

## Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*: Revisiting and Reformation

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The prefix in "revisiting" points to the essential semantic aspect of the topic of this symposium. Whenever a place is revisited, whether in life or in literature, the past is involved and the relationship between the visitor and the past becomes the focus of interest. Perhaps I should say this relationship can become the focus of interest rather than becomes, because even the relationship to one's past and to the past generally is part of the cultural framework and subject to historical change. For example, Robinson Crusoe's revisiting his native England or the return to his island after a long absence have a different quality from the emotionally charged revisits in Dickens, the foremost novelist of memory in the nineteenth century, in whose novels revisiting always awakes "remembrance of things past." These novels lend themselves to an inquiry into what revisiting of places means for the characters undertaking such journeys.

The many examples of revisiting in Dickens are part of a larger pattern of dealing with the past which Dickens evolved throughout his career as a novelist. To some extent they represent a revisit on his own part to the traumatic places of his childhood, but as the papers of this symposium show, the relevance of the topic would not be adequately grasped by a biographical approach. A variety of patterns emerges when you look at the examples of revisiting places in Dickens' novels. There are, for example, the melancholy revisits undertaken by David Copperfield to the scenes of his schooldays, the tragic return of Charles Darnay in *A Tale of Two Cities* to face his family's past, the returns of John Harmon in *Our Mutual Friend* and Arthur Clennam in *Little Dorrit*, who revisit the unhappy homes of their childhood, and there is Pip in *Great Expectations*, who revisits Estella because he still loves her.

Revisiting as an act of remembrance is also a central aspect of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens' comic as well as homiletic fairy-tale. Here, the prefix "re-" links the word field of memory and remembrance (for example, *recollect*, *remember*, *recognise*) to the ethical aim of "re-visiting" indicated by words like *remorse*, *reclamation*, *repentance*, *regret*.<sup>1</sup> Both spheres are characterised by a movement of return—be it in the mind or in the physical world—a common denominator that allows Dickens to explore the ethics as well as the imaginative potential of revisiting.

The title *A Christmas Carol* expresses both aspects. Apart from the obvious fact that Christmas is a feast that celebrates the memory of Christ's birth, the title also points to an aesthetic side of the feast. The etymology of *carol* relates the word to choric music (*OED*), to a round dance, a ring-type movement, all of which imply harmonious activities. In more recent times, the term *carol* signifies a piece of music, written in and between five lines, also called *staves* or *staves*, like any musical notation. The chapter headings contain a further clue to the synaesthetic nature of the title, however. "Stave" is a synonym for *stanza*, but *stave* or *staff* also means *letter*. The *Christmas Carol*, therefore, can be said to consist not only of five staves, but also of five letters, namely c a r o l.

On yet another level of meaning, the story contains five staves in the sense of sticks to walk with, as the *OED* defines the staff: "a stick carried in the hand as an aid in walking . . . (e.g. in reference to 'pilgrims')." <sup>2</sup> *Staff* in this sense points to the motif of the pilgrimage of life, a reference that is particularly relevant to *A Christmas Carol*. Scrooge's nephew reminds him of Christmas as a time when we think of others, especially the poor "as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys" (10). The journey of life is the larger topic and context of the five journey-visits in the story: Marley's in the first stave, the visits of the three spirits and Scrooge's final visit to his nephew. The title, then, prepares for a story in which visits, and revisits, and returns, take place in a form that expresses harmony. As it is going to end harmoniously it is particularly suitable for a feast whose meaning is remembering an event.

The central topic of the story is the reformation and transformation of Scrooge into a man who knows how to keep Christmas. The most effective means of his change from a utilitarian ogre into a kind-hearted

human being appears to be his revisiting places of his earlier life. This is the lesson taught by the spirit of Christmas Past.

### Marley's Message

The topic of revisiting arises in two ways, firstly by introducing us to Scrooge, a character who is not for visiting, let alone re-visiting, and secondly by making us witnesses of a visitation, Marley's visitation on Scrooge. Semantically all this is included in the verb *to visit*, from the sense of 'going to see someone' to the sense of 'warning' or even 'punishing,' but also including the dialectical opposite 'to care for,' senses well established by the translations from the Vulgate.<sup>3</sup>

Dickens describes Scrooge's antisocial habits and attitudes with obvious relish and delight in negative detail in a characteristically comic inversion of ethical values and aesthetic representation. Scrooge's unattractive qualities allow Dickens to indulge in anaphoric repetitions and amplified enumerations, not only to drive home the message but also to enjoy such an outpour of rhetorical *copia*.

Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! . . . The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. (8)

The rhetorical accomplishment of such balanced prose points as much to the eventual harmony of the story as do its contents to Scrooge's imperturbability in view of anything in this world apart from business. His indifference to the weather parallels the indifference and even aversion to him on the part of other people and even their dogs in his neighbourhood. This shying away of all living creatures from Scrooge finds its most cogent expression in the question he is never asked, "when will you come to see me?" (8), with its periphrasis of *to visit*. It is then *e negativo* that Dickens introduces the topic of visiting and revisiting. Scrooge is established as an aggressively tight old oyster,<sup>4</sup> a character who is not for visiting and being visited. The image of the oyster points

to the essential two-sidedness of visiting as an experience, which has an active as well as a passive component. The movement involved, however, is always one of reciprocity. As a form of exchange visiting by its very nature implies re-visiting.

In the world of Scrooge, where the reciprocity of communication is negated, the phenomenon of visiting changes its nature. When Marley returns to his former place and business partner he comes as a visitation upon Scrooge to convince him of the necessity of practising basic human solidarity. Marley obviously has a message to preach, but Dickens does not leave it at that. Marley like an experienced orator seems to know that teaching by itself is insufficient to effect lasting persuasion (and Scrooge's ironic comments during their conversation underline the fact that preaching, rhetorically speaking pure *docere*, is not very impressive). Marley sends the three spirits who confront Scrooge with lively, energetic scenes which add amusement (*delectare*) and especially forcefulness (*movere*) to his words to make Scrooge's conversion a lasting one. With Marley's visitation, then, we are on the traditional semantic ground of *to visit*. He visits in order to warn Scrooge (in the sense of Deut. 32:34) and to bring about Scrooge's reclamation (in the sense of Ps. 106:4). But the visitation also impresses on the reader's mind that the illness and the remedy are related. The visitation aims at visiting, the empathetic turning to one's fellow human beings as a symbol of charity. This kind of empathy begins with actually looking at people. Lifting one's eyes becomes a transcendental, a spiritual gift that makes visiting possible:

Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me! (21)

By referring to the Wise Men Dickens interprets the journey of the Magi as a biblical archetype of visiting. Significantly in view of Scrooge's visits, Marley is talking here of a poor "abode," a home. Such places are metonyms of people, indications that visiting places is the same as visiting people. Visiting means wanting to see someone in friendship, but in *A Christmas Carol* it has more sacramental overtones.<sup>5</sup> Visiting transcends the human sphere to include a religious dimension. It follows

that looking down, not wanting to see, divides a human being from the rest of humanity as well as from God. Marley and Scrooge did not want to see anyone, did not want to look up, and did not want to visit.<sup>6</sup>

Marley's message interprets visiting as a social activity, an act of going out, of leaving the metaphorical oyster shell: "It is required of every man . . . that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide" (19). Marley regards this movement as symbolic of human entelechy, as the condition for human development, opportunity and usefulness (20). His punishment consists in an inversion of this teleological pattern. It is a kind of Dantesque punishment, since after his death he has to suffer the pains of having to travel incessantly. His spirit has to wander aimlessly, "doomed to wander through the world . . . and witness what it . . . might have . . . turned to happiness" (19). Yet this is also a distinctly Dickensian punishment because this unhappy one is not able to visit though he would; wanting to do good and being unable to do so. Like Marley the other characters in Dickens' allegorical procession are forced to observe without being able to act and participate, for example "one old ghost" (whom Scrooge had known, of course), "in a white waistcoat with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step" (22). However, in view of the topic of visiting it is significant that Scrooge observes the train of "phantoms wandering hither and thither in restless haste" (22). The punishment of the phantoms shows the essential difference between aimless wandering and the directional activity of visiting. Scrooge has to infer from the negative image that charity is as much the cause as the final aim of visiting.

The purpose then of Marley's appearance as a ghost is, above all, to warn Scrooge and make him open his eyes to the rest of humanity, i.e. change his life. If this is so, then Marley's appearance serves to explain the necessity and the logic underlying the visiting and re-visiting of places in this story and perhaps in Dickens on the whole.

The logic at work here is that of the traditional art of memory, to be more exact it is an ethical and rhetorical interpretation of artificial memory. The association of memory with the virtues was originally made in Cicero's *De inventione* (II.160) and in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (III.3).<sup>7</sup>

Cicero first developed the idea that memory is a part of Prudence or Wisdom (Marley reminds Scrooge of the Three Wise Men) which again is the part of the idea of Virtue.<sup>8</sup> He defined memory as one of the three parts of Prudence which is composed of *memoria*, *intelligentia*, *providentia*, and it is easy to see that they correspond with Dickens' spirits of the past, the present, and the future.<sup>9</sup> The wisdom Scrooge achieves in the end combines the fruits of memory, understanding, and thinking of the future. I would argue that Dickens, in the Christmas books as a whole, created fictional renderings of Cicero's four parts of virtue, namely Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance, as the basis of his social vision.<sup>10</sup>

Given the background of the ethical aspect of artificial memory it is particularly appropriate that Marley revisits his former house in the form of a memory procession,<sup>11</sup> forcefully bringing to Scrooge's mind what he seems to have, more or less intentionally, forgotten. The train of phantoms Marley is chained to represents a series of memory signs, reminders not only of the misdeeds committed in life, but also signs which are ethically intentional for the observers, be they Scrooge or the readers. The paraphernalia which Marley carries with him—the chain of "cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel" (17)—as well as his grotesque appearance conform to the traditional requirements of effective memory pictures. They are striking and iconic as well as symbolic and thus suitable to impress the memory and work upon the mind looking at them.<sup>12</sup>

From a historical perspective the appearance of Marley and his phantoms also has a peculiar character about it which I would like to call neo-medieval for two reasons: first of all, because the explicit association of artificial memory with ethics took shape in the writings of medieval philosophers like Albert and Thomas, as Frances Yates pointed out.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, Dickens' allegorical method, very aptly followed in Leech's illustration of the "Ghosts of Departed Usurers," resembles medieval representations of the Day of Judgment in which the damned often carry the attributes of their sins with them. One should also remember that Dickens lived in the period of Gothic revival in England. In fact the narrator mentions the "gruff old bell . . . peeping . . . out of a gothic window" (13). Though Dickens had little sympathy

for Catholicism and the Middle Ages, his well-known antipathy towards the prevalent ideas of political economy and the numerous examples in his stories and novels of a paternalistic alleviation of the evils of society was shared by those who yearningly looked back to the Middle Ages (for example Carlyle's *Past and Present*).<sup>14</sup> It is safe to assume that Dickens' concern with memory had a historical dimension as well.<sup>15</sup>

Dickens revitalises the ethical interpretation of the art of memory as much as he turns remembering into a criterion of being human. While he uses the model of artificial memory in "A Christmas Tree" quite conventionally as a structural device, in *A Christmas Carol* he turns the mnemotechnical conventions and methods into ethical instruments. Being visited by a "ghostly" memory image, Scrooge is made to remember. He is made to visit the places of his past which in turn bring his past to life and effect his reformation. In fact, Scrooge is led to revisit the places of his youth in order to learn visiting again, to be a social being again. Revisiting reopens the way to human solidarity, based on the recognition that we are all "fellow travellers to the grave." The first thing Scrooge will undertake after his reclamation is to go out and visit his nephew.

### Revisiting in the Memory

Considering the tradition of the art of memory, Scrooge could be called a memory figure, developing from a character wishing to shut out his past to one living in the past, the present, and the future. The first indication of his character can be derived from the remark that he takes "his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern" and then returns to his "gloomy suite of rooms" (14). The adjectives tell us that Scrooge should have a talent for remembrance or rather a good memory. His humoral constitution predisposes him for it. Frances Yates pointed out that in the medieval theory of humours, melancholy "was held to produce good memories, because the melancholic received the impressions of images more firmly and retained them longer than

persons of other temperaments."<sup>16</sup> Klibansky traced the association of melancholy with the faculty of memory back to Aristotle's humoral and "medical" explanation.<sup>17</sup> He also established that melancholy was always associated with avarice and miserliness, especially in the popular tradition.<sup>18</sup> The fact that Dickens (and his illustrator) have one of the usurers in Marley's procession chained to a chest surely points to the iconological continuity of the popular attributes of melancholy. Dürer himself explains the bunch of keys and the purse carried by the figure of Melancholy as symbols of power and riches.<sup>19</sup> This association of melancholy and avarice (at the expense of love) also explains why Scrooge's fiancée put an end to their engagement. She had been replaced by "another idol . . . a golden one" (34).<sup>20</sup>

However, it is not only cold melancholy that dominates Scrooge's character. His sharp temper, his sarcastic disposition and even black humour also show him to be quite choleric, which indicates that Dickens was acquainted with the double nature of melancholy as described by Aristotle: on the one hand the medical-pathological notion and on the other the normal melancholy, a distinction based on the notion that black bile can be cold as well as hot.<sup>21</sup> In the end Scrooge even becomes a decidedly sanguine character, an indication that his experience of the nightly excursions has also corrected the imbalance of his humours and established the prevalence of the sanguine, usually regarded as an indication of the ideal state of the human psyche.<sup>22</sup> With this background in mind it is easy to see why Scrooge has to be regarded as a man particularly gifted with a good memory. His role as a recluse, who does not want to be reminded of Christmas—a feast that Dickens particularly associates with a "green memory"<sup>23</sup>—has to be seen as a refusal to remember, much like Redlaw's in *The Haunted Man*. In contrast to the later story, however, Dickens turns Scrooge's oysterlike seclusion into a comic overture of his conversion to his own true self.

The three ghosts, whose visitation Marley announced, each take Scrooge to places, to towns and buildings, the most traditional type of image in artificial memory. It is typical of these visits that Scrooge, like Vergil in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, becomes an invisible visitor, who enters the world of his past evoked by the memorial places. This immediate contact appears as a precondition for the reformatory influence of the



past on Scrooge.<sup>24</sup> The first visit takes him back to the time of his boyhood, to the town where he grew up. Scrooge finds everything firmly imprinted on his memory: "I could walk [the way] blindfold" (26). The fact that "incidents of our childhood we often remember best"<sup>25</sup> was regarded as common sense even in the handbook of classical rhetoric that used to be attributed to Cicero, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. The reason given by the rhetorician, that novelty makes images stay in the mind, is different, however, from that observable in Dickens. To him it is the emotional value of places and incidents which constitutes their memorial significance. In this instance Dickens uses landscape as a memorial structure which seems to indicate that he was aware of the existence of less well-known memorial images. Quintilian had also recommended buildings as memory places and extended the types of memorial structures to include "a long journey" or "going through a city" and even to self-made structures.<sup>26</sup> In line with these rules of artificial memory, Scrooge "remembers," "recollects," and "recognises" as he is retracing his steps (26). Revisiting takes the form of walking from place to place in the landscape of memory as the traditional *ars memoriae* had taught. The stations Scrooge passes have become storage places of his past: the market-town, the bridge, the church, the river. Finally he walks into a veritable house of memory where he sees "his poor forgotten self as he used to be" (27). Two things appear noteworthy in this observation.

Firstly, in visiting, Scrooge 'sees' again literally and metaphorically, which is not surprising since the literal meaning of *to visit* is *to see*. Latin *visitare* is *to go to see* and *vis* is the past participle stem of *videre*, *to see*.<sup>27</sup> Secondly and perhaps of greater importance in relation to the tradition of artificial memory is the transformation of the memory place from a striking picture into energetic scenes. These virtually spring up from the places visited with the immediacy of reality. What Scrooge recognises in these scenes and episodes is, above all, himself in the various stages of his past and these images exert the strongest emotional impact on him.

Revisiting a place nearly always means revisiting one's earlier self, and yet this formula does not completely describe what makes Scrooge's re-visiting of his childhood places and experiences so special. It is the experience of being two persons at one and the same time. Pointing

forward to the narrative technique of *David Copperfield*<sup>28</sup> Scrooge, like David the writer, observes his younger self and enters the remembered world, as a visitor indeed:

The spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: wonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the window . . . . 'Why it's Ali Baba!' Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy . . . Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine . . . and his wild brother, Orson; there they go! . . . don't you see him! . . . (28)

Scrooge does not remain a visitor and observer only, he becomes the young boy again; both figures merge and exist side by side. Scrooge re-lives what he experienced as a boy, Ali Baba is suddenly there, and yet Scrooge observes the event as the visitor he is: memory and narrative presence form a symbiosis which is typical for this memorial narrative. The narrator sums it up after the scene of Mr Fezziweg's Christmas Party: "His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation" (33). Scrooge's revisits of the places of his youth conjure up past events, but he is present in them as the older person as well; he is actor and audience at the same time. It is this fusion of past and present which creates the emotional effect the story is aiming at.

From the very first Dickens makes his readers aware of the effect and purpose of Scrooge's revisits. Scrooge is moved because he takes pity with the poor lonely child he once was. Self-pity, however, does not describe Dickens' idea of what memory does. Going back to the places of the past also implies resuffering and—comparable to the psychoanalytic model—leads to a revaluation of the past. This is the beginning of the famous change of heart. Scrooge sits down not far from his former self and weeps

to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice . . . but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with a softening influence . . . . (27-28)

It is then, that he regrets not having given something to the carol singer. The softening of his heart is the essential first step of his education which includes remembrance and visiting. Rushing off after his reclamation to visit his nephew is a proof that he has re-discovered human solidarity and the ultimate purpose of remembering. This movement back into the midst of humanity describes the psychological content of the "philosophy of Christmas," Cazamian's felicitous phrase for the ethical concept at work in Dickens' novels.

If we look back to an earlier Christmas story, which also preaches the change of heart, Dickens' new and specific frame of reference shows up even more clearly. Dickens obviously used "The Story of the Goblins who stole a Sexton" (ch. 29 in *The Pickwick Papers*) as a starting point for the composition of *A Christmas Carol*. The earlier story, however, brings about Gabriel Grub's reformation by showing him in a 'ghostly' way images which shake his heart out of its misanthropy but none of the scenes which he is shown is part of his own past life. Gabriel Grub sees scenes and images of a purely didactic nature, scenes that are supposed to make him thankful and cheerful and willing to share the joy of the Christmas season. They are "a few of the pictures from our own great storehouse," as the king of the goblins tells him, but he is not talking of the storehouse of memory. The ethical and aesthetic dimension of that thesaurus was Dickens' great discovery that marked the transition from a novel structure which still had its roots in the eighteenth century to a novel form that had taken note of the romantic fascination by an individual's past.

### Revisiting the World

With Scrooge's psychological conversion through revisiting the places of his childhood achieved, the Ghost of Christmas Present proceeds to make Scrooge revisit the world outside his "shell" and understand what Christmas means in the present.<sup>29</sup> This experience appeals to his understanding, to his *intelligentia*, the second part of Cicero's definition of prudence and re-enforces the pattern of Ciceronian ethics. The method which the spirit uses to make a case for Christmas can also be traced to Cicero, to his rhetoric and its model of swaying an audience by means

of persuasion. To win Scrooge over to the cause of Christmas, the spirit makes him a witness, first of the masque-like personification of Christmas Present, then the ubiquity of Christmas and finally the effects of Christmas.

Before Scrooge is taken out of his shell to become a witness of how Christmas is celebrated and what its effects are, he looks at the masque-like representation of the Ghost of Christmas Present who appears in the shape of a giant surrounded by all the traditional appurtenances of Christmas, his benevolent nature symbolised in the classical image of the horn of plenty. The ghost introduces himself as one of a family of more than 1800 pointing to the principle of repetition inherent in a feast. However, in this "Stave" Christmas appears as more of a seasonal feast than a feast of Christian remembrance. In contrast to *The Haunted Man*, the other Christmas story that mainly deals with the topic of memory, *A Christmas Carol* celebrates a particularly English version of Christmas. The ghost shows Scrooge a time of cheerfulness, joy and generosity and abundant food (49)—in stark opposition to Scrooge's world of avarice and parsimony. The spirit makes Scrooge understand the social nature of Christmas as a time when rancour gives way to humour and dissonance to harmony, as a feast of fellowship, and especially of visiting. Everybody seems to be out to visit: "But, if you had judged from the numbers of people on their way to friendly gatherings, you might have thought that no one was at home to give them welcome when they got there . . ." (49). Here, humorous absurdity takes the place of pathos reflecting the change of heart and mind that has taken place since Scrooge's first excursion with the ghost.

At this stage of Scrooge's reformation, the spirit need not show him places he knew in the past, but rather lets him see how ubiquitously Christmas is celebrated, outside of London too, among such exotics (for Dickens) like miners—probably in Wales, because they are all singing—and even in a lighthouse, far away from the shore. Seeing the evidence for the cause of Christmas, Scrooge is delighted by the joy of others (including the laughter at his expense in his nephew's house) and he is willing to be taught by the spirit's "precepts" (56). The purpose of the first visitation by the Ghost of Christmas Past was to move Scrooge, literally and metaphorically. After being shown the delights

of Christmas he is prepared to be taught: "if you have ought to teach me, let me profit by it" (40). Going far beyond the Horatian dichotomy of "aut prodesse volunt . . . aut delectare," the rhetorical categories Scrooge employs indicate the closeness of ethics and rhetoric in Dickens.

The spirit has some lessons in store for Scrooge, not far from Dickens' own heart. He tells Scrooge that those who want to prohibit all "innocent enjoyment" on Sundays (in fact the Church itself) pervert the true meaning of Christianity with whose essential teaching the spirit identifies himself (43). The spirit has a sacramental understanding of a meal shared in company. As Scrooge observes the preparations for Christmas at the Cratchits, he becomes a witness to the joy arising from the visits taking place on Christmas and from its social climax, the Christmas dinner. The spirit teaches Scrooge a lesson, but he does so like a good orator who states his case in a variety of ways. The picture of the Cratchits' home and especially of Tiny Tim is commented with ironic references to the stock phrases of Malthus' theory of dealing with the "surplus population" (47). Scrooge recognises its cynicism and is overcome with shame. The orator has achieved his aim.

Finally, the Christmas party at the home of Scrooge's nephew produces arguments that beat Scrooge on his own ground, the doctrine of utility. Scrooge's nephew and his friends discuss the logical absurdity of usury, the uselessness of amassing money for its own sake. The joke for them, of course, is that they are going to be the lucky heirs, and they pity Scrooge for depriving himself even of enjoying the idea of benefiting somebody. Their mockery includes his refusal to accept the invitation to join them for Christmas dinner. As an unreformed utilitarian he should not have refused a free dinner. Finally, the Yes and No game played by the nephew and his party turns Scrooge into a figure of fun. Having to guess that the nephew has Scrooge in mind, the guessers think of every kind of animal except the *animal rationale*. The suggestion that Scrooge is supposed to be an exemplar of this species strikes everyone as the best joke of the evening. The game playfully shows Scrooge his unregenerate self, devoid of what would make him human. Even Scrooge is amused by this caricature, because he now understands its truth.

These scenes, like those relived on the journey into the past, have their effect on Scrooge. They soften his heart (53), but more than that, they

appeal to his intentions, to his will: "... he softened more and more; and thought that if he could have ... he might have ..." (53). Scrooge's perspective has now changed from the concern with his own past to caring for what he can do for others. The end of the second journey leaves him with a contemporary problem that needs to be resolved: Ignorance and Want are shown—just like the ghost of Christmas—as a tableaux to make Scrooge aware of a task that requires not only a change of heart but intelligence and providence as well.

### Reformation

In the "Stave" which features the third spirit, an interesting change of its name takes place. Scrooge first wonders whether this is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, but understands quickly that this ghost is concerned with something completely different from the happy celebration of Christmas. As the previous ghosts this one is a masque-like figure that acts out his own meaning, being shrouded completely, the only thing visible of this "great heap of black" (58) being his outstretched hand, "pointing onward." Scrooge understands this representation to the extent that his own future is the issue, therefore addressing him as "Ghost of the Future."

The scenes which Scrooge witnesses reflect the reputation of a man recently deceased whose identity he seems to guess but is not allowed to look into. Scrooge recognises, however, that like emblems without explication, these scenes have "some latent moral" (60) for him. The moral derives from the fact that all scenes relate to his life. In that sense he visits a landscape of memory. In contrast to his previous journeys, however, the places and people in Scrooge's memory speak of events he does not recall. This is the unusual case of a thesaurus of memories that never were. Nothing is really part of his past. The dreadful message these places spell out for Scrooge is that they might become his past and could foil all his good resolutions. The rhetorician who hides in the garb of the third spirit, however, argues a case only; he is not predicting the future as Scrooge imagines. Just as the audience whom the classical orator addresses must be moved by the power of arguments

and forceful images to a different position, be it in behaviour or belief, Scrooge is shown scenes and events in the wake of the miserable death of a miser to effect his lasting reformation. The reader, needless to say, realises who that person is. Therefore, the pathos of the scenes Scrooge is led to increases with each episode till the climax is reached in the cemetery and Scrooge breaks down.

The method of the spirit of the future inverses the pattern of the previous spirits in yet another respect. Whereas up to this time Scrooge revisited the memory places of his childhood and youth and the world about him, the spirit now takes him to the memory places of other people, or rather he takes him to places that should be memory places of him, first of all "the City" (59). He shows Scrooge what an unimportant place the deceased man occupies in the memory of the merchants ("Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?" 60). Increasing the impact of the episodes the spirit takes Scrooge into a scrap dealer's place, a veritable, though perverted house of memory:

Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones. (61)

Here, to this store of unwanted memory objects, the remnants of Scrooge's existence are finally brought. Their memory value is nothing; only their material value, little as it is, counts for those who have stolen them. In a parody of the day of reckoning Scrooge has been literally stripped of all possessions down to his last shirt, and what remains is the cynical laughter of degraded menials. When the spirit finally takes Scrooge to his death bed, the narrator intervenes with his message of death's impotence in the face of good deeds:

But of the loved, revered, and honoured head, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand was open, generous, and true. . . . Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal! (64-65)

In this highly emotional rhetoric the narrator addresses death himself, unheard, as it were, by Scrooge and articulates his belief in the life-creating, procreative force of the good deed. Scrooge, on the level of the narrative, interprets the scene in emblematic ways, translating the didactic image into action: "Spirit . . . this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!" (65). Scrooge not only enacts the emotional effect of the scene on himself, he is aware of the rhetorical assumption behind the use of emotional images when he asks the spirit: "If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this man's death . . . show that person to me" (65). But he has more disappointment in store for him when he takes him to the house of a poor family, Scrooge's debtors: "The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure" (66).

In contrast to such reactions Scrooge observes the sadness mingled with tenderness that arises from the memory of Tiny Tim. The dead child in his room serves as a contrast to Scrooge's death chamber, but it serves even more as a foil to the following visit to Scrooge's former office. Paradoxically the room serves as a memory place of the future, and Scrooge is eager to find out what images of the future the room might have in store: "I see the house. Let me behold what I shall be, in days to come!" (69). The places of memory in the room turn out to be empty, however, completely void of memories. Scrooge has been virtually erased from the world. Finally there is only the last memory of his existence, the tombstone, and even that "neglected" (70). That is to say, his tomb itself is neither looked after nor—and that amounts to the same thing—is his name read (the pun is based on the etymology of neglect, Latin *neg-lectus*). The vision of such a disappearance finally changes Scrooge's being and re-affirms his promise of "an altered life." When he wakes up his very first thoughts that assure him of being alive are remembrances of his own life. Having ascertained his own self he is prepared to take account of the world outside him. Hearing the church bells he opens the window and prepares for his visit to his nephew. The last "Stave" shows a reclaimed character who finally goes out to visit and to do good. Scrooge will need no more visitations.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>All quotations from *Christmas Books* (Oxford: OUP, 1954) in the Oxford Illustrated Dickens. See 35.

<sup>2</sup>OED s.v. *staff*.

<sup>3</sup>OED s.v. *visit*.

<sup>4</sup>Craig Buchwald, "Stalking the Figurative Oyster: The Excursive Ideal in *A Christmas Carol*," *Studies in Short Fiction* 27 (1990): 1-14, claims "The oyster image . . . despite its unassuming character, is really a kind of master-trope for the story" (1). Unfortunately there are hardly any other related images to substantiate this point. The oyster metaphor does however convey Scrooge's initial state.

<sup>5</sup>The mode of reference is no more than a hinting, but no less either. That Dickens was aware of the idea of sacramental relationships appears from the parody of the Eucharist when Scrooge's former schoolmaster "produced a decanter of curiously light wine and a block of curiously heavy cake, and administered instalments of those dainties to the young people" (30).

<sup>6</sup>Business is a type of interaction Dickens does not regard on the same level.

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of the background and theory of artificial memory see Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge, 1966).

<sup>8</sup>"[H]onestatis . . . habet igitur partes quattuor: prudentiam, iustitiam, fortitudinem, temperantiam" (*De Inventione* II.159).

<sup>9</sup>"Memoria est per quam animus repetit illa quae fuerunt; intellegentia, per quam ea perspicit quae sunt; providentia, per quam futurum aliquid videtur ante quam factum est" (*De Inventione* II.160).

<sup>10</sup>The extent to which Dickens was familiar with the Ciceronian texts is a matter difficult to establish. The list of books at his home in Devonshire Terrace contains the title that could have given Dickens an idea of Cicero's ethics: *Life and Letters of Cicero*, but it was published only in 1844. See the inventory in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. M. House, G. Storey, K. Tillotson, vol. 4 (Oxford: OUP, 1974) 711-25. Less direct ways of becoming acquainted with the art of memory and the ethical issues involved would have been open to Dickens as well.

<sup>11</sup>Dickens in the preface to the First Cheap Edition of *A Christmas Carol* characterises the story as "a whimsical kind of masque." This is discussed by R. D. Butterworth, "A Christmas Carol and the Masque," *Studies in Short Fiction* 30 (1993): 63-69.

<sup>12</sup>A similar method of representing spiritual qualities in concrete images can be observed in the stories of Hans Christian Andersen, for example *The Snow Queen* or *The Ugly Duckling*. Dickens greatly admired Andersen and valued the genre of fairy tales very highly.

<sup>13</sup>Yates ch. 3.

<sup>14</sup>See Joseph Gardner, "Pecksniff's Profession: Boz, Phiz, and Pugin," *The Dickensian* 72 (1976): 83.

<sup>15</sup>In this context it may not be accidental either that an influential work of medieval literature, Guillaume de Deguileville's *Le Pelerinage de L'Homme* (translated by John Lydgate into Middle English) points to its allegorical method when Grace Dieu makes the pilgrim place his eyes into his ears. This startling image describes not only the allegorical process as such but also the strategy of the homiletic poet who changes his method from mere teaching to moving by means of lively representations. This

is the method of the orator as well as the preacher and the didactic writer. See the account by Susan K. Hagen, *Allegorical Remembrance: A Study of The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man as a Medieval Treatise on Seeing and Remembering* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1990).

<sup>16</sup>Yates translates from Albertus who in *De Bono* provides the *locus classicus* for the positive view of melancholy: "the goodness of memory is in the dry and the cold, wherefore melancholics are called the best for memory" (381n57).

<sup>17</sup>R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky, F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy* (London: Nelson, 1964) 16, especially their interpretation of Aristotle's *Problemata* 30, 1. See also 69, 337.

<sup>18</sup>Even though Klibansky was mainly concerned with the background to Dürer's *Melencolia* the general drift of the popular view of the melancholic temper was not specific to any single European country, as we have to conclude from the French and German sources quoted (194). Cf. also the philosophical testimony of Nicholas of Cusa who speaks of "avaritiosa melancholia" (quoted in Klibansky 120).

<sup>19</sup>Klibansky 284-85.

<sup>20</sup>The two children Scrooge discovers under the cloak of the spirit could be regarded as the unattractive children of melancholy Saturn (see Klibansky 195).

<sup>21</sup>See *Problemata* 30: "... the melancholic are not equable in behaviour, because the power of the black bile is not even; for it is both very cold and very hot" (tr. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library). Cicero's distinction between "furor" as equivalent of Greek *melancholia* and "insania" is illuminating, because *furor* is compatible with wisdom: "furor in sapientem cadere possit, non possit insania" (*Tusculan Disputations* III.v.11). Cicero thus separates his idea of melancholy from illness: "Quasi vero atra bili solum mens ac non saepe vel iracundia graviore vel timore vel dolore moveatur." Yates traces the idea of "inspired melancholy" also in Albertus (80).

<sup>22</sup>This combination of the sanguine with melancholy humour is also found in ancient and medieval psychology. For the phenomenon of *melancholia fumosa et fervens*, Yates refers to Aristotle's *Problemata* and to Albertus' *De Bono* (80). From this point of view Scrooge turns from a character who cannot forget to a character who likes to remember, in other words one who lives in the past, the present, and the future.

<sup>23</sup>See *The Haunted Man* for the motif and the motto "Lord! keep my memory green!" The illustration by Clarkson Stanfield shows a Tudor hall in Gothic style and reflects the popularity of medieval architecture in Dickens' time.

<sup>24</sup>"These are but shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. They have no consciousness of us" (27).

<sup>25</sup>*Rhetorica Ad Herennium* III.xxii.35 (tr. Caplan, Loeb Classical Library).

<sup>26</sup>*Institutio Oratoria* XI.ii.21 (tr. Butler, Loeb Classical Library).

<sup>27</sup>Etymologically *visit* also derives from the same root as *to wit*, to know. OED, s.v. *wit* v.

<sup>28</sup>See Matthias Bauer, *Das Leben als Geschichte: Poetische Reflexion in Dickens' David Copperfield* (Köln: Böhlau, 1991), especially ch. 5.

<sup>29</sup>"I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it" (40).