

clue, I found much other evidence cropping up and accumulating, and each blade of it falling into place within the hypothesis my essay develops. Any interpretation, even Cox's, involves hypothesis; so the critical question is the adequacy of each for encompassing the data.

My revised outlook has seemed to me not so much an inverting as an outgrowing of prior and shallow readings. It displaces none of their data. For Shakespeare is careful always to give popular opinion its full due: the heroic Hal of "received" interpretation is kept in the forefront of the play's action and none of the skills that make him admirable in the eyes of his world are denied him. In the political realm, where moral evasions can escape detection (except by Williams in *H5*) and where a favorable image-building is the chief of arts, Prince Hal brilliantly achieves choral repute. His earthly reward is his public "success." Meanwhile, however, Falstaff's wit has been salting events with a comic additive, which if we give it analysis is replete with a *figural* perspective on the contemporary events. Through emblem and irony a revelatory "inside" truth is offered, by which the action's "appearances" are given placing within a biblical and thus overarching perspective. The concurrent two levels of Shakespeare's dramaturgy I have elsewhere termed his "double perspective" (see my *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1969). By one perspective, in the present case, Prince Hal completes his political reformation by casting off Falstaff; by the other perspective, we have been seeing in Falstaff, if we understand a jester's function, a foolery directed toward a casting down of the proud in the imagination of their hearts—the theme of the *Magnificat* (Luke i). An interweaving of these two perspectives, I suggest, does justice to human history's web of paradox.

D. J. Palmer's essay gives a distorted application to the "old man" concept of Ephesians, as I explain in my footnote 31. Cox should read this and reconsider the evidence. Exactly because what St. Paul means by "the old man" is never cast off by Hal, I consider his conversion counterfeit.

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### Scrooge's Conversion

To the Editor:

A theorem often repeated in Dickens criticism is Lord Acton's remark that Dickens "knows nothing of sin when it is not crime." Several critics have pointed out the weakness of this generalization, for moral sins that are not crimes are examined frequently in Dick-

ens' novels. Certainly though, the word "sin" is seldom used by Dickens, and the religious connotations that might be implied by the concept are lost in Dickens' usually vague nonsectarian Christianity, which often seems to be more a mixture of angels, holly, rum punch, and the Golden Rule, than anything else. In his article, "The Ceremony of Innocence: Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*" (*PMLA*, 90, 1975, 22–31), Elliot Gilbert speaks of Scrooge's spiritual conversion from what Gilbert labels "years of wickedness" to a state of "metaphysical innocence." Gilbert correctly points out that the problem of Scrooge's "conversion" is central to an interpretation of the work, yet I find it difficult to accept Gilbert's assertion that Scrooge is a man who must return to a prelapsarian state of innocence, for Scrooge is not a man who has sinned in the conventional sense of the term.

Dickens, whose works eternally celebrate Christmas, was not much of a Christian, strangely enough, and his theology is always a little fuzzy at best. If we look at *A Christmas Carol* closely, for example, we see a story with a rather secular twist. When Scrooge makes his promise to "honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year," we do not necessarily feel that he has become infused with a religious spirit and henceforth is constantly going to honor a holy day. The spirit that has seized his heart is not an angelic one but one that more probably resembles the Ghost of Christmas Present, a jolly bacchanalian ghost surrounded by "turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam." It is not a series of holy spirits that converts Scrooge, but a series of spirits that shows him a materialistic world. And why should Scrooge be converted by holy spirits anyway? Why should he experience a religious awakening? His "sin" or "wickedness" has not necessarily been a denial of religion. Even his name as it has passed into the language connotes Scrooge's "sin." He is a miser; he is tight with his money and will not give to the poor. He refuses the luxuries of life, keeps his rooms poorly heated, wrings his money's worth out of Bob Cratchit, and will not participate in the festival of humanity that surrounds him. He is a kind of a grump perhaps, but he is not necessarily a wicked man.

The "conversion" that Scrooge experiences is not a holy revelation but an economic revelation. Scrooge saves his soul in the same way that Pickwick so often finds atonement—he spends money. Scrooge buys a turkey for the Cratchits—the biggest and most expensive one there is—tips the boy excessively, and then

chuckles with happiness as he pays for a cab to send both boy and turkey to the Cratchits. He then promises a generous sum to the poor (whispering the exact figure gleefully in the ear of the gentleman he had previously kicked out of his office). Scrooge then raises Cratchit's salary and promises future aid to Cratchit's family. To further ensure salvation Scrooge performs one last act of contrition: he buys some more coal. The final illustration of the book shows Scrooge sharing a steaming bowl of punch before a roaring fire, and we need no further proof that Scrooge has mended his ways; he has now learned to spend money and enjoy the material comforts of life. After all, even the Cratchit family knows the true meaning of Christmas; only Bob and Tiny Tim attend church while the rest of the Cratchits stay at home and prepare the food that will presumably fulfill both the physical and spiritual needs of them all.

Gilbert quite accurately points out that Scrooge has made himself a "commitment to a life of accumulation, to the typical Victorian metaphysic of rational materialism" (p. 27). In this respect, Scrooge is not too much unlike his young creator, who with his resplendent waistcoats and somewhat gaudy dress demonstrated in his own lifestyle that materialistic rewards were indeed the legacy to be found by those who adopted a doctrine of hard work. Scrooge does not return to a state of innocence, I would suggest, nor does he really undergo a spiritual or moral conversion. Scrooge simply exchanges one set of economic values for another; in doing so, he comes to the rather secular conclusion that it is not money that brings happiness in life, but rather what money can buy. He has not truly become "innocent," but then he never was really very "wicked" either.

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*Mr. Gilbert replies:*

In his note on my essay, Don Richard Cox questions whether Scrooge's famous conversion, presented by me as a crucial metaphysical revolution in the old man's life, is really all that remarkable or significant. Indeed, in apparent opposition to the familiar criticism of *A Christmas Carol* which considers the change in Scrooge too extreme to be plausible, Cox sees that change as in fact too trivial to be of serious interest. Specifically, he argues that Scrooge's conversion is not a "holy revelation" but simply a matter of a person exchanging "one set of economic values for another," that the only noticeable alteration in the old man is in his willingness to "spend money," that since there is nothing particularly wicked about Scrooge being

miserly in the first place, there can be nothing particularly good or metaphysically significant about his later becoming generous and openhanded.

These remarks seem almost calculatedly insensitive. What, after all, is to be said of a critic who appears to believe that, because the decision to buy a turkey and the decision not to buy a turkey both involve financial considerations, there is therefore no important difference in the end between having a turkey and not having a turkey? Surely only someone with the most austere abstract notions of spirituality could be as careless as this about the distinction between eating and starving. And it is clearly just this distinction that Dickens means us to deal with, on many levels, in his story. True, if we limit ourselves to a consideration of Scrooge's specific actions in the world, we are obliged to talk about a man whose new-found goodness consists largely of his spending his money. But the ramifications of that new generosity are finally much more spiritual than economic. For the Cratchit family in general, and for Tiny Tim in particular, Scrooge's conversion is very literally a matter of life and death. And for Scrooge himself, his revolutionary change of heart means the difference between his participating and his not participating in what Cox calls "the festival of humanity that surrounds him."

The fact that Cox can use such a phrase about Scrooge suggests that he at least tacitly acknowledges the existence of a significant metaphysical dimension in *A Christmas Carol*. Once we admit the existence of such a thing as "a festival of humanity," it is reasonable to go on to talk about Scrooge's dealings with money and property as if they had a more than merely economic significance. In my essay, I speak of Scrooge's desperate acquisitiveness as his futile attempt to restore lost innocence and wholeness through the accumulation, bit by bit, of the scattered pieces of his broken paradise. And I try to account for the generosity that follows his change of heart by suggesting that at the moment the old man reestablishes his original metaphysical health, he recognizes that he need no longer hoard material symbols of it, that indeed he can best assert his new wholeness by divesting himself of those symbols and distributing them as gifts.

For Cox, the "secular" details of Scrooge's conversion hopelessly compromise the spiritual significance of his change; salvation, the critic argues, can never really be a function of sucking-pigs, rum punch, red-hot chestnuts, gift turkeys, and extra rations of coal. To which notion Dickens would surely have responded with the inquiry: Of what else can salvation be a function if not of such things? Of what value to anyone is a spirituality that does not initially arise from a delight in the world? Jesus' advice to the rich man was not "destroy all you have," but rather "sell all you have,