

## **Psicosociodrama intuitivo antes de Moreno: Conto de Natal de Dickens**

### ***Intuitive Psychosociodrama before Moreno: A Christmas Carol by Dickens***

### ***Psicosociodrama intuitivo antes de Moreno: Conto de Navidad de Dickens***

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#### **Resumo**

A aplicação de conceitos de Moreno à estrutura literária da novela *Conto de Natal* de Charles Dickens revela um psicodrama interno da história em que os personagens funcionam como diretor, protagonista e auxiliares. As leituras públicas de Dickens entre 1853-1870 permitiram a transgressão da história de Psicodrama em sociodrama dirigido por Dickens em torno da pobreza e do trabalho – temas centrais e questões sociais de todos os tempos da história. O uso da realidade suplementar durante catarse gera a energia desse dinâmico e complexo “sistema virtual”, mantida após o público retornar ao “modo de grupo” (suas próprias vidas) com processamento pós-desempenho como mostrado por artigos e relatórios de jornais da época sobre o impacto da história.

**Palavras-chave:** Dickens. Sociodrama. Psicodrama. Sistema virtual.

#### ***Abstract***

Applying Morenian concepts to the literary structure of the novel *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens reveals a psychodrama internal to the story in which the characters function as director, protagonist and auxiliaries. The public readings by Dickens between 1853-1870 allowed the story’s transgression from psychodrama into sociodrama directed by Dickens and around poverty and labour – central themes and social issues throughout all of history. The use of surplus reality during catharsis generates the energy of this dynamic, complex “virtual system” which is maintained after the audience returns to “group mode” (their own lives) with post-performance processing as shown by contemporary newspaper articles and reports on the story’s impact.

**Keywords:** Dickens. Sociodrama. Psychodrama. Virtual system.

#### ***Resumen***

Aplicar conceptos de Moreno a la estructura literaria de la novela *Conto de Navidad* de Charles Dickens revela un psicodrama interno a la historia en que los personajes funcionan como director, protagonista y auxiliares. Las lecturas públicas de Dickens entre 1853-1870 permiten transgresión de la historia del psicodrama en sociodrama dirigida por Dickens y alrededor de la pobreza y el trabajo – temas básicos de la historia y cuestiones sociales de

todos los tiempos. El uso de la realidad suplementar durante la catarsis genera la energía de este dinámico y complejo “sistema virtual” que se mantiene después de que el público vuelva a “modo de grupo” (su vida) con el funcionamiento post procesamiento como se muestra por artículos periodísticos contemporáneos y los informes sobre el impacto de la historia.

**Palabras-clave:** Dickens. Sociodrama. Psicodrama. Sistema virtual.

## INTRODUCTION

*A Christmas Carol* by Charles J. H. Dickens is the story of the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge from a stingy businessman to a philanthropist through a time-travelling experience. Since its first edition on 19 December 1843, the novella remains in print with stage, film and TV adaptations.

Dickens (1812-1870) predates J. L. Moreno (1889-1974). Yet the story itself is a written record of Scrooge’s social therapy session directed by Marley, Scrooge’s dead business partner. The ideological, ethical and emotional transformation of the protagonist through a series of vignettes covers the origins of Scrooge’s behaviour, the possibility for alternative choices and the projected future of the impact of his current behaviour. Dickens distributes a variety of roles to his characters locking them in a continuous flipping from psychodrama to sociodrama with each change of scene. This flipping is referred to here as the *psychosociodramatic coin*. From a literary perspective the psychosociodramatic aspects are embedded through a blending of narrative voice and genres that range from comic to tragic – a premodern literary hybridity.

At the time of its publication this pre-Morenian therapy session interacted with readers and audience *creating a virtual system sociodrama* on preselected themes and directed by the author himself. Evidence on the story’s wider social impact in the Victorian society allows for the introduction of the concept of the *virtual system sociodrama* with the story at its nucleus: this system comes to being at any point of interaction with the story such as Dickens’s public readings between 1853-1870, theatre audience or during personal reading. The predetermined group issue of such virtual system sociodrama evolves around poverty and labour, the story’s core themes and concern of the Victorian society.

The virtual system is in line with Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas* generated in storytelling performances. The lived experience of witnessing a performance is a

many-faceted yet coherent system dependent on the interaction and interpenetration of cognition, affect, and volition. It is made up of not only our observations and reactions, but also the cumulative wisdom [...] of humankind, expressed not only in custom and tradition but also in great works of art (TURNER, 1987).

In moments of *communitas*, spectators become “finely attuned”, “feel themselves become part of the whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way” (DOLAN, 2005, p. 11) to those around them; this evokes a feeling of belonging to a group (WEIGLHOFER, 2014). Readers and performance audience are normally seen as participants in a “non-action” space. Yet all the roles in a sociodrama need the potential to become actors. Moreno was dismissive of passive audiences (MORENO, 1983). The impact of theatre and art on the audience remains largely unknown. It is argued here that each flipping of the *psycho-sociodramatic coin* created energy within the audience of Dickens’s time with a lasting effect that culminated in acts of philanthropy following the publication of the story and in a revival of the celebration of

Christmas in Victorian England. Furthermore, it is put forward that this psycho-sociodramatic framework, that pre-dates Moreno, may contribute to the continuing success of the story as it allows a unique freedom/spontaneity during the interaction with the reader.

The story unfolds in five Staves. Dickens refers to each section of the story not as chapter but as *stave* – an archaic form of stanza or verse of a song – to be consistent with the story's title (*a carol*).

The following sections explore the psychodramatic elements of each stave, and how the audience become active participants in their collective role within the generated *virtual system sociodrama*.

### Stave 1 – MARLEY'S GHOST – Warm up

**Summary.** Ebenezer Scrooge is a greedy and stingy businessperson with no kindness or compassion. His business partner, Jacob Marley died on a Christmas Eve. On the seventh anniversary of his death, Marley's ghost appears and warns Scrooge to change his ways. Before Marley disappears, he reveals that Scrooge will be visited by three additional ghosts – each in its turn.

Stave 1 introduces the director (Jacob Marley's ghost); the protagonist (Ebenezer Scrooge); and sets the scene together with the preselected theme for the psychosociodramatic exploration through a series of associations made to the social environment in which the story was written. The industrial revolution at the turn of 19th century precipitated a population shift to towns with an increase in poverty and hunger as employment, feeding and housing capacity were limited (CAZAMIAN, 2013). The wealthier population saw taxes as their only social responsibility and Scrooge's reaction reflects this utilitarian "spirit of the age" when he is asked for a donation for the poor and destitute. The themes that concern the audience as a group – labour and poverty – are hence introduced:

I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments [prisons, Union workhouses, the treadmill, the Poor Law] I have mentioned – they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there.

Stave 1 affords also a glimpse to the different social classes with more details in subsequent Staves:

[...] a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture.

Stave 1 presents the warm up of the virtual system sociodrama simultaneous to the "walk and talk" of the psychodramatic action between protagonist and director and initiated by Marley as Scrooge is unaware as to why he needs help at all. Marley's choices in life (working and not sharing) which resulted in a chained after-life existence that wanders through time and space, mirror Scrooge's choices. What appears to be a personal problem, becomes a central concern of the group:

"It is required of every man", the Ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world-oh, woe is me! – and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness".

Scrooge and audience are invited by Marley to take part in a self-monitoring

sociometric exercise where the criterion for identification with the Ghost is the emotional internal world concretised in Marley's chains:

"I wear the chain I forged in life", replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you? Scrooge trembled more and more".

Trembling is a physical manifestation that awareness of the issues at stake (and resistance) in the protagonist has started. Marley then takes on the role as Scrooge's double as he continues:

"Or would you know", pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!".

Scrooge's reaction of resistance to Marley's intentions, an unwillingness to understand and explore the focus, manifests now by him cracking jokes. The animated speech that follows intensifies further the warm up for the *virtual system sociodrama* as Scrooge begins to tally with his friend:

"Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed", cried the phantom, "not to know, that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed! Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness! Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!".

"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob", faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!".

It held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"At this time of the rolling year", the spectre said, "I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me?".

Marley alternates between anti-role<sup>1</sup> and role reversal as his lines mirror Scrooge's description earlier. Marley sets clearly the contract of Scrooge's therapy session, outlining the methodology (a time travelling course) and the time that it will be completed by. Marley commands space and time completely and he completes his role as the director of the warm up for both Scrooge and the audience as he gets ready to hand over to his assistant directors (AD), the *Three Spirits*. The element of surprise (and spontaneity) is elevated with no disclosure of any information regarding the Spirits:

"You will be haunted", resumed the Ghost, "by Three Spirits". [...]

"Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?" he demanded, in a faltering voice.

"It is".

<sup>1</sup> A role not normally adopting as it shows what not to do; comparable to concept of antihero, a protagonist lacking courage, morality often with dark traits such as dishonesty, aggressiveness.

“I – I think I’d rather not”, said Scrooge.

[...] said the Ghost, [...] Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one [...].  
Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night  
when the last stroke of Twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more; and  
look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!

It is the mirroring of his situation to Marley’s that triggers awareness in Scrooge: his resistance weakens as he negotiates with Marley. One can argue that Marley is the real protagonist, Scrooge being simply chosen to hold Marley’s role to bring catharsis to Marley as it is too late for Marley. However, as Marley never reenters the story, this aspect is not explored.

The subsequent staves describe Scrooge’s therapy session directed by the Ghosts of Christmas Present (**Stave 2**), Of Christmas Past (**Stave 3**) and of Christmas Yet to Come (**Stave 4**). The psychosociodramatic vignettes that follow are examples of surplus reality, each with its own assistant director (Ghost), who control sequence and duration of the events witnessed by Scrooge; introduce soliloquy breaks to allow protagonist (and audience) time for reflection; and at times assist Scrooge in his exploration of his past roles as a child, employee, fiancé etc.

## **Stave 2 – THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS – Enactment: Scrooge’s Psychodrama**

**Summary.** The first of the spirits, the Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge to the scenes of his boyhood and youth which stir the old miser’s gentle and tender side by reminding him of a time when he was more innocent.

The psychodramatic part of Scrooge’s therapy unfolds in Stave 2. The assistant director (Ghost of Christmas Past) works with the resistance and moves Scrooge to the periphery (past) in an attempt to focus Scrooge back to the centre (Scrooge’s present) (MORENO; MORENO, 1969, p. 241). The protagonist explores his past for the reasons for his personal shaping into a lonely, workaholic, stingy person. He watches the auxiliary/inner role of his younger self and re-experiences the loneliness of his childhood; the loss of his fiancée and friends; and his fear of debt/poverty. These are handles of the many doors as Moreno put it later, “We don’t tear down the protagonist’s walls; rather, we simply try some of the handles on the many doors, and see which one opens”. Physical manifestations provide the evidence that changes (and resistance) are triggered in Scrooge’s inner world. It should be noted that this therapy session is forced upon Scrooge against his will. He has neither asked for it nor did he choose his directors. He resists and Marley’s resourcefulness in the choice of vignettes to resolve the protagonist’s resistance is proved right; his AD follows in Marley’s steps selecting the scenes and monitoring Scrooge’s reactions. Each scene and interaction serve as a warm up to the next as the AD pauses and lets the protagonist to lead the way when he feels it is right. This course of action is described by Moreno as “the warming up process proceeds from the periphery to the center” (MORENO; MORENO, 1969, p. 241) and as “[...] the resourcefulness of the director to find clues to get the session started and, once it is started, to see that it grows further along constructive lines” (MORENO, 1972, p. ix).

“Your lip is trembling”, said the Ghost. “And what is that upon your cheek?”

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

“You recollect the way?” inquired the Spirit.

“Remember it!” cried Scrooge with fervour – “I could walk it blindfold”. [...]

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognising every gate, and post, and tree [...].

Scrooge’s desire to be able to speak to his clerk indicates that Scrooge’s warm up is

now complete as he wants to bring the past into the now:

“What is the matter?” asked the Ghost.

“Nothing in particular”, said Scrooge. [...] I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That’s all. [...]

The assistant director continues to monitor Scrooge and works further with Scrooge’s resistance:

“Spirit!” said Scrooge, “show me no more! [...] Why do you delight to torture me?”.

“One shadow more!” exclaimed the Ghost.

“No more!” cried Scrooge! “No more, I don’t wish to see it! Show me no more!”.

But the relentless Ghost [...] forced him to observe what happened next.

Scrooge’s anguish towards the end of his psychodramatic exploration is evident:

“Spirit!” said Scrooge in a broken voice, “remove me from this place”.

“I told you these were shadows of the things that have been”, said the Ghost. “That they are what they are, do not blame me!”

“Remove me!” Scrooge exclaimed, “I cannot bear it! [...] Haunt me no longer!”

The links to the virtual system are maintained with the vivid descriptions of the harsh living and working conditions of the time. However, it is Scrooge’s psychodramatic cycle that is more crucial for the *virtual system sociodrama*: curiosity, interest and concern is developed about Scrooge among the audience (and relief) that Scrooge’s choices are not out of evilness but out of a fear triggered by social forces beyond human powers (economic conditions of the time). Any antipathy towards the protagonist as a result of his earlier attitude is reversed releasing spontaneity and leading the audience to contemplate about aspects of their own lives. Scrooge’s tiredness after the psychodramatic exploration is consistent with current reports (GERSHONI, 2003):

He was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; [...] and had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.

### **Stave 3 – THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS – Enactment: The Psychosociodrama**

**Summary.** The second spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Present takes Scrooge to several radically differing scenes: a joy-filled market of people buying the makings of Christmas dinner; the family feast of Scrooge’s clerk Bob Cratchit; a miner’s cottage; a lighthouse.

Until now the therapy was against Scrooge’s will. As the psychodrama protagonist becomes fully warmed up, his resistance diminishes while his awareness increases about the impact of his behaviour on others. Not only does Scrooge show compliance but he now actively seeks to change:

“Spirit”, said Scrooge submissively, “conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it”.

The new assistant director presents alternative choices to Scrooge by transforming his

room:

It was his [Scrooge's] own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove; from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light [...]; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, [...] Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch [...].

Scrooge's transformation begins to show when the Ghost repeats the views of Scrooge's earlier self:

"Spirit", said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live".

"I see a vacant seat", replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, [...] If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die".

"No, no", said Scrooge. "Oh, no, kind Spirit. Say he will be spared".

"If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race", returned the Ghost, "will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population".

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.

In a series of vignettes, Scrooge also hears what others think of him:

[...] Topper [...] answered that a bachelor was a wretched outcast [...]

[...] "I was only going to say", said Scrooge's nephew, "that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. [...] I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him [...]"

Stave 3 is probably the more complex part of the psychodramatic exploration with characters alternating between role reversal, anti-roling and doubling; not only alternative ways of thinking and behaving are explored, but issues deeper than Scrooge's stinginess are surfacing: the conditions for child labour; the responsibility of welfare; the misuse of spirituality as a justification for human deeds. The continuous flipping of the *psychosociodramatic coin* moves audience from Scrooge's personal story to the societal issues as the characters narrate their everyday life. For the *virtual system sociodrama* Dickens's vision of Christmas concretizes what interclass relations could be like. This is reflected in the first edition's title: A CHRISTMAS CAROL. / IN PROSE. / Being / A Ghost Story of Christmas.

In Dickens's time, Christmas was a rural feudal celebration focusing on the rich and not the poor. At the turn of the 19th century Christmas festivities became obsolete from English culture as a result of the social impact of industrialization and urbanization with population shifting from rural areas to towns. The continued influence of conservative Reformed Christians – who believed that people should not celebrate Christmas as it was not in the Bible commands – meant that Christmas in England (and USA) was a holiday at the discretion of employers and not a public holiday as it is today. The descriptions of luxurious and plentiful food with enticing scents of spice and lemon is an anti-reality for the ordinary people of the time and in contrast with the fear of poverty in stave 2:

[...] the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory. There were [...] baskets of chestnuts, [...] pears and apples, [...] bunches of grapes [...]; [...] oranges and lemons, [...] gold and silver fish [...].

[...] the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose, [...] the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, [...] the figs were moist and pulpy, [...] French plums [...].

Protagonist and audience are faced with the harsh reality of their times:

Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye [...], which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly [...] Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them ... how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie abed to-morrow morning for a good long rest; [...]

[...] They were not a handsome family; they were notwell dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; [...].

#### **Stave 4 – THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS – Enactment: The Sociopsychodrama**

**Summary.** The third spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, harrows Scrooge with dire visions of the future if he does not learn and act upon what he has witnessed. Scrooge's own neglected and unattended grave is revealed, prompting the miser to aver that he will change his ways in the hope of changing these "shadows of what may be".

Moreno defines psychodrama as a deep action method dealing with inter-personal relations and private ideologies, and sociodrama as a deep action method dealing with inter-group relations and collective ideologies. Scrooge manages to live and experience in a personal and a collective way as the protagonist of both psycho- and sociodrama. In this section the virtual system sociodrama contracts back into the personal psychodrama. The unattended grave concretizes the lonely existence of Scrooge if no action is taken. A choice of actions offered to the protagonist in the present strengthens the story as a psychosociodrama inseparable from the social system surrounding its production. Scrooge can be classified as an ego-weak rather than an ego-strong protagonist, as he uses resistances to maintain a fragile emotional homeostasis to protect from excessive anxiety or ego fragmentation. The directors have provided him with enactments that strengthened his ego functions and assisted him in building up an independent ego-structure (KELLERMAN, 1992). The story complies with the unity of time of the classic dramatic structure: all action is occurring in one night (unity of time) and each scene is part of a tightly constructed cause-and-effect chain (ELSE, 1957). However, the expansion of the cause-and-effect chain in both past and future spheres render the work its psychosociodramatic character.

#### **Stave 5 – THE END OF IT – The Sharing**

**Summary.** Scrooge awakens a kind, generous and compassionate man sends anonymously a turkey to the Cratchit family and spends the day with his nephew's family.

Scrooge's conversion to a kind, generous and compassionate man is complete. Having started as a Utilitarian who accepts that starvation is Nature's way of keeping the population under control, he finishes by bursting with energy and excitement, and moves into spontaneous acts: Scrooge sends anonymously a turkey to Cratchit's family, raises his wages and orders an extra scuttle of coal; he spends the day with his nephew's family and shares how he feels. The emotional release experienced by the protagonist was contagious as shown by a multitude of intense responses triggered among readers and audience of Dickens's public



readings 1853-1870: known personalities of that period moved into immediate acts of philanthropy (Robert Louis Stevenson; Sir Squire Bancroft); Mr. Fairbanks, an American entrepreneur closed his factory on Christmas day giving an extra day's holiday to his employees and sent every employee a turkey; the Queen of Norway sent annually gifts to London's crippled children signed "With Tiny Tim's Love" (DAVIS, 1990). Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish philosopher, who nationally did not keep Christmas Day on reading the book he sent out for a turkey and asked two friends to dine; many men sat down after reading it and wrote letters to their friends "out of their fulness of heart and to wish old acquaintances a happy Christmas" (FRASER'S MAGAZINE, 1844, p. 169). The Gentleman's Magazine confirmed that the story's influence had been immediate and practical attributing a sudden burst of charitable giving in Britain to Dickens' novella (THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE, 1844, p. 170). The story has been accredited with providing the template for a modern, urban Christmas, a single day's holiday enjoyed by small nuclear families with no historical or social links to anything beyond themselves (STANDIFORD, 2011); Hutton wrote that Dickens "linked worship and feasting, within a context of social reconciliation." (HUTTON, 2001, p. 113) as the publication of the story precipitated the popularization of the wishing of "Merry Christmas!"; the turkey replaced the goose in the Christmas menu and the Christmas pudding was adopted outside England; Although Dickens did not "invent" the English Christmas, he certainly revived it by metamorphosing it from the "pretense for Drunkenness, and Rioting, and Wantonness" that it was seen to be at the time (STANDIFORD, 2011, p. 107).

Novelist William Thackeray, not always an admirer of Dickens, called A Christmas Carol "a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness". Lord Jeffrey wrote to the author:

You should be happy yourself, for you may be sure you have done more good by this little publication, fostered more kindly feelings, and prompted more positive acts of benevolence, than can be traced to all the pulpits and confessionals in Christendom since Christmas 1842 (COCKBURN, 1852).

Dickens's first ever public reading lasted over three hours at City Hall, Birmingham Town Hall, to the Industrial and Literary Institute on 27 December 1852 and repeated three days later to a crowd of 2000 "working people" (GOLBY; PURDUE, 1986). Dickens himself was aware of the exceptional power of the story: in a letter written to an American friend, Dickens describes himself weeping, laughing and pounding the London pavements for 20 miles each night in the ecstatic realisation that he had created something extraordinary.

## DISCUSSION

Figure I shows the psychosociodramatic framework of the story in relation to its literary structure (staves) and level of awareness of the protagonist (Scrooge) within the psychodrama. The time scale is with respect to the story and Scrooge, not the audience/listener (a different time scale applies for the increase in level of awareness of the audience/reader within the virtual system sociodrama as shown by reports contemporary to the story's first publication). Scrooge's awareness is at its lowest before warm up, increasing progressively through the exploration of Scrooge's past. The level of awareness is preserved as Scrooge moves to explore alternative choices in the present and it increases further before Scrooge is finally confronted with the impact of his current behaviour on the future of all the people he knows. It is this confrontation that brings Scrooge to his transformation to a compassionate humane person. The writing of the story is in itself an act of spontaneity written in six weeks during October and December 1843 in between Dickens's journalist

duties and as a direct response to the *Second Report of the Children's Employment Commission*, a parliamentary publication in February 1843 on the effects of industrial revolution on child labour. Many believe that *A Christmas Carol* replaced *An Appeal to the People of England, on behalf of the Poor Man's Child*, a political pamphlet that Dickens originally planned in May 1843 on the conditions of child education and labour. Less than one in seven British children had formal education; 9-13 year olds were expected to work nine hours a day, six days a week (children provided cheap labour with their small and dexterous fingers, many being crippled by the factories' machines). Concerns about the increasing population – voiced by Scrooge in Stave 1 – were stimulated by the philosopher Thomas Robert Malthus who foresaw catastrophe for England if its masses were not “checked” by famine, war, or disease (MALTHUS, 1798).

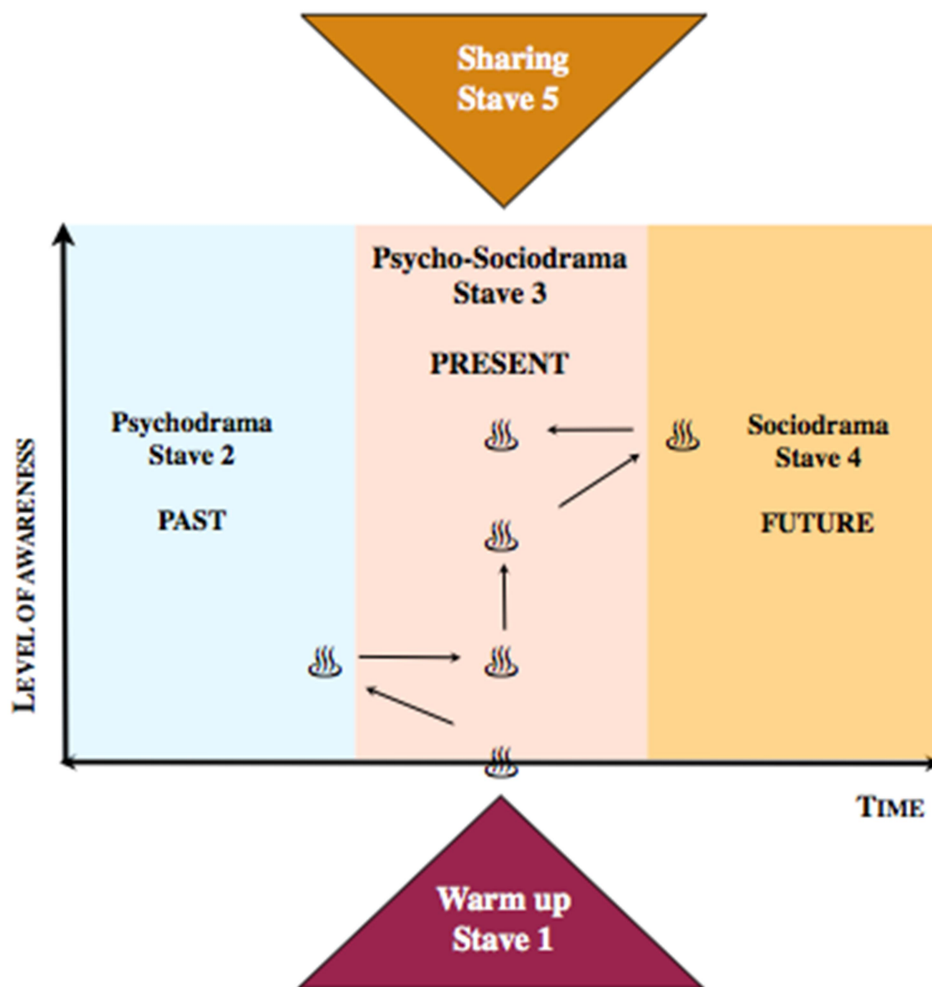


Figure I. Schematic representation of the psychosociodramatic framework of the story *A Christmas Carol* in relation to the level of awareness (☯) of the protagonist (Scrooge) and its original literary structure (staves).

For Dickens the writing of the story approximates to a self-directing private psychodrama session with the writing space as the platform given his childhood experiences: with his father being imprisoned for bad debt and his entire family sent to Marshalsea, a notorious prison for debtors, Dickens was taken out of the school and sent to work as repayment for his father's debt in a blacking factory. Dickens's complete understanding of his

readers' frames of reference make him an unconscious yet effective director of the external sociodrama sending the participants – audience – into an exploration with a social focus as Browne puts it: “Exploring with a social focus is in no way less intense, less relevant or less important than exploring from a personal focus. In reality the social and personal are inextricable” (BROWNE, 2005). Dickens's attention on the individual and the group coupled to his ability to visually concretise issues, e.g. time is used alongside the cause-and-effect chain, precipitated a psychodramatic exploration of sociodramatic impact. Furthermore, as the frames of reference he used are diachronic, replicating themselves over time, Dickens inevitably becomes a timeless director.

Caught up in a cause-and-effect chain, Scrooge is a dramatogenic protagonist whose poor beginnings and later acquired wealth portray both classes, and the personification of the intergroup conflict. The auxiliary egos are a blend of the personal and the collective: they voice largely unspoken concerns - like the two Cratchit children describing their working conditions. The auxiliaries interact powerfully and sociodramatically with each another through role reversal, anti-roling and doubling leading the audience to a subconscious exploration of themes more uncomfortable than Christmas: that of intergroup (poor and rich) relations and social responsibility.

The pauses in action (soliloquy breaks) at times allow the audience for personal reflection on the broader issues and the insights that they are exposed to. Concepts are concretised either by attaining a physical shape (Ignorance and Want as two children, Stave 3, the children of Man “[...] appealing from their fathers”) or by objects (the emotional internal world in Marley's chains, Stave 1).

## CONCLUSIONS

The first record of sociodrama was on 1 April 1921, when Moreno called for a new king in a performance of his Theatre of Spontaneity (FOX, 2006). It has been argued here that the first – although unconscious – sociodrama of a large scale is Dickens's story on 19 December 1843 as evidenced by the social changes following publication. Starting with the sociometric exercise that Marley demands from Scrooge and readers Dickens safely assists in the externalisation of Scrooge's distorted inner world which was shaped by external reality and early relationships causing problems in his adult life (HOLME, 2015). Dickens finishes by calling for a celebration of Christmas, energizing the Victorian society in their collective role: It was left to the people to rise to the responsibility to learn (BYRE, 1989) in *a virtual system sociodrama*.

Many refer to the “Moreno problem”: it is difficult to be original as most action methods were first tried out by Moreno in psychodrama decades before (BERNE, 1970, p. 164; SCHUTZ, 1971). Whether Moreno was inspired by Dickens is not known but it seems that 100 years before Moreno, Dickens had intuitively introduced a hybrid of Moreno's concepts: Therapeutic Theatre, Theatre of Spontaneity and sociodrama: there is a liberating effect of the “true second time” as experienced by Scrooge and including the “entire” community, as a community-focused healing ritual (MORENO, 1983). The latter was urgently needed in the Victorian era. The audience in the public readings of Dickens and the readers at the time were no spectators; conforming to the criteria of Spontaneity Theatre, the Victorian society truly tapped into their potential to act.

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