

What Does Ghost of Yet to Come Represent: Scrooge's Penitent and Exchange Aporia

● KAJIYAMA Hideo

Abstract

This paper examines how the repentance of Scrooge became possible through encounters with the three spirits of past, present, and future in the text of "A Christmas Carol." Charles Dickens is credited with establishing the tradition of Christmas as a familiar family-centred celebration today, and his achievements in this regard have been likened to those of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. However, in a world where money functions in an infinite credit system, the festive nature of Christmas is denied by the miserly Scrooge. For him, money becomes an object of fetishism, and it is this obsession that summons the spirits. Forewarned of his own death by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, Scrooge begins to celebrate Christmas anew by generously giving to others. While this raises the question of whether genuine exchange is possible, the importance of initiating communicative acts, such as "extending greetings," is inscribed into the narrative without certainty of reciprocation.

Keywords:

Christmas, Ghosts, Hauntology, Exchange, Greetings

1. Introduction

In "A Christmas Carol," the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come offers the most enigmatic impression among the three spirits. The Ghost of Marley serves as a traditional spirit urging repentance during one's lifetime by substantiating the existence of life after death, while the Ghost of Christmases Past can be interpreted as a recurrence of suppressed memories from Scrooge's own past. Following them, the Ghost of Christmas Present possesses a supernatural ability to reveal scenes that should be unseen by Scrooge in his own bed at home, yet even this phenomenon can be explained through the theories of psychoanalysis, attributing it to the realms of the unconscious and the spectral.

However, when confronted with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, the reduction of Scrooge's consciousness and unconsciousness becomes a formidable task. This spirit plays a crucial role in leading Scrooge towards his ultimate repentance; however, the very concept of a 'Ghost of the Future' is inherently paradoxical, given that a ghost is clearly an entity that is already deceased. Consequently, in dealing with this ghost who is characterised by indeterminacy, a fresh perspective of interpretation is once again necessitated.

2. Between Language and Money

As articulated in the initial passages of *The Communist Manifesto*, drawing an analogy between communism and a spectre, Karl Marx's *Capital* (1868) unfolds the theory of value morphology. This theory seeks to conceptualise the peculiarity of 'money', which it characterises as a spectral entity, possessing the unique ability to mediate all commodities despite its lack of inherent substance – indeed, perhaps because of this lack. The Tel Quel school led by Marc Shell and Jean-Joseph Goux, engages in the theoretical endeavour of delving into the intricacies of value morphology theory and extending its application to literature due to the parallels between language and money.

The equation of Money = Language operates as a system contingent upon the deferral of its settlement. In essence, the money circulating with its face value intact relies on an unceasing chain of credit systems, wherein the recipient acknowledges that money they receive has the same value as that given it by the provider, and this acknowledgment is transmitted to the next participant. Marx's identification of the 'hoarder' as a subject in his theory of value morphology is significant in this context.

In order that gold may be held as money, and made to form a hoard, it must be prevented from circulating, or from dissolving into the means of purchasing enjoyment. The hoarder, therefore sacrifices the lusts of his flesh to the fetish of gold. He takes the gospel of abstinence very seriously, On the other hand, he cannot withdraw any more from circulation, in the shape of money, than he has thrown into it, in the shape of commodities. The more he produces, the more he can sell. Work, thrift and greed are therefore his

three cardinal virtues, and to sell much and buy little is the sum of his political economy.
(Marx *Capital* 231)

In delineating the archetypal portrayal of a miser, Scrooge is characterised by adjectives such as 'tight-fisted', 'squeezing', 'grasping', 'scraping', 'clutching', and 'covetous' (10), underscoring his dedication to accumulating wealth by minimising participation in the circulation – read as wastefulness – of money. While the exact nature of the operations of 'Scrooge and Marley's' is not disclosed in the text, the narrative extensively details Scrooge's diligence in relentlessly working and cutting costs. The office, lacking heating devices (11) for the sake of efficient work, is portrayed with doors left ajar to maintain constant surveillance over the staff (11). Moreover, when speaking to his nephew's clerk, he says that granting Christmas holidays is a 'Bedlam' (13).

The vehement aversion of the miser Scrooge towards Christmas is unequivocally rooted in its guise as a consumptive affair in the form of festivities. As his nephew contends, Christmas is a day for 'good time: forgiving, charitable, pleasant time', demanding that both Scrooge and others engage in the act of giving. Simultaneously, Christmas presents an opportunity for Scrooge to receive from others. However, this miser adamantly refuses even the invitation to his nephew's Christmas dinner. Scrooge, positioning December 25th as merely as 'a time for paying bills without money' (10), categorically rejects participation in the exchange economy system named Christmas, which seems akin to gathering donations from generous individuals.

3. Fetishism from a Psychoanalytic Perspective

Scrooge's remarkably pragmatic viewpoint ironically points to a broader societal phenomenon wherein the veneration of wealth assumes a quasi-religious character, effectively eclipsing the fantastical and altruistic elements traditionally associated with the Christmas festival.¹ Scrooge's repudiation of benevolent sentiments, not only towards his neighbours but also towards the entire concept of Christmas, is emblematic of a devotion solely directed at pecuniary pursuits. In this context, gold metamorphoses into a deity, and the ensuing fetishism,

characterised by the worship of material objects, is its inevitable progression. Scrooge's defiant declaration, 'keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine,' (10) underscores his resolute separation from the communal spirit associated with the holiday. His Christmas is one consumed by the solitary pursuit of financial gain. Illustrated by his routine dinner at a familiar restaurant and the subsequent immersion in his banker's book to while away the evening (14), Scrooge's Christmas is a stark departure from the customary festive celebrations. This stark individualism is further accentuated when the ghost of Marley, his former partner and fellow miser, materialises upon Scrooge's return home.

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pig-tail, usual waistcoat, tights, and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent: so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind. (19)

The depiction of Marley's ghost as transparent, in contrast to the tangible visibility of the steel safe, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purse attached to the body, appears to narrate the core of Scrooge's fetishism within the confrontation. In psychoanalysis, fetishism is explained as the process by which something becomes the object of desire as a substitute for something that is supposed to be present. Whether it is Freud's assertion that infants fixate on what they see when discovering that their mother 'lacks' a penis (Castration Denial),² or Lacan's claim that the reciprocal interaction between the mirror-image stage and the symbolic world revolves around the supposedly unattainable 'Object a', representing the object of desire,³ it seems that the fundamental structure of fetishism originates from a fixation on what is not there. There appears to be little divergence in the basic structure of fetishism based on 'what is not there'.

The lack of tangible specificity in money, which should be interchangeable, leads to the establishment of safes, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses concrete objects, which then

become the objects of fetishist desire. The transparency of Marley's ghost can be attributed to the inherently ghostly nature of money. In other words, Marley's ghost embodies the incapacity to perceive or touch money itself, perhaps even including its redemption. So, how is it possible to overcome such fetishism? The chains binding Marley's body represent chains of causality, serving as retribution for his avaricious life – a series of deterrent chains that fixate the ghost as money and prevent its circulation. The miser is oriented towards money itself, aspiring to 'pile up treasure in heaven' with money in its equivalent form, rather than money as its use-value. In contrast, the ghosts of the future, when they visit Scrooge's grave, present a future where the exchange value of money is nullified.

4. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

Subsequently, Scrooge encounters the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, fulfilling Marley's prophecy. This spectral entity, in contrast to its Marley's ghost, maintains an upright posture, and its interactions with Scrooge are silent. While the Ghost of Christmas Present is adorned with holly and turkey, emblematic of the celebratory essence of Christmas, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is portrayed as a completely 'cold, rigid, dreadful Death' (70). Scrooge confesses, 'I fear you more than any spectre I have seen', as this Ghost is on the verge of revealing shadows of events that have not yet occurred in Scrooge's time – specifically, his own demise. The scenes unveiled under the Ghost's guidance serve as an ominous prelude, indicating that there is no escape for Scrooge. For instance, among the merchants, the discussion about Scrooge's death unfolds with phrases such as 'Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?' Yet Scrooge remains perplexed, failing to comprehend the reference to 'old scratch'.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that Past, and this Ghost's province was the Future. Nor could he think of any one immediately connected with himself, to whom he could apply them. (65-6)

The return and repression of the 'uncanny' occur because it evokes thoughts of death, yet what is presented here is a more fundamental death, namely the death of the subject. The repeated visits of the ghost to Scrooge's home, foretelling Scrooge's own death, reveal a narrative where accepting the ghost is directly linked to the fate of eventually dying. If we consider that the concept of the ghosts revolving around the 'past' and memories were laying the groundwork for Dickens' later attempts at autobiographical novels, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come possesses an aspect that leaps effortlessly beyond the process of this evolution, confronting the undeniable fact of 'one's own death' that cannot be inscribed into the first-person narrative.⁴ The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is the only one capable of pointing to a world that appears unchanged and even happier despite one's death, and the inscription on the tombstone that reads 'Ebenezer Scrooge' is an indisputable fact, not just a premonition.

5. Hauntology and its Undecidability

The discourse on the revenant, a self-encountering existence returning from the future, has been eloquently articulated by Jacques Derrida, a figure known for exploring the impossibility inherent in *écriture*. *Specters of Marx* (1994) stands as a bold political declaration that defies the prevailing trend of erasing Marx's legacy while heeding the voice of the spectre called communism. Derrida refers to the trajectory of these thoughts as 'hauntology' within this work. If we consider these 'spectres' as entities introducing indeterminacy into binary oppositions like life and death, their definition as typical ghosts – neither entirely alive nor dead – remains unchanged. However, what sets Derrida's notion of spectres apart is the spectre's unsettling aspect as an entity that not only challenges the fantasy based on 'self-presence' but also beckons from the future, disrupting not only the past but also the future.

There are several times of the specter. It is proper characteristic of the specter, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the revenant may already mark the promised return of the specter of living being. Once again, untimeliness and disadjustment of the contemporary. (Derrida *Specters* 123)

It is undoubtably plausible that the apparition Scrooge encountered was precisely such a spectre. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, announced by Marley in the first half of the narrative, was a spectre foretold to be recursively invoked, and as the promised spectre of the living, it beckons to Scrooge from the future. Derrida's notion of spectres, always appealing for a breakthrough in the current situation, suggests that, for Scrooge's repentance to be possible, spectres needed to arrive not only from the past but also from the future.

When Derrida discusses supernatural entities arriving from the past and future, he references a line from Hamlet, '[t]he time is out of Joint'.⁵ The significance of Hamlet's lament lies in the disruption caused by the apparition of the father's ghost, fracturing the continuous flow of time and, by extension, portraying the ghost as a presence that ruptures the stable order. In 'A Christmas Carol', the appearance of the spectres disrupts the routine life that should unfold, causing Scrooge's clock to fast-forward and rewind repeatedly in his sleep. Despite the seemingly chronological unfolding of scenes from past, present, and future Christmases, subtle dislocations in time occur, and what Scrooge perceives is precisely this sensation of 'out of joint'.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet-to Come conveyed him, as before – though at a different time, he thought; indeed, there seemed no other in these latter visions, save that they were in the Future – into the resorts of business men, but showed him not himself. (76)

The prospect of transubstantiation emerges in the future as more than a mere extension of the present, manifesting itself when a rupture in the timeline is instigated by the arrival of the spirits. In a performative sense, we, not solely Scrooge, bear the responsibility for these ghosts. What the spirits of the future pursue is not 'revenge' but, echoing Scrooge's sentiments, to 'live in the Past, the Present, and the Future, to let the three ghosts always live in my heart' (77), to expose ourselves to the headwinds of time from the future, and to consistently confront the undecidability of the ghosts.

6. The Aporia of Exchange

Finally, let us add a note on the aporia of exchange. In the conclusion of the narrative, Scrooge, truly awakened, undergoes a rebirth like 'quite a baby' and begins to celebrate Christmas by generously giving. He bears the cost of a large turkey for himself, another for Bob Cratchit's family, tips for the young messenger, and even covers the carriage fare for deliveries. However, Scrooge's generosity extends beyond these gifts. He donates an enormous amount to the returning gentleman as 'payment of past debts' and declares he will double Bob's salary the next morning.

Exhibiting what may seem an extravagant generosity, the Christmas of the reborn Scrooge revolves around the constant intervention of money. However, what Scrooge is engaged in here, as he keenly pointed out before his transformation, is nothing but economic activity under the guise of 'gift-giving'. Despite shedding the skin of a miser, Scrooge is still fascinated by the value of money exchanged for accolades and trust from Bob and others, possibly still harbouring a fetishism towards currency.

Regarding the issues surrounding such 'gifts', Derrida, in his foundational work *Given Times: I Counterfeit Money* (1994) develops an argument stating that 'giving' is fundamentally an impossible act. This is because, although giving is essentially an act of gratuitousness beyond the dimension of exchange, in reality, it involves reciprocity, psychological obligations, or creating some form of debt for the recipient. The contradictions inherent in such 'gifts' constitute the aporia of exchange (Derrida *Given* 33-42).

Taking a cynical view, if Bob receives a turkey and a doubled salary, he will likely feel compelled to give a gift to Scrooge next Christmas and work even harder than before. In this light, it appears that Scrooge's possessions decrease only superficially through more loans, with the overall quantity remaining unchanged. Substantively, it seems he has not given anything at all.

This dilemma goes beyond mere deconstruction of the text; it challenges us to explore what to do to face the ghosts, seeking 'gifts' that are not incorporated into the cycle of expectations and repayments.

He dressed himself 'all in his best,' and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, 'Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!' And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears. (80)

What is described here is a trivial wish. There are people who, with a cheerful smile, cannot help but greet Scrooge as he walks down the street, saying, 'Good morning, and Merry Christmas'. Whether Scrooge responds to this is not the issue as, at the moment the greeting is made, an unconditional gift has been bestowed.

I greet you because I acknowledge your presence, even if you were an invisible entity. This act of unconditional giving is sure to be 'pleasant to the ear'. After expressing the significance of Christmas, Scrooge's nephew remarked, 'It may not put a piece of gold or silver in my pocket, but I believe that Christmas has been and will be a good, merry time. So, I say, "Merry Christmas"' (10). To resolve the aporia of giving, there is nothing else but offering greetings without knowing if they will be received and having ears to accept the greetings from the returning ghosts who return repeatedly.

Notes

¹ The series of Christmas stories beginning with 'A Christmas Carol' is often credited with solidifying the traditional Christmas celebration we are familiar with today, characterised by domestic festivities. Dickens' name is esteemed for this achievement, often mentioned in the same breath as Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria.

² 'Castration anxiety' is a concept primarily proposed by Freud in psychoanalytic theory. It involves the discovery by male children that the mother lacks a penis and the subsequent fear and anxiety about being castrated by the father. It is believed that this anxiety eventually has a significant impact on sexual preferences and self-formation.

³ 'Object a' refers to something that symbolises lack or loss while simultaneously possessing an allure as an object of desire. One specific example of this object is a mother's breast. This object eludes capture through language or symbols and is positioned as something unattainable as a concrete reality.

⁴ Adorning the trail of Christmas stories is 'The Haunted Man', where Dickens's alter ego, Redlaw, makes an appearance. However, some argue that the emphasis on these autobiographical elements creates a discord with the themes typically expected in Christmas narratives, such as social reform, domestic celebration, and supernatural phenomena.

⁵ As mentioned at the beginning of 'A Christmas Carol', *Hamlet* itself has become a kind of spectre haunting all writers since Shakespeare. However, this is an issue that should be discussed in a different context.

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