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A Sleight of Mind: The Idea of Magic and the Narrative Structure of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

Abstract

The nineteenth century was an age of reason and industrialization. Magic and mythical creatures ceased to exist for the rational minds of the time. Yet, despite the intellectual hostility to magic and mysticism, their sway over popular culture and the literary world remained undisturbed. Magic even found other ways to return. One of these is stage magic. In the 1840s, the stage magician John Henry Anderson dazzled the audiences in London with his performances so much so that Sir Walter Scott called him the Great Wizard of the North (referring to his Scottish origins). In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens adds vivacity to his narrative through the use of narrative theatrics that can be described as pertaining to stage magic. In the novella, a ludicrous form of white magic transforms the main character. The other characters are baffled by the inexplicable change in his behaviors. The transformation seems magical even to them. While hidden from their eyes, Scrooge receives four strange night visitors who reform him through a series of visions. When he finally returns to the “real” world, Scrooge is a different person. What takes place in the novella can in many respects be compared to the tricks used in stage magic (where an item is hidden from the sight of the spectators only to reappear in a different form). The use of magic in the novella, therefore, goes beyond the story. Indeed, a “magical” sleight of mind structures the very narrative of *A Christmas Carol*. This paper seeks to trace the influence of the idea of magic on the narrative structure and techniques of Dickens’ novella. It argues that, in many respects, the narrator can be described as a magician performing tricks on characters and readers alike.

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According to Harold Bloom, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens “teaches us that imaginative innovation can be a form of life” (Bloom 2011: 7). Bloom’s words reveal that although the apparent theme of the novella might be the moral transformation of its main character, aesthetic questions about the nature and role of the literary imagination in the Victorian period are also central to its narrative structure. *A Christmas Carol* (1843) brings to life a magical universe that defies some of the dominant cultural paradigms of its time. This paper seeks to show how the narrator gradually convinces Scrooge and the reader to accept the idea of magic. It argues that the narrator manipulates his main character and his readers and bypasses their resistance by taking advantage of their change blindness¹ and inattention blindness.² This paper also explores some of the affinities between the novella and the art of stage magic that also makes use of these two cognitive phenomena.

The context of the writing and publication of the novella was characterized by an intriguing ambivalence towards the idea of magic. The nineteenth century is sometimes described as an age of disillusionment. Many powerful epistemological systems fell apart as scientific and technological advances shook the most common beliefs about the nature of the universe and its inhabitants. In the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, science enabled human beings to understand many previously inexplicable phenomena — thus, freeing them from the superstitions of the medieval world.³ The forces of nature no longer seemed beyond the grasp of human beings. Many natural phenomena that used to be interpreted as signs of the wrath or blessing of unseen supernatural — usually divine or magical — forces became explicable and even predictable.

Naturally, religion seems to be the epistemological system that suffered most from the rise of science and rationality. Although one may argue that spirituality started to lose ground in Western Europe long before the nineteenth century, religious institutions

¹ “Change blindness is the striking inability to detect seemingly obvious changes that occur between views of a scene” (Murphy, Murphy 2018: 655).

² “Inattentional blindness describes the phenomenon that occurs when an observer fails to perceive an unexpected object, even if it appears at fixation” (Shi, Li 2018: 513).

³ Although the process might have started earlier, its influence on popular beliefs was limited. The 19th century democratized science through exhibitions and public demonstrations and allowed it to exert a stronger influence on popular beliefs than ever before.

maintained a firm grip on the public sphere. The common people did not have unlimited or unrestricted access to the newly discovered scientific facts. Indeed, few dared to challenge the dominant beliefs in public without expecting severe punishments — at least until the second half of the eighteenth century. Even those who whispered their criticism of the fundamentals of the reigning religious doctrines were punished publicly to deter any dissent. The church, whether Catholic or protestant, did run the show — with little or no competition — in the streets of the major European capitals for many centuries.

However, this would not last. In the nineteenth century, public demonstrations of scientific discoveries and technological inventions replaced the burning of “heretics” and “witches” — that had almost entirely disappeared by the eighteenth century. Scientists no longer feared the church. As a result, the authority of religion was significantly eroded. Eventually, scientists started to reject religious beliefs more openly. The belief in (a) hidden principle(s) or force(s) that shaped — and still shapes — the world and the destinies of the beings that inhabit it was no longer as firm and secure as it used to be for many centuries. Scientists believed that they would ultimately unravel all the mysteries of the universe. They even started to dissect the religious phenomenon itself stripping it of its protective aura of sacredness by making it an object of scientific investigation.

As religion and spirituality weakened the medieval idea of magic which had lived in their shadows — shunned but recognized — also became part of the “dying” old world. The belief in magic and magical creatures has always remained on the margin of the dominant world picture. However, it was a useful tool for domination. The powerful used popular belief in magic to control the masses. In the nineteenth century, magic was reduced to an explicable form of entertainment. This certainly damaged the shroud of mystery and fascination that gave the idea of magic its appeal for centuries.

Magic has always held a very intriguing position in Western culture and thought. In his foreword to *Performing Magic on the Western Stage: from the Eighteenth Century to Present*, the stage magician Eugene Burger writes:

Throughout most of its history, beginning around the sixth century BCE, when the Magi came to Greece from Persia, the idea of magic has a somewhat checkered reputation. On the one hand, the idea resonates positively to us. We are drawn to the idea of magic. It is an idea filled with possibilities that suggests the fulfilment of our deepest dreams. We find the idea of magic fascinating and alluring. Perhaps the human heart cries out for magic. On the other hand, it has always been seen as something suspect. Magic has never been trusted and never been seen as trustworthy [...] Many people see magic as ungodly, demonic, from the underworld. Magic frequently suggests danger, something we need to fear. (Burger 2008: ix)

The words of Burger show that ambivalence has characterized the attitude of Western culture towards magic for centuries. Magic has always been a desired and feared mystery.

Throughout its history, the idea of magic has had to wrestle the imaginative space from the dominant cultural, discursive, and social forces. In the Middle Ages, for example, the firm grip of the church drastically reduced the imaginative possibilities of magical narratives. In the *Wife of Bath's Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1400), the narrator describes how religious authorities encroach on the imaginative space traditionally reserved for magic and the magical:

But now elves can be seen by men no more,
 For now the Christian charity and prayers
 Of limiters and other saintly friars
 Who haunt each nook and corner, field and stream,

...

Those places where once you would see an elf
 Are places where the limiter himself
 Walks in the afternoons and early mornings,
 Singing his holy offices and matins.

(Chaucer 2003: 171–172)

This quotation conveys the narrator's resentment of the religious authorities and their restrictive presence that stifles the imagination.

The relationship between religion and magic in the medieval and renaissance periods, however, was more complex than mere competition for the imaginative space. Religious institutions condemned magic and persecuted those who allegedly practiced it. Nevertheless, this did not damage the idea of magic. On the contrary, it validated it. As religious institutions started to use violence to assert their authority, they allowed the idea of magic to occupy the margins of the dominant world picture. On the continent, the confessions of the supposed witches and wizards of the Middle Ages and the investigations carried by the medieval and Renaissance inquisitors were used to legitimize the public punishment of those who allegedly practiced magic. Although England did not have the catholic inquisition, many witch trials were held by the British civil and religious authorities until the enactment of the 1735 witchcraft act. The institutional production of truth in the days of the inquisition⁴ validated the idea of magic: It was evil but real.

Chaucer's quotation also shows that one of the areas that have always been receptive to magic is undoubtedly literature. Through the centuries, many literary works have dealt with the theme of magic. Many of them have achieved a privileged status in the history of British literature due to their reference to magic and magical creatures. Salient examples are *The Arabian Nights*, *The Arthurian Legends* (in their different versions), *The Tempest*, etc.

As rationality and scientific explanations started to dominate the intellectual stage (and even public space through demonstrations) in the Victorian age, the literature of the period responded with a mixture of fascination and skepticism. However, whether acceptive of scientism or resistant towards it, the writers of the time seem to have felt the heavy burden of the limiting rationalization of the world. With magic, superstitions and spirituality weakened and debunked, literature seemed to have lost some of its most valuable assets.

Nevertheless, the literary fascination with the idea of magic was by no means curbed by the rise of scientism in the Victorian period. On the contrary, the realm of literary imagination was still able to shelter the wizards and magical creatures of old against oblivion. By the end of the century, some of them were even able to return (to the cultural stage) in modern forms to haunt a world that was thought to have forgotten them. They managed

⁴ Whether through the inquisition itself or through other institutions.

to bypass the imaginative restrictions of the modern scientific world; these characters and creatures were depicted either as coming from a realm beyond the grasp of science like in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*⁵ or resulting from some unethical scientific experimentation like in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The rise of gothic literature and science fiction in the 19th century reflected an irrepressible yearning for wider imaginative spaces among writers and readers alike.

Usually hailed as “one of Victorian literature’s finest ghost stories” (Snodgrass 2005: xiv), the novella is an attempt to release the literary imagination from the restrictive literality and scientism of the time. In the novella under scrutiny, the gradual transformation of Scrooge from a skeptic old miser to a philanthropic believer in the spirit of Christmas can also be seen as a gradual liberation of the reader’s imagination from the restrictive rationalism of the Victorian age. To achieve this, the novella benefited from the rise of stage magic. It even incorporated some of its cognitive effects, namely attention blindness and change blindness, in its narrative structure.

The opening passage of the novella is structured like one of the tricks of stage magic. In the style of a stage magician (to whom Dickens often compared himself⁶), the narrator starts by compiling official testimonies that “Marley was dead” (Dickens 2006: 1). This is comparable to the rabbit in the hat magical trick where the magician usually asks the audience to look closely at the hat — and might even allow them to put their hands inside it to make sure it is empty. In the novella, the clergyman, the chief mourner, the undertaker and his partner scrooge have signed and sealed Jacob Marley in his coffin. His return, therefore, is officially impossible.

However, like the stage magician who assures the audience that the hat is empty only “to surprise”⁷ them with the rabbit emerging from it, Dickens uses a similar strategy by simultaneously confirming the death of Marley and building the reader’s horizon of expectations. Using this technique at the outset of the novella sets the stage for the subsequent events that will further establish the idea of magic through the manipulation of the performative and narrative spaces of the novella.

In Dickens’ times, stage magic was one of the major artistic and cultural activities performed in public spaces. Karl Bell tells us that it “served as a crucible in which traditional magical beliefs were coopted and remade into something new” (Bell 2009: 26). Bell argues that while it was used to expound the “Bourgeois conceptions of a technological modernity” (27), it also helped “maintain faith in genuine magical thoughts” (27). Stage magic was openly conformist but tacitly — and probably unconsciously (as Bell argues) — resistant and subversive.

It was not targeted by the reigning scientism of the period. Indeed, despite the fact that, at the time, science aimed at eradicating popular beliefs in the supernatural, the stage magicians were at home in the new world of science. They “saw themselves as part of a modern scientific world” (Lachapelle 2008: 319). They even “called themselves professors of amusing physics and demonstrated the wonders of science to the public” (319). They were also

⁵ The immortality of the vampire can be read as connotative of the endurance of the idea of magic and the supernatural in the age of rationalization and scientism.

⁶ See Davis for details about this comparison.

⁷ The stage magician rather establishes a horizon of expectations by focusing the audience’s attention on the hat.

regarded with great admiration in the scientific circles. Towards the end of the century, they were given access to the science labs. For example, in 1893, a number of prominent French stage magicians participated in an experiment conducted by the psychologist Alfred Binet whose objective was to gain insights into “the psychological processes responsible for inducing illusions in the audience” (319). The relationship was mutually beneficial. While stage magicians were admitted into scientific circles, some scientists and inventors enjoyed the auspicious aura of magic. For example, Thomas Edison was sometimes called “the wizard of Menlo Park” (Schlager 2000: 580).⁸

Outside the scientific circles, many were fascinated with stage magic, albeit in a very different manner. It released their imagination from the stifling rationalism and scientism of the time. It came as no surprise that the flourishing of stage magic was greeted with great enthusiasm in the literary circles. The stage magician John Henry Anderson claimed that he received “the great wizard of the North” from Sir Walter Scott (very few have challenged this claim until recently).⁹ He embraced this title and used it for publicity. As a stage magician, he was certainly aware that the idea of magic attracts people because it frees them from the confines of the rational and the explicable.

This yearning for the imaginative freedom the idea of magic in its different manifestations offers is a major theme in *A Christmas Carol*. The meeting between Scrooge and the ghost of Marley is quite revealing about the literary resentment of the (excessive) scientism of the time. In the very spirit of science, Scrooge tries to reduce the ghost of Marley to “an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, [or] a fragment of an undone potato” (Dickens 2006: 18).¹⁰ As Scrooge speaks, the ghost sits motionless and listens. Scrooge goes on to demonstrate (to himself) that the ghost of Marley is nothing but the work of his imagination. When the old miser eventually reaches his usual conclusion, “humbug, I tell you, humbug” (Dickens 2006: 19), the apparition screams and shakes his chains forcing Scrooge to submit. Despite the ludicrousness of the scene that is further emphasized by the narrator’s remark that the ghost takes off his head bandage “as if it were too warm to wear indoors” (Dickens 2006: 19), the scream can be interpreted as an outcry against the literal-mindedness of Scrooge.¹¹ The chains of Marley may, in this sense, be seen as symbolizing the restrictions imposed by excessive scientism and materialism¹² on the literary imagination.

According to Harold Bloom, “Dickens’ genius was essentially dramatic” (Bloom 2009: 778). In the novella, performative power play is central to the ghostly encounters. Before meeting Marley, Scrooge is in total control of his performative space. He does not allow anyone within it. His very presence is forbidding that “[e]ven the blind men’s dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, [they] would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said ‘No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!’” (Dickens 2007: 10). To enter the world of

⁸ It seems that (like all the other dominant discourses before it) science tried to appropriate rather than eradicate the idea of magic.

⁹ According to Karl Bell, Anderson probably made up the anecdote.

¹⁰ A meal that is probably served in workhouses. (See Ian Miller’s article for details on this subject.)

¹¹ His cry forces Scrooge to put his scientific explanations aside and accept that Marley is a ghost.

¹² That are exaggerated through comedy.

Scrooge and reform him, the four ghosts need to break his visual hegemony and subdue his forbidding gaze.¹³

In *A Christmas Carol*, the setting is a performative space where performing entities are vying for control. The competing performers also represent competing ideologies. In this sense, space becomes allegorical. This is why changes in the epistemological and moral positions of the main character are conveyed in terms of space. As a matter of fact, to reform him, the ghosts have to wrestle control of the performative space from the old miser. His resistance may be futile but it is quite telling about the theatrical nature of the novella.

Towards the middle of the story, Scrooge makes a desperate attempt to resist the idea of magic and regain control of his performing space. After waking up, “in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore” (Dickens 2006: 42), he tries to visually and imaginatively secure his space. He does not “wish to be taken by surprise, or made nervous” (42). After opening the curtains, he establishes “a sharp look out all around the bed” (42).¹⁴ The narrator then describes Scrooge as ready for anything “between a baby and rhinoceros” (42). In this scene, Scrooge tries to take control of his visual and imaginative space(s); he is watching every entry point to his room and has imagined every shape a ghost may assume.

However, the narrator soon shatters his horizon of expectations and ours:

Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing [and neither are we]; and, consequently, when the Bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. (Dickens 2006: 42)

This quotation reveals that the narrator is playing with the reader through Scrooge. When both Scrooge and the reader believe that they have grasped the pattern of the ghostly visitations, the narrator directs the narrative to an unexpected direction. The comedy that pervades the description of the scene further increases Scrooge’s vulnerability.¹⁵ By ridiculing him, the narrator divests anything that Scrooge says of any power. Similarly, the narrator strips the reader of his/her resistance through narration and comedy. Even if s/he happens to have similar ideas, s/he cannot take the side of the old miser without risking exposure to the same mockery. As a result, the readers end up suspending their disbelief and accepting the idea of magic.

To sap his confidence even further, the narrator has Scrooge removed from his bedroom — a space he controls. The ghost of Christmas present calls him to the living room. The protagonist recognizes it but fails to reclaim it from the ghost:

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove; from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. (Dickens 2006: 43)

¹³ This certainly cannot always be achieved through screaming.

¹⁴ He uses the power of his sharp forbidding gaze, which we tend to forget after the second ghostly visitation, for the last time.

¹⁵ The narrator describes Scrooge as waking in the middle of a snore that is described both as tough and prodigious. The choice of words is probably meant to ridicule the protagonist. Visualizing the scene, the reader can become aware of its comic nature.

The spirit of Christmas has dyed it with its own colors. It is visibly not Scrooge's. It no longer reflects his pale, colorless and glum personality. The ghost breaks the visual hegemony of Scrooge and claims his space. Defeated, Scrooge enters the room "timidly" (Dickens 2006: 43) obeying every instruction of the spirit. The powerplay of the scene¹⁶ reveals the importance of the visual in the conversion of Scrooge. It also evinces the intertwinement between visuality and power in the novella. Both Scrooge and the ghosts acquire and exert their power through vision — as perceivers or perceived.

In a 1994 article entitled "Spectacular Sympathy: Visuality and Ideology in *A Christmas Carol*", Audrey Jaffe describes the novella as "arguably Dickens' most visually evocative text" (254) and argues that spectatorship is central to its narrative structure. Jaffe tells us that spectatorship is "the mechanism of Scrooge's conversion" (Jaffe 1994: 254). Scrooge is made to watch scenes from the past, the present and the future. He is consigned to the role of the spectator and assaulted through the eyes. The ghosts direct his attention towards certain details of each scene. His "spectatorial" (and spectral) helplessness intensifies his emotional response to these scenes. Jaffe explains that by "projecting Scrooge's identity into past and future", (Jaffe 1994: 254) the ghosts play on his desire "with images of an idealized self" (254). Shattering his sense of security, the four ghosts subdue the skeptical old man and transform him.

Jaffe argues that *A Christmas Carol* exemplifies the visual culture of the time.¹⁷ The visual plays a central role in the worlds of *A Christmas Carol*. In terms of the plot, the transformation of Scrooge relies heavily on his reaction to the visual stimuli presented to him by the ghosts of Christmas. Moreover, in the nineteenth century, the novella was read in public for a number of years (since 1849). Dickens himself performed these public readings. In fact, the author invested much of his time and energy on those performances that his doctor advised him to stop performing public readings (Davis 2007: 591). The public readings were very successful that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert attended one of them in 1851 (though not a reading of *A Christmas Carol*¹⁸). Therefore, one may — not unjustifiably — feel tempted to imagine that Dickens may very likely have changed his voice and used gestures and facial expressions while delivering his public readings of the novella.

In addition, the novella has a disturbing visual history. There is a general awareness among publishers, critics, and readers of the centrality of the visual in the novella. It is a problematic issue in the novella. This is nowhere clearer than in the artistic responses to the first Ghost. Marley's ghost has always been a visual dilemma for many illustrators. For instance, in the first edition of *A Christmas Carol*, John Leech's depiction of Marley's ghost does not give him the appearance of "a common ghost". The striking materiality of the apparition in Leech's illustration makes the viewer almost forget that it has just passed through a closed door.¹⁹

¹⁶ Even if it is mitigated by the comic description of the ghost's appearance.

¹⁷ The novella displays a characteristic Victorian focus on the visual. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the spread of spectacles, exhibitions, and public demonstrations. This trending spectacularism culminated in the Great Exhibition of 1851, which the historian Jonathan Gardner (2008) describes as the first mega event of the modern era.

¹⁸ See Davis for more details on the readings.

¹⁹ His transparency is not complete. The materiality of his clothes and chains is contrasted to the immateriality of his body to show "how the subject becomes disembodied by attachment to wealth" (Smith 2005: 41)

Subsequent depictions of the scene in illustrated editions of the novella, films and other visual arts seem to have followed the model of Leech. He might disappear in thin air or even pass through closed doors, but the ghost of Marley seems material enough to convince Scrooge that he is indeed his former partner. Most visual depictions of Marley's Ghost seem to prioritize his mortal identity over his ghostliness. What seems to matter in the scene is that this is the ghost of Marley — even if he is not ghostly enough.

Prioritizing the identity of Marley's ghost over his ghostliness seems to be a very common readerly decision. The novella's description of the Ghost warrants this decision, because it emphasizes the Ghost's likeness to Marley. When he meets the first apparition, Scrooge is certain that he is:

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. (Dickens 2006: 17)

This description underscores the ghost's identity at the expense of his ghostliness. Everything about him seems real enough for Scrooge to identify him with his late partner. Curiously enough, Dickens uses the pronouns "he" and "him" to refer to the ghost of Marley while the other ghosts are referred to as "it."²⁰ This shows that the person embodied by the first apparition matters more than the nature of the embodiment.

In 2018, the critic and educator Elspeth Bracken conducted an experiment in which she asked four of her students to pick one of three depictions of Marley's ghost. Three of the four chose the image based on the details of the scene rather than the ghostliness of Marley's ghost. The only one that chose the image "because it was 'most like a ghost'" (Bracken 2018: 3) was later "perplexed and disappointed that the novella did not seem to fulfil all the conventions that she expected of a ghost story" (3). Marley does not seem to have convinced her as a ghost.

She and Scrooge certainly are not the only ones that do not see Marley's Ghost as ghostly. Many readers and audiences hardly remember him (as a ghost) after reading the novella. For many readers and adaptors of the novella, Marley hardly belongs to the magical world of the tale. They usually fail to answer the question: "how many ghosts visited Scrooge?" (Orford 2014: 145). Indeed, they "would automatically answer three, forgetting the fourth visitor Jacob Marley" (145). This attitude to the first "ghost" is reflected in many adaptations of the novella where "Marley's appearance is only a brief scene, or left out altogether" (145).

While it is Marley who introduces Scrooge to the realm of magic, he is still too worldly to belong to the magical universe of the tale. This is why his absence in some adaptations of the story is not very noticeable — he "is left behind in the nineteenth century" (Orford 2014: 145). The protagonist and the readers forget Marley and accept the magical world of the novella as real. They experience what neuroscientists call "inattentional blindness" (Macknick et al. 2008: 873). They concentrate on the ghost's identity and fail to notice his lack of ghostliness.

²⁰ This choice is observed throughout this paper.

Despite his glaring materiality, Marley's ghost fails to linger in the memory of the reader. Although he forces Scrooge to believe him, he remains an illusion and fails to achieve complete ghostliness. Like Scrooge, the readers tend to forget Marley as soon as he disappears (or dies in the case of Scrooge). The novella answers the question of what the ghost makes "visible" by asking the more relevant question of what makes a ghost visible and ghostly enough to haunt the text and the reader's memory. Marley's materiality and temporality are hardly the answer.

Unlike Marley, the spirits of Christmas may represent time but they transcend it. They are too close to the readers to be confined to a single time. In this vein, Orford remarks that "the spirits embody Christmas and all time, and in doing so it is easier for the reader or adapter to connect them to the relevance of their own lives" (Orford 2014: 145). The ghost story transcends its time. This is why Marley with his typical nineteenth century attachment to his material possessions cannot be a ghost. This does not entail that there are only three ghosts in the novella. There are still four ghosts but Marley is not one of them.

Of the three Christmas ghosts that visit Scrooge, the last one is the ghostliest. It is less substantial than the other three ghosts and more related to death. It gives Scrooge — and through him the reader — the ultimate ghostly experience of the novella. Not only does the ghost represent the idea of the future as the unknown, but also it — probably more interestingly but less visibly — introduces us to the ultimate ghost of the novella, Scrooge himself.

Andrew Smith maintains that in capitalistic societies, subjects do not realize the "insubstantiality of wealth" (Smith 2005: 41) until they "become ghosts" (41). Naturally, therefore, the final stage of Scrooge's moral conversion involves transforming him into a ghost and presenting him to the reader as such. In the stave about Christmas future, the ghost presents Scrooge with the scene of thugs conspiring to rob the forlorn corpse of a wealthy man. Scrooge assumes the corpse to be his own. This assumption makes him a ghost watching his own corpse being defiled after death.

The ghostly experience of the protagonist culminates in his experiencing of what it means to be a ghost helplessly watching his earthly body and material possessions being robbed and defiled. The image of the first ghost now hovers around the protagonist. Although neither Scrooge nor the reader remember Marley, he is invisibly present in their consciousness — or better their consciences. Scrooge now has to embody the spirit of Christmas to save himself from the fate of Marley.

Throughout the process of Scrooge's transformation, the readers experience "change blindness" (Macknick et al. 2008: 873). While focusing on the transformation of Scrooge into a philanthropic person, the readers may pay little attention to another more tacit transformation — that takes place gradually throughout the novella. It is the transformation of the protagonist into a ghost. Scrooge does not lose the spectral touch²¹ of the final visitation even as he returns to the "real" world. The awakened — or resurrected — philanthropic spirit of Christmas in Scrooge startles everyone around him — none more than poor Bob Cratchit. At the end of the novella, neither Scrooge nor the reader questions the genuineness of the ghostly experience. The only ghost whose shape is questionable (Marley's ghost)

²¹ In a certain sense, Scrooge has always been "a spectral figure" (Chitwood 2015: 675), but he transforms from a forbidding material illusion to a real spirit that can linger in the memory of the characters and the readers of the novella (in a sense, he is transformed into the right kind of ghost).

is forgotten. The “hilarious”²² spectacularity of the final stage of Scrooge’s transformation may not allow the reader to remember the gradual nature of the process. This intensifies the effect of change blindness.

In the preface to the novella, Dickens says that he wanted to “raise the Ghost of an idea” (Dickens 2006: 3). He successfully gives Christmas time a spirit that Scrooge embodies at the end of the story. He also — more tacitly — raises the idea of a ghost transforming his tale into a “Ghostly little book” (Dickens 2006: 3). In the course of the story, both the protagonist and the reader start to take the ghostliness of the tale for granted. The narrator gradually dispels the initial state of disbelief. While the declared intention of the author is usually understood as reviving the festive spirit of Christmas, another effect of the short story of Scrooge’s reformation is bypassing the unrelenting materialism and scientism of his time into the realm of magic and free imagination.

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²² A word that should be used despite its informality as it pertinently describes how sudden, inexplicable and surprising the transformation of Scrooge seems to the other characters and even to the readers who accompanied him on his spectral journey without noticing his gradually emerging ghostliness.

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