

*Negotiating Family and Community in
Anglo-American Christmas Discourses
from 1843 to 2020*

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Abstract

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit mit dem Titel „Verständnis von Familie und Gemeinschaft in Weihnachtsdiskursen von 1843 bis 2020“ argumentiert, dass die Definitionen der Begriffe Familie und Gemeinschaft, so wie sie Charles Dickens in seiner *Weihnachtsgeschichte* beschreibt, über Frank Capras Film *Ist das Leben nicht Schön?* sowie Theodor Geisels Kinderbuch *Der Grinch oder die Geklauten Geschenke* und dessen Verfilmungen bis hin zur Weihnachtswerbung im Coronajahr 2020 in ihren Grundzügen unverändert geblieben sind. Es werden dabei homogene Gruppen beschrieben, die zu Weihnachten an einer „home base“ (dem Heimatort) zusammentreffen, um ihre Gemeinschaft zu feiern. Außenstehende haben dabei zwar die Möglichkeit, Teil der Gemeinschaft zu werden, allerdings nur, wenn sie bereit sind, sich dieser anzupassen. Die Weihnachtstexte, die dieser Arbeit zugrunde liegen, adressieren die jenseits der Weihnachtszeit vorhandenen sozio-kulturellen Probleme nicht, sondern verdecken sie stattdessen hinter einer Fassade, die bei LeserInnen bzw. dem Publikum eine nostalgische Reaktion hervorrufen.

Diese Arbeit thematisiert in den Analysekapiteln den Einfluss von Ritual (in Anlehnung an Victor Turners Beschreibungen von rituellen Prozessen), sozialem Kapital (nach Pierre Bourdieus „Formen des Kapitals“) und Nostalgie (vor allem mit Unterstützung von Svetlana Boym's Abhandlungen zur Thematik) auf die Primärtexte. Dabei wird deutlich, dass Weihnachtsliteratur, -filme, und -werbung sich immer noch der Vorlage bedienen, die bereits Dickens mit seinem Kulturtext („culture text“, Paul Davis) im Jahr 1843 in Stein gemeißelt hat. In der vorliegenden Arbeit soll dieser einseitige, positive und warme Blick auf Familie und Gemeinschaft problematisiert werden, da diese Sicht weder ein differenziertes Bild einer vielfältigen Gemeinschaft zulässt noch eine ergiebige Auseinandersetzung mit Themen wie Diversität oder auch Einsamkeit und Alter ermöglicht.

Acknowledgements

When I read Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* in the summer before starting in earnest on my project, I could not help but notice Scrooge's proclamation: "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year" (Dickens 2012, 78). Well, he is not the only one, I thought, and if he can do it, so can I. It turns out that focusing on Christmas for an entire year is actually more difficult than it sounds, and so I am really grateful to all the people who helped me through this year.

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Introduction

“Sometimes the discussion about the renovated site and the work in progress has more cultural resonance than the built monument that can put an end to the debate.”
(Boym 2001, 80)

Probably the first things that come to mind when thinking about monuments are statues, but the word itself does not mean stone or steel. In fact, monuments exist in various shapes and forms, ranging from statues to literary texts. The word then comes from the Latin *monere* and translates to “remind, advise, warn” (Latdict, s.v. “monere”). Monuments thus are built in the present to remember past events or occasions so that they can give advice and issue warnings to the future (Conference of the Nordic Association for American Studies 2019). Considering these descriptions, monuments seem to be final, when in fact, as literary scholar Svetlana Boym points out, they are “not necessarily something petrified and stable. Monuments are in metamorphosis” (Boym 2001, 79). Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*¹ is a monumental Christmas text and as such it becomes a site for memory, debates and remembrance. It is the foundation for all future Christmas texts that reuse, recycle and reinvent the narrative. Thus, other texts add layers to the monument, but they do not demolish it or build a new monument. This thesis argues that the ideals of family and community defined in Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* as homogeneous groups that come together at Christmas are the main building blocks of the monument. A look at the *Carol* as the basis of the genre of Christmas books as well as other monumental Christmas texts from the 20th and 21st century shows how the tropes of family and community, influenced by nostalgia, ritual and social capital, travel through British and American contexts, until they reach 2020 Christmas advertisements. In other words,

¹ The novel *A Christmas Carol* will from here on occasionally be referred to as the *Carol*.

the definitions of family and community from the *Carol* are reproduced in contemporary Christmas narratives which provoke nostalgic reactions in readers, viewers and audiences. Previous scholars have looked at how the *Carol* shaped and influenced economic perspectives on Christmas or how the message of redemption is also recognizable in other Christmas texts, yet the images of family and community as uncomplicated, warm entities that travel from Christmas text to Christmas text have arguably been neglected thus far. This thesis consequently argues that Christmas texts are shaped by nostalgia for Dickensian definitions of family and community and recycle, reuse and reinvent the *Carol's* ideals. While they add new layers to the monument, the foundation does not change significantly.

Christmas has a massive economic importance and often it seems to have started in the 19th century, fueled also by the popularity of the *Carol*. Dickens, while not inventing Christmas as the 2017 film *The Man Who Invented Christmas* might suggest, fanned the flames of a tradition that needed to be reinvented. Before the 1830s Christmas did exist, even if “a semantic framework of describing Christmas had not yet evolved” (Armstrong 2004, 125). In fact, according to historian Gerry Bowler, Christmas had been a contested issue long before 1830. It was not until the year 312 that Christianity became an officially recognized religion (Bowler 2016, 5), and Christmas was consequently not very visible before that. Bowler writes that Christmas only gradually became a day and then a period to be celebrated. The importance of the birth of Christ in early Christian mythology was not nearly as important as the death, and the emphasis on the origin story only happened, according to Bowler, as a response to other beliefs and religions that challenged the circumstances of the birth. However, once Christianity was recognized and implemented by emperor Constantine, it started to be celebrated more widely (6) before it was for the first time declared “a national holiday” (10) in 529. Since the time of the year – the date of birth had been at the center of debates for a long time, with the Roman Church settling on December 25 – coincided with pagan and midwinter celebrations, the modes of celebration soon started to merge as well (13) and by “1500 the celebration of

Christmas was solidly entrenched in western European cultures” (21). The ever-increasing excessive celebrations soon became a debated side effect of Christmas and with the rise of Puritanism and Protestantism, parts of the population removed themselves from “raucous festivities” (21). From 1700 onwards, Christmas slowly started to become “less visible or important in the cities” (40) and – helped by the French Revolution’s contest with the Church – “its celebration fell out of favor” (43). This development was also greeted by authorities and employers who welcomed that potential workers were available on more days, which in turn sped up the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (41). Interestingly, the Industrial Revolution soon almost required that the celebrations be reinstated, as the increased production levels created grounds for, and opportunities for, for instance, gift giving.

The idea that Christmas as we know it today was invented in Victorian times is a highly controversial and heated issue, and as I have outlined above, celebrations of the occasion did in fact already exist before the 1800s. However, Christmas, as scholars such as historian Neil Armstrong argue, was reinvented in Victorian times (Armstrong 2004). Invented traditions, to briefly outline the term, are “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature” (Hobsbawm 2012, 1) and are based on already existing ideas, concepts or occasions. They become a part of life in order to offer a sense of community and continuity, and they give “a comforting collective script for individual longing” (Boym 2001, 42). Scholars agree that Christmas changed in the 19th century: influenced by popular culture it came “to have new meaning in civic, national and philanthropic contexts” (Armstrong 2004, 125), or as historian Mark Connelly puts it, Victorians “reinvigorate, investigate and revive” (Connelly 2000, 2) Christmas. Organization studies researchers Philip Hancock and Alf Rehn support this view. According to them, Christmas as we know it today, did not exist before the 1830s and the reason it became “a total phenomenon” (Hancock and Rehn 2011, 742) is because of its immense economic and consumerist potential (Storey 2008, 17).

A Christmas Carol was written and published at a time when Christmas was redefined and Juliet John consequently reads it as “a fitting Christmas parable for the commercial world [...] because it offers a salutary reminder of the dangers of a life governed by money and ‘redemption’ [...] [and] because it acknowledges the urban, commercial context and the emotional needs it creates” (John 2010, 270-271). John Mundy supports this view with reference to Scrooge, who is shouted down for his assessment that Christmas is ‘humbug’. Yet, as Mundy points out, there is a true ring to it (Mundy 2008, 167). While the *Carol* addresses the 19th century growing consumerist reality, it is just “as much an echo of pagan and early Christian festive priorities as it is a precursor of our contemporary experience of Christmas” (Mundy 2008, 164). Both John and Mundy emphasize the *Carol* as a stand-out text that is highly influential in giving new meaning to Christmas. In the 19th century, growing economies and emerging consumerist societies, the need to unite increasingly diverse members of societies, and the opportunity to slow down in a time of immense technological and communicational developments meant that there was an appetite for Christmas as a time for embracing families and communities and for slowing down. European and American Christmas literature picked up on the current trends, providing interpretations of and escapism from the chaos of the changes of the day, with Dickens’s novel leading the way.

According to literary scholar Paul Davis, the text became, already right after the first publication in December 1843, a “culture text” (Davis 1990, 4), which is another word for a literary monument. More specifically, Davis means that the *Carol* immediately after publication stopped belonging to Dickens, as he by publishing it gave a Christmas present to the public, who then set out to adapt and change the story (7). This led to a first adaptation appearing already in January 1844, just a few weeks after the short novel was published for the first time (Davis 1990, 9). The enormous popularity of Dickens’s Christmas classic helped and continues to help cement central elements of Christmas within the genre: family and community. 19th century Christmas served as a unifying factor, thus providing room to strengthen a collective

identity. Historian Martin Johnes states that Christmas as a cultural celebration in Britain confirms that there is still a sense of “basic decency in British society” (Johnes 2016, xvii). It reinforces the belief that people are generally caring and content in their lives and relationships (ibid.). Historian Penne Restad highlights that Christmas in the United States also served as a unifying factor, and that Christmas celebrations illustrated an “idealized national self-definition.” (Restad 1995, 14).

Today, we live in a rather different world from the Britain and United States of the 19th century. However, similarly to almost 200 years ago, our world is still affected by constant changes and developments in numerous areas, including climate, technology and family, to name only a few, and in 2020 we were confronted with yet another global upheaval in the form of a pandemic. Nostalgia, as Boym describes it, is particularly prone to appear as a “as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (Boym 2001, xiv), and Christmas, as Johnes has it, is a “product of its time and an escape from it” (Johnes 2016, xiv). 2020 has been immensely influenced by Covid-19, and while this thesis is not aiming to make the pandemic a central focus, including a look at 2020 Christmas commercials can help explaining why many Western countries imposed strict measures in order to “save Christmas”.² Family and community, integral to Christmas in Dickens’s *Carol*, are transported to contemporary contexts and are interpreted to be the essence of Christmas. Thus, saving Christmas in 2020 means enabling families to spend the holiday together and it also reminds people to be generous to other members of the community. That theatres are trying to conduct *Carol* productions during a pandemic emphasizes that the 1843 novel still persists. Christmas and nostalgia for past Christmas (narrations) are escapist strategies in an environment that does not always allow people to slow down and embrace family and community life. Tracing the understanding of family and community in several examples of Christmas texts aims to provide

² See for example Catherine Bennett’s opinion piece in *The Guardian* “Why Are We so Keen to ‘Save’ Christmas Rather than, Say, the Sick or the Economy?” (Bennett 2020).

an answer to the question of whether Christmas in the 21st century still serves the purpose that Restad identified in 19th century contexts.

As mentioned above, Christmas literature, films and advertising often reuse, recycle and reinvent Dickensian ideals of family and community. Some of the other primary texts of this thesis could arguably also be defined as monumental texts; however, while monumental in their own right, they still lean on the *Carol* and should thus be analyzed in relation to Dickens's novel. For instance, Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (originally released in 1946) is a film that defines future Christmas films, yet it too, just like the *Carol*, shows that family and community are still at the center of the narrative. The popularity of the film, and thus its presence within the genre, is manifested through its place on many Christmas films lists, for example taking the top spot on a Radio Times poll as "Britain's favourite Christmas film" (Radio Times 2018). Another prominent Christmas text is Theodor Geisel's ("Dr. Seuss") 1957 children's book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* with the filmic adaptations adding to the ongoing fame of the story of the Grinch, who hated Christmas, but learns to embrace it to become a part of the community. This thesis finally also looks at a selection of 2020 Christmas commercials from British and American retailers, supermarkets and brands. While the television commercials have not reached a comparable status as the other primary texts discussed, they show, through alluding to the preceding monuments, that viewers today still embrace and are receptive to Dickensian definitions of family and community.

To give a more detailed overview, the first chapter introduces the main approaches and terms of the thesis. Ritual, social capital and nostalgia are three connected concepts that influence and shape each other. In a functioning community, people invest in upholding relationships within the group – social capital – and the connections between the members of the group are manifested through ritual. The repetitive participation in rituals is often guided by restorative nostalgia, a longing to return home. All three terms, ritual, social capital and

nostalgia, are central to each of the texts individually, yet they are also what connects them. I will therefore discuss the meaning of the terms in more depth, before applying them to the texts.

The second chapter examines how family and community are defined in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. The well-known story of Ebenezer Scrooge, a penny-pinching miser who learns to embrace Christmas wholeheartedly, puts goodness and family at the center of almost all Christmas narratives that follow, including numerous adaptations, reprints and recordings of the *Carol*, as well as many more stand-alone Christmas stories. Rather than inventing Christmas, Dickens "invented a new genre, the Christmas book" (Davis 1990, 7). While other Christmas texts existed prior to Dickens's *Carol*, notably Clement Clarke Moore's *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, better known as *Night Before Christmas*, published in 1823, the *Carol* was the first commercial success and well-known book about what would become a global, economic sensation.

The third chapter then focuses on Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* and shows it as arguably the first Christmas film that, though not an adaptation of the *Carol*, recycles the Christmas ritual from Dickens's novel and similarly defines family and community as the two driving forces at Christmas. The protagonist George Bailey lives in Bedford Falls, giving up his dreams of travelling and academic excellence in order to support his community. Life at the center of the community does not satisfy George and this is where the film introduces reciprocity, a central feature of social capital, as the aspect that connects individual members within a community. George is unhappy, because he does not see what he gets in return for supporting his community. However, by experiencing a reality where he had never been born, the protagonist then appreciates life in the middle of the community. This appreciation pays off as he is at once embraced and saved upon his return.

The fourth chapter argues that Geisel's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* is a narrative of assimilation through ritual, and as such employs restorative nostalgia for Dickens's culture text. Christmas is represented as a time where individuals can and will be integrated into a

community. The Grinch lives removed from the community, arguably not by choice, and hates Christmas. However, he discovers, after trying to sabotage Christmas, that what is celebrated is being part of a community. I argue that the story employs Dickens's template for Christmas books in that it reproduces the ideals of community. The children's book is a prominent text, as its adaptations to the small and big screen highlight, and I will include the three adaptations to the screen in the analysis as well. Two of these, the 2000 and 2018 adaptations, are among the highest grossing Christmas movies of all time (Stoll 2021).

The fifth and final chapter then examines examples from 2020 Christmas TV commercials in order to establish that even in a year with enormous changes to everyday lives, Christmas and how we understand it has not changed. The commercials draw on family and community definitions that come from the *Carol* and they reproduce images and ideals from Dickens's culture text as well as reproducing scenes from other Christmas texts. The commercials discussed in this chapter employ a 21st century trend in marketing that has been labeled "emotional marketing" (Rytel 2010, 31). By alluding to a cultural memory – reproducing images and concepts from previous Christmas texts like the *Carol* – the commercials aim at encouraging a nostalgic reaction in their viewers. This nostalgic reaction would ideally enable the viewers to have a very specific positive longing for the brand and products, through the emotions promoted in and activated by the commercial.

Before moving on to the first Chapter, I want to briefly come back to the starting point of this thesis. Boym's quote in the very beginning stated that a discussion about a monument, as well as its renovations and reinventions, are often more fruitful and say more than the monument itself. That Christmas is almost synonymous with a celebration of family and community is arguably an undisputed statement. However, how and to what extent literature and Christmas texts in general drive this narration has not yet been thoroughly researched. Doing so can help explain why Western communities fall back on embracing Christmas wholeheartedly every year. This thesis consequently aims to contribute to the existing academic

discourse on cultural implications of Christmas. Starting with *A Christmas Carol*, this thesis argues that Christmas texts from 1843 to 2020 all highlight the ritualistic inclusion of an individual into a community. Christmas in the narrations serves both as a glue – tying together members of a community – and as a curtain – hiding and brushing over conflicts, instead of addressing and suggesting solutions for existing problems in societies. Thus, they promote the narrative that an individual has to change in order to become a part of a collective, and that individual change is all that is required to establish well-functioning communities, while the collective community – though possibly reaching out – does not have to adapt.

Chapter 1: Ritual, Social Capital and Nostalgia

In 2007, Dickens specialist Ruth Glancy discovered that a simple Google search of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, a novel celebrated for, as the 2012 Penguin edition has it, "its humour, compassion and message of redemption", shows 1,230,000 entries (Glancy 2007, 311). In December 2020, there are 334,000,000 results.³ Its popularity is ever increasing, and that is both within popular culture and academia. The growing number of hits underlines the still rising interest in the *Carol*. Similarly, so does the fact that there are numerous new editions published every year as well as adaptations in various forms: Christmas plays in theatres and schools, opera, ballet and musical versions of the *Carol*, radio, recordings and TV specials, and almost yearly we are provided with another remake of the *Carol* in the form of a feature film. According to film studies researcher Florent Christol, there are more versions of the *Carol* in its various incarnations than there are remakes and retellings of any other American or British author (Christol 2015, 2).⁴ In 2020, many more filmic versions of the novel appeared, as staging the *Carol* in theatres was, because of lockdowns due to the pandemic, mostly impossible (Paulson 2020).

Almost 180 years after its first publication, researchers from a broad range of backgrounds still debate reasons for the *Carol's* popularity. Among the most common theories are: the story's appeal of charity, love and redemption (see e.g. Glancy 2007, Holbrook and Hirschman 1993); its cinematic qualities and spectacular imagery (see e.g. Christol 2015, Jaffe 1994); its representations of economic issues and capitalism (see e.g. Smith 2005, Young 2019) and the story's focus on ethical implications and hospitality (Saint-Amour 2007). Another prominent angle is the characterization of the *Carol's* protagonist, although scholars disagree on the effectiveness of Scrooge's character development. Elliot Gilbert for example argues for

³ Number of hits December 10, 2020: 334,000,000

⁴ It is nearly impossible to keep track of the adaptations of the *Carol*. Ruth Glancy's 2007 bibliography gives an overview over publications up until that year, with the focus on printed materials.

a cyclical time in the *Carol*, which enables a realistic return to the innocent self (Gilbert 1975), and therefore dismisses theories that make Scrooge seem as though having an out-of-character change to goodness (Wilson 1952). All of the above perspectives on the *Carol* support its central position in the context of Christmas literature. I agree with the scholars that the message of redemption, the cinematic nature of the narrative or the character of Scrooge are appealing to contemporary audiences. However, I argue that it is not just the message or the mode that is reproduced. Rather, more concretely, the ideals of family and community as presented in the *Carol* are the persisting elements. Through the Carol they become central to the Christmas ritual in Anglo-American Christmas celebrations. Before establishing more concretely what these ideals look like and how they are represented in the *Carol*, the present chapter introduces the main terms and concepts of this thesis, namely ritual, social capital, and nostalgia.

Ritual

As discussed in the Introduction, whether or not Charles Dickens invented or reinvented Christmas does not change the fact that he inscribed and manifested a very prominent Christmas ritual through the text that would immediately after its publication become highly influential in Anglo-American Christmas celebrations. A glance at the *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals that a ritual is the “performance of ritual acts” (*OED*, s.v. “ritual”). It follows that both the act of performing and the content of the performance are features of what we call a ritual. This means also that there cannot be a fixed and stable definition of the term, as performance and content are influenced, changed and determined by actors, spectators, writers, readers, or simply by every participant in the ritual. Religious studies scholar Catherine Bell highlights that a ritual through a scholar’s perspective has the danger of becoming a set of rigid definitions, parts and processes, yet there are no fixed and permanently unchanged rituals (Bell 1997, 21). Traditional rituals, passed down from generation to generation, lose their impact and significance with younger generations, leading to changes to the ritual or to the creation of new rituals altogether

(Bergeson 2004, 66). As much as rituals are continuously evolving, so is the *Carol*. It gives instructions for the content and performance of the Christmas ritual which are interpreted, recycled and reused by Christmas texts that follow the original, as the subsequent chapters will show. Thus, the *Carol* both forms Anglo-American Christmas celebrations and it is itself a part of these celebrations.

Though not being able to separate content from performance clinically, a look at the content of rituals shows that there is almost no limit to what can be “repeated actions or patterns of behaviour having significance within a particular group” (*OED*, s.v. “ritual”). Based on the Latin and French etymology of the word (*ibid.*), scholars often trace origins of rituals to religious customs, rites and ceremonies. My thesis argues that Christmas can be interpreted as a ritual which originates in several different traditions, including the Christian nativity as mentioned in the introduction, but that its content and performance as we perceive it today is inextricably connected with the *Carol*. Thus, the origin story of Christmas is not the focus of the thesis; the focus rather lies on how Christmas rituals are reinvented, recycled and reused by and in contemporary Christmas narratives, while always keeping the connection to the tropes of family and philanthropy from the *Carol*.

Christmas is just one of countless rituals which come in endless shapes and forms, and this leads scholars to try to categorize them. The agreement seems to lie with a six-fold classification, from which one category is relevant in connection to this thesis. However, it is important to point out that these categories are artificial and not every ritual solely falls into just one category. Christmas and all rituals performed in connection to it can be categorized as a calendrical rite or ritual (Bell 1997, 102). Bell further points out that they give cultural and social meaning “to the passage of time, creating an ever-renewing cycle of days, months, and years” (102). The scholar subdivides calendrical rites into two further subcategories; seasonal and commemorative rites (103). Christmas is commemorative, even if the accuracy of the date of birth of Jesus is not historically correct (104). Commemorative rituals establish “fundamental

link[s] between the past and the present” (107). Through re-enactments of the founding event, the time becomes cyclical. The essentially commemorative aspect of the Christian origin of Christmas is and has been out of focus for a long time. Yet, the notion of a birth, or rather rebirth, is still present in the *Carol*, as scholars such as Gilbert argue (Gilbert 1975). Christmas in the *Carol* becomes a ritual that can be classified as “the cycle of production and reproduction of the resources on which the constitution and continuity of the community have been built” (Abrahams 1982, 167).

According to Victor Turner, artists, writers, painters, and other “such ‘makers’ become the articulators of the otherwise inchoate celebratory ‘spirit,’ and the ephemeral events they choreograph, or the permanent artworks [...] they shape or construct, become a kind of shining language” (Turner 1982, 16). As the analysis in the subsequent chapters will show, Dickens created precisely such a ‘shining language’ with *A Christmas Carol*. Similarly, a ritual, according to anthropologist Roger Abrahams, “provides an organizing set of principles, traditional ways of momentarily binding the opposing forces within the community and tying together the past with the present.” (Abrahams 1982, 167). *A Christmas Carol* insists on these sets of principles for 20th and 21st century Christmas celebrations which are more and more removed from the Christian tradition. Novels, films, TV shows, cartoons and advertisements pick up the representation of family and community, and thus the 19th century Dickens novel, written at a time of rapid technological and communicational changes where the sense of community disappeared, serves as a glue until today. It momentarily (for Christmas) ties together individuals with their surrounding groups or communities.

Rituals in general, and the Christmas ritual specifically, are celebrated with concrete objects, symbolic artefacts, events and action. The objects in the context of celebration are, “first and foremost, material objects, though they represent ideas, objects, events, relationships, “truths” [...] or even intangible or invisible thoughts and conceptions” (Turner 1982, 16). Their meaning is not always singular, but may be *multivocal*, *multivalent* and *polysemous*; that is they

have several messages, with several values and multiple interpretations. Such objects “compel attention” (16), signifying that these objects are especially important to the ritual. The novel *A Christmas Carol* itself is such an object, and it promotes other such objects, for example the family dinner, collectively prepared by the Cratchit’s (Dickens 2012, 45-52), Christmas presents, brought home by Belle’s husband (37) or games and music, as played by Fred and friends (57-60). They are symbols of connections, showing appreciation and illustrating how individuals within a community are connected.

Turner distinguishes between the terms *communitas* and structure, “*communitas* is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom” (Turner 1969, 113). The terms are not mutually exclusive, yet *communitas* has a more spontaneous, unplanned nature. The anthropologist uses the Latin term in order to establish that the term goes beyond “an ‘area of common living’” (96) and rather refers to the “modality of social relationship” (ibid.). According to Turner, there are three phases in a ritual, including an initial phase, the phase of liminality (it is here that *communitas* comes into being) and the phase of return. *Communitas*, however, refers to only one phase of ritual, whereas community is a more overarching term. For this thesis, I am consequently using the term community instead of Turner’s *communitas*, as most primary texts in the following chapters define communities as sharing a geographic location as well as values and beliefs. Community also allows me to include the structured aspects of a group of people, and to not only focus on the more spontaneous feeling of shared ideals.

Social Capital

Communities, however, do not just exist, there are certain conditions that need to be in place to build and uphold a community. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu writes in “The Forms of Capital”, that groups are connected through investments of an individual in social capital. Social capital, as the title of Bourdieu’s essay suggests, is just one form of capital, with the two others being

economic and cultural capital. For this thesis however, the third form – social capital – is the most relevant, which is why I am excluding the other two from the discussion. According to Bourdieu, social capital “is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources” (Bourdieu 2002, 286) that enable membership in a community. These resources can be visible in exchanges of “signs of recognition” (287) that clearly establish and maintain relationships. Bourdieu calls this the “practical state” (286) of social capital. This practical aspect of social capital is the most relevant in this thesis, but sometimes members in a community are also linked through an institutionalized state of social capital: “Networks of connections” (ibid.) can in this case be identified through shared names and/or locations.

Furthermore, social capital, according to Bourdieu, is “made up of social obligations” (Bourdieu 2002, 281). The existence of social obligations depends on individuals recognizing the existence of communities as well as their acceptance that every individual has to invest in social capital so that membership in the community is guaranteed. Someone who does not acknowledge or see the need to invest in social capital would thus be free from said ‘social obligations’. However, the logical consequence is also that they would not be a part of the community. Some examples of individuals who do not invest in social capital are Ebenezer Scrooge and the Grinch, as the following chapters will highlight. Scrooge, though sharing the geographic location of his community, refuses to invest in relationships and turns down his nephew’s invitation to share the Christmas dinner (Dickens 2012, 5). Similarly, the Grinch is not a part of the community as he, contrary to the Whos, hates Christmas and does not live in Whoville. Neither protagonist sees the value of social relationships and communities and consequently does not invest in social capital at the beginning of the narrations. Yet, through observing communities from afar they start to long for membership in a group and their reaction is to start investing in social capital. Including individuals in a community at Christmas is a common thread in Christmas narrations, and readers and viewers often project nostalgic longing onto the narratives through their presentations of warm, welcoming communities.

Nostalgia

Many academic and popular discussions about Christmas start with personal accounts of a childhood Christmas or begin with an account of a historical Christmas day thus highlighting that it is always connected with the past, with a longing for people, feelings, places from childhood and/or history. I would suggest that nostalgia and Christmas are as inextricably connected as Christmas and the *Carol*. A dictionary search does not provide sufficient and in-depth definitions, for example *Merriam-Webster's* definition of nostalgia is homesickness on the one hand, and an overly sentimental yearning for some past time on the other (*Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “nostalgia”). While there is some truth to these dictionary definitions, they do not cover the complexity of the term. I will consequently turn to literary scholar Svetlana Boym and philosopher Edward Casey for a more nuanced understanding.

According to Boym, nostalgia “is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed” (Boym 2001, xiii). Scholars often trace the meaning back to its parts – *nostos* as a return to a home (Boym 2001, xiii) and “*algos* [... as] pain” (Casey 1987, 363). This highlights the ambiguity and paradoxical nature of nostalgia, a return to home – note that home is usually positively connotated – but here connected with pain, longing, regret, maybe even anger. Adding to this complexity, Boym points to the following layers of nostalgia; “home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life” (Boym 2001, xiv). These are difficult to encompass simultaneously, yet their relationship creates tension – both positive and negative. One way to simplify the paradoxical nature of nostalgia is to categorize it into different forms, for example prospective nostalgia, which projects pasts into the present and future (Boym 2017, 39). Several forms of nostalgia will play an important part in later chapters and will be discussed in more detail there.

One of the central points of the discussion that scholars return to is the question of time and temporality, or more concretely the relation of past and present. Edward Casey points out

that while time is a prominent feature, it is always connected to a place or world of a different time. This leads him to speak of an “indispensability of place” (Casey 1987, 363), meaning that one is always nostalgic for a place. Casey also addresses the question of what place we are nostalgic for, and he concludes that we are longing for a “lost world” (364) with all its components. The world is lost because it “was never itself given in *any* discrete present moment” (366). To illustrate Casey’s definition, a look at the *Carol*’s protagonist is helpful. Ebenezer Scrooge is ridden by regret and longing for lost worlds, as the visitations by the ghosts highlight. For example, the Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge’s former fiancé Belle with her family on Christmas day and the observing Scrooge sees what a different world could look like; a warm, joyous, happy world with a big and loving family with a daughter who “might have called him father” (Dickens 2012, 37). While he clearly longs for this version of a world – “his sight grew very dim indeed” (37), it also hurts to observe it as the painfilled cries illustrate. “‘Spirit!’ said Scrooge in a broken voice, ‘remove me from this place’” (38). This can be related to Boym’s observation that “[f]antasies of the past [are] determined by needs of the present [and] have a direct impact on realities of the future” (Boym 2001, xvi). Scrooge’s fantasy of the past – he could have married Belle and had a family – is formed by the needs of his present day – he is a lonely miser longing for love. The fantasies also have a direct impact on his future – Scrooge resolves to embrace Christmas and “try to keep it all the year” (Dickens 2012, 78). I argue that Scrooge, by seeing all the festive families and communities, including Belle and her family, realizes that he himself is quite lonely. This realization fills him with a nostalgic longing and regret. Thus, the feeling of nostalgia serves a very specific purpose in the *Carol*, namely that it positively influences a “sense of self and social connectedness” (Batcho 2013, 356). Stave Five consequently shows Scrooge as a happy, generous, family-loving man, with the narrator asserting that Scrooge “knew how to keep Christmas well” (Dickens 2012, 85).

The criterion of the ‘lost world’ does however not entirely explain why nostalgia is particularly prominent at Christmas. Boym’s observations about the “Archeology of Metropolis” (Boym 2001, 75) can be related to Christmas. She writes that a city is shaped by and with nostalgia, and Christmas, as this thesis points out, is influenced by similar forces. In her book *The Future of Nostalgia* Boym writes that “the city imagines its future by improvising on its past. [...] there is a pervasive longing for the visible and invisible cities of the past, cities of dreams and memories” (ibid.). Interestingly, if you substitute ‘city’ for ‘Christmas’, you can see how these two can be compared. Just like a city, Christmas is a site where nostalgia is enacted and debated. The past hugely influences the present and future Christmas, with ideas of progress and efficiency pushed into the backseat. Christmas is built, remembered and longed for with visible and invisible influences from the past, with dreams and memories shaping the image of the today’s Christmas.

To come back to the primary texts of this thesis, they, too, are shaped by the past and memories thereof. More concretely, they are formed by their connection to Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*. The novel, according to Paul Davis, is a “culture text” (Davis 1990, 7) or in other words, it is a monumental text. A monument, as Boym points out, “is not necessarily something petrified and stable. Monuments are in metamorphosis” (Boym 2001, 79). Davis, in *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* meticulously illustrates how the *Carol* changes from one adaptation to the next while occasionally also referring to other Christmas texts that are not adaptations of Dickens’s novel. However, I argue that other Christmas texts also take Dickens’s groundwork and recycle and reuse especially the ideals of family and community as presented in the *Carol*. Thus, they contribute to the continuous development of the monument that Dickens built with his culture text. Instead of following in the footsteps of previous critics who analyzed how the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come present different economic realities or how their appearances highlight hospitality, the subsequent chapters will consequently establish how Christmas narratives are formed by nostalgia for the ritualized

community and family as manifested in *A Christmas Carol*. The chapters of this thesis will each first focus on one monumental Christmas text, progressing chronologically starting with the *Carol*, before moving to more recent Christmas advertising, and trace the representations of family and community.

Chapter 2: *A Christmas Carol*

Edward Casey, as mentioned above, writes that people are nostalgic for “lost worlds” (Casey 1987, 364), worlds that were never “given in *any* discrete present moment” (366). As we saw in the Introduction, when theatre companies in 2020 save the *Carol*, they save the world of the *Carol*. However, other Christmas texts that are not adaptations of Dickens’s novel also express nostalgia for the world presented in the *Carol*. Instead of the world of the text, the values that this world stands for are reproduced through restorative nostalgia, a form of nostalgia that aims at reproducing past experiences and/or occasions. Later Christmas texts employ tropes that were established in 1843, and they copy definitions and ideals that are the foundation of the Victorian text. At the heart of *A Christmas Carol* are the members of families and communities who are bound together by reciprocity and a ritualistic investment in social capital. This chapter will look more closely at the definitions of family and community as homogeneous groups who gather at Christmas and, in doing so, establishes that ritual in the novel is represented as the introduction and inclusion of an individual or outsider into the community.

The Home Base

A family, according to Gerald Handel and Robert D. Hess, is “a bounded universe. Though a family’s members are separately abroad in the wider community for a variety of functions and activities, they return to a territory they all share, a home base” (Handel and Hess 1956, 99). The most prominent example of such a “smallest of all possible symbolic universes” (Gillis 1997, 61) in the *Carol* is arguably the Cratchit family. As *A Christmas Carol* shows, the family members do return home for a specific occasion, Christmas. Though poor on a material and economic level, they are rich in love. They are an example of a family that is both bound by material and actual walls, but their interaction also shows emotional ties. Thus, the Cratchits set the example of a family at Christmas, where there is warmth, love and admiration for one

another. A closer look at the aesthetics of family will establish what exactly future Christmas texts try to restore.

The Cratchits are happy on Christmas day, because they can all celebrate the day together. The ghost of Christmas Present introduces Scrooge and through him the reader to Mrs. Cratchit and her older children Belinda and Peter who start the dinner preparations as the “two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl” (Dickens 2012,46) storm in excitedly and start dancing around the table in anticipation of the Christmas dinner. When Martha comes in, later than usual, her mother helps her inside, “kissing her a dozen times” (46) and making sure that Martha gets some rest in front of the fire. When the family sees Bob and Tiny Tim approaching, they plan to play a trick on them, so Martha is asked to hide. Bob is informed that Martha cannot come – which leaves Bob to exclaim “Not coming upon Christmas Day!” (47) He is shocked and cannot believe that his daughter apparently cannot join the family Christmas celebrations. Martha, seeing the disappointment in Bob, “ran into his arms” (47). The returns are eagerly awaited and the newcomers are welcomed affectionately. Every member of the nuclear family, that is parents and children, comes back home for Christmas, illustrating that the gathering of family is an integral part of Christmas. The narrator frequently comments on the state of the Cratchits’ clothes, amount of food, household items and looks in general. These comments are juxtaposed with actions and feelings on the part of the Cratchits which highlight that the lack of material and monetary wealth does not matter. It is the emotional ties between the family that are more important.

There are several items that enhance the contrast between the narrator’s almost sneering disapproval and the family valuing what the narrator experiences as signs of poverty, among them are the clothes, the goose and Christmas pudding, and the assortment of dishes. The Cratchits’ clothes are described as hand-me-downs, “twice-turned” (Dickens 2012, 46) and “thread-bare” (47), highlighting that the money does not stretch to new shirts and dresses. However, the Cratchits wear their dresses and shirts proudly, “brave in ribbons” (46) to hide

torn patches, and embrace hand-me-downs as a sign of being “gallantly attired” (46). No matter how much the clothes have been worn before Christmas, the occasion makes the Cratchits care extra for their clothes, that for Christmas are “darned up and brushed, to look seasonable” (47). Peter Cratchit, for example, wears a shirt belonging to his father, thus marking Christmas day: the shirt is “Bob’s private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honour of the day” (46). Even though the shirt is too big, Peter is happy to wear it and wants to show the world that he wears something so smart. The narrator does not fail to notice the poor state of the clothes: when Bob returns home and starts to help with preparing a Christmas drink he is careful not to damage his shirt cuffs in the process. This prompts the narrator to quip “as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby” (48). The contrasts between the narrator’s description and the Cratchits wearing the shabby clothes happily and proudly serves to remind Scrooge, and through him also the reader, that money and new clothes are not necessary to live a contented life. Instead of signifying wealth, the clothes symbolize family ties, as for example expressed by Peter’s shirt, and polishing and cleaning the clothes shows the value of the “home base” (Handel and Hess 1956, 99), which is cared for and protected.

Similar to the appearance and clothes of the Cratchits, the food shows the contrast between amount and appreciation. Although there is little food, the family appreciates the opportunity of sharing the dinner. The food binds the family together and it is appreciated in “a territory they all share” (Handel and Hess 1956, 99). The goose is celebrated, smelled already “outside the baker’s” (Dickens 2012, 46), and is praised by everyone but the narrator. Ironically, he remarks that observing the Cratchits “you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds” (48), yet also the narrator realizes that for the Cratchits the goose is quite remarkable and rare, as the comparison of the goose with a black swan illustrates (48): “Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration” (48). Similarly, the Christmas pudding is cherished by everyone, and only the narrator calls out that the size is rather small, even though it “would have been flat heresy” (49) to mention that aspect. The assortment of the

family's glasses to drink from is again representing the lack of economic wealth, yet to the family they serve just "as well as golden goblets would have done" (50).

The family is a small community, with every member doing their part to ensure a smooth, warm, happy Christmas. Even the younger children, not yet earning money and working outside of the home base, do their part for the family without complaining. Bob works for Scrooge, earning "fifteen 'Bob' a-week himself" (Dickens 2012, 46). Martha comes home late, because she had to finish some work from the previous day. In addition to working outside the house and outside the family universe, all the Cratchits help prepare Christmas dinner. Belinda "sweetened up the apple-sauce" (48), Peter helps with the potatoes, Martha warms up the plates, and "the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody" (48). Bob also helps, he makes a Christmas drink with "gin and lemons" (48). The only one not joining the preparations is Tiny Tim; however, he is still cherished by his family, who take care to "escort" (48), carry and help Tiny Tim to wherever he wants to be.

The analysis of Dickens's culture text above illustrates that an emotionally connected family universe is more important than material wealth. The Cratchits do not have money for new clothes or massive amounts of food, yet they are all pitching in to make Christmas a remarkable, warm evening. A functioning family unit such as the Cratchits highlights that even without significant monetary means they are able to be "happy, grateful, pleased with one another and contented with the time" (Dickens, 2012, 52). Consequently, Dickens's *Carol* establishes that the most important thing about Christmas is the return and gathering of the nuclear family. Again, through its monumental status, the text sets the tone for later Christmas texts which also reproduce tropes established in Dickens's text, including the tropes of looking in (Scrooge, the ghosts and the reader) and returning home (Bob and Martha). While the focus is mostly on the nuclear family and blood relations, there are several times when a broader term is necessary to describe the connections between the characters: community.

Constructing Communities

The terms ‘family’ and ‘community’, according to Michael Drake, have both been categorized as “restrictive, even oppressive, [...] [as] area[s] of conflict as much as consensus” (Drake 1996, 1). In Christmas literature, and especially in the primary text of this chapter, both terms are interpreted in a less complicated light. Both seem at Christmas to have healing, inclusive, warm connotations, but with one prerequisite: everyone has to do their part, otherwise families and communities do not function. I use the terms in the sense that the nuclear family is the “smallest of all possible symbolic universes” (Gillis 1997, 61)– including both children and parents. Community on the other hand then is a broader term which can, but does not have to, include families. Communities can signify both a group of people living in a shared area, and a group of people sharing similar values (Dennis and Daniels, 1996, 202). *A Christmas Carol* emphasizes the geographic proximity, but also implies that the values are shared by other groups not sharing the exact same location as their protagonist. Thus, Christmas literature in 1843 already indicated a global perspective to the holiday. However, as an analysis of this interconnectedness of several communities in different locations would go beyond the scope of this thesis, hence I will only focus on Scrooge’s immediate, geographically close community.

The ideal promoted in Dickens’s novel is that Christmas is a time for being generous, benevolent and charitable; in other words, at Christmas, individuals invest in their communities. Christmas in this monumental text is represented as a time to build social networks. These networks, or communities, are in turn set up and maintained through an investment in social capital. To remind the reader, social capital, according to Bourdieu, refers to the resources that facilitate membership in a group (Bourdieu 2002, 286). These resources can be money or items of monetary value, but they can also be less visible, for example acts of kindness. The *Carol* often highlights how money can make an impact, for instance when the two “portly gentlemen” (Dickens 2012, 6) who are collecting money for the poor see Christmas as a time when “it is

more than usually desirable that we should make some light provision for the poor and destitute” (6). The general expectation is that people who show signs of wealth – Scrooge’s name is “above the warehouse door” (2) – are expected to be generous at Christmas, and the two gentlemen – both of them wealthy as their corpulent bodies suggest – enter Scrooge’s office on that premise. They expect that Scrooge will donate some amount of money for charity, as the question “What shall I put you down for” (7) illustrates, yet Scrooge has no intention of doing so. To use present day terminology, Scrooge seems to prefer an institutionalized welfare state, a collective investor in communities, as a mediator securing the workings of the community. Consequently, he supports prisons and union workhouses (7) instead of engaging with members of the community on a personal level.

Scrooge refuses to engage with members of the community because he does not see what he gets in return. The gentlemen see what we today would refer to as the welfare state as failing in upholding what Bourdieu calls “a durable [...] network of relationships” (Bourdieu 2002, 287). Scrooge on the other hand does not (want) to see the institutions he supports with monetary contributions as failing, and he refuses to invest personally in “social relationships” (ibid.). According to Rosetta Young, the pre-reformed Scrooge does not see the economic value in social connections (Young 2019, 226) and says “I don’t make merry myself at Christmas, and I can’t afford to make idle people merry” (Dickens 2012, 7). Merriness, as the gentlemen and Scrooge seem to agree, can be achieved through money. Additionally, it is important to highlight that Scrooge is not a member in the community. As such he is an individual without personal connections to other people. Without these relationships, he does not see the need to invest in others, as the refusal to give money to the gentlemen shows and he consequently rejects reciprocity – giving and receiving – which is at the heart of Dickens’s culture text.

Even though economic capital is very prominent in sustaining the community in the *Carol*, other, non-monetary exchanges and investments also serve to connect individuals. Bob Cratchit toasts Scrooge, with the rest of the family grudgingly following suit, only because it is

Christmas (Dickens 2012, 51). According to Bourdieu, individuals invest “consciously or unconsciously” (Bourdieu 2002, 287) in social capital and unaware that Scrooge is observing the family Christmas dinner, Mr. Cratchit praises his employer as “the Founder of the Feast” (Dickens 2012, 51). This illustration of kindness shows that occasionally, money is not the only valuable variable in the construct of a community. Sometimes, though only on rare occurrences in the novel, kind words and acts are presented as other investment possibilities, as for example also expressed by nephew Fred’s persistent smiles and cries of “A Merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!” (3). The dominant pattern, however, is that charity, generosity and benevolence are the moral obligation of those with material wealth.

Scrooge has to journey through the past, present and future in order to understand how to invest in “networks of relationships” (Bourdieu 2002, 287) and to both want and appreciate membership in the community. Frank Christianson and Peter Garside argue in their “Dickensian Realism and Telescopic Philanthropy” that the *Carol* “explores the transformation from misanthropy to philanthropy” (Christianson and Garside 2007, 79) in a world without sympathy, a world with hectic social and economic changes. Scrooge starts as a person rejecting institutional philanthropy as shown by his dismissal of charity. He is also rejecting philanthropy in a private sphere by refusing to accept his nephew’s Christmas invitation, as Christianson and Garside point out (80). Public and private generosity are not important to Scrooge, and Christianson and Garside highlight that he needs to find “sympathy” and “joy in his abundance” (81). To sum up, reciprocity is at the center of Dickens’s novel. Scrooge has to learn how to fit into the community and at the end of the novel he understands that he has to give to other members in order to receive something in return. Exchanges of monetary signs – the turkey for the Cratchits (Dickens 2012, 81)– and non-monetary signs – laughter, amusement and happiness at the sight of the transformed protagonist (85) – enable a functioning community in the *Carol* at the end of the novel.

Membership in a Community

Family and community are treated as integral components of Christmas in the novel. Scrooge changes from the outcast or outsider to a character at the very center of the community. He becomes part of the Cratchit family and reacquaints himself with his nephew. This ritualistic inclusion of a previously disengaged individual into a functioning community at Christmas is a fundamental building block of the monument that Dickens's culture text constitutes.

To remind the reader, Turner writes of *communitas*, when referring to a "society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated" community (Turner 1969, 96). Individuals, according to the anthropologist, can experience *communitas* "through a limbo of statuslessness" (97). While I am not using Turner's term here, it is useful to illustrate how Scrooge's journey is a ritual or rite of sorts. The reader first encounters Scrooge as an individual outside of the community. In Turner's words, this is an individual detached "from a set of cultural conditions" (94), the first phase of a ritual of transition. The ghosts introduce the protagonist to the second phase, a phase of "liminality" (95). In this phase, invisible to the characters he observes, to borrow Turner's words once more and apply them to the *Carol*, it is "as though [Scrooge is] [...] being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers" (95). Through the scenes he observes, Dickens's protagonist recognizes that his life is not appreciated by the members of the community. This realization leads him to embrace the idea that social connections matter. According to Turner, there is, in this phase of liminality, "some recognition of a generalized social bond" (96) – a spontaneous experience of *communitas*. Scrooge recognizes the social bonds between members of the community, but he also sees that he is not a part of it. The third and final phase of the ritual of transition is the "reaggregation or reincorporation" (94). This phase embraces the "relatively stable [...] [individual who now] has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others" (95). Scrooge's transformation shows that he now understands the principle of

reciprocity as well as the importance of social capital. This means that he engages with members of his community and consequently becomes a part of it.

The analysis above illustrates that the *Carol* through its representation of ritual provides rules and principles that can easily be administered in other subsequent Christmas texts. According to Abrahams, rituals give guidelines that help connect members of a community (Abrahams 1982, 167). Through this particular ritual presented in the *Carol*, the main components of the community – identified above as reciprocity and everyone doing their part – are highlighted. By immediately becoming a “culture text” (Davis 1990, 4), *A Christmas Carol* consequently becomes “a kind of shining language” (Turner 1982, 16) that informs later Christmas texts, including the 1946 film *It’s a Wonderful Life*, on how Christmas can serve as an occasion to connect members of communities. The Christmas texts that follow Dickens’s monumental text not only focus on similar themes, but they also employ his guidelines for the ritualistic inclusion of individuals into a community. In the following three chapters I will look at several prominent examples of Christmas films, literature and advertising in order to establish how they interpret and implement the set of principles and ideals that Dickens’s culture text produces.

Chapter 3: *It's a Wonderful Life*

As we saw in the Introduction, a “culture text” (Davis 1990, 4) is in continuous transformation as it is remembered, reconstructed and reimagined by readers, audiences, playwrights and authors. Instead of giving rise to exact replicas, the *Carol* is consequently reproduced in accordance with “a cluster of phrases, images, and ideas” (3). These ‘phrases, images, and ideas’ are ingrained in other Christmas texts in the late 19th and early 20th century. Notable texts in the Anglo-American tradition include novels such as: Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868); Mavis Doriel Hay’s *The Santa Klaus Murder* (1936); and Agatha Christie’s *Hercule Poirot’s Christmas* (1938). There are also poems for instance: Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, also known as *Ring Out, Wild Bells* (1850); Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Christmas at Sea* (1888); Thomas Hardy’s *The Oxen* (1915); Robert Frost’s *Christmas Trees* (1916) and many more. They are part of the growing genre of Christmas texts that recycle central images and ideas from Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, especially those of family and community. However, not one of the novels and poems listed here have reached a comparable culture text status.

It was not until 1946 that another Christmas text was released, which, while also drawing on Dickens, over time became a monumental culture text of its own. Frank Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* is what Paul Davis calls “the quintessential American Carol” (Davis 1990, 165) and Jonathan Munby refers to as “the Christmas movie, [...] the benchmark against which all other Christmas films are judged” (Munby 2000, 55). Based on the short story “The Greatest Gift” by Philip Van Doren Stern (Capra 2017, 00:00:43), the film adaptation is much more widely known and the American Film Institute registers it at number 20 on their list of *The 100 Greatest American Films of All Time*, outranking movies such as *Forrest Gump*, or *Titanic* (AFI n.d.). Released just after the Second World War, as mentioned above, the film reproduces images and ideas from the *Carol*, and thus reinforces the importance of these at Christmas. The film itself did not receive immediate approval comparable to Dickens’s novel, yet the popularity

of the movie started to grow in the 1970s and is still growing. There are many images and reference in 21st century films, popular culture and advertisements, which are, as we will see in Chapter 5, easily recognized as originating in Capra's film.

The story in *It's a Wonderful Life* is about George Bailey, played by James Stewart, a family man who gives up his dreams to travel the world, go to college and become an architect in order to take over his father's business Building and Loan. After a substantial sum of money is lost on Christmas Eve, the business is about to go bankrupt and George, now married to Mary and with a family of his own, is to be imprisoned for embezzlement. His outlook on life becomes very bleak, leading him to consider suicide. After friends and family pray for George, Clarence, an angel second class who has yet to earn his wings, is sent to earth to save him. Clarence lets George experience an alternative version of the present, a version where he had never been born. This experience leads George to embrace life as it is. He returns home to his family, and with the help of the community he is able to save the Building and Loan business from ruin. George Bailey is a family man, but he is, in addition to that, a man at the center of the community of Bedford Falls, which eventually saves him from penury and prison.

Christmas, as historian Martin Johnes states, is both a "product of its time and an escape from it" (Johnes 2016, xiv), and so is *It's a Wonderful Life*. The film reminds audiences that even after World War II, most people are "committed to others and generally happy in themselves" (xvii). Although released just in time for Christmas, the film itself was not received as a Christmas movie. According to Jonathan Munby, this is because the film projected a narrative with a happy ending that "may have seemed just a little too pat to audiences of the day" (Munby 2000, 46). However, removed from its immediate historical context, the 1970s revived *It's a Wonderful Life* as a Christmas film, as an easing of copyright laws enabled TV companies to screen "this 'free' film as part of their Christmas programming" (40). The film thus became a part of many people's Christmas ritual.

The film's contribution to the understanding of family and community is, however, often lost on contemporary audiences and critics who view the film through a nostalgic veil. This nostalgic veil consists of, in Boym's words, "a superimposition of two images" (Boym 2001, xiv) which in this context are the historicity of the film and the 21st century context, or in other words the past and the present. Both images are very different, and to try to force them into one would create serious problems. Consequently, the ritualistic tradition of watching the film every Christmas has quickly clouded the complexity of the movie's content. Repetitive, ritualistic traditions like seeing *It's a Wonderful Life* every year ensure that the "long-distance relationship" (xiii) necessary to uphold nostalgia is kept in place. Audiences and critics consequently too often only see "the affirmative story and its fantasy of a happy end" (Munby 2000, 55-56). The film almost shows nostalgia in real time through its protagonist who, by experiencing life in a harsh world where he had never been born, starts to long for his own old world, his family and home, and finally returns home to Bedford Falls. Nostalgia, as Boym has it, consists of "*nostos* – return home" (Boym 2001, xiii) and "*algia* – longing" (ibid), and through George Bailey the viewer is able to project their own nostalgic longing onto the screen. Munby argues that only the immediate historic context gives the film a complex, debatable message. The release just after World War II, according to Munby, led to the conclusion that "Christmas was not good enough as a salve to the social and psychic wounds of the time" (Munby 2000, 41). I argue, however, that the film, if viewed through its presentation of family and community and not through a nostalgic veil, still shows that family and community are not solely positive, warm and welcoming, but instead can be restrictive. Even so, in the end, community prevails over individualism.

The film not only recycles Dickensian images of family and community, it also emphasizes the importance of reciprocity. The analysis below will show that *It's a Wonderful Life* and *A Christmas Carol* have the same message at heart, a message that is ingrained in life, politics and culture. It is that you only get if you give, and the film illustrates that reciprocity

not only extends to monetary, materialistic exchanges, but also includes emotional connections. The continuous popularity of *It's a Wonderful Life* legitimizes reciprocity, and additionally problematizes it. The community in focus is primarily white middle class, suggesting that you only give to those who are like you – in this film white middle class straight men and women – and everyone else sits out. There is one person of color in the film, however, but the role of the black character is reduced to an archetypal mammy role, keeping with the time period's mode of representation. It is therefore important to discuss how Capra's film interprets and continues Dickensian definitions of family and community as well as address how the film first questions and then legitimizes uniform and stable images of the same. I will therefore first discuss the trope of the house in relation to the definition of family, before analyzing how reciprocity and social capital are relevant in the wider community. As a final step, I will address how nostalgia is projected onto the film through its presentation of ritual.

Questioning the Home Base

In the previous chapter we saw that *A Christmas Carol* mainly focuses on examples of nuclear family gatherings at Christmas who celebrate their home, their bonds and their achievements. The examples discussed include the Cratchits, Belle and her family, and eventually, Scrooge and his nephew. Some of these gatherings only include what is traditionally the nuclear family, consisting of mother, father and children, yet the *Carol* tentatively opens the idea of family to include other relationships such as uncle and nephew, or friendships. Where the *Carol* stops, *It's a Wonderful Life* starts. The film develops a broader notion of family, including the wider community as a driving, connecting force. However, ending on a close-up of George, Mary and Zuzu in front of a Christmas tree reinforces that the nuclear family is still at the center of Christmas celebrations.

The family in the *Carol* is presented as a scattered entity that only comes together at Christmas and they gather at a shared “home base” (Handel and Hess 1956, 99) which is

cherished by all. *It's a Wonderful Life* on the other hand shows how the 'home base' becomes a trope that is both protecting and restricting members. The Old Granville House, which eventually becomes the Bailey family's house, is at first a symbol for a 'home base' where relationships are performed. They are constantly renegotiated, just as the run-down house is always in need of repairs. The building symbolizes the material and emotional connections of the Bailey family and the Bedford Falls community. As the house develops, so do the family and community ties. The Old Granville House becomes the home for the Bailey family, and the more entangled George becomes with the community, the more it becomes the place where the citizens of Bedford Falls gather. Family and community thus become almost interchangeable. We can consider the following sequences that each present a step in the community and family becoming a unit, or a small "symbolic universe", to use Gillis's term once more (Gillis 1997, 61). However, it is important to note that the development is not linear and purely positive. The material improvements of the walls highlight a dual nature: they protect and imprison, and the protagonist experiences both aspects. Already the first introduction to the Old Granville House indicates that it is a place for dreams and fears of restrictions of these and the film, through its presentation of the house, explores the tensions within traditional homes and houses that can suggest belonging and security, but can also mean the exact opposite.



Image 1. Introduction to the Old Granville House (Capra 2017, 00:24:42)

The first time the audience is introduced to the Old Granville House, it is nighttime and George and Mary walk past it on their way home from the high school ball (Image 1). The wide shot shows George and Mary looking at the house from a distance, the house in the background looms over them, indicating that this is not going to be the last time the audience and the protagonists will face the building. The grand house shows signs of neglect including broken windows and an overgrown lawn, and George and Mary throw stones at the windows, destroying the house even more. The glass breaks, and they each make a wish. To Mary, the house symbolizes romance – and we later find out that her wish included living in the house with George and their family. To George on the other hand, the house is only an old, broken-down place, easily dismissed and left behind. He excitedly exclaims that he will go and travel the world, go to college and become an architect. What George does not realize is that the house will become a cage of some sorts, that confines him and robs him of his dreams, keeping in step with the looming visual imagery of the massive building, bearing down and eventually crushing

George's dreams. The house and its role quickly grow, just as George and Mary's relationship. Emotional connections flourish, symbolizing the development of the home or home base, and enable material improvements to the house. At the same time, the film also highlights the tensions that arise when individuals try to conform to society's expectations, when belonging becomes a strain, rather than a support.

Even though the material state of the house is poor, it symbolizes security, belonging and stability. The narrative is a chronological account of the development of Mary and George's relationship. After being reacquainted at a school dance, Mary and George soon become engaged and married. On the way to begin their honeymoon, Mary and George are stopped by a banking crisis. However, instead of giving up their honeymoon, Mary enlists members of the community to help her prepare a bridal suite at the Old Granville House. The far-from-perfect, patched together home shown to the audience through several pan shots explains that material wealth is lacking at the start of George and Mary's life together. Yet, with inventive ideas and the help of the community, the married couple get off to a good start. This sequence shows again that the nuclear family and the community are strongly connected. Though the roof of the house is leaking, the emotional connections are still intact. The house is imperfect, but the home perfect, as the expression of wonder on George's face indicates when he sees the bridal suite.

The house symbolizes strong emotional connections, but the film also questions the harmonious image of the house by exploring the conflicts within the home. The very positive beginning of the marriage seemingly covers up the evident conflicts that George faces. Renovations cannot be carried out all at once, as George and Mary lack the money. The house thus illustrates that there is always a conflict between material wealth and emotional ties and the narrative tries to brush over every one of George's personal disappointments by confronting him with some emotionally positive news. For example, evidently dissatisfied with the life marked by economic challenges, George finds out that Mary is pregnant. However, this reminder of a growing family again keeps George from leaving Bedford Falls, and it makes up

for his disappointment of having to stay. Through a montage of sequences showing Mary both tending to her now two children and redecorating the house, as well as George engaging more with the community (Capra 2017, 01:11:46 to 01:12:04), the audience sees how emotional connections grow and economic improvements take place. By renovating the house, the walls around the home become not just literally, but also figuratively stronger. George becomes more and more connected with, but at the same time also constricted by, the family and community. In the same montage, the audience is introduced to Bailey Park, a housing area for Bedford Falls citizens who get financial support through George's company. With the speed that Bailey Park is prospering, George's central standing in the community equally develops. Not able to fight in the war because of a hearing impediment, George "fought the battle of Bedford Falls" (Goodrich et al. n.d.). Most other male members of Bedford Falls leave the town as soldiers, but once again, George has to stay. This is another subtle hint that George is not content with the life he leads; it is another reminder that he feels trapped in Bedford Falls. Tensions are appearing, and even if they are subdued by positive news, they are not resolved or addressed directly, leading to the house standing more and more for restraint and confinement.



Image 2. Christmas Eve (Capra 2017, 01:21:25)

The materially much improved house consequently changes to a symbol for the burdens and responsibilities George carries on behalf of his family and community. One Christmas Eve, George comes home to what should be the pinnacle of the development of the house into a home, and to his family warmly welcoming him (Image 2). The establishing shot sets the scene for what is about to unfold as he comes into the room. The hallway, where George with his back to the camera lowers his head in defeat, is dark, contrasted with the light living room where Mary and the children put up decorations. The lighting enhances the different moods with George feeling the walls caving in and the happiness on the other side that he can just look into, but not be a part of. After the developments of the day – Uncle Billy lost a substantial sum of cash in a careless mix-up, and now Building and Loan is about to go bankrupt and George to be held accountable for this – the house seems insufficient to George, it is an old and drafty house. George, who continuously sacrifices his own dreams for the family and community, seems not to get anything in return for his sacrifices, leaving him ever unhappier with his life.

Conflict(solving) in a Community

‘Family’ and ‘community’ are terms that are constantly redefined, and according to Michael Drake, they can be categorized as “restrictive, even oppressive, [...] [as] area[s] of conflict as much as consensus” (Drake 1996, 1). The terms merge in *It’s a Wonderful Life* and as the analysis of the house and home above showed, family and community in the film are presented as slightly more ambiguous than in *A Christmas Carol*. George, through experiencing a few hours in an alternative reality of Pottersville where he had never been born, understands that material wealth is not all there is to life, but that family and community support each other in times of need. The protagonist learns to see the house as well as the family and community as a “home base” (Handel and Hess 1956, 99). A home base does not only include the actual walls and roof of a house or building, it also includes feelings, emotions and relationships. These immaterial walls bind members of a family and community.



Image 3. Family and Community (Capra 2017, 02:01:07)

The shot in Image 3 expresses the view that the community will support their members, if they themselves do the same. Emotional as well as monetary connections are important, but so is accepting one's place in society. George's investment in social capital literally pays off and he receives financial support from all the members of the community that he previously supported. Social capital, to remind the reader, is what enables people in a group to connect and form a "network of relationships" (Bourdieu 2002, 287). The connection between members in the group, or in Bourdieu's words, the confirmation of "mutual knowledge and recognition" (ibid.) is expressed through exchange that signifies membership. In the case of George, the product exchanged is money. First, George is the one who supports his community with loans and, as Image 3 shows, he is paid back eventually. These exchanges, according to Bourdieu, also show who is accepted in the community, and who cannot be a part of it (ibid.), explaining why Mr. Potter, who though living in the same area, is not a part of the Bedford Falls community.

The contrast between protagonist George and antagonist Mr. Potter shows that white middle class American men have to embrace reciprocity and that individuals must always consider what their actions mean for the community. Life in Bedford Falls is a calculated act and the film promotes calculated generosity before genuine kindness, love and goodness. Mr. Potter is not a cherished member of the community, and the juxtaposition of Mr. Potter and George exhibits what is required of members of a community to justify their sharing of the 'home base'. The richest banker in Bedford Falls is a mean-spirited businessman who values individual profit above all else and is consequently not a part of the 'home base' as he only takes from members of the community. George on the other hand does not pursue the biggest profit possible, but rather works to ensure the well-being of the members of his community. Though there are several sequences that show the contrast between the two characters – notably their final encounter, where George wishes Mr. Potter a Merry Christmas, and Potter reacts with arrogance and scorn – the one that I would like to focus on here is the sequence of the company directors meeting (Capra 2017, 00:28:33 to 00:32:36). We learn at the beginning of

the sequence that George postpones his own plans in order to sort out his father's matters after his death. Provoked by Potter, George defends his father and his business decisions, showing that he cares for the members of the community and is appalled by Potter's cold business model. This sequence enables the audiences to see just how different the two men are. Potter, old and in a wheelchair, is a rich man with new and polished clothes and a wheelchair embellished with carvings, and he always has a "goon" (Goodrich et al. n.d.) standing by his side. He sits at the head of the table, symbolizing importance. In addition to his display of wealth, his attitude to George and his family sets him apart from the other company directors. He shows contempt towards George's father Peter Bailey by calling him a "starry-eyed dreamer [...] with a lot of impossible ideas" (Goodrich et al. n.d.) and he also expresses his low regard and disdain for George and his ideas. The outrage George feels culminates in the exclamation that "in my book he [Peter Bailey] died a much richer man than you'll ever be!" (ibid.). Here, George alludes to his belief that there are other forms of riches than money. He means having a place in the community where you are respected, loved and happy, all of them characteristics that Potter does not possess. Potter lacks them, because he only thinks about profit, while George is rich in this sense, because he is a community man, even if, as the analysis above pointed out, he is not always happy about that.

The film shows that functioning communities have reward systems in place. George, as the audience already learns through the voices over the montage in the introductory sequences of the film, is a generous man himself ("I owe everything to George Bailey [...] He never thinks about himself [...] George is a good guy" (Capra 2017, 00:01:20 to 00:01:39). Because of his generosity and benevolence toward his family and most members of the community, George is rewarded in the end. Though only reluctantly selfless (George feels self-pity, being trapped in his hometown), the final sequence ends with point of view, medium, high-angle shots from George's perspective showing the growing amount of money and the equally growing number of people turning up to support him. These shots are interrupted with close-up reaction shots of

George, Mary and Zuzu, their faces showing wonder and happiness. As it is Christmas Eve, Janie starts playing ‘Hark! The Herald Angels Sing’ and everyone joins in, singing of the “newborn king” when the camera focuses on George (Capra 2017, 02:02:23). George’s elevation in the society is completed; through his selfless, benevolent lifestyle he is now one of the most important members of the community of Bedford Falls. Despite exploring tensions within communities and families, the film concludes that the institutions should be interpreted as supportive, welcoming and generally positive. This positivity provokes and triggers nostalgic longing in audiences, as the following will show.

Behind the Nostalgic Veil

Through Clarence, George and the audience experience a completely different version of Bedford Falls, now Pottersville, in a world where he has never been born (Capra 2017, 01:41:12 to 01:57:00). Pottersville does not have a caring community, and realizing that, the viewers long for a Bedford Falls where caring and reciprocity work seamlessly. Viewers long for a “lost world” (Casey 1987, 364), their own Bedford Falls, that never existed in the first place. George’s return to Bedford Falls equally fans the flames of nostalgia. On screen, viewers now see a purely positive representation of family and community. Boym writes of the “utopian dimension” (Boym 2001, xiv) of nostalgia, and defines nostalgia as creating alternative imagined realities coming accrued “by needs of the present” (ibid.). Especially in 2020, but also before the Covid-19 pandemic influenced everyday life, viewers long to escape the present. In a world where changes happen with a speed that is difficult to keep up with, this Christmas classic provides an escape to viewers. Viewing the film through a nostalgic veil enables viewers to project their own imagined pasts on the screen and dream up their own community, where people support each other in times of need.

Ebenezer Scrooge and George Bailey, though arguably almost opposites, embark on a journey to the discovery of how their individual actions matter within a broader context.

Through exploring a story line of ‘what-if consequences’, they, Scrooge through the ghosts and George through Clarence, see the world without them. Scrooge sees that his egoistical, miserly, penny-pinching way of life negatively influences other people’s quality of life, while George sees the world as a lesser place without him in it. The world is a darker place, because George is not able to nurture the relationships with all members of the community. Both novel and film remind audiences that every relationship within a community matters and influences the wellbeing of all other members of the community.

George’s story, similar to Scrooge’s story, is furthermore that of a ritualistic inclusion in an existing community. The discourse about the ritual of Christmas is changing with regard to the symbolic objects used, yet the performance of the ritual is essentially still what it was in Dickens’s novel where an individual recognizes his role in the community. Victor Turner writes that artists through their work create a language (Turner 1982, 16), and I have argued that Dickens created such a language with the *Carol*. Languages are, however, evolving and users of any language play an important part in shaping it. This is what happens here: Capra uses the language of the *Carol*, but adds to it as well. Objects and ideas from the *Carol* are repeated, for example celebrating Christmas with music and playacting, and newer elements from contemporary contexts are added, as for instance Christmas decorations and trees. While new components are introduced, the content and performance of ritual is essentially still the same as it was in Dickens’s culture text. To remind the reader, according to Turner, there are different phases to a ritual. First, the individual finds himself outside of the society (Turner 1969, 94). The difference between George and Scrooge is that the former feels alienated, but generally is accepted and valued as a member already, whereas the latter lives removed from his community. In the second phase, the phase of liminality, the individual is “reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers” (95). George, as discussed above, similarly to Scrooge, experiences how life in Bedford Falls would be like without him and that leads him to the realization that community matters. This

realization enables him to enter into the third phase of ritual, the phase of “reaggregation or reincorporation” (94). He returns home and embraces his place in the community.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat my critique of the scholars who reduce the film to mere ritualized entertainment on the basis of a nostalgic veil. The analysis has shown that there is more complexity to it than meets the eye of the nostalgia-prone viewer. To summarize, family is extended to include the community and the tensions between the individual and the community are explored, though not resolved. Thus, *It's a Wonderful Life* repeats, rehearses and recycles the themes of family and community as they were established in *A Christmas Carol*. Capra's film is thus an illustration of how monuments like Dickens's culture text “are in metamorphosis” (Boym 2001, 79). The emphasis in Capra's film shifts slightly to highlighting reciprocity even more than does the Dickens's novel. Additionally, the film repeats the Dickensian ritualistic inclusion of an individual in a community, but introduces a more complex, less positive image of community. Thus, the film suggests that there are also disadvantages to membership in a community – George cannot at the same time pursue his dreams and invest in membership in his community – yet, the film concludes that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. This kind of reciprocity, the ritualistic inclusion of an individual in a group, as well as social capital are all central aspects for the protagonist of the primary text in the following chapter as well. The Grinch and George Bailey are on a similar journey to embracing membership in their respective communities. In this, again, they repeat and use the template of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.

Chapter 4: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*⁵

People who do not like Christmas are often called ‘Grinch’ or ‘Scrooge’. Both names made it into the *Oxford English Dictionary*, with ‘Scrooge’ described as “used allusively to designate a miserly, tight-fisted person or *killjoy*” (*OED*, s.v. “Scrooge, n.”, emphasis added) and ‘Grinch’ meaning “A spoilsport or *killjoy*; (more generally) an ill-tempered, unpleasant person” (*OED*, s.v. “grinch, n.”, emphasis added). Both Grinches and Scrooges put an end to people’s joys. The difference between a Grinch and a Scrooge is that the former actively tries to spoil Christmas for others, while the latter passively despises Christmas and refuses to engage in traditional activities. Both *A Christmas Carol* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* are often read as critiques of commercialization, and at a first glance, both stories’ main characters seem to despise Christmas on grounds of just that. However, they have more in common than their evident dislike of consumerism. For instance, they both live outside of the community. Read in this light, *A Christmas Carol* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas (1957)* interpret Christmas as centering around “integrat[ing] otherwise alienated individuals into the broader political community” (Weiner 2019, 37). As the previous chapter has shown, *It’s a Wonderful Life* focuses on a similar thread. George Bailey is a polar opposite to the Grinch and Ebenezer Scrooge; he is a figure at the center of the community, yet he also encounters feelings of alienation and loneliness. The Grinch can be seen as a reversed George Bailey, he has never given anything to the community that he observes from afar, and he thus does not receive anything in return. George gives and gives, but does not see what he gets in return and is therefore unhappy. In this conflict between the individual and the community, both *It’s a Wonderful Life* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* are repetitions or reimaginations of the *Carol*. Despite their differences, the only solution offered in all three texts is assimilation, an

⁵ When referring to the different adaptations of Theodor Geisel’s aka Dr. Seuss’ *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* I will use the following abbreviations: *Grinch (1957)* for the children’s book, and for the adaptations I will use the title and release date in brackets; *Grinch (1966)*, *Grinch (2000)*, *Grinch (2018)*. When writing about the character, the name will not be italicized.

embrace of family and community. Christmas, in the end, serves as a connecting device, folding the individual into the community. The *Carol*, defined previously as the first Christmas culture text, is consequently repeated.

I argue that the repetition is informed by nostalgia, specifically restorative nostalgia, in order to keep representing Christmas as a harmonious, all-inclusive occasion, rather than a time where conflict can and arguably should be addressed. To remind the reader, restorative nostalgia rests on *nostos*, the return to the lost home, in that it focuses only on repetition of apparent truths and traditions without questioning these (Boym 2001, xviii). The analysis below will show that various adaptations of the children's story *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* try to shift the tale of "coerced assimilation" (Weiner 2019, 39) to a story of successful integration by adding new dimensions to the original. Yet, at the core they still are repeating a more than century old recipe, led by restorative nostalgic perspectives. While they try to address modern family and community developments, I argue that the message of each adaptation is the same as the *Carol's*, which is that individuals can only be a part of a community if they are willing to embrace norms and values of said community.

Instead of pursuing the narrative's thinly veiled consumerist critique, I will follow in Rosetta Young's and Isaac Weiner's footsteps, and expand upon their interpretation of social capital in the *Carol* and community in the *Grinch (1957)*. According to Young, the *Carol* shows "Christmas as a time of frenetic, frantic investment in social capital, which, usually, in the course of the year, takes a backseat to the cultivation of economic and cultural forms of value" (Young 2019, 227). Weiner on the other hand points out that Christmas is presented as something that everyone shares and takes part in, and as such it becomes a dominating force of the majority. He reads the *Grinch* as a tale of forced assimilation (Weiner 2019, 53). By adding backstories to the Grinch's life, the adaptations reinforce the notion that Christmas can almost be used interchangeably with community. Christmas is a time for investing in social capital and the Christmas genre is until today strongly influenced by Charles Dickens's culture text *A*

Christmas Carol. Interpreting Christmas as a commemorative ritual enables me to combine both Young and Weiner's approaches. Christmas thus not only becomes a time to invest in social capital, it also becomes a time where members of existing, harmonious communities reach out to individuals outside of the group. However, instead of wholeheartedly supporting Weiner's interpretation, I will suggest that the Grinch is excluded from the community not entirely by choice. This interpretation and approach highlights that Christmas in literature is represented as a unifying force which enables communities to welcome individuals into their fold. A comparative analysis also further establishes the *Carol's* immense influence in Christmas literature and its role as a culture text that became a template for subsequent Christmas texts.

The Grinch from 1957 to 2018

Theodor Seuss Geisel's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957) is a children's book written in free verse that builds the basis for all three filmic adaptations. Looked at from 2021, the *Grinch* (1957) ironically almost seems to be a simple, stripped back version of the story. The focus is on what the Grinch hates about Christmas, including the noise and music, blind and excessive consumerism and food consumption. Cindy Lou is just a side note, there is no mayor or Christmas Cheer contest, nor lighting ceremony or childhood story; instead, the *Grinch* (1957) portrays its red-eyed titular character as a smart and reasonable character who tries to stop Christmas more out of necessity than pure meanness. Despite charges of racism and sexism in Geisel's other children's books that led to a very recent stop of publication and licensing of several of his works (Random House Children's Books 2021), this children's Christmas story was and still is generally reviewed favorably (see e.g. Holden 2000). The story of the mean titular character is often interpreted as a critique of Christmas consumerism, and this interpretation hides the more controversial aspects of the narrative. However, the narrative can and should instead be read as a tale of exclusion, and the adaptations further this reading. The

protagonist lives outside of the community, yet one simple act of participation - returning the presents - enables the protagonist to immediately become a part of the Who community.

The first adaptation to the screen of Geisel's children's story is the 1966 animated cartoon. The original story is read as a voice-over. The words are not changed, but there are a few lines added. These lines describe the Who children engaging with their presents and thus they seem to enhance the critique of commercialism. However, the addition of three songs and the pictures themselves highlight the Grinch's removed position in the community. Weiner assumes that the Grinch's position outside of the community is by choice and that he ultimately has no choice but to participate in the dominant discourse where Christmas is intrusive and cannot be ignored (Weiner 2019, 43). Yet, the inclusion of the song "You're a Mean One Mr. Grinch" as well as the Grinch's skin color mark the protagonist as an outsider not so much by choice, but because of looks and lifestyle. Yet, as was the case in the book, returning with the presents enables the Grinch to enter into the community and all the differences highlighted before seem to immediately be forgotten.

The feature film *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (2000) introduces the titular character, played by Jim Carey, as hating Christmas from the start. In flashbacks, the viewer is introduced to childhood experiences of the Grinch in the community, where he had grown to like Christmas, but was mocked and bullied because of his looks. Humiliated, the Grinch moves to a cave on Mount Crumpit, hating Christmas and the pretense of community that he experienced. To protect himself from new rejections, he refuses to engage with members of the community he once was a part of. The film introduces new roles, such as the Mayor as the bully and Martha May as the Grinch's love interest and it greatly emphasizes Cindy Lou's role. The consumerist critique is also enhanced here by pointing out that the Who children quickly grow tired of their presents, which thus end up forgotten or dumped on Mount Crumpit. The Grinch, though as a child a member of the community, is presented as an individual who was forced to

live outside of the community. Yet, the now seemingly unimportant differences are forgotten once the Grinch returns to the town with the presents he previously stole and with an apology.

175 years after the *Carol* and 61 years after the *Grinch (1957)*, the 2018 animated adaptation is furthest from Weiner's interpretation that the Grinch is willingly outside of the community. Though animated, there are only very few similarities between the 1966 and 2018 cartoon. Narrated by Pharrell Williams, this version is three times as long as Boris Karloff's Grinch. Viewers thus get to see the inventive, smart Grinch living in his cave and valuing the presence of his dog. Instead of showing a mean-spirited loner, the Grinch now is a fully formed character who leads an alienated, isolated life because of childhood trauma. The 2018 Grinch does not revel in this lonely life as Jim Carey's Grinch seems to do. He has a strong friendship with his dog, and is isolated from, rather than feared and despised by the Whos. While there is some hint at a critique of consumerism, the dominant themes are alienation and loneliness. Cindy Lou (2018) does not set out to recruit the Grinch as a new Who as she does in the 2000 production. Rather, she almost accidentally meets the Grinch thinking he is Santa Claus. Thus, she asks the dressed-up Grinch to help her mother to be happy and less lonely. Confronted by this wish, the Grinch realizes that Christmas is about community and fellowship. Ultimately, the Grinch again returns the presents and after an apology is welcomed into the community.

The three movie adaptations work against Weiner's interpretation that the Grinch chooses to live outside the community. Weiner bases his analysis on the original children's book and concludes that the Grinch had no other option but to participate in the Whos' Christmas celebrations. The 1966 adaptation of the story does not add a significant subplot to the narrative, yet the songs with lyrics written by Geisel himself suggest that the Grinch is not accepted and possibly forced outside of the community by the Whos. The 2000 adaptation suggests that the Grinch once embraced Christmas but was bullied and consequently left the community. The flashbacks to the childhood and the inclusion of the love story illustrate that the Grinch was a part of the community and can be reintegrated. The 2018 version adds not

only a glance into childhood, but also focuses on relationships the Grinch has with his dog as well as several other animals and members of the community. Here we can see a Grinch who despises Christmas because of childhood traumas and realizes that he is utterly lonely. In this, the 2000 and 2018 adaptations edge closer to the *Carol*. Just like Scrooge revisited experiences of the past, the Grinch in the 2000 and 2018 remembers childhood experiences. In effect, the story line of the past added to the films restores the *Carol's* template. It shows nostalgia for a Dickens' Christmas world that persists until today. Remembering the past at Christmas is what influences the present and this is what ultimately leads Scrooge as well as the 2000 and 2018 Grinch to change direction and become part of the community.

Community from Outside

The children's book and the first televised cartoon are similar, yet the visual dimension and the soundscape of the film point out the Grinch's alienation. Similarly, the 2000 and 2018 adaptations' visual imagery give indications as to why the Grinch is outside the community. No members of the community seem to want the Grinch to become a part of their community in 1957 and 1966, yet in the later adaptations, there is at least one character who welcomes the Grinch and tries to convince him to join the Christmas ritual, with Cindy Lou in the 2000 *Grinch* and Bricklebaum in 2018. The 1966 Grinch is portrayed as a jealous, lonely character based on his looks alone. He is the only character in the cartoon with a green/yellow skin color and red eyes. The red eyes are copied from the original children's book, and Julia Pond writes about how the eyes are symbols for a "Satanic characterization" (Pond 2010). Pond argues that the imagery in both the televised version (1966) and the illustrated children's story (1957) firmly roots the story within a biblical context (Pond 2010). However, the imagery also enhances the alienation of the Grinch. He is the only character – like Satan in Christianity – who is outside of the community. Not only are his eyes red, but his skin in the adaptations is green. The color grows in intensity with the adaptations. It symbolizes that the Grinch is literally green with

jealousy and longing. He is jealous of the community spirit he observes from his cabin – the cartoon’s first images show the Whos singing while standing hand in hand and the Grinch can only watch from afar. While the green/yellow hue of the skin may be explained through technology, it is interesting to see that if we add the yellow tint, there is another layer added to the Grinch’s personality. With yellow, most commonly associated with cowardice, the Grinch is portrayed as wanting to engage with the community, but lacking the courage to do so. The Grinch wants to join the activities, but can only do so in the darkness as he is not accepted in the community. Therefore, we can see the Grinch playing with trains and playing pool while he is stealing the Whos Christmas presents (Jones 1999, 13:01 to 13:20). Other meanings of the color green are hope, expressing that the protagonist wants to join the community, as well as something new, suggesting that the Grinch does not know how to celebrate and how to become a part of the community. The black and white illustrations of the book would support this interpretation. The only color used is red for the Grinch’s eyes, which reflects the red in the festive decorations and clothing. Thus, the red reflections also show the Grinch’s longing to be a part of the community.

The song “You’re A Mean One Mr. Grinch”, with lyrics written by Geisel himself for the 1966 televised version of the children’s story, highlights that the Grinch is outside the community because he is perceived as unhygienic, horrible and mean. Versions of the song are included in the 2000 and 2018 films as well. The Grinch is mean, a monster, vile, foul, a rotter, and nauseating. He is “deplorable rubbish”, “appalling” (Hague and Geisel 1966). He is not accepted, as lines such as “I wouldn’t touch you with a thirty-nine-and-a-half foot pole” (ibid.) illustrate. While the 1966 and 2000 adaptations enhance the Grinch as the mean one, the 2018 version shows a more caring Grinch. This is shown by his interaction with the animals, especially his dog Max and the reindeer Fred.

Even though the Grinch is clearly despised and/or feared by the Whos in the 1966 and 2000 version, he is immediately received with open arms once he brings back the presents and

joins the ritual. The children's book does not show how the Whos see the Grinch, and I do not want to speculate how they perceive him. Yet also in the original, returning the presents gives the Grinch the opportunity to immediately become a part of the ritual. There was no indication prior to his return to town that the Whos would want the Grinch to be a part of their community. This act of giving back the presents rather supports massive consumption and it could therefore prove to be a paradox when the children's story is read as a consumerist critique. In fact, bringing back the presents is what enables the Grinch to become a part of the community. The presents are "signs of recognition" (Bourdieu 2002, 287), they not only enable the Grinch to enter the community, but also mean that the Whos accept the Grinch. The following will show that signs of recognition are essential to social capital and are part of the ritual of including individuals in the community.

Coming Home

All four versions of the *Grinch* start by presenting the protagonist as an individual without social capital and without the opportunity to invest in it. Social capital, according to Pierre Bourdieu, "is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network" (Bourdieu 2002, 286). 'Durable networks' have to be groomed, meaning that individuals have to employ "investment strategies [...] aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (287). Another word for 'durable networks' is communities, and relationships within communities can be manifested through names and acts/ rituals. The most prominent social network in the *Grinch (1957)* and later adaptations are the Whos. Manifested through a collective name, the Whos are connected through their shared participation in the Christmas ritual, which in turns is marked by sounds, food, and presents. The Grinch neither shares the name, nor does he participate in the ritual. Furthermore, the Grinch is geographically removed from the community, living in a mountain cave north of Whoville. The geographical distance makes it difficult for the Grinch to invest in

social capital, yet the narrator also ponders other reasons for the Grinch's refusal to engage in the ritual, and those are anatomical explanations ranging from too tight shoes, to possible implications of mental illness - "It *could* be his head wasn't screwed on just right" (Geisel 2016) - and a heart that is "two sizes too small" (ibid.).

Christmas, and the ritualistic celebration thereof provide the opportunity for the Grinch to invest in social capital once he realizes that Christmas is a celebration of community and fellowship. The Grinch aggregates masses of social capital which is expressed through a "mutual acknowledgment [based on] the reacknowledgement of a minimum of objective homogeneity" (Bourdieu 2002, 286). The basis for the acquisition of social capital is that the Grinch shares the understanding of Christmas as meaning "a little bit more" than pure economic investments, namely that Christmas is a celebration of community and fellowship. This builds the basis for the growths of social capital on the side of the Grinch. Social capital, as Bourdieu highlights, is based on exchanges or relationships within the network (286), and once the Grinch recognizes the Whos' understanding of Christmas, he is able to invest in social capital. He returns the gifts, and in exchange is welcomed as a member of the community.

Even though the Grinch is integrated into the community, the community itself does not change. Bourdieu states that signs of recognition can re-define groups (Bourdieu 2002, 287). The Grinch in the children's book is a new entry to the group and as a new member is allowed to participate in the ritual (he carves the "roast beast" (Geisel 2016)). To mark the permanence of the change, the anatomical features also transform (his heart grows "three sizes that day" (Geisel 2016)). This suggests that the boundaries and limits of the community have not been modified by the new entry. A new look and skin color has been embraced by the Whos, yet only because the Grinch now shares the same values and joins the celebrations. The *Grinch* thus becomes a tale of assimilation, where the protagonist participates in a previously established occasion – Christmas, in previously established places – the dining table, and practices – carving the roast beast. In order for the group or community to persist, individuals

must be “as homogeneous as possible” (Bourdieu 2012, 287). The realization that Christmas is a shared experience of community, gives both sides a common ground to stand on. In this the *Grinch* presents a recreation of the ritual from the *Carol* - including an individual into a community – and this is made possible through restorative nostalgia on part of the audience as well as in its use of the Dickensian template.

Restorative Nostalgia: Ebenezer Scrooge and the Grinch

Given the emphasis on community and family in all four versions of the Grinch, it is natural to see their links to Dicken’s *Carol*. Even though *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is not an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, it is a reimagination of Dickens’s culture text. It restores and rebuilds a text with building blocks clearly recognizable from the *Carol*, with some of its elements very close to the text defining the Christmas genre in 1843, and others hardly recognizable at a first glance. Here we can see what Boym calls “restorative nostalgia” (Boym 2001, 41). Restorative nostalgia focuses on complete rebuilding, yet because of the temporal difference, there are gaps that have to be glossed over (ibid.). As a culture text, the *Carol*, as discussed in previous chapters, has become part of Christmas discourses, but by becoming so ingrained in Anglo-American contexts, it also is subjected to many interpretations, changes and appropriations. It is a part of a cultural memory and pivotal to the invented tradition of Christmas and Christmas celebrations. Invented traditions, according to Eric Hobsbawm, are “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature” which aim to build a sense of “continuity with a suitable past” (Hobsbawm 2012, 1). Invented traditions thus are implicated by “quasi-obligatory repetition” (2). Additionally, they “build [...] on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offer[...] a comforting collective script for individual longing” (Boym 2001, 42). The *Carol* is just such a script, and the *Grinch* repeats it to show Christmas as a time for family and community. A script, according to Boym, can furthermore follow two different paths, one emphasizing the

individual in an encompassing society “not exclusively based on ethnic or national principles” (ibid) and the other aimed at “reestablishing social cohesion, a sense of security and an obedient relationship to authority” (ibid.) achieved through commemorative rituals. The *Grinch* in all its versions leans towards the latter way of interpreting the script, following in the *Carol*’s footsteps. Instead of allowing individuals to remain outside of the Christmas ritual, both Dickens and Geisel write tales of assimilation and (forced) integration. The *Grinch* and its adaptations thus become a mere repetition of the *Carol*, a restored version, showing that a homogenous community is the basis for acquiring social capital.

The building blocks of the 1957 and subsequent *Grinch* stories vary from very concrete ones, like similar characters, to less defined ones, as for instance the values of community. As for the characters, the *Grinch* and Ebenezer Scrooge are characterized similarly at the start of the narrative. As mentioned, both are lonely, miserly and perceived as mean. The only difference is that the *Grinch* is not driven by greed or the need for amassing economic capital. The *Grinch* and Ebenezer Scrooge are however not the only two characters that have similarities. Tiny Tim and Cindy Lou are other examples: they are the ones who reach out to those outside of the community. Tiny Tim is often interpreted as the character that extends a hand to Scrooge (Young 2019, 230), and Cindy Lou takes a similar role in the 2000 and 2018 adaptations of the *Grinch*. She is the one who invites the *Grinch* into the community, and because of her, the *Grinch* eventually takes the steps that enable him to become a part of the community.

The *Grinch*’s assimilation to the community is very similar to Ebenezer Scrooge’s return to his family and community. Both protagonists take central roles in Christmas rituals, which manifest their new positions within the community. The *Carol*’s last paragraph shows that Scrooge changes to a person with social capital, and the *Grinch (1957)*, by placing the *Grinch* at the head of the table carving the “roast beast” (Geisel 2016), suggests a similar long-lasting change in its protagonist. Knowing that Scrooge becomes closer connected with the

community, the *Grinch (1957)* ends with the shared meal. There is no need to give insight into the following years, as the recipe of Christmas narratives suggests that investing in social capital at Christmas is permanent. It becomes clear that the *Grinch (1957)* is a simple repetition of the *Carol*, reinforcing established patterns and traditions without questioning them.

The understanding of family and community varies slightly from version to version, with the 2018 version closest to the understanding of the *Carol's* definition. Family, as discussed previously, is very important in the *Carol*. Family and community are however not mutually exclusive. Rather, a family is a community, but a community does not have to be a family. While a nuclear family is not very central in the 1957 and 1966 versions of the *Grinch*, the 2000 and 2018 versions reintroduce nuclear families, but they highlight at the same time that those families are connected with the community. Here we can see that all primary texts of this thesis so far have this in common: in *It's a Wonderful Life* this interdependency of family and community is also underlined.

At the very end of the *Carol* we learn that Scrooge “knew how to keep Christmas well” (Dickens 2012, 85) and the Grinch learns that Christmas “means a little bit more” (Geisel 2016). Keeping Christmas well means ensuring one’s place in the community for a longer period of time, but also supporting other members of the community. It means recognizing the importance of reciprocity and exchange. The Grinch comes to the same realization, and the 2018 version ends with the Grinch proclaiming “I spent all my life hating Christmas, but now I realize it wasn’t Christmas I hated, but being alone. [...] I’m not alone anymore” (Mosier and Cheney 2018, 01:13:50 to 01:14:00). The Grinch and Scrooge undergo a character change by recognizing and embracing the rules and values of communities. They become less lonely, and through an investment in social capital, they are perceived as members of the community, and are consequently no longer perceived as mean.

The *Grinch (1957)* and all three adaptations show the continuous transformation of the *Carol*, precisely by repeating and restoring the core of Dickens’s culture text; its emphasis of a

homogeneous community. The specific details are to a degree repetitions from *A Christmas Carol*, most significantly, the protagonist the Grinch is very similar to Ebenezer Scrooge. All versions of the *Grinch*, as well as the original *Carol*, address Christmas as meaning “something more”, and by this they mean the enactment of community and family. By repeating again and again the simple, easy, problem-less solution of integrating individuals within the community, the texts speak to their respective historical contexts. Since the Industrial Revolution until today, the world is facing fast changes, immense technological and communicational developments, and the pull of globalization. Against that there is the longing in people for “slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition” (Boym 2001, 16). Nostalgia, Boym writes, “is a mourning [...] for the loss of an enchanted world with *clear borders and values*” (8, emphasis added). By restoring the *Carol* through the *Grinch*, an attempt is made to copy the norms and ideals established in Dickens’s novel and thus give the audiences ‘clear borders and values’.

Chapter 5: 2020 Christmas Commercials

The previous chapter argued that Christmas in the *Grinch* is presented as a unifying force which enables communities to welcome individual members into their midst. Contemporary Christmas television commercials suggest the same. They increasingly lean towards telling stories rather than showcasing individual products. The narratives aim at creating a nostalgic longing in their viewers for a community such as the one presented on the screen; a community where everyone looks out for each other. In this chapter I argue that Christmas advertising supports pre-21st century narratives driven by the *Carol's* ideal of a homogeneous community and family. Rather than creating new meaning in every generation (Davis 1990, 13), 2020 television Christmas commercials, similarly to *It's a Wonderful Life* and the *Grinch*, merely reinforce Christmas as the time of the year to confirm and strengthen communities. There are several tropes and symbols in the commercials which support the argument that Christmas means connecting individuals with already existing communities. Among them is the trope of looking in, which enables a comparison with Scrooge. The tropes as well as the symbols, such as hearts and windows, insinuate, exactly like the *Carol*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and the *Grinch*, that Christmas is the time of year to integrate individuals in a community. This, as the commercials suggest, is achieved by investing in social capital, which refers to resources that enable “membership in a group” (Bourdieu 2002, 286).

Christmas and Commercialism are very much intertwined and, as mentioned in chapter one, Christmas is no longer just a religious commemorative ritual celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, but it has generally become more secular in Anglo-American contexts. Christmas has gained an immense economic impact; today, one third “of annual retail turnover in many Western economies” (Hancock and Rehn 2011, 238) is directly related to the holiday. Advertising has become a central tool to further this development. According to researchers of advertising Cele Otnes and Linda M. Scott, advertising and ritual are two institutions that interact and influence each other (Otnes and Scott 1996, 34). For the purpose of this thesis, I

will concentrate on this relation in the specific context of Christmas advertising and narrow my focus to how advertising uses pre-established rituals and invented traditions to convey an emotional appeal to the audience. I will look at 2020 Christmas television commercials which pay attention to creating emotional connections between people by using a pre-established script. Like Otnes and Scott, I conclude that “social gifts” (37) instead of “ritual artifact[s]” (38) are promoted. However, while Otnes and Scott claim that advertising lacks the opportunity to stage “ritual occasions” (40), I argue that Christmas television commercials such as the Waitrose & John Lewis & Partner (WJLP) commercial do just that, and they do so with the help of nostalgia, ritual and a pre-existing script in the form of Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* and other Christmas narratives.

In “Something Old, Something New: Exploring the Interaction Between Ritual and Advertising”, Otnes and Scott identify several steps and criteria for advertising. First, they suggest that advertising reinforces ritual through offering “social gifts” (Otnes and Scott 1996, 37) which appear in three forms: they create and maintain “social order” (37), “unite people emotionally” (37) and suggest “transformation” (37). Transformation in this context means that products or social gifts offer audiences and potential customers a change, or even an elevation in social status. Second, there is what Otnes and Scott call “Ritual Constellations” (38). Advertisements can reinforce stereotypes through participating and staging ritual and are consequently “socialization agents for consumers participating in, or anticipating participating in, ritual contexts” (40). As such agents, advertisements can influence how people view products and brands and when and how they will be included in everyday life. Advertisements thus “dictate [...], introduce, [...], and educate” (40). Third, Otnes and Scott point out that advertising changed from promoting products to “creating” (38) a script that is ritualized. These new ritualized scripts give context to products, and thus suggest longevity, as well as alluding to the products having a “past, present, and future” (35). Yet, I argue that there is no creation of a new ritual script in Christmas television commercials, rather, an existing script, namely

Dickens's culture text, is used. Viewers are thus encouraged to feel nostalgic for the sense of community and family that is shown on the screen. In order to address a broader cultural and societal significance, advertising seems to have become less and less concerned with promoting specific products or brands, but aims more at stirring up emotions among their audience.

I have identified three main categories of Christmas advertising in 2020, characterized through different narrative techniques: story, story and product, as well as only products. For this thesis, mostly commercials from the first category will be relevant. First of all, there are television commercials that focus purely on a story, not a product, for instance the retailer and supermarket's WJLP commercial. The two-minute commercial "Give a Little Love" follows the symbol of a heart travelling through a community, touching and reaching every member (John Lewis 2020). Similarly, the online shopping company Amazon displays the creative workings of a community in 2020, where people were discouraged from physically being together, in the commercial "The Show Must Go On" (Amazon 2020). Other commercials from small businesses to large companies follow this narrative pattern, including Disney's "From Our Family to Yours" (Disney UK 2020) and Haford Hardware's "#GiveWhatYouCan" (Haford Hardware 2020). While this category does not focus exclusively on promotable products, there may well be product placement involved.

In the second category there are commercials that market a feeling through telling a story while highlighting a single product or a variety of items. In this category, there is for example supermarket Lidl's UK commercial "#BigOnLidlChristmas". This one-minute commercial shows a family Christmas gathering, and singles out products and their prices intermittently (Lidl GB 2020). The third and final category focuses only on products, as for example the tech giant Apple's 2020 Christmas commercial showcasing iPhones and other Apple products (Apple Archive 2020). These third-category commercials are released in the run-up to Christmas, yet they do not address the holiday in any shape or form. The trend in 2020 as well as in the last 10 or so years seems to be leaning toward the first two categories.

However, before analyzing examples of 2020 Christmas television commercials, I want to briefly look at the history of Christmas advertising to understand more fully how ritual, script and advertisements relate to one another.

Brief History of Christmas Advertising

Christmas was not recognized as a national holiday in the U.S. before the mid 19th century, and consequently, Christmas advertising and consumerism started to surge at a similar time (Belk 1989). According to William O’Barr, “industrial productivity had developed to the point where it needed mass consumption to accompany it” (O’Barr 2006). The popularity of gift giving at Christmas started growing in the early 19th century, parallel to the Santa Claus figure gaining speed (Bartunek and Do 2011, 798)⁶. As a consequence of the industrialization paired with the rising popularity of gift giving, advertising became a strategic tool especially at Christmas. Advertising in the late 19th and early 20th century was done by window displays and magazine advertisements, which often featured Santa Claus (Belk 1993, 90). This helped manifest Santa as a “symbol of material abundance and hedonistic pleasure” (Belk 1993, 83). By the late 19th century, Christmas was established as “the most frenzied shopping period of the year” (Hancock and Rehn 2011, 739) which means that Christmas themes and symbols are now inextricably connected with product advertising (O’Barr 2006).

Even a brief look at the history of Christmas advertising cannot ignore Coca-Cola’s influence. Haddon Sundblom’s illustrations of Santa Claus for the 1931 Coca-Cola Christmas campaign (Image 4) defined today’s representations of the character (O’Barr 2006). Sundblom’s illustration shows Santa Claus as the now iconic image of the big old white man with a red coat and white



Image 4. Santa Claus (Coca-Cola 1931)

⁶ In the US, the Santa Claus character was formed immensely by Clement Moore’s *Night Before Christmas* (O’Barr 2006).

beard. He is described as “the busiest man in the world [and] he even knows how to be good to himself” (Coca-Cola 1931). The 1931 Coca-Cola advertisement reminds audiences to think of themselves, a focus that, as we will see, below shifted to promoting caring for others. The Santa figure, however, was not the only symbolism manifested through an advertising campaign. Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer was similarly developed, by Robert L. May for the “mail order house Montgomery Ward & Company” (O’Barr 2006). Rudolph’s story is very similar to that of Scrooge or the Grinch. He too, is an outsider, because of his red nose, and only included into his community – or herd – at Christmas. These two examples show that advertising consequently works with and develops established iconography (Santa) or establishes new symbols (Rudolph’s red nose). They ascribe “social significance” (ibid.) to symbols while at the same time promoting shopping. Building on the invented tradition of gift giving, advertising shows the viewer the connection of the giver and receiver (ibid.). Thus, they highlight that reciprocity enables families and communities to thrive at Christmas.

According to Otnes and Scott, Christmas television specials and films offer a counterpart to the imagery of Christmas advertising (Otnes and Scott 1996, 40). Films and television specials focus on family and home, and gifts that are advertised elsewhere are meant to support this narrative. 21st century television commercials, similarly to instrumentalizing Santa as a symbol that allows for excessive gift giving, started to incorporate the notion that family, home and community are what people long for, which according to Otnes and Scott was previously mostly limited to television specials and films (ibid.). Instead of supporting the narratives from novels, films and television specials, commercials themselves present narratives. Thus, (Christmas) advertising has undergone a shift. Instead of promoting products, the focus is now on feelings. The turn in marketing is often attributed to postmodernist influences, and is named relationship marketing or emotional marketing (Rytel 2010, 31). In the UK, John Lewis & Partners (JLP), later Waitrose & John Lewis & Partners (WJLP), are renowned for their advertising strategy. In the beginning of the 21st century, the individual

products were the focus of Christmas advertising campaigns, while the second decade introduced the first spot to tell a story. With telling a story and creating a feeling, the release of a new JLP Christmas commercial, according to reporter Adam Sherwin, becomes “an annual event almost akin to Glastonbury and Wimbledon” (Sherwin 2014). Other companies slowly followed suit. Amazon for example changed their approach in 2020. The pre-2020 Christmas commercials focused on the packaging, the commercials usually involved singing boxes with the amazon logo and a Santa substitute in the form of a delivery person. However, the 2020 Christmas commercial tells a story of a young ballerina who with the help of her family and community gets to perform a dance in a time when all public performances were cancelled. Advertising thus concentrates on feelings and heartwarming stories. In this, TV commercials lean towards the same recipe that other Christmas texts use, and that is to employ restorative nostalgia to reconstruct a past or more specifically, a previous narration. Christmas texts and advertising reconstruct community and family ideals through focusing on reciprocity, social capital and social gifting, all of which tie family and community closer together.

In 2020, however, families and communities were forced to socially distance. The immense challenges of a global pandemic meant that nostalgia for the ‘good old times’ was ever-present. And so it is no surprise that Christmas advertising picked up on that and emphasized pre-2020 notions of community gatherings. Krystine Batcho writes that “[n]ostalgia has been shown to occur in response to loneliness [...] and to serve a restorative function by increasing perceived social support during loneliness” (Batcho 2013, 356). Many 2020 Christmas television commercials worked especially hard to show the lonely and nostalgic audience that family and community are still present. The commercials in this chapter pick up on the audience’s longing for a different world, a pre-covid world. However, the commercials present not just nostalgia for ‘any’ “lost world” (Casey 1987, 364), but specifically for the sense of family and community presented in Dickens’s Christmas classic. They follow in the footsteps of works such as *It’s A Wonderful Life* and the *Grinch* which, too, have rehearsed and repeated

the Dickensian Christmas. Despite an all-encompassing global pandemic and a racial reckoning especially in the United States, but also globally, that characterized 2020, the need for seemingly outdated understandings of family and community persists. Boym writes that nostalgia is particularly prone to “reappear [...] as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (Boym 2001, xiv). Interestingly, Covid-19 forced the world to stop on the one hand, definitely at the very beginning with lockdowns enforcing everyday life to slow down. Yet on the other side there was an abrupt need for, and acceleration of, new technological products and forms, such as the unprecedented and abrupt increase in the use of online platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. While there was a forced slowdown of everyday life, the workday soon began to be integrated more and more into the home, bringing with it the speedy move to online platforms, new technologies and ways of entertainment. Consequently, we could say that the technological developments – ‘accelerated rhythms’ – and the mass movement of #BlackLivesMatter – ‘a historical upheaval’ – side by side warranted “a renewed need for continuity and slowness, for other more human temporalities that no software of the anticipatory nostalgia industry can possibly simulate” (Boym 2017, 18). Online meeting places were not a satisfactory substitute for the actual physical meetings and it is thus unsurprising that nostalgia for a time before a global pandemic surfaces in Christmas advertising. Yet, the pandemic only highlights a pre-existing theme. As discussed in previous chapters, nostalgia for pre-20th century definitions of family and community was and is present in the examined monumental examples of Christmas texts from the 19th and 20th century. The pandemic, I argue in this chapter, only condensed this already existing longing and brought it to the forefront of our consciousness.

Social Gifts as Visible Social Capital

As mentioned above, social gifts have three functions, the first one being that advertising reinforces ritual and social order through social gifts. In 2020 commercials this is achieved

through promoting an investment in social capital. In this, the television commercials follow exactly in the footsteps of the *Carol*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and the *Grinch*. Social capital is what enables individuals to maintain membership or to become a member of a group or community (Bourdieu 2002, 286). Advertising suggests that the investment in social capital is done through employing economic capital, as unsurprisingly, Bourdieu suggests that social capital is “never completely independent of it” (ibid.). Instead of being symbols of economic capital, products become “signs of recognition” (287). These signs of recognition in the context of ritual are “first and foremost, material objects, though they represent ideas, objects, events, relationships, ‘truths’ [...] or even intangible or invisible thoughts and conceptions” (Turner 1982, 16) and would be employed in the transition from the phase of liminality to the inclusion in the community. In the 2020 Waitrose & John Lewis & Partners Christmas commercial, the signs of recognition show how all members of a community, no matter whether big or small, animated or not, human, animal or snow person, are connected. The signs of recognition, become symbols for relationships instead of being purely material objects.



Image 5. Shopping Bag (John Lewis 2020, 0:51)



Image 6. Cottages (John Lewis 2020, 1:02)

Take for example the Waitrose shopping bag (Image 5) delivered by snow people to an elderly couple. The bag contains, among other things, a Christmas cracker which is shared between the husband and a lonely elderly man in the neighboring cottage (Image 6). The joke from inside the Christmas cracker and the kindness shown to him by his neighbor turn the lonely, sad man into a happy man and as such he is able to give to other people in the

community. The commercial does not show how relationships individually develop through signs of recognition, yet they highlight that signs of recognition, like the shopping bag or the Christmas cracker, impact the wider community. As such they form “networks of relationships” (Bourdieu 2002, 287) or, in other words, they help strengthen communities.



Image 7. *Woman with Dog* (Hall of Advertising 2013, 0:49)



Image 8. *Handover of the Heart* (John Lewis 2020, 0:33)

According to Otnes and Scott, the second function of advertisements is to pick up on the quality of rituals to unite people emotionally. Through acquiring the products, customers join a community of consumers (Otnes and Scott 1996, 37). In the first decade of the 2000s, John Lewis & Partner advertising focused on individual products that turned into Christmas gifts. The 2007 television commercial “Shadows”, for example, showed individual products that were creating the shadow of a woman with a dog (Image 7). Here, the connection to the products is still very clear, though there is an emotional aspect introduced, both with the surprise created – the viewer starts wondering why the products are placed seemingly at random on a stage – and with the slogan “Whoever you’re looking for this Christmas” (Hall of Advertising 2013).

The 2020 Christmas commercial, on the other hand, does not focus on one or more specific products. Instead, the audience gets to see how individual members of a community are influenced and elevated by love, expressed through the symbol of the travelling heart. Image 8 shows a “handover” of the heart. A boy gives a heart-shaped snow balloon to a melting snowman who is literally elevated and flies away, carried by the heart (John Lewis 2020, 0:33).

The products are still there, but they are only props, not the things that create the wondrous images and feelings. The emotional connection does not happen through the products, but rather through the story. Instead of becoming part of the consumer community by buying the products, customers join a caring community by helping and caring for others. This is still done through the products, but the emotional connection between viewer and product is not the focus anymore, instead it is the emotional connection to members within a community.

The third aspect of social gifts is that advertisements, like rituals, suggest “transformation” (Otnes and Scott 1996, 37). Advertising implies that acquiring a product leads to immediate changes for the person. By this they do not simply mean the change from not having to having a product, but that the possession of the product elevates the person. Now, the 2020 WJLP Christmas commercial suggest that having the heart enables one to elevate the life of another person. Take for example the family living room scene (see Image 9 below), which strongly echoes the Bailey family living room in *It’s a Wonderful Life*. The sister gives the glowing heart to the younger brother who then is lifted up by his father to put the heart on top of the Christmas tree (John Lewis 2020, 1:15). The heart in this commercial can be both a product and a feeling. The product itself can change a life – the heart is put on the tree and thus brightens up the room, and so does the feeling of belonging that is expressed through this routine. The heart, as mentioned, travels from sequence to sequence and this suggests that the community is transformed by individual acts that express caring. Thus, attention is called to a cycle of kindness which produces more kindness.



Image 7. Living Room Scene (John Lewis 2020, 1:15)

Ritual Constellations – a 2020 Christmas

The heart serves as a symbol of community, connection and belonging in the WJLP commercial and the community is bound by this ritual. Advertisements, according to Otnes and Scott, stage, interpret and visualize ritual contexts. This turns advertisements into influencers of consumer behavior. As “socialization agents” (Otnes and Scott 1996, 40), they not only influence how people view products and brands, but also potentially regulate when and how they will be included in rituals. Advertisements thus “dictate [...], introduce, [...], and educate” (40) viewers about ritual.

Instead of introducing new concepts, rituals and invented traditions, 2020 Christmas commercials, formed by restorative nostalgia, revert back to seemingly outdated representations of Christmas. 2020 television commercials show happy families, supportive communities and promote slogans such as “Give what you can this Christmas” (Haford Hardware 2020). The restorative nostalgia that dictates the narration in the commercials suggests an increasing awareness of “social support” (Batcho 2013, 356). Instead of introducing and educating viewers about new ways to celebrate Christmas in times of a pandemic, the commercials reinforce family images and concepts of giving originating in pre-2020

Christmases. Thus, nostalgia is a “defense mechanism” (Boym 2001, xiv) employed to convey continuity and safety.



Image 8. *Haford Hardware* 2020



Image 9. *Sainsbury's* 2020



Image 10. *Morrisons* 2020

The representations of families in the screenshots from the above commercials suggest that Christmas is the time of the year for families to come together. A family, as the Images 10-12 suggest, is a homogeneous group, consisting of parents and children. Thus, the commercials promote the notion that nuclear families return to the “home base” (Handel and Hess 1956, 99) for Christmas. In 2020 this was not always an option, so some brands play with this impossibility. Supermarket chain Sainsbury’s, for example, presents home-made videos that show families as they used to celebrate Christmas and puts a phone conversation as a voice-over on top of the short film (Sainsbury’s 2020). This combination of both expresses the longing and regret that is typical of nostalgia. Another commercial that highlights this paradox of longing for being together and not being able to, is the discount supermarket Aldi Ireland’s TV commercial. The last words are “the end of the story shows now more than ever there is nothing quite like Christmas together” (Aldi Ireland 2020). Instead of suggesting new ways of celebrating Christmas, or new ways of being together, the images portrayed in the majority of 2020 Christmas commercials employ nostalgia as a response to the perceived loneliness of their potential customers. Thus, they echo a longing in individuals who in 2020, more than ever, lived in a reality where being together at Christmas often proved to be an impossibility.

Reciprocity, or the act of giving to those less fortunate than oneself, another aspect of the Christmas ritual as established in *A Christmas Carol*, is also prominently featured in 2020 Christmas commercials. I have already explored the symbol of the heart in WJLP’s commercial, which shows that every member in a community has to do their part. Reciprocity here was often

expressed through products, such as the shopping bag or the Christmas cracker. There are many other examples of reciprocity, which highlight that it is not always connected to giving a product. Amazon's Christmas commercial, as will be illustrated below, shows that this can be the case by employing nostalgia. According to Casey, we are longing for a "lost world" (Casey 1987, 365) with all its components. The world is lost because it "was never itself given in *any* discrete present moment" (366).



Image 11. Staging Reciprocity (Amazon 2020)

Image 13 shows a young ballerina performing on a stage (Amazon 2020). The pavement becomes the dancing floor and the houses substitute the stage design and seating area for the audience. Everyone comes to their windows and balconies and is able to enjoy the show by the dancer. The world portrayed in Amazon's commercial shows a functioning community where the neighbors come together to see the performance of a young ballet dancer. Here, reciprocity is what connects the community. The ballet dancer gives her performance to the audience and the audience gives her the opportunity to perform. The dancer receives admiration and the audience receives entertainment. Yet, without corona, it is unlikely that the community would have come together to watch the show. Thus, nostalgia for a pre-covid world where amateur

dancers would be able to perform in front of an audience as big as the one presented in the commercial is fiction – or, to paraphrase Casey, it is a time that never existed (Casey 1987, 366). Nevertheless, because it is a (Covid-) Christmas, communities are shown to come together and embrace their shared lives and experiences.

Additionally, the slogans and hashtags that accompany each commercial also highlight that Christmas is a time for investing in the community. To name a few, there is supermarket Tesco's "Every little helps", WJLP's "#GiveALittleLove" and "Together we can make a big difference", Haford's "#GiveWhatYouCan" and Coca-Cola's "This Christmas, give something only you can give". These slogans and hashtags remind audiences to give to their communities. In a year where many people have been laid off and faced both financial and emotional challenges, there have been fewer people who could actively invest in social capital, but at the same time, there are more who need help from communities. Instead of supporting pre-reformed Scrooge who said that "I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry" (Dickens 2012, 7), advertising suggest that making others happy at Christmas is what fulfils individuals and ensures their happiness.

Rebuilding the Monument

Christmas is built, remembered and longed for with visible and invisible influences from the past, with dreams, memories and wishes shaping the image of the today's Christmas representations. Commercials, as mentioned initially in this chapter, operate with the trope of looking-in which is most often expressed through the symbol of the window. The window can be an actual window on the screen, or the camera which serves as a window for the viewer. The camera transforms the historical shop window and the display changes from a static scene to a story. Through the camera, viewers are able to observe scenes of caring communities, winter wonderlands and excessive meals. The viewer can be compared with Ebenezer Scrooge who also takes on the role of the observer while the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future lead

him through their visions. As an outsider, Scrooge gets to see happy families and content communities. In advertising, viewers take on this role. They observe families and communities that could be just like theirs, and this may lead viewers to imagine their communities as being as welcoming as the community on display. Nostalgia then leads viewers to long for a past where they were part of a community just like the one they can see on the screen. Through the commercials emotions such as wonder (Image 14), longing (Image 15), happiness (Image 16) and regret for not investing in families and communities (Image 17) are conveyed to the viewers.



Image 12. Looking Out (Amazon 2020)



Image 13. Looking Out (Coca-Cola 2020)



Image 14. Looking In (John Lewis 2020)

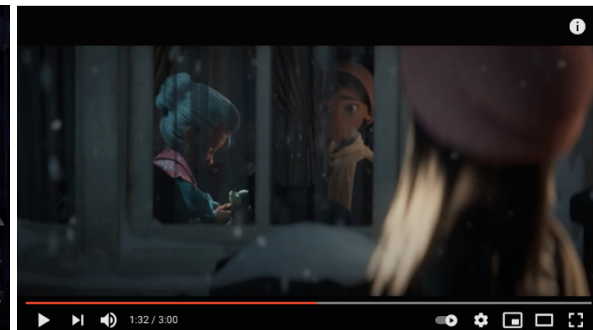


Image 15. Looking In (Disney UK 2020)

A Christmas Carol, according to Juliet John, “acknowledges the urban, commercial context and the emotional needs it creates” (John 2010, 271). The Christmas commercials increasingly address the same aspects. Through a nostalgic filter, Dickens’s culture text is reproduced with particular focus on the importance of community within the Christmas ritual. The community can be both the nuclear family and the wider community. Thus, the commercials are, as much as *It’s a Wonderful Life* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, additions to the monument that Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* built. The texts of this thesis keep

the foundation of the monument – its definition and emphasis on family and community, paired with the attention to reciprocity – but they also add new layers to it. The layers however do not redefine the depictions of Christmas, they simply hide the ‘old’ representations under new veils and technology. Christmas can furthermore be an escape from the difficult and dark everyday life (Storey 2008, 29) and the narratives about the holiday are building on what Boym called “the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offer [...] a comforting collective script for individual longing” (Boym 2001, 42). Instead of reconstructing the entirety of the *Carol*, advertising in 2020, as well as the *Grinch* and *It’s a Wonderful Life*, single out the themes of community and family and reproduce Dickensian ideals.

Conclusion

I have used the metaphor of the monument to describe Dickens's culture text and to determine the influence it has on the other primary texts of this thesis. To conclude, I want to elaborate a little on this metaphor. The word monument, to remind the reader, originates in the Latin 'monere', which means both "to remind" and "to warn" (*Latdict*, s.v. "monere"). As established in the Introduction, monuments can be made of stone, but can also be of other materials or even be a concept or a system. Now, Dickens's novel is arguably *the* monument of Christmas literature. It is carefully constructed and it reminds readers and audiences of social connections, of belonging to a community, and it triggers in readers through these reminders a longing for membership in a community. The foundation of Dickens's culture text consists of the building blocks of family and community, ritual, social capital, as well as a layer of nostalgia – often added by later Christmas texts. Restorations, changes to and perceived improvements of the monument are often guided by restorative nostalgia that recycles and reproduces the ideals of family and community as they were established in the *Carol*. A culture text, as pointed out in Chapter 1, is a "shining language" (Turner 1982, 16) that is employed by, gives guidelines to and sets of principles for future Christmas texts. These guidelines are visible in the representations of family and community as well as through the framework of the ritual inclusion and assimilation of an individual into the community. This assimilation and inclusion only work, as the *Carol* carves into stone, if the individual in question starts to invest in social capital. Thus, Dickens's novel explores the conflict between individualism and community⁷. The only solution that the culture text, and consequently also all other Christmas texts that make use of Dickens's 'shining language' offers, is that individualism cannot succeed. Indeed, the warning that the monument carries is that individuals, for the sake of Christmas, have to be

⁷ To remind the reader, this is not the only aspect explored in Dickens's novel. Many other aspects have already been discussed, among them are for example economy and hospitality that scholars such as Ruth Glancy or Rosetta Young have discussed (Saint-Amour 2007 and Young 2019).

reformed or made more uniform to become a part of the community, or, in other words, the individuals who want to be a part of a community have to assimilate, to conform to the majority. However, these warnings are clouded by nostalgia.

Chapters 2 to 5 defined family and community in the discussed Christmas texts as fairly similar. All texts show the two institutions as homogeneous groups that gather at a “home base” (Handel and Hess 1956, 99) for Christmas. The families and communities are bound by material and emotional ties and both need to be in place in order for a group to thrive. Individuals who live outside of a community have to change and align with the values of the group before they can become a part of it. They do so by engaging with the members in a meaningful, often material, exchange of “signs of recognitions” (Bourdieu 2002, 287). However, the images promoted here are problematic: since the definitions of family and community are very homogeneous, they promote the idea that you only give to those who are like you, and everyone else has to assimilate before being allowed to become a part of the group. Thus, narratives that reproduce the *Carol* are generally that membership in a community is more important than individuality. Real issues and problems remain unsolved and only hidden behind this very warm, cozy, healing, inclusive idea of togetherness.

All primary texts discussed above employ elements of ritual, and ritual often serves the purpose of including previously disengaged potential members into a community. The *Carol*, as well as *It's a Wonderful Life* and the *Grinch* and all its adaptations have their protagonist participate in a three-step ritual transition with more or less very similar stages. To start with, the protagonists either are outside of or feel alienated from the community. They then enter a stage of liminality where they experience how much of an impact their life has or where they have an epiphany-like experience. Scrooge sees that his life had very little positive impact, whereas it is opposite for George Bailey, and the Grinch sees that Christmas means more than the over-the-top engagement with presents, food, and music. Such a realization brings the protagonists closer to the community or enables them to become a part of it. Christmas

commercials in 2020 present a different kind of ritual inclusion that is aimed more at the viewer than any of the characters on screen. Here, the viewer, depending on the commercial, takes on the role of Scrooge, the Grinch or George Bailey. In 2020, the commercials encourage investment in communities through their brand or products which are presented as signs of recognition that have the potential to visualize and manifest relationships.

The analyses above furthermore showed that the investment in communities, according to the primary texts of this thesis, is done through employing social capital. Christmas is represented as the ideal time to invest in social capital, and while some of the primary texts illustrate that this investment can be non-monetary, most texts first and foremost promote a materialistic angle through for example presents of food. Yet, smiles and kind gestures can also be signs of recognition, as seen in the smiles at the reformed Scrooge. However, social capital should also be regarded with care, as *It's a Wonderful Life* highlights. George feels unhappy with his life in Bedford Falls, even though he continuously invests in social capital through loans given to members of his community. Intangible social capital – such as smiles and gestures – does not suffice. Reward systems need to be in place that show clearly what an individual gets in return for his/her investment in social capital.

Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* thus created a language, a set of guidelines for narratives in the genre of Christmas texts. By employing the images and ideals from Dickens's culture text, future Christmas narrations employ a very positive, uncomplicated idea of family and community. This warm and welcoming image provides escapism and nostalgic longing in the readers and viewers. I have shown above that the texts build on a sense of loss of community, and consequently, nostalgia is the reaction to those texts. The texts thus provide an antidote to the fast pace of everyday life and they create, through their representations of family and community, a response to a perceived loneliness, which especially in 2020 was ever present.

However, this narrative is reductive and focuses only on brushing over real issues such as the loneliness of a senior citizen without a family, alienated and bullied individuals who because of beliefs and looks may not fit in. Instead of dealing with these real issues, the narratives, leaning on the template that Dickens provided with his culture text, carry the message that the individual needs to reform to fit into a normative, uniform community. Thus, it is problematic that these texts are often met and also play with restorative nostalgia for a world where problems and real issues are simply ignored and hidden, and where something very similar to contempt or disregard for diversity and individualism enables a functioning community. In 2020 and also before a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic hit the world, social, racial and generational inequalities became even more visible, and Christmas narratives, as this thesis shows, do not address these realities. The genre of Christmas texts is a genre of escapism, and my analysis of Christmas novels, films, and commercials supports the notion that Christmas, as Martin Johnes put it so fittingly, is “a product of its time and an escape from it” (Johnes 2016, xiv). A logical conclusion to this is that Christmas texts should be approached with care and with an open eye to underlying currents. However, I also want to point out that this thesis only included a small number of Christmas texts, and that an analysis of several other Christmas texts is necessary to determine how deep this message runs.

To conclude, let me briefly address how my approach to the *Carol*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, the *Grinch* and the examples of Christmas commercials differs from previous analyses, and why that matters. Other scholars have argued that the *Carol* carries a message of redemption, and while I can see how this conclusion came into being – the unreformed Scrooge after all was a penny-pinching, arguably mean, character – my analysis of the *Carol* in combination with the other primary texts offers a different, new perspective. Instead of redemption, assimilation becomes the prevalent message. That other texts nearly 200 years after the publication of Dickens's first and most influential Christmas novel pick up on assimilation as the solution to the conflict between individuals and communities shows that Christmas texts

should be read, viewed and listened to with attention to messages under the surface. The genre of Christmas books deserves and requires more academic attention all year round and not just during Christmastime, when the danger is that any discussions of the primary texts may be clouded by nostalgia which is precisely what the texts employ to gloss over valid, conflictful discussions that should be happening around families and communities.

Diversity, multitudes of opinions and pluralism are eliminated in Christmas literature, films and advertising, where sameness is valued more than difference. My research and the conclusion that the Christmas texts promote assimilation rather than redemption has left me with several questions that could provide promising grounds for future research within both literary and cultural studies. With Christmas as the global economic driving force that dominates Western countries for months each year, and repeats itself every year, it would be interesting to see whether and how literature and popular culture in non-Western countries has been influenced by Christmas. In Japan, for example, a country that does not recognize Christmas as a national holiday, certain symbols and customs associated with a Western Christmas are nevertheless incorporated in marking the day, with Hancock and Rehn calling the Japanese nod to Christmas a “festival of largely romantic pursuits” (Hancock and Rehn 2011, 740). As outlined above, Western countries also moved away from specific religious celebrations, and ritual celebrations of community are now the focus, as we can see in the interpretations of the films, advertising and texts of this thesis. If Christmas objects and symbols are included in a celebration of the day in Japan, is community also important? Do other non-Western countries and cultures also celebrate a form of Christmas other than interpreting it as an economic driver? If so, is Christmas a similar integrative opportunity that does not allow for individuality? In its ritualistic qualities Christmas reinforces, as we have seen, dominant ideologies and thus does not leave room for individualism; nor does it address or suggest solutions to problems that occur when individuals meet existing communities. It would therefore be very interesting to see if and how for example definitions of family and community

are influenced by Dickensian Christmas ideals and narratives in non-Western countries. To name just one possible example, in what way have diasporic experiences of for instance Indian-American or British-Indian communities shaped narratives in India that are released in September to December, the run-up to Christmas, as it is called in Western countries. Here, it would be fascinating to look at advertising, and see whether Christmas is present, and if so if it is similarly presented as an integrative opportunity.

Equally fascinating is an approach through gender studies, that, although already the focus of scholars interested in Christmas, could profit from a more extensive analysis in connection with the approach used in this thesis. While roles of women in Christmas literature and history have already partly been analyzed, it would be compelling to look more closely at Christmas films and novels that feature male protagonists. The *Carol*, *It's a Wonderful Life* and the *Grinch* are fairly similar narratives in that they center on a male protagonist, who through ritual is reacquainted with his community. My focus here has been how ritual and nostalgia reinforce family and community as the most important aspects of Christmas, but there is huge potential in continuing the exploration of this approach. The protagonists, as analyzed above, transition through several stages of ritual, yet ritual only serves to restore already existing patterns. The Christmas ritual promises, in the phase of liminality, a pause in typical gender roles. However, the *Carol* suggests a long-lasting change in the character of Scrooge who, according to the narrator, is successful in embracing Christmas all year round (Dickens 2012,85). Does that mean that gender roles are not reinforced in Christmas narratives? Or do these narratives, through their presentation of ritual, merely suggest that male protagonists for Christmas are allowed to identify with the home – a sphere that in the late 40s and 50s (the decades of *It's a Wonderful Life* and the *Grinch*) was almost closed to men? Whether taking a more global perspective, focusing on gender roles, or examining community in a larger number of Christmas texts, the conclusion of this thesis warrants that Christmas texts be read, viewed,

watched and analyzed with increased awareness of how restorative nostalgia and monumental Christmas texts influence Christmas discourses.

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