

BELIEF AND CHRISTMAS
PERFORMING BELIEF AND THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CHRISTMAS
PERFORMANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, Christmastime has become a time of tension between the holy ideals of family togetherness, childhood innocence, and goodwill towards men and commercial idolatry. Christ and Santa Claus are pitted against each other in the war on Christmas between religion and secularism instead of feasting together on ham and figgy pudding in the traditional fashion. While many would agree that the everyday realities of the Christmas season do not often live up to the ideals imposed upon the holiday, few are able to tell why this is so or even trace the roots of their discontent.

In an exploration of the unique anomaly of the hierosecular American Christmas, I propose that the unique systems of Christmas belief extend beyond the usual boundaries of sacred and secular to create a complex web of different beliefs that are performed together to create the unique feeling of Christmas. From a performance theory perspective, I use performance as both traditionally theatrical and as a paradigm for understanding and expressing belief in an effort to explore the essential but elusively defined cultural signifiers of the American Christmas.

Through a series of case studies focusing on various traditions of Christmas performance, I apply the performance theories of Diana Taylor, Patrice Pavis, Victor Turner and others to such Christmas staples as Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*. In doing so, I propose different points for viewing Christmas and introducing new points of inquiry for questioning the meaning of Christmas, belief, and performance.

For to my parents, who always believe.

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1. CHRISTMAS AND PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE: AN INTRODUCTION TO PERFORMANCE TRADITION AND THE CREATION OF HOLIDAY CULTURE

Lights twinkle and nativity scenes shine from pastoral church towers. Sleigh bells ring while choirs of children sing the praises of the birth of the Lord on suburban lawns smattered with inflatable snowmen. Thousands of santas dust off their jolly suits for another season of tinsel trees, figgy pudding, and advent candles. The silent, holy night and the annual flight of Santa Claus, reverence and revelry, become one hierosecular – simultaneously sacred and secular – holiday. The breadth of symbolism inherent in the Western Christmas holiday seems as disparate as it is broad. How is it that for many people, an image of a jolly man in red living in the arctic signifies the same holiday as a baby born in a manger at an inn in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago? While many debate or even resent this seemingly strange combination of symbols, the Christmas holiday is not a mythical celebration that developed organically from the traditions of yore. Throughout its history, Christmas celebrations have been constructed, often deliberately, as a direct response to a multitude of societal impulses. The significance of theatrical practice to the development of the Christmas holiday is integral, as live performance has served as a substantial signifier of communal belief practice during the holiday and the establishment of Christmas traditions in a number of cultures.

A thorough and accurate analysis or explanation of the multivalent relationships between Christmas, performance, and belief is likely impossible due to the complexity, individual variance and wide historical span of Christmas practices. My critical inquiry focuses instead on presenting case studies that explore the intersections between performance theories and Christmas traditions in order to underscore the performativity inherent in Christmas.

Performance plays a leading role in defining Christmas, which is a holiday that reflects national identity and belief structures in the United States, as it also does abroad. I have selected the performances and theories explored in these case studies not as wholly representative of either Christmas practices or performance theory, but as points of contact between the two.

Most scholars trace the origins of Christmas to pre-Christian, pagan feasts and celebrations of seasonal changes. Indeed, the conflict between the later sacred connotations of the birth of Christ and pagan harvest rituals was a development of the medieval period and reflects contemporary concerns and confusions over the mixture of the sacred and secular at Christmas. Through a discussion of the historical developments of religious and secular practices at Christmas, especially during the later medieval period in Europe, I will explore a performativity that both expresses belief and acts as a method of ideological control within the hierarchical medieval Church. Furthermore, performances such as both the largely secular cycle plays of towns like Chester and York as well as liturgical festivities such as the Feast of Fools in medieval France both outline the function that performance played in defining belief in its many iterations in pre-industrial Europe. Although Christmas surely underwent many changes before it immigrated to the United States, looking at medieval Christmas performance traditions may allow us to trace the roots of the core spiritual values of Christmas and how performance, long perceived to be sacrilegious, played a key role in defining belief and the structure of the Christmas season. Performances from this time period also help to define performance as an iteration of belief, as reflected by the religious practices of the Catholic Church.

Diana Taylor's conceptions of the archive and the repertoire at work in performance will help to enlighten many of the performances discussed in these pages. Taylor describes the "archive" as that which physically outlasts the transient "repertoire," speaking specifically about performance traditions. Taylor also considers the role of various cultural "scenarios" that are often re-engaged in different performances in order to draw on a sort of cultural memory embedded in those scenarios. I have chosen Taylor's theories since they can illuminate the socio-political connotations of performance. In my exploration of performance as a type of belief, Christmas in the United States is a performative holiday deeply entrenched in socio-political traditions of constructed meaning. Taylor's archive and repertoire will help to both make the difficult distinction between ephemeral performance and persistent text and to highlight the social triggers and connotations (i.e. beliefs) that result in the creation of performance. This process of identification and distinction proves particularly useful in the context of the American Christmas due to the continually changing repertoire and continually growing archive of the season.

By applying Taylor's framings to Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, the text, as a part of the Christmas archive, interacts with ephemeral performances and adaptations, both entries in the repertoire. While Taylor does not focus her research specifically on holiday performances, I suggest that using archive and the repertoire to analyze Dickens' work will enlighten how traditions are established and change over time. Christmas is an ideal holiday for this exploration, as the interaction between past and present are an essential piece of the Christmas season in the United States. Dickens' work is an ideal sample to apply to Christmas in this

fashion as it is often considered among the most influential works of literature to define the spirit – quite literally – of the Christmas season. Taylor’s theories of archive and repertoire in performance provides a model for reimagining the interaction between past and present in establishing traditions like performances of *A Christmas Carol*.

In the world of ballet there lives a performance that is now inseparable from Christmas in the United States. If judged purely on popularity, *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* both bow to Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker*, even though many balletomanes would hardly place *Giselle* behind *The Nutcracker* in their top ten list of best ballets. By studying this performance, which is almost exclusively a mania in North America, the intriguing juxtaposition between popularity and quality often discussed and debated in artistic circles becomes apparent. Upon deeper inspection, the distinction between popularity and quality is not so definite. Much of this murkiness is due to the intense amount of nostalgia built up around the ballet, especially in the United States, despite its Russian origins. I dedicate a chapter to these topics in order to explore the role that performance – for both performer and audience member – plays into the development and maintenance of nostalgic cultural memories such as those of childhood, goodwill, and “Christmas magic” in *The Nutcracker*. Conversely, differing cultural contexts and developments have their varied effects on the performance, creating a complex web of influence and change surrounding a topic as rigidly thought of as “tradition.”

Performance theorist Patrice Pavis offers a theory on cultural transfer that he terms the “hourglass of cultures,” which is a model that attempts to map the different transformations performances undergo in adaptation from one culture to another. Pavis identifies a series of

filters through which cultural elements move from source culture to target culture. I have chosen this theory of cultural transfer both for its common application in performance analysis and for the novelty of applying this theory to the context of Christmas performance. Furthermore, since the American Christmas has a long history of appropriating and often recreating traditions from other cultures, Pavis' theory provides the ideal frame for making first steps toward analyzing the complicated web of American cultural signifiers that constitute belief systems during the Christmas season. Although there are some problems with the linear aspect of Pavis' theory, it helps to identify elements of cultural transfer in American adaptations of *The Nutcracker*. Through comparing the American *Nutcracker* to the Russian model, Pavis' hourglass aids in defining specific signifiers of American cultural identity and, by extension, American structures of belief.

At this point, I encourage the reader to approach this study not as a definitively divided alignment between specific theories and specific performances. I have chosen to represent the theoretical models I find most helpful in analyzing the relationship between performance practices and the cultural definition of Christmas in the United States. I do not suggest that these are the only theories that would be useful in this context. Likewise, the performance traditions are by no means the only Christmas-specific performances in the United States. I chose live performances that are both holiday staples inseparable from Christmas in the United States and cultural institutions with a significant amount of diverse cultural history. Lastly, I wish to assert that this study is not meant to present the inherent and limited link between one theory and one performance. As I am concerned with the development of Christmas tradition, I do not approach

either culturally or theoretically the place of the avant-garde performances in relation to creating these traditions. While the scope of this study does not permit an outline of the innumerable overlaps between the multiple performance theories and Christmas performances, the theories in this study could be used to analyze any of the given performances, and a similar approach could be applied with different theories and different performances. I encourage the reader to view this study not as a two-dimensional chart delineating simple relationships, but a template for analyzing the three-dimensional interactions between performance and the creation of culture, specifically the culture of Christmas.

2. *WHOM DO YOU SEEK?: PERFORMING BELIEF AT THE MEDIEVAL CHRISTMAS AND BEYOND*

“I believe... I believe... It’s silly, but I believe!” – Natalie Wood as Susan in *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947)

Christmas and Belief

The question of whether Christmas is currently a secularized sacred activity or a sacrilized secular activity may not have a simple answer, as the traditions of Christmas stem from multiple times and cultures across shifts in worldviews and paradigms such as the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution. One defining aspect of the seemingly contradictory fusion of the sacred and secular in the Christmas season is the concept of belief. The definitive belief-charged symbols of Christmas are the hierosecular Santa Claus and the holy Christ child of the Nativity: one mostly secular, the other absolutely religious. Understanding belief in relation to the Christmas holiday season usually hinges on associations with one or often both of these figures. If not directly tied to Santa or Christ, “belief” during Christmas often centers on moral feelings of goodwill, togetherness and the innocence of childhood that can be associated with Christ and/or Santa Claus. Belief is also a key to the integral role performance plays in creating the *mise-en-scène* of Christmas. The beliefs present at Christmas are highly performative, rooted in communal relationships, and are often activated by physical display. I intend to explore the performance of belief in order to find distinct iterations of performance that variously affect performer and audience.

Before attempting to explore the function of belief in the Christmas season, I must define what it means to believe and how it relates to performance and the constellations of meanings within the Christmas season. According to Webster's Dictionary, belief is "a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing" ("Belief"). This definition invokes an individualized, internalized decision to bestow trust based on a particular state of mind in the beholder. One major assumption about belief inherent in this definition is that belief is associated with ignorance or lack of analytical ability (e.g. the belief in Santa Claus, magic, or even religious figures and miracles) that is subject to individual choice. While it would be extremely difficult to absolutely refute these conceptions about belief, questioning the function of belief and its place in the Christmas season across time will show that belief is often not an internalized state of the mind, but an externalized, performed *action*, linking performance inextricably to the study of performance.

Many of the above assumptions about belief are somewhat validated by a contemporary, democratic, post-Reformation context that places great emphasis on individual agency. However, this validation is the result of a contextual influence rather than the inherent function of believing, which is intrinsically external and performative. By tracing intersections between belief and Christmas through performance from various time periods, I discern a landscape that, while certainly not objective, will allow us to see belief as essentially performative and the Christmas holiday as a nexus of the intersection of belief and performance both within and beyond varying cultural contexts in many iterations.

Belief and Ignorance

One inherent problem with understanding the differences and similarities between methods of believing is the contemporary understanding of internal, intellectual thoughts as the most complex or sophisticated form of understanding, at least in First World societies such as the United States. The ever-increasing emphasis on formal education as a necessary link between an individual and success evidences the value placed on this knowledge. I suggest that the emphasis placed on formal education contributes to creating various social hierarchies that come into play in the creation of “high” and “low” culture. Emphasizing formal education also suggests that internalized knowledge is more socially valuable than physical abilities. A similar distinction between thought and action may be applied to understanding and expressing beliefs. Indeed, the term “understand” itself indicates an internalized, intellectual understanding of the given subject matter rather than a physically demonstrated performance of belief. Where there is a demonstration of belief, one assumes that it is an outward expression of an inner feeling or understanding of belief. While many performative belief practices may be seen as inferior to intellectual belief practices, the distinction between these performed expressions is due to an imposed hierarchy rather than the inherent value or function of belief or performance.

The hierarchy imposed on belief is at play in the medieval period when many members of the Catholic clergy condemned certain methods of sermonizing or otherwise publically displaying belief. These sanctions were based on the clergy’s foremost desire to maintain consistent religious dominion over the laity by controlling their behavior (Arnold 56). The clergy’s impulse to act against certain belief practices indicates their recognition of a threat to the clergy’s superior position in the structural hierarchy of the Christian faith. The clergy aimed to

control behavior not only because much of the laity was illiterate but also because performing belief correctly was a powerful part of codifying the beliefs and hierarchies of the Church. The repetition of certain forbidden behaviors among the laity and corresponding mandates from the clergy also provide evidence of the clergy's frequent failure to effectively suppress many of these threatening belief practices.

Finally, it is often easy to forget that some performed beliefs denied to the laity were often practiced by the clergy; hence, the performer is often more interpretatively significant than the performance itself, allowing us to question the assumption that internalized belief is superior, more complex, or more sophisticated than exterior performances of belief.

The association between belief and ignorance is somewhat legitimized during the medieval period by the distinction between the learned, literate clergy and the illiterate laity. However, "literate" and "illiterate" are both generally defined at this time by a knowledge or ignorance of Latin, a language then only spoken and by the clergy in the context of religious practice. Vernacular literacy was a different matter, though usually only characteristic of the higher classes due to the high price of printed books and rarity of leisure time for the working classes. The dichotomy between knowledge versus ignorance is defined by the imposition of hierarchical ideals that ignore the value of a more communal, experiential, performed understanding of belief, as evidenced by an emphasis on drawing hierarchical distinctions based on literacy.

Literate learning (e.g. reading and writing) is not the only means of acquiring knowledge, though it may be the only records currently existing from the time period. Performance scholar

Diana Taylor emphasizes the distinction between recorded, archival practices and the ephemeral, performed repertoire (Taylor 19-22). The focus on written documentation as a definitive source for understanding belief practices in the Middle Ages and elsewhere is an example of historians placing the archive of practices before the ephemeral repertoire itself and also illustrates the inherent problem that the archive most likely physically outlasts the actualized repertoire. As stated above, the medieval archive of religious practices in the Catholic Church during the medieval period consists of accounts almost exclusively recorded by the clergy, giving the archive a distinct bias. Because the clergy writes on the laity during a time when establishing hierarchy was of the utmost importance to them, accounts of ignorance among the laity may be rooted in efforts to form an understanding of religious practices that is inaccessible to the laity rather than the inability of the laity to understand religious practices. Except for the decision to take up an ascetic lifestyle, which was not always a spiritual decision and was often a temporary choice made and then abandoned by those of higher classes in order to reach a certain level of holiness, lay people did not have access to the more internal, intellectual understanding of Catholicism typical of the clergy (Arnold 78-79). The separation of the laity from internalized belief established a hierarchy imposed on the laity by the clergy. Because of (or perhaps in spite of) this hierarchy, the laity developed externalized, performed expressions of belief that had a heavy hand in developing theatrical religious practices during the later medieval period when Church officials became more concerned with the behavior and religious education of the masses (Arnold 40).

While many lay belief practices did not always abide by the rules of the clergy, the performance of belief was recognized, and somewhat legitimized by the clergy in their assumption of theatrical elements into religious services. One such phenomenon can be found in the introduction of musical tropes such as the *quem quaeritis* into existing services. Often seen as the predecessor of liturgical dramas and perhaps even later vernacular techniques, the *quem quaeritis* (trans. “whom do you seek”) of the Nativity marks a recognition of performance as a way to heighten a religious experience of belief (Campbell 22). While some believe that the inclusion of theatrical displays in Catholic services were to aid the laity to understand material, the motivations for developing these practices are uncertain and should not be interpreted as pandering or dumbing down the service for the sake of an illiterate lay audience. Rather, evidence of liturgical dramatic practices developing out of the *quem quaeritis* and other tropes should be seen as elements that enhanced rather than simplified the experience of a religious service. These practices were very popular and may have reinvigorated a lay audience previously kept in the dark due to their inability to fully understand the Latin Mass (Arnold 66). In this case, a popular device functions as something more than mere spectacular entertainment. Liturgical tropes and the later, more complex liturgical dramas presented a new, not necessarily inferior, way of understanding religious practice and belief (Taylor xvi). The performance of belief via liturgical dramas provided a Church-sanctioned way of knowing and understanding not inherently tied to literacy.

Other developments regarding belief and its association with ignorance are inherently linked to the emphasis on *knowing* brought on by the increase in scientific inquiry. In order to

believe, one cannot *know*, for knowledge implies an irrefutable and provable truth whereas belief is based on faith that is not provable. To claim to know something that one believes in is, therefore, a display of ignorance and naivety. The opposition of knowledge and belief comes into play in a scientific age when knowledge is placed at the apex of the hierarchy of human learning and experience. This hierarchy comes into play tangibly within the Christmas season as adults, *knowing* of the inexistence of Santa Claus, intentionally feign belief in order to maintain the (false) belief of young children to be discussed below. A useful method for tracking the development of belief beyond the Middle Ages is through the development of theatrical practices and displays of belief during various periods.

Belief as Performance

Belief, faith, trust, and confidence: these terms are both crucially individual and undoubtedly political. Physical images and displays of collective belief are often used to instill a feeling of safety, define communal identity, and establish locations of power. The separation between individual/spiritual and communal/political belief is, in fact, not absolute, and the crossover of the individual and the community brings into question the assumptions generated about belief itself, how belief is performed, and what constitutes the performance of belief. Performance, in fact, can act as an effective model and point of reference to understand the external belief practices of a particular population. To illustrate this point, I will first analyze the belief practices of the assumedly communal medieval Catholic community, a society often thought to have a religious belief system counterpointing the modern, individualized, democratic model.

In medieval Europe, much of the codification of Christianity took hundreds of years to instate and generally focused on controlling clerical behaviors and later public behaviors rather than internalized, intellectual analyses of Christian belief (Arnold 39-40). Due to the literacy of the clergy and illiteracy of the vast majority of the laity, documentation about belief practices during the medieval period is often skewed toward a clerical agenda reflecting ideal Christian behaviors rather than practical reality, especially in accounts of lay behaviors. Recognizing the inherent clerical bias in many accounts is essential for unearthing the unique lay belief practices, which often involve actualized performances of belief.

Victor Turner and Communitas in Belief

An often-cited difference between contemporary and medieval society is a stronger sense of individual identity in the former and communal identity in the latter. Victor Turner defines existential communitas as an acute feeling of intense togetherness usually fueled by a seminal experience that heightens the cohesive identification of a community, usually through ritualized behavior (132). Communitas, a much criticized term and concept, may be experienced in different ideological, structural, or normative models. However, any experience of communitas, according to Turner, must at least momentarily bridge any given social divides for the sake of communal experience. Communitas may be experienced through religious rituals or rites of passage, which are expressions of belief, including those involving group action. In the context of this study, communitas is also the communal experience of belief, and shared belief is a part of what actualizes communitas, creating a community from a collective of individuals.

Applying Turner's concept of *communitas* to a Western model may highlight the illusory communal ideals of the medieval Catholic Easter Eucharist, which is only a part of a larger communally ritualized holy season that is usually kept at a physical and linguistic length from the general laity (Campbell 25-26; Arnold 134). Just as medieval belief practices, developing from a society usually described as more communal than contemporary societies, *communitas* can be experienced in contemporary, individually focused societies (e.g. through shared nostalgic experience, a commonplace of the holiday season). *Communitas* in contemporary Christmas belief practices in fact may be considered more powerful than the medieval alternative because true communal togetherness is not a commonplace in contemporary culture, and may be treated as a valued novelty.

Though the exact function of Turner's *communitas* has been thoroughly criticized, there are plentiful examples of communal, ritualized phenomena that bring into question the modern assumption of individual choice as a definitive part of spirituality. For many medieval societies, literacy was limited to the clergy and applied exclusively to knowledge of reading Latin, a language only spoken by the clergy. Though the laity may have had some basic knowledge of Latin, the esoteric nature of the language and its application to the Catholic liturgy necessarily separated the clergy from the laity. Because of this, some historians have argued that many lay Christians may have participated in ritual belief practices without having an internalized understanding of their actions. As seen below, these ritual and communal acts do not necessarily signify a lack of spiritual understanding.

Turner's concept of *communitas* may extend to describe certain codified rituals of the Christmas season: a collective gasp of awe as the tree is first lit in the town square, the excitement of shared knowledge felt as a congregation finishes the last verse of a well-known Christmas hymn from memory. However, the process of reaching *communitas* appears in varied forms as the result of different practices. For the sake of our discussion, the usefulness of the concept of *communitas* outlines the necessity of ritual or ritualized performative *action* in order to reach a seminal moment that defines belief.

Believing Nostalgia: *A Christmas Carol* and *The Nutcracker*

The Christmas belief action characteristic of the Victorian period relates to an assertion of humanitarian goodwill and the "spirit" of Christmas thematically, though not directly, linked to the moral ideals represented by Christ and Santa Claus. The period of Charles Dickens and an interest in establishing a contradictorily new and age-old Christmas tradition shows a parallel interest in communal action that one could perhaps link to an aim toward achieving what Turner terms *communitas*. Looking at literacy outside the confines of the Latin-based Catholic liturgy, the growth of readership among the general population popularized a variety of literary forms including the novel, a form reaching its height during the gothic period in Europe. Charles Dickens, among the most notable of Victorian authors, was an undisputed master of the novel form and played his own role in establishing what is now termed a "traditional" Christmas. Dickens popularized the belief in goodwill and humanitarian outreach during the Christmas season in his topical novels, including *A Christmas Carol*. Although Dickens' medium is textual, *A Christmas Carol* has been adapted to multiple theatrical versions and, more

importantly, the central journey of Ebenezer Scrooge is a physical performance of his past, present and future where Scrooge plays the role of audience. In this novel, Dickens uses the performance of the past (emphasizing nostalgia), present (emphasizing gratefulness and the intangible “Christmas spirit”), and the future (emphasizing the *necessity to act*), in order to encourage Scrooge to actions of goodwill. Scrooge’s belief performance is not directly linked to Christ or Santa Claus, but to goodwill, generosity, and brotherhood (three aspects at times attributed to both Christ and Saint Nicholas). Scrooge must perform his newfound humanitarian beliefs *in action* in order for him to realize them fully.

While some may interpret Scrooge’s journey as a religious, Christian awakening, this interpretation is only metaphorically supported by Dickens’ text. The story Dickens presents directly evokes a magical element that he closely links with Scrooge’s conversion as well as the Christmas season at large. By presenting goodwill and brotherhood as a product of a magical Christmas season, Dickens emphasizes the concept of “Christmas magic” in which people must believe in order to connect to one another. Another representation of Christmas magic, born in Russia only slightly later than Dickens, the now deeply entrenched ballet *The Nutcracker* emphasizes the link between believing in *Christmas* rather than Christ.

Believing in Christmas in *The Nutcracker* means believing in magic with a Santa-like presence care of of the mysteriously magical character Drosselmeyer. Presented as a childlike dream catalyzed by a magical broken toy nutcracker, *The Nutcracker* emphasizes the Christmas magic that activates late every Christmas Eve (in this case, at the stroke of midnight) that is also attributed later to the yearly ride of Santa Claus. Images of anthropomorphized animals, fairies,

and the pre-Candy Land “Land of Sweets” construct the childlike, dreamy atmosphere that seems to exist for the sole purpose of delighting the dreaming Clara. The Nutcracker/Prince, Clara’s savior, is reminiscent of the reminders during the Christian Nativity of the salvation promised by Christ as well as the benefactor of childhood attributed to Saint Nicholas. By the end of the ballet, Clara awakens underneath the Christmas tree with her nutcrackers still in her arms, forgetful of the minor sorrow she felt the day before and her faith in Christmas magic renewed.

Although Clara’s journey in *The Nutcracker* takes on a different tone than Scrooge’s journey in *A Christmas Carol*, both affirm (or re-affirm) their belief in Christmas through performance. While Scrooge bears witness to the performance of his life and is then moved to perform his own belief, Clara spends almost the entirety of the ballet as an audience member to various performances of Christmas magic constructed as a series of performances not altogether different from what one would expect to find at a royal court celebration. Her belief is, therefore, closer to the more modern conception of an internalized state of mind, especially since the audience learns definitively by the end of the ballet that all of the events she experienced were indeed figments of her own mind presented in her dreams. By raising Clara to the status of honorary royalty, emphasized by the Nutcracker’s assumption of his princely guise, *The Nutcracker* emphasizes the high value placed on childhood innocence during the Christmas season.

The attribute that distinguishes Clara’s journey of belief from Scrooge’s is inherently linked to their age difference. Since Scrooge is older and wealthy, the expectation of his belief hinges on generosity and goodwill before he reaches his inevitable end. Clara, on the other hand,

is a young girl possessing an innocence that many characteristically strive to preserve and celebrate during the Christmas season. *The Nutcracker* presents this preservation of innocence through Clara's cathartic dream journey as a celebration in which audiences can participate in a somewhat metatheatrical observation of Clara's spectatorship and reconstruction of belief through experiencing a literal and conventional performance spectacle. Audience members may also experience the revisitation or *eternal return* (borrowing Eliade's term) of belief vicariously through Clara's journey as they are reminded that while belief may at times *seem* a function of the mind, the childhood innocence that is celebrated at Christmas is tangibly actualized and performed via late night "Christmas magic" (Eliade 86-89). This revisitation may activate *communitas* or not, but it always engages with the audience's own belief systems.

Aside: The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade

A performance of belief during the Christmas season generally thought to be contemporary is actually rooted in communal medieval ceremonies and theatrical presentations. Parades and public spectacles function as a *public* space (e.g. an open, usually secular space not confined to a text, conventional theatre space, or consecrated holy place), especially (though not limited to) those spaces usually designated for practices other than spectatorship such as city streets or shopping malls. These spectacular techniques, not strictly used during the Christmas season, create a communal performance of belief rooted in revisiting common understandings of the season. Because these common understandings are the result of past knowledge and experience, the communal understanding and belief instigated by these public holiday performances usually becomes a ritualized act of nostalgic indulgence while also looking

forward to experiencing the new. To find an example of how this phenomenon works, one needs only to listen to the commentary given during the annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. This event follows a ritualized structure: a processional along a three-mile pass of the same road every year, stationary performances scheduled to interject in the procession at particular times, and a similar line-up of floats and balloons that always culminate in the arrival of Santa Claus and his sleigh, very ritualistically signifying the advent of the post-Thanksgiving Christmas season. The commentary delivered during the Macy's procession also highlights an interest in the old as well as the new. One is sure to hear descriptions of how many years the oldest of floats and balloons have sailed through the streets of New York as well as how many hours were logged in the Macy's "Dream Factory" that fabricated the newest addition to the parade. In essence, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and similar events do not necessarily perform belief directly. Rather, these spectacles are reconstructions of idealized versions of what some think others should believe during the holiday season. The actual performance of belief during the public spectacles of the Christmas season – including tree lightings and visiting mall Santas – lies in the act of pursuing spectatorship. Sometimes audience members seek out these spectacles in a miniature pseudo-pilgrimage and others are drawn into the event spontaneously.

Internal and External Belief

Clarifying the distinction between "internal" and "external" belief is essential for understanding the inherent role performance plays in many religious and holiday practices, including those of Christmas. Essentially, "internal" belief refers the state of mind mentioned by Webster's definition above – a phenomenon that happens within the mind. "External" belief

refers to the performance of belief: not a mere pretending or physical *representation of* belief, but an actualized performance that *is* belief.

Medieval Catholic belief practices complicate the assumption that belief is an inherently internalized phenomenon of the mind. While religious officials may have been concerned with spirituality on a more philosophical level, there is evidence that much of the laity articulated belief through externalized, often public expressions. This externalization of belief physically shows the laity's commitment to their beliefs: pilgrimages, touching statues of saints, and attending Mass (Arnold 69). For the laity, belief was an action and a performance of piety, not merely an external expression of an inner feeling. The clergy reinforced the importance of public performance in the belief practices of the laity by emphasizing public penances, often marching sinners shamefully about town bearing an image of their transgression (Arnold 105-108). The lay citizenry acted as audience to these public processions of shame and often accosted the penitent, perhaps evidence of an internalized understanding of the stigma of sin. Each of these examples problematizes the common understanding of belief as inherently internalized or intellectualized.

The rule of James I marks the end of the Tudor period in England as well as a deliberate shift of focus from the "outer" stage where theatre was no different than games, football matches, and other lewd games, to the "inner" stage of salvation (Elliott 10). The performance of belief posed a threat to the Puritans. Though performance was merely a playful game, Puritans were convinced that actors had to become what they portrayed in order to trick audiences into believing their performances: a kind of belief they viewed as false. This assertion

is a mix of the earlier medieval focus on performance as a way of believing. In this understanding of performance, the actors must literally become what they represent, indicating both a form of belief on the part of the actors wherein they believe they are what they represent, and a form of magic or witchcraft wherein the actors shape shift into what they represent for the purposes of tricking the audience into believing. While some may argue that the Puritan attacks on theatre stem from a political strife between the Scottish Stuarts and English Tudors, opposition to the theatre, specifically religious representations in the theatre, began before and extend after the Stuart reign of England. The important shift for this period is the consideration of performance, in this case theatrical performances, and its potential to effect belief. In addition to medieval practices of performing religious belief, the Puritan period marks a specific link between theatre and external, performed belief.

Later periods such as that of Charles Dickens in the Victorian period see a larger shift towards the internalization of belief. This is partly due to the greater availability of learning and literacy to the general population that expanded since the end of the Middle Ages. The ability to educate an individual's mind develops a greater sense of individuality as distinct from communal identity, and education is generally perceived as something internalized, intangible or indemonstrable. However, as mentioned before, *knowing* and *believing* are distinct. As Scrooge shows us in *A Christmas Carol*, though some people may read and think they *know* what they have been told about the Christmas season and the moral ideals thereof, to *believe* requires an action in which belief is proven through a performed action (in the case of Scrooge, the

performed action is financial giving). The externalized performance may, in fact, catalyze an adjustment of knowledge such as Scrooge's renewed understanding of the Christmas season.

The differences between internal and external belief during the Christmas season are generally minute and are usually convoluted into a distinct form of "Christmas belief" based on the fusion of multiple sacred and secular values. While some people may show piety and celebrate the innocence of the Christ child or appreciate the childish innocence and joy they identify in young ones, some also associate similar values with the figure of Santa Claus, a vaguely spiritual but essentially secular figure. Furthermore, "pious" actions become complicated when combined with a tradition of excessive spending, materialism, and lavish displays. Informed by previous major developments in the relationship between religion and theatre, contemporary Christmas in the United States is a mixture of concerns over theatrical representations of belief and the more individualized practice of inner belief, a practice evidenced since the Puritan period in England. The contemporary Christmas finds its distinction from earlier periods not in its excess, for holiday feasting and gifting developed in previous times, but in the peculiar contemporary capitalist treatment of holiday spending and the particular holiday spending, distinctly contemporary uses of Christmas iconography, and the conscious combination of the sacred and secular to create a uniquely hierosecular holiday. As iconography and public Christmas displays are not the focus of this study, my focus here shifts to performative belief practices characteristic of the contemporary Christmas traditions, exploring origins and distinctions from previous periods that often combine interior and exterior belief.

Contemporary Variations of Belief

Contemporary Christian belief practices are not entirely distinct from earlier practices, though notable societal shifts such as the advent of Protestantism alter the context within which belief systems function. The development of belief performances may be thought of within a similar context. Without ignoring the medieval ancestry of contemporary Christian practices, while there may be more of a capitalist ability to choose a church, pastor, or even a religious system based on individual preferences, the characteristics that distinguish the ways of belief between different spiritual systems are largely performance-based and communal. Individual, private belief is a psychological experience that does not always require an intermediary except in specific circumstances of confusion or questioning such as the Catholic confession where the cleric acts as teacher and guide. All other functions provided by contemporary churches are external performances requiring groups of people to gather and experience a unified, often ritualized, action. Speech and religious literature often play an important, necessary role in these performances, but the culminating *action* defines the ritual: the administration of the holy water during a baptism, the consumption of the bread and wine during the Eucharist. In a post-Reformation context, different Protestant denominations use the same or very similar holy texts. The distinction between these belief systems is less about unique holy texts or even an inherent difference in individualized beliefs, but a difference in how belief is performed. Therein one may find that performance is what defines belief.

Bluffing Belief

I previously mentioned the hierarchy established between the knowing Santa-disbelievers and the ignorant believers. This hierarchy draws a distinction based loosely on age and aligns the “true” with the knowing adult and the factually “false” with unknowing children. Thus, the supremacy of adults is established by their knowing, and children are kept subservient – fact outlined by threats of Santa’s “naughty and nice” list – through their unknowingness. Importantly, while a child’s belief in Santa Claus is unfounded, their belief is an earnest practice similar to those discussed above. Knowing adults, on the other hand, feign their belief. Thus, this “make-belief” is another performance distinct from the performance of earnest belief discussed above. However, though belief in a particular figure or idea is feigned in this situation, bluffing belief in that figure/idea is a performance of belief in a different concept: preserving the innocence of childhood.

Many may identify learning the truth about Santa Claus as a holiday rite of passage. In learning the truth, a child moves from innocent, naïve believer to knowing disbeliever and protector of the innocent. This phenomenon is a part of the codified contemporary holiday belief system. Although this particular form of belief is not necessarily linked to a specific religious preference, similarities to earlier holiday practices underscore a similar formation of hierarchy between the knower and the ignorant. The importance of performance for the belief in Santa Claus also delineates the difference between the knower and the ignorant. The ignorant writes letters to Santa, visits Santa at the local mall, and leaves milk and cookies for his Christmas Eve visit. The knower makes efforts to preserve the ignorance of the others and literally plays Santa

Claus by wrapping and placing gifts under the Christmas tree and consuming the milk and cookies.

The context within which belief is performed usually shapes the conceptions of those beliefs. In order to understand the role of belief in its environment, and perhaps more importantly, to distinguish the essence of belief from the assumptions and constructed conceptions about believing, an awareness of cultural contexts is essential. If performance is an inherent aspect in defining belief, actions and performances of belief give us ample fodder to question the assumptions that belief is inherently individual, internalized, and illogical and open up opportunities to further the idea of both belief and performance as knowledge structures in their own right.

3. THE CHRISTMAS SCENARIO IN ARCHIVE AND REPERTOIRE: CHARLES DICKENS' *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

"I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year." – Ebenezer Scrooge, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843)

Literature, Theatre and Dickens: *A Christmas Carol* and the Creation of Christmas Tradition

Many of the common characteristics of the "traditional" Christmas as defined in the United States draw on traditions established or adapted by Victorian royal courts and the works of socially conscious writers such as Charles Dickens. Even though he refused to accept royal recognition in the form of a knighthood, Dickens remained a favorite of Queen Victoria. One of the most distinctive aspects of Dickens' career is his versatility – transforming from a lighthearted humorist to a respected dramatist – and his gift for framing social commentary with a unique nuance of optimism. These developments relate specifically to Dickens' development as a social activist reacting to Poor Law activism and Chartist politics of in London, though he did not belong to a specific political ideology and tended to employ class markers in his writing rather than political terms such as "democracy" and "freedom" (Ledger 1-9). Dickens' critique of aristocratic, hierarchical structures that oppress the working classes is a driving force in his fiction and can be traced through his serialized Christmas novellas, including the inaugural, highly optimistic *A Christmas Carol* and his later, more critical tales in his Christmas collection such as *The Chimes* (1844), *The Battle of Life* (1846), and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848). As outlined below, the ideologies inherent in Dickens' work – his "Carol

philosophy” – is the source of his work’s appeal. The belief systems represented in Dickens’ work – fighting for the poor and the repressed – make up an ideology that calls for action. This call for action gives works such as *A Christmas Carol* a performativity that is the source of the theatrical tradition of *A Christmas Carol* that still persists.

Much of the success of *A Christmas Carol* relates directly to the performative aspects of the work. Even though Dickens hardly made a profit on publications of the book, the popularity of his story remains undeniable. While the wealthier members of society had the ability to read the novel privately, many of the destitute working class that Dickens seeks to encourage with the social commentary in *A Christmas Carol* did not necessarily experience the novel by reading it. Far more popular for this portion of the population were theatrical productions of the work, which sprang to the stage almost as soon as the book’s publication. Others still enjoyed public or shared readings of the novel in order to avoid buying multiple copies, thus creating a shared experience much closer to performance than to private reading. Ledger cites these instances of public readings as evidence of Dickens’ material link to working class radicalism due to their similarity to methods of reading suggested by radical Regency-period pamphleteer William Cobbett (Ledger 1-9). Finally, Dickens himself toured and delivered readings of many of his works, though *A Christmas Carol*, which marked the first and last of Dickens’ own performances spanning from 1853 to 1870, remained by far the most successful. The graceful mixture of strong political commentary and visions of Christmas opulence in *A Christmas Carol* is conducive to performance and the socio-political ideology in *A Christmas Carol* aims to incite change through the performance of socially conscious actions.

Dickens' personal relationship with the theatre was no secret. From a young age, he dreamt of becoming a stage actor. After experiencing years of poverty that would inform many of his most famous works, including *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens followed his father into a career in journalism – an experience that would affect the social awareness of his works for the entirety of his literary career. As Sally Ledger characterizes him in her study on Dickens in relation to the English radical tradition of the early nineteenth century, Dickens' writing act as a link between the political "People" and a commercial "Populace," both characterizations of a population that come into play during the post-industrial Christmas season (Ledger 1-9).

Despite his fame, Dickens never profited from *A Christmas Carol*, which is, according to popularity and the wide dissemination of the story, his most famous work. While Christmas is now a time for vast profits in the theatrical community due to performances such as adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* and other performances, Dickens, one of the godfathers of Christmas traditions, never saw his profit from *A Christmas Carol*. While Dickens gave permission to certain adaptations of his work, including a few stage productions, many unsolicited editions of the story in *A Christmas Carol* sprang up in the decades succeeding its original publication, including eight theatrical productions in 1844, a year after publication, in London alone (Malan #). Dickens' losses were not due to lack of popularity, but mostly to plagiarism and, to a lesser extent, high production costs for the book, which was printed in color for the first and last time in Dickens' career and included multiple wood cuts and etchings by John Leech. Though plagiarism was by no means a novel happenstance in the 19th century, the immediate popularity of *A Christmas Carol* was compelling enough to inspire a level of forgery

that Dickens rarely experienced anywhere else in his career. While the ethical concerns surrounding plagiarism during the Victorian period are a topic for a different study, the popularity of *A Christmas Carol* as evidenced by the immediate, widespread dissemination of the story illuminates the timely resonance the story had throughout London at the time. The continued popularity of Dickens' story into the present proves that the original timeliness of the tale has since developed and become timeless, becoming a well-established example of what performance theorist Diana Taylor terms the complex of archive and repertoire in performance.

Embodiments of Cultural Memory in Archive and Repertoire: Diana Taylor and the Conflict of Christmas Literature and Performance at Dickens' *Carol*

According to Taylor, entries in the archive of performance are evidentiary materials that exist indefinitely in a fixed form, whereas those in the repertoire are the fleeting activations of what Taylor identifies as "embodied memory" in contrast to static historical evidence (Taylor 19-20). As a recurring cultural tradition, the *Carol* lies problematically on the outskirts of Taylor's discussion of archive and repertoire because its roots are literary: the creation of one individual. However, Dickens' *Carol* extends beyond the boundaries of literacy, mainly through legitimate and plagiarized performances and retellings, and Dickens himself was exceptionally in tune to the cultural identity of the collective and the reach of his *Carol* extends. In fact, many theorists, historians, and literary scholars alike have identified Christmas as a method of defining Englishness and Dickens as one of the leading voices in confirming this Englishness. As Joseph W. Childers clarifies: "I consider the place that certain kinds of difference had in a culture of Christmas – a culture that we often represent to ourselves as egalitarian and universal, but that

also depends on hierarchy and exclusion” (Childers 115). Coming from a tradition of a Christmas dichotomy between the reality of hierarchical exclusion and the fictional ideal of communal goodwill, Dickens’ ideology is a product of the English Christmas rather than its creator. Furthermore, though one could question the place of a work of literature in the most traditional sense within Diana Taylor’s discussion of embodied practice, the number of hands that have dipped into and effected the identity of the *Carol* situate it in between archival, unchanging myth and distinct, ephemeral productions of embodied memory.

The core problem in applying Taylor’s terminology to Dickens’ *Carol* is the literary roots of Dickens’ work. Taylor asserts that cultural memory must be constructed communally and not by an individual. She also asserts that the scenarios that act as conduits of understanding the positions of archive and repertoire require action, excluding literature from a discussion of performance. I suggest that *A Christmas Carol*, from the hand of Dickens, though essentially a literary work, qualifies as at least a theatrical trope that reflects the annual embodiment of the various scenarios of goodwill, transformation, social awareness, paternalism, etc. activated at Christmas.

Part of the conflict in applying Taylor’s analysis of cultural embodiment to the works of Dickens is the difference in collective creation and performance that Taylor characteristically explores in various indigenous populations in the Americas and the perceivedly private literary approach taken by authors such as Dickens. I propose that this difference is a difference of culture rather than what could be called embodied memory. While Christmas itself is rife with relics of pre-Christian traditions, in a culture such as England’s, to which the United States has

for better or worse been inherently and lingeringly linked, a literary approach may be a more appropriate embodiment of cultural memory than other cultures that do not place such importance on the written word. I suggest that works such as Dickens, though they are fictional reflections of societal impulses, belong as entries in the Christmas archive in England and other societies that experience Christmas in a similar way.

I should mention here that a consideration of the distinction between English and American Christmas may provide stumbling blocks for precisely tracking the influence of Dickens on the American Christmas. Christmas in the United States, while absolutely influenced by England, contains some clear distinctions from the English Christmas. These differences include including varying methods of performing the holiday and the protective exclusionism indicated by Childers in the quote above. These differences are due in no small part to the development of a distinctly American Christmas in the style of Washington Irving and others, developing three decades before Dickens' seminal Christmas text. Despite these differences, the essential ethical, political, and economic structure of the holiday – or the “Christmas scenario” – is consistent between England and the United States despite questions of specific cultural significance and practices.

Before I analyze the specific qualities of the Christmas scenario as evidenced in Dickens' *Carol* in order to explore Dickens' role in the Christmas scenario that extends beyond traditional audience circles, a consideration of the marketing of the text may be of use. Such an inquiry will help to contextualize *A Christmas Carol* clearly in light of the conflict between developing ideals effecting the Christmas season: commercialism and individualism versus goodwill and

egalitarianism. I will briefly consider the different “packages” the *Carol* has been wrapped in over the years, considering both the literal marketing and packaging of Dickens’ text as well as the various adaptations of the story in other media, focusing on iterations found on stage and screen.

Marketing Performance: Wrapping the Message in Christmas Packaging and the Theatrical Life of the *Carol*

Seeing Christmas: Marketing the Text

Although Dickens became known for his social activism and *A Christmas Carol* ranks with *Oliver Twist* among his sympathetic works towards poverty in Victorian London, the original marketing package of *A Christmas Carol* did not reflect the aspect of goodwill as represented by Tiny Tim and the Cratchits. For the duration of Dickens’ life, the frontispiece of *A Christmas Carol* was Leech’s etching of Fezziwig’s Christmas party. Even though this is a minor scene in relation to others in the text, the depiction of a merry Christmas party must have been more commercially appealing than an impoverished child during the Christmas season. In fact, most early editions of *A Christmas Carol* did not include any etchings of the Cratchits, providing illustrations almost exclusively of Scrooge and the various ghostly spirits. It was not until Fred Barnard’s 1870’s etching of Tiny Tim, after Dickens’ early death, that the central theme of goodwill towards men became a strong part of the visual aspect of printed editions of *A Christmas Carol* (Malan #). The shift from the joyousness of the Fezziwigs to the pathos of Tiny Tim does not indicate a shift in ideological perspective within the text (archive) of *A Christmas Carol*, but a shift in the marketing, framing, and perception of the text. This shift causes the text

to be interpreted on either an individual basis or via a retelling of a story through either a public reading or a theatrical production (repertoire).

These original marketing decisions, though not as significant for the success of *A Christmas Carol* as the text itself, provided the first publically recognized visual representations of the text. Any discussion of later performance adaptations, therefore, traces their origins back to these original images. Furthermore, the illustrations of the first editions of *A Christmas Carol* codified much of the ideological belief systems in dialogue in the story. The belief systems surrounding wealth, goodwill and family create the ideological matrix of the *Carol* inherent to its development into a cultural tradition.

Watching Christmas: The Carol on Stage and Screen

Theatrical adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* could not avoid visual representations of the Cratchits and the destitute in the same way that book illustrations could, since all characters are physically represented on stage. Though depicting images of the destitute in a time of joyous celebration would not have been an ideal marketing choice, the plight of the Cratchits is essential to the pathos of the story. Most if not every production included Tiny Tim, though some may have omitted the jarring images of “Ignorance” and “Want” that have garnered significant literary attention since the publication of Dickens’ novel. Although the packaging of *A Christmas Carol* at the time of publication indicated yuletide gaiety, the memory embodied by Dickens’ story, especially in performance, emphasizes the relationship between Scrooge and the Cratchit family and the goodwill and equality embedded in the Christmas scenario, which I will discuss in the next section of this chapter.

The first theatrical adaptations of the *Carol* sprung forth almost immediately after its publication. In February of 1844, just months after Dickens published his tale and dozens of others plundered and produced their own versions of the story, no fewer than eight adaptations of Dickens' story appeared in stages across London. These included Edward Stirling's "official" production – allegedly condoned by Dickens in an effort on his part to lend legitimacy and curtail plagiarism – as well as Charles Webb's production, which garnered more popular support and patronage than Stirling's, despite its lack of support from Dickens. In its initial stages of life, theatrical production, along with public and private readings of Dickens' text and the many plagiarized copies of his story, played a leading role in fostering the popularity of the *Carol*. Despite its popularity, there is a curious waning of official theatrical productions of the *Carol* after the mid-1840's. Although Dickens' later Christmas stories such as *The Cricket on the Hearth* were more commercially lucrative during his lifetime, it would be a stretch to say that the *Carol* fell out of fashion or became inferior to its younger siblings. Dickens himself models the value of the *Carol* since went through many lengths to maintain his control over unauthorized reproductions of the story. Instead, Fred Guida helpfully reminds the Dickens enthusiast that the crassness of the theatre led to a lack of sacred materials presented on the English stage during Dickens' lifetime, and some considered the ideologies of the *Carol* too sacred for the stage (41). There are multiple accounts claiming that the *Carol* performances effecting audiences in a pseudo-ritualistic way because of the intense and novel pathos Dickens incites in the story. Perhaps by the mid-1840's, a few years after Dickens' story began to make a home in the English cultural consciousness, the *Carol* was too sacred to stage.

Dickens himself was very fond of the *Carol*, although it did not bring him the same financial gains as many of his other works. Dickens chose to perform a version of his *Carol* in his various public readings, for which he became famous. While Dickens read many shortened versions of his works in public readings, the *Carol* was the most consistently represented in his repertoire, and he would often pair it with readings of his new works as a promotional method. Dickens himself always had an affinity for the theatre and his readings were lively performances of his works rather than mundane readings. Guida mentions that accounts of Dickens' readings assert that no two were ever the same, and Dickens himself enjoyed the discovery of new materials in the *Carol* he would find through performance (42). After the turn of the century, the *Carol* became a steadily more popular institution in both traditional playhouses and English music halls as well as in the burgeoning world of film. The popularity of the *Carol* reached such a height that it is now approaching impossible to evaluate the number of stage, film and television adaptations of the *Carol* that have sprung up and continue to spring up over the years. As a story stuck fast in the collective memory of Christmas, the *Carol* has been produced so often that productions aim either to be true to the Dickensian text or to find an innovative spin on the story.

Many true-to-text adaptations, based usually on condensed versions of Dickens' scenes, including the first film adaptations soon after the turn of the century, do not always encompass the full amount of social commentary evidenced in Dickens' original text. Many of the more contemporary adaptations aiming at finding something new in Dickens' story alter a few ancillary attributes of the *Carol*, usually through modernization or geographical relocation, while

keeping Scrooge's transformation in light of the holiday season at the center. More often than not, social commentary in Dickens' work is omitted in adaptations of his work to either stage or screen, though this is not the rule. I suggest that the avoidance of the grim in many adaptations of the *Carol* is due in no small part to an attraction to the lighter, nostalgic elements of the story: goodwill towards men and hope for a better future. However, as I explore below, the concepts of goodwill and equality among men is not only as fleeting as the Christmas season, but also far more complex when put into the context of the social conditions that make them necessary for the season.

Goodwill and Equality in the Christmas Scenario

Sally Ledger characterizes *A Christmas Carol* as a work that provides an image of “refuge from the chill air of the world of political economy” for the working class (101). A part of the English traditions of hyper-awareness for the poor during the Christmas season, the act of goodwill and displaying (usually temporary) equality among men could be considered a cultural scenario played out often in the embodied memory of Christmas in the English culture. The working class relationship to broader political and economic institutions is a constant presence in Dickens' work, and he often paints a picture of a destitute class in need of salvation. However, depending on the text, Dickens suggests different concentrations of agency regarding the social change he advocates. In *A Christmas Carol*, salvation comes in the form of the paternal figure that emerges from Scrooge's transformation. In his later works, Dickens moves away from the scenario of paternalism to urging individual agency in the face of difficult change. No matter the particulars of the scenario, the goal of goodwill and salvation for the destitute remains common,

and the *belief* that Dickens' advocates for "loving your fellow man" always requires the *performance* of a particular action. Scrooge's belief actions include providing for the Cratchit family, becoming a second father to Tiny Tim, and reconnecting with his nephew Fred. Without these performed actions, Scrooge would not be able to make the shift from pupil of change to a believing practitioner for change. Such a belief would be false, as true belief requires performed action. Since Scrooge is a fictional character central to the ideological *Carol* belief system developed by Dickens, an essential part of Scrooge's role is to model belief behavior in order to encourage a positive change of behavior in the audience. Scrooge must actively model the behavior that proves his belief in order to incite the audience into performance and into belief.

Goodwill and the equality of men is a major scene in the larger Christmas scenario played out every year in the month of December, perhaps encompassing the entire climax of the season. In order to understand the complexity of the Christmas scenario – a term that Diana Taylor uses to identify seemingly simple cultural constructs that require embodiment (Taylor #) – the resolution to the climactic, generous practice of holiday giving is the return to the status quo. The Ebenezer Scrooge at the end of *A Christmas Carol*, who promises to keep Christmas in his heart for all of the year, is an exception to the stereotypical Victorian Benthamite and Malthusian caricature Dickens paints with Scrooge at the beginning of the story. As Childers notes, part of Dickens' critique is to illustrate the longest journey possible – from solipsistic miser to munificent benefactor – in order to illustrate that social reform is possible in the most extreme situations, though the journey may not be as far as we think and the lesson not as long-lasting (122-123). In reality, the Christmas scenario is as ephemeral, though recurring, as the

month of December. One could not find a staged production or video broadcast of the *Carol* in March despite the assertion that the fruits of Scrooge's lesson bloom year-round. Though the plight of the Cratchits deeply moves Scrooge, he swears to uphold the ideals of goodwill towards men only after he is faced with his own mortality, contradicting the traditional, conservative view of Dickensian morality. Dickens indicates economic class rather than spiritual worth as the indicator of either having or wanting; after all, feasting to excess has often been a staple of the English Christmas, as clearly represented by the apparition of the Spirit of Christmas Present and the symbolic swollen goose Scrooge provides to produce the meager material gains of the Cratchit family.

Dickens presents only one individualized example of active goodwill, and though Scrooge may improve the prognosis of his soul and Bob Cratchit's family may eat better, the vast majority of the destitute in London remain hungry and poor. Similar to contemporary political and materialist critiques of Christmas, Scrooge neither completely shakes his solipsistic tendencies, nor does he save every member of society. Much more attention is given to Scrooge's holiday transformation than his alleged actions of goodwill through the remainder of his life, to which Dickens allocates a mere two paragraphs. The temporary nature of performance perpetuates the illusion of economic and social progress embodied by performance at Christmas. The illusion of transformation actually helps to facilitate the perpetuation of hierarchical, capitalistic systems rather than long-lived change. Childers points out that the capitalism's materialistic effects on Christmas are not purely contemporary developments, as George Bernard Shaw illustrates a half century after Dickens:

Christmas is forced on a reluctant and disgusted nation by the shopkeepers and the press; on its own merits it would wither and shrivel in the fiery breath of universal hatred; and any one who looked back to it would be turned to a pillar of greasy sausage. (qtd. in Childers 114)

As a champion of goodwill and patronage for the poor during Christmas and beyond, Dickens presents, through the allegory of Scrooge's questionable transformation, a reflection of his contemporary London, when the liberal reformations of the 1830's seem inadequate and where Dickens codifies Christmas as a narrative space in which to play out his concerns for social progress. Though hope pervades the story of Scrooge's revelations, the true scenario behind acts of goodwill in the Christmas scenario, from Diana Taylor's politicized point of view, may be the masking of quotidian capitalist hierarchy and *laissez-faire* economics behind the artifice of beneficent patronage. Dickens critiques the shortsightedness of Christmas transformation in favor of longer-lasting social change in other works, but *A Christmas Carol* has remained popular in spite of or because it perpetuates a popularly accepted Christmas belief of temporary transformation. Christmas giving is, perhaps, a yearly sacrifice paid by the middle class in order to cleanse them of the guilt of their neglect throughout the rest of the year, similar to the guilt with which the Spirits cajole Scrooge. While culturally distinct from the colonialist scenarios Taylor explores in her study, the class hierarchies within Victorian London illustrated by Dickens address similar questions of guilt and agency in establishing traditions and the cultural archive and repertoire.

In order to address the distinction between static historical narrative and the dynamic cultural scenarios demanding action that Taylor defines, I propose the overlaps between performance, belief, and scenario as the central link between Dickens' approach cultural memory and the Christian ideals of goodwill and equality. Just as scenarios require performance, belief requires performance. The social change advocated by Dickens is driven by beliefs that can be interpreted as either Christian ethics or human goodness. Just as the Catholic belief practices I discuss in the previous chapter require performance in order to evidence and experience belief, the Dickensian belief in goodwill requires action, usually in the style of financial giving. In this way, Scrooge requires performance in the nontraditional, unstaged sense in *A Christmas Carol* in order to legitimate and activate his belief. One major difference between the cultural embodiment Taylor defines as performance and the performance of goodwill enacted by Scrooge in Dickens' *Carol* is that, as a work of fiction, Dickens' work is a reflection of reality rather than a communally created action. Taylor warns against fictional theatrical and literary mimesis or representations of reality in identifying repertoire due to the level of separation between the work of art and the reality of lived experience. However, aside from this crucial difference, the *Carol* fits within the Christmas archive by representing a scenario of goodwill and patronage that is a part of the larger Christmas scenario, spackled with a deceptively simple surface. Where I explore performance as a form of belief, Diana Taylor views performance as a form of understanding – an episteme distinct from the usual, passive method of linguistic transfer.

Paternalism in the Christmas Scenario

Despite the questionable activation of the Christmas scenario within his text, Dickens' *Carol* remains the unequivocal literary iteration of Christmas. Along with *The Nutcracker*, *A Christmas Carol* is a Christmas institution in the United States, but unlike *The Nutcracker*, Dickens' *Carol* provides its American audience with the definitively "traditional" Christmas of the Victorian era. Though Dickens played a pivotal role in emphasizing the idea of caring for the poor during the Christmas season in Victorian London, to claim that he conceptualized the idea would be an overstatement. At least as far back as the medieval period, children performed and begged for monetary or edible gifts during the Christmas season. Christmas was often a popular time of year for medieval lords to provide lavish feasts for some of his colleagues and inferiors. Christian scholars have also linked the origins of this Christmas concept to the teachings of Christ, whose humble birth is celebrated on Christmas. Although Dickens did not, perhaps, invent the concept of goodwill as it relates to Christmas, he reminds us that goodwill is an ideal, not a reality, despite a long history of joyous yuletides. Dickens' critique of London society cleverly fits into the joyous Christmas season by definitively displaying hope; if Scrooge, the most uncompassionate miser, can learn to give to the less fortunate, then so can the rest of us. The problematic side to this Dickensian image of holiday hope is that *A Christmas Carol*, unlike many of Dickens' later works, allows the populace to broadly blame the Scrooges of the world for the suffering of the Cratchits rather than inspiring self-reflection and self-improvement in the larger portion of the population. Dickens recognized this problem and began to question the popular scenario of benevolent paternalism leading to salvation in works such as *Barnaby Rudge*, which pre-dates *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens makes the intentional decision to return to the

scenario of paternalism in *A Christmas Carol* before breaking from it again in his next Christmas book, *The Chimes*.

Through *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens provides one approach to the scenario of Christmas beneficence common to other English narratives at the time. Dickens noted a reliance on paternalism in some of his earlier works, such as *Oliver Twist*, and began to move away from a trope that required a socially or economically inferior character to rely on a superior character for salvation from their plight. As Sally Ledger notes, works like *A Christmas Carol* reflect Dickens's belief in individual giving by activating a fiscally wealthy father figure as a savior to the derelict (Ledger #). Often, these paternal characters function as a literal father, such as Scrooge: "to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father" (Dickens 176). The origins of the paternal trope is a question outside the scope of this study, but its relationship to Christmas can certainly be found in much earlier cultural traditions including those that created various Father Christmas characters. While one could discuss paternalism as an inherent element in the Victorian English literary psyche, Charles Dickens was an exceptionally socially aware writer and recognized that pushing the paternal trope incited a reliance on a wealthy second party often remote from the impoverished classes Dickens sought to help. For example, the benevolence shown to Oliver and to Tiny Tim alike was certainly an exception in the larger context of poverty on the streets of London. The paternalism trope itself is a Western scenario in Taylor's terms, especially in colonizing countries. At its most extreme, colonizers may use paternalism as a euphemism for manifest destiny. In relation to Dickens' London, paternalism acts as a mask for efforts to codify hierarchical class borders. In a sense, the beliefs performed when enacting

paternal beneficence may indeed be beliefs in the Christmas ideals of goodwill and communal caring; however, as Dickens realizes in his later works, paternal acts are often also performances of a belief in distinguishing between and solidifying borders between social classes. As a part of the larger Christmas scenario that extends before and beyond Dickens, paternalism similar to Scrooge's can be found in the different incarnations of Father Christmas.

Much of Dickens' transition from witty satirist to serious novelist can be attributed to a shift in Dickens' tone from naïve hopefulness to grave social commentary. Many of his later works place the onus for change on his readers in lower income brackets instead of relying on the wealthy for salvation. Despite his social awareness, *The Carol* notes a return to paternalism in Dickens' oeuvre. As his first Christmas novel, perhaps this return to the paternal trope notes an inherent cultural link between paternal benevolence and the Christmas season, a part of the scenario of goodwill attributed to Christmas and since labeled as tradition as well as a building block in the Christmas scenario of temporarily veiled social hierarchies.

Conclusion: Ephemerality in Performance

Although Christmas and Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* revisit audiences in many iterations yearly, an essential aspect of the Christmas scenario is the ephemerality also characteristic of performance. The fleeting nature of Christmas is essential to its meaning either as epistemological embodied memory or as performance of either humanistic or Christian beliefs. Although Christmas remains familiar because of the appropriate abundance of entries in the Christmas archive, including many of Dickens' works, each of the archive's re-enactments in the repertoire is a distinct from both the archive and other re-enactments. Each performance in

the repertoire must be distinct from the archive and other performances in order to distinguish it from the ideals of the Christmas archive such as those discussed in Dickens' narratives. As Taylor asserts, the archive is not embodied, and therefore cannot fully reflect life in the way the embodied repertoire can. Christmas experiences are born every season as they are enacted; however, these experiences must also die at the end of the season and remain in the archive until they are reborn into the repertoire in the next year.

Dickens' *Carol* has persisted both in cultural memory and in the static form of archival text, putting it at the intersection of archive and repertoire. Appropriate for the simultaneously indulgent and generous nature of the Christmas season, the *Carol* is an indicator both of humanistic and Christian ideals and of the yearly cashing in on ticket and book sales; the *Carol* has never been out of print since its publication in 1843. Just as Christmas highlights the contradiction between collective social change and individual agency, so too does the *Carol*. Just as Christmas lessens the crippling economic capabilities of *laissez-faire* capitalism without eradicating it, so does the *Carol*. Just Christmas enforces the joy of giving with guilt, so does the *Carol*. So is the problematically joyous and dire scenario of Christmas that reflects in every entry in the Christmas archive and repertoire, including but not limited to the work of Dickens.

4. THE POWER OF NOSTALGIA: TCHAIKOVSKY'S *THE NUTCRACKER* AS INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE AND RECREATION OF THE AMERICAN CHRISTMAS

In the United States, few performances ring in the season of Christmas more often than Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*. Almost every ballet company in the United States mounts a yearly production of *The Nutcracker*. The ballet is so prevalent that many make quips about every Christmas bringing them "one *Nutcracker* closer to death" (Fisher ix). Others view *The Nutcracker* as a cash cow, a yearly sell-out that ballet companies resort to in order to subsidize the rest of their season of "serious ballet." While *The Nutcracker* no doubt often takes in significant profits, more lies under the sugarcoated exterior of this holiday ballet. The history of *The Nutcracker*, how it came and adapted to the United States, and the heavily ritualized process of production and spectatorship of the ballet points to the complicated relationships between performance and culture during the Christmas season. I borrow the vocabulary from Patrice Pavis when I term *The Nutcracker* the result of an intercultural exchange, finding popularity in the United States by being elite and reachable, staid and amusing, decorative and eloquent.

A Russian Immigrant: A Brief History of *The Nutcracker* in Russia and the United States

Although *The Nutcracker* did not reach its height in the United States until well into the twentieth century, Tchaikovsky originally composed the ballet in imperial Russia in early December of 1892. E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* (1816) inspired the plot, though most versions of the ballet simplify Hoffmann's complex plot, tone and image structures that did not translate well into the style of imperial golden age Russian ballet.

Tchaikovsky was unquestionably a well-respected composer, and the 1890 production of his critically acclaimed *Sleeping Beauty* featured the same team as *The Nutcracker* two years later. Despite these benefits, *The Nutcracker* did not garner the same critical response as *Sleeping Beauty*, though it was extremely popular with audiences. *The Nutcracker* was not Tchaikovsky's favorite piece, and took him a comparatively long time to compose. Tchaikovsky was stricken with personal insecurities and tragedies such as the death of his sister as he entered middle age, and *The Nutcracker* marked a period of unease in Tchaikovsky's career. The first production of the ballet had a rocky start, as master choreographer Marius Petipa handed over the production to his less organized and less innovative assistant Lev Ivanov. After the dual premier of *The Nutcracker* with Tchaikovsky's *Iolanthe*, critics deemed *The Nutcracker* a failure as a ballet. Perhaps due to anxieties about the perceived threat of cabaret theatre to the incredibly formal imperial ballet, many critics rejected *The Nutcracker* for not being a ballet for multiple reasons, including the casting of child dancers in leading roles. *The Nutcracker* was performed irregularly in Russia, never quite shaking its anti-balletic reputation, until it first set foot in the United States in the early 20th century.

During the years of revolution in Russia, adaptations and re-imaginings of classical works became more popular abroad. Many adaptations of *The Nutcracker* during this period first appeared piecemeal, used as solo pieces by famous dancers such as Anna Pavlova with Sergei Diaghlev's Ballets Russes. One of the leading pioneers of the ballet adaptation practice in the United States was choreographer George Balanchine, who in the 1920s combined the legitimizing qualities of Russian traditional ballet with an American freedom of expression to

create innovative new stagings of ballets, some of which remain the standard in many ballet houses to this day. Balanchine's choreography of *The Nutcracker* embraced the role of children in the ballet and added much of the American Christmas aesthetics and ethics now thought of as staples in the ballet, especially the sentimental family tone that distinguishes his production perhaps more than his choreography. First taking hold as a holiday event as early as 1932 in Vancouver, *The Nutcracker* rapidly gained popular appeal until the San Francisco ballet started planning yearly stagings of the ballet in the 1950s. *The Nutcracker* was the only Russian classic to create a new home in the United States and the American audience did not seem as immediately critical of its playful tone as the Russian critics were. While it was clear that *The Nutcracker* was perhaps not as sophisticated as some of Tchaikovsky's works, the charming nature of the ballet appealed to the American audience.

Dance scholar Jennifer Fisher suggests that *The Nutcracker* gained popularity in the 1940's due to a Disneyfied aesthetic of dance introduced widely to the United States in the 1940 film *Fantasia*. Fisher notes that the film follows the basic suite structure of the second act of *The Nutcracker* and helps to make classical music less intimidating for an American audience. Subsequent productions of *The Nutcracker* in the United States maintained the traditional bravura of Tchaikovsky's music with the lighthearted playfulness introduced by *Fantasia* (Fisher 23-28). By the late 1950's, a televised version of Balanchine's *Nutcracker* began an ongoing history of televised productions, many of which still featured in the "Battle of the *Nutcrackers*" marathon televised by Ovation every Christmas. "Battle" may be an appropriate term to associate with yearly stagings of *The Nutcracker* since most balletomanes, dancers, and audience

members who visit or participate in their local holiday *Nutcracker* regularly develop opinions about how to stage the ballet properly. Yearly broadcast solidified the portability of *The Nutcracker* in the United States, permanently imprinting it on Christmas in the United States and rapidly disseminating into virtually every professional and amateur ballet house throughout the country.

If there is any further doubt of the embedment of *The Nutcracker* in Christmas culture in the United States, one needs only to look at the 1994 *Nutcracker*-themed Christmas in the White House during the Clinton administration. By identifying *The Nutcracker* as patriotic, it becomes not only a symbol of the American Christmas, but also an articulation of American national identity. While it is difficult to pinpoint definitively the exact quantity and combination of qualities that led to the explosive popularity of *The Nutcracker* in the United States, one of the most appealing qualities, especially for community-specific adaptations of the story, is that the story is an effective template for projecting the unique desires, identity, and agenda of a specific community. Contemporary evidence of *The Nutcracker*'s adaptability can be found in the myriad adaptations of the story whether through changing the nationalities represented in the suites of the second act in the Land of Sweets or a complete re-grafting of the story such as Donald Byrd's *Harlem Nutcracker* of 1996. Finding another traditional ballet with the same adaptive capabilities with the same amount of cultural relevance would be a trying task indeed.

Pavis' Interculturalism: *The Nutcracker* Through the Hourglass

While none would doubt the Russian roots of *The Nutcracker*, the ballet has long since its creation been such a staple of performance culture in the United States that the ballet is now

more American than it is Russian. The American adoption of the ballet is due in no small part to the intense adaptations conducted both when the ballet migrated and more contemporary re-imaginings specific to individual American subcultures. In its journey from the elitism of Russian imperial ballet, *The Nutcracker* has become a specifically American celebration of family togetherness and childhood fancy, although some essential elements of the Russian original remain such as Tchaikovsky's music and, to a lesser extent, major elements of the original plot, despite some reshuffling and renaming of characters. Distinctions between Russian and American versions of *The Nutcracker* actually point to the differences in ideological beliefs between the two cultures that were distinct geographically, temporally, and culturally.

Given a history that is steeped in both tradition and adaptation, *The Nutcracker* becomes a model for exploring performance theorist Patrice Pavis' conception of intercultural transfer in terms of performance and belief at Christmas. By applying Pavis' much-debated hourglass model of transfer between source and target culture to *The Nutcracker*, I attempt to both analyze the current cultural role played by *The Nutcracker* in the United States and by extension how *The Nutcracker* may serve as a model for the broader collection of Christmas traditions in the United States that have been appropriated from other cultures to construct a distinctly American Christmas.

I would first like to present a caveat due to the difficulty in this case of defining the first adapters of *The Nutcracker* in the United States. Instead of focusing on the first American *Nutcracker* or the impact of a specific production, I will instead focus on the transfer of *The Nutcracker* to American soil, which did not occur until the abridged Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo

production that came to New York in 1940. The United States did not see a full production of *The Nutcracker* until the San Francisco Ballet’s 1944 version, which premiered on Christmas Eve. I am not interested in identifying the “definitive” choreographer of the *Nutcracker*, since scholars and practitioners alike still debate this question. Instead, I aim to use Patrice Pavis’ theory of cultural transfer to outline the transfer from one culture to another and to help delineate the difference between the Russian and American *Nutcrackers* and how each reflects on the beliefs embodied in the American Christmas.

Pavis’ approach to “cultural transfer” – essentially a theory on acculturation from one culture to another, is modeled in his “hourglass of cultures” (see figure 1) Outlined in *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, the hourglass represents a purposefully vague model of cultural transfer between source and target cultures that Pavis applies specifically to performance (4):

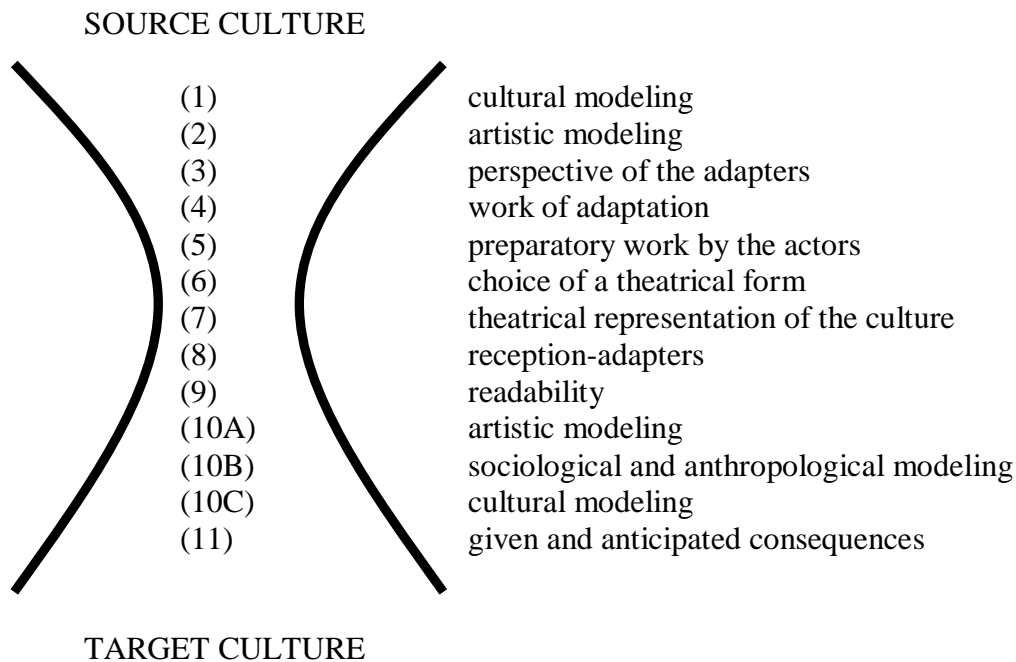


Figure 1: Patrice Pavis' Hourglass of Cultures

In this model, the upper bowl (the source culture) contains grains of sand that represent cultural elements – semiotic signs – that pass through a series of filters before reaching the lower bowl (target culture) in a new orientation (4). Although the chart above, recreated from Pavis’ text, outlines the process of cultural transfer as a clearly delineated, linear passage between source and target cultures, I find it more useful to consider each category not as a “step” in an unchangeable, vertical staircase where the beginning of one step clearly marks the end of the previous. Instead, I will approach Pavis’ hourglass as a series of “filters” through which cultural information passes before acquiring meaning in the target culture. With this approach, I hope to avoid proposing a universal process of cultural transfer and allow for the possibility of overlap and reordering of filters, accounting for the possibilities of each filter acting simultaneously and jumping between filters as different decisions about adaptation are made. Due to this interpretation of Pavis’ hourglass, I will discuss larger themes and trends in translating *The Nutcracker* rather than trying to apply the filters stepwise to the ballet. Similarly, certain filters may go undiscussed or omitted, as the hourglass provides a general schematic for cultural transfer wherein certain filters are more relevant to a particular case than others.

Although Pavis focuses more on distinctions between dominant and dominated cultures, usually between East and West, such distinctions are not as clear in the transfer of *The Nutcracker* from Germany to Russia to the United States. Furthermore, Pavis sympathizes with a postmodern view of theatre theory in defining the necessity of a vague framework as a conduit for artistic contemplation rather than drawing cultural or artistic conclusions from a work of art. Because of these foci, Pavis focuses on Western adaptations of Eastern works through the minds

of avant-garde practitioners of the time such as Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook, and Ariane Mnouchkine. Lastly, the case of *The Nutcracker* is complicated due to the number of source and target cultures and the difficulty of delineating the agency of the source culture and of the target culture. For example, was it the intention of the Russian touring production to communicate their culture to the United States, or was it the decision of certain American practitioners? Furthermore, were these decisions motivated by artistry, finance, or both? Rather than attempting to delineate who made which specific decision in the transfer of *The Nutcracker* to the United States, I instead look at the qualities evident in that transfer and how they may illuminate the ideology of both the target and source cultures.

Although the focus of this study involves cultures without a clear distinction between dominant and dominated, and *The Nutcracker* is both a three-fold adaptation. In the traditionally Western form of ballet, Pavis' hourglass provides a helpful framework for analyzing the possible causes and consequences for the unique cultural journey of *The Nutcracker*. However, I also challenge Pavis' model as an unrealistically linear model of cultural transfer that oversimplifies the methods of cultural adaptation and appropriation. My intention with the remainder of this chapter is to analyze the cultural journey of *The Nutcracker* using the filters in Pavis' hourglass of cultures in order to illustrate both the difficulties of analyzing cultural transfer as well as potential catalysts for the success of *The Nutcracker* at Christmas in the United States. I hope to identify these catalysts as points where Christmas in the United States is defined ideologically and as performed reflections of ideological belief.

Ballet as Artistic Iteration of Culture

Based on the structure of the cultural hourglass, cultural modeling precedes artistic modeling, as it makes sense that art draws from culture. However, it can often be difficult to differentiate cultural from artistic models, especially in a society such as Russia, where artistic traditions are an integrated part of cultural definition. In fact, ballet serves as a useful metaphor for the ideological framework of discipline, technical prowess, and beauty that constitutes the American interpretation of Russian cultural ideology. It is therefore more useful to view the first two steps in Pavis' hourglass not as direct cause and effect from culture to art, but as a mutual interaction where change in one yields change in the other. Due to the Russian domination of the ballet world, particularly during the late nineteenth century, there should be no surprise that ballet was and remains a form of artistic modeling for Russian culture. Artistic points of modeling usually begin with the source culture in a decision about how to present their culture. In the case of art, an individual could make this decision, though prominent individuals in the art world – such as Tchaikovsky – become a part of a larger institution and through the hands of choreographers and dancers, a more complete representation of culture occurs in the full ballet production.

In the case of *The Nutcracker*, I will consider Russian culture the source culture, although the earlier Hoffmann short story certainly influenced at least the plot of Tchaikovsky's score. The cultural modeling of the first definitive production of *The Nutcracker*, choreographed by Ivanov, is therefore one in a long line of previous cultural transfers. The cultural modeling in this production is thus a result of previous transfers as much as it is a creation of the practitioners involved in its creation. During its time, Russian ballet went unchallenged in terms of artistic

and disciplinary prowess, and Tchaikovsky as a well-respected master of his craft. These facts combined make Diaghelev's decision to produce touring productions of Tchaikovsky's works seems an obvious and appropriate artistic model for dispersing Russian culture to other cultures. Thus, ballet becomes an artistic model of Russian culture: a form chosen by the source culture in order to create an embodied representation of intangible cultural ideals.

The central place of ballet in Russian artistic culture contributes to the cultural transfer Pavis indicates in the first two steps of formulation within the source culture, but cultural and artistic modeling may also occur on a smaller scale – that of the individual artist or group of artists – in transmitting a particular work, such as *The Nutcracker*. Although Tchaikovsky may not have approached *The Nutcracker* with an agenda of cultural transmission, by this time, he would have also been well aware of the popularity of his works and the probability of dissemination of his work outside of Russian borders. Tchaikovsky himself, in fact, enjoyed and promoted many of the movements in *The Nutcracker* that he most fancied, despite the struggles he had composing and the misgivings he had about the production.

The brunt of cultural confrontation occurs after the initial contact and each grain has finished trickling through filters and settled in the bottom bowl until the sands are once again disturbed. In some cases, this is where the transfer ends – the target culture assigns meaning to the signs of the source culture based on their own paradigms and cultural episteme. However, for *The Nutcracker* and many other still-surviving and still-adapted works of noted longevity and cultural history, the tenth series of filters marks a potential return to the first two filters, as if the hourglass were turned once again on its head. Once the sands are completely accessible to the

target culture, such as Russia and the United States in the case of *The Nutcracker*, a cultural confrontation occurs that results in formally redefining the cultural signifier (performance) in the terms of the target culture. In his tenth set of filters, Pavis illustrates the complete appropriation of the source culture's product into a new cultural object in the target culture.

A Multitude of Perspectives in Producing Intercultural Performance

The first step in addressing the perspective of the adapters of *The Nutcracker* is to determine exactly who plays the role of adapter throughout the life of the performance. As translation theory shows, adaptation and translation do not always begin and end with the decision of one individual to take an element from one culture and transpose it to another. The complexity of translation methods is particularly prevalent in the realm of performance, where a series of adapters – writers, directors, choreographers, and even audiences – may be involved in the same project. The case of *The Nutcracker* complicates the question of agency even further because the form I analyze here is an American adaptation of a Russian ballet based on a German folk tale, each heavily influenced by three different cultures and historical periods. Although Pavis' model seems to construct the third step of his hourglass as the conscious adaptation of the source culture with the target culture in mind, his model also helps to consider a diverse body of adapters rather than focusing on delineating the particular roles of individuals in the adaptation process. Such delineation would be more useful in a study of the technical particulars of the adaptation process. In the case of *The Nutcracker*, broader cultural perspectives represented by the various body of adapters may prove more useful for sketching the cultural perspectives of different cultures in relation to each other.

The two major perspectives at play here are the Russian perspective on the German folk story and later the American perspective on the Russian ballet. I should note that these are merely the two perspectives that are most relevant to this study, and that multiple subdivisions of national perspective must be subject to a certain degree of generalization. There are, of course, other perspectives at play in the cultural transfer of *The Nutcracker*, and the general sketches I provide here of national perspective may certainly be broken down to smaller subgroups of perspectives that more accurately represent the innumerable regional nuances of each national perspective. As Pavis notes, defining a culture is not a neat business, and we must both recognize and accept a certain amount of imprecision in order to create first a larger framework of analysis before dissecting the nuances, which from the onset of cultural transfer are all possible (6-7).

Many changes made to Hofmann's story during the adaptation of *The Nutcracker* occurred before Tchaikovsky began to contemplate his score and far before Petipa handed down the choreographical responsibilities to his protégé Ivanov, despite the fact that much of the discourse over the Russian *Nutcracker* primarily involves Tchaikovsky and Ivanov rather than the initial efforts of Vsevolozhsky. The perspective taken by the Russian adapters, therefore, was largely driven by the popularity of both Hofmann's story and Russian ballet. The former in this case bows to the latter for the Russian adapters, as evidenced by the myriad changes made to Hofmann's story. The intention of the adapters, therefore, is probably not motivated by reverence for the complexities of German literature. Instead, the balletic *Nutcracker* seems to

use certain elements from a popular German tale in service to the Russian balletic form, which was in its golden age at the time.

When considering the reverence for Russian ballet, the adaptive eye of the United States, in looking towards *The Nutcracker* does not stray so far from the Russian. Much of the world, in fact, recognized the value and dominance of Russian ballet and its ideals of artistic beauty. The differences between the Russian perspective and that of the United States is not a difference of opinion about artistic form – which should be clear given that *The Nutcracker* has remained a ballet throughout its American life – but of thematic appreciation. The American perception of Ivanov's *Nutcracker* begins with an appreciation for Russian ballet prowess. Although other Russian ballets have enjoyed longevity on the American ballet stage, the impulse to both adopt and adapt *The Nutcracker* is unique due not to perceived formal beauty, but to a thematic ideology of family togetherness and childhood fantasy that appealed to the American audience, especially in the mid-twentieth century. The specifics of

In conclusion, both the Russian and American perspectives on adapting *The Nutcracker* to the ballet are both artistic and cultural, both thematic and formal. For the Russians, the thematic significance of plot comes secondary to the cultural and artistic prowess of the ballet form. For the Americans, the cultural model of Russian ballet is a mark of credibility and artistic appreciation, but does not mark the cultural significance of the ballet to the American audience. Instead, the thematic thrust of the story appeals more to the American audience than previous Russian ballet productions, thus providing the Americans immediately relevant cultural signifiers that catalyze an impulse for adaptation. I will discuss the specifics of these cultural relevancies

when I discuss the eighth and ninth cultural filters of reception-adapters and moments of readability.

High Culture and Criticism in the Work of Adaptation

The actual work of adaptation, which I addressed briefly in the previous section, involves developing a code based on the point of view of a particular culture. This code provides the criteria for the act of adaptation which, when finished, acts as a cultural cipher, a sort of key to decoding the source culture. In this case, *The Nutcracker* is one in a long line of similar cultural ciphers formatted based on the ideals represented by Russian ballet. In order to both protect the national treasure and preserve its integrity, criticism was an integral mechanism for regulating and defining the acceptable form of Russian ballet as an institution of high culture as opposed to popular culture.

Including performance, the curious case of art in intercultural exchange always involves the question of “high culture,” which the Russian critical tradition at this time seems bent on preserving. Pavis notes that art is always modeled on “high culture” and appreciated based on how close it resembles that culture (15). Though he does not provide a specific definition for “high culture,” one can assume a link to what I alluded to earlier in the inherent credibility of Russian ballet in other cultures. High culture is a cultural concept, and therefore its definition is not immediately traceable to any particular group of individuals. Instead, conceptions of “high culture” are a collective understanding difficult to define. However, the usual role of the art or performance critic is to act as a vehicle for evaluating and preserving “high culture.” Such is the case in the Russian ballet, and the criticism surrounding *The Nutcracker* can tell us much about

the Russian point of view in creating *The Nutcracker* and, by contrast, the American point of view. The critical perspective also points out the essential difference between the ideals of “high culture” and the widespread appeal of “popular culture.” In this sense, the act and function of criticism may be a result of a belief in preserving high culture.

Criticism of *The Nutcracker* in both Russia and the United States revolves around trivializing the ballet as a product of popular culture versus high culture, though the Russian and American approaches to this criticism differ. Although not every Russian critic condemned *The Nutcracker* from the start, most criticized the audacity of subverting the codified style of Russian ballet. Even though many plot elements were eliminated from Hofmann’s story in order to make them appropriate for the balletic form, critics especially criticized featuring young child dancers on the imperial stage instead of the well-trained beauty of mature dancers. Extensive criticism was also made of the fanciful nature of the piece, which many deemed inappropriate for a serious art form. Finally, Russian critics were fans of neither the chaotic battle scene nor the unholy blending of other cultural dance styles found in the suites in Act II. Scenes that more closely resembled the traditional balletic structure, such as the grand pas de deux and the chorus of snowflakes garnered much more positive feedback from the critics, but did not always outweigh the outrages over more controversial scenes.

American criticism of *The Nutcracker* is not as concerned with maintaining the integrity of the dramatic form, as ballet is not as ingrained or protected of a cultural institution in the United States as it has been in Russia. Instead, criticism of the ballet is now often due to the sheer popularity and frequency of *The Nutcracker*. Perhaps reacting to over-exposure rather than

a pure judgment of cultural worth, American critics now criticize *The Nutcracker* as a purely popular indulgence driven by commercial gain. Without going into detail about the complex relationship between art and commerce, I suggest that the critique *The Nutcracker* in the United States is in part the result of a cultural paradigm that tries to separate the commercial (the popular) from the artistic (high culture), perhaps because true artists are assumed to always exist on the vanguard.

Despite the prevalence of both Russian and American criticism of *The Nutcracker*, given from the perspective of preserving “high culture,” productions of *The Nutcracker* were extremely popular among Russian audiences and remain extremely popular for American audiences. The popularity of *The Nutcracker*, however, should not discredit the cultural value of the performance. Instead, popularity is a better indicator of true cultural points of view rather than those imposed by the ideals of high culture. In this sense, *The Nutcracker* provides a model for an artistic iteration of the American cultural point of view at the time of its adaptation.

Discipline and the Yearly Ritual of The Nutcracker

Few people experience the yearly recurrence of *The Nutcracker* more directly than the artists directly in production. Jennifer Fisher notes that *The Nutcracker*, as the most consistently scheduled and performed ballet in the United States and Canada, acts both as a rite of passage for young ballet dancers as well as a yearly ritual for professional dancers. Dancer training for a production of *The Nutcracker*, therefore, is not limited to rehearsals for a single production. Instead, for most ballet dancers, training for *The Nutcracker* begins at their first performance as a mouse or a party guest in their first production, well before they put on a pair of pointe shoes.

For the original Russian production of *The Nutcracker*, training for the adult dancers was largely similar to the training necessary for mounting other ballets. The most unique aspect of the Russian production was choreographing with child dancers. While the child dancers did little more than stand and move from pose to pose, incorporating child performers marked a departure from the usual Russian ballet formula.

Just as actors train their bodies, minds and voices to play roles, ballet dancers go through extreme physical training in order to rise through the ranks in order to become a professional ballet dancer. While many ballet dancers set their sights on dancing lead roles in the greatest ballets, the hierarchy of roles in *The Nutcracker* indicates a rising through the ranks from party guest to Clara to snowflake to Sugar Plum is a representative model of the development of young dancers from their first pair of slippers to their perfectly formed arabesque. For American ballet dancers, *The Nutcracker* provides a rite of passage for developing a ballet career and a tangible model of performing the “American Dream” – advancing through hard work and discipline.

Performance of Culture and Theatrical Production as Translation

The decision to create *The Nutcracker* as a ballet was not made in the United States. However, the fact that *The Nutcracker* is a ballet is significant both for the original Russian production and for American adaptations. The story of *The Nutcracker* was not subject to any particular legal recourse, and there was no reason that adaptations of the story into alternative forms could not have been executed, should the desire have existed. According to Pavis, the theatrical *mise en scène* always acts as a “translation” – not a reflection – of cultural reality (6).

Theatrical productions like *The Nutcracker* are therefore iterations of reality although they are usually made of fictional material.

As mentioned before, the choice of balletic form was particularly pertinent for conveying culture from a Russian perspective. The reason for this form's popularity, as briefly discussed before, derives from a necessity that Pavis points out: the need, in cultural transfer, to communicate abstract or complex elements in a concrete way (15-16). Without discussing how the wealthy tradition of Russian literature may also convey meaning, theatrical performance certainly provides a more concretely visual representation of Russian values of discipline and ideals of beauty. Creating a theatrical production constitutes multiple levels of translation and adaptation that can overlap and interact throughout the production process, like multiple hourglasses fused together, sharing some filters.

Cultural Appropriation, Exemplifying Christmas Through Reception-Adapters and Readability

At the moment of impact wherein the artistic representation of one culture contacts another, the intention of the target culture largely yields to what Pavis terms "reception-adapters" in the source culture (16). The basic process of this interaction, especially pertinent with a heavily visual presentation such as a dance performance like *The Nutcracker*, begins with the target culture identifying symbols and signs from the source culture's performance that resonate within and appeal to its own distinct ideological framework. Many of the reception-adapters in *The Nutcracker* appeal to an American sensibility.

The Nutcracker's success in the United States, which took off notably in the mid-twentieth century, was not due to the prestige of the Russian ballet, though this medium certainly

helped to legitimize the ballet in the minds of early critics and ballet houses. Rather, the appeal of *The Nutcracker* was based in the plot elements and fanciful ideology of the story. Many of the images and techniques scorned by early Russian critics became points of intrigue for the United States audience: fanciful imagery and costumes, children dancing alongside professionals, and a type of mysterious magic. These images serve as the initial point of contact that form links between the source and target cultures. When placed in the context of national ideologies, these points of contact become moments of readability that develop meaning in the target culture.

The “readability” of *The Nutcracker* for the United States audience depends on the same characteristics that also make Christmas a cultural institution in the United States. The images of magic, childhood innocence, and family togetherness serve as moments of readability wherein the American audience identifies their own cultural ideals. Although *The Nutcracker* did not become a Christmas staple in the Russian performance tradition despite the holiday setting of the ballet, *The Nutcracker* in the United States quickly became inseparable from the holiday. This is largely because the ballet sufficiently mirrors a collection of ideals that are explicitly activated at Christmas. In fact, the holiday may serve as an adequate metaphor for midcentury American idealism.

As Pavis notes, a performance may be “readable” based on multiple aspects of the performance: themes, narrative, form, ideology, and sociocultural triggers (17). Pavis discusses these moments of readability specifically in the relationship between dominant and dominated cultures, but in the case of Russia and the United States, there is no clearly delineated dominator

and dominated, especially in the world of ballet. However, the aftermath of two world wars and growing distrust of Russian policy may have contributed to the American willingness to adapt and change a Russian ballet into an American ballet, a process more specifically discussed in the next section. First, I wish to outline some of the specific moments of readability in *The Nutcracker* for the American audience that led to its adoption into the American cultural repertoire.

The greatest thematic and ideological draws in *The Nutcracker* for the American audience are the fantastic elements, often magical and imaginary. Beginning when the character Drosselmeyer – who may serve as a type of paternal Father Christmas and keeper of Christmas magic in American productions – casts a spell on the toy nutcracker, the magical elements in *The Nutcracker* are linked both to the transformative holiday season (via the narrative elements discussed below) and a dreamlike representation of the childhood imagination in the Land of Sweets. As mentioned above, the fantastical presentation of *The Nutcracker* meshed well with the Disneyfied American aesthetic at the time, thematically emphasizing childhood innocence and imagination and the importance of family togetherness: themes also inherently linked to the American holiday season. For many, the theme of cherishing childhood innocence is particularly pertinent during the holiday season. Aside from religious links to the nativity, belief in the worth of childhood innocence is one of the belief systems performed during the holiday season. On multiple levels of participation from spectatorship to participant and beyond, *The Nutcracker* is a yearly recurring performance of belief in the themes and ideologies represented in the ballet's story.

The narrative of *The Nutcracker* is also well adaptable to an American audience due largely to how well the narrative journey of the story, especially in the Land of Sweets in the second act, emphasizes the moments of thematic readability. The narrative begins with the celebrations of a family Christmas party complete with party guests and gifts and soon transforms into a young girl's dream world after her favorite gift, a painted wooden nutcracker, is broken. While both American and Russian adapters have tweaked this story immensely since the original failure of Ivanov's production, adapters often leave or adjust many narrative elements of *The Nutcracker* to emphasize one theme over another. For example, Balanchine's version adds a scene between Marie (his version of the character Clara) and her mother as she falls asleep, further emphasizing the theme of family togetherness as a central force in the ballet rather than a complete reliance in the second act on the mystical dream world Clara enters.

The significance of the formal structure of the Russian *Nutcracker* was surely significant for those involved in the production of ballet in the United States. For many, *The Nutcracker* presented an accessible bridge between popular American culture and a "higher" form of art. Apart from the commercial potential for the ballet, the fact that *The Nutcracker* was a ballet with a complex score rather than a children's play or book created an appealing mix of popular imagery and high culture, at least momentarily pleasing some critics as well as the popular audience. Beyond the balletic form, the two-act structure of the ballet enhanced the thematic draw of the fantastical/magical elements in the ballet by offering a dream-like framework that believably placed the excess of the second act suites in the world of childlike imagination.

The ninth filter in Pavis' hourglass proves a useful illustration of the different facets of a performance that may be "read" or interpreted by the target culture. This filter also marks the point where certain elements from the source culture are either assimilated into the target culture and then forgotten, minimizing any influence of the source culture, or they are absorbed into the target ideology. Pavis again uses this model assuming that the target culture is the "dominant" culture. Regardless of arguments over political or economic "dominance" between Russia and the United States, however, that the acts of adaptation of *The Nutcracker* taken up in the United States along with the popular appeal of the ballet marks the United States as the dominant shareholder in the ballet, despite its Russian roots. Because of the prevalence of the ballet in United States cultural tradition, *The Nutcracker* is now largely an assertion of American cultural ideology, though perhaps legitimized in the world of "high culture" by its Russian roots.

Given and Anticipated Consequences

Pavis wisely cautions all adapters of performance work by pointing out the ephemeral nature of any performance, and that the consequences of a performance are limited to what lives on in the memory of audiences (19-20). Echoed somewhat in the previous chapter's discussion of Diana Taylor's theory on archive and repertoire in performance, Pavis' assertion about the necessity of the complete physical destruction of a performance does not necessarily take into account the physical remains left over of a production: the archive, which is distinct, though related to the repertoire. However, audience memory plays a particularly prevalent role in the longevity of *The Nutcracker* in the United States, which thrives on a feeling of nostalgia for its audience members.

Similar to the experience of dancers who participate in the yearly return of *The Nutcracker*, many audience members who have seen *The Nutcracker* experience the ballet on a yearly basis whether it be in attending a live performance, a televised broadcast, or any number of adaptations of the classic story. The ballet has existed long enough to obtain the status of a tradition, that which is a reliable recurrence during the Christmas season. A certain amount of nostalgia surrounds the ballet because of this reliable recurrence, combined with the ideals of childhood innocence, Christmas magic, and family togetherness, which are embedded in the American cultural experience of the Christmas season. *The Nutcracker*, as a part of a broader seasonal tradition, both contributes to and takes on the qualities of the season. This is so true that one may feel that they accurately understand what the *The Nutcracker* is about without ever experiencing a full production of the ballet.

Continued productions of *The Nutcracker*, of course, survive because of ticket sales, but tickets are sold and *The Nutcracker* persists because it is immortalized in cultural memory. In this case, Pavis is correct that the consequences of performance are much more long lasting than the production itself, though not because performances of *The Nutcracker* are in danger of disappearing any time soon. Rather, the pleasant, nostalgic memories both performed in the ballet and elicited by the ballet keep the audiences coming back. The consequence of performance, in this case, is the demand for more performance.

Conclusion: *The Nutcracker* as Microcosm of Christmas

Although few would doubt the full integration and leading role played by *The Nutcracker* during the Christmas season in the United States, the role the German and Russian roots of the

ballet is marginal compared to the importance of these cultures played in the cultural transfer of the ballet. Using Pavis' hourglass of cultures as a model outlines the complex nature of cultural transfer, even adaptations remaining within the same formal structure of ballet such as the Russian and American adaptations of *The Nutcracker*. Furthermore, the complexity of the cultural journey of *The Nutcracker* that this analysis can only suggest may serve as a metaphor for the larger series of cultural transfers that make up Christmas in the United States.

I mentioned above that *The Nutcracker* represents a type of Christmas belief that centers on cultural traditions at Christmastime. As with many aspects of multiple holidays, justifications by various religious factions have sought to center various cultural practices on a particular religious ideology. However, valuing childhood innocence, creativity and imagination does not require a religious framework in order to have meaning as a belief. Likewise, believing in the power of family togetherness or the transformational powers of the Christmas season to transcend social, cultural, economic, and political divides are beliefs that inspire certain actions during the Christmas season, often embodied in performances of goodwill. Of these actions, which are performed on every level of interaction from giving a mysteriously wrapped gift to a friend or family member to volunteering at a local charity, attending the local ballet school's production of *The Nutcracker* is certainly a ritual practiced in many communities throughout the country. *The Nutcracker* is so widespread, in fact, that it is a national cultural institution. As Pavis' model illustrates, *The Nutcracker* exemplifies how an artistic, cultural expression may transfer, change, and adapt from one culture to another. Furthermore, *The Nutcracker* serves as

an exemplary microcosm of the American Christmas, as it is a holiday rife with adapted and assimilated cultural traditions.

The American Christmas itself is a collection of holiday cultures adapted and appropriated from other cultures, mostly from northern Europe. The American process of adapting *The Nutcracker* serves as an example of how tradition and culture develops from an urge to tap into other cultures in order to expand and confirm ideologies and belief structures. As Pavis' hourglass of cultures suggests, cultural transfer is a literal act of adaptation, and works of art play a leading role in communicating these cultural shifts. *The Nutcracker* provides an example of the necessary role performance plays in codifying and displaying ideologies of belief. In this case, *The Nutcracker* operates as a performance on many levels both traditionally from the perspective of the performers and ritually from the perspective of audience members. Participating in and viewing a performance of *The Nutcracker* are both performances of the Christmas beliefs in childhood innocence and imagination, the value of familial togetherness, and the transformative potential of the holiday.

5. CONCLUSION: PERFORMANCE, CULTURE AND COMMERCIALISM IN THE AMERICAN CHRISTMAS

“‘Maybe Christmas,’ the Grinch thought, ‘doesn’t come from a store.’” – Dr. Seuss, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, 1957

Revisiting Performance and Belief at Christmas

If belief is inherently linked to performed action, as I argue here, my hope is that the performance case studies I present in this study provide an idea of the breadth of meanings, cultural interactions, and traditions inherent in the cultural practices and performance traditions of the Christmas season. I also hope that my engagement with prevalent performance theories aids in illuminating the complex web of signs and practices that comprise possible definitions of both culture and performance. This study is by no means exhaustive, but may serve as a model for subsequent explorations of other performance traditions. In linking performance theory to Christmas performance traditions, new ground may be broken by engaging with the role of film and television, both of which have certainly aided in both the ritualizing and codifying of holiday spectatorship through its programming as well as redefining communal togetherness by mediating a shared experience with the privacy of home viewing. Although I discuss the links between performance, community, and belief in the first chapter, a wealth of information remains untapped from the myriad performances that exist on the cultural spectrum. Especially in light of Victor Turner’s ventures to apply an anthropological, ritual-centered model to analyzing performance culture, events such as the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade and the countless daily performances of surrogate santas gracing the atriums of every mall and

department store in the country may be explored to find new methods of approaching the mutual developments of performance and culture. My particular focus on beliefs as social, cultural, and psychic constructs allows for an exploration of how culture and art interact and communicate with each other both within a society and between different societies.

Although some of the traditions that are now indelibly associated with Christmas stem from pre-Christian pagan rituals, the early Christian religious traditions provide models for the necessity of performance in belief. While individual proclivities and choices usually influence beliefs, embodied performance (e.g. demonstration) of these beliefs is necessary for expressing beliefs. Before the advent of widespread literacy throughout Europe, individuals who could not read and write relied on action and speech, both performative elements, and used those elements in order to convey and practice belief.

The function of performance as a belief practice did not end with the advent of literacy. Charles Dickens, whose literary influence on Christmas traditions remains unmatched, was himself a performer and believer in theatre and live readings as a way to draw together the masses. Driven partly by commercial concerns, Dickens' work captures his own beliefs in goodwill and reform, particularly during the Christmas season, and *A Christmas Carol* remains one of the most frequently staged and read stories in American theatres and homes during Christmas. As a part of the cultural archive, borrowing the term from Diana Taylor, *A Christmas Carol* is indelibly embedded in American Christmas culture.

A similar mixture of popular appeal and high culture, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* is a staple in the holiday performance canon. The beliefs performed in *The Nutcracker* include core

American values of family, imagination, and transformative potential. As shown through Pavis' lens of the hourglass of cultures, the American Christmas is a hodgepodge of different cultural influences, and many practices and traditions derive from different societies, especially those in Europe. In the transfer of these traditions, however, they become distinctly American as they are appropriated based on the ethos of the United States. The cultural journey of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* from imperial Russia to the United States in the mid-twentieth century helps to illustrate the complexities of cultural transfer, serving as a microcosm of both theatrical adaptation and the cultural appropriation in the development of the modern American Christmas.

Aside: The Modern Christmas and Commercialism

In the context of the American Christmas season, multiple belief systems are activated at one time. Some of these systems are religious, usually with Christian roots, and some are secular and related to childhood, family, charity, and Christmas "magic." The economics of Christmas, which I have touched upon briefly in this conclusion and in Chapters 2 and 3, illustrates the at times contradictory web of beliefs activated during Christmas. Coupled with traditions of valuing family togetherness over anything else are expectations of beautifully wrapped packages. Believing in Santa Claus is both a sign of childhood innocence and an excuse to ask for gifts. Various Christmas television commercials idealize the pricelessness of family togetherness while also selling the latest gift items. Maintaining the leisurely image of the ideal Christmas is in fact expensive and time-consuming rather than leisurely. Perhaps this expense is partly due to the capitalist belief in the worth of acquiring and exchanging wealth, which the Christmas season enhances rather than overshadows in the United States. Christmas is a season of giving, but the

real act of “giving” in the current holiday tradition is usually to purchase gifts for friends and family rather than to donate time to charity and family, as the holiday ideals suggest. One could argue that capitalism is one belief system vigorously embodied and performed during the Christmas season: a belief system that grows larger every season. As James Tracy characterizes: “What a century ago was a season of relatively minor indulgence encouraged by enterprising manufacturers is now so gargantuan a retail orgy that it is fervently monitored by Wall Street as a fundamental index and determinant of the nation’s economic soundness” (Horsley and Tracy 9). The capitalistic view of the season easily becomes oversimplified and pessimistic, but Christmas is doubtless much more individualistic in the wake of Western capitalist economics than it was during its infancy.

Despite a growing tendency toward individualism, the need for expressing a community identity has not left American holiday practices. Though many Christmas traditions in the United States have begun to focus on remaining within the family during the holidays rather than large-scale community festivities especially in the United States, advertising, films, and theatrical performances permit the persistence of the ideals of goodwill, togetherness, and brotherhood during the Christmas season throughout the country (Golby and Purdue 104-107). The confused mixture of both unification and isolation at Christmas is most clearly represented by the advent of television programming – the beginning of an era when experiencing the same event in multiple locations allows a paradoxical private participation in community experiences. The contemporary battle between the sacred and secular in the Christmas holiday focuses more on debating whether contemporary capitalist agendas and ideals belong as a part of the season.

This debate is further complicated by the symbol of Santa Claus, which attempts to mediate the irreconcilable indulgence of capitalism and Christmas ideals of goodwill and giving (Horsley and Tracy 4). If consumer capitalism is a new belief practiced at Christmas, “secularization” and the definition of what is secular comes into question, and it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the sacred from the secular. Paula M. Cooley suggests that sacred means may be appropriated for secular purposes “under certain conditions, in the service of national identity, as they are associated with a capitalist economy” (Horsley and Tracy 209). Christmas, as a mixture of both religious and secular symbols, beliefs, and practices, therefore, mixes the sacred and secular in a performance of national identity. In the United States, Christmas may be seen as a microcosm for various social virtues and vices, a performance of American national identity.

Many lament the capitalist bent of the holiday in the United States even though the integration and frequent clash of sacred and secular has been an integral part of the holiday for more than one thousand years. This conflict has also been essential to the development of the holiday both religiously and civically. By investigating the sacred and secular developments of theatrical practices in the Christmas season, I question conceptions and implications of theatre and religion as an application of the sacred and secular in an era when they are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the terms “sacred” and “secular” are less important to this study than the concept of belief, which can be either religious or civic, sacred or secular.

Conclusion: Final Thoughts on Christmas, Belief, and Performance

At the beginning of this study, my aim was to introduce questions that would illuminate the relationships between belief, culture, and performance by using the Christmas holiday in the

United States as a point of inquiry. My hope is that by identifying Christmas as a constructed system of beliefs rather than a particularly natural cultural development, it becomes a more tangible topic of inquiry. Furthermore, I hope to transcend particular religious mores either in support of or in conflict with Christmas customs in the United States. Instead of placing value judgments on one tradition over another, I suggest that is more useful to treat all signifiers in the Christmas season as valuable points of valuable inquiry that illuminate deep-seeded cultural impulses and beliefs. By focusing on performance, I have also worked to show that belief itself is a form of performance, and performance a type of belief. In this sense, an understanding of both belief systems and performances in a particular culture are mutually illuminating.

While concrete, overarching conclusions about what Christmas means or should mean remain elusive, my intention is not to offer such a definition. I don't aim to question the traditions or beliefs of any particular individual or group of individuals, but I do aim to question my own beliefs and to urge others to do the same in order to reach a more complete understanding of what exactly one believes in and what beliefs they perform, since what someone says and what someone does are often at odds. This tension is clear in the general tendency to mix together the commercial excess of the season with the ideals of goodwill and charity during the Christmas season. While one may believe in both charity and the bountiful economic opportunities afforded by capitalism, and such beliefs may be able to co-exist perfectly, the first step to determining this is to understand the connotations of a societies various performances and how those performances illustrates beliefs. This is necessary in order to fully grasp whether a society or individual really believes in the beliefs they practice. Christ and

Santa Claus and the unique belief structures surrounding them may very well be able to exist peaceably, but they will remain at odds until we attempt to understand what it really means to believe in either.

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