MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Apparition, Time, and the Movement of *The Chimes*

Sara Malton

(Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, CA)

Abstract

This contribution is a reading of Dickens's *The Chimes* as a story of deprivation and starvation – of the mind, spirit, and the body. Throughout his fiction Dickens frequently presents his reader with a version of the moment in which one his character witnesses his own death, like in *A Christmas Carol, The Signalman, A Tale of Two Cities*. However, in *The Chimes* this episode is peculiarly dramatized given the text's focus on starvation, deprivation, and exile. In fact, the protagonist's encounter with his own dead body renders emphatically the degree to which the physical and the psychological are intimately linked; the deprivation, the starvation that necessarily drives such individuals onward from place to place produces a kind of psychological exile. At the end, all the forms of movement here represented are a function of the industrial, utilitarian context that Dickens's tale seeks to indict. They underscore the invisibility of the poor as well as their exclusion from the regular movements of time that determine cultural ritual and the patterns of daily living, exiled as they are into a world of chaos.

Keywords: Nervous motion, time and violence, social and physical exile, nocturnal visitations.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

"Done because we are too menny".
(Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 1895)

Although written some five decades earlier, much in Dickens's *The Chimes* looks forward to what, in his final novel, *Jude the Obscure,* Thomas Hardy will chillingly identify as the coming "universal wish not to live" (Hardy 2002, 326). Published in 1844, a year after *A Christmas Carol, The Chimes* seeks to remedy the impulse toward self-hatred and self-annihilation that Dickens, like Hardy after him, sees as arising from the human disconnection that was plaguing society in an age of industrialization and growing imperial expansion. For what comes to vex the protagonist, Tobias (Toby or 'Trotty') Veck, in *The Chimes* is the growing sense that he ought not to have been born at all. A ticket-porter who waits outside the church door for jobs, Trotty has internalized the prevailing Malthusian logic – one predicated on notions of waste, excess, and scarcity – that Dickens identifies as a primary affliction in his culture. Indeed, Trotty seems to be learning the hard lesson taught to him by his social betters that he had "No earthly right or business to be born" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 104). A society plagued by suicide, infanticide, starvation, and displacement – all these are rung out by the more harrowing sounds of the Bells.

While it may yet remain difficult to assert with absolute certainty what influence *The Chimes* had on Hardy's writing,[1] the thematic connections between *Jude the Obscure* and *The*

This essay is dedicated to the memory of my friend and mentor, David Paroissien (1939-2021), who has left an indelible mark on my life and work and on the world of Dickens scholarship.

I also wish to acknowledge Haydn Hopkins for his exemplary research assistance during my preparation of this essay.

[1] However, Hardy's poem "The Chimes," which appeared in his 1917 collection, *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses,* makes the influence of Dickens's Christmas story hard to overlook. The poem addresses loss and temporal disorientation as the speaker recalls those "hard utilitarian times" (Hardy [1917] 1976, 13), commencing that recollection with an alliterative description of movement that evokes the very name of Dickens's protagonist:

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

Chimes – an obsessive focus on nervous motion; a relationship between time and violence; and a foregrounding of the devastating consequences of social and physical exile – are worth considering here. For, taken together, they point us toward the modernity of *The Chimes,* especially in its treatment of time, deprivation, and violence.

The brief passage I quote above from the latter stages of *Jude the Obscure* originates from its brutally violent, harrowing scene involving the murder-suicide carried about by the protagonist's young son, who hanged himself and his two younger half-siblings after having identified them as the collective source of his family's impoverishment and consequent hunger. They are no longer individuals, but merely each a number adding up to "too menny": they embody useless excess, a drain on their parents' very limited resources. For Jude and Sue and the reader alike, this scene marks an encounter with unconscionable horror.

Although Dickens finally disallows the horror that *Jude* will realize, *The Chimes* approaches something similar in the means by which it charts individuals' inculcation with a sense of their own expendability. Infanticide again serves to exemplify the degree of individual desperation as well as broad scale social decline – in terms of devastating poverty and the resulting breakdown of familial and communal structures (Dickens [1844] 2006, 122). In *The Chimes,* the protagonist, Trotty, is horrified to "[read] of the crimes and violence of the people" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 122), especially the account "of a woman who had laid her desperate hands not only on her own life but on that of her young child" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 122). Such reports seemingly give proof to much of the rhetoric Trotty elsewhere

---

That morning when I trod the town
The twitching chimes of long renown
Played out to me
The sweet Sicilian sailors' tune,
And I knew not if late or soon
My day would be: (1-6).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

confronts regarding the inherent evil of the poorer classes. These stories become all too 'real' when in his visions he encounters his daughter, Meg, who attempts to drown herself along her infant. Yet it will be Trotty's attempt to intervene in order to prevent the tragedy that will ultimately free him from the tormenting visions of the Spirit of the Bells. At that moment of recognition, Trotty articulates Meg's inherent, human value and thereby renounces the utilitarian doctrine regarding the inherent evil and wastefulness of the poor that he had hitherto imbibed. The Bells will at the last ring out with the joy of the New Year and the sacred occasion – Meg's wedding – that it will mark.

It is through an encounter with the dead, or the potentially so, that Dickens's Christmas books finally diverge from the hard lessons Hardy teaches, finding as they do hope and possibility through, as we shall see, the apparitional encounter; inherent in this version of Dickensian death is simultaneously the possibility for resurrection, a possibility that signals the potential transcendence of the social curse, rather than – as in the case of little Jude and his siblings – confirmation of its absolute power. As the grieving Sue Bridehead avers, "We must conform!" (Hardy [1895] 2002, 330).

I. Nocturnal Visitations

Despite its rousing conclusion, *The Chimes* is, like *Jude the Obscure*, a story of deprivation and starvation – of the mind, spirit, and the body. Hunger and starvation are of course dominant subjects in Dickens's writing – we need only think of Oliver's well-known anthem or the dwindling of Little Nell. Indeed, like these earlier tales, *The Chimes* documents a harrowing world of starvation, poverty, and exile.

As many have observed, Dickens would begin composing *The Chimes* at a time when he was himself removed from his own society. Dickens had travelled to Italy, and it was in Genoa that he would, in a roundabout way, find inspiration for *The Chimes*. Although this

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

"inspiration," if we might call it that, initially arises out of profound annoyance. As Dickens writes,

> the bells of the churches ring incessantly; not in peals, or any known form of sound, but in a horrible, irregular, jerking, dingle, dingle, dingle: with a sudden stop at every fifteenth dingle or so, which is maddening. This performance is usually achieved by a boy up in the steeple, who takes hold of the clapper, or a little rope attached to it, and tries to dingle louder than every other boy similarly employed. The noise is supposed to be particularly obnoxious to Evil Spirits, but looking up into the steeples, and thus seeing (and hearing) these young Christians thus engaged, one might very naturally mistake them for the Enemy. (Dickens [1846] 1998, 45).

But Dickens was affected by more than sound in Genoa – it also became a place of intense and formative visual encounter for him: "things that are picturesque, ugly, mean, magnificent, delightful, and offensive, break upon the view at every turn" (Dickens [1846] 1998, 45). One little-remarked upon vision seems of particular importance here – as he experienced something akin to a kind of religious, apparitional encounter. Dickens generally seems to have little patience for medieval visions and miracles, identifying St. Joan of Arc's visions of St. Michael, St. Catherine and St. Margaret as "delusions […] [as] a disease which are not by any means uncommon" (Dickens [1851-53] 1901, 147).[2] Yet one might speculate whether Dickens himself was subject, at least temporarily, to such an illness. Just prior to commencing his composition of *The Chimes* "he dreamed of a Spirit wrapped in blue-drapery, like a Madonna by Raphael" (Ackroyd 1999, 462). He immediately recognized the woman as his deceased sister-in-law Mary Hogarth, but went on to converse with this figure about the primacy of the Catholic Church, asking if "the Form of religion does not so greatly matter, if we try to do good? Or perhaps the Roman Catholic is the best? Perhaps it makes one think of God oftener, and believe in him more steadily?" "For *you*," the Spirit replied, "it is the best" (qtd in Ackroyd 1999, 463).

[2] On Dickens's distrust of medievalism, which likely surfaces here, in addition to his anti-Catholic leanings, see Bauer and Zirker 2017.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

As Michael Slater points out, "Whatever he decided about this had no effect whatever in modifying the sharp hostility towards Roman Catholicism that was to pervade the pages of *Pictures from Italy*" (Slater 2009, 229). Indeed, Dickens's "vision," such as it was, of the Madonna, is useful to note here, less for the degree to which it might raise questions about Dickens's unconscious yearnings for conversion, but moreso for the way that it points toward the tension between fantasy and reality that he will continue to examine in *The Chimes*. "I *wonder*," he wrote to Forster, "whether I should regard it as a dream, or an actual Vision!" (qtd in Slater 2009, 229). Likewise, Dickens asks at the conclusion of *The Chimes* whether Trotty had "dreamed? Or are his joys and sorrows, and the actors in them, but a dream; himself a dream; the teller of this tale a dreamer, waking but now?" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 161). Regardless, he urges his "listener," "try to bear in mind the stern realities form which these shadows come; and [...] endeavor to correct, improve, and soften them." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 161).

As Ackroyd observes, the subsequent fiction seems to bear out the fact that his "nocturnal visitation" (Ackroyd 1999, 463) in the Palazzo Peschire "was not easily forgotten by Dickens: the hooded figure of a woman reappears in his later fiction and his next Christmas Book, *The Chimes*, was also to deal with ghosts and spirits and visitations." (Ackroyd 1999, 464) As in *A Christmas Carol*, the protagonist of *The Chimes* encounters often-terrifying spirits, which mediate his travel between this world and the next. The visions begin when, increasingly convinced that poor men such as he are inherently bad, a bewildered Trotty retreats into the church and climbs upward into the bell tower. Though he seeks escape, he remains trapped in ceaseless movement as he ascends the "narrow stair": "Up, up up, and round, and round; and up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up! [...] It was a disagreeable staircase for that groping work; so low and narrow [...] up, up, up; and climb and clamber; up, up, up; higher, higher up!" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 124). And, it is here, at the apex of this parody of Victorian progress where, as "The Voice of Time [...] cries to man,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

Advance!" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 126), Trotty encounters nothing but chaos. Waking from a swoon, he is stuck by the phantasmagoria "Goblin Sight":

> the tower, whither his charmed footsteps had brought him [was] swarming with dwarf phantoms, spirits, elfin creatures of the Bells [...] He saw them, of all aspects and all shapes. He saw them ugly, handsome, crippled, exquisitely formed. He saw them young he saw them old, he saw them kind, he saw them cruel, he saw them merry, he saw them grim; he saw them dance, and heard them sing; he saw them ear their hair, and heard them howl. [...] (Dickens [1844] 2006, 125-126).

Finally, this chaotic scene dissipates and, left with the Goblin of the Bell, Trotty encounters an even more terrifying vision:

> The tower opened at his feet. He looked down, and beheld his own form, lying at the bottom, on the outside: crushed and motionless.
> "No more a living man!" cried Trotty. "Dead!"
> "Dead!" said the figures all together. (Dickens [1844] 2006, 130).

Trotty thus witnesses his own death, which had occurred, he is told, nine years earlier.

Throughout his fiction Dickens frequently presents his reader with a version of this moment – one in which his character witnesses, in effect, his own death. We see this in Scrooge's encounter with his own grave; in John Harmon's survey of his own corpse at the police station; and in the depiction of the unnamed Signalman who foresees the coming event of his death but cannot stop it. Even Richard Darnay, in flight from Paris, in a manner lives as a result of his own execution, which echoes through the final pages of the narrative.

Yet in *The Chimes* what I would term the dissociative moment occurring at the depiction of the protagonist's death is all the more poignant, for it is neither a matter of switched identity, nor a textual encounter, as in the case of Scrooge's confrontation with his own grave. Rather, Trotty sees his very own body, motionless and dead, before him. This is

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

particularly appropriate given the text's focus on starvation, deprivation, and exile. For Trotty's encounter with his own dead body renders emphatically the degree to which the physical and the psychological are intimately linked; the deprivation, the starvation that necessarily drives such individuals onward from place to place produces a kind of psychological exile. Necessarily so – as hunger and starvation force the individual apart from him or herself, as he or she unwillingly, yet necessarily, participates in the denial of his or her own needs. Similarly, when Meg will be driven to carry in her "wasted arms" the baby she cares for down to the river with the intent to drown it, she becomes, as Trotty himself will argue, someone other than, someone truly "outside of" herself.

Thus, to his portrayal of deprivation, starvation, and want – Dickens yokes this singular haunting spectral image, as the narrative fittingly becomes itself a dissociative exercise: *The Chimes* is a story of exile – of the poor's exile from their communities, but also a tale of exile from the self. In this process, individuals become, like the spirits of the bells, a mass of apparitions, indistinguishable and increasingly lost to the perceptions of those around them.

II. Dicing Time[3]

Despite this implicit emphasis on the invisibility of the poor, *The Chimes* is in many ways a theatrical space, one of hurried movement and discordant sound, of ongoing shifts in scene and character. Its pace – like Trotty's – is suggestive of the pace of modern life that induces hurry and anxiety in the citizenry. This stands at odds with both the secular and sacred times marked out by the bells: their predictable sounds mark out the passing of the day; at other times their chiming signals sacred occasion and event. As Jay Clayton observes in his discussion of sound in *The Chimes*, "For centuries, the sound of church bells has been integral

[3] "Hap" (Hardy 1976, 9, l. 12).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

to complex social networks: systems of time-keeping, religion, mourning, marriage, community relations, national holidays, civic honours and emergencies" (Clayton 2012, 19-40, esp. 26).[4] The ringing bell at once marks the sacramental, timeless event, but at the same time the passing of human time – and at their most intense, therefore, the individual's incessant haunting by his or her sense of mortality, of the uncontrollable pace with which time moves forward and one's life necessarily and increasingly fades away.[5] In charting Trotty's movements, arbitrary and unpredictable (given the nature of his work as a ticket porter) as they are, *The Chimes* emphasizes the frenetic nature of this kind of time. This tension between the sacred and the relentlessly secular – timekeeping, working, running, motion – pervades much of the story.

A Christmas Carol is ostensibly more rigidly structured according to past, present, future. Yet in *The Chimes*, time itself *is* rigidity, associated as it so often is with deprivation. Trotty enjoys a special intimacy with the Bells, which frequently offer him sympathy and encouragement. Yet they also mark out the precarious nature of his very existence in their connection to absence, to the non-event. For, "There's nothing," says Trotty, "more regular in its coming round than dinner-time, and nothing less regular in its coming round than dinner" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 92). The arbitrary, unpredictable nature of how and when a man like Toby might get his next meal or, indeed, his next job, is utterly at odds with the Chimes' marking of time with regularity. Thus, despite their apparent intimacy with Trotty, the Chimes simultaneously mark out a temporal world from which he – and the class he represents – are excluded. Meg, as we see later, cannot pause to indulge in human emotion

[4] See also Bauer's compelling, incisive analysis of *The Chimes*'s "poetics of rhythm," in which he sees Dickens's use of "rhythm as a subject matter" inherently connected "to rhythm as a feature of style" (Bauer 2017, 112).
[5] Gordon Bigelow echoes this in his discussion of Walter Bagehot's sense of Dickens's "strength [. . .] in representing the discontinuity of modern urban life: the clashing juxtapositions, and the odd simultaneity of unrelated events in every second of the urban clock. This temporality of the 'disconnected' [. . .] is what Walter Benjamin refers to in the famous formulation "homogenous, empty time," the time of the newspaper, the telegraph, the crowd, a time that attenuates the teleos of the Christian calendar" (Bigelow 2003, 77).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

and sorrow, but must persist at her work well into the evening; the needs of the body (for food, for sleep) or those of the soul and mind do not regulate it. Rather, "In any mood, in any grief, in any torture of the mind or body, Meg's work must be done. [...] Night, midnight. Still she worked." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 142). The time of the poor is not theirs to control; they inhabit a world – and a time – apart, one defined by "the chaos of hunger" (Scholl 2020,13).

The story thus repeatedly shows that the experience of the poor is that of unpredictability, deprivation, and disruption: indeed, *The Chimes* essentially begins with the interruption of a poor man's lunch. Here Dickens illustrates, as he often does, how "understanding the spiritual aspects of familiar things is an important social responsibility" (Mangham 2020, 150). The intrusion of Mr. Filer, Sir Joseph, and Alderman Cute upon Trotty's meal at the beginning of the tale marks the disruption of a moment of sacred communion – one shared between father, daughter, and her would-be husband. Indeed, here, as elsewhere, Dickens stages his drama as a means of infusing otherwise quotidian moments surrounding the sharing of food with a sacramental essence.

Before all is lost, including Trotty's lunch, the extended scene involves Meg's delivery of a pot of tripe to her father, with, as well, a "hot potato beside, and half a pint of fresh-drawn beer in a bottle." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 95). An atmosphere of moving sanctity and empathy that persists as Trotty commences his meal: the Bells ring out, a greeting that he acknowledges as a Grace, and he responds in kind with a solemn "Amen!"(Dickens [1844] 2006, 96). Trotty goes on to describe a kind of union he shares with the Chimes, as to his ear they frequently ring out with his very name, "Toby Veck, Toby Veck" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 96) and urge him "to keep a good heart" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 96) and encourage him when work is hard to come by. Trotty concludes with an expression of faith, confirming that, yes,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

as the Bells suggest, work always comes at last – it "Never fails" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 96) – and he goes on to enjoy his meal with great gusto.

Although Dickens weaves much delight and tenderness into this exchange, an atmosphere of guilt and worry persists. For as Meg moves to set a makeshift dining table for her father, she in seeming seriousness asks if it is a criminal offence to spread her cloth. Although Trotty answers in the negative, he is quick to note that "they're always a bringing up some new law or other" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 95). The abundance of laws at once contrasts with and directly contributes to the deprivation faced by individuals such as Trotty. Meg is skeptical that the poor could ever keep track of all of the laws to which they are subject. Ignorance seems to be the "crime" of the poor; as well as their lack of legal knowledge, they are blamed for their "ignorance of the first principals of political economy" – and that, according to Alderman Cute, who will soon arrive to disrupt the scene, along with two other "gentleman", is not just the source of their suffering, but of their wickedness.

Prior to the Alderman's arrival and pronouncements, we see how clearly the humanity of Meg's actions – her desire to lay the table – contrasts the austere legal environment that seems to regulate her every movement. Her laying of the table not within the sacred house of worship but rather without also speaks to their exclusion from religious and cultural ritual as well as the widespread domestic disruption affecting the poor. This moment, then, despite its tenderness, marks the perpetual threat of homelessness and exile that will be manifest in the strife faced by other characters in story, such as the itinerant Will Fern and his niece Lillian.

Dickens thus subtly documents the fragmentation of community that recent work on starvation, society, and nineteenth-century cultural production has effectively underscored. In *Hunger, Poetry, and the Oxford Movement,* Lesa Scholl describes how the legal changes that proliferated in this in this period, particularly the New Poor Law, frequently served to

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

further distance society from the actual suffering of individuals. The result was thus additional adverse consequences for the impoverished and their communities. As Scholl explains:

> The unionizing of parish relief, for instance, introduced by the New Poor Law, meant that individual parishes were no longer held directly responsible for relieving distress in their own community. Poor relief was thus bureaucratized, centralized, and sanitized, making hunger and starvation more palatable and acceptable by distancing the direct offense of poverty from the local community's reach (Scholl 2020, 21).

The very fact that Trotty lacks a singular employer further emphasizes the effects of this form of social disconnection; his situation is distinct from that which we see, for instance, in *Hard Times* or even *A Christmas Carol*. For in these other critiques of industrial hardship, a relationship, albeit a negligent and often punitive one, between employer (Bounderby, Scrooge) and employee (Blackpool, Cratchit) exists. In these texts, Dickens can advocate, however problematically, for a more positive relationship based on responsibility between employer and employee. But Trotty, as his constant motion shows, is without anyone to address. To whom ought he petition? The state? "Faceless institutions," Scholl rightly insists, "are not capable of empathetic connection" (Scholl 2020, 22).

The impact of this detachment – and the resulting invisibility of the poor – becomes acute with the sudden arrival of the three un-wise men who interrupt Toby's interaction with his daughter and her fiancé, Richard. Filer, Alderman Cute, and the red-faced gentleman intrude upon this scene, not to bear gifts to the poor and humble, but to steal their food from their mouths. Quoting all manner of ridiculous statistics, estimates, and tables, Filer upbraids Toby for his consumption of tripe, citing it as a gross indulgence that amounts to little more than the theft "out of the mouths of widows and orphans" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 101). Caught in the harassing mental trap laid for him, poor Trotty suddenly

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

"seemed to have starved a garrison of five hundred men with his own hand" ((Dickens [1844] 2006, 100). Alderman Cute rejects all reports of the ubiquitous starvation and suffering[6] that surround them as mere "cant in vogue" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 103) and propounds upon the foolhardiness of marriage among the poor, telling Meg, "your husband will die young (mostly likely) and leave you with a baby. Then you'll be turned out of doors, and wander up and down the street" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 104). As a result, the three depart divided: Meg and Richard "in tears" and Richard "gloomy and down-looking" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 105), while Trotty, tasked by the Alderman with delivering a letter, fell "mechanically, in his usual trot, and trotted off." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 106).

III. "All was nervous motion"[7]

The *Chimes* opens with speculation about the possibilities of rough sleeping in a church, which should be a place of obvious shelter and benevolence. Yet as a result of the intrusion of Filer, Cute, and the red-faced gentlemen, it becomes, as we have seen, a site of banishment and exile. Meg becomes but a wanderer adrift, and Trotty resumes his mechanical movements as he and his family are cast off from the steps of the church and sent out separately into the world.

Thus, Dickens contrasts the Christmas image of the Holy Family with familial discord and disconnection, as the three go their separate ways. This and the subsequent visions of family strife, violence, and separation that Trotty will witness are vastly at odds with that version of Christmas joy and unity that is elsewhere lauded in Dickens. For Fred, Scrooge's

[6] As has been well documented, the "Hungry Forties" was characterized by tremendous suffering in the form of starvation and disease among the poorer classes. 1841-42 had seen an enormous depression, which especially affected the working poor in urban locations and in that well-documented site of deprivation and horror – the workhouse. More widespread famine was of course yet to come: between 1845 and 1850 a million Irish would have starve or die from disease in the workhouses (Bigelow 2003, 151).
[7] *Jude the Obscure* (Hardy [1895] 2002, 84).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

nephew, from *A Christmas Carol,* this, the Yuletide, "is the only time . . . in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys" (Dickens [1843] 2003, 36). Fred insists that all are fellow travelers, pilgrims, journeying together toward their final resting place. Yet here, Dickens's readers frequently witness how the journey of the poor is a much more punitive one. Like Meg, who in Trotty's vision will but "wande[r] here and there, in quest of occupation" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 36), such individuals are often in exile, forced to wander, forced to run, forced out and away from community into a life of disconnection and want. This calls to mind, indeed, Little Nell, forced to wander endlessly in order to preserve her grandfather, but also a host of Dickensian characters: Barnaby Rudge and his mother; the wandering Circus performers of *Hard Times;* Magwitch, the escaped prisoner of *Great Expectations*; even John Harmon, the hero of Dickens's last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*.

Dickens thus aptly designates Trotty's work as that of a porter or a kind of general runner who moves swiftly, at the arbitrary command of others, and who moves alone. Such constant, chaotic movement is likewise the plight of the vagabond. William Fern, whom Trotty will shortly encounter, first in report at Sir Joseph's and then in reality, has been accused of the offence of vagrancy, and it is he who cuttingly blasphemes that well-known articulation of human connection and obligation from the Book of Ruth, saying, in protest against his constant pursuit by the police, "Whither though goest I cannot go [...] Thou people are not my people." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 138). Through Fern and the wanderers like him who populate Dickens's fiction, Dickens documents one of the many double binds faced by the poor and hunger-stricken, those without work, without shelter: poverty so often leads to perpetual motion, making movement necessary for survival. Yet that very movement in and across public space is itself deemed criminal.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

Ingrid Horrocks's study of women, wandering, and mobility in the Romantic age illustrates the growing restriction and criminalization of individual movement, especially of the poorer classes, during this period. In the late-eighteenth century "harsh new penal measures were brought in that altered the 1744 Vagrancy Act, bringing in tighter regulations on vagrants, peddlers, beggars, discharged soldiers, and travelers and wanders of all kinds." (Horrocks 2017, 17). Such ongoing changes to the Act collectively made "the lack of a home or ostensible livelihood a crime worthy of newly severe punishment." (Horrocks 2017, 17). They also contributed to the conception of the unemployed or impoverished as inherently criminal: the Vagrancy Act of 1824 gave Justices of the Peace the power to arrest and imprison "Vagabonds and Incorrigible Rogues" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 113). Horrocks's description of the eighteenth-century woman wanderer thus has equal application to the plight of Will Fern, a man "jaded and foot-sore, and so soiled with travel," (Dickens [1844] 2006, 115) and that of other wanderers who populate Dickens's fiction. As Horrocks explains: "These are not travellers as we know them, adventuring out to explore the world, but unwilling, pained figures, moving not because they choose to but because they have no choice." (Horrocks 2017, 1) Although they do not take him as far afield, Trotty's perpetual, repetitive movements invite, as I have suggested, comparison with the ceaseless steps of the wanderer, who, as Will Fern attests, feels, like Trotty, increasingly criminalized: "Jail, Jail, Jail, afore us," he says, "everywhere we turn" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 138).[8]

[8] The mechanical nature of Trotty's ceaseless movements combined with his sense of the growing criminalization of his class evokes that punitive machine of ceaseless movement – the treadmill. Although treadmills or versions of them – those used to power mills and other kinds of machines with human or animal labour – had been around for thousands of years, the punitive use of treadmills was of course a nineteenth-century invention. Many, including Ackroyd, have noted that Dickens's basis for Alderman Cute is the magistrate Peter Laurie, who ruthlessly sentenced individuals who failed in their suicide attempts to the treadmill (Ackroyd 1999, 465). Appropriately, then, for Dickens, the members of the wealthier classes, too, are but caught in the treadmill of his prejudice. Regarding the red-faced gentleman's beloved "the great old times," "No matter what anybody said, he still went turning round and round in one set form of words concerning them; as a poor squirrel turns in its revolving cage" (Ackroyd 1999, 102). Sir William Cubitt is

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

Trotty can only stop the ceaseless revolution of the wheel of misfortune by the conversion of his vision – that is, through the development of his interpretative capacities. In a crucial moment of recognition – as he looks upon the scene of Meg's imminent suicide and murder of her child – he at last rejects the prevailing taxonomy of the criminal that he has elsewhere absorbed. He claims instead that Meg's desperate actions mark her "as one in whom this dreadful crime has sprung from Love perverted; from the strongest, deepest Love we fallen creatures know!" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 136). His plea for mercy, for an understanding of Meg's singular plight and personhood breaks the spell of the Bells and allows him to reenter "real time," as he arises from his dream to greet Lillian and her Uncle Will, as well as Meg and Richard. As he does so, the sordid newspaper falls, we should note, with its superficial judgments, at his feet.

This resurrective moment is followed by the conversion of previously harsh sound and punitive movement, in the jubilance of the wedding celebration as a celebratory "*band* of music burst into the room, attended by a lot of neighbours, screaming "A Happy New Year, Meg!" "A Happy Wedding!" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 158). Here, in the final scenes of *The Chimes* deprivation is replaced by fulfillment and exile by belonging. Such a conclusion thus provides a tonic to the disconnection inherent in wandering, which, Horrocks observes, "assumes neither destination nor homecoming" (Horrocks 2017, 17). Both are provided here in this joyful counter to the "danse macabre" of the Goblin spirits that plagued Trotty's vision earlier. Mrs Chickenstalker arrives, "attended by a man bearing a stone pitcher of terrific size" containing a flip, or a warm drink (Dickens [1844] 2006, 159). Carried on a frame are a portable collection of bells – a makeshift instrument that correspond to their larger counterparts, "the Chimes, [which were] in lusty operation out of doors." (Dickens [1844]

generally credited with the invention of the treadmill for such use; Shyat offers an extensive discussion of the history of the treadmill and its application in the British penal system.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

2006, 159). Amidst all of this Toby Veck no longer runs, nor climbs, nor toils onward. His trot has become a dance.

As Goldie Morgentaler rightly observes, Dickens viewed dance as "a healthy and harmonious activity requiring the participation of all classes and both sexes; it generates joy and benevolent feelings" (Morgentaler 2011, 264). Yet crucially, *The Chimes's* concluding dance offers a particular corrective to those punitive forms of movement – Trotty's mechanized, hurried steps and Will Fern's ceaseless flight – that dominate much of the tale. Both forms of movement are a function of the industrial, utilitarian context that Dickens's tale seeks to indict. They underscore the invisibility of the poor as well as their exclusion from the regular movements of time that determine cultural ritual and the patterns of daily living, exiled as they are into a world of chaos. The dance, however, controls that chaos – it is at once jubilant, but also measured, intentional, and governed by time, with specific steps and movements that depend upon those of one's partner or those of the next couple. There is at once freedom and interdependence in the movements of the dance; it is a communal spectacle made possible only by the participation of individuals. It allows, finally, for the existence of autonomy and difference – for Trotty's "own peculiar trot" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 161) – within the larger pattern of community. The particular community shown here is notably characterized by perception – by intimacy, history, and knowing. This scene of redemption and the union that it celebrates has depended upon Trotty's seeing Meg for who she really is; Trotty in turn witnesses Will Fern's and Lilly's recognition by that celebratory maternal figure, one who had notably long known the little girl's mother, Mrs. Chickenstalker.

In its depictions of the significance of individual encounter and individual identity, *The Chimes* thus works to counter the prevailing discourse of "too many" that is additionally persecuting the ostracized and impoverished. The controlled chaos of the dance thus offers,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

at least for a time, a means of resisting what a later author such as Hardy will term "the modern vice of unrest" (Hardy [1895] 2002, 79) – that ubiquitous affliction of body, mind, and spirit cultivated by a culture of disconnection, constant movement, and pervasive want. Instead, in *The Chimes* the movement of time offers yet another chance for a New Year, as the terrorizing chaos of Trotty's earlier encounter with the Goblin Sight is replaced by moments of recognition, and movement is no longer punitive, aimless, and desperate, but the source of union, reunion, and joy.

Bibliography

Primary Texts

Dickens, Charles. 1901. *A Child's History of England.* 1851-53. London: Chapman & Hall.

— . *A Christmas Carol.* [1843] 2003. *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings.* Ed. Michael Slater. London: Penguin, 2003. 27-118.

— . *The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells That Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year*. In *A Christmas Carol and Other Stories.* [1844] 2006. Ed. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— . *Pictures from Italy.* [1846] 1998. Ed. Kate Flint. London: Penguin.

Hardy, Thomas. 1976. "Hap." *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy.* Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 9.

— . "The Chimes." [1917] 1976. *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy.* Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 475.

— . *Jude the Obscure.* [1895] 2002. Ed. Patricia Ingham. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Secondary Sources on Dickens

Ackroyd, Peter. 1999. *Dickens.* London: Vintage.

Bauer, Matthias. 2019. "*The Chimes* and the Rhythm of Life." *Charles Dickens as an Agent of Change.* Eds. Joachim Frenk and Lena Steveker. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 111-127.

Bauer, Matthias and Angelika Zirker. 2017. "Subtle Medievalism: The Case of Charles Dickens". *Anglistentag 2016 Hamburg: Proceedings*. Ed. Ute Berns and Jolene Mathieson. Trier, Germany: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier (WVT), 91-102.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

Clayton, Jay. 2012. "The Dickens Tape: Affect and Sound Reproduction in *The Chimes*". *Dickens and Modernity.* Ed. Juliet John. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 19-40.

Morgentaler, Goldie. 2011. "Dickens and Dance in the 1840s". *Partial Answers* 9.2: 253-66.

Slater, Michael. 2009. *Charles Dickens.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Works on Hunger, Starvation, Discipline, and Mobility in Victorian Britain

Bigelow, Gordon. 2003. *Fiction, Famine, and the Rise of Economics in Victorian Britain and Ireland.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Higginbotham, Ann R. 1989. "'Sin of the Age': Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London". *Victorian Studies* 32.3 (Spring): 319-337.

Horrocks, Ingrid. 2017. *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784–1814.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mangham, Andrew. 2020. *The Science of Starving in Literature, Medicine, and Political Economy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rose, Lionel. 1986. *The Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Britain, 1800-1939.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Scholl, Lesa. 2020. *Hunger, Poetry, and the Oxford Movement: The Tractarian Social Vision.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Shayt, David H. 1989. "Stairway to Redemption: America's Encounter with the British Prison Treadmill". *Technology and Culture* 30.4 (October): 908-938.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Bio-bibliographical note

Sara Malton is Associate Dean of Arts (Research and Faculty Support) and a Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, where she specializes in nineteenth-century literature. She is the past Secretary (2018-21) and a past Trustee (2014-17) of *The Dickens Society*. Among her most important published research there is *Forgery in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture: Fictions of Finance from Dickens to Wilde* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and a number of articles published in essay collections and academic journals such as *Religion and the Arts, Studies in the Novel, Victorian Literature and Culture, European Romantic Review,* and *English Studies in Canada*. Her current work focuses on hunger, starvation, and selfhood in Victorian culture, but her interests also include consumer and commodity culture as well as the relationship between literature, technology, science, and modernity.

E-mail address: Sara.Malton@smu.ca

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019