“HUDDLED ‘ROUND THE HEARTH”: RITUALIZED GIFT-EXCHANGE AND CONVERSION IN TRANSATLANTIC NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHRISTMAS FICTION

by

CHRISTIAN GALLICHIO

(Under the Direction of Richard Menke)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the cultural afterlives of the Puritan conversion narrative, a religious and narrative framework used throughout the seventeenth century. I argue that the conversion narrative secularized throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, used by transatlantic Christmas authors — including Washington Irving in *The History of New York* (1809), Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), and William Gilmore Simms in *The Golden Christmas* (1852) — to create a new narrative framework tied to nostalgia for the Christmas holiday season. This newfound Christmas conversion rearticulates its Puritan antecedent by replacing the Puritans’ performative declaration of faith with ritualized gift-exchange between social classes that acted as a symbolic repayment for work performed throughout the year. After the publication of Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, the Christmas conversion became the dominant holiday narrative structure within mid-nineteenth century writing tied to the holiday, reinterpreted by both British and American authors. Concurrent with narrative developments, Christmas

celebrations ritualized, as gifting took on increased significance in transatlantic celebratory habits.

INDEX WORDS: Christmas, Conversion Narratives, Gift Theory, Nostalgia, Ritual Theory, Transatlantic Exchange

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CHRISTIAN GALLICHIO

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by

Christian Gallichio

Major Professor:	Richard Menke
Committee:	Roxanne Eberle
	Tricia Lootens
	Jason Payton

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

To Margot. Never Be Afraid to Chase Your Dreams.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"THINGS ARE NOT THE SAME AS THEY USED TO BE": PURITAN FAITH, NOSTALGIA, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE TRANSATLANTIC CHRISTMAS CONVERSION

INTRODUCTION

When William Makepeace Thackeray, using his popular pseudonym M.A. Titmarsh, wrote, in an 1845 review in *Fraser's Magazine,* "I like Christmas books, [and] Christmas pantomimes [that] indulge in pleasant egotisms of youthful reminiscence," he was speaking of a burgeoning literary market that had emerged in the wake of Charles Dickens's 1843 publication of *A Christmas Carol* (744).Yet only two years later, in another *Fraser's* review entitled "A Grumble about the Christmas-Books," Thackeray would lament the "minor performers" who "hearing of the success of Mr. Dickens's opera, rush forward fiddle in hand, of the very same shape by the very same maker" (126).[1] In alluding to "the very same shape," Thackeray was first in noting this trend within nineteenth-century Christmas narratives, namely that the narrative framework and thematic interests were repeated ad-nauseum post-*Carol*. But what accounts for such a change in perspective? If the Christmas book, as outlined by Thackeray, had been in its infancy in 1845, by 1847 holiday-themed literature had flooded the marketplace,

[1] The irony that Thackeray condemned the influx of holiday themed literature, while also promoting his own 1847 Christmas novella *Mrs. Perkins Ball* was not lost on the author, as he ends his piece "at the very moment he was going to cut his own head off" by attempting to review his own text (126).

overwhelming publishers and readers who attempted to sort through the drivel to find a worthy successor to Dickens.

Thackeray was responding to an evolving, and ultimately overcrowded, transatlantic holiday literary marketplace that "saw the October to December sales period finally overtake the spring sales period" in the mid-1840s (Moore 52). While not all of these texts foregrounded holiday celebration, many capitalized on Christmas, highlighting the holiday's resurgence as a national, and transnational, celebration in the mid to late nineteenth century.[2] If Christmas in the early nineteenth century was an "interval of leisure" that often ignored observances in favor of relaxation, and not a "set of rituals assigned to one particular day," as Penne Restad claims, these authors, both popular and forgotten, American and British, helped reinvigorate a holiday, codifying a series of celebratory practices that were previously overshadowed by New Year's Day (11).

These Christmas books often mimicked the structure and content of *A Christmas Carol*, concentrating on conversion as the overarching theme and framework, foregrounding personalized spiritual change like that of Scrooge. If *Carol* was a type of urtext for the burgeoning genre, then authors, including Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, and even Louisa May Alcott, among many others, used Dickens's general format to construct their own Christmas-themed tales. Scrooge's conversion, what Martin H. Sable calls the heart of the "Carol Philosophy," which prioritized personal over societal change, became the standard template that would fall in and out of popularity as the century

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[2] For further discussion about publishers' schedules, specifically non-Christmas themed publications, see Chapter 5, "The Expansion of Christmas Consumerism" in Tara Moore's *Victorian Christmas in Print*.

progressed (67). It would also provide a still-resonant framework for holiday-themed narratives seen today in print, on television, and in theaters.

For all the importance of *A Christmas Carol,* however, modern critics, and popular authors, including Carlo Devito and Les Standiford, have nevertheless overemphasized Dickens's centrality to nineteenth-century Christmas celebration. The overarching myth that "presents Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* as the reinvigorator of Christmas or, more incredibly, the inventor of the modern Christmas," as Tara Moore writes, neglects social rituals and celebrations that grew in tandem with Dickens's writing in the 1840s and 50s and the historical lineage from which he pulled (3). *A Christmas Carol* may represent an important shift in Victorian holiday celebration, but it was not alone in creating the holiday conversion narrative that we so often consume today.

By recently reconsidering how Christmas came into popular celebration in the nineteenth-century, historians and literary critics have turned away from *A Christmas* Carol, echoing Moore's plea to think of the holiday outside of its associations with the novella. Neil Armstrong, Sheila Whitley, and Karla Marling have almost entirely shunned the popular author in their historical overviews, an understandable if nevertheless incomplete historical corrective. While Dickens's association with the holiday should not be overstated, as has been frequently done in the past, neither should it be understated. Instead of beginning with Dickens's contributions to celebration, as popular authors have done, or casting him off entirely, as more recent scholars have trended towards, this project places *A Christmas Carol* on a timeline of Christmas texts, presenting Dickens as an important node in a larger network of nineteenth century Christmas celebration and conversion.

While Dickens looms large, threatening to obscure the historical lineage and continuum holiday writing that came before and after him, I would instead like to foreground a much different nineteenth-century author — Washington Irving.[3] As will become clear in the ensuing chapters, Dickens was not the first holiday author to centralize conversion. Instead, Irving, in his collections *A History of New York* (1809) and *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-1820), enacts a similar type of spiritual transformation tied to holiday celebration. I juxtapose Irving and Dickens, two early holiday writers, because their relationship can serve as a metonym for the transatlantic holiday marketplace that grew in tandem with celebratory rituals and traditions as the century progressed. Inspired by Irving's portrait of Bracebridge Hall, Dickens appropriated Irving's Christmas celebration, creating similar scenes in *Sketches by Boz* (1836) and *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), before finally rewriting conversion fully in *A Christmas Carol,* only to have subsequent authors use *Carol* as a template for their own works. While Paul Davis argues that *Carol* became a "culture text," infinitely adaptable to any context, Irving's initial Christmas writing would also prove to be just as malleable, despite its relative marginalization compared to *Carol* (5).

Yet even before Irving, conversion narratives were a dominant method of spiritual communication for Puritans in both Old- and New-World England and America. By referencing Christmas conversion, I am also suggesting a historical linkage between religious Puritan rhetoric and nineteenth-century holiday writing, with Irving serving as a

[3] Standiford's *The Man Who Invented Christmas* and Devito's *Inventing Scrooge* are part of a recent influx of holiday themed texts that centralize Dickens's composition of *A Christmas Carol* as the main source of the Victorian Christmas resurgence. Further, these texts, which also include Samantha Silva's fictionalized *Mr. Dickens and His Carol* and the filmed version of *The Man Who Invented Christmas,* place Scrooge's conversion onto Dickens's writing process.

central connecting point between the two types of conversion, helping to explain how the narrative form was reshaped from the spiritual transformation that the conversion embodied in the seventeenth century, to the secular embrace of Christmas spirit that defined later conversions. As conversion became less tied to outward religious rhetoric, the holiday narrative also embraced aspects of celebration that Puritans rejected, namely ritual celebration and gift-giving. While Dickens may not be the inventor of holiday conversion, a dubious distinction to place on any single author, he nevertheless was instrumental to the genre's popularity. Holiday fiction writers post-*Carol* reaffirmed and reshaped the Christmas conversion, secularizing and commercializing the transformation in the process. To understand the evolution of holiday observance that occurred during nineteenth-century Christmas celebration, one paradoxically must look back to early seventeenth-century writing, centralizing a community and narrative paradigm that prioritized communal acceptance over individual development, work over leisure, often rejecting celebration tied to the holiday in the process.

THE FRAMEWORK OF PURITAN CONVERSION

Narratives of conversion, in which a speaker or character moves from sinner to believer, or miser to holiday convert in the case of Irving and Dickens, trace back to Puritan rhetoric, which prioritized salvation as a dominant motif. These spiritual transformations, outlined by critics Edmund S. Morgan and Patricia Caldwell, among others, and explored in-depth in Chapter Two, were codified into a literary genre by the Separatists who withdrew from the Church of England, establishing churches of their own in the mid seventeenth-century (Morgan 33). The Separatists believed that "a church could not be formed by governmental compulsion or by constraint of the wicked, but

only by free consent of the good," pushing against government mandates on worship (Morgan 25). Since the church could not force belief or worship on its parishioners, English Separatists attempted to merge ritual practices (a term that I will address later in this introduction) with "spontaneity" that included "'prophesying,' that is, little extempore sermons or speeches by members of the congregation" (Morgan 27). These spontaneous outbursts would be further codified within the narratives, allowing converts to prove their faith in God through autobiographical storytelling, as religious leaders prioritized an uneven synthesis between conventionalized impromptu narrative structures and storytelling. While the conversion narrative progressed in the seventeenth century, this balance tilted further towards organized "steps" of conversion, especially after Puritan migration to New England throughout the 1600s.

The purpose of the narrative was to give voice to a (traditionally male) practitioner's interior beliefs, which they would publicly perform their account, seeking divine acceptance. While these accounts gained traction throughout the seventeenth century, the Puritan conversion followed a typical structure of progressive steps for the possible convert. They were expected to speak about their "sin, preparation, and assurance; conviction, compunction, and submission; fear, sorrow, and faith," in that order (Caldwell 2). This sequence from sin to faith was crucial. While "the marks of faith in a Puritan were painful to behold and sometimes deceptive, … they ran according to [a] form" that ministers would advise men to follow (Morgan 72). Indeed, Caldwell argues that this form was relatively stable across churches even if "conversion narratives experience was felt to be more than could be rhetorically contained in a perfunctory arrangement of steps" (166). A divine believer not only had to conform to a prescribed

narrative progression, but also performatively reject that they were even constructing a narrative in an effort to tell “the story of the work of grace to the soul” (65). Further complicating this conversion structure were the differences between English and American forms, which would subsequently play out across holiday literature two centuries later, with the former stressing “individual assurance, and especially the assurance that may be derived from the group,” and the latter often “tentative, anxious, and open-ended,” focalizing individual affirmation with “very little assurance” from the congregation (87). English conversion was often reinforced through the congregation’s affirmation of individual reform, while American conversion was often predicated on self-sustaining belief in change. The American and English conversion correspond on the first six steps, diverging in the final stage of the conversion: *faith*, or one’s humbling before God, through a performative declaration often done in front of the congregation. The American conversion prioritized personal acceptance, while the English looked towards the congregation to reinforce the convert’s beliefs.

Despite differences in congregational reception, both forms share roughly the above sequence. In each, the narrative outline strived to map the interior beliefs of a person, rectifying the divide between what Morgan, echoing St. Augustine, calls the two churches: one which “was pure but invisible [and] included every person living, dead, or yet to be born, whom God had predestined to believe in Christianity,” the other “visible but not entirely pure [including] only living persons who professed to believe in Christianity (3). Bridging the gap between the two, the conversion narrative was an imperfect, but nonetheless helpful, method of overlapping the congregations between the visible and invisible churches. While “the visible church, operating in the world of time

and of human corruption, must inevitably contain sinful men," Puritans nevertheless strove "for purity by excluding obvious and gross sinners," using conversion as a litmus test for possible membership (Morgan 31).

The conversion narrative was positioned by Morgan as a uniquely American form of literary expression, and furthered by Caldwell, who went so far as to call the form a unique "scriptural vision that suited the unknown American experience" (186). In doing so, however, Caldwell argues that the English and American forms evolved in tandem, creating two separate but nevertheless interlinked structures, which diverge in the performance of the final step of conversion — *faith*. Contemporary historians and critics often invoke the conversion narrative in relation to manifest destiny, reinforcing notions of spiritual transformation as a particularly American ideology. Recently, the Puritan conversion narrative has become a critical touchstone for any type of American conversion, grafted onto a host of rhetorical performances.[4] Yet the particular sequence of events, the "morphology of conversion" as Morgan terms it, is often neglected in these critical pieces, which tend to treat conversion as an unstable form only predicated on the transformation from non-believer to devotee. But, as I argue in Chapter Two, it is not enough for a character to merely be reshaped; they must progress through these formed steps, beginning with *sin.* The Christmas narrative that emerged on both sides of the Atlantic in the early and mid-nineteenth century is particularly attuned to this sequencing, not only drawing on the overarching conversion as a narrative template but also homing in on the steps taken in a chronological progression.

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[4] See Elizabeth J. West's "Reworking the Conversion Narrative: Race and Christianity in *Our Nig*," and M.X. Lesser and Patience Ford's "A Transcendentalist Conversion Narrative."

Even with these differences, the convert was still given an “expression of feeling,” whether by their internal conversion or congregational acceptance, a convention that transcended national boundaries in the conversion narrative’s evolution (Caldwell 159). Attending to one’s faith was a culmination of the preceding narrative, making a “quasi-mystical experience” central as a turning point of acceptance. Told through “clear strong images that seem to contain much beyond the literal,” this final step was key to mapping the interior soul, as the worshipper attempted to achieve the “interpenetration of the sublime with the everyday,” and to prove their allegiance to both the visible and invisible churches, further overlaying the two separate but interconnected spheres (Caldwell 181). While the conversion narrative would continue to be an important step for communal and religious acceptance post-seventeenth century, the Evangelical revival in America during the early eighteenth century would simplify the conversion’s framework, reducing seven steps to three – conviction, conversion, and consolation (Sweeney 85).

Yet the Puritan framework, I argue, underwent a revival in the nineteenth-century, as Irving reconditioned these steps, grafting them onto his nascent stories of Christmas celebration. Further, the final declaration of faith would become key to narratives of Christmas conversion, as seventeenth-century public performance was supplanted by nineteenth-century performative gifting once Irving and those who followed had placed the conversion narrative onto the holiday. The transition between declaration and materialistic exchange would, in turn, create a cyclical consumeristic feedback loop that would become explicitly tied to Christmas celebration as the century progressed. The Puritans’ main concern with the conversion narrative was the lack of

“acceptable external object” that would symbolize a convert's full acceptance in God (Caldwell 181). But gift-exchange would allow Christmas converts to retain the performative aspects of declaring one’s (holiday) faith, and further prove conversion through free spending and gift-giving.

DEFINING RITUAL GIFTING AND NOSTALGIA

Gift-giving took on dual meanings in Christmas fiction, as gift exchange not only enacts the final stage of conversion, literalizing spiritual transformation, but also reinforces the kind of commodity exchange that would become the heart of Christmas ritual celebration. As gift books rose to popularity in the late nineteenth century, conversion in these texts would reinforce the importance of consumption, as characters would give others the very type of books in which they appeared, creating a mimetic cycle between the narrative within the texts and the books that were being sold. As Stephen Nissenbaum claims, “books were on the cutting edge of a commercial Christmas, making up more than half of the earliest items advertised as Christmas gifts” (140). In the aftermath of Christmas’s resurgence in the 1840s, an entire holiday marketplace rose, with Christmas issues of popular literary magazines, Christmas annuals, and gift books.

While texts about the holiday grew in popularity, Christmas became further defined by ritual celebration, becoming essential to the final stage of conversion. With performative gifting taking over the declarations of faith that defined Puritan conversion, gift-exchange became *the* overarching ritual of Christmas celebration. Catherine Bell notes that theories of ritual practice are often split into two component parts: “‘enthusiasm’ (fostering groupism)” and “‘formalism’ (fostering the repetition of the

traditional)" (16). The safety that rituals provide, in which repeatable actions become codified, creates social practices that transform into "*thoughtless action* -routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic," allowing historically constructed activities to create a "communal unity" across genres, texts, and time (Bell 19; 20). Ritual, thus understood, is a repeated action that draws on historical precedent, places texts back in their historical moments of creation, and gestures to larger social and political movements of the time. In contrast to tradition, which is a "set of fixed activities and values inherited from the past and scrupulously preserved," ritual exists between stasis and progress, building on, and ultimately creating, tradition but adapting to new social and devotional developments (Bell 21). Ritual is then ever-changing and modifying according to the time, while tradition remains a fixed activity.

Yet, too often, scholarship on Christmas ritual has been reduced to investigating a series of liturgical practices, disconnected from the secular traditions that have come to define the holiday or even more often used interchangeably with tradition, divorced from religious precedent.[5] Instead, as Ronald L. Grimes asserts, ritual can be "religious and nonreligious, collective and individual, traditional and invented" (6). For Grimes, ritual is then "fictive insofar as we are aware of its constructed qualities" but "factive, we might say, insofar as it is felt to be derived from tradition or revelation" (13). Just as the conversion narrative has a set sequence of steps, so ritual derives from unity and repetition, confirming order until the ritual act becomes widely accepted and thus a fixed

[5] Ritual and tradition have often been used interchangeably regarding Christmas celebration. See Jennifer Fisher's claim, in *Nutcracker Nation,* that Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* "was elevated to ritual status" becoming "a Christmas ritual" as well as a "holiday tradition" (171). Additionally, Clement A. Miles 1912 overview of Christmas, *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition*, suggests a demarcation between the terms but, in fact, Miles instead uses the two words as synonyms.

tradition. For example, the tradition of hanging stockings on the mantle on Christmas began simply as a ritualized method of drying socks after children had played out in the snow in the late seventeenth century, before becoming a gift-receptacle in Dutch celebrations during the feast of Sinterklass in the eighteenth century and, finally, made tradition with Clermont Clarke's Moore's invocation of the act in "A Visit from St. Nicholas" in the early nineteenth. Tradition, then, is ritual fully codified, unchanging to in the face of social and political upheaval.

As Christmas celebratory practices grew in the nineteenth century, holiday practitioners enacted a "collage of ritual," which included the "sending of Christmas cards, decorating evergreen trees, caroling, hanging Christmas stockings" and, most importantly, "exchanging gifts" (Restad 106). These intertwined practices not only have roots in Christmas fiction of the period but also derive from the overarching ritual Christmas practice of the nineteenth century — gift exchange. As gifting took center stage within holiday narratives, replacing the performative act of *faith* within the Puritan context, other ritual practices were born out of it: tree decoration and stocking hanging provided a space to house gifts, while Christmas cards, mistletoe, and caroling showed affection. Gifting not only "added to a family's material possessions" but also "gave discernible proof of affections," giving the recipient some type of material good that was expected to be paid back in the coming year (Restad 70).

Gifting has never been ideologically neutral, but instead is entangled with social relationships. These "contractual gifts," as Marcel Mauss defines them, come laden with the expectation that "the recipients of one day become the givers on the next" (8, 22). Just as a performative declaration of faith is a binding contract between convert and

parishioners, so gifting creates an "enduring contract" between giver and recipient. Jill Rappaport even notes that "Despite their voluntary appearance, gifts require that we look beyond the donation side of the equation to assess the process of acceptance as well as the material or symbolic payback" (7). Commodity exchange helped to define the networks of alliance and to externalize the transformation that Puritans could only imagine. In holiday stories, gifting showcased a true spiritual transformation that would allow the giver to claim salvation and conversion while creating a cyclical pattern of giving and receiving that was "obligatory and permanent" (Mauss 9).

Gifting ritualized within the nineteenth century, moving from a method of reinforcing social hierarchies — the hierarchy of supervisor and worker in England, or of enslaver and the enslaved on Southern plantations in antebellum America — to a universal sign of financial immoderation, creating a "complicated web of meanings and associations" that became attached to the ritual practice (Restad 70). Furthermore, as gifting became central within holiday celebration in the late nineteenth century, the act transformed from ritual to tradition, evolving from a method of underpinning class differences to a less socially fraught symbol of holiday excess. As the following chapters will show, gifting ritualized in the mid nineteenth-century before stagnating in the latter half just as the conversion narrative, or gifting narrative, fell out of favor with holiday writing for a short period of time. Thus, the conversion narrative was integral to ritualizing, and subsequently traditionalizing, gift-exchange.

The act is also intwined with nostalgia, a noted trait of Christmas celebration. Defined by Svetlana Boym, nostalgia "(from *nostos* — return home, and *algia* — longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a

sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (xiii). Boym considers nostalgia to be split into two different "tendences [or] ways of giving shape and meaning to longing" (41). There is restorative and reflective nostalgia. The former "puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps" (41). Those who believe in restorative nostalgia "do not think of themselves of nostalgic; they believe that their project is about truth" even if that truth is wholly invented (41). The latter concerns the "*algia*, in longing and loss [that creates] the imperfect process of remembrance" (41). Unlike restorative nostalgia, reflective "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (41).

While reflective nostalgia is important in how we interact with Christmas traditions in the present — the stockings, mistletoe, Christmas trees, etc. that have a historical precedent in the nineteenth century and have mostly remained fixed since then — this project is mainly concerned with the overlap between restorative nostalgia and Christmas celebration. Most of the possible converts within holiday texts attempt to build out an invented celebration that has no historical or personal precedent but is nevertheless couched in descriptions of a long-forgotten time, lending credibility to a rapidly changing, ritualized, celebratory structure. As such, when I simply refer to nostalgia in the subsequent chapters, I'm invoking Boym's definition of restorative nostalgia.

PLANTATATION CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION AND CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Further, like gifting, the connection between Christmas celebration and "leisure time" became prominent throughout the century. Celebration was not always

"commensurate with the principles of unity, rational education and the growth of factory-regulated working hours which often characterized the early decades of the nineteenth century," as Neil Armstrong argues (9). Instead, leisure moved out of the confines of a nostalgic England, established in Irving and Dickens' earlier texts, to showcase how Christmas celebration became an urban activity before expanding to include American slave-holding and British imperialism. While gifting reenforced social hierarchies in the early nineteenth-century, delineating between class and social status, by the mid-nineteenth century, Christmas celebration was a colonizing, nationalistic, force, underpinning the distinction between individual and global powers during the latter half of the century.

While conversion spread from rural to foreign lands, Christmas texts became even more self-referential, acknowledging their own role in the creation of ritual celebration. Because the "process and products of writing are themselves frequently implicated in gift exchange," holiday narratives, like the conversions that they write about, are never just the "brisk, dashing, startling caricature[s]" that Thackeray claims them to be (Rappaport 11; Thackeray, "A Grumble" 126). Rather, they are ideological forces that, collectively, told audiences how and why to celebrate. Yet as Christmas-themed texts took hold in the literary marketplace, growing in popularity, the concentrated conversion narrative slowly diminished as the holiday's dominant literary genre, replaced with cheap annuals and themed collections that backgrounded the holiday in favor of overtly supernatural tales that invoked the name of Christmas, but not the celebratory practices of the holiday. This change directly coincides with gift-giving's move from ritual, an unstable, ever-changing force, to tradition, "fixed (normally

formalized) practices … that must appear compatible or even identical with precedent" (Hobsbawm 2).

This project moves chronologically and transatlantically through the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, beginning with an exploration of the origins of Puritan antipathy about Christmas and the spiritual conversion narrative in Chapter Two. By transatlantically exploring how Christmas was outlawed by the Church in England, and the type of conversion narratives that began to crop up among settlers in a nascent New England, we can see two strands of Christmas narratives coalescing along national fault lines. In England, nostalgia for an imagined celebration took hold in the aftermath of the Christmas ban, when authors like John Taylor pushed back against a government and religion that told them when and how they could celebrate the holiday, explicitly tying Christmas to a rural and nostalgic celebration. In New England, the conversion narrative echoed the ban in its invocation of long forgotten past but wasn't yet tied to the holiday. Authors like Thomas Shepard helped to codify the narrative framework, explicating a series of progressive steps that one must undertake before gaining communal acceptance.

After exploring the framework of conversion, Chapter Three moves into the nineteenth century, arguing that Irving's *History of New York a*nd *Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*. resurrect the framework of Puritan conversion in America and nostalgia in England. First, I argue that Irving grafts the form of conversion onto Oloffe van Kortlandt in *History*. An early founder of New Amsterdam, the eventual of location of Manhattan, van Kortlandt has a spiritual encounter with a St. Nicholas, a precursor to Santa Claus who transforms him into changed man. I then turn to *Crayon*, arguing that Irving's caricature of the Squire, a post-convert celebrator who adheres to a strict celebration in

accordance with so-called ancient times, cements the connection between conversion and holiday narrative with his intertwined invented nostalgia and early gift-exchange. This portrait of the Squire exemplifies the type of ritualized celebration that would take hold in the mid nineteenth-century, as various rituals tied to the holiday came to prominence.

Chapter Four traces Irving's lingering impact in the late 1830s and 40s, connecting the author to Dickens's writing about the holiday, first in *Sketches by Boz* (1836), then *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) with the character of Gabriel Grub*,* who serves as a prototype for Scrooge. In these early texts, Dickens explores the ritualization of holiday customs, examining the relationship between familial structures and the celebrations that are born out of them. The chapter culminates with an extended reading of *A Christmas Carol.* With *Carol*, I argue, Dickens fully rewrites and secularizes the conversion framework, and I read the text alongside Henry Dunster and Thomas Shepard's conversions. Here, I argue that Dickens replaces holy with holiday spirit and provides a narrative structure that subsequent authors would borrow (and steal) from in decades to come. Not only does Scrooge fully conform to the steps of conversion, but he also provides a concrete connection between performative declarations of faith and gift-exchange.

Chapter Five follows' Dickens in the aftermath of *Carol's* publication, looking at his follow-up *The Chimes*. Here, I read an ideological debt between Dickens and Thomas Carlyle's notion of social paternalism, a dominant nineteenth-century belief that would subsequentially influence Southern appropriations of *A Christmas Carol* that emerged in the 1840s, '50s, and '60s. These rewritings recondition the conversion narrative, and gift exchange, as a genre that reinforced not only social hierarchies, as *Carol* does, but also

racial ones. As Southern enslavers re-imagined themselves as Scrooge-like converts, they rationalized gift exchange not only a marker of faith, but also as a tool of oppression in the antebellum South. Reading William Gilmore Simms's *Castle Dismal: A Bachelor's Christmas* (1844) and *A Golden Christmas* (1852) as a reaction to *Carol*, I argue that Simms deploys Scrooge's conversion as a characteristic of the respective enslaver, who idealizes gift exchange as a method of (re)payment between enslaver and enslaved, distorting the practice of plantation gifting.

Finally, the Chapter Six epilogue looks beyond the nineteenth-century Christmas conversion, briefly tracing how the narrative fell out of favor in British holiday writing by the 1870s, just as a holiday-themed collections began to crop up in the seasonal literary marketplace. In the latter part of the century, texts shunned the Christmas conversion, either addressing the holiday in memoirs such as Mary Anne Barker's *Station Life in New Zealand* (1870) or only tangentially reflected the holiday, such as Rhoda Broughton's *Tales for Christmas Eve* (1873), which capitalized on readers' demands for Christmas-related material in packaging, if not content. Yet the Christmas conversion would reemerge in the twentieth century, as post-WWII texts such as *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) reposition the protagonist of the conversion not as a miserly Scrooge-like figure, but as a kind-heart led astray.

This literary shift directly coincided, I argue, with the transition of gift-exchange from protean ritual to fixed tradition. As gifting solidified by the turn of the century, it no longer represented a systematic repayment that crossed, but still reinforced, social and racial lines. Instead, gifting commodified, exploding to include everyone regardless of class, becoming what Karla Marling calls "a pig's feast of capitalist greed," that saw gift-

exchange transcend racial, social, and economic lines to some (xii). Thus, excess, not just repayment, became the de facto method of twentieth-century celebration, turning the holiday into a tradition-based celebration that saw gifting become the dominant method of celebration.

Thackeray's so-called "grumble" about the Dickensian imitators who attempted to reproduce "a prose poem, designed to awaken emotions tender, mirthful, pastoral, [and] wonderful" may have led the author to declare "Away with your miserable fiddlesticks, misguided people," yet those Christmas authors nevertheless contributed to a burgeoning narrative that, as the century progressed, defined the scope and practice of nineteenth-century holiday celebration that continues into today (125). By fictionalizing these rituals, holiday authors on both sides of the Atlantic contributed to the creation of our modern celebration and the traditions that are now ensconced in our yearly attempts to reclaim a Christmas that both reflects our own childhood and the Christmases of yesteryear.

CHAPTER TWO

"ALL KEPT CHRISTMAS BUT WE":

TRANSATLANTIC PURITAN LESIURE, NATIVITY, AND CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

INTRODUCTION

In 1681, two years after the death of Massachusetts Bay Colony governor John Leverett, the Colony reversed course on a twenty-two-year ban against Christmas celebrations. Led by the more accommodating Simon Bradstreet, Massachusetts finally aligned with England and Charles II, who had reinstated Christmas celebrations in 1660, thirteen years after the enactment of a Puritan-led ban. Yet not everyone in Massachusetts was happy about this legal shift. Three years removed from his role in the infamous Salem Witch Trials, Massachusetts Judge Samuel Sewall wrote, in a December 25th 1685 diary entry, "Some, somehow observe the day, but are vexed, I believe, that the Body of the People Profane it; and, blessed be to God, no Authority yet to compel them to keep it" (Sewall 114). While the now-legalized holiday festivities were still in their infancy, twelve years later, on Christmas Day 1697, he again happily reported "Snowy day: Shops are open, and Carts and sleds come to Town with Wood," as he took the occasion to "dehort mine from Christmas celebration" (Sewall 466).

Sewall was seemingly echoing a common belief among devout Puritan worshippers, who objected to any type of formal celebration for a holiday they claimed had no biblical precedent. Even post-ban, Sewall and others shunned Christmas, choosing

to spend the day either in quiet reflection or, more likely, publicly chastising those who kept Christmas. Yet Sewall's curmudgeonly, Scrooge-like contempt also had lasting social and political ramifications for the Judge. Only a year later, Sewall discovered that the "Lt. Gov [William Stoughton] invites the Council to Diner to morrow [Christmas] at his house," lamenting that he "knew nothing of it" for his now-infamous position on Christmas had made him "one who is quite out of the Lt Govr favour" (Sewall 489). As Christmas celebration intensified in the waning years of the seventeenth century, Sewall's "well known prejudices" nevertheless cut him off from the rest of the Massachusetts political elite. He believed that "The Greviousness of this proetermission is, that by this means I shall be taken up into the lips of Talkers," as gossip about his curmudgeonly attitude spread throughout the colony (490). Despite being aware of how others perceived his contempt, Sewall nevertheless held firm in his dissenting opinions on holiday celebration throughout most of his life.

Often, historical accounts of the Judge have used him as a stand-in for a typical seventeenth-century New England Puritan who, James Barnett argues, showed a "hostile attitude toward observing Christmas" before, during, and after Massachusetts's ban on Christmas (3). American Puritanism's derision of Christmas has proliferated in holiday accounts, as historians and critics have centralized those, like Sewall, who viewed the holiday as a "popish invention without biblical warrant" (Marling 44). Barnett's *The American Christmas* (1954), Restad's *Christmas in America* (1955), and William B. Waits' *The Modern Christmas in* America (1994) all share similar notions of antagonism toward Christmas in early America. Regarding England during the same period, Bruce David Forbes's *Christmas: A Candid History* (2007), Mark Connelly's *Christmas: A*

History (2012), and Martin Jones's *Christmas and the British: A Modern History* (2016) present similar sentiments, showcasing Christmas celebration along a sequential continuum from Puritan antipathy to post-Evangelical Revival amiability. Often these accounts begin with the overthrow and execution of Charles I and end with the coronation of Charles II, famously nicknamed the Merry Monarch for his role in accepting and legalizing celebration. Yet these histories often fail to consider the rituals and traditions of pre-ban Christmas celebrations that took place in England. While many in America echoed Sewall's infamous disdain, this was not true of everyone and, in England, many were not so willing to give up the holiday celebration that had already been in place for centuries prior.

Instead of viewing seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Christmas celebration as the transition from legal and spiritual opposition to begrudging secular acceptance, I begin this chapter by looking at dissenters during England's and America's bans on Christmas. These protesters included Puritan believers and non-believers alike, who railed against restrictive laws that told them how and when they could celebrate. The fraught relationship between Puritan belief and Christmas celebration was connected to controversial perceptions of nostalgia, leisure, and pleasure in everyday life, with various religious and political leaders staking claims on opposing sides of the Christmas question. After establishing the antagonistic, but nevertheless actively disputed, relationship between worship and holiday, I argue that after the Christmas bans ended—in 1660 and 1681 respectively — these same dissenting voices, including the British poet John Taylor and the colonial minister Henry Scougal, helped organize and systemize Christmas rituals in England and America, including holiday feasts, idle time, and gift-exchange. While

these rituals did precede Puritan bans on celebration, after the bans ended, they also moved out of the rural country celebrations that continued during the bans and into urban, cosmopolitan spaces when Christmas became more widely accepted. Further, late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century English Christmas articulated a tangible connection between holiday celebration and nostalgia — a hopeful return to a previous time.

Simultaneous to developments in late-Puritan Christmas observance was the growing popularity and codification of the conversion narrative, a burgeoning framework that articulated a spiritual transition from sinner to saved, disillusioned to enlightened, or, more importantly in relation to the holiday, present discontent to nostalgic, prelapsarian, gratification. If nostalgia was connected to accounts of early Christmas celebration in England, it was intertwined with the conversion narrative in America. While the conversion narrative wouldn't become connected to Christmas until a century later, with Washington Irving's writing, I nevertheless provide an overview of the narrative structure here, reading the Puritan minister Thomas Shepard's 1646 *Autobiography* and 1635-45 *Confessions* as prototypical conversion narratives that mimicked a morphology of steps. Finally, I turn to the revivalist preacher Jonathan Edwards and his 1737 text *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls* as an example of how conversion narratives replaced the institutional authentication that Puritans advocated with individual acceptance, which reflected a post-Enlightenment disenchantment with religious institutions. The conversion narratives' turn inward led to the eventual adoption of conversion as a particularly American and secularized narrative paradigm that would be co-opted by Irving in *The History of New York*. However, before

discussing the relationship between conversion and Christmas, we must consider how Christmas was celebrated before Puritans banned the holiday altogether in England.

CHRISTMAS DURING THE REIGN OF CHARLES II

Christmas was outlawed in the wake of the 1642 English Civil War, in a movement led by Oliver Cromwell and other Puritan reformers. Traditionally tolerated by the Church of England as a pagan holiday that intermixed ritual celebrations from numerous pagan winter festivals, Christmas celebration was finally barred in 1647.[6] This law was the last in a series of steps that marginalized a holiday many Puritan reformers saw as outrageous in its celebrations of bacchanalian depravity. Beginning in 1645, Parliament approved *The Directory for Public Worship* as a replacement for *The Book of Common Prayer*. In contrast to its predecessor, *The Directory* argued against "festival days," which it claimed were "vulgarly called holy-days, [but] having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued" ("Directory for the Publick Worship of God"). While Christmas was effectively banned as a religious holiday in 1645, Parliament's legal ban two years later was a mere formality against the more pagan celebrations that took place in its aftermath.

One ritual seemed to upset Puritan leaders more than others. "The Lord of Misrule" was a holdover from the pagan winter celebration Saturnalia.[7] During

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[6] For the historical connection between English Christmas celebration and pagan rituals, see Ronald Hutton's *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* and John Storey's "The Invention of English Christmas" in *Christmas, Ideology, and Popular Culture*.
[7]James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* notes the connection between Roman Saturnalia and the Lord of Misrule, writing "feasting and revelry and all the mad pursuit of pleasure" marked the end of year when "the distinction between the free and the servile classes were temporarily abolished" (Frazer 145). See, also, C. Miles "Pagan Survivals" in *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition*, as well John and Miles Hadfield's *The Twelve Days of Christmas* for more on the connection between Roman Saturnalia and the Lord of Misrule.

celebration, a man was “annually elected to preside over the revels, had a retinue of courtiers, and was surrounded by elaborate ceremonial” (Miles 298). The ritual inverted traditional social and economic hierarchies, allowing the appointed Lord of Misrule complete control for the twelve days of Christmas, from Dec. 25th through Jan. 6th. Often, this control manifested in doling out alcoholic drinks and ornate celebration. One such celebration took place in 1634, where Richard Evelyn, the High Sheriff of Surrey and Sussex, appointed Owen Flood, trumpeter to Evelyn, as the lord. Under Flood’s control, “regulations were made to support his [Flood’s] authority” including rules against kissing “any maid, widow, or wife … without the lordships consent [as] he should have punishment as his lordship should think convenient” (Sandys 121). Of course, exceptions were made, as rituals overlapped and the “the mistletoe bough was [considered] a privileged place” for that type of consorting (Sandys 121). Besides complete authority over the methods of Christmas celebration, the Lord also oversaw gift-exchange, often in the form of meat and other nourishments given out during New Year’s Eve. During Owen’s reign over the Evelyn household, “many gifts were made to assist in provisions the guests [including] two sides of venison, two half brawns, three pigs, ninety capons, five geese …” (Sandys 121). Evelyn even joined in to provide food for his servants, gifting to his own appointed Lord of Misrule in his own house.

The particularities of the Misrule ritual did not, however, sit well with Puritan reformers. The act was highlighted more than any other celebration in dissenters’ writing. The pamphleteer Philip Stubbs echoed a growing chorus of Puritan devotees when he attacked the the Lord of Misrule, in 1583’s *The Anatomy of Abuses*:

> All the wilde-heds of the Parish … chuse them a Graund Captain (of all mischeefe) whome they innoble with the title of “my Lord of Mis-rule” … this king anointed chuset forth lustie Guttes, like to him self … then have they their Hobby-horses, dragons & other Antiques, together with their baudie Pipers and thundering Drummers to strike up the devils daunce withal. (Stubbs 147)

Stubbs was not alone in his disdain. Another Puritan polemicist and pamphleteer, William Prynne, would go so far as to connect Christmas to numerous vices in his 1632 theatrical critique *Histriomastix*. He noted that should people observe “our Bacchanalian Christmas extravagancies” they would “thinke our Saviour to be a glutton, an Epicure, a wine-bibber” and “a God of all dissoluteness, drunkennesse, and disorder” (Prynne 747). As argued by the authors, the Lord of Misrule lived up to its name, seemingly destabilizing the relationship between master and servant, and encouraging holiday revelry and excess. These rhetorical attacks on the holiday were largely effective for the devout. By the time Parliament took up “An Ordinance for Abolishing of Festivals” in June 1647, it had already curbed leisure activities, banning folk-dancing two months previously. The concern for moral order finally extended to holiday celebration, as those days that “have been superstitiously used and observed” were outlawed “within this Kingdome of England and Dominion of Wales” (“Directory for the Publick Worship of God”). The concern for moral order was “a product of the widening gulf between the substantial people ‘of credit and reputation’ and the disorderly poor” (Underdown 48). While the Lord of Misrule was effectively wielded as an analog for drunken debauchery, it was also a ritual that was believed to threaten the social order, inverting poor and rich, if only for a short period of time and even though “the mockery was enframed by an

understanding that betters, superiors, virtue, ecclesial charisma, etc. ought to rule" (Taylor 46).[8] Puritans nevertheless encoded Misrule with irrational fears about the overthrow of moral order, connected to celebration of the Christmas holiday.

Yet most Christmas celebrations in seventeenth-century England never took on the depraved antics of "Misrule," and not all Puritans even agreed with the parliamentary ban. Outside of urban centers, Christmas was mainly celebrated within rural homes through a mix of specific rituals — wassailing, mumming, and gaming, among others — or through township celebrations that grafted these rural rituals onto the larger populace. Even before the ban, Christmas celebration was falling out of favor within the cities. John Taylor echoed these sentiments in his 1631 satirical tract *The Complaint of Christmas*, which follows a personified Olde Christmas as he visits various countries and communities. Upon arriving in England, he comes upon a rich man's house in London. Attempting to bring in celebration, he is kicked out "for without any verball answer hee thrust mee and my company out of doores without saying Farewell" (Taylor 18). Before leaving the country, he laments, "But now it [London] is a place destitute of water and fruit; onely, there are such growing, that onely delight the eye, but deride the touch and taste" (Taylor 25). While celebration was falling off in London, the 1647 ban solidified this shift, as celebration, and pushback, was mainly found in townships and more rural areas.

Only five months after the parliamentary ban, street-riots broke out in Canterbury. The newsbook *Canterbury Christmas; or, a true relation of the insurrection in*

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[8] Building upon Natalie Davis's argument in "The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France," Charles Taylor argues in *A Secular Ag*e that 'Misrule' did not disrupt social hierarchies but actually reinforced them, as all the celebrators understood the absurdity of inverting social classes, highlighting the farcical nature of the ritual.

Canterbury on Christmas day last was printed the following January. In it, Puritans sought to connect celebration with violent agitators, noting that "by the appointment of Master Major … that Christmas day and all other Superstitious Festivals should be put downe, and that a market should be kept upon *Christmas day*" (3-4). In response, "the Towne rose [and] took possession of the Gates, and made enquiry for *White* [a Barber who sided with the Major], they found him in a hay-loft, where they broke his head, and drag'd him in the streets, setting open the Prison dores and releasing those that were in the hold" (9-10). By explicitly framing the "insurrection" as a violent uprising, the anonymous pamphleteer gave description to the violence enacted in the name of the holiday, absolving the city officials of any wrongdoing in the process. *Canterbury Christmas* was met with swift criticism and debate.

On the other side, those associated with the riots published *The declaration of many thousands of the city of Canterbury, or county of Kent* only days after *a true relation*. In it, they demanded explanations of "the violent proceedings of the Mayor … in pursuance of some petty order of the House of Commons," claiming that the Mayor was at fault for "causing some of us to be beaten contrary to his oath of office" (6). By rejecting Puritan arguments that distanced Christmas from Christ, the disrupters framed their demands in religious terms, calling for "the celebration of Christs nativity so long continued in the Church of God" to be reinstated, while they endeavored "by Gods gracious assistance to restore Religion to its ancient splendour and lustre" by resting during the holiday, connecting Christmas celebration with a type of leisure-activity (7).

While Puritans attempted to associate the holiday with debauchery and excessive celebration, disrupters asserted that they were reclaiming connection between the holiday

and religious practices. Yet the true conflict at the heart of these growing tensions was between work and leisure, namely how and when poorer classes could relax and spend time with their families. In banning Christmas, the House of Commons sought to control how and when leisure and recreation time was spent. The 1647 Ordinance allowed "convenient reasonable Recreation and Relaxation from their constant and ordinary Labours on every second Tuesday in the moneth throughout the year" ("June 1647"). Despite this proclamation, work and relaxation on non-holy days were often intermixed as non-religious leisure time "was spent in 'necessary and productive' activities" (McCrossen 12).[9] By eliminating Christmas observance, Parliament eliminated a day of true rest, replacing it with a nominal day of relaxation that was often anything but.

Anti-Puritan writing often emphasized this connection between Christmas celebration and true leisure, turning towards nostalgia for Christmases past when the ban was enacted. John Taylor followed up his *Complaint* with 1652's *The Vindication of Christmas*. In this tract, Olde Christmas is now in exile. Having had "as little hospitality as honesty" from those in London, he wanders "into the countrey up and down from house to house" where he is given "a cup of single, slender; lean, small Beer, or Ale" by the rural farmers who lament the "merry memory (or sad remembrance)" of Christmases past (Taylor). With Olde Christmas by their side, the townsfolk renew holiday celebration as "some went to cards; others sung carols … [and] the poor laboring Hinds, and Maid-servants went to dancing" (Taylor). The farmers take time away from their work to re-enact rituals from their childhood, as Olde Christmas celebrates with them before taking

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[9] As Alexis McCrossen argues, rest and leisure were considered opposing activities during the seventeenth century, as leisure was "found in 'less physical forms of work' and recreation. Rest and leisure, then, shared little common purpose" (12).

"my leave of them, promising they should have my presence again the next 25 of Decemb" (Taylor). While Christmas continued to decline within urban centers, as Taylor notes, rural celebration continued, further becoming intertwined with nostalgia for real and invented Christmases past.

When Charles II returned from exile in 1660, after the death of Oliver Cromwell, he restored several religious and secular celebrations, ending the Christmas ban in 1660.[10] Yet by that time, most of the so-called urban-centered "depraved" rituals had fallen out of favor. The Lord of Misrule had virtually disappeared by the 1660s, replaced with rural, highly localized, rituals. John Aubrey's anthropological 1687 collection of rituals and customs, *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, notes that Christmas celebration often took place in country townships, and that they were not "buried in oblivion [as] there may some truth and usefulnesse be elicited out of them" (Aubrey 6). Mentioning such customs as the Yule log, Christmas games, and Christmas ale, Aubrey discusses how these rituals moved out of the church and into individual homes. As such, "the hospitality and festivities in private houses recovered … but the pageants and masks, in the royal household, and at the Inns of Court, had received a death blow" (Sandys 135). Instead, Christmas slowly regained cultural importance post-ban, but did not reach the celebratory heights that existed pre-ban. In 1695, *Poor Robin's Almanac* encouraged all to "thrice welcome, Christmas / Which brings us good cheer," while also lamenting, "Who gifts to the poor at Christmas, / And to their neighbours make a feast, / I wish their numbers were increased" (qtd. in Sandys 137). While Christmas celebration localized, New Year's

[10] Cromwell has often been anecdotally associated with the ban on Christmas, but all historical evidence points that he neither originated, nor was particularly interested, in banning Christmas celebration. See Laura Lunger Knoppers's *Constructing Cromwell*: *Ceremony, Portrait, and Print 1645-1661* and Bernard Capp's *England Culture Wars: Puritan Reformation and its Enemies in the Interregnum, 1649-1660*.

gifting nevertheless remained a universal holiday ritual that crossed both urban and rural spaces. Mainly given in the form of money — often to nobleman or politicians — gifting during New Year's Eve reinforced the very class hierarchies that "Misrule" purportedly disrupted. Aubrey wrote about the "the voice of Country people begging small presents, or New year's gifts, in Christmas" (Aubrey 89). Meanwhile, another central tenet of Christmas celebration began to take hold, namely nostalgia for Christmases past. While present in Christmases pre-ban, nostalgia became even further entrenched within rural celebration, as celebrators re-enacted their childhood Christmases. However, on the other side of the Atlantic, Christmas celebration took longer to gain traction.

NEW ENGLAND PURITAN CHRISTMAS

While riots broke out in the streets of England in response to parliamentary interference with holiday celebration, Christmas was mainly an afterthought in the colonies. Christmas was viewed by the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a "great dishonor of God and offence of others" (*Records of the Governor*). The holiday was outlawed by Governor Thomas Prence, who wrote that anyone "whosoeuer shall be found observing any such day as Christmas … either by forbearing of labour, feasting, or any other way …shall pay for euery such offence" (*Records of the Governor*). At the heart of Massachusetts's ban were not the overblown fears of depraved celebrations such as Misrule — a ritual that never made the transatlantic voyage — but instead concerns about an overabundance of time spent on personal recreation and leisure.[11]

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[11] While the ritual of Misrule was never celebrated in America, the idea of a Lord of Misrule was nevertheless used, mainly as an insult. William Bradford even called Thomas Morton a "lord of misrule" because of his purported hedonistic activities at Merrymount (Bradford 285). Bradford notes the "quaffing

Antagonism about the holiday had existed since the colony's inception. Just one year after landing at Plymouth in 1621, Gov. William Bradford lamented the "one day called Christmasday"; he complains that when the Pilgrims are called out to work "most of this new-company excused themselves and said it went against their consciences to work on that day," only to be found later by Bradford "in the street at play, openly; some pitching the barr and some at stool-ball, and such like sports" (Bradford 107). In a furor, Bradford "went to them, and took away their implements" telling them "… let them keep their houses, but there should be no gaming or revelling in streets" (107). Bradford's scolding would set the precedent against celebration that would carry through for nearly a century and typified how several prominent Puritan leaders responded to the holiday. Already disjointed and broadly unpopular, Christmas waned in the aftermath of Bradford's outburst. However, his claim that no Christmas reveling "hath been attempted that way, at least openly" in the years since proved false (107).

Instead, the Massachusetts General Court's legal ban was a direct response to "some still observing such festivals as were superstitiously kept in other countries" (*Records of the Governor*). While the ban effectively ended public celebration, ritual practices merely moved into households and domestic spaces. In 1662, William Hoar, a resident of Beverly, Massachusetts, was presented to the courts "for suffering tippling [i.e., drinking] in his house by those who came to keep Christmas there" (*Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County*). Cotton Mather wrote about an especially large feast hosted by the Boston-based Gallant family in 1677 that was "celebrated with impunity" (Gildrie 112). A 1679, a group of carolers in Salem Village barged into John

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and drinking both wine and strong waters in great exsess" that happens at the colony (285). See Peter C. Mancall's *The Trials of Thomas Morton*.

Rowden's house singing carols and demanding liquor. Not surprisingly, this ultimately led to a brawl that ended with prosecution for assault, but not to fines for observing Christmas.[12] By 1680, the ban had proven to be largely ineffective in curbing these drunken domestic celebrations. No fines were ever levied at practitioners, and Christmas — while still broadly unpopular among Puritans — continued with those who went against strict Puritan ideology.

At the behest of Charles II, the ban against the holiday was formally repealed. Yet Christmas celebration wasn't fully revitalized — Puritans still pushed back on any type of observance. In 1686, the General Court refused to allow Christmas services to be held in churches in the surrounding Boston area. A confidant of Charles II and decidedly pro-Anglican, the newly appointed Governor Edmund Andros was forced to hold Christmas mass at Boston Town Hall.[13] As Anglican forces gained more political power, Christmas became a fertile ground for debates between Puritan and Anglican leaders. In his 1687 tract *A Testimony Against Several Profane and Superstitious Customs Now Practiced by Some in New England,* Increase Mather renewed attacks on Christmas, noting that observance profaned God because "It can never be proved that Christ was born on December 25" and that "it was in compliance with the Pagan saturnalia that Christmas Holy-dayes were first invented" (Mather 15). While Andros, and by extension England, pushed for renewed observance, Puritan antipathy extended beyond the lack of biblical

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[12] Mather's writing mentions these types of drunken rituals often. His *Advice from the Watchtower: In a Testimony against Evil Customs* notes "to Drink Healths … growes a very common Usage; even among such Professors of our Holy Religion as out least of all to Learn the Ways and Workes of the Heathen" (Mather 34)

[13] Regionalism was tied to the various types of Christmas celebration. While I explore Pennsylvania folk celebrations in Chapter Three, see Abraham English Brown's "The Ups and Downs of Christmas in New England" in *New England Magazine*, as well as Joseph F. Kelly's *The Origins of Christmas* for the ways in which Puritan celebration was regionalized.

precedent. Christmas symbolized "royal officials, external interference in local affairs, and dissolute behavior" (Daniels 90). Andros's antagonisms, which included Christmas observance, ultimately led to the 1689 Boston revolt and his eventual overthrow, helping to lessen the vitriol directed against the holiday.[14] By the early eighteenth century, Puritan leaders preached less about strict Christmas abstinence. Instead, many, like Increase Mather's son Cotton, took a more nuanced approach.

For Cotton Mather, Christmas itself was not entirely controversial. He often sermonized around the holiday, encouraging quiet prayer and reflection. Like many of the English ministers who came before him, Mather preached for leisure, if not exactly rest. He did

> not now dispute whether People do well to Observe such a Uninstitued Festival at all, or no … Good men may love one another, and may treat one another with a most Candid Charity, while he that Regardeth a Day, Regardeth it unto the Lord, and he that Regardeth not the Day, also shows his Regard unto the Lord. (Mather, "Grace Defended" 19)

Instead, it was the ritual practices that often went along with the day that upset him. He made the connection between ritual and sin even more explicit than Bradford, lamenting in a 1711 diary entry that "a revelling Feast, and Ball" highlighted his parishioners' "Corruption, and [celebration that] has a Tendency to corrupt them yett more, and provoke the Holy One to give them up into eternal Hardness of Heart" (Mather, *Diary* 146). After learning that his congregation was participating in such Christmas festivities, he made sure to sermonize against such activities, preaching to his congregation that "our

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[14] From 1686 to 1689, Massachusetts was governed by London, under the rule of Andros, as part of a "Dominion of New England" in which England sought more direct control over its colonies.

holy saviour is not honoured by mirth, by long eating, by hard drinking, by lewd gaming, by rude revelling, by a mass fit none but a Saturn or a Bacchus" (Brown 483). Despite Mather's proselytizing, he nevertheless "expressed more concern for the liberties taken during the celebration of Christmas than for the fact of celebration" (Restad 15). Like his father, he argued against conflating the nativity with pagan rituals, but was seemingly accepting of quiet reflection and prayer during the Christmas season.

His sermons were only marginally effective, curbing congregational Christmas "revelling" for only a short period of time. Puritan and Anglican tension eventually gave way to a renewed, if nevertheless muted celebration. Samuel Sewall would even despairingly note in the 1730s that many "drink Healths, curse, swear, talk profanely and baudily to the great disturbance of the Town and grief of good people" (Sewall 151). These festivities mirrored those practiced in England, often including routine overindulgence — in food, drink, caroling, wassailing, mumming, and overall time spent on personal leisure and recreation — but never reached the bacchanalian excesses of English celebration. Instead, the most degenerate that Christmas became was, perhaps, in the celebration of wassailing, a ritual in which beggars would go door-to-door singing carols in exchange for alcohol or money.[15]

Mainly, however, Christmas in the early eighteenth-century was celebrated with families, in homes, with sometimes lavish, but more often enough simple, feasts. Since Perry Miller's call to reconsider Puritan beliefs outside of the "gloomy, otherworldly, and trading conception of life which sought to forbid … relaxation," several critics, including

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[15] Stephen Nissenbaum points out that mumming and wassailing would often overlap. As he writes, mumming "usually involved 'a changing of Clothes between Men and Women; who when dressed in each others habits, go from one Neighbor's house to another … and make merry with them in disguise" (Nissenbaum 87).

Sacvan Bercovitch, Francis Bremer, and Francis Butts, have articulated a more nuanced understanding of Puritanism's relationship with the intersection of leisure and ritualized festivities (Miller 41).[16] While leisure was encouraged on days of rest, it was often regulated through a series of "steps at both the local and provincial levels to enforce the culture of discipline through civil and ecclesiastical institutions" (Innes 146). As Bruce C. Daniels argues, "Puritan communism imposed a degree of uniformity on everyone's experience in the founding era" (92). Throughout this early period, the church acted as both a place of worship and a community center that organized social events and regulated recreation. The culture of discipline that regulated Puritan lifestyles associated leisure with moral if not physical regeneration that prioritized quiet contemplation and prayer instead of days spent for one's personal enjoyment.

Yet as the seventeenth century progressed, celebratory practices, and the tolerance of religious leaders, fragmented, leading to a divide between towns, and even within colonies. In the wake of spiritual fragmentation, "church activities lost their primacy as New England's most important social vehicle" by the eighteenth century, as the "patterns of leisure and recreation that emanated from the Congregational church meeting" secularized and became more heterogenous (Daniels 92). By extension, Christmas began a minimal, but not entirely insignificant, cultural reawakening. In 1737, a Christmas Sermon by the Presbyterian minister Henry Scougal entitled *A Sermon Preach't on the 25th of December, behind the Nativity of Our Savior* was published in Boston. The Rev. George Whitefield published excerpts of his personal journal under the title *Christmas*

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[16] Belief in Puritans' unwavering piety in the face of "all things [that] are temptations" and that "a man must labor in his calling as though all depends upon his exertions" is a nineteenth-century construct, propagated, in part, by Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter,* where "Hawthorne's Puritans opposed happiness, leisure, and recreation anywhere they found them" (Miller 5; Daniels 4).

Well-Kept, And the Twelve Days Well Spent, where he spoke of his heightened work ethic during the holiday season before conceding “Would to God that Christmas, *if it must be observed*, were kept something after this manner thro’ all Christendom” (Whitefield 11). Benjamin Franklin published a Christmas poem in his 1739 *Poor Richard’s Almanack* calling attention to “O blessed Season! Lov’d by Saints and Sinners, / For long Devotions, or for longer Dinners” (qtd. in Nissenbaum 121). Christmas had finally come to be reluctantly accepted within Massachusetts and the colonies more broadly. By the time the Dutch colonized Pennsylvania in the late seventeenth century, bringing along their own Christmas traditions, Puritan disdain for the holiday had lost out to the ever-growing secularized holiday.

CONVERSION NARRATIVES AND NOSTALGIA

Yet by the mid-seventeenth century, nostalgia — as related to English Christmas — was evocative of a return to a predominately rural Christmas that was often connected to childhood memories. Rituals evoked this nostalgic return, as the yule log, caroling, and wassailing came back to prominence. However, these rituals played out within rural areas, as Christmas moved out of urban spaces into the country. In the aftermath of Puritans’ sustained attacks on the holiday, Christmas rituals became more familial and less dependent on the larger celebrations within townships and cities. While Christmas celebration remained fragmentary in England, it nevertheless began a long, arduous, process of reclamation that would extend into the early Victorian period.

Nostalgia in New England was markedly different from the ritualized celebration that emerged post-parliamentary ban in England; not yet intertwined with Christmas, collective nostalgia didn’t so much evoke a particular holiday or ritual. There was simply

no preexisting Christmas to look back upon, no childhood memories to pull from as Christmas slowly gained cultural importance. Instead, nostalgia within the colonies — pre- and post-ban — would continue to be tied to religious worship until well into the late eighteenth century. Unlike the writings of John Taylor or John Aubrey in England, who argued for a return to Christmases past and all the rituals that went along with them, colonial nostalgia was tied to religious narratives of conversion. Michael W. Kaufman has argued nostalgia within the colonies, particularly in Puritan-led Massachusetts, stemmed "from the conviction that Christ was no longer present in New England, so there was nothing left to do but mourn his absence and long for his return" (94). Instead of a return to a — secularized, ritualized — Christmas, nostalgia in New England was initially linked to personalized, institutionally authenticated, religious conversion, in which a convert would hope to return to some type of prelapsarian state or, at the very least, to bring God back into their lives.

While conversion narratives populated much of early Puritan writing in New England — including works by Samuel Danforth, Benjamin Thompson, as well as Increase and Cotton Mather — Puritan minister Thomas Shepard provides a typical case study of the form these types of narrative took.[17] He often preached on the power of conversion, pointing to his own initial conversion, which had "yielded great dividends of assurance" for himself (24). Posthumously published in 1832 but written in 1646, just three years before his death, Shepard's *Autobiography* includes a lengthy discussion of

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[17] Many of the Puritan authors wrote conversion narratives that also doubled as jeremiads. As Sacvan Bercovitch defines a jeremiad: "first, a precedent from Scripture that sets out the communal norms; then, a series of condemnations that details the actual state of the community … and finally a prophetic vision that unveils the promises, announces the good things to come, and explain the gap between fact and ideal" (16). Simply, the conversion narrative was embodied within a specific person, while a jeremiad was a larger "state-of-the-covenant" address" (4).

his initial conversion to God, one that maps well on Caldwell's morphology. In it, Shepard begins by noting the "senselessness of sin and bondage to self and unconstancy and losing what the Lord had wrought," showcasing his previous *sinful* nature (44). However, he is *prepared* by God to "feel a greater need and put a greater price upon Jesus Christ," and then *assured* to seek "the glory and good of myself," making the transition to an active participant in the process (45). His *conviction* and *compunction* come about when the "Lord also [let] me see my own constant vileness in everything" before *submitting* that he saw "Christ Jesus righteousness for a poor sinner's ungodliness" (45). Shepard finally accepts his *faith* when he "saw the Lord gave me a heart to receive Christ with a naked hand, even naked Christ, and so the Lord gave me peace" (46). The acceptance of Christ gives Shepard assurance of his spiritual mission, but he did not believe in the finality of conversion, either. Instead — like Danforth, Thompson, and the Mathers — Shepard "insisted on the renewability of conversion;" that is, a cyclical process in which one continually undergoes the steps of conversion throughout one's life. While the steps remained fixed, the process was less a structured progression and more a looping series of stages in which one constantly cycled through, as they fell in and out of favor with God throughout their lives.

Yet Shepard's original experience nevertheless had a profound impact on not only his spiritual life, but also his social and cultural status, serving as a galvanizing moment in which Shepard sees that the Lord "used me the more kindly in every place" that he goes to visit (47). Post-conversion, Shepard traveled across England, and eventually America, rhetorically performing his conversion narrative "to accept of the people's call and to stay among them if I found upon my preaching a little season with them" (47). He

moved from Cambridge to Essex and, after a ban from Archbishop William Laud, and a voyage in 1635, to Massachusetts. Laud's banishment was a reaction to growing discontent with Puritan rhetoric, and Shepard, like many other Puritans, fled to the new world in hopes of religious freedom. While ostracized in England, Shepard's harsh rhetoric found a new home — and rapturous audience — within New England, where he continued to preach a "conception of Christ [that is] based on this sense of pain and suffering" (Werge 48). Shepard's preaching often rehearsed his initial conversion, focusing on "his vision of God's special covenant with New England and the incessant need for his chosen people to participate in that covenant with repentance and gratitude" (Werge 40). Thus, conversion was representative of not only a particular type of social and institutional currency and acceptance, as Caldwell and Morgan argue, but also a special relationship between worshipper and God. As graphed out by George Selement and Bruce C. Woolley, Shepard's conception in conversion can be mapped out thus:

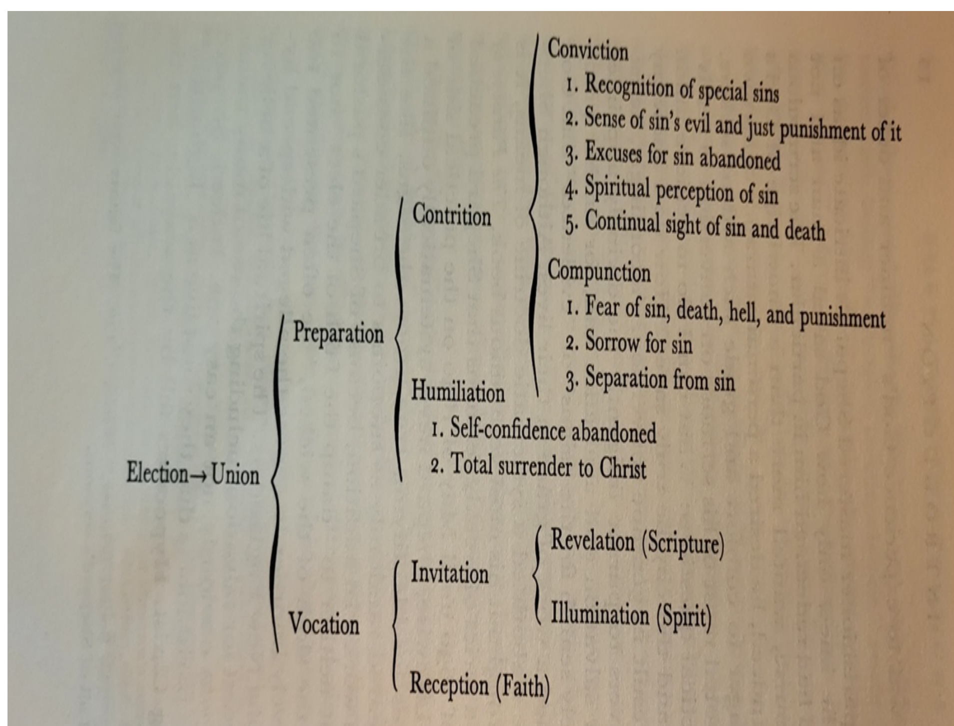

Figure 2.1: The Stages of Shepard's Theology of Conversion (Selement 16)

This framework roughly maps onto Morgan's, and Caldwell's, morphology. In its simplest form, conversion is merely the progression from *election* to *union* or, more simply put, want of reform to a type of symbiosis with Christ. Within the framework, Shepard lays out a series of sub-steps that one had to go through, placing the onus on the possible convert to *contrition* and *humiliation* before an invitation from the Lord to accept him fully within their heart and, finally reception of a type of faith. While Selement and Woolley portray this sequence as a top-down progression, it may more accurately be presented as a recursive loop using Morgan's terminology:

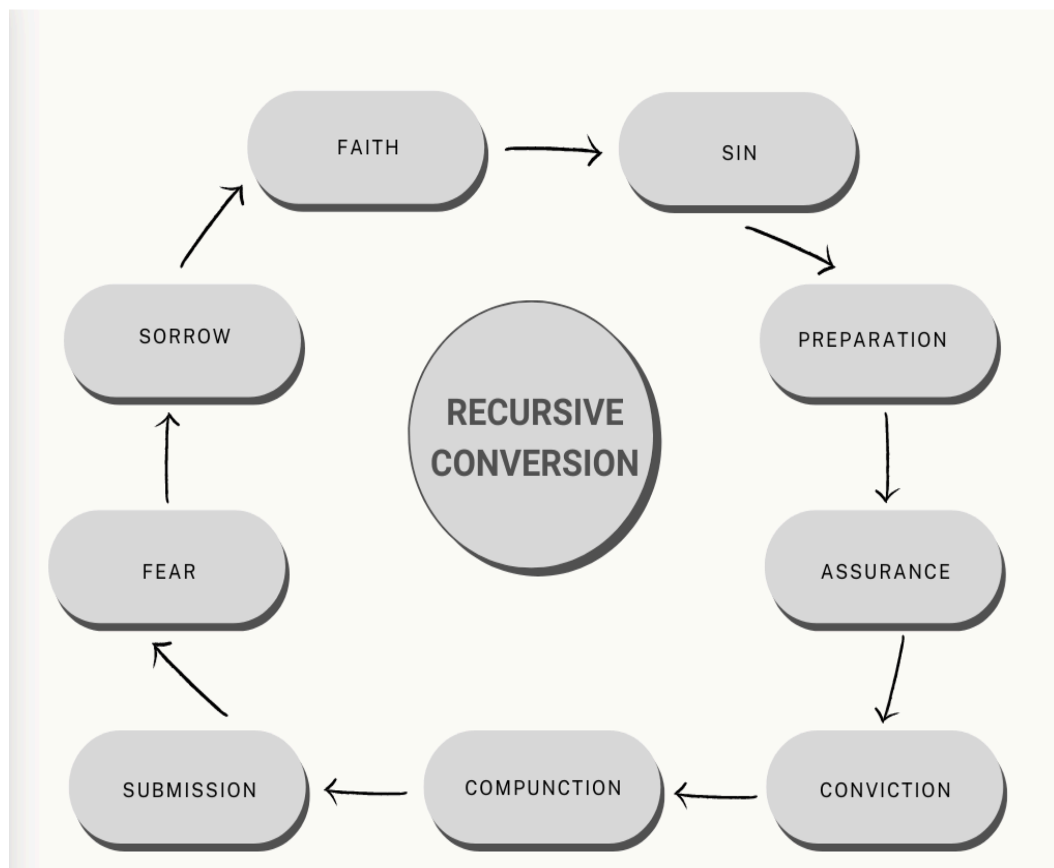

Figure 2.2: Recursive Morphology of Conversion

For one to have such a *reception* required acceptance within the church, predicated on rigorous examination and performance. Like many, Shepard wanted to receive only

visible saints and believers, those who could confirm their faith in God through public performance. This proclamation of one's conversion, and everlasting covenant with God, was a narrative performance in which a convert rehearsed their previous steps before giving themselves over to the judgement of the church, and by extension, its parishioners. Shepard recorded fifty-one of these conversions in his *Confessions*, written between 1638-1645. In it, Shepard's confessors repeat a common closing refrain. Echoing Shepard's own conversion, in which Christ institutes a spiritual reckoning by "letting me see my own constant vileness in everything," his parishioners reflect this turn inwards (45). Elizabeth Olbon, a Cambridge resident whom Shepard met in 1636, is shown "her heart more dead and dull [and] she saw how vain a thing it was to put confidence in any creature" before she witnesses "the Lord's love to her" (41). Another Cambridge resident whom Shepard recorded around 1638, Nathaniel Eaton, loses his "self-assurance" before "the Lord hath awakened me and hath not suffered me to relapse but rise again" (57). In 1642, Cambridge resident John Stansby confesses a similar reckoning where "God shot arrows in my heart" because of his temptation before the Lord "let in some beams of Himself, how ready my heart was to rest upon heartbreakings and to be puffed up with them" (88). All the confessions that Shepard recounts end in this way; as the Lord first shows them their wickedness before penetrating their souls, the speakers mix a variety of metaphors: confessing a love, being awoken from a slumber, being shot with arrows, etc. The testimony that they give Shepard is then given to the entire congregation to prove their newfound conversion.

Shepard is just one of many ministers who used conversion narratives to preach divine acceptance, especially in New England. For most, the final stage of *acceptance* —

or *reception* or *faith* — represented a nostalgic renewal, both into God's good graces and the earthly institution of the church.[18] Daniel Shea has argued that these narratives concern "whether or not the individual has been accepted into divine life, as acceptance signified by psychological and moral changes which the autobiographer comes to discern in his past experience" (xvii). A possible convert was asked to recall their previous life, reflecting on their dissolution with God, before a final acceptance. That acceptance was represented, as Kaufman notes, by a singular desire "to return to the purity and perfection of the 'first institutions,' that time when Christ walked the earth with his apostles" (93). Shepard believed that such a return was paradoxically impossible yet something that the church should nevertheless strive for — as represented in his belief in recursive conversions. The gap between the visible church, imperfect and susceptible to imposters, and the invisible church, perfect but unattainable in one's lifetime, represented the constant tension between the purpose and practice of conversion narratives. Shepard moved to New England because he felt "Christ had, in fact, left England" and that New England represented a possible site of religious revival that was "recovering and restoring the essence of faith, form, and practice as it had existed in the dawn of Christianity," and his converts ultimately proved this belief for him (Werge 45).

However, conversion narratives were not merely an inventory, and taxonomy, of an individual's self-belief. They were performances that proved to a select group that the convert had changed. As such, they were not written for the self, but for an audience.

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[18] While Morgan's morphology has been widely accepted as a typical conversion structure, critics Emory Elliot and Harry Stout have offered a different vocabulary. Elliot uses the term *possession* to describe the final step in which one has "awareness of presence of faith" (201). Stout sees a less rigid, more recursive process in which the final step includes "gratitude [that] causes the sinner to live a life of obedience and thanksgiving [although] individuals must continually monitor their spiritual state and repeat the process of conversion if necessary" (68)

This would change as the Puritans' grip on institutions began to wane in the transition from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries in America. The Great Awakening in the eighteenth century brought a religious revival that was not exactly Puritan in nature, but instead bucked against the type of institutionalization that Puritans that previously preached. As religion became more a self-defined ideology, the conversion narrative, and specifically the final step of *acceptance* or *reception*, moved inside. No longer a necessary performance piece, the conversion narrative became a method of self-identity.

SPIRITUAL EVACUATION

With growing disenchantment with the types of institutions that Puritan leaders bolstered, the conversion narrative began to move away from institutional structures and to become less predicated on the communal and congregational acceptance that Shepard advocated for. Instead, Evangelical ministers such as Jonathan Edwards began to preach self-reliance. Viewing conversion as less of a rigid and codifiable practice, Edwards's 1737 text *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton* provides a counterpoint to Shepard's fixed morphology in *Confessions*. Unlike Shepard, Edwards frames conversion in personal, not institutional terms:

> Persons are first awakened with a sense of their miserable condition by nature, the danger they are in of perishing eternally, and that it is of great importance to them that they speedily escape, and get into a better state. Those that before were secure and senseless, are made sensible how much they were in the way to ruin in their former courses. Some are more suddenly seized with convictions; it may be, by

> the news of others' conversion, or something they hear in public, or in private conferences, their consciences are suddenly smitten, as if their hearts were pierced through with a dart. (49)

Edwards continues by arguing against Shepard's institutionalism, noting that "They have greatly erred in the way in which they have gone about to try this work" (117). Instead of focusing on how the minister, parishioners, and church do or do not accept a conversion narrative, Edwards stresses the importance that the narrative should be "be found to be agreeable to word of God" (118). For Edwards, personal assurance — or *reception*, to borrow Shepard's terminology — is self-defined, forcing converts to look inwards instead of towards religious leaders for reassurance. Faith is less dependent on what others tell the convert.

Edwards envisions the final stage of conversion to be less of a quasi-mystical experience.[19] Instead of metaphors of being awoken, or spiritual penetration, *acceptance* comes from within. A convert may "have often heard that conversion is a work of mighty power, manifesting to the soul what no man or angel can give such a conviction of" (74). Instead, these experiences are framed as "plain, and easy, and rational"—so much so that converts might not be aware that they have accepted a new method of worship (74). Edwards then looks even further inward, noting that "persons after their conversion often speak of things of religion as seeming new to them; that preaching is a new thing … that the Bible is a new book" (74). Unlike Shepard's exterior framework, the newness of experience comes from within, self-defined by the convert. Edwards reinforces this

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[19] Edwards's conception of conversion also differs in the initial step. If Shepard writes about the knowledge of one's sins, Edwards views this stage in particularly violent terms in which the individual suffers in a way that Edwards often equates with sudden, even painful, death.

viewpoint by presenting two case studies within his text, Phebe [Phoebe] Bartlet and Abigail Hutchinson. Both children underwent religious conversions with the help of Edwards very early in their lives. In fact, Phebe was only four, and while Hutchinson's age is never mentioned, most historians place her between eight and ten.

As Edwards recounts, Phebe was "observed very constantly to retire, several times in a day, as was concluded, for secret prayer" in her closet (98). While alone in her closet, she was heard by her mother asking God for forgiveness for her sins. When she would emerge, her mother would ask her what she was praying for as "she continued crying exceedingly, and writhing her body to and fro, like one in anguish of spirit" (98). After these prayer sessions, she underwent a painful — and physical — conversion, in which she retreated into her closet before again emerging to her mother with "this cheerful speech, 'I can find God now!'" and admitting that she now loved God more than her mother and father (98). What happens in the closet is not mentioned, but Phebe's narrative is typical of the structure that Edwards preaches, in which someone retreats into their self — physicalized by the Phebe's closet — before emerging from a particularly violent conversion inwardly changed, if in a way that's not immediately identifiable by outsiders. As Phebe herself notes, her conversion is not predicated on acceptance from her mother or father, only from the Lord himself. Sarah Rivett argues that such "an inwardly directed and phenomenal experience can be known only by the recipient of Christ's indwelling light" (308). Hutchinson undergoes another similarly physicalized conversion. On "the sabbath-day she was so ill that her friends thought it not best that she should go to public worship, of which seemed very desirous" (89). As a result of her own physical confrontation with sin, she is bed-ridden and, on the Monday after the Sabbath,

awakens to find “within herself … the easiness and calmness she felt in her mind, which was of a kind she never felt before” (89). Hutchinson’s conversion again takes place within the confines of her home, away from the church and the ministers, and even from her own parents. Both Bartlet and Hutchinson undergo conversions of their own volition, never seeking outside acceptance of their newly religious status but, instead, becoming happy with their own knowledge of the “lively sense of the excellency of Christ” (90).

Puritan orthodoxy had been too rigid and too defined for the freewheeling revivals of Edwards and his fellow revivalists There was also less of a consensus belief about the importance of institutional religion as the eighteenth century progressed. While Shepard’s conception of conversion was cyclical, it was also mainly inflexible, as demonstrated by his *Confessions*, which repeated an exacting morphology. The conversion narratives retreated from public performance into the “private sphere of the self” in which “self-expression” and “self-realization” had become the de-facto method of demonstrating conversion (Casanova 36). While conversion had always been a form of self-expression, for the Puritans it also served a rhetorical purpose outside of a self-defined belief structure, namely communal and institutional acceptance. For Shepard — or Mather or any number of Puritan preachers — conversion was an initial step into a congregation. In a sense, the congregation acted as an authenticator, viewing what Bryce Traister calls the “externals” of religious authenticity and either accepting or rejecting the veracity of one’s conversion (5). Yet Edwards preached an individually authenticated ideology, one that was not tied to the rigors of an institution, or to any preacher.

Thus, conversion interiorized as the century progressed, which is not to say that conversion narratives become fully divorced from the form’s religious antecedents or that

they became diaristic. But the form became intensely personal. In fact, Meredith Neuman has argued that “conversion narrative is not autobiography, but neither is it a static morphology or a reliable taxonomy of evidence” (202). Neuman’s argument against the autobiographical nature of conversion narratives pushes back against Caldwell’s central claim that these types of narratives were some of the first instances of individualized expression within America. Yet, as Shepard and Edwards demonstrate, for the non-ministers, conversions are almost always mediated through some type of narrator. Shepard’s *Confessions* are not written in the first person, nor is Edwards’ account.

By the late eighteenth century, and into the early nineteenth, the term conversion became a stand-in for any type of American narrative in which a character undergoes a quasi-spiritual (and/or supernatural) transformation. As previously shown, while there is some disagreement about the individual steps that one undertakes, the morphology of conversion remained somewhat fixed. As the eighteenth century progressed, conversion became a metonym for communal, often national, acceptance. This was not a simple linear progression, as conversion, writ large, was used by Puritans to assert not only religious but also communal identities before religion was supplanted by nationalism in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War. First, Puritans used conversion for communal acceptance, evangelicals for individual worship, and, finally, the nation for a type of narrative about the splendor and importance of America. In *The Science of the Soul,* Sarah Rivett even sees this type of secularized conversion in Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography, where Franklin “is highly conscious of the way that it builds upon as well as departs from the tradition of the Puritan spiritual autobiography” (340). Rivett goes on to suggest an entire such movement towards secularized conversion:

> From John Marrant to Phillis Wheatley to Olaudah Equiano to John Woolman and Elizabeth Ashbridge, late-eighteenth-century conversion narratives abounded, as if to announce a kind of generic liberation from the carefully regulated and disciplined attention to the uncertain evidence of the soul imposed in Puritan testimonies prior to Edwards. (Rivett 344)

As America moved away from the rigid structures of Puritan life, it also adopted the conversion narrative in a more "generic" form that allowed authors any type of spiritual or secularized change to gesture to the framework in their own autobiographical narratives. Yet, as we will see in Chapter Three, conversion also moved out of the autobiographical sphere and was used by the authors of fiction to explore the relationship between modernity, progress, and nostalgia.

One such author would completely graft the conversion narrative onto a narrative of manifest destiny of the founding of New York. Yet that author, Washington Irving, who was also a staunch anti-Puritan, co-opted a narrative form that had almost completely transformed by the time of his composition — replacing literalized *faith* with a much more abstract notion of *national identity* — and almost wholly moved away from the religious antecedents, retaining only the form and format. By the late early nineteenth century, conversion was an individualized experience, predicated more on self rather than communal acceptance.

CONCLUSION

Unlike the Christmas converts whom we shall discuss later, Sewell never converted to loving Christmas or celebrated the holiday himself. He remained a staunch anti-Christmas crusader until his death. However, his position also marginally relaxed in

his waning years. He presided over the Massachusetts legislature in 1722, nearly thirty years after his initial diary entries lamenting the legalization of Christmas. Then Governor Samuel Shute "took me aside to the Southeast Window of the Council Chamber, to speak to me about adjourning the General Court to Monday next because of Christmas. I told his Excellency I would consider it" (314). After a prolonged discussion with Shute, and spiritual advice from none other than Cotton Mather,

> The Governor took me to the window again looking eastward, next Mrs. Phillips's, and spoke to me again about adjourning the Court to next Wednesday. I spoke against it; and propounded that the Governor would take a Vote for it; that he would hold the Balance even between the Church and us. His Excellency went to the Board again, and said much for this adjourning; All kept Christmas but we; I suggested King James I to Mr. Dudley, how he boasted what a pure church he had; and they did not keep Yule nor Pasch (Easter). (314)

Nevertheless, he finally allowed the "Adjournment of the Court" on Christmas Day. For the first time in the history of Massachusetts legislature, members were allowed the time to celebrate Christmas. While the decision was a result of a drawn-out back-and-forth between Belcher and Sewall, his final admission that "All Kept Christmas but we" represented a small, but still significant, shift (314). While Sewell continued to rail against the holiday up until his death in 1730, he warmed, if ever slightly, to the notion of holiday leisure in those waning years, allowing the legislature to take the holiday off and spending his own Christmas in quiet reflection and prayer.

The sustained Puritan-backed assaults on Christmas ended up being futile in the face of a holiday that was rapidly developing, and secularizing, throughout the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While Christmas celebration progressed on different timelines in England, the holiday nonetheless began to take on cultural importance. In England, the Puritan ban led to a resurgence in Christmas nostalgia. Within this renewed interested in the holiday, the rural English took up their own folk-celebrations, taking the larger rituals and adopting them for their families and townships. In America, nostalgia was not yet linked to Christmas celebration, though those two would become heavily intertwined as the nineteenth-century progressed. Instead, nostalgia was a religious concept, intertwined with the narrative framework of conversion. As demonstrated, conversion allowed for an individual to admit their sinful nature, while also regressing back into a relationship with Christ. As I've shown, these narratives eventually secularized as the seventeenth-century progressed, becoming a stand-in for any type of narrative that represented notions of national identity that permeated the American consciousness. As the conversion secularized, so did the relationship between narratives and nostalgia.

Yet nostalgia was also still split along a nationalized, and thus secularized, axis. New England Puritan leaders used conversion to signal a nostalgic return to a past in which Christ had not abandoned their mission. In England, Christmas celebration was representative of a return to a simple childhood or a pre-ban Christmas celebration. Washington Irving would address these two very different types of nostalgia, introducing the idea of conversion onto a festive, if not exactly Christmas, setting with his invocation of St. Nicholas. Yet these forms of nostalgia would remain separated within Irving's writing, even if he moves us closer to the fully realized Christmas conversion.

CHAPTER THREE

"THE GUARDIANSHIP OF THE GOOD SAINT NICHOLAS": WASHINGTON IRVING'S CHRISTMAS WRITING AND INVENTED NOSTALGIA

INTRODUCTION

Despite the associations of his now famous 1820 story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" with that other American holiday — Halloween — Washington Irving is perhaps more responsible for defining early nineteenth-century Christmas celebration than any other writer of fiction. Unlike the concentrated holiday celebration in *A Christmas Carol*, Irving's holiday writing is diffused across several texts.[20] While he was a sketch writer more than a novelist, Irving's contributions to holiday literature are buried within two of his most famous long form works. *A History of New York* (1809) and *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*. (1819-20) weave through numerous holidays and stories, but also incorporate St. Nicholas and Christmas respectively, reinforcing the relationship between conversion, nostalgia, and the holiday, and build upon the kinds of early American and English Christmas celebrations and conversion narratives discussed in Chapter Two. As I argue, Irving still separates these historical lines of conversion and nostalgia along a national axis, with Christmas nostalgia in England and conversion in America. Yet he is also conscious of the ways in which the holiday became tied to conceptions of eternal

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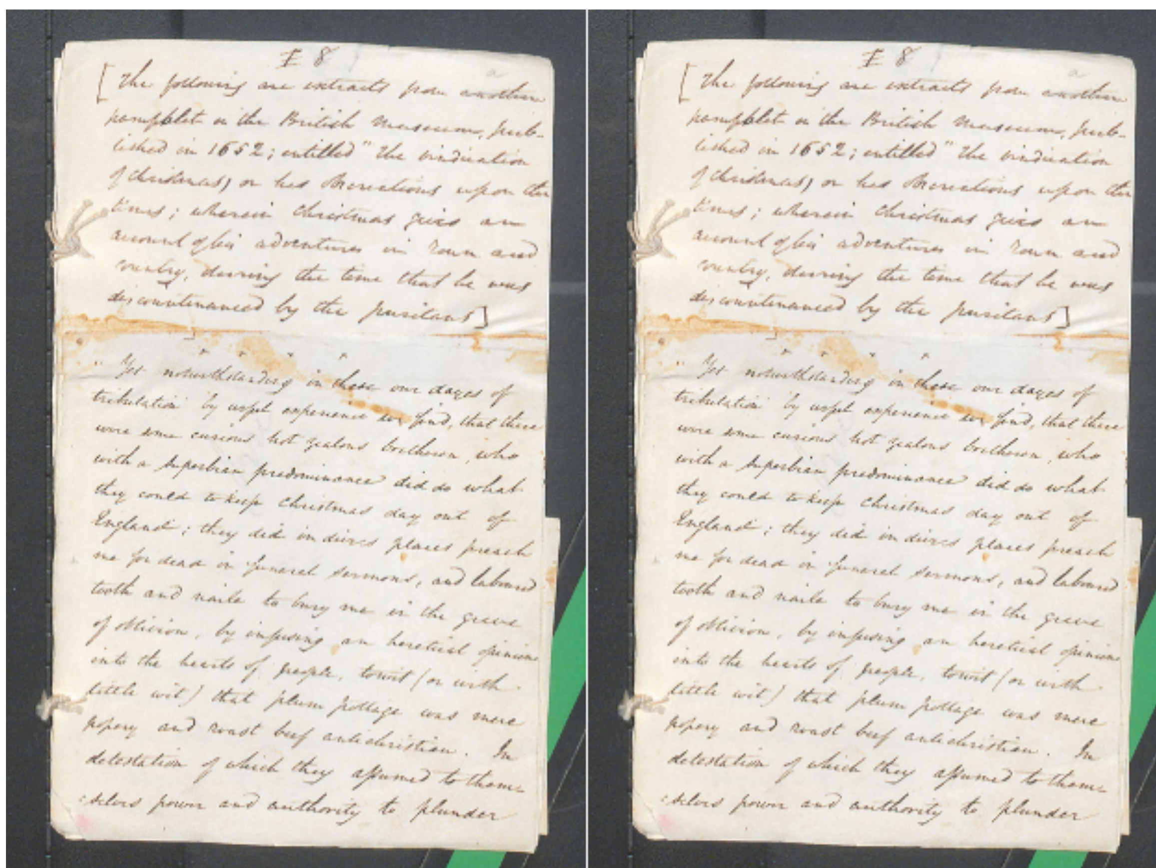
[20] Much of Irving's Christmas writing has regularly been excerpted from its original texts. The chapters concerning the Squire and Christmas celebration in *Sketchbook* have often been reprinted under the name *Old Christmas*. This practice began in 1875, after Irving's death, and has continued into the present with yearly gift-books that claim to be from "The Sketch-book of Washington Irving." In doing so, publishers eliminated the fictionalized Geoffrey Crayon from the narrative entirely, conflating narrator and writer.

change, predicated on a nostalgic return to a past time. For the first time, conversion is intermixed with Christmas — or, more specifically, the supernaturalism of St. Nicholas.

Irving was also acutely aware of the historical lineage of Puritans' antagonistic relationship with the holiday. Himself a staunch anti-Puritan, Irving nevertheless references the likes of Cotton Mather in *History*. Further, he was versed in the rhetoric of English anti-Puritan writers who pushed back against the seventeenth century ban. As seen below, in a journal entry in 1804 before he set about writing his fictionalized *History of New York*, Washington Irving copied out John Taylor's *The Vindication of Christmas* in full.



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[The following are extracts from another pamphlet in the British Museum, published in 1652; entitled "The Vindication of Christmas) or his Observations upon the times; wherein Christmas gives an account of his adventures in town and country, during the time that he was discountenanced by the puritans]

"Yet notwithstanding in these our dayes of tribulation by woful experience we find, that there were some curious hot zealous brethren, who with a superstitious predominance did do what they could to keep Christmas day out of England; they did in divers places preach me for dead in funeral sermons, and laboured tooth and nails to bury me in the grave of oblivion, by infusing an heretical opinion into the heads of people, to wit (or with little wit) that plum pottage was mere popery and roast beef antichristian. In detestation of which they assumed to themselves power and authority to plunder

Figure 3.1: Washington Irving's Journal (Irving, *Washington Irving's Vindication of Christmas*, 1-2)

Perhaps searching for “a proper format for his own stories,” as Penne Restad suggests, Irving’s decision to transcribe Taylor’s entire tract showcases his interest in nostalgic celebration (27).[21] As discussed in Chapter Two, Taylor personifies an Olde Christmas who rambles from town to town after having been exiled from London. Depending on the kindness of strangers, he takes up with rural farmers and their families, reenacting nostalgic rituals — caroling, drinking, dancing, etc. — with them, remarking on the connections between childhood and Christmas. As I will show later in the chapter, in *Sketchbook* Irving grafts the spirit of Taylor’s Olde Christmas onto his character of the Squire at his fictionalized Bracebridge Hall, re-writing the mythologized figure as a bumbling family patriarch insistent on celebrating according to his own vaguely defined “ancient” ways.

Irving was also aware of how his writing intersected with the Christmas rituals of the Pennsylvania Dutch in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Included in these rituals was the growing influence of St. Nicholas on the holiday. By foregrounding the Pennsylvania Dutch, I aim to historicize the rituals that Irving subsequently revitalized in his own writings. Many of these rituals predated *History* — Belsnickling, Second Christmas, and St. Nicholas Day, specifically— but nevertheless were popularized in the publication’s aftermath, bringing them back into public consciousness and, ultimately, leading to a rise in American Christmas celebration. The Pennsylvania Dutch method of Christmas-keeping combined traditional religious festivities with pagan rituals, implicitly pushing back on New England antipathy for the holiday and creating

[21] While historians such as Restad and Nissenbaum have integrated Irving within the continuum of holiday writing, his work is still overshadowed by Dickens, whom he inspired. Many popular Christmas overviews echo the single mention given by Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries’s *Christmas Past* in referring to Irving only once, and as “an American friend to Charles Dickens” (84).

what Arthur Shoemaker termed a “hybridized folk-Christmas” celebration that would carry on into the late nineteenth, and twentieth, centuries (Shoemaker 115). These rituals included feasts honoring both Belsnickle and Sinterklaas, the former a malevolent gift-giver, and the latter a folk-descendant from the Christian St. Nicholas who would inspire the connections between holiday celebration and supernaturalism. Both would serve as the inspiration for our modern Santa Claus, who would be popularized just as Irving’s writing was being read by American readers.

I then read Irving’s first long form text as a prototype for the type of Christmas conversion that would be eventually codified by Dickens, informed by Irving’s own interest in the holiday. There, I argue that *A History of New York* features a secularized conversion narrative for the character of Oloff van Kortlandt — an early, albeit fictionalized, founder of New York City, according to Irving — who is visited not by a religious guide but instead by a vision of St. Nicholas. Unlike the prophetic or even violent visions of Christ that the Puritans had, van Kortlandt’s conversion is predicated on the acceptance of Nicholas, and the Saint’s dreams of a conquered New York. This conversion echoes not only the Puritan narratives discussed in Chapter Two but also the structure of Puritan jeremiads such John Winthrop’s famous *A Model of Christian Charity* (1630), which took the framework of individualized conversion and applied it to a larger community. Not only does van Kortlandt personally convert to the cult of St. Nicholas, a community within the Pennsylvania Dutch, but he uses his conversion to lay out a mythology of New York City. An early prototype of the vaguely spiritual, secularized, and codified Christmas conversions that would come post-Irving, van Kortlandt may change at the behest of a spiritual visit, but his conversion only teasingly

connects to the holiday. Instead, the narrative combines conversion with an early Dutch ritual —St. Nicholas Day — and furthers the connection between the narrative framework and nostalgia.

Nostalgia is even more prevalent in Irving's subsequent collection *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, a fictionalized travelogue by the titular narrator. In this section, I focus on a series of interconnected chapters concerning Crayon's visit to Bracebridge Hall. There, he meets the Squire, a devotee of Old Christmas celebrations who doesn't fully understand the history of celebration he is enacting, despite forcing these rituals and customs onto his family and workers. I argue that the Squire reinforces the connection between Christmas and what I term "invented nostalgia," creating an idealized but nevertheless fabricated Christmas past which he attempts to return to year after year. Just as Taylor mourned the inability to return to the Christmases of long ago, Irving's Squire invents rituals and traditions to replicate a Christmas that had no historical precedent outside of its connection to a fictionalized past.

While these two strands of nostalgia — conversion and Christmas — were still separated along national lines by the early nineteenth century, Irving connects conversion to St. Nicholas — and thus a narrative predecessor of Santa Claus — and paves the way for Dickens's *A Christmas Carol,* a text that would fully solidify the bond between the narrative framework of conversion and Christmas celebration, a thread that I will explore in Chapter Four. Importantly, Irving offers a counterpoint to the type of Puritan antipathy seen in Chapter One, showcasing how Pennsylvania celebration implicitly pushed back against New England orthodoxy and set a standard for Christmas celebration that his writing would further popularize.

THE PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH, SECOND CHRISTMAS, AND THE CULT OF SAINT NICHOLAS

By the time that Irving wrote *History*, German immigrants had arrived in Pennsylvania and Puritan thought — and its emphasis on overt religiosity — had slowly eroded as national identity subsumed religious uniformity. While the nation began to coalesce in the wake of the Revolutionary War, regionalism — and the rituals and traditions with it — held throughout the early and mid-eighteenth century. Yet by the end of the century, there was a diminishing interest in regional identity until, at least, 1790 when "regional identity became submerged in a national polity" (Daniels 60). Outside of English immigration, many Mennonites fled persecution in Germany, establishing regional colonies throughout Pennsylvania and, eventually, New York. This influx of German immigration led to upwards of 81,000 German-speakers, including both nonsectarians and members of religious communities alike, entering through Philadelphia's port between 1683 and 1775 (Louden 64). Bringing with them an Anabaptist-based set of liturgical and sacramental practices and living outside of the purview of Puritan dominated New England, the Pennsylvania Dutch, as they would become known, also brought a host of ritualized leisure activities over. Defined by celebratory rituals that intertwined religious and cultural observances, Christmas celebration in Pennsylvania during the mid to late-eighteenth century, as Increase Mather feared, drew from religious doctrine, namely the birth of Christ and Saint Nicholas, and fused celebration within cultural, secularized rituals including the ones that Irving wrote about.

Outside of New England, eighteenth-century Christmas was marked less by religious observance, though Dutch celebration was ostensibly about the birth of Christ, than by "folk-Christmas" (115). As defined by Shoemaker, "folk-Christmas" is "Christmas of the home and of the streets rather than the Church" and was predicated on a series of ritual practices, including feasts, decorations, revelry resembling seventeenth-century English celebration, and the regionally specific practice of belsnickling (115). This ritual was named after the supernatural figure. Someone would often dress up in fur as Belsnickle, an early precursor of Santa Claus, to hand out treats to children during the December holidays.[22] These celebrations underscored the tension between cultural celebration and the austerity of Puritanism. As German immigrants continued to bring over rituals and traditions from their homeland, American Christmas celebration became further divorced from Christ's birth. The Pennsylvania Dutch celebrations also departed from the type of quiet contemplation that Puritan ministers such as Increase and Cotton Mather tolerated in New England. At the heart of the divide were conflicting views on the nature of leisure, with Puritans simultaneously stressing "that all people needed relaxation to refresh their body and soul" and cautioning against "ungodly, unlawful,

[22] Belsnickling's roots trace back to German tradition in which the figure of Belsnickle was a close companion to Saint Nicholas. The folk-ritual fused this connection with Saint Nicholas and the New England practice of wassailing and mummering — another ritual that required participants to dress up. Writing about the ritual, James Frazer described the costume: "a peasant farmer, generally well-to-do and respected, rigs himself out in motley and hides his face under a mask; round his waist he wears a girdle crammed with rolls, while in his hand he wields a long whip, from which more than fifty cracknels dangle on a string" (248). The historian John W. Wayland recounts that "Belsnickles, when I was a boy… would make it a point to frighten children, if they could. If admitted to the house, they would sometimes throw candy or other sweets on the floor, and then cut with the long switches they carried anyone who would stoop to pick up the candy" (qtd. in Cline 165). See Ruth H. Cline's "Belsnickles and Shanghais" (1958), Eric DeJonge's "The Origins of the Pennsylvania Belsnickle," and Gerald Milnes's "Old Christmas and the Belsnickles: Our Early Holiday Traditions."

unreasonable, or unproductive activities"—the very type that were crucial to folk-celebration (Daniels 16).

For the Pennsylvania Dutch, Christmas and other holidays were connected to relaxation. Ministers in Pennsylvania would often stress that the holidays were a time not only to refresh the body and soul but also to spend with families and doing other social activities. The need for prolonged relaxion even led to a new red-letter day in Pennsylvania: Second Christmas. This day was not given the same reverence as older holidays, but it nevertheless extended the Christmas break past December 25th and came to prominence in the early 1800s. During that time, ministers preached that "Second Christmas," December 26th, was a "holy day, yet do not think it as holy as the 25th," as the Lutheran Minister Ezra Keller wrote in 1849 (Diehl 173). Second Christmas was a way for Christmas revelers to continue their holiday festivities, visiting family members that they couldn't see the day before, prolonging their holiday excursions. Some ministers attempted to sanctify Second Christmas by holding consecrations and Sunday School exercises during the day. However, these attempts to sanctify the day were ultimately unsuccessful, as "Second Christmas was to [the Pennsylvania Dutch] a day of relaxation. Even though they answered the call of their minister to gather at the church, they wanted to make it a social affair," continuing their feasts, drinks, and games after Church services (Shoemaker 118).

Besides Church activities, Second Christmas carried its own set of sub-rituals. Wheelbarrow races were one of the odd features of the holiday, as children and adults would bet money and livestock on head-to-head competitions. Shooting matches for

adults and games of chance for children, called "raffling," were popular during the folk-holiday. Raffling was

> a game of chance common at the holiday seasons in which seven old-time pennies are thrown from a hat or, more recently a leather box. Heads are counted and each player gets to throw the container three times. The player who throws the largest number of heads wins the prize. The highest score possible is twenty-one. Second prize is awarded to the player who throws the lowest score. (Shoemaker 146)

Despite their shared emphasis on connective, social, rituals on both Christmas Day and Second Christmas, the methods of celebration for late-Puritans and German immigrants conflicted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century. However, this tension eventually "diminished [in] intensity," primarily because of the popularity and adoption of the Pennsylvania Dutch folk-festivities across the nascent United States as a direct result of Irving's writing (Barnett 5). Even though Second Christmas never caught on as a national holiday — essentially disappearing by the late 1800s — it was instrumental to a rise in leisure time surrounding the holiday.[23] Those who emphasized the holiday as a "folk occasion" slowly combined Christmas and Second Christmas celebrations to create a hybridized secular-spiritual celebration that would extend the Christmas break and carry on through the late eighteenth into the nineteenth century (Barnett 5).

While the Pennsylvania holiday practices included the celebratory rituals that Puritans feared — singing, revelry, feasting, drinking, and overall overindulgence — they mainly prioritized the social aspects of celebration. Connected to these rituals was an

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[23] Second Christmas does continue to this day but is mainly celebrated by small sects of Pennsylvania Amish. It also shares similarities with Boxing Day, the day after Christmas throughout the UK. Boxing Day was made into a public holiday in the 1870s to accommodate "the number of working-class people who travelled back to see their families" during the holidays (Johnes 43).

early form of gift-exchange, often invoking a spiritual or supernatural figure. When Irving wrote about St. Nicholas, he was citing what German immigrants brought over: a litany of folk superstitions tied to the holiday. Also, unlike the gifting of presents in early English Christmas, which mainly reinforced social hierarchies between employers and employees, gifting among the Pennsylvania Dutch was often between parent and child, a relationship that would play out throughout nineteenth-century American Christmas celebrations. While many of these supernatural figures would fail to attract national prominence in the intervening years, including Belsnickle, the social rituals attached to them would eventually evolve into the common form of gifting associated the holiday today. Belsnickle's spiteful method of gifting acts as a precursor for the type of gift-exchange that Santa Claus would eventually be known for. Many children were afraid of Belsnickle, as the Pennsylvania Reverend B. Bausman wrote in 1871, remembering his childhood in rural Pennsylvania:

> Under [Belsnickle's] ugly mask, and an outlandish dress, such as no child ever saw mortal wear before, no one can tell who he is. We children tremble as in the presence of an unearthly being. Really, the Nickel tries to be pleasant, jabbers in some unknown tongue, and takes a few chestnuts and candies out of his vast bundle on his back, and throws them on the floor for the larger boys… Among these older boys is a self-willed fellow, who sometimes behaves rudely. Whenever he picks up something, Nickel thwacks a long whip across his back. (Ranck 15-16)

Belsnickle, and his method of gifting, "playfully separated the 'sheep' and the 'goats' from among the children" (Wentz 16). Only after the children confessed to their bad

deeds could they be forgiven. But after Belsnickle's visit, when the children went to bed, "the more benevolent figure of the Krist-Kindel (Christ-child) made his visit, bringing some gift symbolizing his love for fallen humanity" (Wentz 16). The supernatural figures of Belsnickle and Krist-Kindel created a dialectic between good and bad, or naughty and nice, with both eventually synthesizing into the figure of St. Nicholas.

Also transferred over from Germany was what James H. Barnett calls "the folk cult of St. Nicholas." Santa Claus was created from intertwining newer Pennsylvania Christmas rituals with the traditions of St. Nicholas Day celebrations from Germany (Barnett 5). The patron saint of children, St. Nicholas was celebrated as a gift-giver as early at the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Before 1800, Saint Nicholas was only passingly mentioned in connection to New York or Pennsylvania. One of the earliest references to Saint Nicholas Day occurs in a 1773 edition of *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*: "Last Monday the anniversary of St. Nicholas, otherwise called Santa Claus, was celebrated at Protestant Hall" ("St. Nicholas"). Once the Dutch expanded out of Pennsylvania and into New York, they carried with them an adherence to Saint Nicholas. Yet many of these developments, and a resurgence of Saint Nicholas festivities were the result of the incredible popularity of Washington Irving's writing, particularly his invocation of Saint Nicholas in *A History of New York*.

The Feast of Saint Nicholas was also important to Pennsylvania celebrations and takes place on December sixth, with many of the rituals associated with Christmas. Historically, children would place their shoes next to the fireplace only to return the next day to find small presents hidden within them.[24] While the Feast of St Nicholas was

[24] Both benevolent gift-givers, Sinterklaas and Krist-Kindel were viewed interchangeably. Sinterklaas was more popular in Germany, while Kris Kindel — the Christ Child — is an amalgamation of religious and

celebrated in Pennsylvania, it was also combined with Christmas festivities, as Krist-Kindel and Belsnickle visited homes during the holiday season to bestow gifts on the children. As the nineteenth-century progressed, Belsnickle fell out of favor and Krist-Kindel has transformed into Kriss Kringle, although not everyone was happy with such a change. The Reverend Aaron B. Grosh wrote in an 1854 *Reading Gazette* article:

> "Kriss Kringle" — This is horribly barbarous imitation of a German barbarism, into which an English ear has led many of our newspaper editors and writers.… "Kriss-Kringle," as a name for the "Babe of Bethlehem" is neither English nor bad German, but a mere jargon or gibberish of the vilest kind — and when the facts are known, sounds like ribaldry. I hope that religious papers, at least, will cease from the name of Christ. (qtd. in Shoemaker 56)

Despite Grosh's protests, Kriss-Kringle and Saint Nicholas were widely popular by the early and mid-nineteenth century, as townships across Pennsylvania and New York celebrated Saint Nicholas Day and Christmas, directly referencing Irving's *History* in the process.

Irving's text was so popular that it even seeped into the public history of New York. *Harper's Baazar* editor Mary L. Booth would write about Saint Nicholas in her *History of the City of New York* in 1859:

> The Dutch had five national festivals… Kerstrydt (Christmas), Nieue jar (New Year); Paas (the Passover); Pinxter (Whitsuntide); and Santa Claus (St. Nicholas or Christ-kinkle day).…

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secular gift-practices. Belsnickle also has a Dutch counterpart, Zwarte Piet ("Black Pete"), a racial caricature, who helps Sinterklaas deliver presents. For more on Zwarte Piet, see Jeroen Rodenberg and Pieter Wagenaar's "Essentializing 'Black Pete': competing narratives surrounding the Sinterklass tradition in the Netherlands."

> But Santa Claus was the best day of all … for having been the day sacred to St. Nicholas, the patron saint of New York, who presided at the figure-head of the first emigrant ship that touched her shores, who gave his name to the first church erected within her walls, and who has ever since been regarded as having especial charge of the destinies of his favorite city. (Booth 192)

Despite Booth's declarative title, she wasn't referring to historical fact, but instead drawing from Irving's imagined history of New York. There is little historical evidence outside of Irving's fictionalized text to suggest the first church was named after Nicholas, or that the masthead contained his image. These and many other of Booth's assertions are lifted directly from Irving's *History* including the "goodly image of St. Nicholas, equipped with a low, broad brimmed hat" on the founding ship (63). Booth's history mirrored several popular accounts of the founding of New York that took Irving's writing as fact. As Charles W. Jones notes, "Miss Booth appears to have been correct in only one particular, that the cult of 'Santa Claus' originated in New York City, from which is spread" (330) Thus, Irving was instrumental to reviving the folk-cult of St. Nicholas and popularizing a figure that had only existed in a nascent form before *History*. While *History* nevertheless only has tangential ties to Christmas holiday, it nevertheless acts as a type of type of urtext for the Christmas conversion, a burgeoning narrative framework that connects Christmas to the type of spiritual renewal that the Puritans preached.

IRVING'S *A HISTORY OF NEW YORK*

Just as Saint Nicholas Day, and Christmas more generally, was gaining some prominence in Pennsylvania and New York, Washington Irving was publishing his

fictionalized historical satire *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809) under the pseudonym Diedrich Knickerbocker. Published on Saint Nicholas Day in 1809 and subsequently revised in 1812, the collection purports to tell the overarching history of the city by the Dutch historian Knickerbocker. The narrative is framed around the disappearance of Knickerbocker, a disappearance that Irving publicized by placing actual ads in New York newspapers seeking information on the missing narrator, drumming up public interest in the work before publication.[25] In *History*, after Knickerbocker leaves an outstanding bill, the hotel proprietor Seth Handaside decides to sell Knickerbocker's manuscript to recoup costs. An unconventional text, *History* was described by an anonymous early reviewer as "a rich collection of wit and humour" that "is vain to attempt to analyse" (Arderman 34). Purposely wide-ranging, Knickerbocker's "historical" account traces the origins of New Amsterdam through its English capture, which "was attended with no other outrage than that of changing the name of the province and its metropolis, which thenceforth was denominated NEW YORK" (Irving 513).

While *History* has been read variously as a lighthearted satire, a burlesque performance, an attack on American institutions, and a work of historical accounting, Irving's central conception of American history pits restrictive New England Puritanism against Lutheran rationalism.[26] Demarcating New York and Pennsylvania against neighboring New England states, Irving presents national character along ideological fault lines, bifurcated by regional distinctions. Adam Kitzes argues, Irving experimented

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[25] For more on how Irving marketed *History*, see Brian Jay Jones's *Washington Irving: An American Original*.

[26] See Martin Roth's *Comedy and America* for more on how Irving was influenced by such "burlesque" writers as Erasmus, Cervantes, and Samuel Butler (115).

"in his approaches to writing fictions and histories with due attention to their variable forms, their mutual correspondences, and materials with which they were composed," intermixing historical fact with invented fiction to create a composite history of the colony and, eventually, state (Kitzes 12).

While Christmas was never truly forgotten on either side of the Atlantic, Irving's claim in *A History of New York* that the "the good old Dutch festivals" have "fallen into sad disuse among my fellow-citizens" rang true through throughout the Dutch colonies (516). *History* tells the story of the Dutch settlement in New York. Irving's disdain for Puritan doctrine is also well established in *History*, as the text "is as critical of antiquarian follies… as it is of progressivist illusions," presenting "the antipathy between Dutch and Yankee at considerable length" (McGann 350; Ringe 456). Much of the satire contrasts the conflict between New England and New Netherland, foreshadowing the "dark and portentous cloud" of New England that hangs over the Dutch colony (Irving 228). For all this disdain for Puritanism, however, Irving is well versed within the writings of Mather, Shepard, and other Puritan thinkers.

Within the text, Puritans are often treated by Knickerbocker as the antithesis to their welcoming Dutch counterparts. The historian goes on to attack them, at length, satirically offering

> the steady narration of my [Dutch] history, which will contain not only proofs that the Dutch had clear title and possession in the fair valleys of the Connecticut, and that they were wrongfully disposed thereof — but likewise that they have been scandalously maltreated ever since by the misrepresentations of the crafty historians of New England. And in this I shall be guided by a spirit of truth and

> impartiality, and a regard to my immortal fame — for I would not wittingly dishonor my work by a single falsehood, misrepresentation of prejudice, though it should gain our forefathers the whole country of New England. (230)

Despite distancing his work from Puritans' relentless religious fervor, Irving's text is full of allusions to a "string of incredible stories about New England witches, grisly ghosts, horses without heads — and hair-breadth scrapes and bloody encounters among the Indians" (105). Included within these references is Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), which traces the religious development of New England (Irving 216).[27] *Magnalia* was written by Mather to explore "the Wonders of the Christian Religion, flying from the Depravations of Europe, to the American Strand" (Mather 23). As he often does throughout *History*, Knickerbocker ironically aligns these religious Puritan beliefs with the mystical "occult sciences" that attempt the "conversion of Quakers and Anabaptists" (Irving 350).

Well versed in Mather's rhetoric but nevertheless disdainful of it, Irving satirizes Puritan's oft-mocked attempts at "conversion" by grafting Puritan rhetoric onto the founding of New York but eliminating reference to Christ and Christianity. Thematically divorced from its pious origins, van Kortlandt's conversion works alongside other secularized American conversions that used the framework to preach communal growth and expansion. Immediately following Irving's discussion of the witchcraft of New England — which Knickerbocker claims was supplanted by the "more profitable hocus

[27] Irving never directly cites *Magnalia Christi Americana* by name. Instead, he refers to the text ironically as "that excellent work, the history of New England" that "furnishes us with unquestionable facts [that] there be witches too many" within New England (216-217). Also, Irving includes reference to Mather's "History of New England Witchcraft" in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" in *Sketchbook* to signify Ichabod Crane's status as an interloper in the Dutch-settled Tarry Town (296).

pocus of trade" — he begins his next chapter about the director-general of New Netherland Peter Stuyvesant, sub-titled "which records the rise and renown of a valiant commander, shewing that a man, like a bladder, may be puffed up to greatness and importance, by mere wind," in "praise of the good St. Nicholas" (350). The cult of St. Nicholas is rhetorically positioned as the antithesis to New England Puritanism, to "whose protecting care he entirely ascribes the strange dissentions that broke out… and the direful witchcraft that prevailed in the east country" (350). A figure of renown and worship, St. Nicholas is characterized by Irving as a benevolent guardian of the Dutch, keeping them sheltered from the chaos that erupts in New England as those colonies devolve into accusations of witchcraft. Even though Knickerbocker, and thus Irving, rejects Puritan conversion as it relates to religious indoctrination — arguing that such beliefs led to an overreliance on mysticism and that "whenever any stones fall from the moon, the greater part of them are sure to tumble into New England"— he nevertheless utilizes the same framework when discussing St. Nicholas and the founding of Manhattan (350). Irving mentions the patron saint no less than forty times throughout the text, and St. Nicholas is often invoked in relation to protecting the colony.

Early in *History*, as New Netherland is still being formed, Knickerbocker focuses a chapter on Oloff van Kortlandt. Despite admitting that "I can learn but little" of van Kortlandt's history, he describes him as a "one of a set of peripatetic philosophers who passed much of their time sunning themselves on the side of the great canal of Amsterdam in Holland" (127). Van Kortlandt sails to New Netherland to help establish the homestead of Communipaw.[28] Irving portrays van Kortlandt as a strict imperialist

[28] Communipaw was settled in the early seventeenth century by Henry Hudson and is in present-day New Jersey. Irving's van Kortlandt in *History* does not align with the historical account of the real Oloff van

who urges the leaders of New Netherland to seek "some more eligible site for the seat of empire," constantly pushing for expansion (123). Described as "anxious" and possessing an "evil eye," van Kortlandt isn't particularly liked by the fellow colonists. Nicknamed "Oloffe the Dreamer" by the other men, he is quick to fall asleep and is often visited by St. Nicholas in his dreams. Upon "the advice of the good St. Nicholas, who had appeared to him in a dream the night before, and whom he had known by his broad hat [and] his long pipe," van Kortlandt is soon tasked with laying out towns and searching for other land surrounding Communipaw, taking several Dutchmen with him on the journey (123). Having no land of his own, van Kortlandt is quick to claim all the land that they pass through, expanding New Netherland in the process with little regard for the Native communities that are already established.

At night, St. Nicholas still visits him with visions of "the delicious wildness of Nature," and prophetic inspiration about the possibilities of New Netherland (135). Yet the journey quickly turns catastrophic after van Kortlandt and the crew shipwreck on the island of Manhattan. Despondent at his fate, van Kortlandt turns against his shipmates, overindulging in food and drink as "he deemed it incumbent on him to eat profoundly for the public good," despite the scarcity of resources, eventually exhausting the group's food supply in the process and leading the crew to consider a mutiny against him (144). Prioritizing his own well-being, van Kortlandt nevertheless finds his "heart yearning" for a better life, and the acceptance of his crew, as he falls asleep one night in a drunken stupor (144).

Cortlandt. A brewer and businessman who rose to prominence and wealth after the founding of New York, he was never tasked with exploring surrounding lands nor associated with discovering the island of Manhattan. Irving is correct that there is still very little written about the real van Cortlandt. See his entry in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

As before, van Kortlandt dreams of St. Nicholas. However, in contrast to his other dreams, which featured passive interactions, now St. Nicholas comes to visit van Kortlandt to bring about a spiritual change. Conforming to the contours of conversion, van Kortlandt is characterized as a spiteful man who only thinks about himself, while Irving uses St. Nicholas as a Christ-like figure to inspire transformation. Irving uses descriptions reminiscent of modern depictions of Santa Claus — imagery that would subsequently be used by Clement Clarke Moore in his 1823 poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas." The saint "came riding over the tops of the trees, in that self-same wagon wherein he brings his yearly presents to children" and descends on a slumbering van Kortlandt, who is alone in the woods (144). As St. Nicholas smokes his pipe, van Kortlandt is awoken by the sight. Taking it upon himself to climb "up to the top of one of the tallest trees," St. Nicholas continues to exhale from his pipe as van Kortlandt watches the smoke that "spread over a great extent of the country [and] assumed a variety of marvelous forms, where in dim obscurity he saw shadowed out palaces and domes and loft spires" (144). The celestial images are reminiscent of Winthrop's famous "City on a Hill" proclamation but made secular. Van Kortlandt and St. Nicholas never speak, but the Saint gives the traveler a "very significant look" before riding away, leaving van Kortlandt to reflect on his personal reformation (145).

Like so many converts before him, van Kortlandt is shown the error of his ways through a dream, waking up "instructed" and with the belief that "it was the will of St. Nicholas that they should settle down and build the city" (145). In a text filled with meandering digressions, van Kortlandt's conversion is surprisingly compressed within a few paragraphs — his entire narrative treated as an aside within the larger colonization of

New Amsterdam — but he nevertheless is spiritually, if not religiously, transformed. The elements of conversion are all here. van Kortlandt's *sin* of gluttony is signified by the metaphor of filling himself to the "very brim" (144). These actions are quickly redressed through St. Nicholas' spiritual visitation, as he is *prepared* by the image of St. Nicholas, as "he descended hard" upon him (144). van Kortlandt finds himself *assured* of his spiritual mission by the smoke from the saint's pipe and *convinced* as "he considered it [the smoky images of a great city] more attentively" (144) He finally *submits* to Nicholas' vision and sees the possibility of "a city wherein a little fire would occasion a great smoke" (144). He awakens a reformed man, "greatly instructed" by the vision of St. Nicholas, interpreting the dream to mean "that they should settle down and build the city here; and that the smoke of the pipe was a type how vast would be the extent of city" (145). He apologizes to his crew members for his recklessness and vows to become a new man, working to realize the possibilities of a new city before them.

Van Kortlandt performs the final step of conversion, *faith*, when he returns to Communipaw to convince others to build a vast city. His personalized conversion is transposed onto the larger community of New Netherland, as van Kortlandt believes St. Nicholas provided him with a vision of possible utopia. Like Puritan converts before him, van Kortlandt calls "a general meeting of all the wise men and dignitaries of Pavonia [a settlement on the Hudson River]" and rhetorically performs his conversion before them just as Puritan converts recounted their own transformations before a congregation. Narrativizing his interactions with St. Nicholas, he tells the council "the history of their voyage" and his prophetic dream (146). If the congregation was the last barrier to acceptance, the Pavonia meeting acts in a similar manner for van Kortlandt. After his

narrative, the dignitaries confer, celebrating his prophetic visions. He is "held in more honor than ever," and works to make his dream reality (146). He negotiates with "the Indians in the blandest terms" for the island of Manhattan (151). Using the significant sign of St. Nicholas as a reason to exploit the Indigenous population, he swindles as much land from them as he can get, as cheaply as possible. Through his conversion, van Kortlandt is convinced of the possibilities of New York, but still refuses to pay a fair price for the land, mirroring the "hocus pocus of trade" that befall the New Englanders (350).

While Irving draws from the genre of conversion, he also inverts John Winthrop's famous proclamation for a "City of Hill" from his jeremiad "A Model of Christian Charity," invoking similar imagery but secularizing the process of foundation, replacing religious with cultural iconography in a competing creation of an American city.[29] Winthrop argues that "the onely way to avoyde this shipwracke… is to followe the counsel of Micah, *to doe justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God*" (46). St. Nicholas's prophetic vision, in which the "smoke of the pipe was a type of vast would be the extent of the city" echoes Winthrop's famous call that we "must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill": both texts utilize an elevated perspective, the tree-line for Irving and the hill for Winthrop, that allows Winthrop and Irving (through van Kortlandt) to imagine the possibilities of the city (144; 47). While Winthrop compares Boston, and the Puritans who founded it, to a "body" that "consists of parts, [so that] that which knits

[29] Abram C. Van Engen has noted "the lack of attention paid to Winthrop's sermon in the seventeenth century" as well as "the repeated neglect of it in the nineteenth," in which "hardly any soul managed to care that John Winthrop —on the eve of his arrival in America— had proclaimed that 'we shall be as a city upon a hill'" (5). Despite the probability that Irving didn't directly know Winthrop's writing, the text nevertheless serves as a type of the prototypical jeremiad that *History* reworked.

these parts together, gives the body its perfection," Irving compares Manhattan to a "young twig" that "first received the twists and turns which have since contributed to give it its present picturesque irregularity" (47; 158). Irving's alternative creation is rooted in conversion and, through the invocation of St. Nicholas and December celebration, synthesizes Puritan rhetoric with folk-writing, portraying the founding of New York not as a "covenant with Him for his work," as Winthrop claims for Boston, but under "the guardianship of the good St. Nicholas" (Winthrop 47; Irving 144). Still, the connection between conversion and Christmas is only tangential in *A History of New York,* as Nicholas Eve — and St. Nicholas, more generally — was not fully coupled with Christmas celebration by the time that Irving wrote *History*.

If Winthrop, and by extension the Puritans, predicated foundation, and continuance on "a conformity with the work and end we aim at," Irving inverts this relationship between work and conversion to further align Christmas, St. Nicholas, and the founding of Manhattan with leisure (46). While the Puritans viewed leisurely activity with trepidation, Irving fictionalizes the foundation of Manhattan as taking place only after van Kortlandt passes out after "swallow[ing] the last possible morsel, and wash[ing] it down with a fervent potation" and dreaming of St. Nicholas (144). In contrast to the active work of Winthrop, it is during van Kortlandt's passive dreams that he realizes his true purpose, goaded on by the fellow members of New Netherland into the active process of acquiring land and building the city. The worship of St. Nicholas may be built around leisurely activities and passive reflection related to holiday celebration, but it nevertheless also meant active labor following a conversion to realize the convert's vision.

When Christmas celebration took on more prominence in the early nineteenth century, while Irving was composing, leisure became a central tenet of Pennsylvania Dutch Christmas celebration. The "the pro-Christmas attitude on the part of Lutheran and Reformed religious leaders, allowed the people [in the early 1800s] to establish and develop a folk Christmas of their own" which often included "very leisurely home preparations [that] went on in the shape of extra baking of cakes and dainties, from a doughnut to a mince pie," in addition to time spent with family (Shoemaker 14; 12). Christmas celebration was remodeled, changed from the disorderly celebrations that Puritans attempted to quash, and connected more to leisure and relaxation, further moving celebration off the streets, out of the churches, and into homes, where revelers could dictate how and when Christmas celebration occurred.

Despite the prominence of St. Nicholas in *A History of New York,* and his role as the spiritual guide who spurs van Kortlandt's conversion, Irving doesn't yet fully connect conversion to Christmas. St. Nicholas Eve was closely aligned with but substantially different from Christmas. Indeed, Christmas is only brought up twice in the narrative, and only as a method of marking time for various voyages that others undertake. While Nicholas Eve would eventually merge with Christmas celebrations, as the Pennsylvania Dutch consolidated December holidays, St. Nicholas wouldn't be fully connected to the figure of Santa Claus until 1823, when Clement Clarke Moore, an avid reader of Irving's work, anonymously published his poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" in the *Troy Sentinel*.[30]

[30] For an exploration of Moore's poem and the conflation of Nicholas Eve and Christmas, see Stephen Nissenbaum's "Revisiting 'A Visit from St. Nicholas" in *The Battle for Christmas*.

That text was inspired by Irving's portrayal. Much like van Kortlandt, Moore's narrator has a sleepy encounter with St. Nicholas. He notes "the stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth/ And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath" (Moore 41-42). When St. Nicholas turns to notice him, "A wink of his eye and a twist of his head / Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread / He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work" (Moore 47-49). These allusions to Irving's St. Nicholas show how Irving laid the groundwork to connect St. Nicholas to the holiday, and conversion narratives. Further, New York would become linked with Christmas celebration and St. Nicholas, with historians treating Irving's text as fact, not fiction.

While Moore would connect the Saint to Christmas, Irving nevertheless inspired a resurgence of interest in St. Nicholas and inspired the type of American Christmas celebration that would continue into the late nineteenth century. The relationship between conversion, leisure, and nostalgia would become a dominant thematic interest for other Christmas writers, including Dickens. Further, Irving would also continue to explore Christmas more fully in his follow-up, *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819), connecting invented nostalgia with rural English holiday celebration and showcasing a post-conversion figure with his famous character of the Squire.

We know not to whom we are indebted for the following description of that unwearied patron of children—that homely, but delightful personification of parental kindness—SANTE CLAUS, his costume and his equipage, as he goes about visiting the fire-sides of this happy land, laden with Christmas bounties; but, from whomsoever it may have come, we give thanks for it. There is, to our apprehension, a spirit of cordial goodness in it, a playfulness of fancy, and a benevolent alacrity to enter into the feelings and promote the simple pleasures of children, which are altogether charming. We hope our little patrons, both lads and lasses, will accept it as proof of our unfeigned good will toward them—as a token of our warmest wish that they may have many a merry Christmas; that they may long retain their beautiful relish for those unbought, homebred joys, which derive their flavor from filial piety and fraternal love, and which they may be assured are the least alloyed that time can furnish them; and that they may never part with that simplicity of character, which is their own fairest ornament, and for the sake of which they have been pronounced, by authority which none can gainsay, the types of such as shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.

For the Sentinel.

ACCOUNT OF A VISIT FROM ST. NICHOLAS.

Figure 3.2: "Account of A Visit from St. Nicholas" from *Troy Sentinel* (Moore 3)

IRVING'S BRACEBRIDGE HALL AND NOSTALGIA

Despite the commercial and critical success of *History,* Irving's family had mounting debts attached to their trading company. In 1815, Irving travelled to Europe to try to salvage its business relationships. While his brief foray into business would ultimately prove unsuccessful, he would reside in England for the next seventeen years of his life.[31] While living in Europe, he composed his next book, *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (1819-1820). Published in seven installments in America and a two-volume edition in England, *Crayon* uses a similar frame to *History,* deploying an Irving stand-in, this time the titular Crayon, to travel through England, much as Irving himself did in 1817. While Crayon visited numerous real locations, including Westminster Abbey and Stratford-on-Avon, in Irving's fifth American installment, published on Jan. 1, 1820, Irving's pseudonymous narrator travels to the fictional Bracebridge Hall.[32] Modeled after Birmingham's Aston Hall, Bracebridge Hall is the focus of five chapters that are perhaps the most coherent and cogent section of the entire book. In them, Irving would narrate the nostalgic Christmas celebrations of the Squire, a patriarchal figure who insists that his entire house observe the relatively bygone holiday according to "all the old festivals" (162).

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[31] For more on Washington Irving's mounting debts and his time in England, see Mary Weatherspoon Bowden's exhaustive biography *Washington Irving*. For the monetary reasons why Irving "profited by residing in Europe at a time when certain of his works were first published in published in London," see Clarence Gohdes's *American Literature in Nineteenth Century England* (33).

[32] Irving would continue to write about Bracebridge after the publication of *Sketchbook*. His *Bracebridge Hall, or the Humorists, a Medley* (1821) features Crayon returning to the hall and writing a series of character sketches of about the Bracebridge family. Despite the connection, Christmas is only mentioned passingly in the text, as Crayon reminds "the reader, if he has perused the volumes of the Sketch Book, will probably recollect something of the Bracebridge family, which I once passed a Christmas" (1).

After introducing St. Nicholas into the public consciousness in *History*, creating a distinctly Americanized version of the Saint, Irving now turned to the rural, distinctly English, celebrations of Christmas in *Sketchbook*. Irving's position as a transatlantic author, with his "tendency to write to overlapping but conflicting English and American audiences" and to "imagine himself hovering in some non-locatable place within the Atlantic itself," has complicated critical portrayals of his work (Kitzes 12). While American in his presentation of the founding of New York, Irving nonetheless "was bound to America by the ties of family and friends, but not by slogans of democracy and Manifest Destiny; these last he viewed almost through the eyes of an Englishman" (Williams 28). Irving's critical portrayal of both American and English customs, as well as his extended period abroad, muddles nationalized portraits of the author, as the narrator in *Sketchbook* sees "a continuity of scene" between the two nations and a "connected succession of persons and incidents, that carry on the story of life" (14). Irving's writing, especially in *Crayon,* collapses the narrative and ideological spaces between England and America. Geoffrey Crayon, "a quasi-fictional persona who presents himself as an American on tour" embodies this mode of Americanness as he travels around England, even as he discusses the "literary animosity daily growing between England and America" (50). Rhetorically asking "What have we to do with national prejudices," Irving imagines a reciprocal transatlantic relationship, calling such biases "inveterate diseases of old countries, contracted in rude and ignorant ages, when nations knew little of each other, and looked beyond their own boundaries with distrust and hostility" (50). This view culminates in his trip to Bracebridge Hall, as his characterization as an outsider allows him to explore the Squire's eccentric modes of

celebration that built on a type of nostalgia not rooted in personal or historical experience.

His lament about the sorry state of the festivals attached to the holiday was true in England, at least as Christmas in the early nineteenth-century was often celebrated in wealthy homes. Foregrounding an invented nostalgia that harkened back to an imagined, and fictionalized, rural English Christmas celebration, Irving's portrait of Bracebridge "laid the foundation" of Christmas celebration not only in England but in America, where Americans "embraced Irving's [English] portrait of Christmas as their own" (Jones 45). While *History* only hinted at the holiday, as several historians, including Karal Anne Marling, Restad, and Nissenbaum, have noted, *Crayon* marks one of the first sustained fictionalized portraits of Christmas celebration and would be co-opted by such authors as Dickens. However, while these historians only briefly touch on *Sketchbook*, I argue that the most important contribution of Irving's *Sketchbook* is that it was the first work to (re)claim Christmas observance as a secularized social practice, a trend that would continue throughout the nineteenth century. Further, I see Irving's portrait of Bracebridge Hall, and more specifically the Squire, as the first nineteenth-century text to solidify and codify the connection between nostalgia and celebration, while also taking on the class-based structure that dictated how and when the lower classes could celebrate Christmas and indulge in leisure. While van Kortlandt, spurred by St. Nicholas, proceeds through a spiritual conversion, the Squire of Bracebridge Hall reaches and elaborates that final stage, *faith*, as Irving centralizes the Squire's post-conversion celebratory practices and the performative rituals — often attached to recreation — that go along with such a conversion.

American Christmas celebration was still in its infancy around 1820, regionally distinctive but nevertheless overshadowed by surrounding holidays including Nicholas Eve in early December and New Year's Eve at the end of the month. In England, Christmas celebrations were not only highly regional but also demarcated along socio-economic fault lines. In 1790, the *Times* commented that the "beef and pudding, and turkey and chine are almost synonymous with the day," also remarking that "the young people are invited to dine with the old, and a kind of general joy spreads itself around," a testament to how leisure was intertwined with celebration (Dawson 221). In 1795, the *Gentlemen's Magazine* noted that the Christmas feast at Aston Hall included "a brown loaf, with twenty silver threepences stuck on the top of it, a tankard of ale, with pipes and tobacco" and remarked that "the servants have full liberty to drink, dance, and go to bed when they please" on Christmas (Dawson 243). Irving, who had visited the Hall often during his travels aboard — and subsequently named Bracebridge Hall in *Sketchbook* after Abraham Bracebridge, one of the last original family members to live there before the house was sold in 1817 — would have been well aware of these celebratory rituals and their relationship to class.[33] In most writing about English Christmas celebrations before 1820, the festivities were limited to the lower-to-middle classes, with upper-class benefactors funding these celebrations.

These class structures play out in *Sketchbook*. Partway through his journey — at the behest of his friend Frank Bracebridge — Crayon ventures to the romanticized, feudal, and antiquated Bracebridge Hall. Frank promises Crayon a return to the "honest

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[33] Irving was probably also influenced by Coleridge's writing about "Christmas in the north German town of Ratzeburg," which was often reprinted in publications while Irving was working on *Crayon* (48). See Neil Armstrong's *Christmas in Nineteenth-Century England*.

days of yore," though Frank is also unclear about when these idealized days took place (169). While at Bracebridge, Crayon discovers a "world… more homebred, social, and joyous than at present" (169). Starkly juxtaposing the present with a wistful past, Irving introduces nostalgia into Christmas celebration, showcasing Bracebridge Hall as a representative of the type of celebration that John Taylor writes about in his *Vindication*. Crayon and Fred descend upon the hall, returning to a "festive season with green decorations of bay and holly" that allows them to escape "the least pleasing effects of modern refinement" as the countryside is scrupulously preserved to resemble an earlier time period (164). Crayon had previously been contending with the effects of urban life throughout his trip, lamenting how "large cities absorb the wealth and fashion of the nation" and noting that in England "the metropolis is a mere gathering-place, or general rendezvous, of polite classes, where they devote a small portion of the year to a hurry of gayety and dissipation" (58). But Irving suggests that the citizens often wish to return to the "calm and settled security" of the past, a belief that he connects to "the hereditary transmission of home-bred virtues and local attachments" (62). Bracebridge now allows Crayon to retreat into this past, replete with highly localized connections and celebrations.

Run by the Squire, "a bigoted devotee to the old school [who] prides himself upon keeping up something of old English hospitality" and "even regrets that he had not been born a few centuries before, when England was itself," Bracebridge is an "irregular building of some magnitude" that, like the Squire, "seemed to be of the architecture of different periods" (175). Synthesizing the "ancient" and "the French taste of Charles the Second's time" — a pointed reference to the 'merry monarch' — the Hall's incongruous

wings symbolize the Squire's attempt to return "the hall… to something of its primitive state" (177). Just as he freely fuses architectural designs for various movements, he constantly rejects the modern ways, demanding that even holiday celebration is done in strict accordance with "ancient usage" (176). Yet this celebration, where "a great deal of revelry was permitted, and even encouraged, by the squire, throughout the twelve days of Christmas" has no actual historical precedent, despite the Squire's belief that he is nostalgically returning to the Christmas celebrations of his youth (176).

Figure 3.3: Bracebridge Hall (Irving 161)

Instead, the Squire has "filial reverence" for "old games and local customs" that sometimes seem inspired from Taylor's writing or Pennsylvania Dutch celebration but are more often just wholly invented by the Squire himself (192). The Squire's insistence on community celebration mirrors Taylor's tract, in which Olde Christmas is welcomed to dinner by the rural families, where he roasted apples and drinks ale. After which

> we discoursed merily, without either prophaness or obscenity; some went to cards; others sung carols, and pleasant songs (suitable to the times) then the poor laboring hands, and maid-servants, with the plow-boy, went to dancing; the poor toyling wretches being glad of company, because they had little or no sport at all tilld came amogst them; and therefore they skipped and leaped for job, singing a carol. (Taylor 894)

Similarly, residents of the town surrounding Bracebridge engage in their own holiday rituals:

> Travelers of inferior order were preparing to attack this stout repast, while others sat smoking and gossiping over their ale on two high-backed oaken settles beside the fire. Trim housemaids were hurrying backwards and forwards under the directions of a fresh bustling landlady; but still seizing an occasional moment to exchange a flippant word, and have a rallying laugh, with the group round the fire. (171)

The Squire oversees these rituals, lamenting how "many of the games and ceremonials of Christmas have entirely disappeared" as "the world has become more worldly" (165). His method of celebration may connect the townsfolk together, creating a self-contained, regional ecosystem under his watchful eye as he dictates the means and methods of

celebration. He even goes so far as to construct his own Christmas carols, adapting Robert Herrick poems to “an old church melody” (184). Despite the connections to Taylor and Olde Christmas, Crayon is nevertheless aware how that these rituals are mere modern invention as he “soon discovered the entire celebration had been invented by the Squire as part of an effort to recreate the hierarchical social order over which he had once presided” (Restad 26).

Just as Taylor and other seventeenth-century authors argued against the Christmas ban by invoking invented Christmases past, *Sketchbook* builds upon the connection between Christmas and nostalgia.[34] Taylor’s Olde Christmas gestures towards Puritan antipathy and rural community celebration in which fellow revelers recall their childhood experiences, attempting to return and replicate a Christmas long ago. The Squire even listens, in agreement, to the Parson’s sermon on Christmas Day. There, the Parson attacks the history of Christmas bans, lamenting the “Puritans [who] made such a fierce assault upon the ceremonies of the Church, and poor old Christmas [that] was driven out of the land by Proclamation of Parliament” (190). Similarly, upon the discovery that “Our old games and local customs… had a great effect in making the peasant fond of his home… They made the times merrier, and kinder, and better,” the Squire rejects the Puritan disdain for Christmas celebration, further differentiating the religious traditions from folk-Christmas celebrations that he makes his township observe (192).

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[34] Irving also directly quotes the Elizabethan poet Nicholas Breton’s 1626 shepherds’ calendar *Fantasticks: Serving for a Perpetual Prognostication* while discussing the holiday rituals of the Bracebridge town. As Irving describes, “the scene brought to mind an old writers account of Christmas preparations: - ‘Now capons and hens, besides turkeys, geese, and ducks, with beef and mutton — must all die — for in twelve days a multitude of people will not be fed with little…’” (170).

The township of Bracebridge plays along, as Crayon observes the townspeople playing out confusing traditions to reclaim the "strong local peculiarities […] home-bred feelings, [and] honest fireside delights" that make up "the traditionary customs of golden-hearted antiquity" (164). A benevolent but determined ruler, the Squire encourages these overlapping traditions that attempt to return to an idealized, hierarchical society. However, they are almost entirely invented — static, never changing in their design, but also lacking historical precedent. When the town descends on Bracebridge to enact his traditional celebration, the Squire rejects anything that even hints at modern celebration. He refuses "any thing on Christmas eve but good old English," never fully defining the scope of his demands but still chastising a young British officer's attempt to play a new song on the guitar (177). This suggests that his devout insistence on retaining a type of stasis and his regression is conditioned on a hierarchical system that positions the Squire above all his servants — both literally and figuratively — as he sits in his chair "looking around him like the sun of a system" (177).

While the Squire paternalistically gives his servants the days off to celebrate, he also rigidly controls their method of celebration, mandating that they take part in the merrymaking. In the Servants' Hall "a great deal of revelry was permitted, and even encouraged, by the squire… provided everything was done comfortably to ancient usage" (177). In the hall, "old games of hoodman blind, shoe the wild mare, hot cockles, steal the white loaf, bob apple, and snap dragon" are laid out, with the servants expected to participate (177). Further, he expected "his household at church on a Christmas morning; considering it a day of pouring out of thanks and rejoicing" (187). Yet, despite the Squire's fixed control, the country people "did not understand how to play their parts in

the scene of hospitality" (192). They are unable to act out the invented traditions and the Squire becomes flustered as the manor becomes "overrun by all the vagrants of the country," who descend to eat the Squire's food and, more importantly, indulge in his liquor (192). The insistence on performative celebration, where the Squire watches over his workers as they celebrate, ends up as a disappointment, in part becomes of the confusing traditions that he insists on. His nostalgia is predicated on what Eric Hobsbawm has termed "invented tradition." While tradition is often viewed as a fixed unchanging practice that is tied to historical precedent, invented tradition "is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1). The Squire's means and methods of celebration are new, but he nevertheless ties them to an imagined past, one that reimagines Christmas celebrations, seemingly conferring historical importance by merely invoking the idea of a vague, ill-defined nostalgia, even though such wistful views of the past are wholly invented by the Squire with no ties to his own childhood Christmas celebrations.

Often, Irving places the types of celebratory rituals seen in Pennsylvania Dutch celebration onto Christmas at Bracebridge. Many of the Squire's customs come from Irving's own upbringing, transposed onto the English countryside. Just as the Squire insists on a feast that includes "Hams, tongues, and flitches of bacon" as well as "two foaming tankards of ale," Dutch celebration would often consist of "good mince pies & as fat a turkey as you can procure" (171; Shoemaker 4). Irving commingles these two types of celebration, the Dutch insistence on feasting and the English use of the holiday

to reinforce class stratification. The Squire's rigid adherence to the "religious and social rites of Christmas" is showcased in his request that his servants perform various celebrations, including that "the Yule clog and Christmas candle were regularly burnt, and the mistletoe, with its white berries, hung up, to the imminent peril of all the pretty housemaids" (176). The Squire's celebration intermixes various cultural celebrations, including the Yule log, as well as mistletoe, which "is well recorded from the seventeenth century" but didn't come to prominence until Dutch celebration (Hutton 20). Likewise, "steal the white loaf" is a traditional German parlor game akin to tag, while "shoe the wild mare" appears to come from Robert Herricks' poem "A New Years Gift: Sent to Sir Simeon Steward" and was often played during Second Christmas in Pennsylvania (Herrick). Irving synthesizes these discrete and transatlantic celebratory practices, combining cultural rituals together to create a new form of celebration, marked by plurality. While the Squire loves "to see this day well kept by rich and poor" and tells Crayon that it is the "one day in the year, at least, when you are sure of being welcome wherever you go," his celebration still reinforces class-stratification (191). Irving takes the diverse, ancestral, Christmas rituals and combines them into a ritualized Christmas celebration that further severs any connection between religious and folk tradition. This synthesis allows for the façade of historical continuity but is actually the work of a present unable to connect present rituals with historical traditions.

While Irving doesn't narrativize the Squire's conversion with as much detail as van Kortlandt, he still portrays him as a post-conversion figure who strictly adheres to invented, nostalgic, celebration. In contrast to *A Christmas Carol*, in which we will see a systematic progress through the steps of conversion in Chapter Four, Irving only hints at

an unstructured, vaguely defined transformation that the Squire underwent. As told by the Squire during the Christmas Eve dinner, his past indicates a wayward youth that he was able to rectify through his "strict adherence" to paternalistic, hierarchical Christmas celebration. Instead, Irving suggests a conversion akin to van Kortlandt's in *History* but only focuses on the final stage, the Squire's proclamation of *faith* through celebration and ritualized gift-exchange. As the group sits down for Christmas Dinner, "The Squire told several long stories of early college pranks and adventures" in which he "live[d] lustily on his paternal domains, in the vigorous enjoyment of prosperity and sunshine" (201). His "singular mixture of whim and benevolence" belies a previous hint of the wayward life that he previously lived. The Squire recounts his youthful indiscretions, which only change after he moved to Bracebridge, overseeing the house and its servants, and broke through "the chills of ceremony and selfishness" to become "an emblem of Christmas hospitality" (191). The merrymaking of the Squire's early life is contrasted with the patriarchal role he now inhabits at Bracebridge, accepting the "true Christmas virtue of charity" (201). Intertwined with his instance on celebration, because of his conversion, is an inflexibly nostalgic view of Christmas. The only way to prove that he has transformed is through his merry-making and benevolent rule over his servants. Through his secularized, but still not sequenced, Christmas conversion the Squire "lived but with times past, and knew but little of the present" (199). Bracebridge's festivities are the Squire's attempt to reclaim an imagined Christmas past, one that is paternalistic, warm, and welcoming but nevertheless performative. He continually pushes against "the only evil," that of the "gathering film of misanthropy" (206). But because the servants, and townsfolk, don't understand the celebration, Crayon eventually leaves the entire

Christmas celebration, lamenting his "own disappointment" at how the joys of Christmas past can never be repeated in the future (206).

The Squire's insistence on games and celebration for those under him creates space for leisurely activities, but he asserts what those activities are and how they should be performed. These attempts to control celebration harken back to his feudal beliefs that "the nation… is altered; we have almost lost our simple true-hearted peasantry. They have broken asunder from the higher classes and seem to think their interests are separate" (192). His hopeful return to a feudal system is predicated on the belief that "one mode to keep [the poor] in good humor in these hard times, would be for the nobility and gentry to pass more time on their estates, mingle more among the country people, and set the merry old English games going again" (192). By enforcing such controlled rigidity on the performance of celebration, the Squire invents a new type of Christmas celebration, but also fails to convey the meaning or reason behind these the rituals. Further, the leisure time given to his workers is still spent with the Squire, not outside of the purview of his estate. As Crayon wryly observes, the peasants raise "something of a grimace, and [give] each other the wink" as they take in the food and drink offered by the Squire, using him for their own indulgence and generally mocking him (193). Irving shows that while the Squire has converted and harkened back to a type of Christmas celebration that is, on the surface, agreeable, but nevertheless ahistorical.

While Irving was not the first author to invoke nostalgia in relation to Christmas celebration, he popularized the connection in the early nineteenth century. Bracebridge "drips with nostalgia" and "open[ed] the door to the nostalgic, backward-looking, but commercialized new Christmas" (Moore, *Sacred to Santa* 57; Moore, *Victorian*

Christmas in Print 22). As the Squire constantly repels the newer Christmas customs with a fantastical celebration of his own creation, he solidifies the sentimental Christmas narrative, indicating the possibility of change that the holiday can bring about. In this framework, Christmas is always more evocative in hindsight. The Christmases of youth — whether misremembered or not — are always better than the Christmas of present. The Squire cannot revive the idyllic past because it did not exist. The "futility of his undertaking" is not lost on either Irving or even the Squire, but the latter cannot help but look back to an elusive history for a more hopeful holiday narrative (Restad 28).

Yet the Squire's nostalgia for Christmas fueled a reinvention of various Christmas rituals within the real world, as various readers latched onto the Squire's nostalgic celebration and tried to replicate it around the holiday. When the stories were published "they 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" (Nissenbaum 60). Could Christmas reinforce the paternalistic class structure that had seemingly given way to modernity? Crayon's holiday excursion essentially mocks the performative nature of the Squire's conversion and nostalgic rituals, ironically depicting a Christmas where the Squire hoped to recreate a feudal system at the Hall. His attempts fail, as the townsfolk are confused, belligerent, and unwilling to adapt the Squire's modes of celebration. Yet in the reception of these chapters — particularly in America — Bracebridge Hall was often misread, interpreted as honoring a bygone time, not as an ironic display of misplaced class-based hierarchies. This was especially true of the holiday parties that were inspired by Irving's writing in the early nineteenth century.

CONCLUSION

Irving's lasting impact on Christmas in both texts would be felt on both sides of the Atlantic, but particularly in America in the early nineteenth century. A friend of Irving and Moore, the wealthy New York merchant John Pintard would launch a "revival of St. Nicholas Day with a grand banquet at City Hall for members of a the New-York Historical Society" on December 6th, 1810, a year to the day after the publication of Irving's *History* (Burrows and Wallace 462). While the banquet was a success and inspired a host of imitations in the subsequent years, revivals of St. Nicholas Day never gained the widespread celebratory support that Pintard and the Historical Society had hoped.

Instead, the holiday would soon be subsumed by Christmas shortly after the publication of Clement Clarke Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas" had reintroduced the patron saint into the public consciousness — and solidified the connection between St. Nicholas and Christmas. Irving's *History* faded somewhat in the interim, remembered less for its invocation of St. Nicholas Day, and more for its imagined discovery of New York. Never one to admit defeat, Pintard pivoted and held another grand banquet in 1831 at the same hall, this time on Christmas Eve. With the Historical Society, he declared that the "new rituals of Christmas were of 'ancient usage," modeling this particular celebration on Irving's other text, co-opting the Squire's customs and games from Bracebridge Hall (462). Adopting the feast, mistletoe, and carols that the Squire insists on, Pintard and the Historical Society's celebration was popular, even observed in the subsequent years afterwards. Soon, Irving's ironic depictions of a nostalgic Christmas had been subsumed by Pintard, and by a public, who read them as invocations of a

forgotten time. It didn't matter that the imagined time had only a tenuous connection to history and was mainly fictional invention. Instead, Christmas became intertwined with invented nostalgia, as numerous holiday parties modelled after Bracebridge cropped up in New York after Pintard's 1831 celebration. Like Irving's Squire, many participants even believed "the staging of a nostalgic Christmas might restore a social harmony and well-being ravaged by modern times," reinforcing a socio-economic hierarchy that turned towards paternalism as a social structure, a trope that would carry into the 1840s and beyond (Restad 137).

While Irving's contribution to Christmas literature has been relatively marginalized in comparison to Dickens and other later nineteenth-century authors, he invented and popularized many of the transatlantic holiday rituals that continue into the present. He left a lasting impact on Christmas literature, creating a space for fictionalized representations of not only Christmas rituals that evoked a nostalgic — but also imagined — past, while also writing one of the earliest references to Saint Nicholas that connected the patron saint of Christmas to narratives of renewal and conversion. As the century progressed, Santa Claus would come more into the mainstream of Christmas celebration in later nineteenth century — and even more in the early twentieth. Along with the notion of supernatural intervention, Irving nevertheless encoded Christmas conversion with ideas of manifest destiny in *History*, rewriting and secularizing a Puritan genre, while also furthering the thematic connection between nostalgia and Christmas

These separate thematic threads — American conversion and English nostalgia for invented tradition — would be fused together in Charles Dickens's writing, which latched on to not only the nostalgia connected to the holiday but also the conversion that

had been so central to van Kortlandt and the Squire's change-of-heart in relation to the holiday. Like Irving, Dickens would introduce Christmas elements into his own sketchbooks and short story collections before fully exploring the holiday, and solidifying the genre of Christmas conversion, in *A Christmas Carol* and his subsequent Christmas novellas. That text, more than any others, looms over the holiday — endlessly retold throughout successful generations. Yet, like Irving, Dickens also wrote his way into his nostalgic Christmas lament, testing out narratives in earlier works before embarking on composing *A Christmas Carol*.

CHAPTER FOUR

"I WILL HONOUR CHRISTMAS IN MY HEART": DICKENS'S HOLIDAY WRITING, CHRISTMAS CONVERSION, AND RITUALIZED GIFT-EXCHANGE

INTRODUCTION

Just as Irving turned to John Taylor for inspiration when creating his version of St. Nicholas and Bracebridge Hall, Charles Dickens rewrote Irving in turn with his 1843 novella *A Christmas Carol*. Correspondents for much of the early 1840s, Irving and Dickens often wrote to each other about their mutual interests and works. A fan of Dickens's 1841 novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* — which was serialized in 1840 — Irving sent him a letter complimenting the work and his characters. In turn, Dickens quickly responded in his own letter, dated April 21st, 1841. In it, Dickens writes about his respect for Irving, noting:

> There is no living writer… whose approbation I should feel so proud to earn. And with everything you have written, upon my shelves, and in my thoughts, and in my heart of hearts, I may honestly and truly say so. If you could know how earnestly I write this, you would be glad to read it. (Dickens, "To Washington Irving" 80)

Suggesting the "warmth of the hand I autographically hold out to you, over the broad Atlantic," Dickens began a transatlantic correspondence that would culminate in a dinner

while he was visiting New York in 1842 (80). Throughout Dickens's American tour, the authors met and, as the letter below attests, dined together.

Fuller's
Fifteenth March 1842.

My Dear Irving.

We leave here tomorrow night. Say that you will come and dine with us tomorrow—inviolably alone—at 4. Don't refuse, if you love me. It may be a very long time before we dine together again.

I am glad to say that I have a brother to whose memory we can drink a glass of wine—he died in his infancy some nine and twenty years ago. He wasn't a twin, but we must make the best of him.

Heartily Your friend
Charles Dickens

Washington Irving Esquire

Figure 4.1: Dickens Letter to Irving (Dickens, "To Washington Irving" 15 March 1842)

Yet their friendship eventually dissolved a few years after Irving's appointment as the United States ambassador to Spain in 1842.[35] With the publication of Dickens's cutting critique of America in his travelogue *American Notes* (1842) and novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), which was being written and serialized concurrently with *Carol*, Irving's disposition toward the famous British author changed. While describing a visit to Irving in 1859, the publisher E.A. Duyckink wrote:

> He spoke of Dickens and of his liking for his writings in spite of his disapproval of his ungenerous treatment of the Americans in his books, who had given him so extraordinary a reception simply on the score of his talents and genius … He would not visit a man [Dickens] who had proved himself so insensible to American kindness." (Irving 912)[36]

Despite the relative cooling of their friendship in later years — especially on the part of Irving — the influence of Irving's writing on Dickens was profound, especially as Dickens was beginning to write about the holiday.

In that first letter to the American author, Dickens even uses the fictionalized Dutch historian as a synecdoche for *History*, remarking "Diedrich Knickerbocker I have worn to death in my pocket — and yet I should shew you his mutilated carcass — with a joy past all expression" (Dickens "To Washington Irving" 80). Further, he even goes so far as to suggest "I should like to travel with you, outside the last of the coaches, down to

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[35] The final correspondence between Irving and Dickens was on April 12th, 1845, when Dickens wrote that "I don't despair of seeing your face, and shaking your hand again, one of these days in some remote place or another" (Dickens, "To Washington Irving" 95). However, they never met in person again.

[36] The writer Maunsell B. Field quoted Irving calling Dickens "outrageously vulgar – in dress, manners, and mind" upon their first meeting (Pacey 333). This quote has often been used by biographers and critics to argue that Irving disliked Dickens immediately. Yet their correspondence continued well into 1845. For a more nuanced look at their friendship, see W.C. Desmond Pacey's essay "Washington Irving and Charles Dickens."

Bracebridge Hall," invoking the fictional estate as a possible meeting-place for the authors, a location where their mutual interests in Christmas, celebration, and benevolent paternalism could intersect (Dickens "To Washington Irving" 80). As has been argued by others, notably David Parker, Dickens was inspired by Irving's text and the American Christmas celebration that Irving had subsequently encouraged. As Christmas regained cultural relevancy during the 1830s and '40s, in the aftermath of *Sketchbook*'s publication, "there are features of [Dickens's] writings on Christmas that do seem to have something distinctly American about them," including the connection between supernaturalism and the holiday, and the customs associated with Pennsylvania Dutch celebration (165).[37]

While Irving is central to the creation of Christmas celebration, and to the relationship between nostalgic, ritualized celebration and conversion, Dickens was the author who most popularized the genre — showing that Christmas writing could not only be financially lucrative but also critically successful. As such, *A Christmas Carol* looms large within any discussion of nineteenth-century Christmas. Paul Davis is correct when he argues *Carol* "was written to be retold" and that "it has been adapted, revised, condensed, retold, reoriginated and modernized more than any other work of English literature" (3-4). Because of the wealth of criticism directed towards *Carol*, scholars have recently moved away from Dickens's contribution to the holiday, hoping to dispel the myth that was single-handedly responsible for Victorian Christmas. Yet by recently marginalizing Dickens, critics have also neglected the importance of *Carol* for the

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[37] Parker goes on to cite how the "evolution of Christmas customs in America, in fact, did much to shape the festival throughout the English-speaking world during the nineteenth-century," specifically noting the connection between Irving's St. Nicholas and the rise of supernatural stories connected with the holiday (165). See Parker's "Dickens and the American Christmas" and his *Christmas and Charles Dickens*.

subsequent literature that rewrites both Scrooge's conversion and the type of nostalgic celebration that the novella codified.

While *Carol* has often been casually referenced as "a conversion story" by critics, the idea of secularized conversion has never been fully contextualized (Douglas-Fairhurst xx). Using Dickens's own metaphor of a hand being held out across "the broad Atlantic," this chapter places *Carol* within an intertextual and historical relationship with the types of conversion narratives that came before it, arguing that Dickens synthesizes and codifies the conversion and nostalgia that Irving introduced into nineteenth-century Christmas literature, fusing the disparate — and transatlantic — narrative modes of *History* and *Sketchbook* into a cohesive narrative of Christmas conversion, which could then be reworked and rewritten by Dickens himself and others post-1843.

I begin this chapter by setting up Dickens's early writing about the holiday, reading Dickens's Christmas narratives in *Sketches by Boz* (1836) and *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) as precursors that separately tested out the ritualized nostalgia and conversion that Dickens took from Irving. *Sketches* works alongside *Sketchbook* to solidify the mutual relationship between Christmas and nostalgia, while also continuing to ritualize several celebratory practices —including an early indication of class-based gift-exchange — that Irving had introduced and popularized in America. Similarly, *Pickwick* solidifies the relationship between conversion, Christmas, and the supernatural. The embedded narrative of Gabriel Grub both revises the spiritual transformation that van Kortlandt went through at the behest of Saint Nicholas, and serves as rehearsal for *Carol*, creating a continuum of spiritual conversion tied to the authors and, most importantly, to the holiday.

After reading *Sketches* and *Pickwick* as continuations of Irving's thematic and narrative interests, I turn to an extended reading of *Carol*. In this section, I juxtapose Scrooge against two standardized Puritan conversion narratives, Cotton Mather's *The Converted Sinner* and Thomas Shepard's transcription of Henry Dunster's conversion. This section systematically works through Caldwell's nine-step morphology of conversion. It shows how Scrooge conforms to the tropes and implications of each step, working his way through a non-denominational, but still spiritual and sequential, morphology of Christmas conversion, codifying a framework that soon after became the dominant genre of Christmas narratives. When Scrooge arrives at the final step of faith, he eschews the public performance inherent to Mather, Shephard, and Irving's conversion narratives. Instead, I argue, he proves his conversion through gift-exchange between employee and worker, reinforcing a paternalistic relationship and continuing a thematic trend that was first introduced in *Sketches*. As read through gift theory, this exchange acts as a repayment for the underpaid labor performed, while also reinforcing the relationship between class and gifting during nineteenth-century Christmas.

With the immediate success of *Carol*, imitations proliferated the marketplace, as authors hoped to ride the financial coattails of Dickens's work. Those imitations include Dickens's own follow-up Christmas novellas, most notably his second Christmas book *The Chimes* (1844). As will be explored in Chapter Five, those texts reworked the conversion narrative, eliminating the holiday from the text, with diminishing literary and narrative results. No author, Dickens included, was able to capture the cultural conversation in the way that *Carol* did, as that core-text crystalized the Christmas conversion. Soon, however, that text would be weaponized by Southern antebellum

authors who twisted conversion and Christmas to push forward pro-slavery arguments in Christmas narratives.

Yet in the 1830s and '40s, Christmas celebration was still in its infancy in England. Dickens's first long-form text, a series of sketches that resemble and are likely named after Irving's own work, re-introduced the celebratory methods back into public consciousness and spurred a renewed interested in Christmas.

BENEVOLENT CELEBRATION IN *SKETCHES BY BOZ*

A collection of short sketches written for newspapers and magazines between 1833 and 1836, Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* features a loose organizational structure. Split into sections about "Sketches from Our Parish," "Scenes," "Characters" and finally "Tales," the text lacks the framed narrative of Irving's *Sketchbook*. Boz may be a thinly veiled pseudonym for Dickens, as Crayon was for Irving, but the narrator is also far less active in the stories, hovering on the periphery of the narratives. Despite the relatively fragmented nature of *Sketches*, Dickens still creates of mosaic of life in London, moving away from Irving's rural portrait of England and turning his critical eye towards Scotland-Yard, Newgate, and Vauxhall Gardens. Christmas is often mentioned throughout *Sketches*, but mainly as a method to mark time.[38]

But in his section on "Characters," Dickens dedicates a chapter to a "A Christmas Dinner." The sketch was originally published two days after Christmas 1835, when he

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[38] Dickens's tale "The Black Veil" uses Christmas as a backdrop for a young medical practitioner who is nostalgic for "his annual Christmas visit to his native place and dearest friends; he thought how glad they would all be to see him…" (426). Further, Dickens mentions a "Christmas pantomime" in his tale "Mrs Joseph Porter" (493). All these references to the holiday, outside of "A Christmas Dinner," are anecdotal in nature.

was only 23, in the newspaper *Bell's Life in London* under the title "Christmas Festivities." In the text, the author keenly notes the recursive, transformative, capabilities of the holiday. As that initial title suggests, Dickens was writing about the celebrations that had become associated with Christmas, continuing to ritualize many of the holiday observances that Irving had first written about in *Sketchbook*, moving them out of the pastoral and into the urban spaces that Dickens would become known for.

Boz begins the tale by generally reflecting on the spirit of the holiday, noting that for some "the present only serves to remind them of reduced circumstances and strained incomes" before imploring the reader to "Reflect on your present blessings — of which every man has many — not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some" (256). Boz then turns to sketching out a "Christmas family-party" that is "an annual gathering of all the accessible members of the family" taking place at Uncle George's house (257). The house is overrun, bustling with family members preparing for their festivities, with grandmamma and the children making the sweets while grandpapa "produces a small spring of mistletoe from his pocket, and tempts the boys to kiss their little cousins under it" (258). Later in the night, Uncle Robert and Aunt Jane arrive with a newborn baby and aunt Margaret, who "married a poor man without her [grandmamma's] consent," returns to the family's good graces (259). The sketch ends as the entire family sits down for a "perfectly delightful' dinner where "nothing goes wrong, and every body is in the very best of spirits, and disposed to please and be pleased" while the holiday awakens the sympathies of the family members and "perpetuate their good feeling during the ensuing year" (260; 261).

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SCENES AND CHARACTERS.—No. X.

CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES.

Christmas time! That man must be a misanthrope indeed in whose breast something like a jovial feeling is not roused—in whose mind some pleasant associations are not awakened—by the recurrence of Christmas. There are people who will tell you that Christmas is not to them what it used to be—that each succeeding Christmas has found some cherished hope or happy prospect of the year before dimmed or passed away—and that the present only serves to remind them of reduced circumstances and straitened incomes—of the feasts they once bestowed on hollow friends, and of the cold looks that meet them now, in adversity and misfortune. Never heed such dismal reminiscences. There are few men who have lived long enough in the world who cannot call up such thoughts any day in the year. Then do not select the merriest of the three hundred and sixty-five for your doleful recollections, but draw your chair nearer the blazing fire—fill the glass, and send round the song—and, if your room be smaller than it was a dozen years ago, or if your glass is filled with reeking punch instead of sparkling wine, put a good face on the matter, and empty it off-hand, and fill another, and troll off the old ditty you used to sing, and thank God it's no worse. Look on the merry faces of your children as they sit round the fire. One little seat may be empty—one slight form that gladdened the father's heart and roused the mother's pride to look upon may not be there. Dwell not upon the past—think not that, one short year ago, the fair child now fast resolving into dust sat before you, with the bloom of health upon its cheek, and the gay unconsciousness of infancy in its joyous eye. Reflect upon your present blessings—of which every man has many—not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some. Fill your glass again, with a merry face and a contented heart. Our life on it but your Christmas shall be merry, and your new year a happy one.

Who can be insensible to the outpourings of good feeling, and the honest interchange of affectionate attachment, which abound at this season of the year? A Christmas family party! We know nothing in nature more delightful! There seems a magic in the very name of Christmas. Petty jealousies and discords are forgotten; social feelings are awakened in bosoms to which they have long been strangers; father and son, or brother and sister, who have met and passed with averted gaze, or a look of cold recognition for months before, proffer and return the cordial embrace, and bury their past animosities in their present happiness. Kindly hearts that have yearned towards each other but have been withheld by false notions of pride and self dignity, are again united, and all is kindness and benevolence! Would that Christmas lasted the whole year through, and that the prejudices and passions which deform our better nature were never called into action among those to whom, at least, they should ever be strangers!

Figure 4.2: "Christmas Festivities" in *Bell's Life in London* (1)

The most obvious model for Dickens's sketch is Irving's similarly titled "The Christmas Dinner," embedded within the chapters focusing on the Squire. In Dickens's narrative, Grandpapa takes over the patriarchal position held by the Squire. He dictates

the means and methods of celebration, as he "always *will* toddle down, all the way to Newgate-market, to buy the turkey, which he engages a porter to bring home behind him in triumph" (257). Besides procuring the turkey, he hangs the mistletoe and holds court during Christmas dinner, regaling the family with "a slight digression relative to the purchase of previous turkeys, on former Christmas-days" (260). Operating much like the Squire with his dinnertime rambling about his youth, Grandpapa reflects on his own Christmases past and is nostalgic for when "he was just thirteen years and three months old, *he* kissed grandmamma under a mistletoe too" (258). He "not only sings his annual song with unprecedented vigour, but on being honoured with a unanimous *encore*, according to annual custom, actually comes out with a new one" (260). While Boz implores that the reader "dwell not upon the past" but be present at Christmas celebrations, Grandpapa still looks back to the Christmases of his childhood as a pure distillation of the holiday (260). His celebration is built on the rituals and traditions that he repeats year in and year out, including lugging the prize turkey back home and even giving the porter who helps him "a glass of spirits, over and above his hire, to drink 'a merry Christmas and a happy new year" (257). A creature of habit, Grandpapa suggests a continuity between the older and newer generations, asking the children to recreate his mistletoe kiss as a method of celebratory transfer.

Grandmamma also performs her own rituals, including a form of gifting that recalls the way that the Squire repaid his servants for work performed throughout the year. While the family is preparing for the festivities, Grandmamma is "very secret and mysterious for two or three days beforehand" as rumors begin that "she has purchased a beautiful new cap with pink ribbons for each of the servants, together with sundry books,

and penknives, and pencil-cases for the younger branches" (257-258). Her choice to gift to both her servants and the younger children in the family reflects the dual focus of gift-exchange in the early nineteenth-century Christmas, which often reinforced class stratification in England but parent-child relationships in America.[39] Grandmamma's decision to bestow gifts on them bridges these nationalized differences, reinforcing the relationship between paternalism and gift-exchange that would come to the forefront in *Carol*. Further, she spends most Christmas-eve employing the children to help her make plum-pudding, even insisting "regularly every year on Uncle George coming down into the kitchen, taking off his coat and stirring the pudding" (258). In an echo of Grandpapa's insistence on repetition, Grandmamma is teaching Uncle George her rituals so that they can be repeated, and codified, by the family.

Most of these rituals are directly referenced from Irving's text. As discussed in Chapter Three, the plum pudding, mistletoe, feast, and even "a glorious game of blind-man's bluff" that Grandpapa plays come directly from *Sketchbook* (257). In particular, the notion of kissing under the mistletoe was "widely believed [to be] an ancient custom" precisely because Irving and then, Dickens wrote about even though "little documentation of mistletoe customs at Christmas is to be found before 1800" (Parker 103). The repetition, or recurrence, of Christmas rituals predicated on invented nostalgia within the family creates a stable method of celebration, but it also is backward-looking by design. Grandpapa and Grandmamma insist on *how* the family celebrates because it

[39] Gift-exchange significantly differed in America and England before the 1840s. For more on early-nineteenth century gift-exchange, see James G. Carrier's "The Rituals of Christmas Giving" in *Unwrapping Christmas*. In the chapter, Carrier explores the tension of Christmas gifting in which "on the one hand it is a commodity purchased for money in an impersonal transaction, and on the other it is a gift given to express affection in a personal relationship" (55).

ostensibly builds on their own childhood Christmases — even if those rituals are misremembered or wholly invented. Thus, present Christmases will never live up the imagined holidays of the past. Even Boz is aware of this type of nostalgia, noting that "There are people who will tell you that Christmas is not to them what it used to be" (256). The family's ever-changing relationship to Christmas celebration is nevertheless always predicated on a nostalgic return. Even when Margaret comes in and potentially destabilizes their carefully dictated celebration, it is only a moment of discomfort before "the girl [Margaret] breaks suddenly from her sister and throws herself, sobbing, on her mother's neck… Friends crowd round to offer their hearty congratulations, and happiness and harmony again prevail," returning the family to a type of dewy-eyed stasis (260). The text suggests that this inertia is the overriding sentiment of the holiday, the elders forever yearning to reclaim previous, mythical Christmases as they repeat yearly rituals and pass them along to newer generations.

Yet Boz does not view this stasis and its corresponding invented nostalgia as a negative trait. In contrast to Irving's satirical lens, which characterized The Squire as a bumbling and aloof patriarch, Grandpapa and Grandmamma are amiable in their celebration. Dickens writes, "There seems a magic in the very name of Christmas," as rituals become traditions, and are passed down through successive generations (259). This return is built on "kindly hearts that have yearned towards each other, but have been withheld by false notions of pride and self-dignity" that manifest at other points throughout the year (259). Christmas, however, allows for the family to be "again reunited, and all is kindness and benevolence!," as the holiday invites feelings of renewal and hope (259). Seasonal renewal comes to the forefront of the celebration, as Boz notes

how “the unkind feelings that have struggled against better dispositions during the year, have melted away before its genial influence, like half-formed ice beneath the morning sun,” connecting the holiday to forgiveness and, thus, conversion (259). While Margaret believes that she will be welcomed with “conscious rectitude and cold forgiveness” upon her return, the family changes their feelings about her precisely because she returns during a holiday season that is built on “rational good-will and cheerfulness” (259, 260). The recursive methods of celebration are forged year after year, slowly codifying the rituals but also suggesting a presiding feeling of nostalgia and stasis.

“A Christmas Dinner” works to solidify the transition from ritual to tradition for such practices as hanging mistletoe, carving the turkey, and even caroling, embodied within Grandpapa and Grandmamma. As they repeat the rituals, and begin to transfer them to the younger generation, “the customs of the season are more important… than private memories the season might provoke” (Parker 127).[40] In comparison to Dickens’s other, later Christmas narratives, this first entry of his into the canon of holiday writing is more interested in the generalities of the holiday, and the possibility of annual customs within this distinctly middle-class family. But, as we will see in *Pickwick*, the Christmas season could be paradoxically both a site of nostalgic stasis and change — or, more specifically, conversion.

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[40] Like much of Dicken’s writing, *Sketches* was originally “intended for the Christmas market [in 1835], but delays meant that it did not appear until 8 February 1836” (Schlicke 3). For more on the publication, and reception, of *Sketches* see Paul Schlicke’s “Risen Like a Rocket’: The Impact of ‘Sketches by Boz.” For more on the Christmas literary book market, see Tara Moore’s *Victorian Christmas in Print*.

GABRIEL GRUB'S CONVERSION AND A PICKWICKIAN CHRISTMAS

The thematic preoccupations of ritualization, supernaturalism, and conversion would carry into Dickens's follow-up, *The Pickwick Papers*. Serialized over twenty months from 1836 to '37, his first novel concerns the travels and adventures of the Pickwick Club and its members — Samuel Pickwick, Nathaniel Winkle, Augustus Snodgrass, and Tracy Tupman.[41] Much like *Sketches*, *Pickwick* is ostensibly a loosely connected series of tales. Yet, unlike that previous text, *Pickwick*'s tales are often linked together through the framing of the Club, as its members tell stories to each other. Christmas is too used as a marker of time within the text, even before Dickens dedicates "A Good-Hearted Christmas Chapter" to the holiday "containing an account of a Wedding, and some other Sports, beside, which although in their way, even as good customs as Marriage itself, are not quite so religiously kept up, in these degenerate times" (360).

While Dickens, of course, is being flippant in his titling, his reference to "good customs" not "so religiously kept" is nevertheless an apt introduction to a chapter that concerns the Pickwick club descending on Mr. Wardle's estate, Manor Farm at Dingley Dell, for the wedding of Wardle's daughter Bell to Trundle, as well as a rural Christmas celebration that is obviously influenced by Bracebridge. The Pickwickians take a coach out into the country, the "wheels skim[ming] over the hard and frosty ground," while the narrator reflects on the Christmas holiday generally (360). He speaks of the family bonding and healing that happens during the "brief season of happiness and enjoyment"

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[41] Like *Sketches* and Irving's work, the serial publication of *Pickwick* was timed so that "the individual numbers chronicle the time of year in which each was published, so that June 1836, brings forth a cricket match, the January number of 1837 celebrates the festival of Christmas…" (Bevington 219). See David M. Bevington's "Seasonal Relevance in *The Pickwick Papers*."

that Christmas brings, with the holiday's ability reunite the "families whose members have been dispersed and scattered far and wide" (361). Thus, Christmas brings about a nostalgic return to "the delusions of our childish days, that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth" (361). This nostalgia is built on the "recurrence of the season," meaning that each year we are transported back into our invented pasts through the repetition of Christmas rituals and traditions (361).

Thus, the first part of the chapter reads as a rewriting of Bracebridge, as the group descends on the antiquated estate, transported back into the world of a nostalgic Christmas past. The rituals that the Wardle family enact are strikingly similar to the Squire's. Wardle's other daughter Emma informs Sam that the family "always has [games in the kitchen] on Christmas eve" (374). Wardle hangs "with his own hands a huge branch of mistletoe," which Pickwick uses as an opportunity to take Wardle's older mother "beneath the mystic branch, and salute[] her in courtesy and decorum" (376). Pickwick is also "blinded shortly afterwards with a silk-handkerchief, falling up against the wall, and scrambling into corners, and going through all the mysteries of blindman's buff, with the utmost relish for the game," followed by a "game at snap-dragon" and a holiday feast (376). For the feast, Pickwick even makes a drink featuring "hot apples… hissing and bubbling with a rich look, and a holly sound, that were perfectly irresistible," before being regaled, like Grandpapa in *Sketches*, by Wardle's own "Christmas song" as the late-evening turns to storytelling (378).

While Wardle takes on the role of the Squire, dictating the means and method of celebration, Pickwick fits into the role of Crayon, a cheerful bystander only too happy to indulge in the rituals. But Wardle's Christmas celebration eschews the classist

reinforcement of the Squire's. The Squire's tenants and workers don't understand the Christmas rituals that are pushed on them. Alternatively, the Wardle family's Christmas eve custom means "every body sits down with us on Christmas eve, as you see them now – servants and all; and here we wait till the clock strikes twelve, to usher Christmas in, and while away the time with forfeits and old stories" (378). The servants are placed on equal standing to the Wardles and the guests are allowed to indulge in the games and merrymaking and, importantly, understand how these rituals are enacted. For Dickens, Christmas is linked to invented nostalgia, but also has the transformative capabilities to erase the distinctions of class, if only until the "clock strikes twelve" and the servants return to their roles (378).

Further, just as the Squire and Grandpapa recounted stories of their youth, Wardle, "more jolly than ever," uses Christmas Eve as a reason to tell stories (366). However, his story is not strictly autobiographical — like the previous Christmas patriarchs' — but instead supernatural. Wardle's mother recalls "such a fall of snow, a good many years back" when Wardle's father "told us a story about the goblins that carried away old Gabriel Grub" (380). As Wardle hasn't heard the story "since you were a child," Dickens connects the nostalgia of previous Christmases with supernatural storytelling. While Wardle tells the story of Grub, Dickens frames the tale within the chapter to "give the goblin a fair start in a new one" (380). This choice connects Wardle's rituals with the type of oral storytelling that previous Christmas patriarchs practiced, as the family systematically works their way through their rituals. First, they begin with mistletoe, followed by games and a feast, with drinks, and finally all gather around the

fire to hear about supernatural tales. Christmas serves as a site for memory-making in the form of rituals but also a place to produce fiction.

"The Story of Gabriel Grub who stole a Sexton" concerns a "sexton and a grave-digger," who is a "ill-conditioned, cross-grained, surly fellow — a morose and lonely man, who consorted with nobody but himself" (382). He is an ungenerous man, even rapping a singing boy "over the head with his lantern five of six times just to teach him to modulate his voice" (382). While digging a grave on Christmas Eve, Grub is visited by goblins, who, in a chorus, chastise him, rhetorically asking "who makes graves at a time when all other men are merry, and takes a pleasure in it?" (385). In an anticipation of *A Christmas Carol,* the goblins transport Grub through "a thick cloud," so that he can see a family in which "the fairest and the youngest child lay dying," before showing Grub a series of present-day scenes, transforming Grub's wickedness as "he saw that men who worked hard and earned their scanty bread with lives of labour, were cheerful and happy" and that "women… were oftenest superior to sorrow, adversity, and distress; and he saw that it was because they bore in their own hearts an inexhaustible well[spring of affection and devotion" (388). In viewing all these images, Grub becomes "an altered man," eventually leaving behind the town to "seek his bread elsewhere" (390).

Grub's conversion mirrors van Kortlandt's, with the singular supernatural figure of St. Nicholas replaced by the various goblins. Yet, as brutal as it is, the conversion still follows the typical morphology. Grub is exposed to his *sin* as the goblins rhetorical ask "who makes graves at a time when all other men are merry" (385). He is violently *prepared* when the goblins "held him while another poured the blazing liquid down his throat" and *assured* of his conversion when they "show the man of misery and gloom a

few of the pictures from our great storehouse" (386; 387). He demonstrates *compunction* when he "murmured out something about [the scene] being very pretty, and looked somewhat ashamed" after witnessing the death of a child (388). He *submits* and is *fearful* after being "kicked without mercy" by the goblins, before feeling *sorrow* for his fellow man as he "looked on with an interest which nothing could diminish" (388).

Grub finally accepts his *faith* when he begins to believe "that it was a very decent and respectable sort of world after all," leading to him leaving behind his life to start anew after he awakens back in the graveyard on Christmas Day (388). As with van Kortlandt, the spiritual conversion allows Grub to accept the holiday spirit, but unlike that previous conversion, Grub runs away for a period, convinced that "his reformation [will be] disbelieved" by the townsfolk whom he has already wronged (389). He does, however, return to perform the final act of declarative faith, narrativizing his conversion. When he comes back ten years later, like van Kortlandt to the council members, "he told his story to the clergyman, and also to the mayor; and in the course of time it began to be received as a matter of history, in which form it has continued down to his very day" (390). Grub's conversion proves instructive for others, closing out the cyclical loop of conversion as

> Gabriel Grub was afflicted with rheumatism to the end of his days, this story has at least one moral, if it teach no better one – and that is, that if a man turns sulky and drinks by himself at Christmas time, he may make up his mind to be not better for it, let the spirits be ever so good, or let them be even as many degrees beyond proof, as those which Gabriel Grub saw, in the globin's cavern. (390)

Grub's moroseness and willingness to work on Christmas without understanding that his fellow men toil away throughout the year, happy to have some leisure time around the holiday, furthers the connection between Christmas conversion and leisure. Grub is converted when he finally accepts that people need time away from work to focus on their families. Further, Dickens centralizes leisure and celebration as Grub is converted into a believer only after seeing the "materials of happiness, contentment, and peace" that come to his fellow men during the holiday (390).

In both scenes — the Pickwickian Christmas and Grub conversion — Dickens reworks Irving's Christmas work, essentially rewriting Bracebridge and van Kortlandt's narratives, but never really changing the underlying relationship between celebration, nostalgia, leisure, and conversion. Instead, these scenes replace Irving's satire with earnestness. But just as Dickens would rewrite Irving, he would similarly cannibalize his own Christmas writing for his first Christmas novella. *A Christmas Carol* would not only become *the* central Christmas text of the nineteenth century, but would also, I argue, structure and systemize the Christmas conversion, fully pulling the narrative framework out of its Puritan context, while commercializing it in the process.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL'S STRUCTURED CHRISTMAS CONVERSION

Perhaps the most consequential piece of holiday writing within the nineteenth-century, Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* provides the clearest, and first, example of how Christmas conversion narratives were fully codified in the century. Instead of the religious rhetoric of Mather, Shepard, and others, Dickens continues the process begun by Irving, reworking the nostalgia inherent to conversion — a return to a prelapsarian self that is nevertheless rooted in an imagined past — and grafting the narrative framework

onto his tale of Scrooge's redemption. By implementing a series of supernatural visitors — Marley, The Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come — Dickens shows Scrooge undergoing a quasi-religious transformation that allows him to return to his own boyish interest in the holiday. The transformation is also predicated on another forebear to Santa Claus. The Ghost of Christmas Present stronger resembles Father Christmas, a proto-Santa figure that operates much like Irving's Saint Nicholas. Further, Scrooge's transformation also rests on a nascent holiday ritual: gift-exchange.

The basic idea of Scrooge's conversion, or even the novella's indebtedness to *Pickwick*, is not new. Just as *Pickwick* and *Sketches* rework the narrative and thematic interests of Irving, so does Dickens to his own earlier work. As Michael Slater notes:

> The basic notion for this "Ghost Story of Christmas," as he sub-titled it, derived, as has long been recognized, from a Christmas tale he wrote for *Pickwick* seven years earlier, describing the misanthropic sexton Gabriel Grub's overnight conversion to benevolence as a result of goblin intervention. Once Dickens had conceived of the more elaborate supernatural machinery of Marley's Ghost and the Christmas Spirits, and also of the definitive mean old skinflint, Ebenezer Scrooge, he had his story… (218)

Slater goes on to define Scrooge's "moral conversion" as simply a "change of heart" (219). This description aligns with what other critics have noted about Scrooge's transformation, generally and broadly defining conversion as a move from non-believer to convert. Despite her title "The Religious Conversion of Ebenezer Scrooge," Joanmarie Smith only briefly refers to Scrooge's conversion, arguing that "His mind and ways change from treasuring money to treasuring the possibility of making others happy"

(356).[42] In response to Elliot Gilbert's claim that Scrooge converts from "years of wickedness" to "metaphysical innocence," Don Richard Cox even argues that "the 'conversion' that Scrooge experiences is not a holy revelation but an economic one" (922). Cox is correct in his assertion that the economic revelation is central to Scrooge's transformation, but it isn't the either/or prospect that he makes it out to be. Instead, I view Scrooge's conversion are both spiritualized and secularized, inspired by the religious and historically narrative framework, but nevertheless more invested in the holiday spirit than in the Holy one. Scrooge may change at the behest of these spiritual visitors to become a better person, but Dickens does not tie this conversion to any specific religious rhetoric. Further, Scrooge's conversion is ultimately economic in its final stage — as the tangible proof of his conversion is laid out in starkly economic, class-based, and, ultimately, gift-oriented terms.

But, before Scrooge reaches his declaration of faith, his journey conforms to the structure of Caldwell and Morgan's morphology. I argue that in *Carol* Scrooge doesn't just go through a secularized, generalized, conversion, like the one Slater, Smith, Douglas-Fairhurst, and company see — one that is unsystematic and broadly the transition from miser to believer. Instead, I contend that Scrooge's conversion is highly structured around the formal steps of religious conversion, just as van Kortlandt's was, and just as those formulated by Mather, Shepard, and any number of Puritan converts that preceded Dickens. *Carol* conforms closely to the narrative tropes of the first eight steps of conversion — secularizing the spiritual guide just as Irving did but nevertheless

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[42] While Smith does contend that "Dickens gives us every reason to believe that Scrooge's conversion was a religious one," she does not go into detail about the steps of such a conversion (357). Instead she only argues that "it is God and through Scrooge's imagination — and perhaps through some spirits" that he is converted (361).

retaining the same Christian rhetoric that links conversion to nostalgia. But the final stage of *faith* offers the clearest divergence between Puritan and nineteenth-century conceptions of the conversion narrative. As I will show, performative faith — as previously exemplified by van Kortlandt's public recounting of his encounter with Saint Nicholas — is replaced with economic repayment through gifting that attaches paternalistic meaning onto the nascent holiday ritual of gift-exchange. Instead of the performance, Scrooge is only capable of 'proving' his belief in the holiday spirit through gift-giving that, if only briefly, acts a repayment to Bob Cratchit for the underpaid labor that he performed over the years.

By juxtaposing *Carol* against Mather's *The Converted Sinner* and Henry Dunster's conversion — as written out by Thomas Shepard — we can see just how clearly Dickens's work is modeled after the structure and thematic interests of Puritan conversion. Despite the supernatural nature of Scrooge's conversion, it nevertheless conforms and clearly underlines how the relationships between nostalgia, ritual, and celebration intersect. Mather's sermon recounts the story of two pirates who are converted on the eve of their execution, providing moral instruction for those who wish to change. The text is bifurcated into two sections. First, Mather sets up the steps of conversion by invoking scripture, and then he turns to a dialogue between himself and the criminals Archer and White before their execution to exemplify the process. Similarly, Dunster's conversion recounts his transformation, and how God called him to move the Massachusetts Bay Colony to work as an educator and minister, eventually serving as the first president of Harvard from 1640 to 1654.[43] Both Puritan texts are archetypal of the

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[43] Dunster's conversion is one of many that Shepard recorded and is representative of the type of conversions that Shepard wrote down — wealthy gentleman who took over positions of power in Puritan

morphology of conversion, with the one key difference between them that Mather's sermon recounts the conversion of others (told through Mather's peripheral narration), while Dunster's is told in first-person. Yet both conform to and exemplify the overall structure of religious conversion.

I. SIN

The initial step of *sin* includes an "outward misfortune" that exposes "a litany of… sins," showcasing the sinner's wrongfulness not only against God but also against fellow worshippers (Morgan 68; Caldwell 165). Mather begins his sermon by relating the tragic story of Archer and White, who received a "Sentence of Death" after robbing "no less than four & thirty Vessels, and offered most Abusive and barbarous Usages to the People that we so unhappy as to fall into their Hands" (1). Mather recounts their request that he produce a sermon that exemplifies how the "Glorious GOD fetches Good out of the Greatest Evil" and use their sin as a method of instructing others (1). Mather directly confronts Archer and White's "miserable circumstances" (32). Similarly, Dunster recalls "When I came from University to teach school, The Lord wounded my soul with temptations for five years" including "stealing from parents" which "did leave a stain on every ordinance of God" (162). The theft from others constitutes his central sin against God.

New England. While Dunster served as Harvard president until 1654, he was forced to step down from the college after he adopted the view of believer's baptism, arguing that only consenting adults should be baptized. Once he refused to have his infant son baptized, he resigned his post and self-exiled to Plymouth Colony. See Timothy L. Wood's "I Spake the Truth in Feare of God': The Puritan Management of Dissent During the Henry Dunster Controversy."

Both Archer and White and Dunster recall sins that relate to pilfering from others. Similarly, *A Christmas Carol* begins with Marley's death, and Scrooge's indifference as he "was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral" (9). Associating death with business, Scrooge's focus on the business of the day accounts for his primary sin — an unwillingness to consider the human element within his business relationships and, also, ignoring the charitable mood brought about by the Christmas holiday. He even chides his nephew Fred, rhetorically asking, "What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented against you?" (11). For Scrooge, Christmas is associated not with the benevolence preached by others, but a reminder of looming bills. This belief is also filtered through his own economic analysis, with Scrooge viewing every relationship as either a cost or a benefit to himself personally.

Fred rejects this financial simplification, noting "There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited" (12). Instead, Fred focuses on the interconnection that the holiday affords, as "the only time… when men and women seem to by consent to open their shut-hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave" (12). Fred suggests that Christmas is a brief time in which social equality among classes is possible. Scrooge rejects this on personal terms, noting to two gentlemen immediately after his conversation with Fred that "It's not my business" to care for the poor, and "It's enough for a man to understand his own business and not to interfere with other people's" (14).

Scrooge's social and economic selfishness, like that of Archer, White, and Dunster, is the central transgression that needs to be righted.

II. PREPARATION

After establishing the sinful transgressions of the convert, they are *prepared* for their conversions with the assistance of a spiritual guide. For Mather, it's his own assistance in Archer and White's "Preparation for Death" by having them reflect for "some weeks of Time... to Think upon your ways" (32). For Dunster, it is "the Lord [that] showed me where the fault was" as he turns back towards the Bible, reading Romans 5, 8, 9, and 10 to reflect on his own waywardness (162). Morgan refers to this step as an attempt to make a possible convert "sufficiently pliable to the will of God" through a journey inward, as they consider their sins that placed them outside of realm of the Lord or, in the case of Scrooge, the holiday spirit. This preparation asks converts to look towards the past to analyze their own decisions and the reasons why they have fallen out of favor with God and society.

Marley obviously acts as Scrooge's initial guide, preparing him with the instructions to wait, as he "will be haunted… by three spirits (24). Marley's personal decisions, like Scrooge's, make him a stand-in for Scrooge's possible future if he maintains his present course, as Marley's economic selfishness meant "my spirit never walked beyond our counting-house… in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole" and is literalized in a chain that "was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made… of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel" (19). He carries around the tools of his

profession as an albatross. By shunning connections in life, Marley is forced “to wander through the world… and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness” (22).

Much like Fred, Marley prepares Scrooge to reconsider his own definitions of business outside of what they mean to his own profits or losses. After being told that “you were always a good man of business” by Scrooge, Marley retorts “Business!… Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business” (23-4). By expanding the term, Marley foreshadows how Scrooge will be converted, transformed to consider ‘business’ to include human relationships outside trade. But the conversion is still prepared for Scrooge in typically economic terms as Scrooge’s “chance and hope” of change is directly resulting from Marley’s “procuring” of the spirits (24). When Marley leaves, Scrooge is overcome with emotion, as Dickens echoes Mather and others with the “the Invisible World” that will soon lead to Scrooge’s own conversion (24).

III. ASSURANCE

While Scrooge slumbers after Marley’s visit, the Ghost of Christmas Past descends upon him, *assuring* him that the visitation is for his “welfare” (29). Scrooge, Archer and White, and Dunster are all assured of the importance of their spiritual journey by a spiritual mentor, directly linking assurance with the previous step, *preparation.* As Mather attests, these two steps allow the sinners “to be turned into the way of OBEDIENCE,” whether that be the religious or social norms that the convert is being asked to conform to (6). Mather’s use of the passive voice, ascribing the “turning” to an unnamed person displays the importance of mentorship and prevenient grace in this

conversion model, specifically in these two steps. Caldwell notes the interrelation of receptiveness inherent to these initial steps alongside the possible convert's passivity.

Before becoming an active participant in the conversion process — which comes with the next step — one must surrender to outside forces and make oneself open to spiritual guidance and, for Scrooge, visitation. Scrooge prepares for these visitations by "sleeping upon the instant" when Marley left, even wondering whether "I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night" (27). While Scrooge is in his bed, he continues to dwell on Marley's visit and the possibility of other ghosts coming to him. Dickens formally echoes these repeating thoughts as Scrooge "went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over, and he could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavored not to think, the more he thought" (27). Similarly, Archer and White are asked only to "Think" upon their crimes, reflecting on their waywardness before the more active work of conversion can begin (32). Their solitude assures them that they are on the correct path. Dunster is perhaps more active within his *preparation* and *assurance*, reflecting on the Bible, but he also notes that "In my judgement I sought salvation by Christ but in deed did not" (162). At this point in the process, he is assured that salvation in Christ is possible, but not yet wholly prepared to become an active participant in fully accepting Christ within his heart.

Once the Ghost of Christmas Past approaches, Scrooge is hesitant to accompany the childlike ghost, but he is ultimately reassured by him. As they approach the window, Scrooge admits "I am mortal… and liable to fall" (29). The Ghost responds, "Bear but a touch of my hand *there*… and you shall be upheld in more than this" (29). Scrooge

accepts the ghost's word and begins the spiritual journey with him, crossing the divide between passive and active participant in the process, and the visible and invisible worlds. Yet, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, conversion is anything but a linear process. Instead, the converts often move recursively through steps, sometimes doubling back. As we will see, Scrooge is in constant need of reassurance as he slowly begins to accept the overall process.

IV. CONVICTION

Once the convert has sufficiently reflected on their sin during the preparatory phases, their *conviction* is tested, which often results in an initial failure. Morgan refers to this step simply as "humiliation," in which "individuals perceived [their] helpless and hopeless condition and despaired of salvation" (68). Mather notes how the "high self must be dethron'd, and brought into a due Subordination unto GOD," in which the convert sublimates their own identity for their identity in relation to a spiritual being (5). For Archer and White, this active process manifests in "reading and praying" from Mather's assigned scripture, with the two reflecting on their relationship to God (33). Dunster begins not only to believe that he is a sinner in the eyes of the Lord, but openly to wonder "will Lord have mercy on such an enemy?" (163). Thinking of himself as someone who may be beyond salvation, Dunster turns back to Romans, noting "the Lord showed that when enemies, Christ died for the ungodly" (163). While Dunster considers himself one of those "ungodly," he also has the conviction to believe that is not beyond salvation.

For Scrooge, his *conviction*, or humiliation, is shown through by the vision of his fiancée Belle, conjured by the Ghost of Christmas Past. In the scene, Belle breaks off her

engagement with Scrooge, lamenting that “Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve” (37). Just as Archer, White, and Dunster became bewitched by devotion to money, Scrooge also has replaced love with monetary obsession. Belle then uses the same language to break off their agreement, noting that “Our contract is an old one” and that Scrooge has “changed,” replacing his worship of her with that “golden” Idol (37). She notes that he “weigh[s] everything by Gain” mimicking the profit/loss metaphor that Scrooge applies to his entire life (37).

This moment proves too much for Scrooge as the cries out “No More… Show me no more!” to the spirit, fully humbled (37). This moment is also the lynchpin of the entire process of conversion: “a man not destined for salvation could go this far and never get any farther” from this step because it requires the convert to become an active participant in the process, no longer merely submitting to their spiritual guide but joining them in the collaborative undertaking of salvation (Morgan 68). For Scrooge, he is humbled before the Ghost, but he finds his own voice, autonomy, and, thus, conviction, asserting himself to demand an end to this scene. In doing so, he “kindled a spark of faith” that leads him to the next step, and further into the conversion process (Morgan 68).

V. COMPUNCTION

Following the humiliation and active conviction, a possible convert is tested on their *compunction,* in which they are often shown their previously wayward actions and asked to reflect on them. For van Kortlandt, this occurred when Saint Nicholas rode down

to teach him the errors of his ways. For Scrooge, that compunction comes when he is reprimanded for his previous sins — namely the reduction of all relationships to economic gains and/or losses. This moment comes when he is confronted by the Ghost of Christmas Present with Man's Ignorance and Want, two children who "are Man's… and they cling to me, appealing from their fathers" (62). The Ghost of Christmas Present, like Saint Nicholas, is modeled after the English Father Christmas, a precursor to Santa Claus.[44] As the Ghost tells Scrooge, "Beware them both, and all their degree, but most of all beware this boy [Ignorance], for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased" (62). A now-concerned Scrooge asks, "Have they no refuge or resource" before being chastised by the ghost, who repeats Scrooge's own words of "Are there no prisons? […] Are there no workhouses?" (63). Scrooge is very literally confronted by his own words, as the Ghost turns them against Scrooge.

At this stage, "the soul must fight against doubt and despair," again turning inwards to reflect on its own moral failings, but also looking towards the future and the possibility of salvation (Morgan 70). Similarly, Mather asks Archer and White if "God should yet withhold his Grace from you, and leave… could you complain of any Injustice in Him?," to which the prisoners reply in the negative (37). They understand that their theft and killings have left them out of favor and that it is their own fault. Mather, on behalf of God, reprimands the sinners for their sins, pointing out the precarity of

[44] Father Christmas came to prominence during late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Christmas celebrations and saw a resurgence in the early nineteenth century. His description matched the American portrait of Saint Nicholas, with "his white beard, his furs and his boots, the sleigh in which he travels evoke winter. He is called 'Father' and he is an old man, thus he incarnates the benevolent form of the authority of the ancients" (Levi-Strauss 43). As the nineteenth century progressed, he became a benevolent gifter in England. At the time, Portraits of Father Christmas drew heavily from John Leech's image of The Ghost of Christmas Present in *Carol*. See Claude Levi-Strauss's "Father Christmas Executed" in *Unwrapping Christmas*.

forgiveness, placing guilt on the sinners. Likewise, Dunster sees “the innumerable evils [that] had compassed me about,” while also finally accepting “now is a first time I was enabled to gather fruit, ‘tis a time from me to call upon the Lord” (163).

Figure 4.3: The Ghost of Christmas Present (45)

All four of the converts are haunted by their past actions, forced to confront their own waywardness, as Scrooge is quite literally confronted by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come after his encounter with Ignorance and Want. This step marks the transition

from a person’s own doubt about the possibility of conversion to an acceptance of the inevitability of salvation. It also acts as a bridge between the past actions of the convert and the possible future—one in which the convert has finally come back into the graces of God for Archer, White, and Dunster, or into the holiday spirit for Scrooge.

VI. SUBMISSION

After this scene, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come descends upon Scrooge. The fearful Ghost is a “mysterious presence” who fills Scrooge “with a solemn dread (64). Scrooge almost immediately *submits* to the ghost, “prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart,” displaying an “obedience that was hitherto missing” (Dickens 64, Morgan 70). Unlike the previous Ghosts, which Scrooge begrudgingly accepted but nevertheless pushed back against, this Ghost inspires such fear within Scrooge that he immediately asks the Ghost to “Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know” (64).

Generally, once a convert is forced to face their previous misdeeds, they then submit to some type of higher power, aware that their conversion is imminent and now in their own hands. Just as Archer and White admit that “There’s no number of Sins" that they haven’t committed “against our Maker,” Scrooge is finally willing to embrace his conversion and work alongside his spiritual guide to do so (Mather 39). Scrooge has been prepared by the previous Ghosts — shown his own waywardness within the past. With the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, Scrooge actively accepts that “your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was,” already thinking about his life post-conversion (64). Mather describes this stage of the process in

strikingly similar terms to Morgan's, declaring that the convert must "Fall down before GOD, and sincerely say, Lord, thou shall be my all: the All Sufficient and Everlasting Portion of my Soul" (6). Only through acceptance of this higher power can a convert move on to the next step.

Dunster, as well, is made to "look up to the Lord to be reconciled and change my nature. I believe word, Lord would receive an enemy, but I did not discourse am I such an enemy as feels it because I did really feel it" (163). He continues by "cast[ing] himself on the Lord's grace and then I bid adieu to all [self-] righteousness," giving up his self for his relationship to God (163). For each of these converts, the act of submission is the process of giving oneself over to higher power, a sublimination of one's identity as self-contained to one that is relational to whatever spiritual presence they are looking towards —God for Archer, White, and Dunster and the Christmas Spirit (i.e., charity) for Scrooge. Once the converts have fully embraced participation in the process of spiritual conversion, they no longer are helped along the progression of steps but take ownership of the conversion, aware of the possibility of acceptance if they continue along but only if they see through the conversion themselves.

VII. FEAR

Following *submission* to a higher power, a convert must make amends for their earlier transgressions, rectifying the course that they've undertaken by cyclically returning to the person that they might have become if they stayed the course of sinful behavior. The *fear* that emerges from this window into their possible selves is revealed, for Scrooge, as he confronts the "the stone of the neglected grave [with] his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE" (75).

Figure 4.4: Scrooge at His Own Grave (76)

If Scrooge had stayed his course, unwilling to accept the Christmas spirit, and the geniality and charity that goes along with it, then he would have died alone, just as Marley did. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come shows Scrooge a possible future, instilling in him a lingering fear as he screams out “No, Spirit! Oh, no no!,” begging the spirit to “hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope!” (75).

The Ghost guiding Scrooge to see a possible end to his own life echoes how Mather treats Archer and White after they've submitted to his guidance and the possibility of salvation. Mather questions the prisoners, wondering what purpose a few weeks of "Spotless Performances" would "signify for the past years of Lives all spent in Wickedness" (42). The two are at a loss for words, aware that such a conversion might not rectify the evil that they previously performed but also aware that they can only now look towards the future. Invoking Romans 7:15, they confess "We know not what to do," fearful of the people they've become and the possibility that the darkness may still linger within them (42).

Mather describes this stage as "an EXHORTATION to be now prosecuted" (42). No longer will the spiritual guide help the sinner along the path; instead, they will only expose the flaws and faults within them. Likewise, Dunster reflects that "A man must not only see he is a sinner and so think Christ will receive such a one but here may be a deceit for a man must hold on waiting till Lord speak peace" (163). For Dunster, his fear unmasks a deep uncertainty about the possibility of salvation and manifests in his inability to hear the Lord, as he openly wonders if God will speak to him about his transgressions and absolve him of his past sins. The fear of not knowing how to proceed, or even whether they will be able to be forgiven for their past misdeeds, leads directly into the next stage, and the sorrow that they feel over the sins that they perpetrated.

VIII. SORROW

As Scrooge reflects on the possibility of dying alone, neglected by those around him, he falls "upon his knees" crying, and *sorrowful* about the life he has lived, he finally repents (75). This penultimate stage, in which the sinner expresses "a desire to hear the

Word preached" and to rewrite the wrongs of the past, comes as Scrooge wishes to "sponge away the writing on this stone" (Caldwell 165; Dickens 77). The use of "sponge" purposely invokes the imagery a washing away of one's sins, akin to a baptism, or rebirth of one's soul. Scrooge laments the life that he had previously lived, aware that, though he might want to, he cannot rewrite his previous sins. Instead, he can look towards the future and what his life might be like post-conversion.

Furthermore, while Archer and White lament their past transgressions and begin to accept the possibility of conversion, Mather speaks of the "purified [blood] of your SAVIOUR [that will be] sprinkled in your souls" (44). Each conversion narrative invokes holy sacraments, baptism and communion, as a manifestation of the stage of *sorrow.* Dunster writes that the "Lord hath made me bid adieu all wordly treasures" for which he laments but also thanks for his "humility of spirit" that comes along with such a change (164). For all the converts, this sorrow leads to an acceptance that their sins have "not suddenly cut us off" from their respective communities but have only isolated them for the period of their waywardness (Mather 46). Now that they have converted, embracing the holy — or holiday — spirit within them, they are allowed reentry through an acknowledgement of their past transgressions and, as we will see in the final step, a performative declaration of faith.

Just as Archer, White, and Dunster keep the Lord within them, Scrooge invokes a more secularized belief that he "will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach" (77). By using the term "try" Scrooge hints towards the recursive nature of conversion and the belief that such a

spiritual transformation is not inherently final but a process that must be undergone repeatedly by the convert. While the converts may lament their previous lives, they also are finally able to fully accept the change that they've undergone and are now capable to putting such a conversion into narrative form, preaching for others about the possibility of spiritual change.

IX. FAITH

After the converts have thought through their previous lives, they can finally accept their transformation, living in a state of grace around the *faith* that they now possess. This stage asks them to reflect on their sinful ways and vow to change — rewriting their previous transgressions through performing "true saving faith" before a group of already converted (Morgan 73). If Scrooge conformed to the previous eight stages of conversion, succinctly progressing through the steps much as any number of Puritan converts had, this final act, in which the convert is asked to prove for the community their essential change, marks a slight but significant diversion. For Puritan converts, true understanding of faith posed an essential problem: how could a congregation know that a sinner was truly converted? Imperfect assurance, in which converts would speak to their newly found faith, offered tentative "internal evidence of faith" but, as Caldwell argues, it could often lead to doubts from members of the congregation (84).

For the Puritan converts, faith moved the conversion out of the personal, private, sphere and into the public. Archer and White end *The Converted Sinner* by giving "thanks to God" that he "has not permitted us to go in our Sins," while imploring Mather

to “continue your Prayers for us” (46). Mather takes this moment, like the Ghost of Christmas Present, to tell the two that “your Crimes have not been *Sins of Ignorance*,” as the two have finally learned from their misdeeds (46). Mather then turns back to the congregation that he is preaching to and notes “they expressed Comfortable *Hopes* to find Mercy with a GOD *Ready to Pardon*” and that “these Poor Men may after all, be found amount the Elect of GOD, in this wondrous way brought home unto Him” (49). He not only laments the deaths of the pirates, but also exhorts the congregation to change, telling them to “beware of Hypocrisy” if they do not treat their fellow men with a “Heart Sound in the Statutes of GOD” (47). Dunster, as well, uses this final step to proclaim, “I bless God for keeping me out but I desire you to be careful what scholars enter to your churches and pray for humility of spirit” (164). Dunster’s central point is to reflect on who should be let into the church, as some might attempt to corrupt and misinterpret texts. In both conversion narratives, a proclamation of faith is followed by a warning to others to not follow on the same path but to heed the lessons of the convert.

The inability of parishioners to truly know the interior beliefs of a convert meant that most could only attest to spiritual transformation, unable to tangibly prove this change outside of their self-contained narrative of conversion. Yet the Christmas conversion also moves away from the public performance inherent to Puritan conversions. When Scrooge is finally about to “make amends” for the wrongs he has committed, instead of merely proselytizing, he also buys the “prize Turkey that was hanging up,” gifting the bird to the Cratchits anonymously (78). Scrooge proves his conversion through gift-exchange, freely using his wealth as a signifier of spiritual transformation. With his change, he even finds humor, with a “chuckle with which he

said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cad, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy" (79). The turkey, "the one as big" as the boy whom Scrooge pays to pick it up, signifies, as Russell Belk argues, "the final theme of Scrooge's transformation," meaning the change from "being a frugal utilitarian to being a free-spending hedonist" (Dickens 78; Belk 88). Scrooge's conversion to holiday believer is concurrent with his insistence on spending his large amounts of savings, vowing to "raise [Bob's] salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, as well as discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop" (83).

In contrast to the Puritan converts, Scrooge can tangibly prove his conversion. He goes to his nephew Fred's house, taking part in the merrymaking of a "Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness," and showing his family that he is a changed man (133). He also replaces the performative faith of previous conversion narratives with gift-giving as a symbol of spiritual transformation. Bob knows that he is a changed man who "did it all, and infinitely more" because he gifted him the turkey, increased his wages and took on a paternal role within the Cratchit family, becoming a "second father" to Tiny Tim (83). When Dickens writes that Scrooge "knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge," he is echoing any number of Puritan conversions that, like Dunster, discuss the Lord giving the convert "much peace to see the order of His People" now and in the future (164).[45] In the end, Dickens turns towards the future, where Scrooge keeps Christmas all the year 'round.

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[45] John Jones's conversion narrative looks to the future when the "Lord helped me to hope and so desire to hope still" (200). William Manning addresses the "the greats as public and private, though that not in private that others have which my sin has deprived me of, which if the Lord now gives, I hope I shall never admire the Lord sufficiently for" and Alice Stedman writes "many times since the Lord hath spoke to me to

SCROOGE'S GIFT-GIVING

The type of gift-giving that occurs between Scrooge and Bob — an employer to his worker — was in line with gifting that often took place in mid-nineteenth-century Christmas celebration. As Nissenbaum and Marling have noted, exchange between employer and employee was common during Christmas celebrations, which almost always took place between disproportionate social and economic classes, and was often reserved as a symbolic repayment for work performed throughout the year, creating what Claude Levi-Strauss termed a "lasting disequilibrium" between the giver and receiver (56).[46] That paradigm and gift exchange from a parent to a child were the only two major forms of Christmas gifting. Gift-exchange between members of the same socio-economic class would not be popularized until the early twentieth century.

While gift-giving represents tangible corroboration of conversion for Scrooge, it also reinforces social and economic hierarchies between himself and Bob. Not only does Scrooge gift the turkey, but he also gives Bob a "raise [in] your salary" and monetary assistance to his "struggling family" (77, 83). Marcel Mauss argues in *The Gift* that gifting is never an ideologically neutral activity; instead, the practice is intertwined with "obligations" attached to both giver and receiver (83). Thus, gift-giving is represented through a series of payments and debts, mirroring the economics laden throughout

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help me" (98, 105). Almost all the fifty conversion narratives that Shepard transcribed turn towards a public declaration in the end.

[46] Nineteenth-century gift exchange, especially around Christmas time, was often linked to "Christmas charity," in which higher economic classes would give gifts to lower classes in the spirit of charitable giving. See Claude-Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Gregory J. Moschetti's "The Christmas Potlatch: A Refinement on the Sociological Interpretation of Gift Exchange," and "Olde Christmas: Dickens, Irving, and Christmas Charity" in Marling's *Merry Christmas!* Obviously, this type of exchange still occurs with Christmas bonuses, gift-baskets, etc.

Scrooge's conversion. If gift-exchange is often an attempt for "balancing accounts" — in which giver and receiver are, for a moment, on equal social footing — Scrooge's gift of the prize Turkey not only signifies conversion, but also attempts to equal out whatever moral debt he owed to Cratchit and his family. (83).

Having underpaid his worker for years, Scrooge also overcompensates, providing Cratchit with a series of physical and monetary gifts not only to balance out the work that Cratchit performed but also to ensure that Cratchit can never repay the gifts that Scrooge has given. Instead, Scrooge reinforces the disparate relationship between himself and Cratchit through his gift-exchange, attempting to clear away this economic imbalance between the two men, but nevertheless further reinforcing their differences. Scrooge may attempt to right the economic wrongs he perpetrated against Cratchit, but he also underlines their economic and social differences. Further, Dickens reinforces the two types of Christmas gifting, not only having Scrooge repay his worker but he also acts as a parent to Tiny Tim, taking on a paternal role for both Bob and his son.

For Mauss, gifting is always a cyclical exchange, an attempt by the giver to balance the debts between giver and receiver that instead traps the two parties in an endless exchange of obligations—here, not only between Bob and Scrooge, but also in Scrooge's other relationships. Scrooge also repays debts owed to charity by paying "Not a farthing less" than what he whispers to the man he has previously rebuffed because "A great many back-payments are included in it," attempting to balance out his other monetary omission, but also overcompensating (80). For Scrooge to prove that he has finally converted, he must counteract all his existing debts and obligations. By performing these series of exchanges, Scrooge reforms in the eyes of the community, as

"it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well," but he also keeps Bob in his employ, acting as a perpetual parent to his worker, a trait that would feature more prominently in his other Christmas novellas (83). Tara Moore has argued, "rather than radically reworking class hierarchies to prevent future hunger, the nostalgia-laden Christmas books for the most part return to an eighteenth-century paternalistic approach to aiding the destitute" (491).[47] Just as Mather acts a parent to Archer and White, Dunster to his congregation, van Kortlandt to the Indigenous populations, Scrooge's paternalism proves conversion and is well-meaning, but it also harkens back to a "middle class nostalgia" with a feudal understanding of the relationship between worker and employee (Storey 30).

Like the Lord of Misrule before it, Christmas gift-giving seemingly upsets the class distinctions that were reinforced throughout the year, switching the roles of employer and worker, as Scrooge now must work to find a suitable gift for Bob. But, in fact, Scrooge's gifting — and the type of gift-exchange that grew out of *Carol* — merely reinforces class-boundaries just as Misrule did. With Scrooge's gifting, he creates a newly disproportioned relationship between Bob and himself that the latter could never hope to repay. Instead, Bob is forced into the child-like role with his employer.

INVENTED NOSTALGIA AND FEZZIWIG'S BALL

Scrooge's lavish gift-exchange is also participating in the ritualization of Christmas. In the early nineteenth-century, as Nissenbaum has argued, gifting was

[47] While Moore is writing specifically about how the "Christmas books annually took up the cause of the hungry poor within a developing rhetoric of benevolence," the argument works within the context of conversion, as well (491). See "Starvation in Victorian Christmas Fiction."

typically reserved for "giving lavish purchased gifts to the children of the family," while gifting between adults was almost unheard of outside of work relationship (168). But as consumerism began to draw in new customers —and Santa Claus became a more commercial figure as early as 1840 — gifting transcended the age-defined boundaries between parents and children. Instead, gifting would take on social distinctions, as "one of the defining characteristics of an effective Christmas present was that it *was* a luxury" that would be given between master and worker (168). This relationship began as matriarchs would give their nannies jewelry or other ornate, or, more likely, faux-ornate, trinkets as a type of repayment for their work throughout the year. Quickly, this exchange transferred to male employers, who would treat their workers to bonuses, time-off, or feasts as another method of repayment. The types of gifts that employers would give to one's workers often fell along gendered lines.

Famously, before Scrooge has gifted to Bob, he is treated to such an exchange, as his previous employer Fezziwig throws a lavish party for all the "young men and women employed in the business" (35). Fezziwig is clearly modeled after Irving's Squire. He rewards his employees for work performed throughout the year and leads the celebration. But, unlike the Squire, Fezziwig doesn't so much insist on a performative method of celebration. Instead, he leads the celebration. When the fiddler

> (an artful dog, mind! The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!) struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were

> not to be trifled with; people who *would* dance, and had no notion of walking. (36)

Further, he puts on an opulent feast for his servants, apprentices, and other workers. This party includes cake, cold roast, mince pies, and plenty of beer.[48] These exchanges reinforce a type of benevolent paternalistic relationship between Fezziwig and those under him. Once the night comes to an end: "when the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side of the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas" (36). All the while that the party is going on, the older Scrooge regresses to a type of childlike innocence as he watches the festivities. He "acted like a man out of his wits" as "he corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation" (36).

Scrooge's lapse back into his early years recalls the type of nostalgic celebration that the Squire, and even Wardle, championed, in which past Christmases influence and help ritualize the methods of present-day celebration. After Scrooge becomes self-conscious about his activities, the Ghost of Christmas Present asks "He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise" (37)? Scrooge notes Fezziwig's transformative powers:

> "It isn't that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self. "It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a

[48] The association of Fezziwig's name with Christmas celebration has continued into the present. Yearly Fezziwigs — or Victorian Christmas Balls — are celebrated by numerous historical societies including Regency Encounters, Old Dominion Dance, and The Commonwealth Vintage Dancers, among other societies.

> toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune." (37)

Scrooge's attempt to quantify Fezziwig's power over his workers speaks to how Scrooge will right the wrongs that he has done to Bob, and Scrooge freely admits that "I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now" (37). The progression from gifting as an activity between child and parent in the 1820s and then, to employer and worker in the 1840s reinforced this connection between worker and child. Scrooge sees his younger self and ultimately regresses to a state of childhood innocence while watching Fezziwig's Ball. He attempts to do the same thing to Cratchit. But, instead, of a celebratory Christmas ball steeped in Christmas rituals and traditions, he does so through this newer Christmas ritual — gift-exchange. Dickens further draws out this connection when he explicitly becomes a second father, using his conversion to not attempt to repay any economic and moral debts, but also ingratiate himself in the Cratchit family (83).

Gift-exchange progressed from ale and a feast with the Squire and Fezziwig, to money and food with Scrooge, yet the core relationship between workers and employers remains. Scrooge participates in a ritualized form of gift-giving within the 1840s, one that prioritizes paternalism, a trope that would continue throughout holiday writing in the 1850s, as well. Furthermore, gift-exchange becomes intertwined with leisure, as Scrooge prioritizes time off for Bob, a repayment for the work that he has performed for Scrooge. These two ritual celebrations, paternalistic gift-gifting and leisure time would influence several holiday writers post-*Carol.*

CONCLUSION

Scrooge's conversion may have been historically influenced by Irving and, consequently, Puritan conversion narratives, but upon publication, it became a dominant narrative in and of itself. Financially and critically successful, *A Christmas Carol* became a phenomenon, kickstarting a trend in Christmas texts that would carry throughout the nineteenth century and into the present. Further, Scrooge's conversion took hold, creating a template for the types of holiday conversion narratives that would continue to be popular in the mid to late nineteenth-century in both England and America. While most of these texts could not replicate the success of Dickens's first novella, they nevertheless helped codify a genre that is still rewritten today.

But Scrooge's paternalistic conversion would also bring up central questions about the relationships between workers, employees, leisure-time and the holiday that would continue throughout the century. In England, Scrooge's benevolent and feudal paternalism continued a theory of economic and social development that was inspired by Thomas Carlyle's writing. English Christmas writing would continue to push this theory, attaching the conversion onto benevolent employers, landlords, and other businessmen. As Chapter Five will explore, many of these texts reinforced the theories of paternalism, codifying gift-giving as an economic Christmas ritual, and eventual tradition, that would repay workers for underpaid (or unpaid) labor throughout the year. Alongside Christmas parties, feasts, and other rituals, gift-exchange would be woven into the fabric of the cyclical economic relationship between workers and employers.

In America, *Carol* would become immensely popular just as critics of Dickens's American writings — namely *American Notes* — were disowning the famed author.

Because of his writing on the immorality of slavery — a position that would lead to his own disillusionment with Carlyle —Southern authors pushed back against Dickens's popular holiday tale. Yet *Carol* and its reprints also paradoxically sold incredibly well within the South. The popularity of *Carol* and its ingrained ideas of paternalism inspired many pro-slavery authors, including William Gilmore Simms, to rewrite the text. Simms and others would take Scrooge's paternalistic, economic, conversion and weaponize it, transplanting the narrative framework onto American plantations. Likewise, Scrooge's conversion would be grafted onto enslavers, with the gift-exchange inherent to the final stage of conversion being used as argument for the benevolence and morality of slavery.

CHAPTER FIVE

"THAT INEVITABLE CHARITY WHICH CHARACTERIZES THE INSTITUTION OF SOUTHERN SLAVERY": CONVERSION, SOCIAL PATERNALISM, AND PLANTATION CHRISTMAS

INTRODUCTION

While *Carol* was popularizing Christmas writing in England, leading to a slew of imitations, including from Dickens himself, Christmas celebration — and the subsequent literature that came out of its revival — was still in an infantile stage in America. An immediate success, *Carol* not only reanimated an already burgeoning holiday in the mid nineteenth-century, but it also spawned numerous imitators that rewrote the Christmas conversion, further codifying it as *the* dominant literary genre tied to the holiday within the mid nineteenth century. I argue that these texts, which included Dickens's own follow-up *The Chimes*, furthered the connection between social paternalism, a dominant ideology at the time, and gifting, all rooted in the genre of conversion. As recounted in these narratives, Christmas gift-exchange further fortified class imbalances in England and illuminated the appalling and complicated dynamics of enslaver/enslaved relationships in America.

Yet it would take more than a decade after the publication of *A Christmas Carol* before American authors truly began to contend with the holiday, and the ritualistic implications of Christmas conversion. Thus, this chapter begins by contextualizing those

English imitations that cropped up in the immediate aftermath, noting how these *Carol* rewrites reinforced the overall narrative structure of the Christmas conversion, and furthered the relationship between benevolent paternalism and gift-exchange. I then turn to Dickens's *The Chimes* as an example of an inverted conversion, one that repositions the possible convert as a worker, not employer, to diminishing results. Even though *The Chimes* fails as a conversion narrative, it still is modeled on Thomas Carlyle's notions of social paternalism as espoused in *Past and Present* (1843), which would prove influential to other holiday writers on both sides of the Atlantic. While their protagonists may have mirrored Scrooge's conversion, the conversion also moved beyond Scrooge's upper-class lifestyle to, instead, graft onto lower-class individuals that did not benefit from this type of social transformation — a trait that led to the subsequent critical and commercial failures of Dickens's subsequent novellas.

After exploring the afterlives of *Carol* in England, the chapter moves transatlantically to America to look at the complicated reception that *Carol* received. Both praised and lambasted in equal measure, *Carol's* recognition exposed an animus against Dickens that had been percolating since *American Notes'* publication a year earlier. Despite this national antipathy, *Carol* sold well, but — as was the case with most of Dickens's work — was reprinted without his approval. These reprints circulated particularly in the southern United States, a region that I argue, had its own specific sub-set of rituals and traditions tied to the holiday. One antebellum writer, William Gilmore Simms, would trace holiday celebration across three texts — *Castle Dismal; or, The Bachelor's Christmas* (1844), *Maize in Milk: A Christmas Story of the South* (1847), and *The Golden Christmas: A Chronicle of St. John's Berkely. Compiled from the Notes of a*

Briefless Barrister (1852). A staunch Southerner, slavery apologist, poet, and novelist, Simms was well-versed with Dickens's writing by the time he set out to compose his own Christmas novellas.

During the antebellum period, Simms wrote his most consequential works, reconfiguring the Christmas conversion in the process, and marking the transition of gifting from ritual to tradition as the final stage of Christmas conversion. This section explores his early Christmas writing, including the supernatural *Castle Dismal* and conversion narrative *Maize in Milk*, before turning to an extended reading of *The Golden Christmas*. As I argue, *Golden Christmas* reconditions *Carol's* conversion. Instead of gift-giving gesturing towards the supposed benevolence between employer and employee, plantation gifting becomes racialized and a perverted method of supposed economic repayment between enslaver and those enslaved within Simms's writing, modifying Dickens's focus on class imbalance to reflect growing moral and political arguments about the practice of slavery in the lead up to southern secession.

In addition to his fierce social and political criticism related to slavery — and eventually the Confederacy — Simms also worked as a literary critic for various publications and reviewed Dickens's own novels and novellas for the *Southern Quarterly Review*, of which he served as editor. While sometimes praising his work, Simms was quite scathing regarding his feelings about Dickens overall. He wrote mockingly about the "captious, sneering spirit" in which Dickens wrote his staunch anti-slavery chapter in *American Notes*, noting that "We are entitled to speak of this work in terms of the strongest displeasure" as "It has excited by its meanness, scurrility and trivial character, the scorn of the whole country" (Simms, "Dickens' American Notes" 167-168).

SQR often wrote about Dickens, with Simms dedicating ample space to his own thoughts on the author's work. Simms believed that the nature of serial publication was "decidedly unfriendly to art" because the "author soon becomes indifferent to all general proportions in his work, — to all symmetry of outline, — all compactness of plan and execution" (Simms, "Dickens's Bleak House" 224). He lamented the error of "Mr. Dickens is in allowing his *satire* to get the better of his *fiction*" in *Bleak House*, but also noted that "Mr. Dickens cannot make a dull book, though he may sometimes lead his readers into the long-drawn-out meshes of a tedious one" in relation to *A Tale of Two Cities* (Simms 224; Simms, "Dicken's A Tale of Two Cities" 568). With Dickens's Christmas novellas, his response was also decidedly mixed. Simms denounced the later novellas as failures. *The Chimes* (1844) had a "very good moral, and a wholesome object in view" but nevertheless Simms saw "small literary merit in the Christmas *brochure* of Mr. Dickens" (Simms, "The Chimes!" 22). He was even more blistering in his notice on *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848), remarking that had "been issued by an unknown writer, it would have been generally pronounced a wretched piece of drivel" (Simms, "The Haunted Man" 270).

THE CHIMES ! A GOBLIN STORY. BY DICKENS.

WITH a very good moral, and a wholesome object in view, we see but small literary merit in this christmas *brochure* of Mr. DICKENS. It is benevolent in its design. It gives a painful picture of the privations and sufferings of the poor, and of the blindness, the insensibility and the corruptions of the rich; but this is all. As a story, the plot is worthless; and the fancy and imagination are wholly borrowed from time-out-of-mind old German fantasies. That it may do good is very possible. That it may prompt some drowsy nature to draw forth the reluctant shilling, and quiet the importunate beggar may be granted;—though we half doubt even this. The truth is, that Mr. DICKENS has such a child's trick of exaggerating all his crimes, and wrongs, and miseries, that we are apt to question even the small degree of truth which enters into his description. If he were more certain in the likeness, he would be more successful. We can believe in the hardhearted of his purse-proud citizens, but he makes them too silly and too inflated, not to leave us in constant doubt of their personality and identity. That cruelty to man, and indifference to the claims of humanity, should yet mix with the pretension that insists upon its benevolence, is very probable; but that both of these traits should be in such excess as he represents them in the same person, is neither true nor probable. The worldling, it must be remembered, is quite as much a worldling in his prudence, (we call it so for want of a better name,) as in his avarice. His very vanity is made to put on the guise of meek-

Figure 5.1: Simms Review of *The Chimes* in *Southern and Western Monthly Magazine* (222-223)

Despite these cutting critiques of Dickens's later works, Simms nevertheless gave his most effusive praise for *A Christmas Carol*. Like many other critics at the time, he was taken by *Carol's* compact emotions. For that first novella, Simms remarked:

> He has tenderness in high degree, and this is one chief source of his humour. His sense of the picturesque is good, his fancy lively and original, and his conception of a character piquant and irresistible. The "Christmas Carol" of Mr. Dickens is probably one of the fairest and highest specimens of his several attributes of fancy art, humour and pathos. (Simms, "Spirit of the Age" 334)

His regard for *Carol* over Dickens's other work isn't surprising, given his own literary output. Simms often toggled between comedies, historical, and holiday fiction. As discussed later in this chapter, his Christmas works — particularly *The Golden Christmas* — are indebted to the structure and content of *Carol*. While the authors overlapped in representations of holiday supernaturalism, ritual, and gifting, the Christmas conversion that Dickens had codified became a rhetorical tool for Simms to promote pro-slavery arguments. Instead of the paternalistic employer that Scrooge represented, Simms would reposition his converts as benevolent enslavers, mirroring Dickens's plotting, but now transposed onto a Southern plantation Christmas, effectively weaponizing the conversion to preach the imagined kindheartedness of his slavers and the infantilization of those who were enslaved.

With *The Golden Christmas* and his other holiday texts, Simms was responding to a marketplace that quickly capitalized on Carol. The flow of gifts from enslaver to the enslaved was built around not only physical gifts, but also the control of time. Thus, as Simms stresses, enslavers would often gift time off to the enslaved. These pro-slavery imitations were critically neglected at the time, widely read but often dismissed as cheap imitations of *Carol*. They also interacted with the rituals associated with the plantation Christmas, an intricate web of overlapping celebrations that stretched the Christmas holiday well past December 25th, fusing together the Christmas's of Irving's Pennsylvania Dutch, Dickens's nostalgia laden representation, and even the early debauchery of Lord of Misrule. However, before turning to this fraught period within the South, it's important to reflect on how *A Christmas Carol* was received in Dickens's

home country, and how it solidified a new framework for the Christmas story, leading to an influx of holiday texts in the process that mimicked *Carol*'s conversion.

CAROL'S RECEPTION IN ENGLAND

In the aftermath of *Carol's* publication, the cultural and literary impact of Dickens's holiday tract was immediately felt. In Thackeray's review, he commended "the children of the present generation" who "Rush to the Strand! And purchase five thousand more copies of the *Christmas Carol*" (Thackeray, "A Box of Novels" 168).[49] The novella sold six thousand copies in its initial publication between December 19th and Christmas Day, 1843. Yet, even more than its sales and critical reception, *Carol* spawned several imitators that adopted the Christmas conversion, mapping Scrooge's spiritual transformation onto a host of stand-ins that sometimes resembled the famous protagonist, but just as often took the basic outline of the conversion. Yet in all these rewritings of the tale, the conversion had crystallized, becoming the main narrative framework of holiday stories in the late 1840s and early '50s.

The Yule Log, for Everybody's Christmas Hearth (1847) by Louis Alexis Chamerovzow follows Abel Chumps, a well-to-do businessman whose "only weak point" is his miserliness, as he is unwilling to spend any money because "he beheld nothing but rainy-days; and thought of nothing, save how he should provide against them" (36). Single-minded in his quest for financial stability, Chumps is unfeeling towards the plights

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[49] Like Simms, Thackeray's review also noted Dickens's rapid output, lamenting "Every month has brought us some kind token from this delightful genius. His books may have lost in art, perhaps, but could we afford to wait?" (167). Further, he was highly critical of Dickens's other Christmas novellas, noting "This story is no more a real story than Peerybingle is a real name" about *The Cricket on the Hearth* (Thackeray, *Contributions* 88). See Charles Mauskopf's "Thackeray's Attitude Towards Dicken's Writings."

of his fellow-neighbors. Abel even complains about having to provide for them during the holiday, telling his wife "Darn the Yule … be I to keep open house? What good do come o' burning the Yule, and feasting o' neighbours, and that like?" (52). When Abel goes to sleep on Christmas eve in the parlor, the Yule log slowly transforms into a "queer little old man" who was "all body and no legs" (63). This anthropomorphized log acts as his spiritual guide. He is taken by the log to visit aristocratic houses across England that mirror Irving's Squire, keeping "up the Constitootion and customs of Old England" in Christmas celebration (78). After seeing the generosity of those around him, Abel awakens a reformed man, flinging open his doors to celebrate, declaring "Welcome! Welcome, all … God bless you! A merry Christmas to 'ee all, and many on 'em … Make y'ursevles at home, every body! You be right welcome" (187). Like Scrooge, he spends lavishly on the accompanying feast, as the entire town descends upon his house to make merry.

Similarly, Mark Lemon's *The Enchanted Doll: A Fairy Tale for Little People* (1849) concerns Jacob Pout, a misanthropic dollmaker who "ought to have been a happy man, for customers were always satisfied with their purchases" but was instead "rather lazy and very envious" of the rival dollmaker Anthony Stubbs (4). This one-sided competition comes to a head during the holidays. One night he is visited by a fairy, who gives him an enchanted doll that will sell "for just one hundred pounds, and that sum, with what you are worth already, will place you on an equal footing with Tony Stubbs" (11). But, if Pout is content with his life, "the ENCHANTED DOLL will be of no service to you" (11). The doll will only return to Pout whenever he becomes envious of Stubbs again. With the ability to finally find some financial security and beat his arch-rival,

Jacob ends up selling the doll. However, in a twist of fate, it keeps returning to him over and over, as Stubbs and Pout become locked in a never-ending competition. This rivalry continues for years. Pout's disposition only changes at Christmastime, during Alderman Kersey's party where he meets a fictionalized Charles Dickens, who shows him that the true meaning of Christmas is not envy but love and compassion for his fellow worker. Afterwards, the doll disappears for good when Pout and Stubbs merge their businesses.

Perhaps the most comparable to *Carol*, W.M. Sweepstone's *Christmas Shadows: The Tale of the Poor Needle Women* (1850) imitates Dickens by introducing D. Cranch, a curmudgeonly outfitter who undercuts other outfitting houses by covering "every wall and boarding in London … with immense placards, which informed all who read them that any Mr. Cranch sold goods fifty per cent cheaper than any other house in the trade" (3). He hires many needle workers, keeping a small section of the community employed, but he also underpays and overworks them. When one particular worker asks for a loan before the holidays, he refuses. Cranch chastises her, arguing "There is the work … and if it does not suit your pleasure to do it all over again, I can soon find plenty of others who will; but —mark this! — you won't have another stitch out of my warehouse till that is done" (38-39). Without any money to pay for her sick brother, she drowns herself. On Christmas, Cranch is visited by goblins, who reenact Gabriel Grub's violent conversion by tying him down, verbally berating him for his misdeeds, and showing him a collection of women who worked in his warehouse. When confronted by the drowned women, he weakly responds "I was always a father to them" (93). After a night revisiting his past, he finally converts, realizing that he cannot morally operate his warehouse. Unlike *Carol*, *Christmas Shadows* ends with Cranch "about to retire from business" as his daughter is

set to marry (205). Realizing that he cannot continue his work, Cranch closes the warehouse.

These three texts tapped into a marketplace that was clamoring for more Christmas content. By the late 1840s and early 1850s, *Carol* imitations, and the Christmas conversion more generally, had become the de facto Christmas genre. *Carol* was a type of a “culture text” that inspired rewrites precisely because of its “traditional typology” that “links Old and New Testaments in the transformation of Scrooge” along with “the nativity with the crucifixion and resurrection” (Davis 80). Thus, the profound influence of *Carol’s* “social gospel” oversaturated a Christmas book marketplace with rewrites that further dictated the means and methods of celebration (87). Within these texts, the celebratory methods that Irving and Dickens wrote about continued to ritualize. Mistletoe, the Yule log, and gift-exchange had solidified within the public consciousness and seeped into the imitations. At Alderman Kersey’s Christmas party in *The Enchanted Doll*, he “kissed his partner under the mistletoe… All the women are pretending to run away from the kissing-bough and all the men are dragging them back again” (50). *The Yule Log* anthropomorphizes its titular log to serve as an extended metaphor for the Christmas spirit and the “Yule-feasts” that take place during the period (60).

Further, gift-giving continued to gain prominence. No longer was gifting just restricted to that of parent and child, though that exchange still maintained its cultural dominance. Post-1843, Christmas charity became a central ritual within English holiday celebrations and replaced the older tradition of Christmas Boxes — where workers would go door-to-door collecting Christmas bonuses. Instead, by 1850 shopkeepers, chimney sweeps, postmen, and other tradesmen “determined to abolish the custom of giving

Christmas Boxes to their customers" and to focus, instead, on charitable giving (Weightman 61). In 1860, three hundred inmates of Hereford workhouse received "Christmas cards, Christmas presents of orange, tobacco, and sweets, and a Christmas dinner of roast beef and plum pudding" (61). This type of gifting reinforced the type of economic and social hierarchies that *Carol* preached.

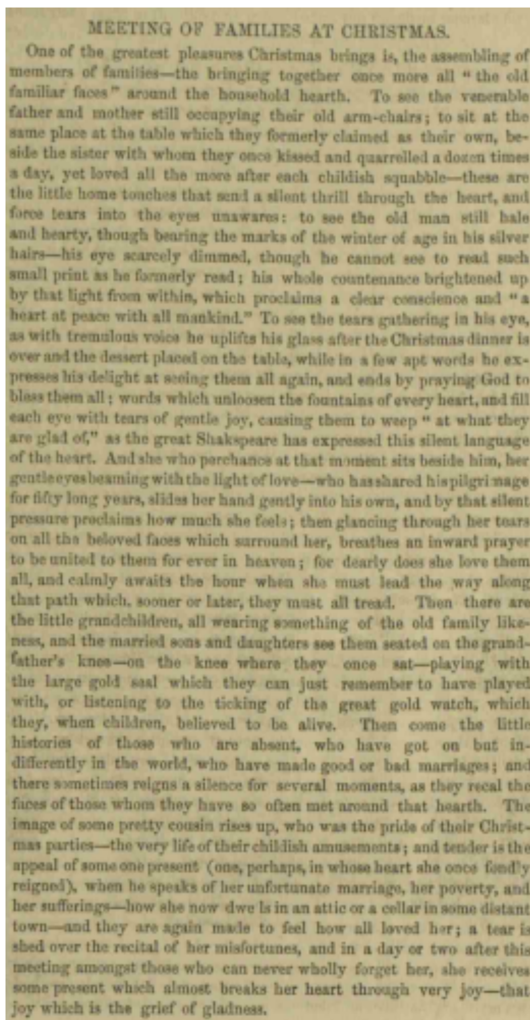
Building from Pennsylvania's extended holiday break and modeling their policies on Scrooge's benevolence towards the Cratchit family, employers began to recognize their workers' time outside of the office or factory. During the holiday, there was an easing of routine, while decorations were hung to make the office, or factory floor to seem less a place of work. Leisure-time became a central component of English holiday celebration, as families returned to each other. An 1849 *Illustrated London News* article spoke to this growing ritual, noting "one of the greatest pleasures Christmas brings is the assembling of members of families — the bringing together once more of all the old familiar faces around the household hearth," invoking a nostalgic return to one's childhood when "the venerable father and mother [are] still occupying their old armchairs [and] sit at the same place at the table which they formerly claimed as their own" (419). Other newspaper articles reflected this growing interest in conservative, nostalgic return to the family and what *The Morning Chronicle* in 1860 called "the joyful reunion" (qtd. in Weightman 90).[50] Such a ritual could only come from "an act of self-denial, by closing our banks, our wharves, our warehouses and our shops can we give to those we employ

[50] Increased mobility from the railroad also allowed families to reunite during the holidays. As Martin Johnes argues, "as the festival grew in importance at the end of the nineteenth century, so too did the number of working-class people who travelled back to see their families. This was enabled by rising real wages, the spread of the railways, [and] Christmas trains" (43). For more on the intersection of leisure-time and railroad expansion, see Johnes's *Christmas and the British*.

and to thousands who live miles away the priceless pleasure of restoration to the family circle" (qtd. in Weightman 90). Deeply rooted in British consciousness and charity, Scrooge's conversion would also be Americanized, adapted "to an American business ethic of community service and rejecting the ingrained self-interest of Europe," a topic that will be explored later in this chapter (Davis 141).

These ritualized activities — Yule logging, mistletoe, gift-exchange, and leisure — not only mimicked Scrooge, and Dickens's ethos of Christmas charity and celebration, but also reflected a growing interest in the social paternalism that Thomas Carlyle was preaching. With the publication of *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle had laid out a rationale for a return to a feudalistic social and economic hierarchy. That these ideas would seep into Dickens's composition of not only *Carol* but also his follow-up novella, *The Chimes*, is not surprising. Within his subsequent Christmas novellas, Dickens continued to explore the Christmas conversion, but also furthered its relationship to the

type of benevolent paternalism that would also become central to antebellum depictions of Christmas celebrations, as well.



MEETING OF FAMILIES AT CHRISTMAS.

One of the greatest pleasures Christmas brings is, the assembling of members of families—the bringing together once more all "the old familiar faces" around the household hearth. To see the venerable father and mother still occupying their old arm-chairs; to sit at the same place at the table which they formerly claimed as their own, beside the sister with whom they once kissed and quarrelled a dozen times a day, yet loved all the more after each childish squabble—these are the little home touches that send a silent thrill through the heart, and force tears into the eyes unawares: to see the old man still hale and hearty, though bearing the marks of the winter of age in his silver hairs—his eye scarcely dimmed, though he cannot see to read such small print as he formerly read; his whole countenance brightened up by that light from within, which proclaims a clear conscience and "a heart at peace with all mankind." To see the tears gathering in his eye, as with tremulous voice he uplifts his glass after the Christmas dinner is over and the dessert placed on the table, while in a few apt words he expresses his delight at seeing them all again, and ends by praying God to bless them all; words which unloosen the fountains of every heart, and fill each eye with tears of gentle joy, causing them to weep "at what they are glad of," as the great Shakspeare has expressed this silent language of the heart. And she who perchance at that moment sits beside him, her gentle eyes beaming with the light of love—who has shared his pilgrimage for fifty long years, slides her hand gently into his own, and by that silent pressure proclaims how much she feels; then glancing through her tears on all the beloved faces which surround her, breathes an inward prayer to be united to them for ever in heaven; for dearly does she love them all, and calmly awaits the hour when she must lead the way along that path which, sooner or later, they must all tread. Then there are the little grandchildren, all wearing something of the old family likeness, and the married sons and daughters see them seated on the grandfather's knee—on the knee where they once sat—playing with the large gold seal which they can just remember to have played with, or listening to the ticking of the great gold watch, which they, when children, believed to be alive. Then come the little histories of those who are absent, who have got on but indifferently in the world, who have made good or bad marriages; and there sometimes reigns a silence for several moments, as they recal the faces of those whom they have so often met around that hearth. The image of some pretty cousin rises up, who was the pride of their Christmas parties—the very life of their childish amusements; and tender is the appeal of some one present (one, perhaps, in whose heart she once fondly reigned), when he speaks of her unfortunate marriage, her poverty, and her sufferings—how she now dwells in an attic or a cellar in some distant town—and they are again made to feel how all loved her; a tear is shed over the recital of her misfortunes, and in a day or two after this meeting amongst those who can never wholly forget her, she receives some present which almost breaks her heart through very joy—that joy which is the grief of gladness.

Figure 5.2: "Meeting of Families at Christmas in the *Illustrated London News* (1849) (419)

THE CHIMES AND A POST-*CAROL* CHRISTMAS CONVERSION

Like *The Yule Log, The Enchanted Doll,* and *Christmas Shadows,* Dickens's immediate *Carol* follow-up, *The Chimes* serves as the closest that the author got to rewriting *Carol*. In both, a wayward protagonist is confronted by a supernatural force that

preaches conversion towards benevolence, whether through ingratiating employees into one's own family structure or, for *The Chimes*, literally returning to one's own family. Further, both foreground social and economic paternalism. Yet *The Chimes* reverses its protagonist's fortunes, narrowing in on a downtrodden Toby "Trotty" Veck, instead of the wealthy business-owner Scrooge.

The novella begins with the porter Veck on New Year's Eve — with Dickens invoking the extended Christmas holiday, if not overtly referencing it — when Alderman Cute, a Justice, and Mr. Filer, his friend, confront Toby and his daughter Meg. Cute and Filer berate Toby and Meg for being poor. According to Filer, "You [Toby] snatch your tripe, my friend, out of the mouths of widows and orphans" (101). Meg is planning to marry her lover Richard on New Year's Day but is talked out of it by Cute and Filer. Toby is then given a letter from Cute to deliver to Sir Joseph Bowley, an employer who, upon meeting Toby, also berates him for being able unable clear his debts before the New Year. Bowley intends to have Cute lock up Will Fern, a man wanted for vagrancy. As Toby leaves Bowley's house, he runs into Fern and dissuades him from going to Cute's home but, instead, to come to Toby's. Toby, Will, and Will's young niece Lillian meet Meg at the Veck home. That night, Toby is called by the Chimes and walks up the church stairs to be confronted by the supernatural bells and its goblin attendants. The Chimes tell Toby he has sinned by losing faith in the improvement of man and show him a future in which he and his daughter are dead. Finally, Toby awakens to Meg and Richard marrying and the narrator offers the reader a choice between the happy wedding ending or the darker implications of Toby falling to his death.

Much like Scrooge, Veck is converted through a rigid series of steps. According to the goblins, Trotty's central *sin* is this:

> Who puts into the mouth of Time, or of its servants … a cry of lamentation for days which have had their trial and their failure, and have left deep traces of it which the blind may see — a cry that only serves the present time, by showing men how much it needs their help when any ears can listen to regrets for such a past — who does this, does a wrong. And you [Trotty] had done that wrong, to us, the Chimes. (128)

After Trotty asks to be spared, the shadows and goblins *prepare* him for the spiritual journey by repeatedly telling him to "Listen" (129). His *assurance* comes from the spirits and image of Richard who "got it into his head … that he might do better … and that she wasn't good enough for him," which forces Meg to be alone in the world with a child (148). Trotty's *conviction* in the spirits' mission is reinforced when he learns what befell Meg, with Mrs. Tugby mentioning that with Meg's baby "she has not been able to do her old work … How they have lived, I hardly know" (150). Trotty's *compunction* is displayed as he pleads to "Have mercy on [Meg] on me … I was her father" (155). He *submits* as the Chimes tell him to "Learn it from the creature dearest to your heart!" before showing him a scene of Meg taking her daughter to the river to drown them both, without any ability to pay off their debts (155). Trotty falls "down on his knees, and in a shriek" *fearful* of her death, crying out "I have learnt it! … O, save her, save her!" (156). His *sorrow* emerges as he laments "I slandered Nature in the breasts of mothers rendered desperate! Pity my presumption, wickedness, and ignorance" (156). After he is returned home, his *faith* is declared in the domestic space, as "You never in all your life saw

anything at all approaching him" as he "sat down in his chair and beat his knees and cried" before demonstrating his conversion, and throwing a party for Meg and Richard, as the narrator directly addresses the reader, imploring them to "endeavour to correct, improve, and soften [the stern realities]" of one's situation to live more fully with the moment (161).

Dickens here was both influenced by and critiquing a paternalistic ideology that permeated Victorian culture in the 1840s and '50s in which Christmas "played a prominent role in masking the inequalities of the employer-employee relationship through symbolic gestures that attempted to affirm bonds of loyalty" (Armstrong 73). Paternalism was "powerfully influenced by a nation's institutions, institutions that are in turn a product of a nation's past" (Roberts 9). As such, "paternalism was a venerable outlook, a matter of old ways performed time out of mind" (9). Specifically, within *The Chimes,* Thomas Carlyle's speculative *Past and Present* looms. It's a treatise that more directly confronts the problematic "Condition of England" (7). A work heavily influenced by nostalgic impulses, *Past and Present* essentially argues that while nineteenth-century England is the wealthiest the country has ever been, a lack of true leadership, or an "Aristocracy of Talent," is leading to the social, economic, and moral decay of the country (32). Carlyle's work juxtaposes the harsh present conditions with an idyllic monastery, St. Edmundsbury, from the twelfth century. He foregrounds Abbot Samson, a monk who watches over his fellow monks with a firm yet understanding hand. According to Carlyle, Samson is representative of the type of leadership that England needs: a political mind to steer the country into a future that is paradoxically reflective of the idyllic past. The *past* portions of Carlyle's text are, additionally, filtered through "these

clear eyes" of Samson's assistant and fellow monk Jocelin of Brekelond, who tells the story of Samson (50). Through this comparison, Carlyle concludes that the only way for England to progress and avoid societal and economic stagnation is by looking into the past and adopting the feudal paternalism of these forbearers, making "the leaders of industry" into a noble aristocracy (268).

That Dickens narrativizes Carlyle's theories in *Carol*, and directly in *The Chimes* is not surprising. Throughout their careers, Carlyle and Dickens's personal and professional lives overlapped. Mildred G. Christian says as much when she writes, "Dickens, in his nearly thirty years' friendship with Carlyle, maintained, throughout, an attitude of respectful ... veneration, such as a son might offer a father" (35). "Carlyle was always a hero to Dickens" and Carlyle reciprocated this admiration as he confessed in a letter to John Sterling that he "sat almost a whole day reading [*The Pickwick Papers*]," and the two maintained a professional and personal friendship (Christian 28). They shared similar causes in fighting for international copyright law reform, and Dickens would even dedicate his later novel *Hard Times* (1854) to the author. Upon completing *The Chimes,* Dickens noted to his friend and biographer John Forster that, "I particularly want Carlyle above all to see it before the rest of the world" (Christian 29). While Carlyle would not attend Dickens's initial reading, he would show for a later reading of the

novella, a scene recorded in Daniel Maclise's pencil sketch of the occasion, republished in John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1875).

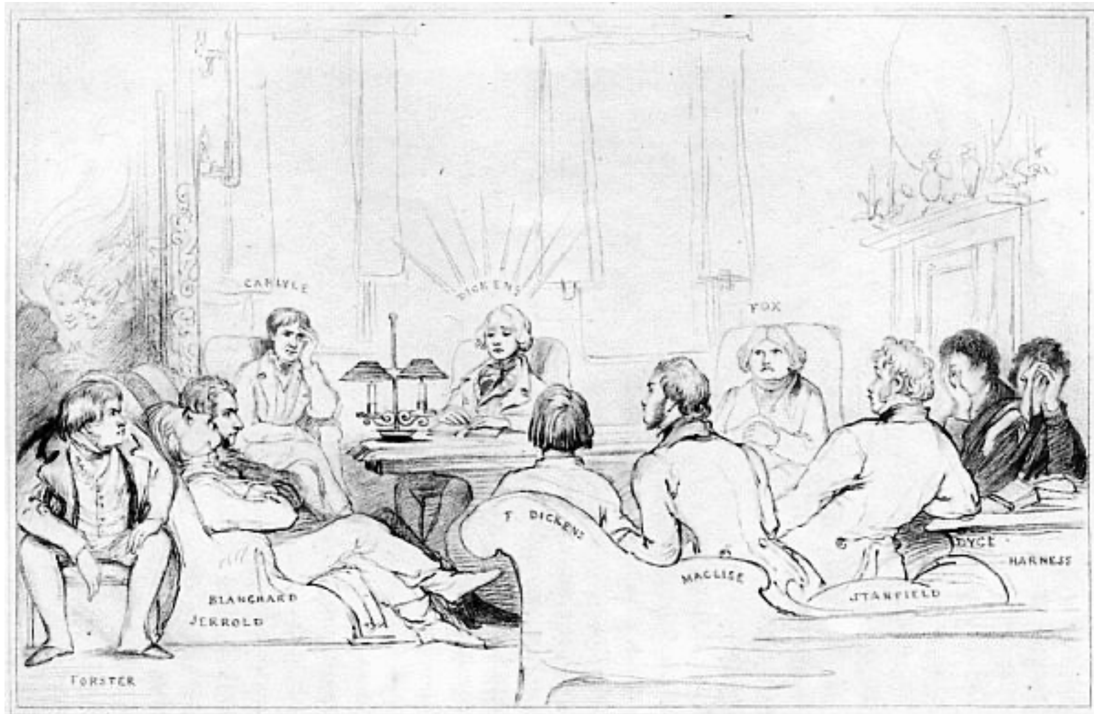


Figure 5.3: Dickens Reading *The Chimes* with Thomas Carlyle (1844) (Forrester 174)

The Chimes remains heavily indebted to the social and political ideology of Carlyle. Superficially, I see these similarities stemming from characters Alderman Cute, Mr. Filer, and Sir Joseph Bowley, who serve as negative personifications of Carlylean principles. Yet this debt goes beyond pure mimicry as Dickens argues that social upheaval and conversion comes not from Carlylean distrust of the "cloud curtain of the future" but from embracing a hopeful time to come firmly rooted in familial compassion (Caryle, "Signs of the Times" 1). Alderman Cute represents the type of "misguided" leader that Carlyle sees within his present condition, one who doesn't understand any of

his citizens and only sees the negative in the poor (Carlyle, *Past and Present* 33). Cute's determination to "Put Down" all manner of economic and social problems shows his complete disinterest in rectifying the "Condition of England" problem (105). Instead, he would rather ignore these problems and reinforce the imbalanced hierarchy. As he looks upon Trotty, Cute bemoans, "Look at him. What an object! The good old times, the grand old times, the great old times! *Those* were the times for a bold peasantry, and all that sort of thing," directing correlating nostalgia and paternalism (101).

Cute's friend and the novella's resident statistician, Mr. Filer attacks the same 'Condition of England' through a different entry point. As Filer's ironic name implies, he attempts to categorize everything around him, highlighting "Carlyle's major onslaught on statistics" when Filer "mathematically [proves] that Trotty is a robber because he has eaten some tripe" (Slater 510). Filer, additionally, criticizes Meg for wanting to marry because "[the poor] have no right or business to be married … and *that* we know they haven't. We reduced it to a mathematical certainty long ago" (104). Instead, they reduce the poor to simply an inconvenience and a mathematical anomaly. Sir Joseph Bowley remains markedly different from Cute and Fowler, as he shows some empathy to his workers by claiming to be the workers' "perpetual parent," but he doesn't fully act in a paternalistic manner to them. Instead, Bowley "exemplifies the belief that cash payment is indeed the chief, if not the sole, link between human beings" by berating Toby for not clearing his debts in the new year (Slater 509).

Each of these characters personifies a central notion integral to Carlyle's social theory.Carlyle romanticizes Samson because in political, economic, and social spheres the monastery flourishes under his great leadership. We know that he "was great" in

public business, would "fight the battle of reform" in feudal parliament, and when King Richard was held captive in Germany, offered to "search till he found him" (108). This moral code is made manifest in Samson's balancing of both the "practical and devotional" that was needed in the monastery (114). Samson expertly invokes the firm paternalism that would define Carlyle's standard for a new aristocracy, becoming the "singular shape of man, shape of a Time" in this idealized portrayal, and Carlyle looks to the governance of the past for molding the Abbot by stating, "how strangely do modes, creeds, formularies, and the date and place of a man's birth, modify the figure of the man" (128). It is the present social conditions that have led to neglectful leadership for Carlyle.

The idyllic past is juxtaposed with a myriad of problems confronting present-day nineteenth-century England. Even though "England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce supply for human want in every kind," Carlyle still sees England as "dying of inanition" (7). This stagnation is presented as able-bodied workers "sit in Workhouses, Poor-law Prisons, or have 'out-door relief' flung over the wall to them," while the masters, comparatively, are lazy and have left a "country [that] has been misguided" (7, 33). Carlyle sees a lack of talent that can take up a true leadership role within England. Despite all these attempts at reform, including "Trades-Unions, Anti-Corn Law Leagues, Carlton Clubs" and Chartist Movements, progress will never take the form of a panacea, or what Carlyle constantly refers to as "Morrison's Pill," a patent medicine (227, 28). The cure-all instead comes from looking to the past as, "to predict the Future, to manage the Present, would not be so impossible, had not the Past been so sacrilegiously mishandled" (239). This mismanagement relates largely to Carlyle's own nostalgia. A Carlylean past

is important to the present because of the societal lessons that come along with stories of the past.

If Dickens looked to employers in *Carol*, here he turns to the employed. Home life becomes the increasingly dominant interest as the novella progresses. Toby first finds shelter in the home of Sir Joseph Bowley after being berated by Cute and Filer and dealing with the "hard frost" "bracing" air and "wintry sun" on his walk over to Bowley's (107). Toby is physically presented with what could be a mirror of progress in his life including a porter of higher and, presumably, richer standing and a mansion. While Toby finds physical but not mental solace in Bowley's home, he does eventually set off for his own home. On the journey, when confronted by Will Fern, Toby begs him to "stay," saying that he will provide a "shelter for your heads" (118). The Veck home is emblematic of safety and respite from the encroaching economic plot. The home is described in simple yet welcoming terms, as Toby and Meg take care of Will and Lillian by asking them "to come to the fire" and providing them with tea (119). Toby does all this selflessly, as "he neither ate nor drank except at the very beginning, a mere morsel for form's sake" (120).

But Veck is decidedly not Scrooge, and when the Chimes go about trying to change him, it's because he doesn't believe in the progress of society. Veck is too overly focused on his own misfortunes and not on the progress towards the future. Once the Chimes tell him this, "Trotty's first excess of fear was gone" (128). Here Dickens repurposes conversion not to reflect a more benevolent, but nevertheless muddled, relationship between the upper and lower classes. By converting Veck, Dickens seems to be arguing that the downtrodden also are in a sense responsible for social stagnation if

they do not believe enough in progress that is nevertheless rooted in a type of social and economic feudalism. While the novella is still laced with the same misty-eyed nostalgia for times past, it nevertheless is an odd choice that essentially repositions the conversion narrative away from a Scrooge-like miser and onto a worker without the same autonomy.

This inversion perhaps explains the tepid critical response that Thackeray, Simms, and others had to the text at the time of publication. The *Christian Remembrancer* noted this odd switch in protagonists, complaining in an unsigned review that "we scorn the growing picturesque view of the poor; we are beginning to treat them as we do torn thatch, ruined groves, and blasted trees" (Dickens, *Critical Heritage* 301). The review continues, highlighting that *The Chimes* is "a moral story, ostensibly, avowed, ambitiously *moral,* and nothing more" (301).[51] This feeling was echoed in the novella's overall critical reception. An unsigned review in *Parker's London Magazine* lamented that the novella "is sadly wanting in good taste and plot" (173). In *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, Theodore Martin claimed that "*The Chimes* is the poorest production which has yet emanated from his pen. The plot, if there be one, is both meagre and clumsy" (239). One of the only positive notices came from an unsigned review from Forster, who noted in *the Edinburgh Review* that the novella was as delightful as *Carol* "but urged with more intense purpose and a wider scope of application" (181). Forster however was alone in viewing *The Chimes* as a worthy successor to *Carol*.

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[51] The *Christian Remembrancer* review is also the only one to flag the connection between Carlyle and Dickens within this story, lamenting "by-the-bye, Boz has taken to Carlyle, though he does not own it" (301). For more on the connections between Carlyle and Dickens within *The Chimes,* see Michael Slater's "Carlyle and Jerrold into Dickens: A Study of the Chimes" and Rob Breton's "Bourdieu, The Chimes, and the Bad Economist: Reading Disinterest."

Even though *The Chimes* is related to the Christmas holiday more in marketing than actual plot, its reception shows how much impact the Christmas conversion had already had in England by 1844. Any deviations from its structure resulted in critical and commercial failure. By switching its protagonist's fortune, and converting a working-class man such as Veck, Dickens veered too far away from the upper-class reform and economic repayment that *Carol* had preached. It's notable, then, that he would abandon the conversion plot, and any supernatural elements, altogether in his follow-ups *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845) and *The Battle of Life* (1846), each released to diminishing critical and commercial returns. When he did finally return to the supernatural in *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848), it also marked a return to the Christmas holiday and the idea of Christmas gifting, yet this time with less benevolence attached.[52]

Yet the idea of paternalism endured, especially in America, where through imitations of Dickens's *Carol,* authors not only rewrote the conversion but also transported the entire narrative across the Atlantic, uprooting it from the class-based preoccupations to instead contend with growing social and moral issues in America, particularly the 'peculiar institution' of slavery. The way that *Carol* circulated within the United States revealed just how much of an impact Dickens's earlier writing about the country had on its success, and how intertwined English Christmas celebration was with types of holiday spectacles that emerged during the antebellum period.

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[52] *The Haunted Man* is organized around the rituals of gifting, split into sections "The Gift Bestowed," "The Gift Diffused," and "The Gift Reversed." The novella concerns the protagonist Redlaw's ability to forget "the memory of the sorrow, wrong, and trouble … Freed from such remembrance, from this hour, carry involuntarily the blessing of such freedom with you" (344). Like *Carol* and *The Chimes*, the novel argues for the interconnection of nostalgia and Christmas when Redlaw realizes the misery he causes by erasing others' memories.

RECEPTION IN AMERICA AND ANTEBELLUM CHRISTMAS

If *Carol* was rapturously received in England, its reception in America was more complicated. Both a financial flop and well-reviewed, *Carol* tapped into a renewed interest in holiday celebration that was brewing in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century. Yet the novella also laid bare the growing animosity between Dickens and his American readership. This was true nowhere more than in the South, which simultaneously accepted *Carol* with caveats and rebuked his previous writing in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *American Notes* in the process. The latter's discussion of slavery, and Dickens's use of graphic depictions so that his readers would "be sufficiently sickened and repelled" by the institution of slavery, created a tangled relationship between his antebellum readership and his newest text (258).[53] This was compounded by a growing resurgence of Christmas celebrations in southern states. These holiday parties intermixed the supposed debauchery of the "Lord of Misrule" with Dickens's paternalism and the prolonged celebration of the Pennsylvania Dutch, blending holiday rituals that built on their transatlantic counterparts, all with the specter of slavery hanging overhead.

By late January 1845, *Carol* had been brought over to the United States, shipped alongside the January number of *Chuzzlewit*. Almost immediately after the ship docked, *Carol* and *Chuzzlewit* were pirated. These reprints were cheap and part of a growing sub-section of gift-books that would circulate during the holiday — and dominate holiday trends in the late nineteenth century. Meredith McGill notes, "gift books were one of the

[53] Much has been written about the complicated reception of Dickens's American works. Charles Dickens's "stories influenced the lives of a diverse American audience and contributed to the development of the American character" (McParland 11). Yet these receptions differed along political, economic, and regional lines. For more on Dickens's American reception, see Robert McParland's *Charlies Dickens's American Audience* and Sidney P. Moss's *Charles Dickens's Quarrel with America*.

first mass-produced luxury commodities, designed to overcome the uncertain and intermittent demand for books by appearing annually, in time to be purchased and given away for Christmas" (29). Not only was *Carol* pirated to create gift-books, but it also circulated in periodicals, as "The New York *Sun* and the *New World* reprinted the *Carol in toto* in their pages, and a multitude of newspapers featured extracts from the book in their columns" (Moss 160). These copies were sold for pennies compared to authorized edition that Dickens had overseen. The *Sun* was sold for three cents, and Harper & Brothers sold their own cheap pamphlet edition for six. While all these reprints sold well, it also created a conundrum for Dickens, as his work was incredibly popular, but he was seeing no financial return.[54]

By February, critical notices began to appear in prominent newspapers and literary journals. While the overall critical reception of Dickens, especially in the 1840s, was highly, and nationalistically charged, US reviewers reacted favorably to *Carol*. A prominent New York lawyer and literary critic, George Templeton Strong echoed several other critics when he wrote that *Carol* made him "strong of heart ever since … He's [Dickens] not dead yet, though *Martin Chuzzlewit* is flat and the *American Notes* a libel on this model republic of enlightened freeman" (Strong 225). Lewis Gaylord Clark concurred in a glowing review for the *Knickerbocker,* writing:

> If in every alternative work that Mr. DICKENS were to send to the London press he should find occasion to indulge in ridicule against alleged American

[54] Dickens's complication relationship with copyright is explored in detail in McGill's *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*. This animosity was especially true with the publication of *Carol*, and even extended beyond the U.S. Dickens brought a suit against *Parley's Illuminated Library* in England after they printed an abridged version of *Carol* under the purported authorship of Henry Hewitt. While Dickens won the case, *Parley's* escaped damages by declaring bankruptcy. In the end, the suit costs Dickens hundreds of pounds.

> peculiarities, or broad caricatures of our actual vanities, or other follies, we could with the utmost cheerfulness pass them by unnoted and uncondemned, if he would only now and then present us with an intellectual creation so touching and beautiful as the ones before us. (85)

Clark's review was followed by positive notices in *The New York Evening Press,* the *New York Subterranean*, and *Graham's Magazine.* In Southern magazines and newspapers, the pronounced sentiment for *Carol* was similar, but nevertheless couched in criticism about Dickens's writing about slavery. An unattributed review in the *Southern Literary Messenger* commended the story, while also noting Dickens's overall "assault on our country" with his other American writing (252). Yet as Harnett Kane, in his overview of Antebellum Southern Christmas celebrations, remarked,"More than any other person in history, Dickens spread a general affection for Christmas [while] around the plantation fires and in the towns thousands read, reread, quoted and requoted his evocative passages" (32). In fact, according to Kane, "Southerners welcomed Dickens' emphasis on family life, too, for the way in which they lived developed continuous ties of close relationships," while appreciating Dickens's "Stress upon the warm cheer of the season, the close family life, and his pictures of traditions" (33). *Carol* did work to soothe over the damning writing in *American Notes,* but antebellum authors still could not forget about this work. Yet Dickens's holiday text would paradoxically offer a model for Christmas celebrations in southern states, as plantations became sites for holiday festivities that, if not outwardly mimicking *Carol*, nevertheless took inspiration from the benevolence that Scrooge showed to the Cratchit family.

Unlike the relatively compact celebration in England and New England at the time, antebellum Christmas celebrations followed the Pennsylvania Dutch and were framed around increased leisure time. Often, schools would take breaks for the Christmas holidays, and extended families would descend on plantations for longer stretches of time, reflecting a belief in the unbounded hospitality that animated southern Christmas. While Christmas in New England had been celebrated for a few decades, it nevertheless paled in comparison. As the Confederate author James Battle Averitt wrote in his memoir *The Old Plantation: How We Lived in Great House and Cabin Before the War* (1901), in "the South Christmas has ever been known as a season of blessed rejoicing. Among the people of the North, until the past two or three decades, their Thanksgiving, with puritan *imprimatur,* was a higher feast than that of the Nativity. This grew out of their differences in religious faith and training" (172). This leisure time translated to more time to contribute to the rituals of the holiday, and a break from the drudgery of fieldwork for the enslaved men and women. Yet the antebellum Christmas was also a heavily scripted process that only seemingly upset class distinctions but, like Misrule, nevertheless encoded celebrations between enslavers and those they've enslaved with strict sequences of rituals that, if broken, often resulted in violent beatings or possibly murder.

Thomas Nelson Page notes the rituals when he writes about antebellum Christmas celebrations in his slavery-justifying essay collection *Social Life in Old Virginia Before the War* (1897). In it, he notes:

> There were games and dances – country dances, the lancers and quadrilles. The top of the old piano was lifted up, and the infectious dancing-tunes rolled out under the flying fingers. Haply there was some demur on the part of the elder

> ladies, who were not quite sure that it was right; but it was overruled by the gentleman, and the master in his frock coat and high collar started the ball by catching the prettiest girl by hand and leading her to the head of the room right under the noses of half a dozen beautiful lovers, calling to them meantime to "get their sweethearts and come along." (98)

Mistletoe, oral storytelling, and dances became the main components of Christmas celebration during plantation Christmas. This was a time of both intense preparation and, finally, controlled relaxation. These parties extended over days and would often intermix white plantation owners and their families with those of the enslaved workers. It was custom that enslavers would go over to slave quarters to provide a feast and, perhaps, some music for merriment during the holidays. While these activities were rigidly controlled, Christmas nevertheless represented a mixing of enslavers and the enslaved unlike any other time during the calendar year, echoing, if not exactly mimicking, the class imbalance that the Lord of Misrule advocated for.

Another such ritual was the Christmas Gift, in which those enslaved who worked in the house would wake up the owner's family by yelling out "Christmas Gift," soliciting some type of gift from their enslaver. Averitt writes about the ritual, contending:

> Nor is this Christmas joy confined to the servants at the quarter. The old mansion is full of the opening up of various forms of festivity. Hear the ringing shouts of "Merry Christmas, father!" "Merry Christmas, mother!" "Christmas gift, ole Marster; Christmas gift, Ole Mistiss," coming from Handy, Buck, Eliza and all the other house servants. The custom of the family was, as each one came out into

> the breakfast room to bring with them their presents for the other members of the household, placing them on a side table, beautifully dressed with flowers and evergreen, prepared for that purpose. After family prayers these packages, properly bestowed, were all opened. (178)[55]

In writing about this ritual Averitt suggests a perverse kinship between the children of the house and the enslaved waking up on Christmas morning. The parental image of a gift-giver was reinforced by both the children and those enslaved receiving gifts within the house on Christmas morning, with the enslaver acting as a benevolent gifter to both.

For the enslaved who worked within the fields, Christmas celebration was built around rigidly controlled leisure time and reinforced slaveholder paternalism, in which enslavers would treat their enslaved men and women akin to children, seemingly allowing them the indulgences of leisure during the holiday, but also controlling the manner and method of such time. Arguably, the most important slave holiday, it "gave slaves the relief from daily labor demands to better hone their own customs and beliefs" (May 9). Solomon Northup would write:

> The only respite from constant labor the slave has through the whole year, is during the Christmas holidays. Epps [Northup's enslaver] allowed us three — others allow four, five, and six days, according to the measure of their generosity. It is the only time to which they look forward with any interest or pleasure. They

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[55] This ritual was played out in various accounts of Christmas celebration, although most conform to the basic contours of Averitt's description. See also Elizabeth Pringle's *Chronicles of Chicora Wood* (1922), where she remembers "Christmas morning very early, 'Merry Christmas!' echoing all over the house; all the house-servants stealing in softly to 'ketch yu,' that is, say the magic words 'Merry Christmas!' before you did. Then joyful sounds, 'I ketch yu!' and you must produce your gift …" (151).

> are glad when night comes, not only because it brings them a few hours repose, but because it brings them one day nearer Christmas. (214).

Yet this time away from field or domestic labor was part of a larger rhetorical argument forming about the supposedly humane treatment given to the enslaved during the holiday. It also acted as a reprieve from what Jodi Melamed calls “primitive accumulation” for antebellum society, in which “capital is accrued through transparently violent means” (76). Such prescribed leisure was also weaponized. Charles Ball in his *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball*, discusses his first Christmas on a plantation. In it, he writes:

> As Christmas of the year 1805, approached, we were all big with hope of obtaining three or four days, at least, if not a week of holiday; but when the day at length arrived, we were sorely disappointed, for on Christmas eve, when we had come from the field, with our cotton, the overseer fell into a furious passion, and swore at us all for our laziness, and many other bad qualities. He then told us that he had intended to give us three days, if we had worked well, but that we had been so idle, and had left so much cotton yet to be picked in the field, that he found it impossible to give us more than one day. (268)

CHRISTMAS, 1851.

Hurrah! for the brave old Christmas time,
When cares were all forgot,
When man could live, right merrily,
Contented with his lot.
Man's nature, when worn with care and woe,
With life disgusted feels,
And needs some fun, when the year is done,
If but to grease the wheels?
Then Hurrah! for the brave old Christmas time,
The day without a tear,
The day of rest, forever blest,
As the Sabbath of the year!

Figure 5.4.: "Christmas, 1851" in *The Southern Literary Messenger* (1852) (19)

An anonymous poem published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* titled "Christmas, 1851" also speaks to this supposed contentment. In it, the author states, "There was a time when Christmas came/ Like Israel's Jubilee, / And freedom gave to the weary slave" (13-15). They continue to note the "cheerful smile" that the enslaved have while he prepares for work, noting how "he looked for the merry Christmas time" when he would be given time away from the fields (17-21).

While these moments offered a brief interval of rest, enslavers would often ply the enslaved workers with copious amounts of alcohol. While not all those who claimed

people as property did this, it nevertheless was common practice. Frederick Douglass would write about this phenomenon in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), noting:

> But the majority spent the holidays in spirts, ball playing, wrestling, boxing, running foot races, dancing, and drinking whisky; and this latter mode of spending the time was most agreeable to their masters. A slave who would work during the holidays, was thought, by his master, undeserving of holidays … Not to be drunk during the holidays, was disgraceful; and he was esteemed a lazy and improvident man, who could not afford to drink whisky during Christmas. (252)

Leisure was purposely built around addiction and contributed to assumptions about enslaved contentment at Christmas that supposedly "gave the lie to abolitionist critiques of what white southerners possessively dubbed their 'peculiar institution' and contributed to the region-wide defensive mentality that helped produce southern succession" (May 5). Christmas was a period of celebration, ritual, and familial nostalgia. Further, this position played out across antebellum literature of the time that nevertheless points back to *Carol* and Scrooge's own paternalistic ideology. Southern authors purposely mimicked the relationship between employer and employee in *Carol*, as authors such as Simms rewrote this paternalism onto the plantation, making rhetorical arguments about supposed contentment.

Gifting also echoed this paternalism. Much as in England, gift-exchange in nineteenth century antebellum Christmas reinforced differences of status and age. Gifts were only given to younger children or, just as often, to the enslaved men and women. The writer Martha Haines Butt would write in her anti-*Tom* novel *Antifanaticism: A Tale of the South* (1853). "Each slave always expects some little present from their owners,

who never fail to remember them" (158). This process "by masters to their enslaved people was a complicated, often highly scripted process with all sorts of psychological meaning and consequences for both parties in the transaction" (May 55). Such an exchange was also the result of communal pressure on the plantation. Booker T. Washington would write about his own experience in "Christmas Days in Old Virginia." In it, he reinforces this influence:

> The master who gave no present to his slaves was looked down upon by his fellow-masters. He was considered unworthy to be classed among slave-holding aristocracy. The presents, in most cases, consisted of a new suit of clothes, or a new pair of shoes. I remember that the first pair of shoes I ever had the opportunity of wearing came to me in the shape of a Christmas present. Later on, when the war was going on … I received as a Christmas present a pair of wooden shoes. (Washington)

Again, while not all enslavers partook in gift-exchange, it nevertheless was a relatively common phenomenon. These gifts took on multiple forms, but mainly were food-focused, with chickens, turkeys, and candies given to the enslaved in anticipation of a holiday celebration, encouraging a feast. However, gifting could also move beyond sustenance, as some would offer the enslaved new clothes, as well, as Washington recalled. Yet the entire process of gift-exchange was a highly controlled ritual that often was done in front of a mixed audience of the enslaved and the enslaver's family. Such a time demanded a performance of humility and thankfulness on the part of the enslaved men and women, as gift-exchange was encoded with paternalistic ideals that were used to reinforce the power dichotomy between the two. Such an inherently scripted process gave

a show of generosity, but also belied the inherently antagonistic relationship between the giver and receiver.

Yet as the Civil War approached, Christmas became a cultural site for Southern authors to place their vested arguments about the paternalistic benevolence of the institution. This was especially true of William Gilmore Simms, who not only spent his career advocating pro-slavery positions, but also became one of the most well-published authors of Christmas literature during the mid-nineteenth century.

THE GOLDEN CHRISTMAS AND THE PLANTATION CHRISTMAS CONVERSION

Carlyle's paternalism would calcify in William Gilmore Simms's holiday writing. In three texts — *Castle Dismal*, *Maize in Milk*, and *The Golden Christmas* — Simms would explore the Christmas rituals, providing a blueprint for plantation Christmas celebration, while also deploying the conversion narrative, and ritualized gift-exchange to further the southern argument about the benevolence of slavery. This is most true of *The Golden Christmas,* a novel that grafts the conversion onto a curmudgeonly enslaver who doesn't exactly mirror Scrooge's miserliness but must nevertheless overcome his prejudices to truly celebrate the holiday. Yet it's also in Simms's earlier Christmas texts where he explores supernaturalism, ritual, and holiday celebration.

Written just a year after *Carol*, *Castle Dismal* is a text that shares its preoccupation with the connection between supernaturalism and holiday celebration. The novel concerns Ned Clifton, who visits his college friend Frank Ashley for the Christmas holiday. Reflecting on the nostalgia for Christmas's past, Ned notes "Christmas in Carolina – no longer what it has been — still brings with it the song and dance, the frolic

and the festival — the young are brought together, and the old grow young in the contemplation of their sports" (10). While there, he is haunted nightly by the specter of a "very slight and shadowy" woman (43). Upon discovering that a woman died at Dismal, he sets out to find William Porter, a man who used to live at the castle, who tells Ned about an accidental death. Once William can accept his own role in the woman's death, he dies "the victim of long repressed passions, and fears, suddenly breaking all bounds, and stifling the feebler energies at last, by which they had so long been controlled" (191). While the protagonist doesn't exactly convert throughout the story, he acts more as an audience surrogate — recalling Crayon's purpose at Bracebridge.

The novel was well-received at its initial publication, with even Edgar Allan Poe calling it "one of the most original fictions ever penned," though it's fallen into relative obscurity since (qtd. in Simms xxix). Yet the novel is less important for its overt supernaturalism than it is for how Simms also gestures towards the ritual activities of the holiday. As Ned arrives, Ashley tells him, "These are holiday times, and we must look for visitors of all classes. The Christmas log must be burning when they come, and Christmas cheer must smoke upon the table. There must be mince pies, of course; and for the drink, Ned, see you yon pile of eggs! We'll have a noggin, to night, or I'm no sinner" (32). The Yule log burns as the guests go around telling ghost stories — precipitating Ned's nighttime encounter and preparing him for the type of ghost story that he would soon find himself in.

Simms would continue his preoccupation with the Southern holiday celebration in *Maize in Milk,* published just a few years later. Eschewing the supernaturalism of *Dismal,* the novella concerns Colonel Openheart's preparations for the Christmas holiday. He is

"the master of 'Maize-in-milk' [who] was sovereign in his way, whose power was known only by its bounty" (323). While they had previously lived well, this season the Openhearts are contending with poor crops. Mrs. Openheart considers not keeping Christmas, an idea that is openly rebuked by Mr. Openheart. For him, Christmas celebration links them to the previous generations and is so ingrained in the yearly rituals at Maize that cancelling it would be impossible. He tells her:

> Not keep Christmas, Mrs. Openheart — not keep Christmas? Why, what in the world should I do with myself, my dear, or with you … And what should we do with the neighbors — with Whitfield, and Jones, and Whipple, and Bond, and poor old Kinsale and all the wives and little ones all of whom have spent Christmas and New Year's with us for the last hundred years or more? (326)

For Mr. Openheart, the Christmas celebration is too important a ritual to reduce it to finances. He openly reminisces about the "ham and turkey just as now — there was roast and boiled — there was a round of beef — there were sausages and pillau — there were sundry pairs of ducks, cabbage and turnips, and potatoes; and for dessert, nuts, apples, mince-pies, plum-puddings, and more" (327). The rest of the novel concerns the ways that Openheart attempts to pay for the lavish celebration. He settles on selling some of those he's enslaved to make some money. But when he takes them to the market:

> He turned away to conceal his emotion, and hurried into the neighboring woods. The strong man wept like a child as the loud outcries and lamentations of the slaves still pursued him. He had been to them a father and a benefactor, had watched them in sickness, and indulged them with moderate tasks when well. As he thought upon the parting, he recovered all his strength. (416)

While the family laments the pending sale, and their misfortune, Openheart's daughter Bessy is proposed to by Mr. Berkshire, a wealthy enslaver. She accepts and Berkshire pays off Maize-in-milk's debt, allowing Openheart to keep his enslaved workers and his lavish plantation Christmas. The novel ends as he declares before his guests, "Thank God, it is a happy Christmas after all" (422).

Maize in Milk follows a similar trajectory as *Carol*, in which Openheart sees that ritualized celebration, not the money that funds it, is the most important aspect of the holiday season. Yet he is also saved from financial ruin, and the potential emasculation of having to sell off the enslaved men and women by Berkshire. These paternalistic feelings towards his enslaved manifest when he shows emotion for the first time in the novel at the thought of selling them. Simms implicitly argues here that the Christmas holiday was a time for mutual benevolence and that Openheart's paternalism is the best that the enslaved could ask for. This thematic interest would be repeated in *Golden Christmas*, which would fully adopt the sequencing of Dickens's Christmas conversion.

While the sales and reception of *Castle Dismal* and *Maize in Milk* reflected the overall feelings about Simms's writing more generally — he was widely recognized as prolific, regional, and a chronicler of southern manners — sales and reviews of *The Golden Christmas* were tepid, at best. *Literary World* remarked "A Southern Christmas is, it is well known, a season of great hilarity, and its genial scenes both of indoor and out, high and low life, are full of vigor and animation we are always sure of having from Mr. Simms" (qtd. in Guilds 203). But *Harper's New Monthly* merely called the tale "a slight story" that "in its execution… is more careless than the usual writings of the author" (qtd. in Guilds 203). Contemporary criticism has echoed these complaints, with

little written about the text in the intervening years. Simms wrote the novel to, in fact, capitalize on *Carol's* generous sales and circulation. David Aiken notes, "By the time Simms did write a Christmas story 'a la Dickens,' he was in an impish frame of mind: if American publishers were going to insist upon looking to England for story ideas, he would take the best of England, turn it upside down, and give it a Lowcountry twist" (v).[56] That twist would prove to be Simms's interest in exploring how Christmas rituals operated on plantations

The novel concerns higher-class Southern bachelors pursuing woman whose families don't approve. Ned Bulmer, the narrator Dick's best friend, is in love with Paula Bonneau. His father, Major Bulmer, does not approve of this love because of a "long feud which had existed between the Bulmer and Bonneau families" (28). Major Bulmer wants Ned to instead marry Beatrice Mazyck, whom Dick loves. This love quadrangle plays out against the backdrop of the Charleston Christmas scene, as wealthy plantation families prepare for the "great festival" by throwing parties leading up to Christmas Eve (53). The romantic plot resolves when Dick and Beatrice discover they truly love each other while Major Bulmer comes to accept the love between Ned and Paula and rectify the old family feud before inviting the Bonneaus to his own Christmas party. The novel ends when the newly reformed Major Bulmer gives gifts to all "some three hundred slaves, of whom half the number, perhaps, were *workers*," that he owned (29).

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[56] Atkins suggests that the novel could be "viewed as a Southern Christmas Carol" because of its focus on benevolence between enslavers and the enslaved. Yet he also problematically conflates Simms's portrayal of "the lives of Carolina slaves" with historical record. His argument is that "As Simms makes clear in *The Golden Christmas,* slaves had property over and above what was provided by the master. Many had their won gardens and livestock as well as means to earn money for themselves and still have enough time to spare for pleasant pastimes." (ix). For a more historically grounded exploration of the brutality of the Charleston slave environment, see Joseph Kelly's *America's Longest Siege: Charleston, Slavery, and the Slow March Toward Civil War.*

In contrast to *Carol,* Simms presents this story in first-person, a point of view that he would use in *Castle Dismal* as well. While the novel is ostensibly about Dick, he is not the one who undergoes a conversion. Harking back to Irving's Crayon, Dick bears witness to the so-called reform of Major Bulmer. Thus, Bulmer progresses from a man whose "blind, insane hostility" to the French threatens to overtake his family and distance himself from his son (46). He converts to a man "determined to overthrow … the ancient prejudices between the Bulmer and Bonneau families," measuring such a newfound benevolence by the gifts that he gives to those he's enslaved on Christmas (109). Just like the Squire, the Major, a wealthy enslaver who has built an extravagant life for his family, disregards "the modern English, who are nothing but continental apes and asses" and echoes Carlyle by telling those around him to look to the "real Old English before they became corrupted" as examples of purity (35). He cannot literally and figuratively see into the future, as "Ned suspected that his father's sight was becoming bad" (89). His ritual celebration is built around his own invented nostalgia for several holiday rituals of the time — Yule logging, 'noggin, tree-lighting, storytelling, and most importantly, gift-exchange.

The steps that Bulmer goes through mirror the sequential conversion, but they are not supernatural and, instead, are predicated on Bulmer's transition from loathing the Bonneaus with an "old British bull-dog attitude, as if to show that his blood has undergone no deterioration" to graciousness, and his acceptance of a fusion between modern and nostalgic custom (8). The Major's *sin* stems from his disregard for his son Ned's love interest, placing his own feud above his son's happiness and his unwillingness to budge from his own traditions. His inability to adopt to present society is shown when

he refuses any type of French food, preferring "no imported meats" at his table because "it is the old custom. I inherited it — it is sacred as the practice of my ancestors, — and in these days of democracy, which threaten to turn the world upside down, in which old things are to become new, I do not feel myself at liberty to question the propriety of the few antique fashions which I am prepared to retain" (35). He is *prepared* for his conversion by Dick, who acts as a type of guide for the Major and suggests that the Major could hold on to his dignity, and help Ned be happy, if "a compromise might well be made between the manners of your day and ours," suggesting that he is too nostalgic for the past (75).

His *assurance* comes as he is berated by his son, who proclaims that "Hearts, sir, have a language in *our day*, which was denied them in yours. Perhaps this is one of the redeeming features of ultra democracy" (86). His *conviction* comes as he scolds Ned for not dancing with Beatrice, telling him "Dick Cooper before you! Yes, indeed he will go before you all your life; That man will be somebody yet … I would to God he could drive into your empty noodle some of that good sense and proper veneration which distinguish himself" (88). It is later in the same night, when he drunkenly swerves and "the buggy was turned over, and the horse off with it" that Major Bulmer shows *compunction* (90). His *submission* comes when, the next day, he goes to see Madame Girardin, Paula's Grandmother, to "acknowledge my past stupidity in not knowing you better" and ask for "permission to make proper amends in the future for the past" (106). Bulmer considers his own *fear* and *sorrow* of being rejected when he cannot settle on an invitation and "every precaution had to be taken by which to avoid offending the *amour propre* of the old lady and re-awakening her ancient prejudices" (109). While Mme. Girardin is hesitant

to accept the invite, remarking "these sudden changes are very awful" in the Major, she is eventually convinced by Paula to join the celebration (110). As Bulmer is transformed, he finally accepts that his family will associate with the French, performing his *faith* by hosting a large Golden Christmas party that intermixes new festivals — notably tree lighting and Father Christmas — with "the mansion house [being] entirely surrender[ed] to the ladies and married people" (140). These others start a celebration that enables Bulmer to give in to his son's wants and asks the Bonneaus to "let our families, hitherto separated by evil influences, be now united by blessing ones" (161).

With the arrival to the party of Bulmer dressed up as "Father Chrystmassse," his supposed selflessness materializes when he bestows gifts on every member of the party "until all tokens of love and friendship were distributed" (151).[57] As with Scrooge's turkey, Bulmer must prove this faith through commodification of goods. By giving every single partygoer a gift, he reinforces a class hierarchy, positioning himself on top through a potlach. Bulmer reinforces the communal leadership for which he is known throughout the town and makes sure that "Father Chrystmasse has a tree bearing good fruits also for [the enslaved]" on his plantation (152). Bulmer positions himself among the community but also as gentle to those he's enslaved. This exchange can be seen as repayment for services rendered by them within Bulmer's eyes. The cost of their work is transmogrified through a "little token of Christian sympathy and good will" leading to Dick claiming that "Even the slave is rich. He is rich in certainty – security; - he is insured against cold and hunger" (152). Bulmer's gifting is also played out in front of "a learned professor

[57] Simms offers a point of differentiation for Father Christmas, who the Major makes a point of telling everyone "is an English, not a Dutch saint, be it remembered" (150). Further, he notes that Father Christmas "is a much more respectable person, in our imagination, than the dapper little Manhattan goblin whom they call Santa Claus" (150).

from one of the Northern Colleges, and a young English gentleman, the young son of a noble house" who "watched the scene with a staring curiosity" that "enabled them quietly to revise a hundred erring notions and stupid prejudices" (152). Here, Simms argues the Christmas celebration, and plantation gift-exchange, has the possibility to change Northerners perspective on the "inevitable charity which characterizes the institution of Southern slavery" (153). Bulmer sees this value exchange as balancing while Dick inverts normalized expectations and claims that the enslaved workers have *more* wealth because of this gifting. Bulmer's supposed benevolence is meant to solidify his conversion, as he transforms into a more respected figure within Charleston and cares paternalistically for those he's enslaved as if he were their father. This infantilization extends to the figure of Father Chrystmass, whom Dick argues those he's enslaved "believe to be a real personage — a sort of half Diety, half moral, coming once a year, to see that they are and deserve to be happy" (153).

If Bulmer's gifting introduces his outward conversion, then the mass of decorations and customs reinforces this change. The first exchange of Christmas Eve preparations has Bulmer reminding his wife, "You mustn't stint us in Egg-nog" and making sure the huge Christmas tree was "elevated within the great hall" (138, 139). Simms takes the object worship of Bracebridge Hall and expands upon all manners of celebration including "The holly and the cedar, twined together with bunches of 'Druid Mistletoe" (140). The party relishes the fireworks provided by Bulmer and feasts on the "The Boar's Head" because it "was the famous dish at Christmas" in the south (148). The sheer opulence of the scene points to an overcompensation by Bulmer to show how truly converted he had been. He even goes far as to introduce a "Christmas Tree" to the

proceedings, “which was elevated with the great hall. This was a beautiful cedar, carefully selected, and brought in from the woods, the roots well fitted into the half of a huge barrel, rammed with moss, the base being so draped with green cloth as to conceal the rudeness of the fixture” (140). Simms goes on at length recounting the individual externalized methods of celebration, providing a blueprint for the type of Christmas parties that went on in the antebellum south.

His excess in both gifting and decorations exteriorizes his conversion more fully than any other character seen thus far. Gifts to children and the enslaved men and women are central to the celebration, as “there were boxes of toys for the children to be unpacked, and trunks of pretty presents to be examined” (140). While the enslaved celebrate Christmas with both “play and pleasure,” it is not lost on the reader that their celebration comes after that of Bulmer and his acquaintances, reinforcing Bulmer’s belief in racial hierarchies (152). The enslaved people are even required to work, as “half of the day, Christmas eve, was employed in these and a score of other performances” (140). Christmas, as Restad notes, “became a key element in expounding the southern ideal, one in which the perceived virtues of the plantation system could be symbolized and ritualized” (77).

Major Bulmer’s conversion is clearly modeled on Scrooge’s and is rhetorically used by Simms to preach an idealized version of antebellum Christmas celebration that hinges on the same type of invented nostalgia and benevolent paternalism found in Dickens’s novella. Bulmer’s benevolence is extended even beyond mere gift-exchange, as the novel’s denouement ends with the Major forgiving one of the enslaved workers on his plantation, Jehu, for trying to steal a pig. Jehu “admit[s] that he could not resist the

temptation to steal hog meat" because, according to Dick, "it was a law of nature that he should steal it" (167). Upon hearing Jehu's confession, the Major promises that "If you keep honest till next New Year's, Jehu, and kill no more fat pigs of other people, I will give you three out of my stock" (168). Here, Bulmer lords over his plantation, as Simms rhetorically argues for the contentment of the enslaved during the holiday season, in addition to teaching a moral lesson as one might to a misbehaving child.

CONCLUSION

Post-Civil War, the Christmas conversion waned as the dominant holiday genre in both the United States and the United Kingdom. This could be perhaps explained by the explosion of holiday celebration, the ingrained traditions that now crossed regional and national lines, as well as the overall decline of Christmas-themed texts. Instead of the conversion, the literary marketplace was overrun by a rapid influx of Christmas-adjacent texts that referenced the holiday, even if they didn't overtly contend with the rituals and traditions that undergirded celebration. The holiday book-market became a site for the booksellers to dispose of large numbers of their books as authors repackaged previous short stories, novellas, and novels under titles that associated themselves Christmas holiday. Many of these further reinforced the connection between ghost stories and Christmas, even if they only briefly mentioned the holiday or had nothing to do with it except in name.

Christmas from the 1870s onward was defined more by gift-books that mimicked the form of *Carol* — with its ornate design and gilded pages — but barely referenced the holiday within the texts themselves. This transition was also marked by the

transformation of various holiday customs from ritual to tradition, which created a fixed and static method of celebration. The various rituals of the nineteenth-century — Yule logging, Christmas trees, oral storytelling, mistletoe, and even the Christmas tree — had become staples of holiday celebration on both sides of the Atlantic, repeated yearly with little variation. The movement towards tradition helped solidify how, when, and whom with Christmas was celebrated — as laws and customs gave increased time off work and the period between Christmas and New Year's mirrored the previous plantation celebrations as an extended time to spend with family and friends.

Yet the Christmas conversion would nevertheless come back into prominence during the twentieth century. As will be discussed in the Epilogue, Christmas narratives, like the conversion itself, fell into a cyclical pattern that saw renewed interest in the forms of holiday storytelling. By the twenty-first century, the conversion would again become the dominant genre of holiday writing and viewing, as holiday stories proliferated in literature, television, and film. In these narratives, invented nostalgia is foregrounded in the ways in which holiday-themed media continue to re-originate the Christmas conversion.

CHAPTER SIX

EPILOGUE

"LET ME GO ON WITH MY CHRISTMAS DAY":

THE AFTERLIVES OF THE CHRISTMAS CONVERSION IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND BEYOND

POST-BELLUM CHRISTMAS NARRATIVES AND CELEBRATION ABROAD

By 1865, overtly Christmas-themed texts — ones that contended with rituals, conversion, and nostalgia — began to wane. After *The Golden Christmas*, Simms never wrote about the holiday again. An obvious reaction to the post-bellum reconfiguration of Southern states, and to regional rituals, the plantation Christmas faded into a cultural memory that wouldn't be tapped into until twentieth century writers revisited the Antebellum period. Margaret Mitchell may have written about the "smell of eggnog bowls, wreathed in holly at Christmas time" in *Gone with the Wind* (1936), but she was referring to a celebration long past (877). The decrease in Christmas-themed texts in America could be partially attributed to post-bellum antipathy for all types of rituals related to the practice of slavery, but this reduction was felt in the North, as well. In the late-nineteenth century, Christmas celebration had effectively calcified in America, with the holiday being recognized by employers, in addition to local and state governments. In 1860, several New England states accepted Christmas as a holiday, and in 1870 Christmas was finally recognized as a federal holiday.

The rituals that had been associated with Christmas celebration — including tree lighting, mistletoe, and even eggnog — solidified as familial and social traditions. Activities such as hanging stockings around the mantle became yearly activities, fixed and unchanging in their yearly repetition. They also began to be commercialized. In 1851, Franklin Pierce put the first Christmas Tree in the White House and in 1895, Grover Cleveland put electric lights onto his White House Christmas Tree. By 1902, Teddy Roosevelt, an arch conservationist, was powerless to fight the yearly tradition of a Christmas tree, begrudgingly placing one in his White House (Marling 54). The market responded in kind, with Christmas tree farms cropping up throughout the US in the 1870s and '80s, and tree lighting became a yearly tradition — one that was often dangerous before electric lights, so families would only light their tree for a short period of time, with a bucket of water close by.

Gift-giving was also part of a growing holiday infrastructure, as Christmas shopping became a cultural activity in both America and England. As "the formal one-way dispensing of duty" that had animated early nineteenth century English and American gift-exchange "gradually yielded to rituals of exchanging gifts among family, friends, and neighbors," the performative gift-exchange, or more specifically, the final act of *faith*, was no longer necessary to prove one's Christmas conversion (Restad 66). Instead, everyone was giving and receiving gifts, creating a new, cyclical exchange of commodities that transcended class, age, and sometimes even race. Further, charitable causes dominated the December landscape, as organizations jockeyed for end-of-year giving by wealthy donors. In 1901, the Salvation Army put on an extravagant Christmas

Dinner at Madison Square Garden for donors, an act that would soon become a yearly tradition for the organization.

As Christmas became an unstoppable cultural and economic force, narratives about the holiday paradoxically decreased. The framework of the Christmas conversion had helped to ritualize gift-exchange, nostalgia, and celebrations. But, in a society that had already cemented its yearly traditions, it proved to be extraneous. Instead, Christmas books became only tangentially related to the holiday, as “the bulk of December texts became far less invested in Christmas ritual and sentimental instruction; nonetheless, December books sales continued to climb” (Moore 98). These texts fell into two different categories: texts published in December that had little connection to the holiday and ghost stories that repackaged short stories and periodical narratives, with only tangential ties to the holiday.

Christmas annuals took over the marketplace from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. These periodicals included Dickens’s own *Household Words* and *All the Year Round.* While early issues of the periodicals directly contended with holiday, by 1852 “Dickens seem to have realized that the previous numbers had exhausted the numbers’ ability to keep specifically Christmas-themed writing interesting” (Klimaszewksi 34). Instead, these issues would frame the embedded stories around “people sharing tales as they sit around a fire” near Christmas time (1). These periodicals became sites for Dickens and other authors to contend with the implications of holiday celebration, both home and abroad, even if they didn’t directly address the holiday itself. Yet “rather than reflecting the celebration, the stories became integral components of the domestic holiday

ritual" as families would gather round to share the yearly annuals, ritualizing the act of reading in the process (Callanan 78).[58]

Instead, discussion of Christmas moved into the narrative space of the autobiography. This was often true of British texts that narrativized Christmas abroad, connecting Christmas celebration to empire. Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857) discusses the titular author's time during the Crimean War. A mixed- race author, she notes the connections between holiday celebration and national identity, claiming Englishness by stating, "I wonder if the people of other countries are as fond of carrying with them everywhere their home habits as the English. I think not. I think there was something purely and essentially English in the determination of the camp to spend the Christmas day of 1855 after the good old 'home' fashion" (159). She goes on to describe the "flour, plums, currants, and eggs" in addition to the "plum-puddings and mince pies" that are consumed, reminding the soldiers of their homeland (159). Similarly, Mary Anne Barker would write about her time in New Zealand with the same national pride in her memoir *Station Life in New Zealand* (1870). There, she would remember her "own Christmas party to the shepherds and shearers" that she throws "to prevent the shearers from going over to the nearest accommodation-house and getting tipsy" (101). Barker spent her entire day preparing for the party, making traditional English recipes to give to the New Zealanders, including a "little mutton" that she introduced to the Māori "very much disguised as curry, or in pies" (102). Her

[58] Melisa Klimaszewski's *Collaborative Dickens: Authorship and Victorian Christmas Periodicals* explores how the Christmas periodical became a site for Dickens to work with "plural authorship and intertextuality," by conducting and editing the issues (2). Similarly, Laura Callanan's turns to Dickens and Wilkie's Collins's "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners" (1857) published in *Household Words* which not only shows their "attitudes towards rebellion in allegorical and metaphorical form, but its relationship to the holiday for which the genre itself is named" (78).

national pride even comes out when they begin to sing Christmas hymns at church the next day and Barker "found the tears trembling in my eyes. My overwhelming thought was that it actually was the very first time those words had even been sung or said in that valley — you in England can hardly realize the immensity of such a thought" (102).

Barker would return to England shortly after *Station Life*'s publication and continue to write about the holiday. *A Christmas Cake in Four Quarters* (1871) is a quasi-fictional exploration of the various customs that occur in four locations— England, Jamaica, New Zealand, and India — under the British empire, and the rituals and traditions that they keep. The novel serves less as a juxtaposition of these various rituals, and more of an argument towards hegemonic celebration. In each location, a British family forces their nationalized celebration onto the locals. When various servants suggest local cuisine in New Zealand, the protagonist Joe refuses, asking the servants to join him for a "shoulder of mutton" and declaring, "here's a capital Christmas dinner after all" (134). Here, Christmas serves as another mode of imperial expansion, as holiday customs traversed colonies, collapsing the distance between national identity and holiday celebration.

In Barker's description of England in *Four Quarters*, she focuses less of the holiday traditions and more on the relationship between stories and Christmas. The scene opens on a schoolhouse, with the schoolteacher Mrs. Owen trying to keep the children occupied before the start of the Christmas holiday. She decides to tell them a story about her life abroad, admitting "there are several very interesting historical [stories] connected with the old Castle, but I have a shrewd suspicion that you want to hear about something dreadful" (15). The children admit as much, asking for "*one* little ghost story," and Mrs.

Own eventually relents. The connection between the ghost story and Christmas predates even *Carol*, but by the late nineteenth-century, these stories were often printed at Christmas time, but only had tangential connections to the holiday. F. Anstey was right when he declared in his 1884 essay "The Decay of the British Ghost" that "There was a thing thoroughly Christmassy, for example, about the witchlike old lady, with a horrible dead rouged face, who looked out of a tarnished mirror and gibbered malevolently at somebody, for the excellent reason that he chanced to be her descendant" (252). However, the ghost story often invoked the feeling of Christmas, if not the actual celebration.

Rhoda Broughton's *Tales for Christmas Eve* (1873) proves to be an interesting case study in this phenomenon. A collection of previously published short stories — "The Truth, The Whole Truth, and Nothing But the Truth," "The Man With the Nose," "Behold it Was a Dream," "Poor Pretty Bobby," and "Under the Cloak" — there is no mention of Christmas outside of the collection's title. Yet all the tales are macabre, centering on a haunted house that "had such a villainously bad name, that the owners were glad to let it for a mere song" (17). Broughton's collection sold well during the 1873 holiday season, circulating in a marketplace that was craving anything new, supernatural, and holiday adjacent. Savvy in how to market her work, Broughton retitled the collection *Twilight Stories* shortly after its publication, effectively repackaging the stories for a new seasonal market and severing the tangential connection to Christmas. *Tales for Christmas Eve* successfully capitalized on a growing seasonal market satiating for anything Christmas-related.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, HALLMARK CHRISTMAS MOVIES, AND THE RENEWED CONVERSION

However, like the recursive nature of the conversion itself, the Christmas conversion would reemerge in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as Christmas narratives returned to a growing sense of nostalgia for bygone celebrations and narrative. The most famous of these conversions is in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). Like *Carol*, it has become another touchstone for the Christmas season, yearly viewed by families and friends alike. It also acts as a quasi-adaptation of *Carol*, which served as a direct inspiration for Philip Van Doren Stern's story *The Greatest Gift*. In that narrative and Capra's film, George Bailey decides to commit suicide on Christmas Eve, after his Uncle Billy has lost money from the Bailey Bros. Building and Loan. Facing customers who count on him, and the possibility of jail time at the behest of Potter, the richest man in Bedford Falls, George believes that killing himself is the only way out of his troubles. Yet, the angel Clarence intercedes, telling George, "You know you shouldn't think of such things — and on Christmas Eve of all times!" (3). When George wishes that he'd never been born, Clarence accepts, noting, "All your troubles are over. Your wish, I am happy to say, has been granted — officially" (5).

As George and Clarence roam through Bedford Falls, George realizes that he has touched several people around him. His wife Mary would be a librarian and a spinster if he hadn't been around, his brother Harry would've died as a child and the entire town would've been taken over by Potter. *It's a Wonderful Life* is one in a long line of *Carol* adaptations that take the basic contours of conversion, if not its specifics. But it also inverts its protagonist's disposition. Capra's film is viewed through the prism of a

fundamentally good person, one who isn't in need of holistic conversion, but only to be talked out of a single decision. This also plays out in the performative declaration of *faith* that happens at the end of every conversion. Instead of having George atone for his actions through some type of gifting, as Scrooge does, the story has the entire township gives to George, equaling and eventually surpassing the money lost by Uncle Billy in order to save the business and, thus, the town. It positions conversion as a communal activity, in which members of Bedford Falls prove that they are aligned with George's altruistic mission through gift-giving. This exchange is specifically in money, and as the collection basket is passed around the Bailey house, people begin to sing Auld Lang Syne. Even the bank examiner who has come to the Bailey household to arrest George for fraud gives some money to basket. Once he does so, he is able to join with the others in singing.

When *It's a Wonderful Life* was released in 1946, the response was less than rapturous. Mark Harris notes "while some critics were delighted and moved … just as many were left cold" (436). The film quickly bankrupted Capra's director-led studio Liberty Pictures. It only found a resurgence after its copyright lapsed in 1974 and television stations could air the film for free through the 1980s, becoming a holiday perennial in the process. These repeat airing coincided with several other holiday films that took over airwaves in the 1980s and early '90s, including *Christmas in Connecticut* (1945)*, The Bishop's Wife* (1947), and more recently *A Christmas Story* (1983) and *Scrooged* (1988).

That final film served as a post-modern retelling of a *Carol*, transposed onto the '80s excess of television. But, as Davis claimed, the *Carol* and its conversion never really

disappeared, it has just been re-originated time and again. Not only has the conversion seen a relative resurgence in contemporary Christmas literature, but the Christmas film marketplace has especially been flooded in recent years with TV movies that utilize the Christmas conversion. Many of these films adopt *Carol* or *Wonderful Life*, embracing the recursive qualities of Christmas texts. Bharat Nalluri's *The Man Who Invented Christmas* (2017) sees Dickens struggling to make ends meet with the waning sales of *Chuzzlewit* and going through his own type of conversion while writing *Carol*, accepting his father, and realizing money isn't all-important in the process. *Spirited* (2022) tells the story of the Ghost of Christmas Present who, after having worked a few centuries, is ready to return into the world of the living, but only after he converts one more person.

This interest in conversion also plays out in TV movies. In the past decade, Christmas movies have seen rapid growth on networks such as Hallmark, Lifetime, and Netflix. In 2022, 150 Christmas movies were released across these platforms. These films are often conservative — both socially and politically — playing out now standardized narrative beats. In most, a single woman living in an urban city returns to her small town, often at the behest of a sickly parent or failing small business. There, she meets a former lover. After flirting with the idea of returning to her work, she converts, finally deciding to reclaim the Christmas Spirit and stay in the town. Just as often, these films directly reference the *Carol* of Dickens. *Ghosts of Christmas Always* (2022) follows Katherine, the Ghost of Christmas Present, as she attempts to reform the miserly grocery-store owner, Peter. In the film, Katherine overtly explains the fictionalized connections between Dickens's *Carol* and her role. As she tells Peter, Dickens was the first to be "Scrooged," leading to his inspiration to write *Carol*. The two eventually fall in love. In *A*

Dickens of a Holiday! (2021), a woman invites her former boyfriend, a troubled movie star, back to their hometown to perform as Scrooge in the town play, reforming him in the process. These tropes are so standardized, and baked in the conception of Christmas narratives, that Hallmark even has a bingo card for viewers to track of when they are deployed. Following out a similar logic, *A Christmas Movie Christmas* (2019) has two sisters who are transported into a Christmas movie of the week, playing out a meta-narrative, where the two must convert to the Christmas spirit before they can go back to their lives.

Much like the Christmas narratives that emerged in the mid nineteenth century, there is an overabundance of recent holiday texts. Yet, many conform to the tropes and framework that animated holiday writing in the nineteenth century, which in turn had its historical antecedents in the seventeenth. The Christmas conversion has become standardized, so ingrained within our narratives and culture that when a film or text deploys it, we understand the contours of the narrative, even if its morphology hasn't been articulated. *Carol* is rewritten by each successive generation, imbued with the concerns of society with each new retelling. Yet the Christmas conversion remains a structured method of conveying the inherently flawed nostalgia that is so intrinsically tied to holiday celebration.

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