

Supernatural Elements and Social Criticism in Charles Dickens's *The Chimes*

Charles Dickens'in *Çanlar* Adlı Eserinde Doğaüstü Olaylar ve Toplumsal Eleştiri

Sercan ÖZTEKİN 

Kocaeli University, The School of Foreign Languages, Kocaeli, Turkey



ABSTRACT

Charles Dickens incorporates supernatural elements in his realistic works. He, therefore, refers to opposite religious and scientific explanations for the existence of unearthly phenomena that prevailed in the Victorian period. However, in *The Chimes*, one of his ghost stories, he focuses on scientific attitudes to supernatural beings rather than conventional views. He generally relates the main character's mind and uncanny visions to social problems and inequality which traumatize underprivileged citizens. This study examines the work in relation to the depiction of the supernatural. After a brief discussion of the Victorian attitudes to the eerie and the unknown, it discusses the ways in which Dickens employs supernatural figures, blending them with social criticism.

Keywords: Charles Dickens, Mind, Social Criticism, The Chimes, The Supernatural

ÖZ

Charles Dickens, gerçekçi eserlerine doğaüstü unsurlar dahil eder. Bu yüzden, Viktorya döneminde süregelen, doğaüstü güçlerin varlığıyla ilgili dine ya da bilime dayalı birbirine zıt açıklamalara atıfta bulunur. Ancak Dickens, *Çanlar* adlı hayalet hikayesinde, doğaüstü olaylarla ilgili geleneksel görüşlerden çok bilimsel yaklaşımlara odaklanır. Genellikle ana karakterin zihnini ve tekinsiz imgelemleri yoksul vatandaşları sarsan toplumsal problemlere ve eşitsizliğe bağlar. Bu çalışma, belirtilen eseri doğaüstü güçlerin tasviri açısından ele almaktadır. Bilinmeyen ve esrarengiz varlıklara karşı Viktorya dönemindeki yaklaşımları kısaca irdeledikten sonra, Dickens'in bu unsurları toplumsal eleştirisiyle birlikte nasıl kullandığını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Charles Dickens, Zihin, Toplumsal Eleştiri, Çanlar, Doğaüstü Olaylar

Geliş Tarihi/Received: 25.03.2021

Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 06.10.2022

Yayın Tarihi/Publication Date: 30.12.2022

Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding Author:
Sercan ÖZTEKİN
E-mail: sercan.oztekinn@gmail.com

Cite this article as: Öztekin, S. (2022). Supernatural Elements and Social Criticism in Charles Dickens's *The Chimes*. *Journal of Literature and Humanities*, 69, 94-99.

Atif: Öztekin, S. (2022). Charles Dickens'in *Çanlar* Adlı Eserinde Doğaüstü Olaylar ve Toplumsal Eleştiri. *Journal of Literature and Humanities*, 69, 94-99.



Content of this journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

Introduction

Supernatural elements like ghosts, spirits, and goblins appear frequently in Charles Dickens's fiction, especially in his ghost stories. Dickens generally sets most of these stories around Christmas time and uses them as a form of social criticism by giving the characters and the reader moral lessons through uncanny forces. *The Chimes* (1844), the second novella in his five Christmas books, criticizes capitalism and social conditions of the poor with the subtitle "a goblin story." Dickens, using fantastic elements in realistic fiction, dwells on the ambivalence that prevailed in the Victorian period. While the society was highly conservative even with its belief in the paranormal and the mystic, it was also becoming modern through social and technical transformations. Thus, there were both religious and scientific interpretations of the unearthly phenomena. Although Dickens refers to religious beliefs by placing the supernatural at a church, he seems to be in favor of psychological explanations by presenting these visions as dream-like situations and hallucinations deriving from characters' social and mental states. In addition to mistreatment of the story's main character and its effects on his psyche, the darker and gothic setting constantly described at the church contributes to psychological and scientific accounts of experiences with the occult. It is often believed that people will more probably encounter ghosts in an eerie or frightening place. In this way, Dickens spotlights scientific explanations of the supernatural while he foregrounds social criticism in the story. With all these aspects in mind, this article explores

how Dickens touches upon Victorian social circumstances and scientific attitudes to the unknown through supernatural elements in *The Chimes* (1844).

The Victorian age was a time of immense social change with scientific and technical improvements; however, this modernization did not eliminate traditional and religious opinions. Purchase points out that the significance of religion declined in the second half of the 19th century, although it survived in certain Christian groups and practices (2006, pp. 119–120). Nonetheless, discussing the assumed decline of faith through the rise in scientific advancements and new economic structure with industrialization, Oppenheim highlights the fact that Victorians “*were fully aware that the place of religion in the cultural fabric of their times was scarcely secure*” (1985, p. 1). Hence, there appeared two-sided explanations for the supernatural. Religious and scientific interpretations of the existence of unearthly phenomena were in opposition, mirroring the social atmosphere of the 19th century. While these mystic entities were seen as reflections of the mind by scientists, more traditional stances regarded them as real.

Eerie and unearthly phenomena were the subjects of great interest for the Victorians. In Victorian prevailing conservatism and religious beliefs, supernatural beings were not just irrational ideas for most of them. People believed the existence of these creatures which might contact them from the other world following death. Spiritualism, dating back to the early 19th century, emerged through interest in the supernatural and focuses on the communication with ghosts and spirits. It was nevertheless criticized for being non-scientific and proposing religious interpretations of the unknown and the unseen. Noakes explains that the popularity of spiritualism is related to common and lasting “*preoccupations about the afterlife and the immortality of the soul*” (2004, p. 26). Therefore, it is not surprising that these attempts to define the supernatural were scorned by the people who were trying to explain the phenomena scientifically.

Supernatural beings were also entertainment for the Victorian reader in ghost stories which stemmed from the gothic tradition of the 18th century. This situation contributed to the interest in spiritualism and mesmerism that looked for explanations for the existence of the uncanny. Victorian society seemed to have ambivalent attitudes about a supernatural occurrence because it usually both scared and attracted people. Generally, a contrast between science and spiritualism was established, and spiritualism was disapproved of not resting upon empirical study. In the meantime, medical practitioners and physiologists explained these mystic phenomena with research into human physiology and the mind, including mental disorders (Noakes, 2004, p. 31). As Henson indicates, such pragmatic clarifications started in the early 19th century with David Brewster and Samuel Hibbert’s propositions that ghosts are reflections of the mind (2004, p. 46). They connected the existence of ghostly beings to physiological changes in the body and the mental effects of these alterations. Another scientific way of accounting for the supernatural phenomena asserted that these visions were the results of merely a “*subjective optical effect*” due to the defective eyesight of an individual (Smajić, 2010, p. 18). That is, contradictory opinions on the supernatural coexisted in the 19th century, and this situation was reflected in literature featuring fantastic and unearthly elements in realistic works. In *The Chimes*, Charles Dickens reflects on scientific explanations of the supernatural because they are linked with the main character’s mental state and his earlier experiences in the story.

The Chimes and Social Criticism

In addition to Dickens’s being a realist writer, his imagination and fiction interacted with the development of spiritualism and the clash between science and religion in the definition of supernatural beings in the 19th century. Dickens shows his interest in the mystic in several short ghost stories which he inserted in his first novel *Pickwick Papers*. This occupation with the eerie and the grotesque in his fiction could be associated with the scary bedtime stories told by his nanny in his childhood, as he explains in *The Uncommercial Traveller* (Chakraborty, 2012, p. 59). With the supernatural and gothic side of his fiction, Dickens combines paranormal elements with realistic settings. Thus, his keen engagement with mysterious phenomena and stories is reflected in his long-standing realist fiction. The popularity of the supernatural, Christmas time tradition of telling spine-chilling tales, and Dickens’s fascination with spiritualist practices all contribute to his creation of ghost stories. He appeals to the masses as he follows the current trends of mystery, sensation, and even detective stories. In a similar way, he includes supernatural motifs in his works because he is aware of the Victorian interest in the supernatural. Despite Dickens’s fictional representations of contradictory stances toward the supernatural, Henson stresses that he was more interested in psychological theories and medical texts about ghosts (2004, p. 45). As Tytler explains, Dickens visited a lot of asylums because of his interest in psychological disorders and patients with these illnesses (1997, p. 424). Moreover, Dickens consulted Brewster and Hibbert’s works while he was involved in the treatment of Augusta de la Rue, whose hallucinations he thought to originate from her nervous system (Henson, 2004, p. 46). Accordingly, he related these apparitions to some nervous and mental disturbances.

Victorian readers “*expected moral messages, as well as amusement*” from such a prolific novelist who had written novels like *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* (Kurata, 1984, p. 19). As a realist writer with his concerns for social ills, it is inevitable to find social criticism even in a fantastic and gothic story. Employing supernatural features, Dickens feeds the readers’ craving for social messages and moral lessons which are significant aspects of his works. One of the most significant functions of supernatural elements in realist fiction is to present social problems and emphasize ethics through certain characters. As Moran states, the ghost story was usually used by writers to raise social awareness and advocate morality (2006, p. 91). Accordingly, Dickens’s ghost stories focus on the theme of penitence and transformation and denounce corruption in society. Regarding the social, economic, and political atmosphere of the Victorian England, it is not surprising that industrialism, capitalism, and the clash between social classes receive the greatest attention and criticism. Smith explains that apparitions generally stand for social problems and Dickens highlights the need to arouse “*some moral insight which can halt the spread of industrialisation*” (2005, p. 51). Dickens, by using the gothic genre, displays injustice and anxieties in the 19th century while calling for sympathy for those who are suffering from terrible conditions. With this in mind, in *The Chimes*, he draws attention to social problems and hypocrisy in addition to psychological overtones related to the experience of the supernatural.

The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In, with its long subtitle, was written in 1844, and it is the second of the five stories in Dickens's Christmas Books. It is centered on Toby Veck and around the people he interacts with. Toby Veck, or Trotty, a destitute man, is made to believe that the working class is inherently worthless and corrupt. One night, upon hearing the bells at the church calling his name, he encounters spirits of the bells and a goblin that condemn him for his self-pity and for ignoring the poor. After they show him disastrous scenes of his family from the future following his death, he wakes up at his home. Slater suggests that *The Chimes* is "more serious and reflective" than other Christmas stories by Dickens, and it is in a position which marks a transition in his literary career "from 'early' to 'late' in both manner and matter" (1966, pp. 108–109). That is, Dickens's interest in social problems and his attempt to focus on them becomes an indispensable part of his "late" fiction. For this reason, he accentuates the issues linked with social structure of the Victorian age and campaigns for social reforms of the situation of the poor and ignorance of the upper classes.

As the title suggests, the story is set on New Year's Eve, not exactly on Christmas day unlike the other Christmas stories. Still, it is pervaded with the Christmas spirit that Dickens wants the readers to feel. It is well-known that Dickens was one of the figures who redefined Christmas and transformed it from a Church-based tradition of abstinence to "a family- and friends-based festival of merriment, giving and generosity" (Chakraborty, 2012, p. 46). The most significant reason why the story is set at that time is to advocate moral order and awareness about social ills. Dickens holds the belief that Christians should feel for people in difficult conditions and sympathize with them, especially with the poor.

Toby Veck is introduced as a ticket porter waiting for work to carry goods, documents, and messages. Dickens highlights his poverty from the very beginning (2006, p. 90). While Toby is waiting for work, he reads a newspaper which features scornful reports about the poor and humiliates them. The newspaper makes him question whether the poor are born corrupt and think that they do not even have a right to celebrate the New Year. Later, his daughter, Meg, announces that she is going to get married to Richard although they are penniless. Their poverty is underlined once again when she says "we are poor now, we shall be poor then" (2006, p. 98). Dickens's purpose in the story is to "bring home to his readers the terrible plight of the poor" (Slater, 1966, p. 132). That is, the poverty of lower classes will not change in this materialist system where the strong always abuse the weaker. Additionally, Meg's remarks show that the poor accept their situation and do not try to start any reforms, and this passiveness of the poor is one of the things Dickens considers wrong.

While Toby is eating the tripe which Meg brought him on his way back home, a few men come out of the house, in front of which Toby is eating. One of these men castigates Toby for eating in front of his house and bothering him. Toby is constantly embarrassed by them because of his poverty and the food he is eating. Mr. Filer, one of the men, says that tripe is "the most wasteful article of consumption" (Dickens, 2006, p. 99) to eat, so it is a significant object standing for poverty and humiliation of the lower class. Alderman Cute, the other man, is the embodiment of hypocrisy and pretentious gentility, so he is a vehicle for social criticism. He assumes "an offensive familiarity with the common people" and "effectively isolates them as an inferior class" (Kurata, 1984, p. 23). He claims to be familiar with "this sort of people" and to treat them kindly, but he constantly degrades the members of this class (Dickens, 2006, p. 102). Additionally, Mr. Filer implies that "they have no right or business to be married" and "to be born" (2006, p. 104). Following his ignominious remarks about Toby, Cute starts criticizing Meg upon learning about her marriage to Richard. He warns her about a scary image of the future because he says that the couple will be poor and miserable with the many children they will probably have. He adds that he will not forgive or help her when she will be desperately in need of help. Also, he says that he will not pity her if she drowns or hangs herself because it will be her fault. Dickens refers to his hypocrisy because, later in Toby's vision, Cute says that he "shall make a point of wearing the deepest mourning" for the suicide of a respectable banker (2006, p. 134). That is to say, people like them do not care about the poor as much as they do for people with higher social status.

Then, Toby delivers a letter from Alderman Cute to Sir Joseph Bowley who is a member of parliament and as hypocritical as Cute. The letter is about a man called Will Fern who was brought to court for "being found at night asleep in a shed," but Sir Joseph does not feel pity for him (Dickens, 2006, p. 112). He constantly declares that he is the poor's father, but it is very superficial because he humiliates them indirectly by trying to take control of them. Regarding this social control, Alderman Cute and Mr. Filer were also talking about punishing Will Fern as a lesson for the public because of his so-called crime. Additionally, Sir Joseph rebukes Toby for his small amount of debt and implies that he does not have a right to "look at New Year in the face" and even "lie down on his bed" comfortably (Dickens, 2006, p. 114). He does not offer financial support or even sympathize with him. In this way, he is very similar to Alderman Cute in his manners and attitude toward the working class. Smith explains this bigotry and corruption by writing that "the economically powerful have failed because of their inappropriate use of wealth" (2005, p. 43). In contrast to this upper-class pretence and dishonesty, Toby's humbleness prevents him from distinguishing between Bowley's statements and reality. Thus, through the insults of these ignorant characters, Dickens points out how the working class internalizes the idea of their worthlessness and misery themselves.

At home that night, upon reading some other depressing news about the desperate poor and recalling his interaction with the prejudiced upper class, Toby hears the bells calling his name and climbs the church tower. He feels dizzy and faints because of the gothic and mesmerizing atmosphere of the church at night. When Toby wakes up, he sees "the Goblin Sight" and the tower "swarming with dwarf phantoms, spirits, elfin creatures of the Bells" (Dickens, 2006, p. 125). With the presence of these unearthly beings, Dickens keeps up the gothic and frightening atmosphere of the tower with a detailed description "of the dread and terror of the lonely place," and "of the wild and fearful night that reigned there" (2006, p. 127). It is depicted as a dream-like and even a nightmarish experience for Toby, as he feels very scared and shocked by this sight after such a hypnagogic state. The second half of the story begins with this surreal atmosphere which Dickens maintains until the end.

After this gothic and terrifying effect both on Toby and the reader, the Goblin and the spirits start a diatribe of social criticism addressing Toby which is their most important function in the story. They start talking about time and the improvement of humanity. They also say that the ones who only cry and lament their own situation do wrong. Dickens alludes to social responsibility for poverty-stricken ones.

In addition, these unearthly beings mention “*the Putters Down of the crushed and broken natures,*” which is a clear reference to figures like Alderman Cute and his hypocrisy and inhumanity to the poor (Dickens, 2006, p. 129). Most importantly, they address the one “*who turns his back upon the fallen and disfigured of his kind*” as guilty (2006, p. 129). As Alderman Cute constantly talks about putting down the poor and their careless behavior, this reference is very obvious. Dickens clearly intends to criticize the people who abandon even their own kind.

Following the commentary on humanity and social problems, the spirits start showing Toby scenes from the future. First, they show him scenes of Meg, which reflects his mental state because of his attachment to his daughter and Cute’s severe criticism of her. In visions about Meg, Toby sees her as very poor and in miserable conditions. He sees her as an older woman, 9 years after his death. Dickens refers to Toby’s psychology because all the things he experienced and heard that day materialize in his visions at the church. Meg is terribly impoverished and desperate, and Richard, her husband, is drunk and possibly unemployed. These things are just the same as Alderman Cute expressed earlier that day. The Goblin and the Spirits show Toby the things that mortified him in his encounters with the men. In later visions, it is understood that Meg and Richard’s marriage has become difficult because of Richard’s drinking and idling which made him lose everything. When Richard gets ill and dies, Meg goes out and attempts to drown herself and her baby in the river. This vision implies Cute’s previous statements about Meg’s possibly killing herself in the future, which has probably left remarkable effects on Toby’s psyche.

In another scene shown by the spirits, Toby sees Sir Bowley’s house, a celebration, and “*a great dinner*” there (Dickens, 2006, p. 132). This scene is a total contrast with Meg’s life. There are also poor people and children, and they are playing together with the rich. Dickens tries to say that these things could only happen in dreams or another world, not in the real world. Also, Will Fern appears and talks to the men because of being wrongly accused of his petty crime. It is understood that he was in prison, and he wants to tell the truth, looking for justice. He is trying to say that he is accused wrongly, just because he is poor. He is imprisoned for anything, and the government is very eager to say “*to jail with him*” which he says constantly to criticize the unjust treatment of the underprivileged (2006, p. 138). Moreover, he adds that they should treat the poor better. Normally, the poor cannot enter such a house as Sir Bowley’s, and an indigent man like Will Fern cannot talk to them in this annoying and disrespectful manner. Accordingly, Dickens disapproves of this clash between classes and points out that treating the poor badly is the biggest problem for society. He uses Will Fern as a mouthpiece in his criticism of insensibility and brutality of the upper class.

These visions are shown to Toby in pieces, one about Meg, another about the upper-class members, and then another one about Meg. Dickens deliberately employs this narrative style in order to emphasize differences between the social classes and their lives. Just as fantasy and reality are juxtaposed in the story, the poor and the rich are gathered and described together in Toby’s visions.

The Supernatural as Psychological Reflections

In addition to conspicuous social satire and criticism in the first half of the story, Dickens presents the reasons for Toby’s traumatized psychology and confused mind which will lead him to his uncanny experience with the goblin and the spirits at the church. The bells at the church are significant devices that combine Toby’s social anxiety and embarrassment with his visions including the supernatural features. The bells are constantly present in each section of the story. As Bauer points out, Toby’s life is linked to the bells in a variety of interconnected ways “*from the physiological and psychological to the allegorical as well as supernatural*” (2015, p. 113). Dickens provides a very detailed eerie description of the church and the bells, which contribute to the gothic atmosphere and the revelation of memories in Toby’s unconscious. Toby identifies himself with the bells because there are many similarities between them. The bells stand there the whole day in a similar way to Toby, and people do not look at the bells just as they ignore him. Whether he feels happy or sad, he imagines that the bells are talking to him. While he is waiting for work or thinking about his situation after his conversation with Alderman Cute, he imagines the bells contact and sympathize with him. Therefore, Dickens forms a connection between them prior to Toby’s later supernatural encounters at the church.

Dickens combines Toby’s experiences in the first half and the mystic phenomena in the second half with the ending, and that makes the reader question reality and fantasy in the story. Harris states that fantastic agents are the outcomes of social and cultural anxieties and desires (2008, p. 3). Toby’s experiences with unearthly beings are obviously related to his psyche and traumatic meetings with the so-called philanthropists and politicians earlier in the story. As observed, in the visions shown to him, Toby does not see any places where he has not been before. This again lays emphasis on the influence of psychological reflections and these visions being dream-like. Kurata indicates that “*the dream visions are realistic, not only because they depict the actual degradation and desperation of the Victorian poor, but also because they are based on sound psychology*” (1984, p. 26). Ironically, these fantastic visions are realistic despite the fact that they are reflected by Toby’s psychology and social problems as triggering factors. Moreover, these Goblin visions which terrify Toby are equally terrifying to the reader because “*they are the shadows of reality*” (Kurata, 1984, p. 26). However horrifying and unreal the visions seem, they are based on real social problems and trauma that is present in Toby’s mind. In a similar way to Henson’s commentary on Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, Toby’s memory and altered state of mind and his concerns about the future, blended with the spirit of Christmas, become the substance of his visions (2004, pp. 47–48). In this way, Dickens specifies the significance of psychology regarding scientific explanations for the supernatural.

Dickens makes a clear reference to psychology and the operation of the brain by describing mind like a “*Sea of Thought*” where a variety of objects are merged in an interesting and inexplicable way (2006, p. 125). Furthermore, he highlights the fact that the mind is a gigantic matter which should be studied in detail to reveal a lot of incidents connected to people’s personalities, traumas, or dreams. Similarly, Henson argues that the existence of the supernatural is related to the identities of the protagonists “*with memory playing a crucial*

role" (2004, p. 47). Toby possibly remembers every single detail of humiliating comments about him and his family, so it is inevitable that his visions reflect on these comments and how effective they are on his psyche. Additionally, Pykett suggests that the fantastic in literature, with sensation, has its origins in "the personal or political unconscious" and repressed, marginalized, and silenced groups attempting to react against the social and political institutions (2001, p. 193). In other words, Dickens points out that the psychology of the poor is negatively affected by traumas caused by social and political insensitivity for their conditions.

Dickens makes the reader ponder on Toby's psyche and his traumas caused by social inequality and hypocritical politicians and aristocrats. Toby's visions are based on "the operations of the mind" (Dickson, 2020, p. 6). Through the effects of his experiences earlier in the story, Toby's mind provokes a psychological response to social injustice, insensitivity, and hypocrisy. This reaction includes fantastic elements and Victorian interest in the occult and traditional ghost stories in a gothic setting. In addition, Harris clarifies that "[t]he gothic in literature typically expresses a fateful burden of the past upon the present by externalizing the negative psychology of aberrant individuals in an isolated location" (2008, p. 19). Toby's visions about Meg make the reader consider the psychological side of the experiences with the supernatural. Alderman Cute's criticism and visionary talk on Meg's future must have such a powerful effect on Toby that he cannot get rid of the trauma and sees these visions the Goblin and the spirits show. As Dickens writes in the story, "spirits of the bells are in the shape of thoughts of the mortals" (2006, p. 131). That is to say, these uncanny beings and experiences with them can be read as manifestations of Toby's psychological concerns.

The fact that Toby floats "up the staircase like mere air" presents him in a ghost-like manner regarding his possible death, or his being in a dream, floating from scene to scene (Dickens, 2006, p. 150). In this way, Dickens refers to Toby's status as a ghost or a dreamer. Furthermore, the Goblin and the spirits show Toby dead lying on the ground, and he watches his own image in a ghost-like situation. In this way, Dickens keeps the reader suspicious if these visions are real after his death, or if he is just dreaming. Following his final vision where he is trying to save Meg from drowning, he wakes up and sees Meg by the bed. Then, Richard comes and waits until they can get married. There is a final scene of celebration, happiness, with the marriage and the Christmas spirit, so Dickens provides a hopeful ending. Although it seems that Toby was possibly dreaming all these things with the Goblin and the spirits, Dickens keeps the end unclear, leaving the reader think if it was a dream or a real experience. This mood is sustained even at the end of the story:

Had Trotty 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? If it be so, O listener, dear to him in all his visions, try to bear in mind the stern realities from which these shadows come; [...] So may the New Year be a happy one to you, happy to many more whose happiness depends on you! (Dickens, 2006, p. 161).

Here, Dickens elaborates on the possibility that Toby's awakening might be a dream within a dream. He emphasizes "the mind's capacity for altered states of consciousness" (Dickson, 2020, p. 1). In this way, the subject is infiltrated by "shadows," and concerns derive from "stern realities" which Dickens successfully displays in the novella (2006, p. 161). Accordingly, these darker thoughts and fears are freed when the subject is asleep. At the same time, Toby's awakening could be read as a symbolic one related to his epiphany through the visions and realities presented to him. Upon waking up, he understands the visions or dreams may become real starting with Meg's marriage; however, he cannot change anything about their situation. With the emphasis on their misery and poverty, Dickens makes the reader feel social responsibility for them as well. Even if his visions are his dreams, the most important thing is that they are all based on real problems and the need for change in society.

Conclusion

The most significant two issues to study in *The Chimes* are Dickens's social commentary and his references to realistic interpretations of the supernatural rather than the religious. Through the story, Dickens combines Victorian interest in the mystic phenomena and neglect of responsibility for social problems. He tries to explain unearthly creatures, making them linked to human psychology and social circumstances of the Victorian age. He advocates awareness for the conditions of vulnerable and needy people in society. While doing this, he underscores the psychological effects of this social injustice and neglect on these people. Dickens wants to point out that it is not the goblins or spirits we must be afraid of, but it is the hypocritical and so-called philanthropists who are the real monsters because they are indifferent to the real needs and conditions of the poor. That is to say, Dickens suggests that the privileged ignoring these citizens are as guilty as the criminals they fiercely reprimand and exclude. With this social criticism in a ghost story, it can be inferred that the Victorians do not care about the poor as much as they are interested in the supernatural. Thus, *The Chimes* is possibly Dickens's most peculiar Christmas story because it has a highly realistic evaluation and description of society, besides an ordinary Christmas spirit of hope and happiness. What is more, Dickens foregrounds the reader's responsibility for the ones who need help and support.

Finally, although it has ghostly elements in it, it is totally realistic in social description and its critique of social injustice. Dickens uses the fantastic elements to generate an effect on the reader and makes his social commentary more effective in this way, instead of saying it directly. Fantastic features become the elements which enable the unsaid truths to be told in an efficient manner. In other words, realistic and fantastic characteristics coexist in the story, yet realistic attempts to stress social problems are achieved through supernatural features. This might also indicate the impossibility of any solution attempted or offered by the people in the real world. Dickens might not believe in the people of his time. The interesting thing is that the defense of the poor is textually accomplished by the use of supernatural figures in this story. These creatures are the only ones that can openly call attention to social ills and inequality in the conditions of lower classes. Although Dickens sets the stories, including *The Chimes*, around Christmas and the New Year, he does not endeavor to give religious but moral lessons about the social problems in the Victorian age. That is, the condition of the poor and their psychological states caused by social inequality need more attention than supernatural phenomena do.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Declaration of Interests: The author declares that they have no competing interest.

Funding: The author declares that this study had received no financial support.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazar, bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

References

- Bauer, M. (2015). The Chimes and the rhythm of life, In J. Frenk & L. Steveker (Eds.). *Charles Dickens as an agent of change*. Associated Medical Services Press.
- Chakraborty, S. (2012). Dark side of the moon: Dickens and the supernatural. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, IV(1), 58–72.
- Dickens, C. (2006). The Chimes. In R. Douglas-Fairhurst (Ed.). *A Christmas carol and other christmas books*. Oxford University Press.
- Dickson, M. (2020). Dickens's nightmare: Dreams, memory, and trauma. *Interface Focus*, 10(3), 20190076. [CrossRef]
- Harris, J. M. (2008). *Folklore and the fantastic in nineteenth-century British fiction*. Ashgate.
- Henson, L. (2004). Investigations and fictions: Charles Dickens and ghosts. In N. Bown, C. Burdett & P. Thurschwell (Eds.). *The Victorian supernatural*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kurata, M. J. (1984). Fantasy and realism: A defense of *The Chimes*. *Dickens Studies Annual*, 13, 19–34.
- Moran, M. (2006). *Victorian literature and culture*. Continuum.
- Noakes, R. (2004). Spiritualism, science, and the supernatural in mid-Victorian Britain. In N. Bown, C. Burdett & P. Thurschwell (Eds.). *The Victorian supernatural*. Cambridge University Press.
- Oppenheim, J. (1985). *The other world: Spiritualism and psychical research in England, 1850–1914*. Cambridge University Press.
- Purchase, S. (2006). *Key concepts in Victorian literature*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pykett, L. (2001). Sensation and the fantastic in the Victorian novel. In D. David (Ed.). *The Cambridge companion to the Victorian novel*. Cambridge University Press.
- Slater, M. (1966). Dickens (and Forster) at work on *the Chimes*. *Dickens Studies*, 2/3, 106–140.
- Smajić, S. (2010). *Ghost-seers, detectives, and spiritualists: Theories of vision in Victorian literature and science*. Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, A. (2005). Dickens' ghosts: Invisible economies and christmas. *Victorian Review*, 31(2), 36–55. [CrossRef]
- Tytler, G. (1997). Charles Dickens's 'the Signalman': A case of partial insanity? *History of Psychiatry*, 8(31 Pt 3), 421–432. [CrossRef]