

“Winter Stories — Ghost Stories... Round the Christmas Fire”: Victorian Ghost Stories and the Christmas Market

Caley Ehnes

University of Victoria

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Abstract

Using the publication of Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Old Nurse’s Story” in the 1852 Christmas number of Dickens’s Household Words as a case study, this paper examines how the publication of Victorian ghost stories in Christmas numbers redefines the ghost story, transforming it from a modern text participating in contemporary debates on spiritualism into a social text participating in the broader cultural project of reaffirming the nation’s (religious) traditions in the face of (secular) modernity. While the themes of Christmas ghost stories explicitly address social issues and secular, middle-class cultural values, the morals and social traditions promoted by Christmas fiction cannot exist outside of the era’s contemporary conversations about the place of religion in a modern, industrial society. The ghosts and goblins of Dickens’s Christmas fiction address and attempt to correct the social ills of modern society through a secularised application of Christian values and behaviours.



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