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*The Chimes* and the Rhythm of Life

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# *The Chimes and the Rhythm of Life*

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One of the quasi-mythical stories that contributed to Dickens's creative imagination is the account of Dick Whittington, the apprentice boy who became Lord Mayor of London. Based on historical fact,<sup>1</sup> it appears to have been particularly attractive to Dickens not just because it is about the legendary social rise of a boy called "Dick" but also because, according to folklore, the fortune of Dick Whittington was made by his listening to the voice of the bells of St. Mary-le-Bow, which made him return to London after initial disappointment, as they sang out to him, "Turn again, Whittington, / Once Lord Mayor of London!"<sup>2</sup> Dickens, for example, has Dick Swiveller in *The Old Curiosity Shop* hope that "Perhaps the bells might strike up 'Turn again, Swiveller, Lord Mayor of London.' Whittington's name was Dick" (OCS 373). In *Barnaby Rudge*, the narrator, on the occasion of Joe Willet's leaving London, points out that

there were no voices in the bells to bid him turn. Since the time of noble Whittington, fair flower of merchants, bells have come to have less sympathy with humankind. They only ring for money and on state occasions. Wanderers have increased in number; ships leave the Thames for distant regions, carrying from stem to stern no other cargo; the bells are silent; they ring out no entreaties or regrets; they are used to it and have grown worldly. (BR 237)

The narrator regrets the disenchantment of the modern world, that is, the disappearance of a kind of providence that magically avails itself of the musical and rhythmical devices provided by the churches in order

to convey its message. But in spite of the sense of loss expressed in this comment, the voice of the bells remains central to Dickens's notion of time, change, and life. He turns it from a folk legend to a motif that indicates key qualities of literary art.

Dickens shows us a world in constant metamorphosis, where everything is marked by transformation, including the structures of society, the realm of material things, and the lives of human beings. Because change is inevitable—and whenever someone, such as Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, tries to stop its course, it asserts itself all the more forcibly—Dickens repeatedly raises the questions: Can it be influenced for the better? And what such an improvement—or the prevention of a change for the worse—may mean? In this respect, the temporal arts play a decisive role, for their very nature is change. To Dickens, the art of prose is temporal in the sense of being musical and rhythmical; this is why it may serve to represent life and society and why it is suited to influence the nature of their changes. In order to explore this, I focus on a very limited example, which is nevertheless quite instructive, for it presents a poetics of rhythm as one of the foremost instruments at the disposal of a writer seeking to influence change.<sup>3</sup> It does so by connecting rhythm as a subject matter to rhythm as a feature of style.

The story selected, which is to make us see the key function of rhythm as a link between verbal art and the representation of life and society, is Dickens's second Christmas Book, *The Chimes*, published in 1844. It is immediately relevant to the topic of this volume, for the notion of change is central to its idea—an idea which is part and parcel of its verbal realization. *The Chimes* is a story in which, on the one hand, scathing and bitter social satire prevails. There is a set of people apparently in charge of public and private affairs that comprises self-styled Friends and Fathers of the poor (Sir Joseph Bowley, MP), administrators and Justices who wish to show their energy and competence by "Putting Down" whatever is unpleasant (Mr. Alderman Cute) and scientific-minded but inhuman political economists and social reformers (Mr. Filer). These caricatures are contrasted with the protagonist of the story, Toby Veck, called Trotty, a ticket porter standing all day outside a church door waiting for a job, as well as with his daughter Meg, her fiancé Richard, and a poor laborer (Will Fern) and his young niece. The representatives of the ruling classes are shown to intervene, with disastrous results, in the lives of the poor. As Will Fern puts it,

But when work won't maintain me like a human creetur; when my living is so bad, that I am Hungry, out of doors and in; when I see a whole working life begin that way, go on that way, and end that way, without a chance or change; then I say to the gentlefolks "Keep away from me! Let my cottage be." (TC 189)<sup>4</sup>

"Chance or change," or rather "without a chance or change" are key words of the story. They indicate, as in a formula, the demand for reform presented in this Christmas Book in a most unconciliatory manner.<sup>5</sup>

But, on the other hand, there is, as Alexander Welsh puts it, "something more profound than the satire" (8). This can be seen in the very speech just quoted, for Will Fern's "Keep away from me! Let my cottage be" is, strangely enough, a rhyming couplet whose lines, by their parallel sound-structure and 5-5 syllable length, evoke the metrical patterns of hymns.<sup>6</sup> The formula "chance or change" itself points to the musicality of poetry, for it is a quotation from James Beattie's *The Minstrel* of 1771 (74), one of the most popular poems of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> The transcendence of satire is suggested from the beginning by the fact that Trotty Veck is not actually the protagonist of the story but the church bells are—or, rather, the bells in their remarkable affinity with Trotty. The story is named after them. Trotty's life is connected with the ringing of the bells in a variety of interrelated ways from the physiological and psychological to the allegorical as well as supernatural (*The Chimes*, after all, is called "A Goblin Story"): "there were points of resemblance between themselves and him" (TC 155). The bells are "invested" by him with "a strange and solemn character" (TC 156), with "liking" and "love," and, due to their "deep strong melody," with "a species of awe" (TC 156). The bells speak to him, as we see (or rather hear) in the very first of the four sections or "Quarters" into which the story is divided:

"[. . .] Why bless you, my dear," said Toby, [. . .] "how often have I heard them bells say, 'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby!' A million times? More!"  
"Well, I never!" cried Meg.

She had, though—over and over again. For it was Toby's constant topic. "When things is very bad," said Trotty; "very bad indeed, I mean; almost at the worst; then it's 'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby!' That way." (TC 161-62)

The sound of the bells is both rhythmically and melodiously translated into human speech<sup>8</sup>:

Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby!  
 B o B [o] B o B [o] B -o= B [o] B o

Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby!  
 [əʊ] [e] [əʊ] [e] [i:] ([ʊ]) [ɑ:] [əʊ]  
 [əʊ][ɪ][e] [əʊ][ɪ][e] [i:][ə][ʊ] [ɑ:] [əʊ][ɪ]

The bell notes appear melodiously as vowel sounds in a change of [əʊ] and [e], as well as [i:] and [ɑ]; the voice of the bells is thus founded on an alteration of back and front vowels (back/front// back/front// front/back// back/front); we note that this is not a monotonous alternation but that it is rhythmically enlivened by the inversion of the back/front sequence in “keep [. . .] heart”; if the offbeat vowels are included, we get additional (short) [ɪ] and [ʊ] (another front/back pair) and perhaps a schwa in “a,” that is, a peal of between four and seven bells in all.<sup>9</sup> Dickens, although imitating the different bell notes and their ups and downs, does not represent a systematic, full peal as in the art of change ringing (made popular in English literature by Dorothy Sayers’s *The Nine Tailors*), which “is to work out mathematical permutations and combinations” (Sayers 19–20). The attempt at such a representation can be seen in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s poem “Chimes,” where by the repetition and permutation of identical words such a mathematical peal is imitated.<sup>10</sup>

Toby Veck’s recognition of verbal messages in the melody and rhythm of the bells has its basis in his own existence. And this is not only because his usual place of abode is a niche of an ancient church but because his life is intricately connected with other rhythms, such as the rhythm of the weather. Toby’s own rhythm fits in well here, for whenever he has a message to deliver, he moves in his own particular and peculiar trot, from which he derives his nickname:

Wet weather was the worst: the cold, damp, clammy wet, that wrapped him up like a moist great-coat: the only kind of great-coat Toby owned, or could have added to his comfort by dispensing with. Wet days, when the rain came slowly, thickly, obstinately down; when the street’s throat, like his own, was choked with mist; when smoking umbrellas passed and repassed, spinning round and round like so many teetotums, as they knocked against each other on the crowded footway, throwing off a

little whirlpool of uncomfortable sprinklings; when gutters brawled and waterspouts were full and noisy; when the wet from the projecting stones and ledges of the church fell drip, drip, drip, on Toby, making the wisp of straw on which he stood mere mud in no time; those were the days that tried him. [. . .] But coming out, a minute afterwards, to warm himself by exercise: and trotting up and down some dozen times: he would brighten even then, and go back more brightly to his niche.

They called him Trotty from his pace, which meant speed if it didn't make it. He could have walked faster perhaps; most likely; but rob him of his trot, and Toby would have taken to his bed and died. (TC 153)

The rhythmical nature of the passage is obvious. It is not only established by the rhetorical figure of anaphora, which is a favorite of Dickens's and, of course, an eminently rhythmical device as it serves to structure a passage through the repetition of an identical unit at the beginning of each clause. We find it in "Wet weather" and "Wet days," as well as in "when the rain," "when the street's throat," "when smoking umbrellas," "when gutters brawled," and "when the wet." Dickens sometimes uses anaphora to point up empty or even threatening rhetoric,<sup>11</sup> but it may also contribute to a specific kind of *energeia* that serves to convey the presence of something alive. This is the case here, for it shows the inclement weather being part of Toby's natural urban world in which his trot signals his particular rhythm of life. The clashing of beats, emphasized by alliteration, "wet weather was the worst; the cold, damp, clammy wet," may almost bring Toby's trot to a stop, but in fact, it never does.

wet weather            was the worst;  
 B    B    o [o]    B    o    B  
 the cold, damp, clammy wet  
 o    B [o]    B [o]    B    o    B

Although marked by repetition, the rhythm is never monotonous; similarly, the alliteration of the consonants [w], [k] is enlivened by the variation of vowel sounds. The hurtful weather will be integrated into the beats of Toby's movement, his rhythm. For to Toby, who stands in the church door most of the day, being is movement, as can also be seen and heard in a leitmotif of his, that is, his favorite phrase, "Here we are and here we go" (first used TC 191).

Here we are    and    here we go!  
 B    o    B [o]o    B    o    B

The rhythm reflects Toby Veck's peculiar trot, which combines a regular alternation of beat and offbeat with variation, as the whole phrase, due to the slight pause after "are," can be grouped into a B-o-B and an o-B-o-B section, the latter being a repetition of the former and marked by an anacrusis supporting the rhythm. This combination of repetition and variation is actually the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of the expression "to ring the changes"<sup>12</sup>—again the topical keyword not just of this volume but also of *The Chimes*. Dickens contrasts a world, a system, and a language "without a chance or change," with a world marked by repetition and variation, that is, by rhythm or "change."

This can be seen more clearly when considering the overall structure of the story, which is marked by the interruption of Toby's rhythm by the three gentlemen mentioned earlier. Toward the end of the first quarter, the door of the house upon whose steps Toby Veck, accompanied by his daughter and her fiancé, has eaten his dinner, opens, and out comes a man (Alderman Cute) who is also, like Trotty, characterized by his pace ("that peculiar compromise between a walk and a jog-trot—with which a gentleman upon the smooth down-hill of life [. . .] may come out of his house" [TC 165]) and by a rhythm clearly marked by identical repetition: "'What's the matter, what's the matter!' said the gentleman [. . .]. 'What's the matter! What's the matter!'" (TC 165). The three gentlemen and this lifeless rhythm literally interrupt the life processes of Toby and his circle: they sacrilegiously prevent Toby from eating his meal, and by facetiously stupid comments make, or try to make, Richard think twice about his proposed marriage. Taking into account that it is the last day of the year, the gentlemen can be seen to interrupt not only the cycle of the day (daily nourishment) and the cycle of life (marriage and getting children) but also the cycle of yearly renewal (there will not be any happy new year for Toby) and the rhythm of a workman's life.<sup>13</sup> One of the gentlemen is expressly shown to lack "proportion"—"This gentleman had a very red face, as if an undue proportion of the blood in his body were squeezed up in his head" (TC 166)—a term clearly suggesting that Dickens wished to stress that something is rhythmically wrong.

The locus classicus for this concept is Shakespeare's *Richard II*:

Ha, ha, keep time! How sour sweet music is  
 When time is broke, and no proportion kept!  
 So is it in the music of men's lives. (5.5.42–44)

The fact that the music of Toby Veck's life is disrupted is further emphasized by the interruption and change in the sound and rhythm of the chimes, which are caused by the gentlemen's intervention:

"Born bad. No business here!"

The Chimes came clashing in upon him as he said the words. Full, loud, and sounding—but with no encouragement. No, not a drop.

"The tune's changed," cried the old man, as he listened. "There's not a word of all that fancy in it. Why should there be? I have no business with the New Year nor with the old one neither. Let me die!"

Still the Bells, pealing forth their changes, made the very air spin. (TC 174)

There is our word again, *change*, but now it does not refer to the "chance or change" lacking because of the failure of those who believe themselves in control. Nor does it primarily refer to the changes of the bells that are in keeping with the natural rhythm of life. To be exact, the bells are still "pealing forth their changes," but the changes are changed for the worse. Thus we immediately recognize the changed rhythmical pattern of the chimes. The clashing beats, enhanced by alliteration, in Toby's self-accusation "Born bad. No business here"—

Born bad. No business here.

B B [o] B B o B

—are indeed unheard of up to this point in Dickens's story, especially because the central stress of the line is on the annihilating "No." And when the beats go on, even though they assume a "change" or a "trot," this will be a different, far more repetitive, regular, and monotonous one than before, as we see and hear in the following passage:

Put 'em down, Put 'em down!

B o B [o] B o B [o]

Good old Times, Good old Times!

B o B [o] B o B

Facts and Figures, Facts and Figures!

B o B o B o B o

Put 'em down, Put 'em down!

B o B [o] B o B

(TC 174)



In "Put 'em down," the melody descends from [o] via [ə] to [aʊ]; there is no real progress, but the rhythm, as it were, collapses back on itself. In fact, as we learn a few pages later, now Toby's "trot went to that measure, and would fit itself to nothing else" (TC 178). But there is something else. We might be irritated by the words "Good old Times, Good old Times!" heard by Toby in the bells, especially when we remember the narrator's mournful reflection on the disappearance of the bells' sympathy with humankind in *Barnaby Rudge*. The evocation of "Good old Times" in *The Chimes* contributes to the change for the worse, for they take up the exclamations of the red-faced, disproportioned gentleman (the Friend and Father, Sir Joseph Bowley) Toby had heard when his dinner was interrupted. Slater and others have explored the satire of the "Young England" movement with its longing for the restoration of a feudal system; Douglas-Fairhurst, in his edition of *The Chimes* (427–28), quotes lines from Lord John Manners's *England's Trust* about the time when "The greatest owned connexion with the least; / From rank to rank the generous feeling ran, / And linked society as man to man." Why does *The Chimes* not subscribe to this?<sup>14</sup> Is not Toby Veck expressly shown (by another figure of sound) as a *vecchio*, an old man connected to the memories of the past? In *The Chimes*, we are, after all, presented with harmony lost or interrupted, with the link between human beings dissevered and finally reestablished. The answer has to do with what to me seems the central issue in *The Chimes*, namely, movement in time, that is, rhythm.

It is brought home to the reader in what turns out to be Toby's dream; his nightly visit to the church tower and the bells. Toby is magically drawn up to the top of the tower by the sound of the bells, whose "energy was dreadful" (TC 196). They mark Toby's despair and subconscious desire to kill himself. Within what—as we are later suggested to believe—is a dream, Toby falls into a swoon when he has reached the bells and wakes up again to see a "Goblin Sight" (TC 201), the spirits 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 tear their hair, and heard them howl. He saw the air thick with them. He saw them come and go, incessantly. He saw them riding downward, soaring upward, sailing off afar, perching near at hand, all restless and all violently active. (TC 201–02)

He saw them young, he saw them old,  
 o B o B o B o B  
 he saw them kind, he saw them cruel,  
 o B o B o B o B[o]

This is the overly regular alternation of beats and offbeats (enhanced by anaphora and alliteration) which has become the rhythm of the chimes after the change, but in contrast to the earlier groups of three syllables (BoB–BoB), the swarming, the movement, the activity which are the issue now are audibly represented, even made felt, by the group of four syllables (oBoB–oBoB), which are by means of semantic choices (the contrasting pairs young/old, kind/cruel, etc.) further grouped into units of eight syllables or four beats. The spirits of the bells are shown and heard to be the energy of life itself, and what the narrator says a little later about Toby's feeling "cut off from all good people" (*TC* 203) applies to the appearance of the spirits as well: they are perceived as "a bodily sensation" (*TC* 203), that is, similar to and as a rhythm.

In this context, the Goblin of the Bell tells Toby why a longing for the past is wrong: "millions uncountable, have suffered, lived, and died: to point the way Before him" (*TC* 204). This advancement, the "progress onward" to the goal of "greater worth [. . .] greater happiness [. . .] better life" is something envisioned at the transcendent moment "when Time and He [that is, man] began" (*TC* 204). It is thus eschatological or apocalyptic in dimension, and the longing for the past is an interruption that not only must be expiated like a sin (this is what Toby has to do for his doing the bells "wrong in words," a phrase echoing the communion service in the Book of Common Prayer)<sup>15</sup> but will also bring about an even "fiercer and [. . .] wilder" (*TC* 205) movement into the future. It is the negation of past suffering, the loss of a meaningful continuum and rhythmical progress and the lack of trust and hope (*TC* 250). In a vision not unlike Scrooge's in *A Christmas Carol*, Toby Veck is made to see the fatal outcome of that interruption: his own suicide and the misery of his child, who will be desperate enough to kill her baby,<sup>16</sup> a change ("Ah! Changed. Changed. The light of the clear eye, how dimmed. The bloom, how faded from the cheek" [*TC* 208]) that, in an allusion to the book of Job, means death.<sup>17</sup>

The ambivalence of change is thus the ambivalence of death itself. To Dickens, the right kind of living in time will make all the difference. The denial of time will bring about self-annihilation,<sup>18</sup> as can be seen in the last words of the usurer Ralph in *Nicholas Nickleby*:

“At any hour,” replied Ralph fiercely. “In the afternoon, tell them. At any hour, at any minute. All times will be alike to me.”

[. . .]

The sound of a deep bell came along the wind. One.

“Lie on!” cried the usurer, “with your iron tongue! Ring merrily for births that make expectants writhe, and for marriages that are made in hell, and toll ruefully for the dead whose shoes are worn already! Call men to prayers who are godly because not found out, and ring chimes for the coming in of every year that brings this cursed world nearer to its end. No bell or book for me! Throw me on a dunghill, and let me rot there, to infect the air!” (NV 806)

Whereas in *Nickleby*, the attitude that denies time is a source of infection and thus threatens the entire society, in *A Christmas Carol*, the narrator points out that the striking of death will be ineffectual if it has been preceded by actual, pulsating life:

It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand WAS open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse a man’s. Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal! (CC 118)

This is an effect to which the literary artist contributes. By showing the rhythm of the chimes to be closely connected to the rhythm of life itself, Dickens evokes the age-old equation of the human pulse and musical rhythm. Isidore of Seville, for example, in the chapter on music in his seventeenth-century encyclopedic *Etymologies* points out that “however we speak, or however we are moved by the internal pulsing of our veins—these things are demonstrably linked, through their musical rhythms, to the power of harmony.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, this observation goes back to the very beginnings of medical research on the human pulse, that is, to the Alexandrian anatomist Herophilos of Chalcedon (fl. ca. 280 BCE), who was also a musical theorist. “The essential phenomenon in the pulse, according to Herophilos, is rhythm, as in music.”<sup>20</sup> The history of reflecting on the identity of the pulse and musical rhythm includes the seventeenth-century physician Samuel Hafenreffer, who regarded the pulse as “the sweetest melody of human life” or Johann Joachim Quantz, the flute teacher of Frederick the Great, who advocated the pulse as a natural metronome.<sup>21</sup> Even closer to *The Chimes*, the meaning of *pulsus* as the ringing of bells establishes the

close connection of tolling bells, pulsating blood, and musical rhythm. As John Donne puts it in his Meditation 18,

At inde, Mortuus es, Sonitu celeri, pulsuque agitato. *The bell rings out, and tells me in him, that I am dead.* [. . .] *The Bell rings out; the pulse thereof is changed; the tolling was a faint, and intermitting pulse, upon one side; this stronger, and argues more and better life.* (91)

As Alexander Welsh notes, Dickens ironically presents the social reality of his time (e.g., the sad fact of child murder) only as a dream, whereas the reality of the story is a dreamlike happy ending, a reunion of Toby, his family, and his friends (10). Toby has learned to be more mindful of the rhythm of his life, and this is why, in the end, the sad change is changed once more and becomes an ex-change between human beings. This can be seen when the poor man, Will Fern, who has come to town in order to look for the deceased mother of his niece Lilian, finds her in the person of the shopkeeper, Mrs. Chickenstalker:

The worthy dame, to his surprise, turned very pale and very red. "Not Lilian Fern whose mother died in Dorsetshire!" said she. Her uncle answered "Yes," and meeting hastily, they exchanged some hurried words together; of which the upshot was, that Mrs. Chickenstalker shook him by both hands; saluted Trotty on his cheek again, of her own free will; and took the child to her capacious breast. "Will Fern!" said Trotty, pulling on his right-hand muffler. "Not the friend you was hoping to find?" (TC 245)

Thus, finally the New Year is celebrated with a dance, and in order to make every reader notice that it is rhythm that this story is all about, this dance is accompanied not by a fiddler (as in *A Christmas Carol*) but by rhythmical, percussion instruments, by "[t]he Drum (who was a private friend of Toby's)"—the metonymy fits in well with the identification of rhythm and human life—as well as by "the marrow-bones and cleavers, and the bells; not *the* Bells, but a portable collection on a frame" (TC 243).

"Trotty [. . .] led off Mrs. Chickenstalker down the dance, and danced it in a step unknown before or since; founded on his own peculiar trot" (TC 245). This modulation of the overall rhythm to an individual trot is at the heart of Dickens's story. *The Chimes* is, in keeping with its satirical elements, moralistic, not just in its caricature of the self-righteous but also in its final appeal to its readers, who are told to "endeavour to correct, improve, and

soften" (*TC* 245) the stern realities. But its genuine concern is not so much an appeal to do something but rather a peal, a rhythm that must be minded and that makes us part of an unbroken movement. The aim is "growing to time," which is promised to the addressee by the speaker of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 and which is the transformation into the music of verbal art.

In this respect, the rhythmical patterns and sound patterns in Dickens's story are not just an example of iconicity—signs miming their meaning, in this case providing onomatopoeic correlatives to Toby's perception of the bells, for example—but they are the meaning itself. In the end, they are not signs at all but examples of the very life that the story presents to us as desirable.<sup>22</sup> The music and the dance at the end of the story are not a symbol of a better life but the better life itself, and the rhythm of the story is part of it. This can be seen from the way the rhythm is foregrounded again toward the end of the story:

You never in all your life saw anything like Trotty after this. I don't care where you have lived or what you have seen; you never in all your life saw anything at all approaching him! He sat down in his chair and beat his knees and cried; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed and cried together; he got out of his chair and hugged Meg; he got out of his chair and hugged Richard; he got out of his chair and hugged them both at once; he kept running up to Meg, and squeezing her fresh face between his hands and kissing it, going from her backwards not to lose sight of it, and running up again like a figure in a magic lantern; and whatever he did, he was constantly sitting himself down in his chair, and never stopping in it for one single moment; being—that's the truth—beside himself with joy. (*TC* 241–42)

Rhythmical repetition is enlivened by modulation, as we well notice when considering particular sections of this sequence; for example,

He sat down in his chair and beat his knees and cried;  
 -o- B -o- B o B o B o B  
 he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed;  
 -o- B -o- B o B o B o B  
  
 he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed  
 -o- B -o- B o B o B o B  
 and cried together;  
 o B o B o

The double offbeat/beat (“anapaestic”) is repeated and then followed by an alternating offbeat/beat rhythm; the semantic repetition/modulation (cried/laughed) again pointing to the rhythmical modulation and vice versa; the latter taking place when the asymmetrical two beat–three beat sequence is, after its first repetition, replaced with a two beat–two beat–three beat sequence. Dickens can here quite literally be seen as an agent of change, transformation being brought about by the presence and fascination of what is much more than a stylistic device.<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Sir Richard Whittington, the late medieval Master of the Mercers’ company and Lord Mayor of London, famously improved the sanity of the city and founded a charity still extant today. See <<http://www.mercers.co.uk/living-tradition>> and <<http://www.mercers.co.uk/charitable-trusts>> (21 Mar. 2012).
- 2 The traditional verse is reprinted at <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Whittington](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Whittington)> (21 Mar. 2012).
- 3 This field has attracted surprisingly little attention in criticism. Perhaps Dickens still suffers from the prejudice expressed by Saintsbury, who, focusing on certain blank-verse elements in Dickens’s prose, complains about “a certain poverty in rhythmical resources, a no doubt unconscious conviction that if you want to make prose harmonious you must ‘dash and brew’ it with the methods of verse itself” (382). Saintsbury seems completely oblivious of the variation of rhythmical structures and the uses to which they are put by Dickens. Baum (75–76) is similarly averse to verse structures obtruding themselves onto prose. Among the few contributions addressing the complex aural dimension of Dickens’s prose are Honan and Ho Lai Ming.
- 4 *The Chimes* and *A Christmas Carol* are quoted from Slater’s 1971 Penguin edition. This is to be preferred to other editions because Slater takes prose rhythm into account: “During the early 1840s Dickens was experimenting with a ‘rhetorical’ style of punctuation, based on speech-rhythms rather than on grammatical sense. This involved especially the lavish use of dashes, colons and semi-colons. [. . .] The present edition, which seeks to convey as fully as possible the distinctive flavour of these little stories as they were first published, reproduces the punctuation used in the original printing of each Book” (xxvii). Slater (*Charles Dickens* 230) points out that the aural dimension of *The Chimes* is evoked by the narrator, at the end, directly addressing the reader as “Listener.”
- 5 On *The Chimes* as a topical satire, see Slater, “Carlyle and Jerrold into Dickens” and “Dickens’s Tract for the Times.” Kurata tries to find a comprehensive perspective on the exposure of social ills and the fantasy elements of the story.
- 6 An example is the melody of “Seelenbräutigam” by Adam Drese (1698), which was adapted to a number of English hymns; see [www.ehymnbook.org](http://www.ehymnbook.org) (3 Jan. 2011). I am grateful to Inge Leimberg for this and other suggestions and references.

- 7 The second book of *The Minstrel* begins “Of chance or change, O, let no man complain, / Else shall he never, never cease to wail; / For from the imperial dome to where the swain / Rears the lone cottage in the silent dale, / All feel the’ assault of Fortune’s fickle gale; / [ . . . ]” (41). The combination of “chance or change” with the reference to the “cottage” clearly identifies Fern’s speech as an allusion to *The Minstrel*. But whereas Beattie stresses the common subjection to fortune, Fern emphasizes the division of the rich and the poor. Wordsworth in his 1815 preface to *Poems* mentions *The Minstrel* as an example of “The Idyllum” (28).
- 8 In order to avoid assignations such as “iambic,” which are inappropriate to prose rhythm (and, to a large extent, to English prosody in general), I have adopted Carper’s and Attridge’s system of indicating beats (B) and offbeats (o), with [o] denoting a silent offbeat (pause) and –o= a double offbeat with a slightly more pronounced emphasis on the second part. The system also avoids the problems (discussed, e.g., by Fowler, Hoover, and Pettersson) of relating metrical systems of poetry to prose rhythm.
- 9 The sounds [i], [ʊ] and [ə] may be said to represent fainter strokes of the [i:], [e] and [əʊ] bells; alternatively [ə] and [əʊ] may represent different bells.
- 10 Cf. the first section of Rossetti’s poem: “Honey-flowers to the honey-comb / And the honey-bee’s from home. // A honey-comb and a honey-flower, / And the bee shall have his hour. // A honeyed heart for the honey-comb, / And the humming bee flies home. // A heavy heart in the honey-flower, / And the bee has had his hour” (239).
- 11 A well-known example is the beginning of *Hard Times* with its imitation of Mr. Gradgrind’s manner and nature by means of the anaphoric repetition of “The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s [ . . . ]” (*HT* 1). Another case in point is the “eloquence” of Mr. Chadband in *Bleak House*.
- 12 “ring” v.<sup>1</sup> 17. *trans.* “to ring (the) changes. a. To go through all the possible variations of a process; to repeat essentially the same word, statement, and so on, in various different ways. Also to ring (the) chimes.”
- 13 Thus it is no coincidence that Richard is a blacksmith, a trade that—due to Handel’s tune—to Dickens always goes together with the epithet “harmonious”; apart from Pip in *Great Expectations*, there is also, for example, Mr. Morfin’s violoncello practice in ch. 58 of *Dombey and Son*.
- 14 Cf. Mrs. Skewton’s (“Cleopatra’s”) false dotting upon the Middle Ages in ch. 27 of *Dombey and Son*.
- 15 See the 1552BCP at [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1552/Communion\\_1552.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1552/Communion_1552.htm) (21 Mar. 2012): “And yf any of those be an open and notorious evyll lyver, so that the congregacion by hym is offended, or have done anye wronge to his neyghbours, by woord or deede: The Curate havinge knowledge thereof, shall call hym, and advertyse him, in anye wyse not to presume to the Lordes Table, untill he have openly declared hymselfe to have truely repented, [ . . . ]”
- 16 On the exchange and interplay of dream vision and reality in this respect and as a structural device in *The Chimes* as a whole, see Frenk (85–119, esp. 90).
- 17 Job 14:14: “If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.”
- 18 Christina Rossetti, in her poem “Dead Before Death,” first published in *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), presents such a death: “So lost till death shut to the opened door, / So lost from chime to everlasting chime, / So cold and

- lost for ever evermore" (ll. 12–14; p. 53). Dickens's Paul Dombey provides an additional perspective on the problem. This "old-fashioned" boy is frequently connected to time, especially by means of Dr. Blimber's clock, which speaks to him in a disturbing fashion: "Grave as an organ was the Doctor's speech; and when he ceased, the great clock in the hall seemed (to Paul at least) to take him up, and to go on saying, 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?' over and over and over again." (*DS* 145; see also chapters 12 and 14). It seems as if Paul is overwhelmed by the task of having to live in time, and he dies accordingly.
- 19 Isidore, *The Etymologies* (III.xvi.3; III.xvii.3) in Lindsay's ed. of the original Latin: "Sed et quidquid loquimur, vel intrinsecus venarum pulsibus commovemur, per musicos rhythmos harmoniae virtutibus esse sociatum." Cf. III.xxii.6: "Strings (chorda) are so called from 'heart' (cor, gen. cordis) because the throbbing [pulsus] of the strings in the cithara is like the throbbing of the heart in the chest." Of course Dickens need not have read Isidore to be familiar with the analogy; Shakespeare's Sonnet 8, where lute-strings and heart-strings "Strike[s] each in each by mutual ordering" takes the link for granted.
  - 20 See Klein, and in the same section "As Galen (K IX 464) reports: 'as the musicians establish their rhythms according to certain definite arrangements of time-periods, comparing arsis and thesis with one another, i.e. the upward and downward beat, so Herophilus supposed that the dilation of the artery corresponds to arsis and its contraction to thesis.'"
  - 21 See Hahn and Kümmler.
  - 22 The fact that the story seems to have been inspired by the bells of Genua (see Slater, *Charles Dickens* 229) gives an added twist to the notion of endowing the bells with a rhythmical voice that points out living (with)in time.
  - 23 I would like to thank the organizers, Lena Steveker and Joachim Frenk, as well as the participants of the Saarbrücken conference on "Dickens as an Agent of Change" for the splendid event and their feedback to my talk, which has also profited from the stimulating discussion at the informal meeting of the *Connotations Society* at Münster in December 2010.

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