as noted by Moore; however, the winter festival at the end of the calendar year is also a space for reflection on the months that have passed. Positioned at the edge of a new beginning, we can clearly see how Christmas may often be experienced a liminal hinge between past and future. The 'critical moments of transition'[140] that Turner associates with liminality and Stokker links to the temporal position of Christmas, are evident in the framing narrative of Sheppard's fireside collection. For the girls who share their stories, the fireside represents warmth, stability and security in midst of the Christmas moment of transition. From this safe domestic space, the individual feels secure enough to contemplate the mysteries of time and liminality that begin to frame their thoughts and curiosities. Liminal themes can also be detected in the stories told beside the Christmas fire. Below, I will examine how and why ritual storytelling is framed by the Christmas fireside in Sheppard's collection of stories, before moving on to consider the key theme of transition, and the significance of crossing thresholds in this work. Finally, I will explore the model of communitas that is incorporated into the story's frame, and attempt to clarify its relevance as a response to the liminal concerns that punctuate Sheppard's text.

The first chapter of Sheppard's *Round the Fire* begins with a contextual marker indicating that the gathered company 'are going to sit round the fire and tell stories' (1). There is no preface or introduction to identify the moral purpose of this collection of stories. Instead, the text is prefigured by a front-page illustration (Figure 16), showing six girls gathered around a hearth that has been festively adorned with holly and a Christmas tree.

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[139] Kathleen Stokker, *Keeping Christmas: Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land* (St. Paul MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000), 329.
[140] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 94.



Figure 16. Front-page illustration *Round the Fire: Six Stories* (1856)

By situating her narrators around an imaginary fire it is clear that Sheppard is perpetuating the mid-century trend of representing the hearth as a space where both time and narratives are navigated. The narrative frame is an important context for each of the stories in the collection. As noted earlier, the framing fireside is a reassuring place for the narrators as it symbolises security, comfort and safety in the present moment. This context becomes even more significant in Sheppard's collection as these "fireside themes" are rarely found in the stories themselves, which often deal with threats to the safety and security of the storyteller's home and the storyteller herself.

Ruth opens her story 'Christmas Candles' by reflecting on the scene before her:

> I sit before the bright fire and see it sparkle on the fender, and the little rainbows in the glass drops on the mantle-shelf, and the piano, and the red

> curtains, and the dishes of fruit and sweetmeats on the table, and [...] see your happy faces and hear your pleasant stories (147).

Clearly, Sheppard uses this technique to detail the *mise en scène* of the fireside frame to the reader. Domestic comfort and festive cheer characterise the room where the girls are sitting, and there is a sense of safety within the community of 'happy faces.' Surrounded by these faces and hearing 'pleasant stories,' the comfort of the fireside setting works as an effective frame for these stories, as it represents a secure domestic space to which both the reader and narrator return after each story has ended. Yet despite the insistence on the pleasant and happy context, there are disturbing undertones in the front-page illustration of the fireside scene. The six figures look tiny in front of the gigantic blazing fire, and the girl who sits on the chair appears to be looking nervously at the flames. If the fireside does represent a space where time is navigated, the illustration suggests that there is something both frightening and overwhelming about it. Interestingly, there is only one child who does not have her back to the hearth and this figure, who is reclining on the floor and looking directly into the fire, is strangely shrouded in darkness and looks almost spectral at first glance. While Sheppard refers to the fireside frame of the stories using language which dwells on the brightness of the fire and the comfort of the room, the illustration is unsettling and indicates that the stories that will be shared around the story have a mortal and temporal depth that is far more pronounced than the cheerful, superficial descriptions of the fireside initially suggest. Moore has noted that 'Christmas opened the door to the spiritual searching expected of a liminal season. It was a season out of time [...] time set apart to evaluate [...] sorrows'.[141] In Sheppard's collection we encounter Christmas as a time to evaluate past events and process personal development. With this in mind, the need to establish the fireside as a symbol of security and comfort that overarches and

[141] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 138.

encapsulates the vulnerable storytelling community becomes clear; yet, as the illustration implies, the liminal moment is also inescapably overwhelming and unnerving.

The six narratives Sheppard presents are personal autobiographies. In 'Our Nurse,' Katie tells a story about a new Nurse who comes to take care of her and her siblings after the death of their mother. The Nurse's devotion to her family is shown when their home catches fire and she rescues the children, almost sacrificing herself in the process. Cecile's story 'Baby's Blue Shoes' is set in her homeland of Switzerland, where she has a baby brother and a very intelligent dog. One afternoon both the dog and the baby disappear. All that can be found is one of the baby's blue shoes; then a sudden avalanche buries the house. Eventually it is revealed that the dog had sensed the avalanche and rescued the baby from danger, leaving one of its blue shoes behind to reassure Cecile's family that the baby was safe. The third story is narrated by Norah, who reflects on the experience of famine in Ireland. She tells the group about how her and her sisters organized a bazaar to raise money for the poor and how it was almost destroyed by a crowd of poor, hungry and angry men, before turning out to be a great success. The fourth story is Effie's 'The Midsummer Tree.' Here, Effie describes a rich girl named Lady Lucy whom she once met with her brother. Lucy is proud and idle when they meet her, and one day she defies her governess's orders and climbs out onto the terrace of her house. Dramatically, she is struck by lightening, falls from the terrace, and becomes dangerously ill. During her illness however, she transforms from being unkind and selfish into a loving and thoughtful child. Knowing that she is about to die, she invites hundreds of children to her home, where there is a huge Christmas tree and party for them, though it is midsummer. Mary narrates the next tale, and tells the group how she once heard a story from an old man who told her that there were mermaids in a dangerous cave near to where she lived. Despite her mother's orders not to venture to this place, Mary went to the cave and became trapped as the tide rose. The final story of this collection is Ruth's 'Christmas Candles.' This sad tale details how

Ruth's family dies due to poverty, and as an orphaned child she is forced to work for a cruel woman. On Christmas Day she wanders alone into the cold streets, and after falling in the snow is rescued by a kind family. The daughter of this family is dying, and she tells that Ruth that she is an answer to her prayer that God would send another child for her parents. As these brief descriptions highlight, each story in *Round the Fire* is intensely personal and highly sentimental. The fireside collection marks a visible shift from the earlier fairy tale genre of Christmas literature in its reflective maturity and use of personal exposition as its chief narrative form. Many of the stories in Sheppard's volume resemble the kinds of moral tales told to the young at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth century. In particular, *Round the Fire* formally echoes Maria Edgeworth's collections of short stories for young people published between 1801 and 1805. As in Sheppard's collection, Edgeworth's tales focus on a particular child who learns a moral lesson through their life experiences.

Likewise, in each of Sheppard's narratives the storyteller relates an event that has shaped their life to the rest of the group. Writing on the liminal process, Charles Taylor notes how the individual passes 'a period on the "threshold", undergoing trials and ordeals, before they step into the new identity'.[142] The imagery of crossing thresholds, and undergoing trails and ordeals of transition reappears throughout *Round the Fire*. Many of the stories begin with a change in the narrator's circumstances as they refer to an alteration that has taken place in their personal lives, a transition to which they are attempting to adapt. For Katie it is the death of her mother and the arrival of a new Nurse, for Cecile it is the addition of a baby brother to her small family, and for Norah the Famine dramatically alters her community. In *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner reveals that:

[142] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 48.

> all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*), and aggregation. The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual [...] from an earlier fixed point.[143]

In Ruth's story we see this process very clearly, as she details the changes in her life by measuring and comparing her situation from one Christmas to the next. In her first Christmas memory she recalls being held in her father's arms; by the next Christmas she has learned the names of objects in her father's shop; the following year she is able to help her parents prepare for Christmas; and in the next, she is able to read her Grandfather a story. These early Christmases mark personal growth and progression; however, they are soon disrupted by alterations to Ruth's family life. The subsequent years are not identified with forward motion and achievement, but loss and absence. Eventually, after all the members of her family have died, Ruth is left alone. The annual festival that she previously used to mark the passage of time becomes alien to her: 'I should not have known Christmas was so near, if I had not heard the children talk' (162).

Linking this narrative into Turner's 'rites of transition,' Ruth is 'detached' from her earlier 'fixed point' associated with family life. It is here that the transitional moment is reached in Ruth's story. The alienation from Christmas caused by the loss of family represents a trial of dislocation and personal isolation. Turner describes how 'during the intervening liminal period' the individual is 'ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state'.[144] We see this paralleled in Ruth's story during the interval between her mother's death and her aggregation into an adoptive family. The liminal period for Ruth is a time of painful solitude, as she tells us 'I had never been quite alone, in the cold too' (165). Furthermore, at certain points during this liminal period she doesn't seem to know herself: 'I felt ill and strange, and as if I could not walk' (166), becoming physically and emotionally disorientated: 'I did not know where

[143] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 94.
[144] Ibid.

I was' (167). The most distressing episode of Ruth's story occurs as she goes out alone into the night to find her mother's grave and lie beside it, but finds the gate to the churchyard locked and she gets lost in the snow. The imagery of the threshold is interesting to consider in this scene. Ruth leaves the house of the cruel woman she has been working for to go to the churchyard, and Sheppard draws attention to the act of her crossing this threshold, as she: 'went out, locking the door, and carrying the key' (166). Approaching the churchyard, Ruth finds another threshold but she is unable to cross it as 'there were no prayers that evening and the gate was locked' (166). If Ruth had crossed this threshold, she would have lain beside her mother's grave and presumably died in the cold; but instead, the third threshold of this episode represents her salvation. As she wanders outside into 'a wide street' she falls down into the snow, where a young, dying girl called Alice sees her from a window and begs her mother 'go and bring her in! Go and bring her in' (171) and 'almost in a moment' (167) a door opens, the mother picks Ruth up from the ground and takes her across her threshold and into her house: 'she carried me up-stairs. Oh how warm, and bright, and lovely the house looked to me!' (168).

In a way, the story ends where it begins, with Ruth reflecting on the comfort and security of the domestic space, after her experience of homelessness and isolation. Though Alice died 'she begged her papa and mama to keep me, and they did; and I know they always will' (172), representing the third stage of Turner's 'rites of transition,' where the individual 'is in a stable state once more'.[145] The fireside context in which Ruth's story is told reminds the reader that Christmas can be both a point of stability and comfort in changing times, and a liminal zone of transition. It is particularly interesting to note that when Ruth is spending her first Christmas as an orphan alone in the cruel woman's house, the fire she sits beside dwindles out: 'I suddenly felt very cold indeed, and I looked up. The fire was out, though the cinders were not burned through; I had put on too many at once.

[145] Ibid.

There was no wood to be found, and the matches were locked up too' (165). Significantly, it is the absence of a fire that ultimately convinces Ruth to leave the house. She tells the girls, 'I could no more bear it. The cold made me think I was going to die. So I thought [...] very suddenly that I would go and die on the grass in the church-yard where my mother lay' (166). In this instance the Christmas fireside is not a point of stability and comfort, instead it encourages Ruth to leave the fireless and comfortless house. The new home that she is adopted into at the end of the narrative however, reinstates the fireside emphasis on unity and stability. It is a house where 'nearly all the [...] windows down low in the areas shone red and bright with a big fire inside' (167), and the first thing that happens to Ruth when she is taken into this space is that she is 'put down in a chair in before the fire' (168).

As Ruth's story demonstrates, moments of transition are often connected to the symbolic significance of crossing a threshold. This imagery is of particular significance in Sheppard's *Round the Fire*, as the threshold to the domestic space was something celebrated and venerated by the Victorians. Gillis claims that there was a 'mid-century emphasis on boundaries and the symbolic uses of yards and gardens [...] The threshold was now clearly marked by the whitened step and polished door'[146] and he later reveals that 'carrying the bride over the threshold was a rite invented by the Victorians'.[147] By marking the threshold, and placing an emphasis on its symbolic value, the Victorians accentuated the important distinction between the warm, homely, domestic space and the cold outside world, as explored in the first section of this study. In emphasising this distinction between the welcoming indoor space and the harsh external space, the fireside is itself a kind of threshold. As seen in Sheppard's stories, crossing a threshold during the liminal process of transition can either be associated with danger and drama, or with a rescue or escape from trouble. The transitional point in Katie's story is an interesting

[146] Gillis, "Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life," 221.
[147] Ibid., 226.

example, in which crossing the boundary of the home becomes a life-changing event. At the beginning of her story, Katie reveals 'we were very happy in our house, until mama died' (4), but as she goes on to describe the place where she lived, images of enclosure and stasis emerge: 'our house had no garden in front, only an iron railing, and not one tree. At the back of the house there was a square piece of gravel, and a smaller square piece of grass; and there was a high brick wall all round. But nothing would ever grow in that place' (4). The iron railing and high brick wall that encircle the house have become oppressive, and we are told that nothing can grow in the garden. This implies that the house has become a place where the children are similarly unable to grow without the homely presence of their nurturing mother, and also draws attention to the claustrophobia of the average home. Furthermore, the transitional phase of dealing with their mother's death is reflected by disorder within the interior space of the household. In the nursery there were 'plenty of puzzles and books, but the pieces of the puzzles were all mixed up' (5). Here, the representation of the home seems inconsistent with Victorian ideals regarding domesticity. Although the Nurse brings order to the home and is a beneficial, motherly influence on the children, the house remains enclosed by a high brick wall and iron railing.

From the opening description of the house and the grieving family within it, Sheppard seems to imply that a transition to a new space is needed, and the drama of the story occurs when this transition into a new home is enforced. Katie reveals how the house was accidentally set on fire, and describes the family's escape from their burning home. In this episode, a dangerous and dramatic crossing of the threshold takes place. When fire consumes the day nursery, the children's Nurse saves them by tying them up in a bed sheet and lowering them to the ground through a window. Katie recalls the moment when, attached to the bed sheets, the Nurse 'let us down very gently out of the open window. We felt ourselves swing very slowly in the dark, and soon we touched the ground' (24).

Suspended mid-air and feeling themselves 'swing very slowly in the dark'; the calmness of this liminal moment of passage is set against the blazing fire that consumes the house. The fire that destroys Katie's home also reminds us that the girls are supposedly listening to this story in front of a fire. As in the front-page illustration, the dangerous fire in Katie's story subtly suggests, once again, that there is something peculiar about the fireside that the girls are gathered around. The parallels between Katie's narrative and the storytelling context indicate that there is something unsettling about the liminal process. In the very act of sharing these stories with one another, the girls are crossing another significant milestone in their transition from children to young adults. Perhaps, therefore, the liminal moment is disturbing because it represents leaving childhood behind, just like ruins of the burned house that can no longer be inhabited. After her house has been destroyed, Katie explains that 'Papa took another house' (27), but the focus of the story seems to shift away from the burning of the home. Instead, Katie ends her tale with the relief that the family survived the fire together. In the face of death, she recognises that 'some of us might have been burned after all' (28) but they are saved by the dramatic act of crossing the threshold, a moment of transition. Jenks claims that 'transitions are all, always at some level, about death and rebirth',[148] and it is notable in this story, that the transition which takes place is one that deals at first with the death of a parent, but ends by celebrating life and togetherness. Through dramatic and destructive disorder, a new order and familial unity emerges.

As in Katie's story, in Effie's tale the liminal process represents danger at first, but is then followed by a life affirming shift in consciousness and a new maturity. In Effie's story, the moment when a threshold is crossed is perhaps the most dramatic example from the entire collection. In this instance, it is not the narrator who crosses the domestic boundary, but Lady Lucy. This occurs after Lucy disobeys her father's instructions, is

[148] Jenks, *Transgressions*, 43.

struck by lightening, and then falls from a terrace. Effie describes how Lady Lucy climbed up onto a high ledge and declared 'I am like a queen' (111), but she struggles to articulate what happened next:

> oh, how shall I describe it! At that instant one bright, very bright, flash of lightening shot out of the black cloud. It quite blinded me for one instant – then I heard a scream – I looked – I ran! Lady Lucy was tottering on the little square of stone. She tried to save herself; she stretched her hands. But it was no good: she fell! fell from all that great height to the ground, which was covered with close, hard gravel.
>
> I screamed dreadfully! (111)

The description of Lucy's fall seems to fit in with Jenks's claim that 'transitions [...] are frightening, dangerous and damaging'.[149] As in both Ruth and Katie's stories, the moment of transition and 'detachment of the individual [...] from an earlier fixed point',[150] is beyond their control. In Lucy's case, Effie notices that 'she tried to save herself [...] but it was no good.' Lucy is overpowered, and from this perspective it could be argued that she is forced to cross the threshold that she had mocked by her earlier recklessness and willing disobedience. After this event, Lucy enters a liminal stage of her life; however, this is a liminality that precedes death rather than social aggregation. Before she dies Lucy undergoes the personal transformation and growth characteristic of the liminal period; she becomes patient and kind, though 'always sick, and almost always in pain' (115). The process of her inward transition is made explicit when Effie asks her how she has become so patient despite the ordeal she has been through, and 'she always said that she was not patient at first; that she had been very angry with God, until, after thinking a long time, at nights when she could not sleep, something in her heart told her that it was to take the pride out of her she had that terrible fall' (115-6). The fall in Effie's story clearly echoes

[149] Ibid., 42.
[150] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 94.

the account of the fall in Genesis, and it could be argued that Lucy is aligned with Lucifer who also falls out of heaven because of pride.

As Gilead has suggested 'powerlessness [and] humility' are the typical conditions of a passenger in the midst of a liminal process.[151] During her sleepless nights, Lucy comes to an acceptance and understanding of what has happened to her. She is transformed into a gentle and warm child, and before her death she invites hundreds of children to come to a birthday feast, her birthday being midsummer. Though her birthday is at midsummer, she celebrates it with the imagery of Christmas. Believing that she will not live until Christmas, she has 'a Midsummer tree instead' (117), craving the imagery of the liminal time of Christmas to mark the temporal significance of both her birthday, and the day she will die. At the end of the story, Effie remembers hearing about Lucy's death: 'mama told us that Lady Lucy was gone – gone home, she said; for mama and papa call dying going home [...] her home is now in *Heaven*' (119-20). As a transitory crossing from the life to death, it is significant that Effie repeats her mother's metaphor of death as 'going home.' By describing heaven in this way, Sheppard affirms the Victorian belief that domesticity is blessed. This is further emphasised by Effie's own thoughts on the significance of the domestic fireside in the opening of the story. Here she explains her admiration for noble shepherds, who 'take the cold trembling lambs in their arms to the cottages, and let them lie in the ingle-nook. The ingle-nook is the warmest corner by the fire' (94). Not only does the imagery of Effie's description echo biblical references to Christ as the good shepherd who 'gives His life for the sheep',[152] and the Christmas nativity account of the coming of the shepherds to the infant Jesus, it also emphasises the significance of the fire as a safe refuge from the cold, outside world. In this way the story seems to offer a degree of conciliation to Victorian readers, by seizing upon the ideology of home and the cultural significance with which it had been invested at this time. Furthermore, from this

[151] Gilead, "Liminality, Anti-Liminality, and the Victorian Novel," 183.
[152] John 10:11 (King James Version).

perspective death becomes part of the liminal process of aggregation. Rather than representing a sudden and dramatic cessation of life, the notion of 'going home' implies that another, heavenly, domestic threshold has been crossed, and that the liminal process has in some way been fulfilled.

When Cecile experiences a liminal moment of transition at her Swiss home in 'Baby's Blue Shoes,' she is similarly able to acknowledge the change in her perspective. After an avalanche buries her home, she is trapped inside with her mother and their maid, cut off from the outside world and anxious for the safety of her father and baby brother. During this uncertain and isolated interval, Cecile experiences a dislocation from her usual life, as exemplified by her experience of time:

> Mama had her watch on, and I kept asking her what time it was every minute. How very, very long the time seemed, I cannot tell you. At last I took mama's watch out of her hand, and looked myself. I thought every minute was as long then as any hour had ever been before. The hand which showed the minutes seemed to crawl, crawl, crawl; and as for the hand which showed the hours, *that* seemed not to move at all [...] it seemed to me as if the time would not go on at all! (52-3)

In this liminal phase, time appears to lose its ordinary dimensions. The scene emphasises the subjective nature of time, as the moments measured by the watch do not match up with Cecile's experience of its duration. Indeed, Cecile becomes confused when the hands seem 'to crawl, crawl, crawl' or 'not move at all.' Eventually, when Cecile's father comes to their rescue, they are forced to exit the house from a crack in the roof. As in Katie's story, the crossing of the threshold is unconventional and dramatic: 'we all went up the ladder [...] How curious everything looked from the top of the house! The garden was still covered with snow, and so was the field, and so was the house too, except that little place in the roof where it had been cleared away' (58-9). Here, the transitional point represents

both escape and release for Cecile, however it simultaneously enables her to gain a new perspective of her home in light of the strange circumstances of the avalanche. Furthermore, the scene of reconciliation that follows is made all the more powerful by the separation that had preceded it, and the realisation that her baby brother 'must have been smothered to death directly' (61) if he had not been saved by the dog. As in Katie's story, the sense of relief and comfort at being safely reunited and together once more is the overarching impression left with the reader at this tale's close.

The symbolic significance of crossing thresholds in works that deal with liminal themes is attested to by Campbell, who observes that the individual moves past 'his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realization,' and 'as he crosses threshold after threshold' he comes to a 'realization transcending all experiences of form'.[153] The process of crossing boundaries and coming to realisations is of great significance in Sheppard's collection of tales. Each narrator seems to be aware of the significance of the story they tell, a narrative choice that in itself seems to confirm that these narratives address life-shaping periods of transition. The fireside frame thus acts as a shared space where meaningful life-experiences can be unravelled. This observation links in to one of Turner's comments on the liminal process, where he claims that the liminal group are 'reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life'.[154] In each of these stories we see how the events have shaped and changed the girls' lives and memories, endowing them with new perspectives and attitudes through which they seem to have emerged and matured from the transitory periods of their lives. For example, at the close of Norah's story 'The Little Bazaar,' which deals with the Irish Famine, there is a consciousness of the experience of emerging from a liminal time of deficiency. As the story draws to an end, Norah remembers 'how delightful it was, after the sickness was

[153] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 190.
[154] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 81.

gone, and when the new potatoes came' (91), focusing on the new growth that emerged after the Famine, a liminal period of trial and ordeal. She goes on to note the transformation she saw in her community after this time had ended: 'the trouble had done our people good – […] they worked better, and lived better, and enjoyed all the things of life better, because of the trouble they remembered, and which they will never forget' (91).

In another moral tale, 'The Miser's Cave,' we see a girl named Mary emerge from a period of detachment and isolation with a realisation of reality. The liminal period in this tale occurs when Mary becomes trapped alone in a sea cave with the ever-rising tide threatening her safety. She introduces this event by explaining that her tale has 'a happy end but a bad beginning; for it came out of my disobedience to my dear mama' (122). By framing her story in this way, referring to the beginning and ending, Mary seems to acknowledge the significance of the intervening, liminal period that she goes on to describe. For much of her childhood Mary's sea captain father was absent, and she implies throughout the story that she was drawn to the sea and cliffs because she missed him and would remember the stories he had told her when she was home. Storytelling in 'The Miser's Cave' however, becomes dangerous, particularly when it is associated with strange mythological creatures. Mary's adventure in the cave is brought about after she hears a fireside fairy tale told by an old man. This old man tells her about the Miser's Cave: 'if I looked along the rocks, I should see a corner where they left off, and there was nothing but water and sky […] round that corner, amongst the rocks, was the Miser's cave. It was a wonderful cave, he said' (132). The man goes on to tell her that a miser used to live in the cave so that he could collect treasure from the beach nearby, however he was also visited by a mermaid who would sing songs to him, and eventually the sound of her voice made him jump in the water and drown. The fairy tale becomes a real possibility for the young Mary when she recalls that the old man: 'believed there were treasures in the stone chest *now*; for who would have taken them away' (134). By ending with this temporal

immediacy, the old man's tale becomes dangerous, as he has implied that the little girl could discover its truth. Mary is used to hearing stories from her father about the real dangers at sea, and reveals that she had asked the old man 'to tell me a story; for I thought he knew about the dangers at sea, as well as papa. But he had not been a sailor, and had taken no long voyages' (132). While her father's stories were based in reality, emphasising the real dangers of life at sea, the old man's tales stress the magical possibilities of treasure, and the only suggestion of danger is the attractive figure of the singing mermaid. The distinction between the truth represented by her father's stories and the make-believe of the old man is brought into focus when Mary asks the old man's son, Mat, about the wonderful story she heard, but 'he said his father wandered when he talked' and like the young Mary, he 'did not know how to divide true stories from made-up stories' (135). In an attempt to make Mary grasp reality, Mat tells her 'there were no such things as mermaids [...] "Ask your brave papa, miss, when he comes home"' (135). Mary however, chooses to believe that her father has withheld the truth from her, wilfully selecting the fantasy of the old man over the reality of her father.

Sheppard uses Mary's story to remind her audience that these are realist tales, and not supernatural narratives. The fireside frame in *Round the Fire* is a space where the girls share tales from their past in order to make sense of reality. Significantly, Sheppard's model of fireside storytelling rejects the escapism and fantasy usually associated with supernatural fairy tales. The realism of *Round the Fire* is made explicit through the words of Mat, who reminds Mary that 'fancies be very pretty things, but they *be* only fancies' (135). Mat also warns Mary that the sea has risen higher and higher each year in that part of the rocks, and she should never go there because she might be drowned by the tide. The tension between the old man's fanciful tale and the reality represented by Mat is highlighted as Mary explains, 'I was very angry with Mat, because he did not believe the story which I wished to believe,' before emerging from her story to address the other girls

and the reader, 'did you never wish to believe in fairies, after reading a fairy tale? I know you have' (136). This direct question stresses the danger of fairy tales for young audiences and is a typical early-nineteenth century trope. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Christmas fairy tale at this time often sought to emphasise its own illusory quality to naïve young readers by self-consciously drawing attention to its unreality, and in the vast majority of cases explicitly returning the reader to reality at the end of the story. It is significant to note that Mary first encounters the old man who tells her the story 'sitting by a very little fire into which he was staring' (131). As noted earlier, in much Christmas literature the size of a character's fire directly corresponds to their inward character. By describing the old man as keeping 'a very little fire' Sheppard similarly intimates that he should not be trusted.

When Mary does venture to the Miser's Cave, after being explicitly forbidden to go there by her Mother, the reader sees how she is separated and detached from the rest of society: 'there were crowds of children on the beach, and crowds of fishermen, and their wives with babies in their arms [...] but I did not stay to see them' (138). Venturing out alone, and becoming detached from the rest of the community marks the liminal stage of Mary's tale, further accentuated as she arrives alone at the Miser's Cave just as 'the sun was dipping into the sea' (139), a natural moment of liminal transition. When she enters the cave, however, Mary is 'disappointed, indeed' (139), and as she realises she is trapped and becomes afraid, her isolation and fear of death act as a moment of transition in the narrative. Mary realises her foolishness in believing the fairy story, remembering that there were 'no little white fairy boats for me now!' (141) and reflects on her life: 'in the midst of my screams I remembered all that had ever happened to me. My being a little child; all papa's visits; mama's loneliness when he went; our pleasure when he came back; the garden, and every flower in it; the rooms, and all the furniture' (142). It is interesting in this passage that her thoughts take her back to the comfort of the domestic realm. She

remembers, with longing, the rooms and the furniture of her home, and the safety it symbolises. Campbell stresses the importance of the move away from fairy tale mentalities in realist literature: 'it is a pleasant haven of escape, but the fairy tale of happiness ever after cannot be taken seriously; it belongs to the never-never land of childhood, which is protected from the realities that will become terribly known soon enough'.[155] At the end of Mary's story it is clear that she has realised the danger of make-believe during her liminal isolation in the Miser's Cave, as she emphasises the moment when she was told 'the *true story* of my being saved' (144). The fireside context where Mary now sits with a group of other girls and shares her "real" story is thus represented as a far more wholesome space than the 'very little fire' where she once sat alone with the old man and learned about the make-believe mermaids. Viewing Mary's story within the collection of *Round the Fire* narratives, it is evident that Sheppard seeks to accentuate individual growth and mark the transition from childlike perspectives into maturity in this tale; a move figured as the transition from fairy tale to realist text and representative of themes that we have seen repeatedly emerging in this volume.

As in Mary's story, realism characterises Sheppard's text and is attested to in each of the stories. The fireside frame of communal storytelling brings the narrative choices of each individual into sharper focus. In 'The Storyteller,' Walter Benjamin writes, 'traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they have learned what is to follow',[156] and in *Round the Fire* the narratives usually open by establishing the time when the life-shaping event took place. Katie reveals that she was five years old at the time of her story, however we can deduce from some of the information she provides, that she is now eleven. Norah tells us at the opening of her story 'The Little Bazaar': 'I was much smaller and younger then; for I am ten now, and it

[155] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 28.
[156] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*, ed. Dorothy J. Hale (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 367.

was six years ago. Yet, though it happened so long a time past, I remember it quite as well as my very last birthday' (63). The consciousness of time passing and the girls' awareness that they have changed since the narrative events took place is also implied through retrospective comments that demonstrate how their perspectives have altered. Mary explains in her story that she used to speak rudely to Mat when he would work in the garden for her Mother. After describing how she would call him names, she admits, 'I think now that it was very mean of me' (131). Similarly, Katie describes how her Nurse would encourage her to improve her learning so that she could sit with her widowed father at dinner, 'and converse with him about the things that clever gentlemen talk of,' before revealing 'I am not ready yet; though I shall soon be' (11).

By drawing the tale back into the present moment, the girls juxtapose their previous self with their present self, illustrating how their past has enabled them to mature. Writing on the premises of realism, Ermath explains:

> one must step back from particulars in order to grasp them [...] The implication of realist technique is that proper distance will enable the subjective spectator or the subjective consciousness to see the multiple viewpoints and so to find the form of the whole in what looks from a closer vantage point like a discontinuous array of specific cases.[157]

The frame tale of *Round the Fire* provides this 'step back from particulars' as the girls regress in the retelling of their tales, selecting key events and shaping the narration of their stories from a 'proper distance.' Moreover, we see the girls themselves becoming keen to 'find the form of the whole' that interlinks their individual narratives. At numerous moments within *Round the Fire*, the girls find points of comparison and contrast within their tales. Norah opens her tale by admitting, 'I have never been in a house on fire, like Katie, nor under the snow in a house, like Cecile; but I have been in the midst of

[157] Ermath, *Realism and Consensus*, 35.

something quite as terrible, though perhaps sadder, and I'm sure slower than either the fire or the avalanche – a Famine' (63). And later in the story she compares her experience with a scene described in an earlier tale: 'I heard a noise. I think it must have been something like the noise Katie heard in the fire' (83). Seeing the similarities and highlighting the differences that distinguish her tale from the earlier accounts, Norah begins to find form and search for patterns among the stories told. This can also been seen in Ruth's story, where she opens with, 'I liked all your stories very much. My story will be only a little like one of them' (147), and the Scottish Effie similarly begins by comparing her homeland with that of Cecile's native Switzerland, 'where the deep glens are, the snow falls as deep in some parts of Cecile's land' (93). These inter-textual references enable Sheppard to craft a believable frame for the stories, whilst implying that the audience should seek out similar points of connection between the stories as they read. Writing on the art of storytelling, Barbara Benjamin suggests that, 'through our stories, we can see who we have been and envision who we may become. We can remind each other of where we have come from and we can join with others to determine where we are going'.[158] The space around the fireside therefore, is charged with temporal significance, and as we will see below, the communal act of joining with others 'to determine where we are going' links into Turner's model of post-liminal communitas.

The concept of communitas provides a point of connection between the Christmas fireside and temporal liminality, as it refers to an unstructured community where individuals are equal.[159] As observed in the first section of this chapter, gathering together at Christmas was of special significance for the Victorians, and a framing group dynamic is also crucial to Sheppard's collection of stories. In *The Ritual Process* (1969), Turner refers to a post-liminal sense of 'communitas' to describe the communal bond forged from the emotional upheaval associated with liminal transition. When the individual passes through

[158] Barbara Benjamin, "The Case Study: Storytelling in the Industrial Age and Beyond," *On the Horizon* 14, no. 4 (2006): 163.
[159] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96.

a period of transition the process is accompanied by a special kind of togetherness. Taylor defines communitas as:

> the intuition we all share that, beyond the way we relate to each other through our diversified coded roles, we also are a community of many-sided human beings, fundamentally equal, who are associated together. It is this underlying community which breaks out in moments of reversal or transgression [....] the draw to communitas can go way beyond the boundaries of our society. It can be activated by the sense that we are all human beings, equal, that we belong together.[160]

Fundamental equality, the disruption of ordinary social classification, and the intuitive sense of belonging together form the essence of communitas. However, the notion of communitas as an underlying community is particularly interesting, as it seems to imply that this ideal social model is omnipresent, but only becomes visible at certain moments of transition, as, or after, the liminal threshold has been crossed.

A need for the form of togetherness expressed by communitas is closely connected to the nineteenth-century emphasis on home, and the fireside community. As we have seen, the storytelling circle of Sheppard's *Round the Fire* can be used as a prime example of the social model that, Turner argues, emerges from liminality. Turner suggests that the individual needs time apart from their usual way of life, in order to adjust to change. During this temporal 'limbo'[161] members of a group become fundamentally equal, they are all participants in the process of transition, and the unity of communitas helps them to form the foundations for their future phase. Turner notes that communitas emerges, alongside liminality 'at certain life crises, such as adolescence',[162] and in *Round the Fire* we encounter six young girls reflecting on their short lives. Sheppard's emphasis on personal growth and development in the tales implies that they are in another transitory state: the

[160] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 49.
[161] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 97.
[162] Ibid., 103.

process of developing from childish girls into mature young women. The adolescent moment is particularly significant in literature, and especially so in first person narratives like Sheppard's, as it generates discussions about selfhood and identity in the midst of human change. In *New Maladies of the Soul* (2005), Julia Kristeva writes about adolescence as a liminal time of maturation, and in her analysis of the adolescent novel she observes 'a psychic reorganization of the individual' suggesting that after the 'stabilization of subject identity, adolescents begin to question their identifications, as well as their capacities to speak and to symbolize'.[163] The transitional moment represented by the adolescent's unstable sense of identity and identification elevates the importance of the group structure, and makes the similarities and differences that the girls observe between themselves all the more significant.

Turner claims that the 'generic social bond' we find in communitas 'in some cases transcend[s] tribal or national boundaries',[164] and the reader of Sheppard's volume is frequently made aware of the national diversity of the storytelling group. Katie and Ruth may be English, but Cecile is Swiss, Norah is Irish, Effie is Scottish and Mary from a 'little island near England' (121). Gathered around the Christmas fireside however, they represent the communitas model of being 'together as equal human beings'.[165] The equality at the heart of communitas is essential for the ritual of storytelling beside the festive hearth, as it encourages the individuals to freely express themselves. As Taylor notes, communitas 'sets free our spontaneity and creativity',[166] and is vitally important as a literary foundation as 'we have a more intense sense of the unity of our story, because now we're sharing it'.[167] Furthermore, Glancy notes that the act of telling tales beside the fire was significant as it 'provide[d] a vital release for the teller' only 'made possible through

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[163] Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 136.
[164] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 103.
[165] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 469.
[166] Ibid., 50.
[167] Ibid., 715.

the relationship of narrator and listener, writer and reader'.[168] These comments on communitas suggest that it fulfils the need for togetherness during moments of transition. In emphasising equality, communitas transcends conventional social boundaries, generating creativity and enabling the storyteller to put their own tale into perspective as they share it. As the stories of *Round the Fire* demonstrate, liminal transition is commonly preceded by a period where the individual is isolated, threatened by danger, or detached from their familiar way of life. Mobley summarises the liminal process as 'separation, transition, and incorporation',[169] and it is this final 'incorporation' that is represented by the communitas of the festive fireside, encircling and contextualising the individual narratives.

While reading these fireside tales, both the reader and narrator are aware that the Christmas hearth is a temporary space, a liminal pause in itself, bracketed on either side by temporal transitions. After the stories have been exchanged the fire will be extinguished, and the company will part ways until they gather beside the hearth again, next Christmas. Although the Christmas fireside is associated with transition, it simultaneously offers comfort and reassurance. As the readers came to the end of one story, another would begin; and as one Christmas drew to a close, the annual fireside ritual was a welcome reminder that another Christmas would soon follow. In the same way, the yule log tradition marked both seasonal change and temporal continuity. The fire celebrated the return of the sun and the end of another dark winter, but the custom of using the previous year's brand to light the annual fire also connected each year to the one that had preceded it. Thus the custom of lighting a festive fire implies progress while simultaneously gesturing towards the significance of the past. It is in the reflective space beside the fire that the liminal nature of the Christmas moment comes into sharper focus. As the *Illustrated London News* had aptly

[168] Glancy, "Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes," 72.
[169] Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero*, 28.

noted in 1843, Christmas was a time to both look 'back upon what is buried [and] forward upon what is to spring forth'.[170]

[170] "The Old Year and the New," *Illustrated London News* 3, no. 86 (December 30, 1843): 417.

Conclusion: "The Inexhaustibility of the Subject of Christmas"

"I never can understand this business of Christmas Books," said the Professor of Christmas Literature. "There is a mystery in it."
"You!" cried the Christmas Bookseller. "Not know your own subject!"
"That is the end of all knowledge, good-man-Bookseller," replied the Professor of Christmas Literature. "All that can be known and understood of any subject deepens the mystery."

"The Mystery of Christmas Books," *The Speaker* 18 (November 26, 1898), 645.

As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth century, Christmas remained a hugely profitable market for booksellers. But as the Professor of Christmas Literature expresses in this sketch for *The Speaker*, there was an inherent mystery in the continuing appeal of the Christmas book. Indeed the Bookseller admits to the Professor, 'the mystery to me is how they sell at all,' before pointing to a shelf where 'you see; the same dogged stuff, the same dogged writers; big, closely printed books with plenty of pictures. [...] Everyone of these tells more or less the same story; they are written, published, illustrated and sold; it has become an established custom to do so'.[1] He admits that the only reason he still stocks these festive books is because 'I have to sell what my customers buy'.[2] Believing that it is now the ritual of buying Christmas books that appeals to his customers, rather than the content of the books themselves, the Bookseller expresses doubt that Christmas literature is even read at all. Outraged at his friend's skepticism, the Professor argues that the Christmas book is still relevant in the 1890s: 'I can [...] assure you that these books are read. Ask at any free lending library, and you will see'.[3]

The tension between the business of seasonal bookselling and the literary value of Christmas writing was a concern for authors and reviewers of Christmas print as early as 1850. One reviewer of Thackeray's fourth Christmas book, *The Kickleburys on the Rhine*, confronted Christmas writers, accusing them of choosing to write for Christmas because of

[1] "The Mystery of Christmas Books," *The Speaker* 18 (November 26, 1898), 645.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

financial and commercial pressures rather than their inherent attraction to the season. This writer for the *Times* highlighted the money-making schemes of festive authors, claiming 'there is another motive for these productions [...] which betrays itself, in the quality of the work, as the principal incentive. Oh, that any muse should be set upon a high stool to cast up accounts and balance a ledger!'[4] If, as the reviewer argues, nineteenth-century Christmas writers wrote merely for the purpose of cashing in on seasonal book buying, it could be argued that these Christmas books are nothing but mere commodities, relics of a booming festive marketplace that contain little worth analyzing between their covers. Indeed, the *Times* article affirms that 'we should [...] little think of taking these compositions as examples of the merits of their authors'.[5] Arguably, the majority of nineteenth-century writers were well aware of the lucrative returns of publishing for the seasonal market, but dismissing festive literature as little more than a commercial novelty only over-simplifies the genre, and fails to take into consideration many Christmas works that are rich sources for analysis, as this thesis has endeavored to prove.

Correspondingly, Christmas writing has occupied a peripheral position in much nineteenth-century literary scholarship to date. Texts dating from the first half of the century, and particularly any pre-Victorian Christmas works, have largely been left unwrapped and under the Christmas tree by modern critics. Although, quite rightly, there is a valuable body of work on Charles Dickens's Christmas books, less-familiar writers such as Thomas Hervey and Elizabeth Sara Sheppard have all but disappeared from the Christmas consciousness. And while scholars frequently examine the works of Alfred Tennyson, Washington Irving and Thackeray, the critical writing on these authors rarely considers the significance of Christmas in their works. Tara Moore does briefly refer to some of these well-known and lesser-known writers in *Victorian Christmas in Print*, but a sustained analysis of the literature itself has not yet been the subject of any critical volume.

[4] "The Kickleburys on the Rhine," *The Times*, January 3, 1851.
[5] Ibid.

A close analysis of Christmas writing has major implications for the genre, as it uncovers how festive print was interacting and engaging with the broader concerns and preoccupations of the century. The social and cultural commentary that is found within Christmas print has, until now, largely gone unnoticed by scholars. It has been my concern to make a case for the study of Christmas literature and demonstrate that much festive writing is acutely reflective and consistently offers insight into the wider concerns of the period. By repositioning Christmas texts and considering them as a primary, rather than a peripheral, source of analysis, I have argued that the genre can enhance our understanding of the evolution of the nineteenth-century celebration. More specifically, it has been my intention to reveal precisely how seasonal writing from the period both highlights and responds to the complex consideration of temporality that was simultaneously being questioned by many writers and thinkers of the time. Widely read and hugely instrumental in transforming the publishing world, nineteenth-century Christmas writing deserves far more attention than it has hitherto been given.

In order to engage thoroughly with these Christmas texts and achieve an adequate depth of critical analysis, it has been necessary to limit the scope of this study to a few select works and a relatively narrow time frame. Nonetheless, the years 1819-1857 formed a crucial period in the foundation and development of Christmas writing, and the texts chosen for analysis in this thesis were widely read, reviewed and advertised in nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines. When it comes to further avenues for the study of nineteenth-century literature the subject of Christmas is, as Leigh Hunt aptly suggested in 1840, 'inexhaustible'.[6] Many of the festive sub-genres explored in the chapters of this thesis could easily be extended into full-length studies of their own. In particular, the overwhelming volume of writing on 'old Christmas' in the nineteenth-century periodical press deserves far more attention than the limitations of this thesis have permitted. There is

[6] Hunt, "Inexhaustibility of the Subject of Christmas," 78.

also a vast amount of periodical writing referencing the Christmas fireside, which surpassed the thematic focus of Chapter Four. The juxtaposing and often contradictory notions of the Christmas fireside as both a sanctified space, which protects a family from evil spirits, and the ideal place to share ghost stories, would certainly be a fascinating and fruitful line of research.

Beginning this project, it had been my intention to examine the Christmas literature beyond Dickens. While this has been possible to some extent, escaping the monumental influence of Dickens's Christmas writing is, as Moore has already discovered, 'impossible'.[7] This thesis analyses only three of Dickens's Christmas texts in depth: the Christmas chapter of *Pickwick Papers*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Cricket on the Hearth*. It would be possible to write an entire thesis on Christmas and time in Dickens's writing alone, but since it was my intention to draw together a broader range of Christmas print I have limited my analysis of Dickens, although his remarkable influence can be seen in each chapter of the study. Of course, the writings of Dickens are the best known Christmas works from the nineteenth century, and for this reason they have already received a great deal of scholarly investigation. Yet there remain a number of Dickens's festive texts that have been neglected in favour of the *Carol*. In examining the representation of Christmas and time in *Pickwick* and Dickens's third Christmas book, *Cricket*, I have taken small steps to give these overshadowed seasonal texts some of the consideration they deserve. But I have also been guilty of only fleetingly referring to other Dickens works, such as *The Chimes*, *The Haunted Man* and *The Battle of Life*, in order to devote a chapter of this thesis to the *Carol*. There remains much work to be done in the field of Dickens's lesser-known Christmas writing. An exploration of his contributions to the seasonal numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* would also be a significant future project that has, thus far, been sidelined by the overwhelming popularity of the *Carol*.

[7] Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print*, 143.

There are a number of different directions that future investigations into nineteenth-century Christmas writing could take, but this thesis also paves the way for further research that expands upon Christmas and temporality. Extending the study chronologically, it would be interesting to question whether the same temporal concerns continue to permeate Christmas writing during the second half of the nineteenth century, and even into the twentieth century. Allowing this chronological expansion would also demand an investigation of the ghost story. Jarlath Killeen has already underscored the centrality of time in this genre, claiming that 'the cultural anxiety over time [...] is also evident in the ghost story. The ghost, after all, represented a breach in historical progression: in a stark reproach to the Victorian investment in notions of linearity and progress, the ghost is a manifestation of the "past-in-the-present"'.[8] Representing the past, present and yet to come, the three spirits of the *Carol* are among the first ghosts to voice the connection between Christmas and the human experience of time. Examining the festive legacy of Dickens's three spirits, an investigation into the Christmas ghost genre of the second half of the century would overlap with a number of themes already highlighted in this thesis, such as the nineteenth-century fascination with time past, representations of supernatural time, and the ghost's lingering association with the domestic fireside.

Expanding the study geographically, an examination of the bourgeoning market of nineteenth-century American Christmas writing would also be a productive avenue for research. Strangely, very little has been written about American Christmas literature. Nissenbaum is one of only a handful of critics to briefly explore Christmas reading trends in this part of the world, and even he is rather distracted by the *Carol*. In *The Battle for Christmas* he argues that festive reading in nineteenth-century America was being encouraged as an alternative to misrule from the 1830s onwards: it was an activity that 'posed no social risk' and 'even promised harmless amusement along with cultural

[8] Killeen, *Gothic Literature*, 129.

enhancement'.[9] It would be very interesting to investigate whether the same temporal concerns that we find in British Christmas writing from the nineteenth century also appear in the material published for Christmas on the other side of the Atlantic.

The influence of the nineteenth-century Christmas on modern celebrations is unquestionable. Christmas remains an important time for the publishing market, with writers such as Michael Morpurgo, Carol Ann Duffy, Julia Williams, Trisha Ashley, Cathy Kelly, Jenny Colgan, Scarlett Bailey and Katie Flynn contributing to the twenty-first century Christmas bookshelf.[10] Moreover, the cultural preoccupation with the fictive imagery of a 'nineteenth century' or 'Victorian Christmas' is still used as the context for much contemporary Christmas media, strangely echoing many nineteenth-century writers' own preoccupations with Christmas past, as explored in Chapter One. Bestselling author Anne Perry's series of twelve Christmas novellas frequently use Victorian Britain as their backdrop. This is the case for *A Christmas Secret* (2007), *Silent Nights* (2009), *Christmas Vigil* (2011), *A Christmas Odyssey* (2011) *A Christmas Homecoming* (2012) and her forthcoming book for December 2013: *A Christmas Secret*. Fiction aside, the nineteenth-century interest in Christmas and the experience of time remain pertinent for a modern society in the midst of its own digital revolution. Although there have been a great many social and cultural changes and advances since Christmas in the nineteenth century, the festival still remains a cherished annual moment for most.

Amidst the developments of twenty-first century digital technology, Christmas is being both revolutionized and fiercely protected. On December 25, 2013, we will be able speak face-to-face with our relatives on the other side of the world through online video-

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[9] Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 119.

[10] Morpurgo, *Christmas Stories* (2012); Duffy, *Mrs. Scrooge: A Christmas Poem* (2009), *Another Night Before Christmas* (2010), *The Christmas Truce* (2011), *Wenceslas: A Christmas Poem* (2012), *The Twelve Poems of Christmas* v. 1-5 (2009-13); Williams, *Last Christmas* (2009), *A Merry Little Christmas* (2012); Ashley, *A Winter's Tale* (2008), *The Twelve Days of Christmas* (2010), *The Magic of Christmas* (2011), *Wish Upon a Star* (2013); Kelly, *Christmas Magic* (2012); Colgan, *Christmas at the Cupcake Cafe* (2012), *Christmas at Rosie Hopkins' Sweetshop* (2013); Bailey, *The Night Before Christmas* (2011), *Married by Christmas* (2012), *Just for Christmas* (2013); Flynn, *In Time for Christmas* (2009), *Christmas Wishes* (2010), *A Sixpenny Christmas* (2011), *A Christmas to Remember* (2013).

calling technology. Moreover, we can now access online countdowns to discover how many months, days, hours, minutes and seconds remain until 'the big day,' track Santa Claus's progress around the world on Christmas Eve with NORAD's interactive map,[11] and count down the final seconds of the year with the rest of the nation via live New Year Eve broadcasts. As a consequence of these extraordinary digital advances, today many people are constantly connected to some form of digital social media. Interestingly, Christmas is now being increasingly singled out as an opportunity to spend time offline, and dedicate a few days to friends and family, away from the distractions of the computer or the smartphone. *Psychology Today* published an article in December 2010 entitled '12 Ways to Unplug for the Holidays,' which suggested that making a 'scavenger hunt' or a 'cardboard puppet theatre' might be good ways for twenty-first century families to celebrate the season.[12] Bloggers also use Christmas as a time to 'unplug' from their daily or weekly posts. Taking a 'digital sabbatical' in December 2012, a blogger for *This Luminous Life* explained: 'Novembers and Decembers always have me reflecting on the past year – who I've become and what I've accomplished. Along with that, I always think about who I want to become and what I want to accomplish.' For this blogger, these annual thoughts require time away from technology: 'I'm taking a month offline in December. This will be my month to log on to myself'.[13]

The nineteenth-century mindset continues to shape modern perceptions of Christmas as a time set apart from the order of ordinary life. While the influence of the Victorian Christmas is still recognised by many celebrants today, *A Christmas Carol*, which represents only a fraction of the vast amount of nineteenth-century festive print, is the only Christmas text from the period that is presented to the majority of twenty-first century audiences. Likewise, only a small number of literary scholars have glanced at the

[11] NORAD: the North American Aerospace Defence Command.
[12] Anne K. Fishel, "12 Ways to Unplug for the holidays," *Psychology Today*, December 20, 2010, http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-digital-family/201012/12-ways-unplug-the-holidays.
[13] Laura Norcross, "A Month Offline for a Month To Myself," *This Luminous Life* (blog), December 3, 2012, http://www.thisluminouslife.com/a-month-offline-for-a-month-to-myself/.

broader significance of nineteenth-century Christmas writing, often neglecting to delve into the concerns at the heart of the genre and paying little attention to the inherent links between Christmas and contemporary understandings and approaches to temporality. It is peculiar that the role of Christmas print has been given such slight attention, particularly as nineteenth-century writers were themselves so acutely aware of the festival's social and human significance. In 1848, one writer for the *Illustrated London News* suggested: 'Any one who would wish to examine the manners and customs of its people could have no better opportunity for the purpose than Christmas'.[14] By reconsidering and responding to the pivotal role of Christmas print, we can begin to uncover some of the issues dominating the social and cultural consciousness of nineteenth-century readers and writers. From this point we can begin to recognize the enduring influence of the nineteenth-century understanding of Christmas and time. By taking the opportunity to explore the festive literature from this period, it becomes clear that nineteenth-century Christmas writing has undoubtedly left a far deeper legacy than merely plum puddings, fir trees and Christmas crackers.

[14] "The Streets at Christmas Time," Christmas Supplement of the *Illustrated London News* 13, no. 350 (1848): 407.

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