

Aside: The Christmas Carol Paradox

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As long as I can remember, I've watched the [George C. Scott version of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol](#) on Christmas Eve. It was a practice that started with my father (it is his personal favorite video version of the classic tale) that I chose to continue for my own purposes. I guess it's become something of a tradition. I've held an evolving perspective to it over the years, starting from my initial terror at the horroresque version of the ghost of Christmas future that it portrays and as of late I've considered the emotional aloofness of the ghost of Christmas past to be something of a nuisance. Both elements are appropriate to the story and the version, but they have hit me differently depending on what phase I am in with my personal life.

My favorite perspective on A Christmas Carol itself is what I call The Christmas Carol Paradox. A paradox is a seemingly absurd proposition that is somehow true. With A Christmas Carol a paradox arises in the distinct and opposing perspectives that the original audience had with it compared to modern audiences. This is for a fascinating reason.

Charles Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol in the Victorian era of literature where ghost stories were commonplace. This aspect of the story was amazingly normal to his original readers. What was not normal was his portrayal of common Christmas traditions portrayed throughout the story. Victorian England was in a state of flux and vigorous debate regarding the social and religious nature of Christmas during Dickens' penning of the story. His normalization of these traditions would eventually become widely accepted and somewhat canonized, but they were much less so at the time of his publication. So to the original readers, the portrayal of Christmas celebration and traditions was unusual.

Fast forward a few centuries to modern audiences and we find both of these factors are reversed. Modern audiences generally relegate ghost stories to the horror genre as instruments of fear rather than moral lesson guides that are amicably relating to key characters. So, to modern audiences the ease at which Scrooge accepts the progressive haunting of Marley and the Christmas spirits is mildly unnerving. The Christmas traditions are much better received because the social and celebratory Christmas practices showcased in Dickens' tale are commonplace across much of the world today. This is totally normal for many modern enthusiasts of the story.

For the Christmas Carol Paradox to come to life one would have to somehow bring an original fan of the story, now centuries passed away into conversation with a modern enthusiast. Setting obvious language and cultural barriers aside, the original fan and the modern enthusiast would find themselves at opposing perspectives of the exact same story. When it comes to the ghost story, the original enthusiast would consider this a commonplace storytelling element that drives the unfolding tale of Scrooge's redemption because that is the point and purpose of ghost stories, to use spectral beings as a type of guide for characters to evaluate their history and destiny through. The modern enthusiast would consider all of this to be very strange. The ghosts are oddly friendly and intentional. They lack vengeance or any sense of danger for Scrooge. When Dickens' portrayal of Christmas traditions are discussed, it is the original fan that becomes unsettled. Much of these practices are not widely celebrated in his time. Some of them would be considered experimental, oddly secular, or out of touch with the religious overtones typically associated with the holiday. The modern enthusiast, on the other hand, sees nothing out of sorts. Friends and family gathering over elaborate food sharing memories, blessings, fun, and games is remarkably common in much of the modern world. That one would regard Christmas in somewhat strict religious overtones is bizarre.

With both elements both the original fan and the modern enthusiast find themselves at odds. They cannot agree on the necessity of the ghost story nor can they come to terms on the quality of the Christmas traditions. Yet both see value and allure in a well told story of a miser's redemption, which is a truly beautiful thing.

So, this is the Christmas Carol Paradox. That both of the key contributing elements to the tale: the ghost story and holiday traditions are considered both normal and abnormal in opposing ways by an original fan and a modern enthusiast. But at the same time, each of them regard it as a remarkable and valuable story.

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