

A
Little Book
about
A Christmas Carol

by Linda Hooper

Parleware



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about
A Christmas Carol
by Charles Dickens

On the occasion of the 150th
anniversary of its first publication.

by Linda Hooper

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The Dickens Project

The Dickens Project of the University of California is a scholarly consortium devoted to promoting study and enjoyment of the life, times, and work of Charles Dickens. The Project consists of faculty and graduate students from the eight general campuses of the University of California as well as from other major American and international universities. Founded in 1981 and headquartered at UC Santa Cruz, the consortium includes among its institutional members the City University of New York, the University of Texas at Austin, Stanford University, the University of Southern California, Rice University, the California Institute of Technology, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In addition to promoting collaborative research on Dickens and the Victorian age, the Project disseminates research findings through a series of annual conferences, institutes, and publications, as well as through courses, theatrical performances, and other programs open to the general public. The Project also organizes faculty exchanges, supports the professional development of graduate students, and produces curricular materials for use in teaching Dickens in the schools and colleges.

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Introduction

Inasmuch as the Dickens Project seeks to promote study and enjoyment of the life, times, and work of Charles Dickens, it is fitting that on the 150th anniversary of the first publication of *A Christmas Carol in Prose, Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*, we mark the occasion by offering a new publication which we hope will further the appreciation and understanding of Dickens's best known work. No other book or story by Dickens or anyone else (save the Bible) has been more enjoyed, criticized, referred to, or more frequently adapted to other media. None of his other works is more widely recognized or, indeed, celebrated within the English-speaking world. Some scholars have even claimed that in publishing *A Christmas Carol* Dickens single-handedly invented the modern form of the Christmas holiday in England and the United States.

As G.K. Chesterton noted long ago, with *A Christmas Carol* Dickens succeeded in transforming Christmas from a sacred festival into a family feast. In so doing, he brought the holiday inside the home and thus made it accessible to ordinary people, who were now able to participate directly in the celebration rather than merely witnessing its performance in church.

Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in the 1840s. These were years of famine in Ireland as well as of severe economic depression worldwide. Dickens knew and understood the effects of poverty, and, by having Scrooge notice homeless mothers huddled in doorways at the end of the first Stave, he was writing from his own observation and experience. So today, *A Christmas Carol* along with other works by Dickens continues to direct attention to the problems of homelessness and economic injustice on our very doorsteps. In focusing on such questions, Dickens is a writer for all historical periods, including our own.

It is useful to recall that Dickens had written an earlier version of *A Christmas Carol* several years before taking up the story of Scrooge in October 1843. His first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), contains an interpolated tale, "The Goblins Who Stole A Sexton," that anticipates *A Christmas Carol* in several interesting respects. Told at a Christmas party, the story recounts how Gabriel Grubb, a drunken, cruel, misanthropist, is visited one Christmas Eve by goblins, who torment him physically and show him scenes of the happy domestic life from which he has deliberately excluded himself. The lessons they teach him result in his redemption. He reforms his ways and eventually leads a long and happy life.

The major change that Dickens made in 1843 when he revised his earlier tale was to transform its central character from a member of the working class—a sexton—into

a wealthy businessman, thereby introducing a different and considerably more “radical” social message into the story. Nevertheless, the basic situation in the two stories is quite similar. Both Gabriel Grubb and Scrooge are spoilsports. That is, each refuses to join and participate in the communal festival or sacred “sport” of Christmas. In both stories the spoilsport receives supernatural visitors who instruct him in the human values appropriate to the Christmas season, and in both stories the spoilsport undergoes a conversion that reunites him with the spirit of community and fellowship. In both stories, moreover, a child or group of children plays an important role in the redemptive process.

In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens unites important features of the two Christmas stories he wrote for the December number of *Pickwick Papers*, joining the family feast of Dingley Dell with its games, intergenerational bonding, and domestic rituals together with the story of a supernatural visitation leading to conversion.

The various Christmas Carol adaptations listed below reflect only a fraction of the many ways in which Dickens’s original tale has been transposed to other media. In a sense, the story itself is already a multi-media production, especially the scenes where Scrooge is made to witness a series of visionary tableaux in which he can not participate. It is almost as if Dickens were writing a story to be told by media not yet available in the Victorian age. Yet no

sooner was a new technology invented in the intervening 150 years than *A Christmas Carol* was quickly adapted to it.

Reactions to *A Christmas Carol* have varied tremendously over the years, with each generation finding in it a message—spiritual, psychological, or political—applicable to the needs of different audiences. Clearly the Carol is an ideological work, both in and for our own time. The enormous success of its multiple adaptations testifies to its enduring value as a marketable commodity. Ostensibly its message is one that decries the commercialism of a debased Christmas celebration. Yet ironically, the story itself continues to be bought and sold, packaged and repackaged to meet an apparently inexhaustible demand. Indeed, the book you hold in your hands is itself a result of the Dickens Project’s participation in the commercialization of *A Christmas Carol*. However pure our motives in seeking to promote enjoyment of the Carol, we also knew that we could sell our little book and turn the profits to some practical use—a good one, we assure you! In the end, it may not matter that *A Christmas Carol* has been commercialized, since its story of the strength of community and the power of love is not lost in the buying and selling.

Curiously enough, Dickens himself made little money from *A Christmas Carol*, although he had high hopes for its commercial success. In its first edition, the Carol was a beautiful little book, well made and lavish with illustra-

tions. Our little book, not so lavish nor so beautiful, nevertheless attempts to reproduce some of the spirit that animated the original. May it bring you pleasure and good cheer!

John O. Jordan
December 1993

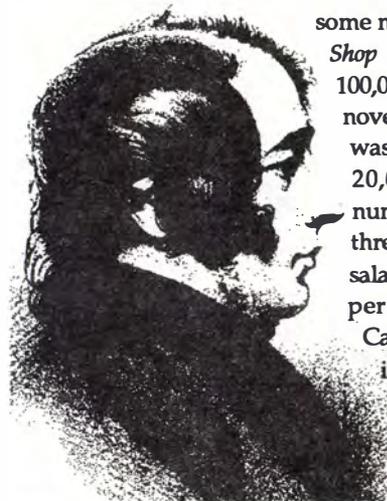


Charles Dickens, 1812-1870
Dickens's Life Before the Carol

In October of 1843, when he started to write *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens was at thirty-one the successful author of *Sketches by Boz*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge*, and *American Notes*. Although his previous books

had been very popular, with some numbers of *Curiosity Shop* selling as many as 100,000 copies, his current novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, was only selling about 20,000 per monthly number. His publishers threatened to reduce his salary from £200 to £150 per month. His wife Catherine was expecting their fifth child.

As a solution to these financial pressures, Dickens was planning to



Charles Dickens, 1844

leave England for Italy, where his family could live more cheaply.

Money had always been a worry for Dickens. He was born into a struggling lower-middle class family. When he was ten, Dickens's father moved the family from Chatham to a smaller house in Camden Town, London. The four-room house at 16 Bayham Street is supposedly the model for the Cratchits' house. The six Cratchit chil-



The shorter building is one of several childhood homes of Dickens, this one possibly the model for the Cratchits'.

dren correspond to the six Dickens children at that time, including Dickens's youngest brother, a sickly boy, known as "Tiny Fred."

Even with the move to London, his family could not afford to send Dickens to school, and instead he was free to explore the urban neighborhoods around him. When he was twelve, his father found work for him in a factory, and he boarded with another family, much as David Copperfield boarded with the Micawbers. Soon afterward, his father was imprisoned for debt, and the whole family moved to the Marshalsea debtors' prison save for Charles, who kept working. He felt abandoned and ashamed of this experience for the rest of his life, and although he fictionalized it in his novels, during his life he told the truth to only one person, his friend and biographer, John Forster.

Dickens was later sent back to school, but when his parents could again no longer afford to pay for their son's education, he found work first in a law office, and then as a newspaper reporter, covering the proceedings of Parliament. He taught himself shorthand and soon was known as the fastest and most accurate parliamentary reporter in the City.

While working as a reporter, Dickens began writing semi-fictional sketches for magazines, eventually publishing them as *Sketches by Boz*. His next work was *The Pickwick Papers*, which was published in a relatively new

serial format. Each month, a twelve-thousand word section of the book was sold in a "number," at a shilling each. This made a long book affordable to many more people. After *Pickwick*, all of his subsequent books, until *A Christmas Carol*, were first sold in serial form.

Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in six weeks, from October 1843 until the end of November. It was the first story Dickens wrote all at once, and the effect on Dickens's writing is noted by one critic who writes, "It is a transitional work between the early novels and his mature work. This is the first occasion of Dickens discovering a plot sufficient to carry his message. [Dickens]... at last began to keep a steadier eye on the purpose and design of his work which was to characterize his work from *Dombey and Son* [the novel following *Carol*] onward."

Dickens was in debt when he hoped to turn a quick profit from *A Christmas Carol* royalties. As one biographer described it, his bank manager had given his muse an enthusiastic push. *A Christmas Carol* was a best seller and Dickens expected his first royalty check to be £1000, but due to the high production cost of the book—in part because of his many last minute changes and its expensive materials—he received only £250.

Dickens and Christmas

Charles Dickens was an outgoing, playful man who loved games and parties. The act of writing *A Christmas Carol* affected him profoundly. During its composition, he wrote a friend that he "wept and laughed, and wept again, and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner in the composition; and thinking whereof he walked about the black streets of London fifteen and twenty miles many a night when all the sober folks had gone to bed."

Despite Dickens's frequent criticism of organized religion and religious dogma, he loved celebrating Christmas. Of the Christmas following the publication of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens wrote in a letter, "Such dinings,

from
Charles Dickens
Eighteenth April 1844.

Dickens's signature in a presentation copy of
A Christmas Carol.

such dancings, such conjurings, such blind-man's bluffings, such theatre-goings, such kissings-out of old years and kissings-in of new ones never took place in these parts before. To keep Chuzzlewit going, and to do this little book, the *Carol*, in the odd times between two parts of it, was, as you may suppose, pretty tight work. But when it was done I broke out like a madman, and if you could have seen me at a children's party at Macready's the other night going down a country dance with Mrs. M. you would have thought I was a country gentleman of independent property residing on a tip-top farm, with the wind blowing straight in my face every day." Jane Welsh Carlyle (wife of Thomas) was a guest at his New Year's Eve party that year and described the performance by Dickens and his best friend. "Dickens and Forster above all exerted themselves till the perspiration was pouring down and they seemed *drunk* with their efforts. Only think of that excellent Dickens playing the *conjurer* for one whole hour—the *best* conjurer I ever saw."

On January 15, 1844, Charles and Catherine's son Francis Jeffery was born. Dickens's biographer Peter Ackroyd (1990) points out the irony that one month after the publication of *A Christmas Carol*, which glorifies the family and especially the pitiful Tiny Tim, Dickens's feelings for his own youngest child were more Scroogish than Cratchity. Dickens wrote a friend, "Kate is all right again, and so they tell me is the Baby. But I decline, (on

principle), to look at the latter object." When the Dickens family left for Italy in July, they left the baby in England with his maternal grandmother.

After *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens wrote another "Christmas book," *The Chimes*, for Christmas 1844. Dickens wrote three more Christmas books and many Christmas stories. He edited two magazines, *Household Words*, and *All the Year Round*, which published annual "Christmas numbers" for which he wrote and edited stories. Writing about Christmas and, later, giving readings from *Carol* were important sources of income for Dickens for the rest of his life. It is possible that Dickens sometimes regretted this relentless association with the holiday. In a letter to his daughter Mamie he wrote that he felt as if he "had murdered a Christmas a number of years ago, and its ghost perpetually haunted me."

A Christmas Piracy

When Dickens toured the US in 1842, just a year before writing *A Christmas Carol*, he hoped to further the establishment of international copyright laws. His books had been reprinted in the US, and, although they sold thousands of copies, he had never received royalties. US publishers believed that he, along with other British writers, were compensated for their work in their own country, and, if they saw their books published overseas, that popularity was payment enough. Dickens supported himself and a growing family solely through his writing and publishing efforts. His writing had ensured his rise from the lower-middle class, and theft of his work by enterprising foreigners left him feeling bitter and cheated. In the end, Dickens retaliated in writing the hilariously satirical memoir, *American Notes*, and the novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In both books Dickens portrays Americans in unflattering characterizations.

Overseas publishers were not the only competitors for Dickens's genius. British copyright law was relatively new, and authorial rights were still unprotected. Dickens's works were sold in unauthorized reprints and bald plagiarisms from the beginning of his career. In many of these publications only characters' names were slightly changed, leaving the story, but not the inimitable language, reason-

ably intact. Pirates also presented widely popular theatrical performances. Dickens attended one of these performances of the *Carol* and found it "heartbreaking."

Dickens sued publishers who pirated the *Carol*. The courts decided in his favor, after which he exclaimed in a letter, "The pirates are beaten flat. They are bruised, bloody, battered, smashed, squelched, and utterly undone." But the publishers who pirated his works declared themselves bankrupt, and the lawsuit grew so complicated Dickens had to pay £700 to disentangle himself from it. He later wrote bitterly of his experience, "It is better to suffer a great wrong than to have recourse to the much greater wrong of the law."

England, December 1843
The Spirit of Christmas Immediately Past

A Christmas Carol was written when English Christmas traditions had been in a centuries-old decline. Most of the holiday traditions Dickens recounts in *A Christmas Carol* have roots in the Roman Saturnalia and the Saxon holiday of Yule and are much older than Christianity. In fact, in many periods throughout the history of Christianity, these traditions were even "sinful."

For most of their history, the English lived in rural areas and rarely left the place where they grew up. "Christmas" was a twelve-day festival taking place in the manor of the local "lord," and included burning the Yule log, playing traditional games, and feasting on traditional foods.



In the mid-seventeenth century, the Cromwellian Revolt abolished Christmas as well as the monarchy. However well the monarchy was subsequently "restored," the traditions of the winter holiday never recovered. But religious prescription was not the only cause of the decline of Christmas. Even by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution, especially in the north, was changing the communities that still tenuously kept the customs of their ancestors.

By the time the *Carol* was written in 1843, the lavish celebrations of the past were a distant, quaint memory. Some still remembered them, and even before the *Carol* a few popular books attempted to record the celebrations of the past, such as *The Book of Christmas* by T.H. Hervey (1837) and *The Keeping of Christmas at Bracebridge Hall* by Washington Irving (1820). But social forces beyond simple nostalgia were at work, rekindling the need for winter celebrations.

Better employment prospects in the cities prompted many people to leave their homes for jobs in the cities. More and more boys were being sent away to school, and their winter homecoming inspired celebrations that drew upon what traditions could be remembered.

Dickens was one of the first to show his readers a new way of celebrating the old holiday in their modern lives. His Christmas celebrations of the *Carol* adapted the twelve-day manorial feast to a one-day party any family could

hold in their own urban home. Instead of gathering together an entire village, Dickens showed his readers the celebration of Fred, Scrooge's nephew, with his immediate family and close friends, and also the Cratchits' "nuclear family": perfectly happy alone, without the presence of friends or wider family. He showed the urban, industrial English that they could still celebrate Christmas, even



Illustration from *The Book of Christmas*, by T. H. Hervey, 1837, with which Dickens was probably familiar.

A Christmas Carol without Christ

The *Carol* was first published in a time of great religious controversy, and its lack of babes, wisemen, stars, mangers, and other icons of the Christian nativity inspired a multitude of sermons and pamphlets. Some religious leaders believed that any story of Christmas without references to the birth of Jesus was self-indulgent and unchristian, and that the ritualistic celebrations in the story were pagan and sinful.

Although *A Christmas Carol* is generally associated with the Christian winter holiday season, for it does contain references to the Christian Jesus; its themes are not exclusive to Christianity and it inspired a tradition for decades in Christmas books and celebrations that appealed to many non-Christians.

Victorian Family Values

The first readers of *A Christmas Carol* were able to see themselves in the people shown to Scrooge by the Spirit of Christmas Present. While today the most remembered character of the story is Scrooge, Dickens's first readers identified most strongly with the Cratchit family.

The Cratchit family, although quaint and sentimental to modern readers, was a familiar portrait of the lower-middle class families who read the *Carol*, familiar in fact to Dickens himself, who modeled the Cratchits' lifestyle on his own childhood experience. Dickens demonstrates that even in poverty, the winter holiday can inspire good will and generosity toward one's neighbors. He shows that the spirit of Christmas was not lost in the race to industrialize, but can live on in our modern world.

Great debates over the plight of the poor and other social issues were beginning to be the focus of much political discussion during the 1840s. When the Spirit of Christmas Present warns of impending doom for "Man's Children," the symbolic "Want and Ignorance," Dickens's readers could instantly identify these symbols. They were the offspring of a new industrial society, who filled the new industrial cities.

"Who can listen to objections regarding such a book as this? It seems to me a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness. The last two people I heard speak of it were women; neither knew the other, or the author, and both said, by way of criticism, 'God bless him.'"

William Makepeace Thackeray, 1844

"Though no one claimed in 1843 that Dickens invented Christmas—that hyperbolic suggestion would surface later on—many seemed to feel he had rediscovered it and freed it from puritan constraints."

*Paul Davis, The Lives and Times
of Ebenezer Scrooge, 1990*



"The tale has prompted more positive acts of beneficence... than can be traced to all the pulpits and confessionals in Christendom, since Christmas 1842."

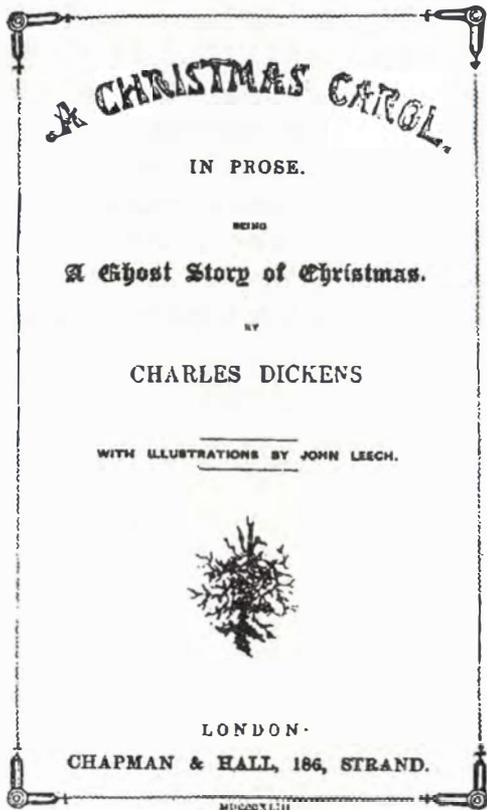
Lord Jeffrey, in a letter to Dickens a week after publication of the Carol, 1843

"All persons say how differently this season was observed in their fathers' days, and speak of old ceremonies and old festivities as things which are obsolete. The cause is obvious. In large towns the population is continually shifting; a new settler neither continues the customs of his own province in a place where they would be strange, nor adopts those which he finds, because they are strange to him, and thus all local differences are wearing out."

Robert Southey, 1807

"There is no doubt that, by reason of his little Christmas Books, Dickens had distinctly identified himself with the festive season, to which he thus imparted a touch of joviality and good-feeling of the old-fashioned English kind, so much so that the omission of a Yule-tide story, around which his magic pen could weave such delightful fancies, was regarded as a real public loss."

Frederic G. Kitton, 1890



The original title page.

The Illustrations

Dickens took great care in the appearance of *A Christmas Carol*, calling for the production of four full-page hand-colored steel engravings and four wood engravings. He employed as his illustrator John Leech, who was one of the best known "comic illustrators" of the time. From existing correspondence, we know that Dickens discussed the illustrations with Leech very carefully. Though we know he approved them, we don't know if Dickens explicitly told Leech which scenes to illustrate. It is interesting to note which scenes *are* illustrated, and which are not. Scenes which are often omitted from adaptations, such as the chained ghosts haunting the dark night, are emphasized by their illustration in the original. The following pages contain reproductions of all original illustrations, with the passage which describes them.



Marley's Ghost

His colour changed though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, "I know him; Marley's Ghost!" and fell again.



The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever.



A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given time, what would have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsy, corkscrew, thread-the-needle, and back again to your place; Fezziwig 'cut'—cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.



“Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!”

In the struggle, if that can be called a struggle in which the Ghost with no visible resistance on its own part was undisturbed by any effort of its adversary, Scrooge observed that its light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that with its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head. The Spirit dropped beneath it, so that the extinguisher covered its whole form; but though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light, which streamed from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground.



It was clothed in one simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare, as if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls were long and free; free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

“You have never seen the like of me before!” exclaimed the Spirit.



“They are Man’s,” said the Spirit, looking down upon them. “And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!” cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. “Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse. And bide the end!” “Have they no refuge or resource?” cried Scrooge? “Are there no prisons?” said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. “Are there no workhouses?”

The bell struck twelve.



“Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point,” said Scrooge, “answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?” Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood. “Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead,” said Scrooge. “But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you will show me!”

The Spirit was immovable as ever. Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE.



"A merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. "A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!"

Adaptations
"So the figure itself fluctuated
in its distinctness"

Adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* fall into three rough categories. The first of these is a straight adaptation, or interpretation of the story for the sake of the story, with an attempt to keep as close to the Dickens text as is possible. The second is the use of the story as a medium through which to make an often unrelated point. *A Christmas Carol* has often been adapted in this manner to political commentary or satire. The third is an exploitation of the story's popularity or cultural importance as a sure way to make money.

Even faithful adaptations vary slightly because they contain the opinions and priorities of the writers. J. Edward Parrott explained the changes in his adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* by explaining that, because he recommended the play for young people, certain scenes were "too tragical in their intensity, and too harrowing in their unpalliating realism."

Cyclical political and moral attitudes also affect adaptations. In most of the adaptations that stray from Dickens's original text, many of the changes are representative of the era in which that adaptation was done. For example, before the stock market crash of 1929, an adaptation called

An American Carol was a business-based celebration of capitalism. A forward-looking 1928 stage version of *A Christmas Carol* called *Mr. Scrooge* contained a "critique of capitalism" and portrayed a Cratchit with "the beginnings of a revolutionary consciousness."

The older the story gets the looser the interpretations become. Many of late twentieth-century adaptations are based on either the events or the characters in *A Christmas Carol*, rather than on the story as a whole. For example, Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* echoes the hard-hearted miser who learns to love the Christmas season. The Frank Capra film, *It's A Wonderful Life* depicts the personal transformation following a man's observations of his life as if he were absent from it.

The adaptations mentioned so far all have a Christmas setting. There have also been similar adaptations for other holidays. A recent *Roseanne* episode showed Roseanne losing her Halloween spirit, being visited by ghosts of Halloween past, present, and future, and then regaining her love of Halloween pranks. There has also been a version of the Grinch's story, adapted to Halloween.

Like folklore, perceptions of *A Christmas Carol* have changed as the story is passed down from one generation to another. Most people are familiar with Dickens's *Carol* have never read the original book. Though *A Christmas Carol* is a literary work written long after the time of oral storytelling had passed, its history is very much that of a

folk tale. Anyone who studies the *Carol* soon sees that the story changes as its audience changes, and it will continue to change in Christmases yet to come.

Dickens's Own Adaptation

From 1857 until the end of his life, Charles Dickens performed public readings of his books. *A Christmas Carol* was his most popular and favorite reading. It was the first piece he performed, and the last before his death. Dickens adapted the *Carol* for performance, shortened it first to three hours, then eventually to an hour and a half. Dickens seldom referred to the prompt copy of *A Christmas Carol* that he carried onto the stage with him, and each reading was a little different, because he added to and changed the *Carol* when he read. "I got things out of the old *Carol*—effects I mean—so entirely new and strong that I quite amazed myself and wondered where I was going next," he wrote to a friend. The *Manchester Examiner* in 1867 said of his readings, "There is always a freshness about what Mr. Dickens does—one reading is never anything like a mechanical following of a previous reading, even of the same work." Another newspaper of the time wrote, "He gave to every character a different voice, a different style, a different face."

Dickens enjoyed performing because he loved his "public." Writing of his first audiences at a reading of the *Carol*, he said, "They lost nothing, misinterpreted nothing, followed everything closely, laughed and cried... and animated me to that extent that I felt we were all bodily going up into the clouds together."



In 1867 and 1868, Dickens performed in the United States. His readings were so popular that people camped overnight in the streets to buy tickets at box offices, or found tickets sold by scalpers. In Washington D.C., President Andrew Johnson had tickets for his family every night. The tour was incredibly lucrative. Dickens made \$140,000 on the tour, an immense sum for the time. He refused to pay taxes on this income—in protest to a government which for decades had not taken up his cause of international copyright—and was physically protected by the New York City police from the federal tax collectors who came to arrest him the day he boarded ship to return to London.

~~laughed, and not much caring what they laugh
at, so that they laughed at any rate, he encoura-
ged them in their merriment, and passed the hour
pleasantly.~~

After tea, they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about when they sung a Glee or Catch, I can assure you especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins of his forehead, or get red in the face over it. Scrooge's niece played well upon the harp; and played among other tunes a simple little air (a mere trifle: you might learn to whistle it in two minutes), which had been familiar to the child who fetched Scrooge from the boarding-school, as he had been reminded by the Ghost of Christmas Past. When this strain of music sounded, all the things that that Ghost had shown him, came upon his mind; he softened more and more; and thought that he could have listened to it often, years ago, and might have cultivated the kindnesses of life, and his own happiness with his own hands, with

Tadpole DP 1860

8

A page of Dickens's own prompt copy of
A Christmas Carol

Adaptations of A Christmas Carol

The following is only a selection of the hundreds of versions, parodies, and adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*. In many cases the adaptation listed is the first work created in that medium. For example, the first sound recording was in 1905, there have been many after.

- 1844 *A Christmas Carol; or Past, Present and Future*. Dramatic adaptation
- 1850 *Christmas Shadows. A Tale of the Times*. Story derivative
- 1867 *A Christmas Carol*. As Condensed by Dickens for his readings.
- 1878 *The Miser*. Pantomime
- 1885 *A Christmas Carol. Being a few scattered staves from a familiar composition, rearranged for performance by a distinguished musical amateur, during the Holiday Season, at H-rw-rd-n*.
- 1893 "The Spirit of Christmas Present (Passages from a political 'Christmas Carol' of the period descriptive of a slumbering Statesman's Yuletide Dream.)" Political adaptation
- 1896 *Jobkin's Christmas Eve*. Illustrated parody

- 1901 *Scrooge, or, Marley's Ghost*. Silent film
- 1905 "The Awakening of Scrooge." Sound recording
- 1910 *A Christmas Carol*. Silent film by Thomas A. Edison
- 1912 "Bob Cratchit's Speech: Supposed to be Delivered After the Events Depicted in A Christmas Carol." US newspaper story
- 1921 *A Christmas Carol. Suite for piano in two parts*
- 1922 "An Epilogue to A Christmas Carol: Stave VI, The Last of the Four Spirits"
- 1928 *Mr. Scrooge. A dramatic fantasy with some of the original illustrations by John Lynch [sic]*
- 1928 *Scrooge*. Black and white sound film
- 1928 *A Christmas Carol: The Story of a Sale. With marginal notes for salesmen*. Edition which used events in the Carol to teach principles of salesmanship.
- 1930 *A Christmas Carol*. Marionette play
- 1934 First performance of Lionel Barrymore's radio production
- 1946 *A Christmas Carol*. Television play
- 1947 *Men of Goodwill: Variations on "A Christmas Carol" for Orchestra*
- 1955 *A Christmas Carol*. Operetta in Two Acts

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- 1956 *The Stingiest Man in Town*. TV Musical
- 1962 *Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol*. Animated film
- 1967 *A Christmas Carol*. Television parody. Tom Smothers as Scrooge, Jack Benny as Marley.
- 1970 *Scrooge*. Color musical film
- 1975 *The Passions of Carol*. Pornographic film
- 1978 *A Christmas Carol*. Classics Comics (Marvel Comics Group)
- 1979 *A Christmas Carol*. Illustrated by puppets
- 1983 *Mickey's Christmas Carol*. Disney animated film
- 1983 "A Reggae Christmas Carol" in *The National Lampoon*
- 1985 *God Bless Us Every One! Being an Imagined Sequel to A Christmas Carol*
- 1986 *John Grin's Christmas*. African-American adaptation by Robert Guillaume.
- 1986 "It's a Wonderful Job." Television parody on *Moonlighting*
- 1988 *Scrooged*. Feature film
- From *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, by Paul Davis, 1990.

Satirical Adaptations

Possibly because of its strong moral message, *A Christmas Carol* has been used in satire almost since first publication, notably by *Punch*.

By 1901 *Punch's* editors were well aware that readers were amused by pieces ridiculing what had become known as the "Dickens Christmas:"

The Old Style

Nothing could have been more cheerful than the well lighted streets. The holly and the mistletoe glistened in the green-grocers' windows. Toys were everywhere, and scores of happy children toddled beside their rosy-cheeked parents full of the glee of the joyful season, and so on, and so on, for a dozen pages.

The family party assembled together in the old ancestral hall was a right merry one. The armour reflected back the red glare of the blazing yule log. Dancing and flirtation and all the brightest side of life were in evidence on all sides. What could have been more delightful? What could have been more in keeping with the good traditions? And so on, and so on, for another dozen pages.

"Ah," said the host, as he bid adieu to the last guest for the last time, smiling, "what a pity it is that Christmas comes but once a year!"

The New Style

Nothing could have been more dismal than the fog-hidden streets. The green—if there were any—could not be seen in the fruiterers' windows. The customary cheap presents in the toy shops were hidden by the prevailing gloom. Children by the scores hivered and whimpered as they listened to the querulous voices of their parents. And so on, and so on, for a dozen pages.

The family party assembled in the large dining room quarrelled with the utmost heartiness. They had been so intent upon their bickerings that they had quite forgotten to keep up the fire. The coals were as cold as the biting frost without. The hall table was covered with unpaid bills. County Court summonses had been left early in the afternoon and were well in evidence. What could have been more in keeping with the sadness of the dismal season? What could have been more wretched? What could have been more in keeping with the bad traditions? And so on, and so on, for another dozen pages.

"Ah!" said the host, as he bid adieu to the last guest for the first time, smiling, "how fortunate it is that Christmas comes but once a year!"

Long before Murphy Brown vs. Dan Quayle, literary characters have been adapted to illustrate political opinions. Here are three twentieth-century examples, and a Victorian cartoon.

Scrooge as Adapted by Ed Meese

In 1983 Edwin Meese, counselor to President Reagan, defended Ebenezer Scrooge, after Reagan had been compared to the fictional miser.

"Let me say that because it's the Christmas season, some historical research has revealed a great injustice that I would like to right at this time. As a matter of fact, I found that actually Scrooge had bad press in his time. If you really look at the facts, he didn't exploit Bob Cratchit. As a matter of fact, Bob Cratchit was paid 10 shillings a week, which was a very good wage at that time.



"Furthermore, the free market wouldn't allow Scrooge to exploit poor Bob. England didn't allow free public schools until after Dickens was dead. So that the fact that Bob Cratchit could

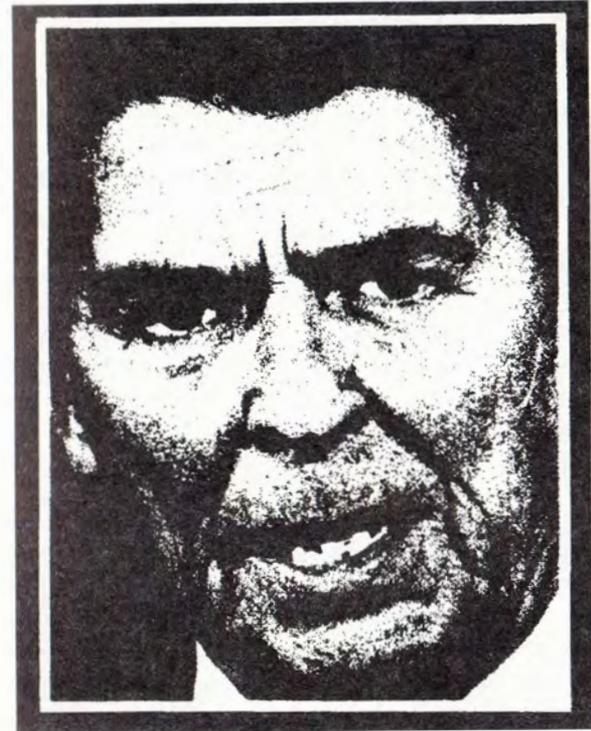
read and write made him a very valuable clerk and as a result of that he was paid 10 shillings a week. Bob, in fact, had a good cause to be happy with his situation. He lived in a house, not a tenement. His wife didn't have to work and only one of his children had not had much of an education, but he still had a job. He was able to afford the traditional Christmas dinner of roast goose and plum pudding. So after all folks, I think we have to change our views. So let's be fair to Scrooge. He had his faults, but he wasn't unfair to anyone."

(As reported in *The New York Times*, December 15, 1983)

A Christmas Carol as told by "Uncle Ronald"

by Richard Lingeman in *The Nation*, December 1985

"All right, children, is everybody settled? Good. Stay quiet now, and Uncle Ronald will tell you *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Once upon a time, in the city of London, England, there was an honest, hardworking businessman named Ebenezer Scrooge. With his partner, Jacob Marley, Scrooge founded a small but profitable blacking company in Cheapside. Then Marley died and Scrooge was left to run the business alone, assisted by his



clerk, a man named Bob Cratchit. This Cratchit fellow wasn't much help. He was a lazy, worthless agitator type who was always trying to organize the other workers into

a union. He kept Cratchit on purely out of the goodness of his heart, because Cratchit had a crippled son named Tiny Tim. Far from showing his gratitude, however, Cratchit accused his employer of violating child labor laws and threatened to take him to court. Even though Scrooge patiently explained that nobody else would hire 8-year-old children, Cratchit just sneered 'Bah, Humbug!'

'This Cratchit had no team spirit whatsoever; he was always trying to shirk his duties and constantly nagged Scrooge for days off. Reminds me of certain Federal employees who are too lazy to work on Martin Luther King's birthday. Nowadays, of course, Cratchit would have been calling for government boondoggles like the Legal Service Corporation and Aid to Families with Dependent Children and for cuts in defense spending to pay for them.

"Now, where was I? Oh, yes, the straw that broke the camel's back was Cratchit's refusal to work on Christmas Day, even though Scrooge was swamped by end-of-the-year inventory. I should think that it would have been the essence of the Christmas spirit for him to help poor Scrooge keep his hours down. But no. Cratchit said he'd promised Tiny Tim he'd be home for Christmas dinner, and if he didn't come home the boy's heart would be broken. Now, Scrooge had seen this Tiny Tim and he suspected he was faking a gimpy leg so he could collect disability payments, or whatever they called it in those

days. Like father, like son. Cratchit was what was known as an 'almshouse chiseler,' which means he was always getting money from poorhouses under the problem of socialism that was prevalent in England before Mrs. Thatcher turned the country around. At any rate, when Cratchit refused to work on Christmas Day, Scrooge just blew his top and fired him.

"Well. Cratchit stormed out, vowing to get revenge. Using money he'd cadged from the almshouse, he went to a pub and had some drinks with an out-of-work actor he knew. This fellow used to play ghosts in Shakespearean plays until he was kicked out of the Stage Actors Guild for un-British activities. The two of them hatched a plot whereby the actor would dress up like a ghost, sneak into Scrooge's room at midnight and frighten the old man out of his wits.

"I'm afraid this bit of blackmail worked all too well, because poor Scrooge had a cardiac condition and was under doctor's orders not to get excited. The ghost told him in a deep scary voice to bring a turkey and two bottles of gin to the Cratchit place on Christmas Day or someone would tell the police that he'd been dumping blacking into the Thames and polluting the royal swans. So the next morning he sent the Cratchits a basketful of food, and they all got high on plum pudding. Cratchit was so elated by his success that he persuaded his co-workers to go on strike, and Scrooge finally had to move his blacking

business to India, where the work ethic was still strong.

"So that's my story, children. Happy holidays to you all, and by golly, even if it is illegal to teach young people about the Man Upstairs, I'm going to say it: God bless us, every one!"



John Tenniel, an illustrator best known for his collaborations with Lewis Carol, contributed this political satire to *Punch*, December 1893.

"[The Spirit of Christmas Present] will show Scrooge the most horrible sight of all—Scrooge. And having shown, smash him and his power for evil once for all. Rebuild the world.

Already they are doing it, Scrooge. Your days are numbered.

And they are not waiting. They are gathering in their thousands, and their millions.

Demanding work and wages.

Fighting hunger.

Demanding the release of their comrades. Hunger has not crushed, not will prisons daunt them.

They are gathering, Scrooge....

I hope you had a rotten Christmas, Scrooge!

And I hope next year sees you warmer—in hell—than this.

"Mr. Scrooge—1932," *The London Daily Worker*

Translations

Translations are the most common adaptation. Like most of Dickens's books, *A Christmas Carol* has been translated into many languages.



Afrikaans	Japanese
Arabic	Korean
Braille	Lithuanian
Bengali	Norwegian
Bulgarian	Portuguese
Chinese	Polish
Czech	Persian
Catalan	Rhaeto-Romanic
Dutch	Russian
Danish	Rumanian
Esperanto	Serbo-Croatian
Eskimo	Spanish
French	Slovak
Finnish	Slovene
German	Swedish
Greek	Turkish
Georgian	Tamil
Hungarian	Welsh
Italian	Zulu
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