



Christmas customs find life through literature

"Marley was dead, to begin with." Thus, incongruously, begins Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, one of the best known Christmas stories.

Along with Dickens' tale, the pantheon of popular Christmas literature includes such works as O. Henry's "Gifts of the Magi," Truman Capote's "A Christmas Memory," Dylan Thomas' "A Child's Christmas in Wales" and Clement Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas."

These and other works are trotted out each year to be read aloud at bedtime or in schools. Meanwhile, plays, radio performances, tele-

vision shows and movies based on these and other Christmas works fill the airwaves and theaters from late November until Christmas Day itself.

This body of literature has helped both to spread and to encourage the development of Christmas traditions in the United States, James Barnett noted in his book *The American Christmas: A Study in National Culture*.

"Christmas has accumulated a rich and distinctive body of songs, stories, poems, pictures and plays," Barnett wrote. "These embody its traditions and meanings and transmit them

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