Unlike the blighted child, who is always the victim of the adults around him, in the crucial transitional period between childhood and maturity about to be examined, the growing youth must himself take responsibility for the future course of his life. Like the struggle for existence at birth and death, the transition is difficult as, for the second time, the individual is torn from an environment of effortless warmth, support, and comfort. Small wonder if occasionally a potential adult tenaciously assumes the fetal position and makes a career of being a preserved baby in a bottle; for coming out of the childhood garden means that he must acquire a precise sense of time, recognize responsibility and limitations upon personal freedom, and struggle painfully with the implications of his developing understanding. He must likewise accept the conditions of life in the world of hard fact if he is to live at all; he must be both willing and able to make the distinction between dream and actuality, and to acknowledge that whatever may be the relationship between the inner and outer worlds, it is not that of magic wish fulfillment.

For this is the other side of the coin. Although castles in the air are the grand accomplishment of the child imagination and fancy in the protected garden, they are not in fact inhabitable. They emblematize the capacity to see visions and dream dreams—but also portray the soul-destroying consequences of becoming lost in a "groundless" world: of trying to protect the cherished inner world by rejecting the very dubious outer one. For just as the attempt to deny reality to the dream world likewise denies all that gives life
real value, so the attempt to deny reality to the world of hard facts is to deny the stuff of life itself.

In childhood, it has been seen, at first the phenomena of both worlds are equally "all new and all true": no gap exists between them, and "great expectations" encompass "great fulfillment" as a matter of course. Now the youth must try to reconcile with his dreams an empirical world that he discovers is quite indifferent to them. In this borderland between child and adult, then, the maturing individual must come to renounce "great expectations." Like all the others, this transitional struggle is crucial, for the person unwilling or unable to relinquish his dreams of magical fulfillment will remain, temporarily or forever, a half-adult fixated at an immature level of development, often hiding as a pseudo-child among the innocents in the garden.

The "great expectations" configuration in Dickens is loosely constructed. The adult builder of air castles is still a child with his easy optimism, irresponsibility, and egocentricity. His character is established by freezing him into the childhood surroundings, either as an adult interloper in the garden or as a bewitched child in a fairy tale. Nothing good may be said for great expectations: they blight or destroy character by encouraging the irresponsible qualities of the "undisciplined heart"; they blind their possessor to the "facts" of life and involve him in a painful readjustment if he is to recover from them. Because of these deadly effects, this configuration overlaps frequently with the marsh images, especially when an adult decides to disguise himself as a child and to remain in the protected garden for his own purposes.

Such an adult is Harold Skimpole, who roams predatory through the Bleak House country as a pseudo-child. Skimpole demonstrates the destructive consequences of air castles, not because they are airy and unrealizable, but rather because he succeeds so well in making them materialize for his selfish purposes. For Harold Skimpole is a professional. As a preserved child he lives a free and easy life quite above the restrictions and limitations that hamper most people. Examination of Skimpole, therefore (and of his foil character, Lawrence Boythorn), will show us the characteristics and consequences of the childhood exploiter in his most efficient and slickly polished form. Skimpole is quite frank about his superiority to a standard of judgment that would condemn his opportunistic betrayal of the child Jo. Says Skimpole: "I am exactly the man to be placed in a superior position, in such a case as that. I
am above the rest of mankind, in such a case as that. I can act with philosophy, in such a case as that. I am not warped by prejudices, as an Italian baby is by bandages. I am as free as the air. I feel myself as far above suspicion as Caesar's wife'" (BH, ch. 61). Skimpole might well assert his pride in maintaining himself as a baby without bandages, for it has taken all his endowment of clever resources to preserve himself in that irresponsible state.

Like Grandfather Smallweed, Skimpole has gathered about himself a peculiar family. As he himself observes to Ada Clare and Esther Summerson on the occasion of their visit to his uneven apartment (its elegance fading away from his presence): "'It is pleasant . . . and it is whimsically interesting, to trace peculiarities in families.'" Had he known the Smallweeds, he would have noted with special interest a family peculiarity in direct contrast to his own. "'In this family,'" he adds with simple pride, "'we are all children, and I am the young-est'" (ch. 43). Skimpole the child is his own favorite subject, and Esther observes "the fantastic way in which he took himself under his own protection and argued about that curious person."

John Jarndyce, with his sincere love for all children, also takes this child under his protection, though not without suspicion of an east wind blowing up. "'There's no one here,'" says Jarndyce, "'but the finest creature upon earth—a child. . . . I don't mean literally a child,' pursued Mr. Jarndyce; 'not a child in years. He is grown up—he is at least as old as I am—but in simplicity, and freshness, and enthusiasm, and a fine guileless inaptitude for all worldly af- fairs, he is a perfect child'" (ch. 6). It would be, suggests this good man, "'the height of childishness . . . to regard him as a man. You can't make him responsible.'"

Esther's first impression of this child is that he is "a little bright creature, with a rather large head; 1 but a delicate face, and a sweet voice, and there was a perfect charm about him. All he said was so free from effort and spontaneous, and was said with such a captivating gaiety, that it was fascinating to hear him talk." But Esther has too much common sense to be taken in by this pseudo-child:

Indeed, [she records] he had more the appearance, in all respects, of a damaged young man, than a well-preserved elderly one. There was an easy negligence in his manner, and even in his dress . . . which I could not separate from the idea of a romantic youth who had undergone some unique process of depreciation. It struck me as being not at all like the manner or appearance of a man who had advanced in life, by the usual road of years, cares, and experiences. (ch. 6)
That other receptacle of common sense, Mr. Bucket, similarly has the number of "that elderly young gentleman" (ch. 57). Esther has expressed her view that Skimpole's treachery has passed "the usual bounds of his childish innocence." Bucket quickly gives her a piece of advice respecting the "bounds" of such a person:

"Bounds, my dear? . . . Bounds? . . . Whenever a person proclaims to you 'In worldly matters I'm a child,' you consider that that person is only a-crying off from being held accountable, and that you have got that person's number, and it's Number One. Now, I am not a poetical man myself, except in a vocal way when it goes round a company, but I'm a practical one, and that's my experience. So's this rule. Fast and loose in one thing, Fast and loose in everything. I never knew it fail. No more will you. Nor no one." (ch. 57)

There never was a man more fast and loose than Harold Skimpole. To acquire freedom, he might have said, looking guileless, one need only demand it—such a simple thing: "Now, my dear Miss Summerson, and my dear Mr. Richard," said Mr. Skimpole, gaily, innocently and confidingly, as he looked at his drawing with his head on one side; 'here you see me utterly incapable of helping myself, and entirely in your hands! I only ask to be free. The butterflies are free. Mankind will surely not deny to Harold Skimpole what it concedes to the butterflies!"' (ch. 6). Certainly no bounds constrict the man for whom "time is no object," and who can conceive of the world on no smaller terms than "the universe" with none of the sordid limiting realities of the world of hard facts. He has a delicate sentiment toward Ada, "the child of the universe." Jarndyce advances the opinion that the undifferentiated universe makes "rather an indifferent parent," to which Skimpole replies:

"Well! . . . you know the world (which in your sense is the universe), and I know nothing of it, so you shall have your way. But if I had mine," glancing at the cousins [Richard and Ada], "there should be no brambles of sordid realities in such a path as that. It should be strewn with roses; it should lie through bowers, where there was no spring, autumn, nor winter, but perpetual summer. Age or change should never wither it. The base word money should never be breathed near it." (ch. 6)

In the world in which Skimpole dwells, this gracious thought is as good as the deed, for he has resolved not to recognize the dismaying gap between the dream and the factual worlds. He therefore
plays happily in the idyllic garden of a make-believe world where, as in the toy theatre, nothing is but thinking makes it so. And—dazzlingly—"what with his free hilarious manner, and his engaging candour, and his genial way" he seems to say to all those foolish adults about him, "I am gay and innocent; forget your worldly arts and play with me!" in a grotesque imitation of the invitation extended to the traveller by the child in the garden. (see ch. V) His decadent pleasure in the good things of the garden is tagged by his laggard love of fruits out of season. If Dr. Blimber's children were prematurely "forced" to bear flavorless fruit before their time, this man with his parade of "basket(s) of choice hothouse peaches" (ch. 18), his "little plate of hothouse nectarines on the table, and . . . another of grapes" (ch. 43) like them comes to artificial ripeness with a false blush on the cheek. "Give me my peach, my cup of coffee, and my claret," he says, handing about grapes never to be paid for; "I am content. I don't want them for themselves, but they remind me of the sun" (ch. 43). The reminder is as good as the actuality—better, for it is never clouded over on a rainy day.

In fact, Skimpole has perfected the art of substituting the thought for the deed, and finds the result personally most satisfactory:

"I don't regret [he explains] that I have not a strong will and an immense power of business-detail, to throw myself into objects with surprising ardour. I can admire [Mrs. Jellyby] without envy. I can sympathise with the objects. I can dream of them. I can lie down on the grass—in fine weather—and float along an African river, embracing all the natives I meet, as sensible of the deep silence, and sketching the dense overhanging tropical growth as accurately, as if I were there." (ch. 6)

With the most engaging and rational of arguments, he cannot understand why the rest of the world fails to accept this eminently sensible position:

He had been enriching his medical attendant in the most lavish manner. He had always doubled, and sometimes quadrupled, his fees. He had said to the doctor, "Now, my dear doctor, it is quite a delusion on your part to suppose that you attend me for nothing. I am overwhelming you with money—in my expansive intentions—if you only knew it!" And really (he said) he meant it to that degree, that he thought it much the same as doing it. If he had had those bits of metal or thin paper, to which mankind attached so much importance,
to put in the doctor's hand, he would have put them in the doctor's hand. Not having them, he substituted the will for the deed. Very well! If he really meant it—if his will were genuine and real: which it was—it appeared to him that it was the same as coin, and cancelled the obligation. (ch. 15)

As a matter of strict accuracy, this apparently most frivolous and careless view of life is the most practical of philosophies for the shrewd, willful, and egocentric parasite who declines to accept the pain and suffering that are the real price of commitment to life at this crucial transitional point between childhood and maturity. Although Skimpole smilingly denies that he has the least idea what a "principle" is (ch. 18), he nonetheless has a clear and simple philosophy by which he lives and which he expounds with his usual engaging frankness. Like the Utilitarians, he seeks pleasure and avoids pain. "When I go anywhere," he says, "I go for pleasure. I don't go anywhere for pain, because I was made for pleasure. Pain comes to me when it wants me" (ch. 61). This simple principle quickly removes him from any scene of distress and saves him a great deal of trouble.

"And he is a child. Now, isn't he?" asks John Jarndyce for reassurance (ch. 6). Well, yes and no. He is a child in form, but the child heart is missing. His innocent benefactor unconsciously recognizes this lack in further observing: "As to Skimpole . . . a habitable doll's house, with good board, and a few tin people to get into debt with and borrow money of, would set the boy up for life." The most that Skimpole dreams of is to endure forever in this hollow existence that will lead Bella Harmon of Our Mutual Friend to protest: "I want to be something so much worthier than a doll in a doll's house" (OMF, bk. IV, ch. 5). But Skimpole is inconvenienced by no such unsettling ambition.

The curious reader may feel inclined to ask Ada's question: "Pray, cousin John, . . . what made him such a child?" Though rubbing his head, a little at a loss, Jarndyce attempts an explanation.

"Why," he slowly replied, roughening his head more and more, "he is all sentiment, and—susceptibility, and—and sensibility—and—and imagination. And these qualities are not regulated in him, somehow. I suppose the people who admired him for them in his youth, attached too much importance to them, and too little to any training that would have balanced and adjusted them; and so he became what he is. Hey?" (BH, ch. 43)
Or, as Bucket might say, nothing has apparently ever put any limiting "bounds" on his studied childish innocence. For what is required to grow up is attaching "sentiment, and—and susceptibility, and—and sensibility—and—and imagination" to living objects rather than freeing them in the imaginary garden for the enhancement of one's own pleasure: to "regulate" and "balance" these qualities of the dream world one must put them to work in the actual world—must transform hypocrisy and sentimentality into honest sentiment. The defining characteristics assigned to Harold Skimpole represented to Dickens a pragmatic failure, and mark the point in the path where he parted company with Wordsworth in his idealization of childhood.

Yet, as if fearful that he might not be understood, Dickens created an antithetical character to help take Skimpole's measure: also "boundless," also childish, also overwhelming—but nonetheless endearing and warm. Lawrence Boythorn, too, may have been a little deficient in "any training that would have balanced and adjusted" his qualities, but who would object when these qualities are an expansive child's heart and a quick, passionate action in response to its promptings? For the child heart, though difficult to maintain, is the one part of the child most precious to preserve.

A gentleman in Nicholas Nickleby, telling the story of "The Five Sisters of York," eulogizes the youngest sister, Alice, for her gladsome voice and merry laugh, which infected all around her with witching glee. This gentleman is led to rhapsodize about the measureless worth of the heart from which such joy springs, and to lament the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of maintaining such a heart through the vicissitudes of life.

"If we all had hearts like those which beat so lightly in the bosoms of the young and beautiful, what a heaven this earth would be! If, while our bodies grow old and withered, our hearts could but retain their early youth and freshness, of what avail would be our sorrows and sufferings! But the faint image of Eden which is stamped upon them in childhood, chafes and rubs in our rough struggles with the world, and soon wears away; 'too often to leave nothing but a mournful blank remaining." (NN, ch. 6)

This child heart of Lawrence Boythorn, through some magic of invulnerability, has survived even a blighted love to make a pathway of some brightness through the world. But the child heart is such an anomaly in the adult world that Boythorn too wears the eccen-
tric look. We repeat, however: who would object to such heart-warming eccentricity?

Yet some do. Harold Skimpole and his admirer, Sir Leicester Dedlock, are less than enthusiastic about Boythorn. It is ironic that a man so unrestrained as Harold Skimpole should be a little reserved about a similar quality in Boythorn. "'Nature forgot to shade him off, I think?' observed Mr. Skimpole . . . 'A little too boisterous—like the sea? A little too vehement—like a bull, who has made up his mind to consider every colour scarlet? But I grant a sledge-hammering sort of merit in him'" (BH, ch. 15). Skimpole, of course, is unrestrained in the gratification of his personal desires and appetites, while Boythorn is unrestrained in his right-hearted explosions. Esther, for one, would be surprised if these two thought very highly of each other: "Mr. Boythorn attaching so much importance to many things, and Mr. Skimpole caring so little for anything."

Time, for instance. Boythorn has invited Esther, Ada, and Skimpole for a visit to Lincolnshire. When they arrive, via coach, he is waiting, charged with energy and good-natured impatience.

"By Heaven!" said he, after giving us a courteous greeting, "this is a most infamous coach. It is the most flagrant example of an abominable public vehicle that ever encumbered the face of the earth. It is twenty-five minutes after its time, this afternoon. The coachman ought to be put to death!"

"Is he after his time?" said Mr. Skimpole, to whom he happened to address himself. "You know my infirmity."

"Twenty-five minutes! Twenty-six minutes!" replied Mr. Boythorn, referring to his watch. "With two ladies in the coach, this scoundrel has deliberately delayed his arrival six-and-twenty minutes. Deliberately! It is impossible that it can be accidental!" (ch. 18)

Boythorn's precise sense of time not only sets him at odds with Skimpole, but also points out his vitality. It would seem in the natural order of things, then, that Skimpole and Boythorn should on occasion tangle. If their skirmishes never quite come off, the uneasy peace between them is maintained on the one hand by Skimpole's indisposition ever to take a stand that will bring him into disharmony with his companions of the moment—on the grounds that "everybody's business in the social system is to be agreeable" and on the other hand by Boythorn's high sense of responsible hospitality, which keeps their little dialogues from ending "in some violent explosion on the part of our host."
The Boythorn establishment itself mirrors a man at poles remove from the one who lives provisionally in an untidy apartment spottily supplied with furniture that comes and goes, and who lives on food brought in out of season and never paid for:

Everything about the place wore an aspect of maturity and abundance. The old lime-tree walk was like green cloisters, the very shadows of the cherry-trees and apple-trees were heavy with fruit, the gooseberry-bushes were so laden that their branches arched and rested on the earth, the strawberries and raspberries grew in like profusion, and the peaches basked by the hundred on the wall. Tumbled about among the spread nets and the glass frames sparkling and winking in the sun, there were such heaps of drooping pods, and marrows, and cucumbers, that every foot of ground appeared a vegetable treasury, while the smell of sweet herbs and all kinds of wholesome growth (to say nothing of the neighbouring meadows where the hay was carrying) made the whole air a great nosegay. Such stillness and composure reigned within the orderly precincts of the old red wall, that even the feathers hung in garlands to scare the birds hardly stirred; and the wall had such a ripening influence that where, here and there high up, a disused nail and scrap of list still clung to it, it was easy to fancy that they had mellowed with the changing seasons, and that they had rusted and decayed according to the common fate. (ch. 18)

This is the home of a man who, with his acceptance of time, has also accepted change and mortality: who is content to mellow into the harvest season of maturity, to grow old and decay along with the rest of the created world. He is a man, that is, in marked contrast to Skimpole, that depreciated and damaged young/old man who has avoided “advancing in life, by the usual road of years, cares and experiences,” and whose best wish for his young friends, Richard and Ada, must be that age or change should never wither them.

With the introduction of Richard and Ada, it can be seen that the heart of the difference between Skimpole and Boythorn can be gauged by their attitude and practice toward tender, vulnerable things. Everywhere in Dickens, the really appropriate test for measuring the distance between sentimentality and real sentiment is a child. In Bleak House, a parade of children trails through the various plot lines revealing the true nature of the adults around them: Jo, the Smallweeds, the Jellybys, the Pardiggles, the Coavinses—and the hapless brood entrusted to Harold Skimpole.

On the very first occasion when Esther meets Skimpole, John Jarndyce has just prepared his guests for an encounter with “a per-
fect child.” A child, they learn in rapid succession, who knows and admires Mrs. Jellyby (another escapee into a more malleable world) and who is an “Artist”—“an Amateur, but might have been a Professional.”8 And then Esther’s guardian ingenuously supplies the other half of the necessary information:

“... he has been unfortunate in his affairs, and unfortunate in his pursuits, and unfortunate in his family; but he don’t care—he’s a child!”

“Did you imply that he has children of his own, sir?” inquired Richard.

“Yes, Rick! Half-a-dozen. More! Nearer a dozen, I should think. But he has never looked after them. How could he? He wanted somebody to look after him. He is a child, you know!” said Mr. Jarndyce.

“And have the children looked after themselves at all, sir?” inquired Richard.

“Why, just as you may suppose,” said Mr. Jarndyce: his countenance suddenly falling. “It is said that the children of the very poor are not brought up, but dragged up. Harold Skimpole’s children have tumbled up somehow or other.—The wind’s getting round again, I am afraid. I feel it rather!” (ch. 6)

For Skimpole long ago, as the youth in the idyllic garden of irresponsibility, having just lost his first position as a medical practitioner, and “having (as he added with delightful gaiety) ‘nothing to live upon but love, fell in love, and married, and surrounded himself with rosy cheeks’” (ch. 6). Like the other innocent victims in Bleak House, his children too fall under the damaging influence of “adult” irresponsibility. Therefore, he is not only a parasite upon society, but is also a blighter of childhood. His cavalier attitude toward the troubles of the Coavinses children likewise reveals his monstrous callousness as he not only ignores their plight but also pretends to have been their benefactor in giving employment to their father, the debt collector.

He said, Well, it was really very pleasant to see how things lazily adapted themselves to purposes.... He could have dispensed with Coavinses. There had been times when, if he had been a Sultan, and his Grand Vizier had said one morning, “What does the Commander of the Faithful require at the hands of his slave?” he might have even gone so far as to reply, “The head of Coavinses!” But what turned out to be the case? That, all that time, he had been giving employment to a most deserving man; that he had been a benefactor to Coavinses... (ch. 15)
Skimpole is again so touchingly affected with sentiment at the thought that his eyes fill with tears and his heart swells magnanimously. Did only Dickens detect the guilty Sultan in this captivating soliloquy—or did he intend to convey that perhaps the shrewd Skimpole was engaged in a furious frenzy of talk to conceal from those about him his own awareness of evaded responsibility? No matter—the guilty Sultan flashes for a glittering moment across the scene.

The truth is that, to Skimpole, children, like other people, are valuable only as convenient props for his own comfort and security, or as marketable commodities to be exploited for their exchange value. Consider the case of Jo. Sick and weary, he has been brought home by the compassionate Esther. Skimpole, a guest at Bleak House, views the wretched boy with fastidious distaste and disposes of him with his customary frivolous logic: "You had better turn him out," says Skimpole. "If you put him out in the road, you only put him where he was before. He will be no worse off than he was, you know. Even make him better off, if you like. Give him sixpence, or five shillings, or five pound ten—you are arithmeticians, and I am not—and get rid of him!" (ch. 31). By remarkable coincidence, as Esther long afterwards learns from Mr. Bucket, the callous suggestion only modestly foreshadows what actually happens. For on that very night, Bucket appears at Bleak House on the trail of Jo. "'I made up my mind, that night,'" the detective recalls, "'to come to the door and ask for Toughey [Jo], if that was all.'" Instead, however, he tosses a handful of gravel against a window behind which he sees a shadow moving:

"As soon as Harold opens it and I have had a look at him, thinks I, you're the man for me. So I smoothed him down a bit, about not wanting to disturb the family after they was gone to bed, and about its being a thing to be regretted that charitable young ladies should harbour vagrants; and then, when I pretty well understood his ways, I said, I should consider a fypunnote well bestowed if I could relieve the premises of Toughey without causing any noise or trouble. Then says he, lifting up his eyebrows in the gayest way, 'it's no use mentioning a fypunnote to me, my friend, because I'm a mere child in such matters, and have no idea of money.' Of course I understood what his taking it so easy meant; and being now quite sure he was the man for me, I wrapped the note round a little stone and threw it up to him. Well! He laughs and beams, and looks as innocent as you like, and says, 'But I don't know the value of these things. What am I to do with this?' 'Spend it, sir,' says I. 'But I shall be taken in,' he says, 'they won't
give me the right change, I shall lose it, it’s no use to me.’ Lord, you never saw such a face as he carried it with! Of course he told me where to find Toughey, and I found him.” (ch. 57)

Thus Jo is put out on the road according to Skimpole’s suggestion, but Dickens has slyly slipped the fypunnote from one childish hand to the other.

Skimpole is capable of the most vicious actions against the vulnerable life about him, veiling those actions all the time in tender sentiments of protection and concern. Boythorn, on the contrary, strides thundering onto the scene with a canary riding unconcernedly on his head. Jarndyce tries to prepare his young friends for this visitor as he did for Skimpole: “‘His language is as sounding as his voice. He is always in extremes; perpetually in the superlative degree. In his condemnation he is all ferocity. You might suppose him to be an Ogre, from what he says; and I believe he has the reputation of one with some people’” (ch. 9). But, as in the case of Skimpole, things are not always what they purport to be, and Boythorn is no blighter of childhood. Though he may be incapable of anything on a limited scale, Boythorn’s extremity, as Esther observes accurately, is mostly verbal and his superlatives “‘go off like blank cannons and hurt nothing.’” Even as he is “expressing the most implacable and passionate sentiments,” his canary is “quietly perched on his forehead”; or, as it “now perched upon his thumb,” he softly smooths “its feathers with his forefinger”—to the accompaniment of his booming laughter, for both he and his listeners are in on the joke that his professed violence is a fraud.

Despite the fact that Boythorn has no children of his own, he is sensitively responsive to their presence: his attitude toward them is generous and protective. Jarndyce tells his young friends not to be surprised to observe Boythorn assuming a protective role toward him—“‘for he has never forgotten that I was a low boy at school, and that our friendship began in his knocking two of my head tyrant’s teeth out (he says six) before breakfast.’” As Esther is recovering from her illness, her guardian appears one day with a letter from Boythorn, “‘heart of chivalry, breathing such ferocious vows as never were breathed on paper before, that if you don’t go and occupy his whole house, he having already turned out of it expressly for that purpose, by Heaven and by earth he’ll pull it down, and not leave one brick standing on another!’” (ch. 35).

Boythorn confounds the Skimpole formula by reversing the relationship of thought and deed, word and action. In him, the
tender act neutralizes the violent profession to contrast the hypocritical Skimpole disadvantageously with a man of true sentiment. As usual, Esther’s clear eye detects the truth of the matter: it would be most surprising if these two souls had thought very highly of one another.

Agreement between Boythorn and Sir Leicester is equally unthinkable as the former storms the gates of Chesney Wold demanding a right-of-way across the marshy place in Lincolnshire with its proscriptions against trespass. While Sir Leicester sits woodenly by his fire of Dedlock timber and antediluvian forest asserting his timeless repose, Lawrence Boythorn, as the force of life (which insists on breaking in with its unsettling changes), joyously sets himself in opposition to the “most stiff-necked, arrogant, imbecile, pig-headed numskull, ever, by some inexplicable mistake of Nature, born in any station of life but a walking-stick’s!” (ch. 9). Boythorn does battle like a malign and laughing comic spirit, frolicking about with infectious gaiety to undo Sir Leicester’s efforts in the sure knowledge that life and time will continue to burst through those boundaries any man is deluded enough to build against them. Boythorn describes their actions and counteractions:

“The fellow [Sir Leicester] sends a most abandoned villain with one eye, to construct a gateway. I play upon that execrable scoundrel with a fire-engine, until the breath is nearly driven out of his body. The fellow erects a gate in the night. I chop it down and burn it in the morning. He sends his myrmidons to come over the fence, and pass and repass. I catch them in humane man traps, fire split peas at their legs, play upon them with the engine—resolve to free mankind from the insupportable burden of the existence of those lurking ruffians. He brings actions for trespass. I bring actions for trespass. He brings actions for assault and battery; I defend them, and continue to assault and batter. Ha, ha, ha!” (ch. 9)

Though he is firm that there shall be “no closing up of my paths, by any Dedlock,” Boythorn bears no malice toward his neighbor, who is himself not malevolent, but simply a rather pathetic anachronism, like the ancient mild reptiles which time passed by. Without a leg to stand on, Sir Leicester yields himself up to the inevitable family complaint, gout.

And a goodly show he makes, lying in a flush of crimson and gold, in the midst of the great drawing-room, before his favourite picture of my Lady, with broad strips of sunlight shining in, down the long perspective, through the long line of windows, and alternating with soft
reliefs of shadow. Outside, the stately oaks, rooted for ages in the
green ground which has never known ploughshare, but was still a
Chase when kings rode to battle with sword and shield, and rode a-
hunting with bow and arrow; bear witness to his greatness. Inside, his
forefathers, looking on him from the walls, say, “Each of us was a
passing reality here, and left this coloured shadow of himself, and
melted into remembrance as dreamy as the distant voices of the rooks
now lulling you to rest;” and bear their testimony to his greatness,
too. And he is very great, this day. And woe to Boythorn, or other
daring wight, who shall presumptuously contest an inch with him!
(ch. 16)

“He carries himself,” observes Boythorn, “like an eight-day clock
at all times; like one of a race of eight-day clocks in gorgeous cases
that never go and never went—Ha ha ha!” (ch. 18)—an interesting
smile once more illuminating his perceptiveness of the relation-
ship between life and time.

In the end, Boythorn maintains the pretense of feud and vio-
lence against Sir Leicester because his compassionate heart real-
izes that the broken old relic needs the feud to strike some fire
of purpose from an otherwise blasted life: violence once more
concealing kindness in the ironic inversion of hypocrisy that con-
stitutes Lawrence Boythorn. The last word to be heard from
Harold Skimpole, on the other hand, comes in the diary left at his
death five years after coolness developed between him and John
Jarndyce following Skimpole’s carelessly discarding his depleted
young friend, Richard: “Jarndyce, in common with most other
men I have known, is the Incarnation of Selfishness” (ch. 61).
Thus, his last word is the repudiation of the true benefactor, which
seems to characterize in general the selfish parasite and in particu-
lar the adult dallying in the garden.

In the antithetical characters of Harold Skimpole and Lawrence
Boythorn, Dickens develops to its fullest his view of the qualities
producing the preserved child. In his perverted or defective rela-
tionship to time, responsibility, and worldly affairs; in his attitudes
and practices toward the fruits of the garden—children—and
benefactors; in his ability to reject the actual world and live in the
dream world (substituting the thought for the deed), Harold
Skimpole is a frightening monster who embodies the social threat
and the individual peril confronting human beings when someone
decides to remain a preserved child. He is as grotesque and revol-
ting as the Hindoo baby in a bottle. Lawrence Boythorn not only
provides contrast to bring out Skimpole's characteristics even more sharply, but also suggests the delicate balance that needs to be achieved by the mature adult: in putting away childish things, he must strive to keep the child heart, which is closely related to that dream world of childhood. While living in the actual world, he should carry the ideal world within him. As we have already heard the gentleman in *Nicholas Nickleby* observe: "If we all had hearts like those which beat so lightly in the bosoms of the young and beautiful, what a heaven this earth would be!" If Boythorn is an anomaly among men, it is a pity that it should be so.

Although in these two characters the portrait of the adult child is most fully fleshed in, essentially the same picture may be caught in a vignette, or flashing glimpses of it may appear in other characters. Mrs. Matthew Pocket, for example, sits for her miniature in *Great Expectations*. In the same book, Pip successfully makes the transition to maturity, but Dickens does not let the reader forget the alternative possibility, exemplified in the person of this eccentric character permanently frozen in childhood patterns as the cost of maintaining great expectations. Brought up by a father who "had invented for himself a conviction that his deceased father would have been made a Baronet but for somebody's determined opposition arising out of entirely personal motives" (*GE*, ch. 23), and who had firmly planted in his daughter's mind that she was destined for great things, Belinda Pocket comes by her great expectations through both heredity and environment. Even after marriage to Mr. Pocket and the appearance of a bevy of children, she still considers herself as "one who in the nature of things must marry a title, and who was to be guarded from the acquisition of plebeian domestic knowledge." Surrounded by her children, who, like Skimpole's "were not growing up or being brought up, but were tumbling up" (ch. 22), reading her "book of dignities," she lives in serene removal from the world about her. Pip thinks it curiously irrelevant and absentminded of her when she asks him, upon first meeting, "if I liked the taste of orange-flower water." So far as he can see, "the question had no bearing, near or remote, on any foregone or subsequent transactions" (ch. 23). Whether or no, the question establishes at once that taste for exotic fruit (like Skimpole's), which Dickens uses to tag the irresponsible adult dallying in the garden.

Mrs. Pocket's predominant characteristic is her sure method of preserving inviolate a dream world overwhelmingly besieged by
the bustling household around her. Pip reports: “[A] neighbouring lady with whom the family were personally unacquainted, wrote in to say that she had seen Millers slapping the baby. This greatly distressed Mrs. Pocket, who burst into tears on receiving the note, and said that it was an extraordinary thing that the neighbours couldn’t mind their own business.” On another occasion, she sits absorbed in eating an orange steeped in sugar and wine, while the ignored baby in her lap plays happily but dangerously with a pair of nut-crackers. Little Jane jumps to the baby’s rescue:

“Mama dear,” lisped the little girl, “baby ood have put hith eyeth out.”

“How dare you tell me so!” retorted Mrs. Pocket. “Go and sit down in your chair this moment!” (ch. 23)

With unassailable dignity, she says majestically: “I will not be interfered with by Jane. . . . I hope I know my poor grandpapa’s position.”

Understandably, Mr. Pocket is in some despair and grief over the conditions in his household:

“This is a pretty thing, Belinda! . . . Here’s the cook lying insensibly drunk on the kitchen floor, with a large bundle of fresh butter made up in the cupboard ready to sell for grease!”

Mrs. Pocket instantly showed much amiable emotion, and said, “This is that odious Sophia’s doing!”

“What do you mean, Belinda?” demanded Mr. Pocket.

“Sophia has told you,” said Mrs. Pocket. “Did I not see her, with my own eyes, and hear her with my own ears, come into the room just now and ask to speak to you?”

“But has she not taken me downstairs, Belinda,” returned Mr. Pocket, “and shown me the woman, and the bundle too?”

“And do you defend her, Matthew,” said Mrs. Pocket, “for making mischief?”

Mr. Pocket uttered a dismal groan.

“Am I, grandpapa’s granddaughter, to be nothing in the house?” said Mrs. Pocket. “Besides, the cook has always been a very nice respectful woman, and said in the most natural manner when she came to look after the situation, that she felt I was born to be a Duchess.” (ch. 23)

The outside world of facts has no way to breach Mrs. Pocket’s defenses to assail her dream world, for she accurately sees that the threat to her serenity is not the disturbing fact itself, but the knowl-
edge of that fact. She therefore immediately and unerringly attacks those who presume to be messengers from the outside. 11

Both Harold Skimpole and Belinda Pocket are grotesque projections of monstrous adults who have voluntarily and even willfully turned their backs on the demanding outside world in order to remain in the effortless world of childhood. These caricatures of life have carefully avoided the test of the critical “struggle in time” necessary to demonstrate their humanity. As a result, they are empty imitations of real people who, as John Jarndyce explains of Skimpole, need no more than “a habitable doll house” to sustain their existence.

Miss Flite, of Bleak House, suffers a different fate: she has long ago given up all struggle in her enslavement to great expectations and is permanently suspended in the air-castle world. She represents the long, perspective view on the Court of Chancery. This allegorical figure with her caged birds is both spokesman and oracle for all the Chancery victims from the beginning to the end of the suit. Her memory reaches back to old Tom Jarndyce. She inherits her own expectations from a father, a brother, and a sister, all of whom “expected a Judgment” and who are all “‘dead of course, my dear’” (BH, ch. 35). She is the first to see the fatal attraction begin in Richard, and the last to give blessing to Gridley, who considers her the one tie he ever had on earth unbroken by Chancery. She perceives the total truth and pronounces judgment with oracular madness and wisdom. It would be wiser of course, she responds to Esther's question, not to expect a judgment that will come only on the Day of Judgment: “’[V]ery wearing to be always in expectation, of what never comes, my dear Fitz-Jarndyce! Wearing, I assure you, to the bone! . . . But, my dear,’ she went on, in her mysterious way, ‘There’s a dreadful attraction to the place. . . . There’s a cruel attraction in the place. You can’t leave it. And you must expect.”” Although the comment refers to the Court of Chancery, the judgment might well speak for the “cruel attraction” of all great expectations and castles in the air that make it so difficult to depart from the childhood garden: “You can’t leave it. And you must expect.”

The preserved child and the suspended adult, then, have already willfully or involuntarily failed to make the transition that still lies before a parade of characters, central figures in the five great novels extensively exploring this transitional period between child and adult: Martin Chuzzlewit, David Copperfield, Bleak House, Little Dorrit, and Great Expectations. Martin Chuzzlewit, David Cop-
perfield, Richard Carstone, Arthur Clennam, and Philip Pirrip—"Pip"—are all builders of air castles. They share with Harold Skimpole, Mrs. Pocket, and Miss Flite all or most of the qualities and practices that define their characters.

Within the details of the first of the novels involved, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the outlines of the familiar scenario quickly begin to take shape. Having been reared with "great expectations" (and therefore in danger of blight by the ideas of his elders), young Martin enters the story as a headstrong young builder of air castles. Having fallen out with his grandfather, Martin is drawn to enroll in a special type of "architectural school" operated by a Mr. Seth Pecksniff—"PECKSNIFF, ARCHITECT," who runs a school for aspiring young air-castle builders, "though of his architectural doings, nothing was clearly known, except that he had never designed or built anything; but it was generally understood that his knowledge of the science was almost awful in its profundity" (*MC*, ch. 2). Once a young man was snared, Pecksniff:

> turned him loose in a spacious room on the two-pair front; where . . . he improved himself, for three or five years, according to his articles, in making elevations of Salisbury Cathedral from every possible point of sight; and in constructing in the air a vast quantity of Castles, Houses of Parliament and other Public Buildings. Perhaps in no place in the world were so many gorgeous edifices of this class erected as under Mr. Pecksniff's auspices . . . (ch. 2)

Young Martin is a gifted pupil in this school.

His entrapment by the air-castle delusion is soon emblematized by a propensity to consider the will as good as the deed. Both he and his friend, Tom Pinch, are much affected when Martin declares that "'If I should turn out a great architect . . . one of the things I'd build [should be] . . . your fortune'" (ch. 12). Like Skimpole, Martin considers his generous professions as good as any coin of the realm.

After an estrangement develops between him and Pecksniff, Martin and his more realistic companion, Mark Tapley, journey to America, where Martin has no doubt his architectural talents will be in great demand. Ominously, from the beginning of the enterprise, Martin's visits to various establishments of the "Golden Balls" variety have driven them hopelessly into debt. This inability to live within one's means (earlier suggested by Skimpole's furniture, which "comes and goes"), is a sure sign of the castle builder. "Poor
Martin!” mourns the narrator. “For ever building castles in the air” (ch. 21).

In *David Copperfield*, the next of the air-castle novels, as David is about to set out from his school days in Canterbury to seek his fortune in London, his head is filled with “misty ideas” of his future. He has no doubt that his dreams will readily materialize. “So powerful were these visionary considerations in my boyish mind,” he reports, “that I seem . . . to have left school without natural regret. . . . I know that my juvenile experiences went for little or nothing then; and that life was more like a great fairy story, which I was just about to begin to read, than anything else” (*DC*, ch. 19).

At this critical moment, Aunt Betsey sends him to Yarmouth so that he might think without distraction about his future. Inevitably, he is drawn to make a pilgrimage to “Blunderstone” for the last imperiling blunder of his youth. As he makes his way through the old familiar haunts and lingers by the graves of his parents and brothers, an airy structure arises before him. “My reflections at these times,” he recalls, “were always associated with the figure I was to make in life, and the distinguished things I was to do. My echoing footsteps went to no other tune, but were as constant to that as if I had come home to build my castles in the air at a living mother’s side” (ch. 22). In the fairy-tale reading of life, castles in the air are quite appropriately built as habitable structures, and David sees no problem arising from their construction.

When, in *Bleak House*, Richard Carstone is introduced to the reader, he is a youth of nineteen on the threshold of maturity. As a ward in Chancery, he has been conditioned from infancy to make no distinction between dream and fact, for the whole world of Chancery is one of great expectations to be magically fulfilled “tomorrow, when the suit is to be settled.” It is, then, not surprising that an immature youth should be irresistibly drawn by its magic promise. As John Jarndyce says: “There are not many grown and matured men too, who, if they were thrown into this same court as suitors, would not be vitally changed and depreciated within three years—within two—within one. How can we stand amazed at poor Rick?” (*BH*, ch. 35). For despite example and warning, Richard counts on the suit to make his fortune—“it may, you know!” he says brightly (ch. 14). Ada confirms her trust in him if not in it: “So, Richard said there was an end of it,—and immediately began, on no other foundation, to build as many castles in the air as would man the great wall of China. He went away in high spirits.”
In *Little Dorrit* a surprising change occurs: unlike the youths who precede him, Arthur Clennam is introduced as a "grave dark man of forty." He does not appear to be a likely candidate for the adolescent crisis.

Clennam first appears in the unnatural marsh world of Marseilles as one of a group of travellers temporarily imprisoned in quarantine. He is returning from twenty years of exile in the East, the "country of the plague" suspected as responsible for the travellers' quarantine in this suspended world. Arthur has fallen in with a small group of fellow travellers that includes the Meagles establishment: Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, their daughter Pet, her young maid, Tattycoram, a Miss Wade, and a Monsieur Rigaud. This group passes the time in social conversation, which soon takes a pointedly personal turn. Arthur shows particular interest in the Meagles family, listening intently as Mr. Meagles begins to clarify his small ménage, with special attention to the pampered daughter, Pet, and to her deceased twin sister, who, in Meagles's mind, continues to live and grow with her sister. The Meagles adore their daughter, whose precarious health has prompted the trip from which they are now returning to England. Pet's tempestuous and angry companion, Tattycoram, we learn, does not share the Meagles's view of things: "I am younger than she is by two or three years, and yet it's me that looks after her, as if I was old, it's she that's always petted and called Baby!" (*LD*, bk. 1, ch. 2).

Arthur Clennam has shown a gentle sympathy with Meagles's account of his family. Now, when Meagles conversationally inquires: "Perhaps I may ask you, whether you have yet come to a decision where to go next?," Clennam pours out the story of his life.

"Indeed, no. I am such a waif and stray everywhere, that I am liable to be drifted where any current may set. . . . I have no will. That is to say . . . next to none I can put in action now. Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago; always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from me in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words."

"Light 'em up again!" said Mr. Meagles.

"Ah! Easily said. I am the son, Mr. Meagles, of a hard father and mother. . . . Austere faces, inexorable discipline, penance in this
world and terror in the next—nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere—this was my childhood, if I may so misuse the word as to apply it to such a beginning of life.” (bk. I, ch. 2)

It would appear from this account that Arthur, suspended here “in quarantine” at forty years old, has been a victim of childhood blight. Only when he returns to his old “home” in London does it become clear that such is not the case. When he informs his mother that he renounces his inheritance and plans to leave the House of Clennam, it becomes evident that he is only passing through this house for the last time rather than remaining here in servitude.

But something more important to our immediate purpose emerges from this chapter. After his conversation with his mother on the evening of his return home, Arthur talks with her old servant, Affery, now Mrs. Flintwinch. Arthur asks her about a girl he has seen—Little Dorrit—who, it seems, has been recommended to Mrs. Clennam by his “old sweetheart.” Mrs. Flintwinch informs him that the latter is again available as a wealthy widow if he wants her. With this news she has “introduced into the web that his mind was busily weaving, in that old workshop where the loom of his youth had stood, the last thread wanting to the pattern. The airy folly of a boy’s love had found its way even into that house, and he had been as wretched under its hopelessness as if the house had been a castle of romance” (bk. I, ch. 3). He recalls that the face of the pretty girl “from whom he had parted with regret” less than a week ago in Marseilles “had had an unusual interest for him, and a tender hold upon him, because of some resemblance, real or imagined to this first face that had soared out of his gloomy life into the bright glories of fancy.” And then he begins to dream. “For, it had been the uniform tendency of this man’s life—as much was wanting in it to think about, so much that might have been better directed and happier to speculate upon—to make him a dreamer, after all.”

At the age of forty, Arthur Clennam is still suspended in the adolescent world of air-castle dreams. This discovery has its humorous aspects, of course, but we must remind ourselves that he has spent twenty years exiled from the society that might have helped him grow up. Only now does any meaning attach to what seemed an isolated incident in the first chapter, “Sun and Shadow.” In the literal prison there, two figures, the jailer and his small
daughter, are coming “to feed the [imprisoned] birds.” He is singing the “revolutionary tune,” which will reappear throughout the novel as a leitmotif. One of the lines of this song, “Who passes by this road so late?” seems to be answered. It can only be Arthur Clennam.

As “the last thread wanting to the pattern” was introduced into “the web that [Arthur’s] mind was busily weaving,” from the memories invoked by his conversation with Mrs. Flintwinch, so has the last necessary thread now been woven into the fabric of the emerging story. The novel can be expected to trace Arthur’s path along the road to maturity as he leaves his mother’s house and involves himself in the experiences he finds outside in the world of time.

After *Little Dorrit*, Dickens tells the story of one more air-castle builder in *Great Expectations*. Like David Copperfield, Pip relates his own story. Although Pip does not report that his childhood found nourishment in early reading, which David says, “kept alive my fancy,” his thinking nonetheless runs along similar lines. His first visit to Miss Havisham sets the fairy-tale dreams going. When his sister and Mr. Pumblechook later cross-examine him about the details of that visit, Pip finds himself inventing a fantastic story about Miss Havisham and the occasion: “‘She was sitting... in a black velvet coach. ... And Miss Estella—that’s her niece, I think—handed her in cake and wine at the coach-window, on a gold plate. And we all had cake and wine on gold plates. And I got up behind the coach to eat mine, because she told me to’” (*GE*, ch. 9). He rejects as too unbelievable the addition of “four richly caparisoned courser,” which I had had the wild thoughts of harnessing.” But he does embellish his account with a description of how “‘Estella waved a blue flag, and I waved a red one, and Miss Havisham waved one sprinkled all over with little gold stars, out at the coach-window. And then we all waved our swords and hurrahed.’” Later, Pip miserably confesses to Joe that it was all “lies,” and adds: “‘I don’t know what possessed me, Joe.’” Yet what possessed him is not hard to surmise in light of the Cinderella configuration of images, where Miss Havisham’s flag (as her crutch will later do) turns into a sparkling magic wand and the “swords” have a special significance of sharpness to his creator even if their meaning is not quite clear in Pip’s mind.

When Mr. Jaggers informs Joe that young Pip is to “‘be immediately removed from his present sphere of life and from this place, and be brought up as a gentleman—in a word, as a young
fellow of great expectations’” (ch. 18), Pip is quite prepared for the
knowledge. “My dream was out; my wild fancy was surpassed by
sober reality; Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a
grand scale.” In his eyes, she is nothing less than the magical bene-
factor of the fairy tale.

“This is a gay figure, Pip,” said she, making her crutch stick play
round me, as if she, the fairy godmother who had changed me, were
bestowing the finishing gift.

“I have come into such good fortune since I saw you last, Miss
Havisham,” I murmured. “And I am so grateful for it, Miss Havi-
sham!” (ch. 19)

Thus Pip, too, has built his castles in the air, though he does not
give his airy structures that name, being satisfied to refer to them
more literally as his “great expectations.”

All of our five “youths” are about to be tested by “real life.”
Their ability to reconcile their dreams with the outer world of stub-
born facts will demonstrate whether they possess the strength and
will to survive this last borderland struggle for life in the world of
time. If they succeed, they will leave the childhood garden and
graduate into maturity. If they fail, they will lapse permanently
into either literal or figurative death. During their struggle, they
will be surrounded by emblematic figures who are involved in, or
have already won or lost, the same struggle.

Martin Chuzzlewit and Mark Tapley proceed toward America,
the far-off land supposed to bring Martin’s dream to reality. Omi-
nously (given the Dickens imagery), their destination in the heart
of the American continent is a settlement called the “Valley of
Eden,” where “‘I’m told,’ said Mark, ‘as there’s lots of serpents’”
(MC, ch. 21).

The two adventurers are temporarily heartened, however, when
they are shown a “great plan” of the city of Eden:

A flourishing city, too! An architectural city! There were banks,
churches, cathedrals, market-places, factories, hotels, stores, man-
sions, wharves; an exchange, a theatre; public buildings of all kinds,
down to the office of the Eden Stinger, a daily journal; all faithfully
depicted in the view before them. . . .

“But, I am afraid,” said Martin, glancing again at the Public Build-
ings, “that there’s nothing left for me to do.”

“Well! it ain’t all built,” replied the agent. “Not quite.” (ch. 21)
As a matter of fact, none of it has been erected. It exists only as a foundationless city in the Edenic childhood garden. What they find at journey's end is nothing but "a marsh . . . where even the blessed sun, shining down on festering elements of corruption and disease, became a horror. . . . At Eden too. The waters of the Deluge might have left it but a week before: so choked with slime and matted growth was the hideous swamp which bore that name" (ch. 23). The air-castle and marsh sets of images have merged naturally together in this early novel as they will continue to do in later ones. Here in Eden, the "Bank, and National Credit Office . . . had some feeble props about it" but was "settling down in the mud, past all recovery," like the little shoal-lighthouse in *Great Expectations*.

The groundless nature of Martin's great expectations now becomes clear to him with devastating effect; for "many a man who would have stood within a home dismantled, strong in his passion and design of vengeance, has had the firmness of his nature conquered by the razing of an air-built castle." Despite brave efforts to establish an architectural office, the enterprise is doomed. Martin now must confront squarely the failure of the "real world" to yield and conform to his air-castle specifications.

Martin proves equal to the task, though not without great travail. Presently he falls into a deep illness with the ague and fevers indigenous to the marsh. He hovers for days between life and death in this state of withdrawal into his private inner world. Subsequent events reveal that his illness has provided the catalyst for straightening out his thinking. It has brought him face to face with his own egocentricity and has therefore revolutionized his life: he now cannot vacate "Eden" fast enough.

The profound change in Martin is confirmed by his new relationship with Tom Pinch upon his return home. In the interim, Tom has himself become a success. Says Martin: "'With his advice to guide me, I may do the same. I took Tom under my protection once . . . and promised I would make his fortune. Perhaps Tom will take me under his protection now, and teach me how to earn my bread'" (ch. 43). Asked by Tom what his future plans may be, he replies: "'No longer to make your fortune, Tom, . . . but to try to live. . . . I will do anything, Tom; anything; to gain a livelihood by my own exertions. My hopes do not soar above that, now'" (ch. 48). These two conversations between Martin and his friend are like parentheses around the period in Martin's life that constitutes his final testing for manhood.
David Copperfield's confrontation between expectations and hard facts proves to be much more complicated. In the relatively short period of time between his arrival in London, where he is to read the fairy tale of life, and his sobered decision to learn stenography as a practical way to earn a living, David had made four staggering discoveries. First, he has identified his own human fallibility through the famous dinner party when he tumbles down more than one staircase as a result of his drunken state. He has learned the power of evil in the form of Uriah Heep, who has by now accomplished the ruin of Aunt Betsey and Mr. Wickfield. He has experienced the complexity of human love, guilt, and grief in Steerforth's seduction of Little Em'ly. And, finally, he is beginning to identify the impossibility of reconciling love in a doll's house with the demands of the practical world as embodied in the Cookery Book, whose very name prostrates Dora almost beyond recovery. His own sense of responsibility in every one of these areas abolishes the fairy tale with magical swiftness. During this period, he has before him the far from reassuring example of his friends the Micawbers (see note 11).

Now, struggling over the "noble art and mystery of stenography," he finds himself "plunged into a sea of perplexity that brought me, in a few weeks, to the confines of distraction" (DC, ch. 38). When he has at length mastered the alphabet, he despairingly comes upon a "procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters, the most despotic characters I have ever known, who insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb, meant expectation, and that a pen-and-ink sky-rocket stood for disadvantageous." ¹⁴ The characters were, as he said, purely arbitrary; the "for instance" is not. In it David unconsciously reveals the true nature of his inner struggle through the choice of characters overtly selected to illustrate his outward struggle. The air castles of great expectation, he is perceiving, have more in common with insubstantial cobwebs and fragile skyrockets than they do with houses one can live in. Great expectations, in fact, are positively disadvantageous.

The moment when David truly assimilates this fact marks the turning point in his transition from adolescent to adult. Now ready to assume the responsibilities of maturity, David reports that his assiduous attempts to master shorthand have mirrored "a patient and continuous energy which then began to be matured within me, and which I know to be the strong part of my character" (ch. 42). Without the "companionship of the steady, hard-working quali-
ties,” one cannot expect greatly. “There is no such thing as such fulfilment on this earth. Some happy talent, and some fortunate opportunity, may form the two sides of the ladder on which some men mount, but the rounds of that ladder must be made of stuff to stand wear and tear.” Thus David quickly gives up his easy great expectations about his career.

Unlike Martin, however, David cannot simply get on a boat and steam away from Eden. Giving up the castle embodied in the doll’s house is much too complicated. He becomes plagued with a double vision that causes him to recognize the futile cruelty of trying to change his child wife—the doll in the doll’s house—whom he must yet continue to love, protect, and grieve over as an anomaly in life; at the same time he apprehends that a wiser young man would have paid more attention to the foundations of his castle. Although he himself must pay heavily for “the first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart” (ch. 48), he must protect Dora against suffering from his mistake. She must not know that “the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting.”

What I missed, I still regarded . . . as something that had been a dream of my youthful fancy; that was incapable of realisation; that I was now discovering to be so, with some natural pain, as all men did. But that it would have been better for me if my wife could have helped more, and shared the many thoughts in which I had no partner; and that this might have been; I knew.

Between these two irreconcilable conclusions: the one, that what I felt was general and unavoidable; the other, that it was particular to me, and might have been different: I balanced curiously, with no distinct sense of their opposition to each other. When I thought of the airy dreams of youth that are incapable of realisation, I thought of the better state preceding manhood that I had outgrown. (ch. 48)

These thoughts involve the old solidly based days at Dr. Strong’s before the building of the airy dreams.

After the deaths of Steerforth and Dora, David goes abroad to grieve over his lost childhood:

As a man upon a field of battle will receive a mortal hurt, and scarcely know that he is struck, so I, when I was left alone with my undisciplined heart, had no conception of the wound with which it had to strive.

The desolate feeling with which I went abroad, deepened and wid-
ened hourly. At first it was a heavy sense of loss and sorrow, wherein I could distinguish little else. By imperceptible degrees, it became a hopeless consciousness of all that I had lost—love, friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered—my first trust, my first affection, the whole airy castle of my life; of all that remained—a ruined blank and waste, lying wide around me, unbroken, to the dark horizon. (ch. 58)

Out of this wasteland, David emerges a man with a "disciplined heart," though he never loses the reluctant notion that the same thing might have been achieved with less travail had the airy castles never been built.

And now Richard Carstone must face his ordeal. Richard's fate, however, is already established by the impossible conditions imposed upon him. Although, as John Jarndyce says, if two angels could be concerned in the suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce it would change their nature, only certain people are susceptible to its blight. Richard is a perfect victim by both timing and character. At nineteen, he stands hopefully at the point of transition. Esther says: "I believe Richard's was as frank and generous a nature as there possibly can be. He was ardent and brave, and, in the midst of all his wild restlessness, was so gentle, that I knew him like a brother in a few weeks" (BH, ch. 9). But already the ominous note is sounded by the "wild restlessness": Richard is flighty and up in the air. Even as he laughs at and pities Miss Flite, Esther as usual penetrates to the true facts of the case: "But he never thought—never, my poor, dear, sanguine Richard, capable of so much happiness then, and with such better things before him!—what a fatal link was riveting between his fresh youth and her faded age; between his free hopes and her caged birds, and her hungry garret, and her wandering mind" (ch. 23). Flite, too, sees it: "Let someone hold him back," she warns, "'Or he'll be drawn to ruin'" (ch. 35). Jarndyce has been concerned about the "indecision of character" that Chancery has encouraged in Richard: "'It has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off—and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance—and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused'" (ch. 13).

Having built his air castles, Richard can live nowhere else. He flits from profession to profession (as Lady Dedlock flits from place to place), and when Esther suggests that he might "settle down," he explains his restlessness in appropriate terms:
“My dear Esther, I am a very unfortunate dog not to be more settled, but how can I be more settled? If you lived in an unfinished house, you couldn’t settle down in it; if you were condemned to leave everything you undertook, unfinished, you would find it hard to apply yourself to anything; and yet that’s my unhappy case. I was born into this unfinished contention with all its chances and changes, and it began to unsettle me before I quite knew the difference between a suit at law and a suit of clothes; and it has gone on unsettling me ever since.” (ch. 23)

Like David’s doll house, this “bleak house” of Richard’s lacks the firm foundation to make it habitable.

All of Richard’s fine qualities of the fresh heart and the ardent optimistic spirit gradually lose their natural look as he becomes suspended in the dream world of the child. The real world turns into a monotonous wasteland (see ch. 3); he falls into debt, renounces his true benefactor—and fittingly substitutes Harold Skimpole as confidant and adviser.

These two children are naturally drawn to each other. Richard is laughingly willing to reach into his pocket to relieve Skimpole’s financial embarrassment. John Jarndyce is provoked into an unwonted criticism on this occasion: “But really—” he exclaims, “to get hold of you and Esther—and to squeeze you like a couple of tender young Saint Michael’s oranges—It’ll blow a gale in the middle of the night!” (ch. 6). As with Skimpole’s other hot-house fruit, someone other than he must pay for this delicacy too. But Richard unguardedly finds Skimpole “fresh and green-hearted” (ch. 37); in turn Skimpole appreciates and encourages this “shepherd-youth” who is “full of the brightest visions of the future”—and he continues to squeeze until all the juice is gone.

Everyone around Richard knows from the outset the disadvantageousness of great expectations. Richard closes his ears to the knowledge and, like Mrs. Pocket, rejects any messenger from the world of hard facts. Since Richard is marked to be the sacrificial victim of “Chancery,” of “trusting to this, that, and the other chance,” he cannot come out of the dream this side of his death.15

On that occasion:

“It was a troubled dream?” said Richard, clasping both my guardian’s hands eagerly.

“Nothing more, Rick; nothing more.”

“And you, being a good man, can pass it as such and pity the dreamer, and be lenient and encouraging when he wakes?”
“Indeed I can. What am I but another dreamer, Rick?”
“I will begin the world!” said Richard, with a light in his eyes.
(ch. 65)

Now, with the recognition that “beginning the world” means coming out of suspension in the dream, Richard has too late shown himself ready for maturity. His death closes the door on his struggle.

As we pick up the story of Arthur Clennam, he has already existed in his suspended world for more years than constitute Richard’s entire life. What, exactly, has at this juncture prompted him to resume the interrupted journey of his life—to pass by this road so late? It has something—everything—to do with the young girl from whom he parted less than a week ago and who has stirred within him the same feelings left suspended when Flora Casby foresook him to marry Mr. Finching. He is about to resume his life with a second chance at youthful love.

In the first three chapters of _Little Dorrit_, Dickens embodies the confusing dilemma about to confront Arthur in the persons of the bewildering assortment of women churning around in the web of his mind as he is furnished the last thread needed in the pattern. His success or lack of success in sorting them all out will determine his future: Pet, her dead twin sister, Tattycoram, Miss Wade, his old sweetheart, and Little Dorrit, whom he has just met as a shadowy figure moving through the Clennam household—all represent women in varying states of growth or non-growth. We might well add his mother, frozen in her marshy world, whose influence he has just successfully evaded.

The group of women whom Clennam meets in quarantine are on the surface a puzzling assortment. A little thought about Mr. Meagles’s discussion of his family, however, begins to yield clues for conjecture. It seems that this genial and well-intentioned man has reared his daughter in so sheltered an atmosphere that she, like Dora, will never be able to grow up: he has, to be precise, “spoiled” her. His belief that her dead twin sister continues to live and grow with “Pet” confirms rather than challenges the idea that Pet is herself permanently suspended in a deathlike state, for the converse of this notion is that Pet lives and grows no more than her dead twin. Passive and passionless herself, Pet has as companion another young girl who is her exact opposite. In the scene described, tempestuous Tattycoram rages in frustration: “A sullen, passionate girl! Her rich black hair was all about her face, her face was flushed and hot, and as she sobbed and raged, she plucked at her lips with
an unsparing hand” (LD, bk. I, ch. 2). Miss Wade sits aloof, watch-
ing Tattycoram with "a strange attentive smile."

Not until many chapters later when Miss Wade reviews her own past does it become clear that at this moment she sees her youth-
ful self in the sobbing girl. Long frozen at Tattycoram’s stage of de-
velopment, she can recall with passion a time when she was im-
prisoned in a similar situation. As the fellow travellers are released from quarantine, Mr. Meagles observes: “I bear those monotonous walls no ill-will now. . . . One always begins to forgive a place as soon as it’s left behind; I dare say a prisoner begins to relent to-
wards his prison, after he is let out” (bk. I, ch. 2). Miss Wade dis-
agrees: “If I had been shut up in any place to pine and suffer, I should always hate that place and wish to burn it down, or raze it to
the ground. I know no more.”

Both Pet and Tattycoram fear this solitary, haughty woman: Pet “shrink[ing] childishly in her spoilt way” closer to her father; Tatty-
coram passionately exclaiming: “You seem to come like my own anger, my own malice, my own—whatever it is—I don’t know what it is.” Pet and Tattycoram complement each other in a way suggest-
ing that, if their two natures could only be synthesized, they would become a single complete person. Complex in their interrelation-
ships, these women contribute to the web of Arthur’s thinking.

As he begins to move through the societal world of London with
the fresh and critical perspective of a stranger, he sees, interprets,
judges, and acts as one newly engaged in life. Although arrested in
his individual development some twenty years back, he has not truly been permanently crippled in his basic nature: “He was a
dreamer . . . because he was a man who had, deep-rooted in his na-
ture, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been
without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him
to be a man of honourable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness
and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic
heart” (bk. I, ch. 13). “What is to be expected of me in middle life,”
he has asked Meagles, “Will, purpose, hope?” (bk. I, ch. 2). As he
becomes engaged in the troubles of those about him, however, both
will and purpose have already begun to stir within him.

Hope is another matter. Arthur has just discovered that “his old
sweetheart,” Flora Finching, was also arrested in her development
some twenty years ago. The anomaly of her girlish ways in her ma-
tronly figure horrifies him without drawing his attention to the par-
allel in their lives. He is, as a matter of fact, about to commit the
same folly for the second time: falling in love with another child
who will never grow up, the child Pet to whom he was first drawn because of her resemblance to Flora.

On this evening of his distressful encounter with Flora, he returns to his lodgings to review his situation. Sitting down before the dying fire, he “turned his gaze back upon the gloomy vista by which he had come to that stage of his existence. So long, so bare, so blank. No childhood; no youth, except for one remembrance that one remembrance proved, only that day, to be a piece of folly” (bk. I, ch. 13). Yet his basic belief “in all the gentle and good things his life had been without” saves him from the weakness and selfishness of “holding that because such a happiness or such a virtue had not come into his little path, or worked well for him, therefore he was not in the great scheme, but was reducible . . . to the basic elements. . . . A disappointed mind he had, but a mind too firm and healthy for such unwholesome air.”

As Arthur sits by his dying fire “from which the blaze departed, from which the after-glow subsided, in which the ashes turned grey, from which they dropped to dust,” like Louisa Gradgrind he thinks: “How soon I too shall pass through such changes, and be gone!’ To review his life, was like descending a green tree in fruit and flower, and seeing all the branches wither and drop off one by one as he came down towards them.”

From the beginning, this man, reared without expectations and suspended in the ruins of his youthful air castle, has expected nothing more to come from this new love than from anything else in his life. He conceals from himself that he is in love by inventing “Nobody” as his surrogate.18 The course of his infatuation is pursued through the chapters entitled “Nobody’s Weakness,” “Nobody’s Rival,” and “Nobody’s State of Mind.” With “Nobody’s Disappearance,” the enchantment is gone. Though at his “advanced” age he still has no hope for personal happiness, he is now free to seek it.

The anima figure who will guide him to maturity, Little Dorrit,19 is quite unlike the confused women Arthur is trying to sort out. “This history,” observes the narrator, “must sometimes see with Little Dorrit’s eyes, and shall begin that course by looking at him” (bk. I, ch. 14). Indeed, although she looks on everything with a clear and free gaze, she looks most of the time “at him” and most of the chapters where he is physically absent are still charged with Arthur’s presence.

Little Dorrit, despite her diminutive appearance and despite her peculiar upbringing, has accomplished the miracle of “growing
up." Both born and bred in the Marshalsea, she will never need to forgive her “prison,” because no prison, physical or mental, has ever had any power over her. Yet her father is the most consummate of air-castle builders. He has fantastically managed a whole lifetime in air castles, converting so unlikely a place as Marshalsea Prison—in the midst of a London slum—into a congenial habitation for the gracious lord of the manor known as the Father of the Marshalsea. In comparison, the later “real” castles where he is for a time granted a fairy-tale wish-fulfillment life seem unreal and ironically diminished, suggesting that air castles flourish best in the dream world. Little Dorrit remains untouched by her father’s delusions, which have blighted the lives of her brother and sister. Though about the same age as Pet, Little Dorrit has already long been a mature woman. Ironically, until the end of the novel Arthur imagines her to be a child he must protect.

As Arthur continues along his societal route, he makes a final blunder typical of the castle builder. Inveigled into a speculative investment that leaves both himself and his trusting partner in hopeless debt, Arthur must pass through the debtor’s prison before he can be restored to life after the now familiar healing fever.

Finally, Arthur is released from “prison” into a healthy autumn world of abundant harvest. The “Sun and Shadow” of chapter 1 have disappeared. “From the sea-shore the ocean was no longer to be seen lying asleep in the heat, but its thousand sparkling eyes were open, and its whole breadth was in joyful animation” (bk. II, ch. 34). With Arthur’s delivery, all the world around him has been restored to a natural state in marked contrast to that earlier scene in Marseilles. Little Dorrit and Arthur are married “with the sun shining on them” in the nurturing church in which Little Dorrit’s birth was registered and which has served as her refuge in time of need. After their marriage, “they paused for a moment on the steps of the portico, looking at the fresh perspective of the street in the autumn morning sun’s bright rays, and then went down” into life. “Went down,” says the narrator, “into a modest life of usefulness and happiness.”

Pip, however, is not quite so fortunate. The fairy-tale delusion he falls into as a child subjects him to a more profound blighting influence, from which he will never recover sufficiently to enjoy the happy life available to Arthur.

This suspension in childhood is implied, in fact, by the very conditions laid down by Mr. Jaggers for Pip’s being granted his great expectations.
"Now, Mr. Pip," pursued the lawyer, "I address the rest of what I have to say, to you. You are to understand, first, that it is the request of the person from whom I take my instructions, that you always bear the name of Pip. You will have no objection, I dare say, to your great expectations being encumbered with that easy condition. But if you have any objection, this is the time to mention it." (GE, ch. 18)

This condition is laid down with the bland speciousness of Mr. Scratch bargaining for the soul of Jabez Stone in "The Devil and Daniel Webster." One need only recall the first paragraph of Pip's book to catch the implications: "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip" (ch. 1). Thus the infantile name is the emblem of the child state in which Pip must remain.

The second condition is equally significant: "'Now you are to understand, secondly, Mr. Pip, that the name of the person who is your liberal benefactor remains a profound secret, until the person chooses to reveal it. . . . It is not the least to the purpose what the reasons of this prohibition are. . . . This is not for you to enquire into. The condition is laid down.'" It is important to note here that Pip does in fact have solid expectations, that he does actually have a "liberal benefactor." But in the child world, expectations are magically fulfilled and liberal benefactors are fairy godmothers. The second condition, then, holds Pip as an enchanted child in a fairy-tale world that forbids enquiry into the real facts. As for David, life seems to Pip more like a great fairy tale he is about to read than anything else.

Pip of course cannot permanently hold to either condition: it is precisely his inability to do so that ensures he will grow into maturity. Upon Pip's arrival in London he is conducted by Mr. Wemmick to the rather sordid chambers which he is temporarily to share with Herbert Pocket. Pip is dismayed by all the "dry rot and wet rot and all the silent rots that rot in neglected roof and cellar. . . . So imperfect was this realization of the first of my great expectations," he recalls, with no effort to gloss over the facts, "that I looked in dismay at Mr. Wemmick" (ch. 21). As he and Herbert later get acquainted, Herbert decides to call him "Handel" in preference to any other name. On the occasion of his first trip home, Pip already has reason to be thankful for this decision. He recognizes as a fellow passenger the convict who had brought a message from Magwitch, but who, he hopes, will not recognize him. "Good
by, Handel!’ Herbert called out as we started. I thought what a blessed fortune it was that he had found another name for me than Pip” (ch. 28). Thus quickly has Pip participated in at least token violation of one of the conditions established for his great expectations. As for the other condition, it is easy for Pip to accept it since he is already convinced that he knows the facts: Miss Havisham, his fairy godmother, is his “liberal benefactor.”

Pip, though deluded, is not willfully uneducable. One by one his experiences deepen his initial impression that his great expectations are being most imperfectly realized. He and Herbert become members of “the Finches of the Grove,” a club dedicated to the life of pleasure: “We spent as much money as we could, and got as little for it as people could make up their minds to give us. We were always more or less miserable, and most of our acquaintance were in the same condition. There was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did” (ch. 34).

But these dissatisfactions become relatively insignificant as Pip begins to realize that the real disadvantage of great expectations is their effect upon their possessor. Somehow they are connected with his increasing feelings of guilt.

As I had grown accustomed to my expectations, I had insensibly begun to notice their effect upon myself and those around me. Their influence on my own character I disguised from my recognition as much as possible, but I knew very well that it was not all good. I lived in a state of chronic uneasiness respecting my behaviour to Joe. My conscience was not by any means comfortable about Biddy. When I woke up in the night... I used to think, with a weariness on my spirit that I should have been happier and better if I had never seen Miss Havisham’s face, and had risen to manhood content to be partners with Joe in the honest old forge. (ch. 34)

Meanwhile, Pip and Herbert live beyond their means.

The parasitical qualities of the adult child are emblematized in Pip’s and Herbert’s perpetual indebtedness, and their continued receipt of threats of “legal proceedings.” Now the two youths are led to that further folly of substituting the thought for the deed. Pip is better at this than Herbert, “who modestly said he had not my administrative genius.”

The time has come when the load of debt must be faced. Fortified by a good dinner ceremoniously planned for the occasion, they prepare to set their affairs in order.
I would then take a sheet of paper, and write across the top of it, in a neat hand, the heading, “Memorandum of Pip’s debts;” with Barnard’s Inn and the date very carefully added. Herbert would also take a sheet of paper, and write across it with similar formalities, “Memorandum of Herbert’s debts.”

... The sound of our pens going refreshed us exceedingly, insomuch that I sometimes found it difficult to distinguish between this edifying business proceeding and actually paying the money. In point of meritorious character, the two things seemed about equal. (ch. 34)

When the whole memorandum is completed, a further ritual brings affairs to a satisfactory conclusion:

When I had got all my responsibilities down upon my list, I compared each with the bill, and ticked it off. My self-approval when I ticked an entry was quite a luxurious sensation. When I had no more ticks to make, I folded all my bills up uniformly, docketed each on the back, and tied the whole into a symmetrical bundle. Then I did the same for Herbert ... and felt that I had brought his affairs into focus for him. (ch. 34)

For the time being, the problem is magically resolved in this world where “thinking makes it so” and anything may be achieved without personal cost.

Immediately ahead of Pip, however, lies the end of the fairy tale. “A great event in my life,” he writes, “the turning point of my life, now opens on my view” (ch. 37). With the return of Magwitch thus foreshadowed, Pip discovers what he believes to be the last and most important disadvantage of his great expectations. In his fastidious horror at the reality of his benefactor, so unlike his image of his fairy godmother, he resolves never to take another penny from him. In Pip’s view, every penny he has already taken is an unwelcome debt hanging over his head with all the others. “‘Think what I owe him already!’” he exclaims to Herbert. “‘Then again: I am heavily in debt—very heavily for me, who have now no expectations—and I have been bred to no calling, and I am fit for nothing’” (ch. 41). His expectations, he sees, have actually disqualified him for coping with real life.

Pip is wrong, of course, in thinking he has now learned everything possible regarding his expectations’ disadvantages. His great struggle is still ahead as he fights his way out of the irresponsible and egocentric childish world into the responsible and altruistic adult one represented in his changing views toward Magwitch. At the end of this pivotal episode in Pip’s life, Magwitch lies on his
deathbed. Now Pip has a second chance to make a claim upon the convict's fortune, which he earlier renounced in his effort to rid himself of the loathsome connection with Magwitch. Since he is not related to the convict, it would not come to him without a fight. Jaggers is angry that Pip seems ready to let it slip through his fingers and urges him to make a claim upon it. But Pip is now ready to renounce the fortune for right reasons: "I had no claim, and I finally resolved, and ever afterwards abided by the resolution, that my heart should never be sickened with the hopeless task of attempting to establish one" (ch. 55).

More than that, Pip has now been completely delivered from his enchanted suspension in false values. All of his natural human feelings come flowing back as he develops love and compassion for the benefactor he first found so revolting. After the death of Magwitch, Pip too falls into the fever and delirium that will finally leave him cleansed and restored to life, although he may never find personal happiness. Pip is at peace in realizing that "my great expectations had all dissolved, like our own marsh mists before the sun" (ch. 57).

With Great Expectations, Dickens weaves the story of the air-castle builders for the last time. Each reenactment of this final childhood temptation to build one's future on great expectations alone creates the same crisis as a great disparity develops between the wonderful dream and what actually comes to pass. The world outside is indifferent to the world a person has created inside. Anyone who is both willing and able to realize and accept this fact will successfully pass over the border into maturity. Anyone who either can or will not realize and accept it must linger in the childhood garden as a monstrous interloper or a pathetic adult manqué.

The final words of John Jarndyce to Richard ("What am I but another dreamer, Rick?") remind us, however, that this discovery does not even yet probe the full story of the relationship between dream and actuality. Paradoxically, Jarndyce, who has warned against building air castles from the beginning, still holds on to dreaming. It remains for the adult to discover the nature of the final reconciliation between the inner and outer worlds of experience.