

## SWEDEBORG'S ENDURING INFLUENCE: THE RESURFACING OF HEAVEN AND HELL IN DICKENS'S *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

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The tale of Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens's story, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), begins with one of the most recognizable passages in English literature: "Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. . . . Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail" (1). At first glance, unsuspecting readers might consider these words as simply a striking and entertaining opening: the words themselves do not necessarily reveal the events to come. Readers revisiting *A Christmas Carol*, however, would surely recognize the foretelling implication of the lines in the comprehensive narrative of the text. With the very first words of his work, Dickens establishes a fact that must be accepted before readers encounter the story. He stresses that a man named Marley is very much deceased and legitimizes the claim through multiple witnesses: "The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change for anything he chose to put his hand to" (Dickens 1894, 1). In addition to four officials witnessing Marley's burial, Scrooge confirms it with his own signature.

If Scrooge's signature on the funeral register is not enough to prove his understanding of Marley's death, Scrooge's blunt practicality absolutely reinforces it: "Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise?" (Dickens 1894, 1). Scrooge's willing admittance of Marley's demise augurs his shock and then belief in the supernatural events that follow. Scrooge must admit that Marley is a spirit—for he knows full well that Marley cannot be alive, and because of this foundational understanding, a channel for Scrooge's belief is opened which would otherwise be stemmed. Dickens finalizes the groundwork for belief by echoing his first words: "There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to re-

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late" (Dickens 1894, 2). Readers may find Dickens's reiterations of Marley's death as redundant, but without this acknowledgment, *A Christmas Carol* unravels; rather than supernatural visitations, the haunting of the three spirits becomes simply an extraordinary dream. Within the first pages of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens overemphasizes Marley's death in order to establish the facticity of the spirit world and to remove the possibility that Marley's appearance in the text is simply a corporeal visit.

To date, many scholars approaching *A Christmas Carol* have taken the existence of the spiritual within the story as a matter of fact without considering the imaginative origin of the spirit world as an object of inquiry. They accept Dickens's inclusion of the supernatural without considering what may have inspired him to do so. Dickens's discussion of the spiritual realm in *A Christmas Carol* hearkens to the work of a well-known mystic and writer, Emanuel Swedenborg. In *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: From Things Heard and Seen* (1758), Swedenborg recounts his own experiences with beings of the spiritual state. He attests to direct interaction with otherworldly beings throughout a period of thirteen years (Swedenborg 1946, 3, § 1).<sup>2</sup> Swedenborgian theory circulated in his own country and abroad through the Romantic and Victorian eras, and the question of whether or not Dickens wrote under Swedenborgian influence motivates this study. The following letter from Dickens, written in 1841, if not suggesting an absolute knowledge of Swedenborg's writing, at least establishes that Dickens owned a copy or study of Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*:

Mr. Charles Dickens presents his Compliments to the Society for printing and publishing the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg; and begs to thank them cordially for their obliging communication, and for the copy of the work on Heaven and Hell, [*sic*] accompanying it. He begs to assure the Society that he will not "reject the book unexamined", (he is at present quite unacquainted with it, save from their description)—and that it shall have his most careful and attentive consideration. (Dickens 1969, 377)

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<sup>2</sup> Both page number, as well as paragraph number—that are the same in all editions—are given when citing from works by Emanuel Swedenborg as in this case: (Swedenborg 1946, 3, § 1).

In addition to Dickens's ownership of Swedenborg's formative text, Dickens also noted in an 1856 issue of his periodical, *Household Words*, that the "'New Jerusalem' Church was 'based on revelations claiming to be divine'" (qtd. in Whitehead, 545). Although Dickens's statement regarding the New Church appeared over a decade after the publication of *A Christmas Carol*, it provides reasonable evidence for Dickens's familiarity with Swedenborg's philosophy. It is entirely possible that the Swedenborgian Society's gifting of the copy of "the work on Heaven and Hell" might have initiated a philosophical undertaking and interest that extended years beyond Dickens's publication of *A Christmas Carol*.

The notable evidence indicating Dickens's possession of "the work on Heaven and Hell" and Dickens's later insinuated familiarity with Swedenborgian philosophy provides grounds for a comparative analysis of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*—his first Christmas story to represent the spirit world—and Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*—a text that closely outlines Swedenborg's own account of the spirit world. Both Dickens's and Swedenborg's texts include descriptive accounts of the existence of a spiritual dimension where spirits wander unseen. Within the worlds described by Dickens and Swedenborg, light and heat are physical manifestations: light portrays Divine truth, and heat demonstrates Divine goodness and love. A thorough examination of the portrayals and characteristics of spiritual beings within *Heaven and Hell* and *A Christmas Carol* reveals noteworthy similarities and further confirms Emanuel Swedenborg as one of the sources of inspiration for Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. These parallels could suggest a further influence of radical Swedenborgian religious theory on Dickens during a time period when the expected religious inspiration originated with the Church of England. A Swedenborgian influence on Dickens would also extend to a greater influence over the inhabitants of Victorian England, based on the extensive impact Dickens made through his own publications.

Existing scholarship in Victorian studies has asserted varying inspirations for Dickens's use of spirits as well as multiple explanations for the wider interest in Spiritualism in the Victorian period. Rather than referencing religious possibilities, researchers such as Joss Marsh, Helen Groth, and Peter Lamont reference the historical context of the Victorian era as the primary influence on Dickens. These scholars specifically reference the technological development of the camera and the fluctuations of scientific understanding,

such as the changing views of natural selection and evolution stimulated by Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of Species*. In her article, "Dickensian 'Dissolving Views': The Magic Lantern, Visual Story-Telling, and the Victorian Technological Imagination," Joss Marsh suggests the growing development of "dissolving views" with lanterns as one possible inspiration for the spirits. With a lantern's "dissolving views," individuals would attempt to make a smooth transition between two still picture frames, which created the illusion of images immediately appearing. This immediate manifestation, Marsh claims, directly contributed to the concept of the hauntings and the transportations to different scenes in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*; because of this, Marsh states that "*A Christmas Carol* is . . . lantern-derived" (Marsh 2009, 338). Marsh's argument runs parallel with Audrey Jaffe's interpretation of *A Christmas Carol* as a compilation of vivid "frames" that encourage spectator participation and empathy (Jaffe 1994, 255). Another scholar who has interpreted technology as the impetus for the appearance of spirits in Dickens's Christmas story is Helen Groth. Groth's research utilizes the idea of theatrical illusions in reference to the explanation and reenactment of paranormal events. Her study of Dickens's use of the spiritual in another of his Christmas stories, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*, references Dickens's preoccupation with memory and illusion as a credible source of inspiration and expounds on John Pepper's own use of theatrical illusion to create a stage adaptation of Dickens's Christmas story (Groth 2007, 54). The majority of the specters that haunt Scrooge mysteriously appear before him without any notice, and Scrooge witnesses a rapid transition between scenes in his past and in his present. These rapid transitions, according to Marsh, Jaffe, and Groth, are best explained through a historical study.

Whereas Marsh, Jaffe, and Groth explain the presence of ghosts in *A Christmas Carol* by focusing on the evolving technology using still frames or historical context, Peter Lamont and Jennifer Bann both emphasize Spiritualism as Dickens's inspiration. Lamont specifically examines the scientific climate of the period to explain the wider Victorian interest in paranormal events; namely, he explores the foundation for Spiritualism. Spiritualism, a religion revolving around intentional communication with the dead, became quite popular in the Victorian era; many scholars attribute the spread of this fascination to the growing religious dissention that characterized this period. Victorian citizens avoiding the traditional religious doctrines of the

established church may have sought answers to their curiosities in religions like Spiritualism. According to Lamont, however, the religious crisis in the Victorian era only encouraged the growing curiosity for Spiritualism. The Victorian interest in Spiritualism, specifically séance phenomena, increased as scientific minds failed to explain away supernatural occurrences (Lamont 2004, 899).

Jennifer Bann perhaps delves the furthest into the existing curiosity surrounding Spiritualism in Victorian Britain. Bann responds to the fascination for Spiritualism, and the consequent demonstration of the supernatural in Victorian ghost stories, in her article "Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Specter." Although Bann mentions *A Christmas Carol* solely in order to provide an example of early Victorian ghost stories, she distinctively associates the religious influence with the portrayal of spirits in Dickens's and other Victorian authors' works. The connection between ghost stories and Spiritualist influence in the Victorian era is demonstrated through Bann's observation that "Spiritualism's contribution to supernatural literature was not limited to the séance and all of its trappings; it helped to subtly transform the figure of the ghost, from the less-than-human apparitions of earlier narratives into the more-than-human characters of the later nineteenth century" (Bann 2009, 665). Her argument focuses on the observation that ghosts that appear throughout Victorian literature demonstrated fewer limitations as time progressed. She examines multiple ghost stories along the Victorian timeline that begin with the exhibition of powerless specters to ghosts capable of powerful intervention and action. The reference to Spiritualism in "Ghostly Hands" distinguishes this article from other Victorian scholarship about the inspiration for using spirits because of Bann's acknowledgment of religious influence. However, though Bann connects the Victorian fascination with the supernatural to the expansion of Spiritualist beliefs, she only briefly mentions the works of the philosopher who arguably influenced the development of Spiritualism the most: Emanuel Swedenborg. Bann joins a number of scholars and writers who attribute Spiritualism to the imagination of Swedenborg; the connection between Spiritualism and *A Christmas Carol* is established, but a direct influence from Swedenborg to Dickens is not explored. Although all of these articles provide legitimate explanations for the fascination surrounding the spiritual in the Victorian mindset and manifested in Dickens's work,

specifically *A Christmas Carol*, the majority overlook the possibility of the greater religious influence on Dickens's use of the spiritual. However, the dismissal of the radical religious exploration in Dickens's life as a source for the supernatural limits the extent of the conversation.

A description of the fluctuating religious beliefs in Victorian Britain necessitates a brief synopsis of the religious turbulence of the sixteenth century because this period of shifting belief effectively foreshadows the future religious instability of the Victorian era. The consecutive rules of Henry VIII and his children, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth, brought about the violent segregation of the Protestant and Catholic churches and the alternating persecutions of the two sects. Although Queen Elizabeth's unspoken pronouncement—kissing an English translation of the Bible—for a resurgence of the Reformation would bring about more religious placidity, England had experienced too much vacillation to remain untouched: a time period of merely twenty-five years, beginning with the cessation of Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon in 1533 and ending with Elizabeth I's coronation and silent affirmation of the Protestant faith in 1558, saw six changes in England's national religion that were often accompanied by violent persecution ("The Tudors"). The abrupt changes in national belief persisting through the reigns of the four British monarchs – Henry VIII, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth—certainly left the effects of religious confusion and doubt in the minds of the British people. What remained from this period of religious persecution was a propensity for religious dissent, so encouraged by the variations of belief demonstrated by the British monarchs, that would manifest itself in the preservation and growth of various religious factions, including "Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians and their Unitarian successors, Quakers, and Methodists," during the established dominion of the Church of England in the Victorian era (Helmstadter and Phillips 1985, 2).

Although remnants of the once dominant Roman Catholic faith persisted—a population of 679,067 Roman Catholic believers in England and Wales was recorded in 1851—the remaining Catholic followers only accounted for roughly four percent of the entire British and Welsh population in 1851 (Clark, 149). Within the Victorian time period, the government maintained the Church of England as the established church, and the support of the state was unquestionable: "There had developed since the Reformation

such a web of connections between the Church of England and the state that, after three centuries, the Church was considered by most Englishmen to be part of the apparatus of government" (Helmstadter and Phillips 1985, 49). Although the Church of England was politically and economically reinforced by the state, it was not so widely supported by British citizens. According to a religious census recorded in 1851, only fifty-two percent of the total population of regular church-goers in England and Wales attended Anglican services (Clark, 151). Because this census only included individuals who regularly attended religious services, the census for the Church of England—which barely exceeded half of the population—seems to indicate society's prominent dissatisfaction with this religious institution. In addition to this statistical representation, multiple works expressing a more vocal frustration with the Established Church were published. Texts like John Wade's *The Black Book: An Exposition of Abuses in Church and State*, published in the early 1830s, call for a more marked reforming of the Established Church and reveal a residual displeasure in the social abuses of the clergy within the Church of England (Wade 1985, 31). John Wade's voice, among others, insisted upon a religious revolution at the same time that other voices across England were crying for the disestablishment of other social, political, and religious injustices and false doctrines. Many works of the period expressed the existing inquiries concerning science, nature, society, and religion, such as Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, which brought about the theories of natural selection and evolution, or Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children," which prompted social restructuring beginning with the abolishment of child labor. A developing interest in Spiritualism through the Victorian time period, which was also reflected in various works of literature through the use of ghost stories, also became popularized through experimentation with mesmerism and a "plethora of séances, materializations, ectoplasm, and table-rappings" (Bann 2009, 664). Various Victorian ghost stories outlined in Bann's article—such as Brönte's *Wuthering Heights*, Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story," and Riddell's "Old Mrs. Jones"—all demonstrate a curiosity stemming from Spiritualism, making Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* one of many works influenced by this emergent mania (Bann *Ibid.*, 671). Radical religious beliefs diverging from Anglican doctrine, though discouraged by followers of the Established



Church, seemed to be widely correlated with the wider Victorian vogue of analyzing and challenging the rationales of popular conventions.

Victorian Britain was an encouraging environment for reform, and Charles Dickens was a well-known representative among many for social reform. His legacy is one of bringing social injustices like poverty and child labor to the attention of the public through his published works. One of Dickens's lesser known prejudices was against religious sectarianism and stringent denominationalism. In a discussion of Dickens's own religious beliefs, the question of whether or not he ultimately associated with a particular denomination has not been answered; most scholars write in a similar strain as Peter Ackroyd: "Dickens seems to possess a religious sensibility without any specific religious beliefs" (Ackroyd 1990, 505). While Dickens's spiritual preferences seemed as eclectic as his clothing choices, he was more than vocal about his religious aversions. Among the list of religions that Dickens criticized are the religions of the Dissenters, Nonconformists, Catholics, Anglo-Catholics, and Anglicans. True to his eccentric nature, Dickens strayed from accepted norms and paved his own religious path. For a time, Dickens regularly attended Unitarian services on Little Portland Street, and while on his tour of America, he listened to the sermon of Edward Taylor, a Methodist minister whose sermons catered specifically to sailors (Ibid.; Dickens 1913, *American Notes*, n.p.). Because he experimentally attended religious services in several denominations, Dickens must have been familiar with a wide variety of doctrines; however, rather than associating with an exclusive religious order, he seemed to sift through various theologies for beliefs that matched his own religious sentiment.

The unsettled religious question in Dickens's consciousness is observed through Dickens's own account of one of his disquieting dreams. Specifically, Dickens's dream reveals a troubled introspection concerning the possibility of only one veritable religious sect: in the dream he was visited by the form of his deceased sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, and he demanded of the figure, "What is the True religion? You think, as I do, that the Form of religion does not so greatly matter, if we try to do good? Or perhaps the Roman Catholic is the best? Perhaps it makes one think of God oftener, and believe in him more steadily?" (Dickens, qtd. in Ackroyd 1990, 439). Dickens's words betray his confusion about which true religious denomination was the right one. However, he seemed to resolve this conundrum by



selecting religious beliefs that he accepted as true from various doctrines, rather than accepting one specific creed or belief system. Dickens's uncanny ability to absorb and "effortlessly recall the visual details and elaborations" (Ackroyd 1990, 15) of the scenes around him, may have contributed to his penchant for focusing on the more interesting facets of different religious denominations and essentially picking and choosing pieces that he found more interesting. As one interpretation, Dickens's tendency for religious syncretism may have influenced the way he read the work he received from the Swedenborg society. Even if Dickens did not agree completely with Swedenborg's theology, at the least he might have been imaginatively compelled by Swedenborg's radical doctrine. His powerful memory may have further contributed to an unconscious preservation of the elements of written works he encountered. If Dickens read "the work on Heaven and Hell," as he claimed he would do, the vivid descriptions within it may have increased the chance of Dickens storing away pieces of Swedenborg's theology within his own unconscious.

Emanuel Swedenborg's first publications were greeted positively in his country because they paralleled his original studies in scientific inquiry. However, with Swedenborg's change in study, his writings were more often met with rejection. When Swedenborg felt called by God to pursue religious studies, his radical accounts were met with extreme hostility from multiple religious leaders. Religious authorities, like Bishop Filenius, the president of the Swedish House of Clergy and Swedenborg's own nephew, referred to Swedenborg's theology as an "abominable infection which is not grounded in sound reason, and still less in God's Holy Word, but consists of untruthful visions and dreams...most infamous and untruthful nonsense" (qtd. in Trobridge 1949, 211; Wilkinson 1849, 189). Swedenborg's works deviated so widely from accepted doctrine that even his advocates were punished. However, despite the initial objection to Swedenborg's theological texts, the works continued to be published and a following continued to grow.

*Heaven and Hell*, one of Swedenborg's most well-known publications, indicates the controversial variances from traditional Christian doctrines, such as those taught in the Church of England:

*Heaven and Hell* presents a succinct digest of many of the key elements of Swedenborg's theology, including his teaching that heaven has the struc-

ture of a human being . . . the doctrine of heavenly marriage . . . and the idea that the earth is a proving ground for the human soul, which after death gravitates strictly toward whatever its ruling passion . . . was in life and thus tends toward heaven or toward hell . . . after an interval in the intermediate world of spirits. (Rose, Shotwell, and Bertucci 2005, 32).

Dickens's own religious instruction in the Established Church and briefly in the Baptist church may have stimulated an involuntary negative response to some of Swedenborg's more radical theories (Ackroyd 1990, 43–44). However, Dickens's own inner curiosity for the otherworldly may have prompted him to continue studying Swedenborg's accounts of the intermediate spirit world regardless of any initial aversion (Ibid., 359). If Dickens had attempted to keep his fascination for the paranormal secret, he was unsuccessful. One of Dickens's closest friends, John Forster once remarked, "Such was his interest generally in things supernatural, that, but for the strong restraining power of his common sense, he might have fallen into the follies of spiritualism" (Forster, qtd. in Ackroyd 1990, 359). Popularly, Swedenborg's works have often been considered as a cornerstone of the Spiritualist movement. Scholars, such as Bret E. Carroll and J. Stillson Judah, have posited that the Spiritualist movement and others like it "incorporated teachings from Swedenborg's theological works in the fundamental suppositions of their systems" (Rose, Shotwell, and Bertucci 2005, 220). If anything, "the work on Heaven and Hell" would have fed Dickens's already existing curiosity for the spirit world. Although it may not directly relate to this study, it is also worth noting that Swedenborg's philosophies have also been attributed to the Anti-Slavery and Transcendentalist movements: two specific movements with which Dickens publicly associated himself (Ibid., 202–210; Dickens 1913, *American Notes*, n.p.). In more ways than one, Dickens and Swedenborg demonstrate similar belief systems.

To understand the correspondences between Dickens's and Swedenborg's texts, further explanation of Swedenborg's beliefs on the intermediate spirit world (his "world of spirits") between heaven and hell is required. Swedenborg describes the spirit world as a place that is located between heaven and hell; the two places could be described as existing in a tier system with heaven at the uppermost level, hell at the lowest level, and the spirit world in the middle (Rose, Shotwell, and Bertucci 62). Although

various dimensions of existence are not initially described in *Heaven and Hell*, Swedenborg describes that there are “spirits and angels . . . from other earths,” which suggests existing spirit realms on various planets in his work *The Earths in the Universe* (Swedenborg 1915, *The Earths*, 401). If related to the familiar belief that Earth[s] is physically located between heaven and hell, spirits in the intermediate world would perhaps inhabit the same space with the living. However, in Swedenborg’s own theology he distinguishes between the spirit and natural worlds, stating that “There are two worlds . . . one in which all things are spiritual, which is therefore called the spiritual world, and the other in which all things are natural, and thence is called the natural world; and that spirits and angels live in their own world, and men in theirs” (Swedenborg 1915, *The Soul*, 324–25; § 2). Because Swedenborg details that men are able to commune with spirits, which suggests a close proximity, the distinction between the worlds may only be explained in terms of cognizant awareness. In *The Earths in the Universe*, Swedenborg writes, “he whose interiors are opened by the Lord, may speak with them [spirits] as man with man; which has been granted me now for twelve years daily” (Swedenborg 1915, 401–402; § 1). Spirits live in their own world due to the fact that men are not often aware of their presence, yet Swedenborg’s own recorded experience insinuates men may see spirits, which implies that distance is not the distinguishing category of the two worlds. Supporting this conclusion is Swedenborg’s statement that there is a lack of conscious awareness concerning the fact that men are able to converse with spirits from other worlds and that men, angels, and spirits wander the earth (Swedenborg 1915, *The Earths* 402; §§ 2,3). This image is compatible with Swedenborg’s doctrine: he claims that it is possible for human beings to witness spirits wandering in the spirit world; however, most people are not able to see spirits because they lack the capacity of spiritual sight. Spirits are of a supernatural nature, and one must have spiritual sight to see them. According to Swedenborg, a human being’s material organs—like eyes—can only perceive elements of the material world (*Heaven and Hell* 274; § 453). With some of Swedenborg’s basic theological principles concerning the intermediate world of spirits in mind, and in consideration of Dickens’s own assurance to study Swedenborg’s philosophies, specific comparisons can be made between *A Christmas Carol* and *Heaven and Hell*.

*A Christmas Carol* follows Scrooge, a coldhearted miser, as he is haunted by the spirit of his old partner, Marley, and three other ghosts on Christmas Eve. The Ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet To Come reveal elements of Scrooge's own life that molded him into the man he is and warn him of the eventual outcome should he refuse to change. The hauntings occur within one night, and Scrooge's fate rests on his ability to admit his own shortcomings and accept the lessons in love and charity that the spirits give him. Predating this opportunity for redemption, Scrooge's physical characteristics betray the hardness within him. He is described as a man who has been frozen by his own cold bitterness and lack of benevolence, and Scrooge maintains this coldness around him at every moment (Dickens 1894, 2). Swedenborg similarly compares an absence of love in a person's life to coldness. This perception, that man "grows warm from the presence of love and cold from its absence," perfectly aligns with Scrooge's condition at the outset of *A Christmas Carol*, when he demonstrates his heartlessness in such ways as suggesting that the poor "had better do it [die], and decrease the surplus population," rather than becoming an even greater strain on the pocketbooks of the working citizens in society (Ibid., 7). The symbolism of coldness attributed to an absence of kindness is a familiar one, but both Dickens and Swedenborg take this symbol literally and describe beings as growing physically colder when they refuse to experience and share love. In *A Christmas Carol*, there is a physical manifestation of Scrooge's heartlessness: "The cold within him froze his old features . . . made his eyes red, his thin lips blue . . . A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin" (Ibid., 2). Although this depiction could be attributed to creative characterization, further parallels between Dickens's and Swedenborg's works seem too similar to be coincidence.

The similarity between the two texts continues with Scrooge's reaction to Marley's first appearance. With the unassisted ringing of the bells in Scrooge's abode, the boom of a slamming door, and the sound of clanking chains, Marley's ghost appears before Scrooge. Scrooge immediately reacts in recognition of the spirit, which correlates with Swedenborg's theory: "The form of the spirit is the human form. . ." (Swedenborg 1946, 274; § 454); [and] "When the spirit of man first enters the world of spirits . . . his face and his tone of voice resemble those he had in the world" (Ibid., 278, § 457). However, although Scrooge does admit to recognizing Marley's

face, he must still ask who the being before him is, which leads readers to question whether or not any change has occurred in Marley's appearance or if Scrooge is simply shocked (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 12). Although this may be as an exclamation of surprise and disbelief, it may also be in reference to Swedenborg's words: "subsequently, his [a spirit's] face is changed, and becomes in conformity with which the interiors of his mind had been while he was in the world" (Swedenborg 1946, *Heaven and Hell*, 278; § 457). If Marley's visage had altered to reflect the absolute greed and coldness he held in life but might have hidden beneath a mask of civility, it may have taken on slightly less recognizable appearance than Scrooge would have recalled when Marley was living.

Supplementing the accounts relating Scrooge's initial response to seeing Marley's ghost, the very description of the ghost recalls Swedenborg's claims in *Heaven and Hell*. After establishing that the figure before him is the spirit of Marley, Scrooge's previous business partner, Scrooge addresses the chain that circles around Marley's waist and trails behind him. Marley's eerie response, "I wear the chain I forged in life," is followed by an even more chilling series of questions: "Is its pattern strange to *you*? . . . Or would you know . . . the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it since. It is a ponderous chain!" (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 14). The transgression, centered around greed, that consumed Marley in life cannot be ignored by him or those who witness him, for it is physically bound to him after death. Similarly, Swedenborg writes, "In a word, to each evil spirit all his evils, villainies, robberies, artifices, and deceits are made clear, and are brought forth from his very memory, and his guilt is fully established; nor is there any possible room for denial, because all the circumstances are exhibited together" (Swedenborg 1946, *Heaven and Hell*, 284; § 462 [8]). In Dickens's own interpretation, the exhibition of Marley's sins appears in the form of a weighty chain that is made entirely of "cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel" (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 12). Dickens's reference to a fetter that is forged through the actions and choices one makes in life and destined to be tied to that person after death seems to be a direct reference to other specific passages in *Heaven and Hell*, in which Swedenborg outlines the concept of "ruling love[s]," or objects—either physical or figurative—that

most strongly occupy the attention of an individual (Swedenborg 1946, 297; § 477). These ruling loves play a principal role in a person's life on earth and beyond the grave, for these loves are the foundation of a person's perceived purpose. Swedenborg writes, "Their [spirits'] love is like a bond or a rope tied around them, by which they may be led and from which they cannot loose themselves" (Ibid., 298; § 479 [3]). Swedenborg references a tether around an individual's waist from which they are eternally bound, and Dickens creates a strikingly visual representation by describing Marley's own chain. Scrooge not only observes the material representation of Marley's ruling love, but he witnesses a scene of the spirit world beyond Marley's existence: "The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost . . . none were free" (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 17). Swedenborg's description of ruling loves acting like tethers, binding spirits specifically around the waist, is particularly striking when compared to *A Christmas Carol*, for Marley's ghost exhibits his own ruling love: money. Marley's ghost also alludes to Scrooge's yet unseen tether. Marley and Scrooge seem to share the same ruling love—or master-passion. This is emphasized at a later point in the novel when Scrooge's potential lover states that she has been replaced with another "idol . . . a golden one;" she furthers this observation by noting, "I have seen your [Scrooge's] nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the *master-passion*, Gain engrosses you [emphasis added]" (Ibid., 31). According to Marley, Scrooge's fate is destined to be the same as Marley's if he does not choose to reexamine his life and change his ways.

In addition to the similarities arising with the physical description of Marley and Scrooge, portions of Swedenborg's philosophy concerning the religious importance of charity may be manifested in Marley's speeches. Both authors reference "spheres" in relation to man. For instance, Swedenborg writes, "There are spiritual spheres of life emanating from and surrounding every angel and every spirit, by which their quality in respect to the affection of their love [ruling love / object of attention] is known" (Swedenborg 1946, *Heaven and Hell*, 11; § 17). Similarly, Marley cries out, "Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed . . . not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness" (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*,

15). Marley's expresses his grief over failed opportunities to demonstrate charity by recalling, "The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were, all, my business" (Ibid., 16). In such quotations, Dickens reveals through the mouths of his characters the fundamental role that charity plays in his concept of religion.

In this work, Dickens creates a unique fate for those who refused to demonstrate charity in life; they are cursed to wander the earth and indefinitely witness acts of charity that they can no longer partake in. One of Marley's most striking exclamations is as follows: "It [a spirit that was not charitable in life] is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!" (Ibid., 14). This viewpoint may be an adaptation of Swedenborg's own theology: individuals who have "withdrawn from the life of charity, which life can be lived only in the midst of the world . . . are incapable of being affiliated with angels, because the life of angels is a life of joy resulting from a state of blessedness, and consists in performing good deeds, which are works of charity" (Swedenborg 1846, *Heaven and Hell*, 346; § 535). In both cases, those lacking charity are prevented from being a part of charitable acts and partaking in the joy charity reaps. Dickens's thoughts certainly resonate in a similar strain with Swedenborg's emphasis on the enormity of charity. Swedenborg's views on charity were strong enough to compel him to write an entire text titled *Charity*. In reference to charity, Swedenborg states, "Essential Divine worship . . . [consists] in a life of love, *charity*, and faith [emphasis added]" (Ibid., 119; § 222). In this way, Swedenborg expresses that the path to Heaven is not determined by church attendance; rather, a truly Christian life is marked by actions of authentic love. Swedenborg also writes concerning charity that "every good that a man does to the neighbour is of charity, or is charity," and that those in heaven are "forms of love and charity" (Swedenborg, *Charity*, 7; *Heaven and Hell*, 11, § 17). The emphasis on charity was a popular motif in the Victorian era, and was also echoed in the Unitarian church, the church with which Dickens seemed to most strongly relate (Ackroyd, 387). Although charity was a well-known concern in Victorian Britain, published philosophers with emphases on charity, such as Swedenborg, may have helped to contribute to the development of this preoccupation in the Victorian mindset.



Beyond the initial haunting of Marley's ghost, which still resembles Marley's former living self, are the hauntings by the spirits revealing past, present, and future Christmases in Scrooge's life. At the stroke of one in the morning, "light flashe[s] up in the room upon the instant," and Scrooge comes face to face with his bygone Christmases (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 20). The most appropriate symbol for the Ghost of Christmas Past is also its most prominent feature: light. Scrooge describes the spirit as having "a bright clear jet of light" springing from the top of its head that illuminates the spaces around it (Ibid., 21). More important than the mere description of a being of light is the symbolism that it suggests. This particular Spirit haunts Scrooge in order to show him visions of his past and to illuminate the errors Scrooge made in his past. To put more succinctly, the purpose of this Spirit is to reveal the truth.

The Spirit transports Scrooge to crucial moments of Christmases past, instances of Scrooge's past include when he enjoyed a festive dance with the perfect example of a generous businessman (Fezziwig) or when Scrooge chose the love of money over the love of his former fiancé (Ibid., 27–31). At these moments, Scrooge is struck with different emotions, including joy, despair, and fury. When Scrooge is forced to reckon with the blunders that he made in his past that negatively affected his future, Scrooge becomes enraged, which reflects a very human reaction to the unpleasantness of harsh realities or truths. When the Spirit's "light [is] burning high and bright," and when the truth of his past becomes much too bright for Scrooge to bear, he takes the cap that the Spirit carries and attempts to extinguish the truth (Ibid., 34). However, Scrooge discovers the impossibility of quenching absolute truth, for even when Scrooge exerts every bit of his effort to force the cap to cover the whole of the Spirit, "he [cannot] hide the light, which stream[s] from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground" (Ibid., 34). As much as Scrooge attempts to mask or conceal the light that revealed truth emits, it still exists and streams out from beneath its covering.

The comparison between light and truth is specifically emphasized throughout *Heaven and Hell*. Swedenborg makes a definite connection between light and truth when he states, "Divine truth . . . is compared to light" and "the truth itself is likewise called light" (Swedenborg 1946, 9, 72; §§ 13, 130). Although light often symbolizes truth because of the sense of illumination (shed light) a person experiences after understanding the

truth of a matter, the comparison usually stops at the analogy. However, both Swedenborg and Dickens supersede basic comparison by specifically depicting a physical manifestation of light in supernatural beings who symbolize absolute truth. Dickens repeatedly describes the “light that [shines] out of the Ghost of Christmas Past,” and Swedenborg explains, “As Divine truth is light in the heavens, so all truths wherever they are, whether within an angel or outside of him, or whether within the heavens or outside of them, *emit light* [emphasis added]” (Dickens 1894, 30; Swedenborg *Heaven and Hell*, 74; § 132). Both works describe physical emissions of light from otherworldly beings that are characterizations of veracity, and just as Scrooge attempts to hide himself from the pain that the truth brings him, in Swedenborg’s text, those who are not accustomed to righteous love and light “shun that light [of heaven] and hide themselves in dens and caverns” (Swedenborg 1946, *Heaven and Hell* 302, § 481 [4]).

The likeness between physical descriptions, specifically in the garments, of the spirits in *A Christmas Carol* and *Heaven and Hell* is also worth notice. The clothing of the Ghost of Christmas Past is described as “a tunic of the purest white,” and Swedenborg depicts angelic spirits as being clothed in “garments that glisten as if with light . . . garments that are glistening white,” where the extent of the brightness and color “correspond[s] to their intelligence...[and] correspond[s] also to truth” (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 21; Swedenborg 1946, *Heaven and Hell*, 96; § 178). Just as the Ghost of Christmas Past, the personification of the truth in Scrooge’s history, is clothed in white garments and radiates a bright light, the illumined spirits that are characterized by truth in *Heaven and Hell* wear radiant garments.

In the brief twenty pages that contain Scrooge’s interaction with the Ghost of Christmas Present, references to a *torch*, *fire*, and *blaze* are made thirty-three times, or an average of over one and a half times per page. In the succinct six pages describing the Christmas events for the Cratchit family, the references to fire number sixteen times. The multitude of references to heat and flame do not seem to be a coincidence, for at the very initiation of this haunting, Dickens makes sure to associate the Ghost of Christmas Present with this fiery element. After the stroke of two, Scrooge’s attention is drawn to a “blaze of ruddy light,” and he follows the light to its source: a Spirit sitting next to “a mighty blaze . . . roaring up the chimney,” reclining on a throne formed of a plentiful feast, and holding aloft “a glowing torch, in

a shape not unlike Plenty's horn" (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 35–36). Whereas the Ghost of Christmas Past is personified by light, the Ghost of Christmas Present is personified by the heat of fire and the light that is produced from it.

In the same way that light is related to truth in *Heaven and Hell*, heat is related to goodness: "Divine good, which is compared to heat, is the good of love" and "the good of love corresponds to fire; therefore in the spiritual sense fire is love" (Swedenborg 1946, 9, 66; §§ 13, 118). Swedenborg further creates this connection by stating, "The heat of heaven constitute the life of their will, because that heat is Divine good and Divine love therefrom. The veriest life of the angels is from heat, and from light only so far as heat is in it . . . and the good that is called good of love is heat" (Ibid., 76; § 136). Just as heat and fire are associated with goodness in Swedenborg's text, Dickens associates the "good Spirit" of Christmas Present with warmth, love, and goodness. Scrooge refers to the Ghost of Christmas Present as "the good Spirit . . . [exhibiting] his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men" (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 41). Swedenborg and Dickens both create a physical manifestation of goodness through the reference to flame and heat. In *A Christmas Carol*, it is not just in the Ghost of Christmas Present's person that goodness and heat are manifested, but in his physical surroundings. The Ghost of Christmas Present conveys Scrooge to multiple homes in which the aura of goodness is apparent, such as the home of the Cratchits and Scrooge's nephew Fred. In each of the places visited, families are gathered around a fire and a corporate feeling of warmth and gladness pervades, and the Ghost of Christmas Present blesses the inhabitants by sprinkling an unknown substance from his torch on them that only magnifies the goodness and joy they experience (Ibid., 39).

In addition to the thirty-three references to flames in the section featuring the Ghost of Christmas Present, Dickens fills nearly four whole pages with descriptions of food. Whether it be of the throne of "turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat . . . mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters . . . twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch" that the Ghost of Christmas Present initially reclines on; the Cratchits' Christmas goose and flaming pudding; or the contents of Grocers' stalls, Dickens spends an inordinate amount of space vividly describing food in the third "stave" of

this story (Ibid., 36). The images of plenty permeate this chapter, and the Spirit's torch is specifically related to "Plenty's horn." A similar observation can be derived from the text of *Heaven and Hell*: Swedenborg writes that goodness and truth, and so warmth and light, are inseparably conjoined. The combination of heat and light is also directly connected to vitality: "By the world's heat when conjoined with light, as in spring and summer, all things on the earth are quickened and grow" (Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 77; § 136). The plenty surrounding the Ghost of Christmas Present recalls a bountiful harvest, the product of quickening growth. In fact, the very person of the Ghost of Christmas Present seems to be surrounded with growing life that can only be related to the season of spring; he is robed in a mantle or cloak of "deep green" (the color most associated with life) and he is surrounded "with living green, that . . . [looks] a perfect grove" (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 36–37). The Ghost of Christmas Present, in his palpable vitality, seems to be the perfect representation of the organic combination of goodness and light that is described by Emanuel Swedenborg in *Heaven and Hell*.

The strength of comparative descriptions between *A Christmas Carol* and *Heaven and Hell* ceases with the account of the Ghost of Christmas Present; this seems to be as a result of Dickens's own creative license. Swedenborg asserts in his works that heavenly and good spirits physically portray their inner goodness, and only spirits of evil would appear dark or disturbing; however, Dickens chooses to demonstrate the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come as an eerie being; he may have chosen to dress this spirit in such a way to symbolize the darkness of what Scrooge's future might have been without the intervention of the spirits. Though the comparison between *A Christmas Carol* and *Heaven and Hell* cease with the description of the Ghost of Christmas Present, the lessons that the two Spirits strive to teach Scrooge resonate with Swedenborg's theology. At the climax of the hauntings, ending with the unnerving presence of the mute Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come, Scrooge sees what appears to be an unchangeable destiny in the vision of his name etched on a gravestone at the head of a neglected burial site. Scrooge implores this Spirit, "Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of the things that May be, only?" (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 68). Although Scrooge begs for the chance to change his fate, that of being forgotten by the living and wandering eternally in chains, this

miserable destiny seems finite as the Spirit unfalteringly points at the grave. However, Scrooge falls to his knees and cries, “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. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!” (Ibid., 69). As he is begging for his life, the image of the phantom dissipates, and he finds himself back in his own room. His first act of charity is to buy the Cratchits an enormous goose for their Christmas meal, which he advances by increasing Bob Cratchit’s salary. These acts of generosity and kindness proliferate to the point that Scrooge is described later as becoming “as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world” (Ibid., 75). Because Scrooge takes to heart the truth and goodness that the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future reveal to him, he is able to avoid Marley’s unfortunate fate. Scrooge’s change in character, which certainly demonstrates Dickens’s larger religious beliefs, perfectly synchronizes with Swedenborg’s concluding thoughts on the pathway to Heaven:

The life that leads to heaven is not a life withdrawn from the world, but a life in the world; and that a life of piety separated from a life of charity; which is possible only in the world, does not lead to heaven; but a life of charity does; and a life of charity consists in acting honestly and justly in every employment, in every business, and in every work, from . . . a heavenly motive. (*Heaven and Hell*, 347; § 535 [3])

There is a slight and very subtle distinction between Swedenborg’s religious observation and popular Christian doctrine that is worth noting. A Christian might claim that an individual who accepts Jesus Christ’s sacrifice as a saving grace is heaven-bound and living a life of charity is simply as an outcome of a changed heart and a desire to emulate God: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good” (New King James, Luke 6:45a). Furthermore, after becoming a Christian, if an individual lived piously—but not necessarily charitably—he would still be allowed into heaven based on his profession of faith; however, he would not receive as much reward as a Christian who lived piously *and* charitably. Swedenborg swerves from this general religious interpretation by placing a more

distinctive emphasis on true charity by labeling it as a means of leading to heaven rather than as a result of conversion.

Though Scrooge's redemption is deemed unbelievable and even absurd by those who were long witness to his previously coldhearted character—"Some people laughed to see the alteration in him" (Dickens 1894, *A Christmas Carol*, 75)—Scrooge nevertheless continues in his newfound life of charity. In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens focuses on the spiritual importance of kindness and charity and is vague concerning religious doctrine, which represents his supposition that "the Form of religion does not so greatly matter, if we try to do good" (Dickens, qtd. in Ackroyd, 439). Unlike traditional religious philosophers, Swedenborg would most likely confirm Dickens's belief: after his turn in interests from the scientific to religious, he stopped attending church services. Swedenborg's gardener and the gardener's wife questioned Swedenborg's Christianity on the basis that he did not attend church; however, when challenged by Swedenborg to examine his life, neither could not deny his Christianity (Rose, Shotwell, and Bertucci, 45). Swedenborg's focus was to live a life of goodness stemming from a heart intent on serving God and others, and based on Dickens's life and works, Dickens seemed to echo Swedenborg's larger philosophy of what it meant to be a Christian.

Based on Dickens's preoccupation with finding one true and sacred religious doctrine and combined with Dickens's established curiosity for elements of a supernatural nature, the presentation of "the work on Heaven and Hell" to Dickens may have opened the door to a great impact on Dickens's life and work. The strong comparisons of the spirits and the similarity of theology between *A Christmas Carol* and *Heaven and Hell* that suggest Swedenborg's direct influence in Dickens's work only reinforces this argument. Although this research focuses on one of Dickens's works, *A Christmas Carol*, the possibility of an overarching influence from Swedenborg throughout Dickens's entire oeuvre is a strong one. Further research may reveal pieces of Swedenborg's philosophy in Dickens's other works; such an influence would prompt a reexamination of the magnitude of Swedenborg's philosophical impact in Victorian Britain. If Dickens's work is truly an exhibition of the Victorian sympathy and if Dickens was indeed giving a kind of fictional form to Swedenborgian philosophy in his publications, then Swedenborg's religious tenets may have had a heavier impact in

this age then scholars may have previously considered. If this is the case, Swedenborg's doctrine should also be more widely acknowledged as a significant influence over the Victorian mindset.

If in fact Dickens kept his promise to make "the work on Heaven and Hell" an object of study, then factors of comparison—Marley's speeches and chains, Scrooge's appearance and the lesson in charity he undergoes, the Ghost of Christmas Past's description as a being of light to symbolize truth, and the Ghost of Christmas Present's association with fire and heat to symbolize goodness—become salient indicators of Swedenborg's direct influence in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. If Swedenborg's theology is not directly alluded to in Dickens's holiday work, it still provides relevant explanation for many of Dickens's most striking images and descriptions.

At the time that Dickens published this story, the Church of England was considered fully established; however, it did not have as prominent a following as would be expected of a national religious institution. The Victorians inherited a religious confusion from their ancestors in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and it culminated not only in the initiation of different religious sects and vacillating views on the definition of true religion but also in the critical analyses of such matters as politics, social justice, and science. Dickens was a child of the Victorian sentiment; he demonstrated discontent with multiple religious institutions and chose instead to adopt doctrines that suited his own understanding of true Christian behavior. Because Swedenborg's beliefs about the way that leads to Heaven align with Dickens's broad understanding that it is more important for one to be good than to conform to the structure of one specific denomination, Dickens may have been apt to refer to Swedenborg texts for spiritual guidance. If Dickens was impacted by Swedenborg enough to include pieces of *Heaven and Hell* in *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens may have continued to study more of Swedenborg's numerous works. If this was the case, Dickens's own impact on the Victorian culture through his published works would suggest a proliferation of Swedenborg's theology among the individuals who came into contact with Dickens's works, not only in Victorian Britain but across the world. The similarities between *A Christmas Carol* and *Heaven and Hell* call for a closer examination of Dickens's corpus to discover further evidence of Swedenborgian inspiration; however, at this juncture, the evidence provided suggests a distinct possibility that Dickens was directly influenced by



Swedenborg. The possibility of Dickens's adopting Swedenborgian tenets augurs an unobserved but tangible Swedenborgian influence that would have permeated Victorian society and would legitimate the placement of Emanuel Swedenborg among the distinguished influences of the Victorian era. □

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