The image clusters in this chapter probe the true relationship between dream and actuality as it is finally revealed to the maturing man or woman through the workings of memory, experience, and hope; that is, through awareness of past, present, and future. In this development, the individual's understanding of time once more emerges during adulthood as the central determinant of the quality of life. Not only does external time bring one to birth and death; not only is the willingness and ability to struggle in that time a condition of real living; but also now, and only now, as time becomes internalized, does it grow clear that individuals possess within themselves what is necessary to put all of life into meaningful perspective.

All of the configurations through which the relationship between dream and actuality is explored contain human beings with an ambiguous or shadowy reality: ghosts, mirrored images, pictures, the successive figures in one's own past. While these insubstantial shadows depend for their existence on a matching reality of some kind and of some time in the physical world, they in turn interpret that reality and evaluate its significance.

The questions they must answer are metaphysical: How real is the past? Is the present experiential world of physical actuality the only reality? How can the unactualized future be considered real? That the first question, "How real is the vanished past?" engaged Dickens's imagination extensively is indicated by the abundance of configurations exploring it.

The first set of such images expresses the idea that the past will
not lie down and stay dead, but has a way of asserting itself as a continued palpable force in the present. Sometimes this idea is contained in the image of “the restless graveyard.” Out of this graveyard come many ghosts, all with voices reminding those they haunt that past human experience has much to communicate to the present. Everyone now living is surrounded by the shadowy figures of all who have ever lived. Awareness of the restless graveyard, the ability to see and hear ghosts, is a mark of the sensitive human being or of the frozen person about to be humanized. In Eliot’s term, it is awareness not of what is dead, but of what is “already living.”

On the day Pip meets the convict Magwitch, the churchyard inspires in him a fearful fancy that the dead might momentarily come out of their graves. The child David, too, takes fright from hearing the story of Lazarus read—“And I am so frightened that they are afterwards obliged to take me out of bed, and show me the quiet churchyard out of the bedroom window, with the dead all lying in their graves at rest, below the solemn moon” (DC, ch. 2). Master Humphrey, pondering on “that constant pacing to and fro, that never ending restlessness, that incessant tread of feet wearing the rough stones smooth and glossy,” which marks the passage of humanity throughout time, wonders how a sick man with his heightened sensitivity could endure the sound: “think of the hum and noise being always present to his senses, and of the stream of life that will not stop, pouring on, on, on, through all his restless dreams, as if he were condemned to lie, dead but conscious, in a noisy churchyard, and had no hope of rest for centuries to come!” (OCS, ch. 1). Here the sick man becomes suggestively confused with the people in the “noisy” graveyard, and it is difficult to determine whether a live man is looking at the dead, or vice-versa. This is an effect that seems to have interested Dickens.¹ In Our Mutual Friend, a similar thought gives John Harmon pause as he lingers by Limehouse Church graveyard while attempting to solve the riddle of his own supposed murder:

“It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals,” said he, “to be looking into a churchyard on a wild windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to know that I lie buried somewhere else, as they lie buried here. Nothing uses me to it. A spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognized among mankind, than I feel.” (OMF, bk. II, ch. 13)
His identification with the past is an immediately felt experience with uncanny insight into the relatedness of all humanity—even to the interchangeability of their experience.

The restless graveyard, then, is one way of repudiating the pastness of the past. A second picture, developed most fully and allegorically in the Christmas book for 1846, entitled The Battle of Life, might be called the ancient battleground. The story begins with an extensive account of a great battle fought many years ago on the very spot where the events of the present story take place—a bloody battle from which “the painted butterfly took blood into the air upon the edges of its wings”; “the trodden ground became a quagmire” with sullen pools whose “one prevailing hue still lowered and glimmered in the sun”; and the plain was “strewn with upturned faces.” For a time, a “tainted wind . . . blew across the scene of that day’s work and that night’s death and suffering.” Traces of the fight lingered—and were fearfully regarded—for a still longer time, in “deep green patches in the growing corn”; in “great worms abounding there”; in “wounded trees” and “scraps of hacked and broken fence and wall, where deadly struggle had been made.” But eventually memory fades. Finally the last of the wounded trees have fallen into ashes as Christmas logs and “the deep green patches were no greener now than the memory of those who lay in dust below” (BL, Part the First).

Failure of memory, however, cannot erase the fact that the present act of human life is played out on the same battlefield.

If the host slain upon the field could have been for a moment reanimated in the forms in which they fell each upon the spot that was the bed of his untimely death, gashed and ghastly soldiers would have stared in, hundreds deep, at household door and window; and would have risen on the hearths of quiet homes; and would have been the garnered store of barns and granaries; and would have started up between the cradled infant and its nurse; and would have floated with the stream, and whirled round on the mill, and crowded the orchard, and burdened the meadow, and piled the rickyard high with dying men. (Part the First)

Now a further refinement on the basic idea is caught in this picture of a past life intermingling with the present: it also penetrates and permeates it in the blowing dust and as a part of the very nourishment of the present passed on through many seasons of garnered stores in barns and granaries. Once again it would be impossible to
say where the dead leave off and the living begin. Here is the societial extension of a personal image already familiar, one that also repudiates the pastness of the individual past by implying the procession of figures that every adult carries along as a present reality throughout life.

The Mystery of Edwin Drood also contains an example of this fusion of restless graveyard and ancient battleground. Cloisterham (a fictitious name, says the narrator, thereby suggesting a timeless universality) is an old cathedral town—"once possibly known to the Druids by another name, and certainly to the Romans by another, and to the Saxons by another, and to the Normans by another; and a name more or less in the course of many centuries can be of little moment to its dusty chronicles" (MED, ch. 3). The children of Cloisterham, we are told, grow "small salad in the dust of abbots and abbesses, and make dirt-pies of nuns and friars" in this ancient town where "every ploughman in its outlying fields renders to once puissant Lord Treasurers, Archbishops, Bishops, and such-like, the attention which the Ogre in the story-book desired to render to his unbidden visitor, and grinds their bones to make his bread." They, in turn, work their way into his thinking: "Fragments of old wall, saint's chapel, chapter-house, convent and monastery, have got incongruously or obstructively built into many of its houses and gardens, much as kindred jumbled notions have become incorporated into many of its citizens' minds. All things in it are of the past." In this striking parallel to the imagined scene on the ancient battlefield, once more past life invades, penetrates, and nourishes—or stifles—the present.

Looming over the city of Cloisterham is the cathedral tower, whose vicinity is avoided after dark by the citizens of the town. Even though they might deny their belief in ghosts, their avoidance betrays "the innate shrinking of dust with the breath of life in it from dust out of which the breath of life has passed," though both are simultaneously "dust." It also suggests the widely diffused reflection: "'If the dead do, under any circumstances, become visible to the living, these are such likely surroundings for the purpose that I, the living, will get out of them as soon as I can'" (ch. 12).

Perhaps the most interesting thing about these fearfully apprehended ghosts is that they never actually materialize from such likely surroundings of battlefield or graveyard: their value in such contexts is purely affective. The ghosts that haunt the works of Dickens arise from a radically different source. In a letter to Mrs.
Gaskell (November 25, 1851), Dickens defines the function of ghost stories as "illustrating particular states of mind and processes of the imagination"—the function they invariably serve for him.

A second set of images, then, exploring the past as it lives in memory, analogizes the states of mind and processes of the imagination that sometimes result in people seeing ghosts. In summary, these mental states all enable their possessors to see the egocentric present in a multiple perspective, projected against past, extended present (that is, across space), and future; for as Scrooge learned, not all ghosts are of the past. The ghost of the future, in fact, may be the most compelling of all.

The person who looks into a mirror and sees something there besides the expected image is in a state of mind to see ghosts. One of the most instructive references to the mirror appears in a letter from Dickens to Lady Eastlake—undated, but possibly referring to an illness of June 1853:

I have been ill of six days in bed, for the first time in my life. Since Monday last I have been having a man every morning—a stranger to me, with big gaunt eyes and a hollow-cheek—whose appearance was rather irksome and oppressive. I am happy to say that he has at last retired from the looking-glass and is replaced by the familiar personage whom I have lathered and scraped these twenty years.

With "big gaunt eyes" and "hollow cheek," this stranger's resemblance to the "dreadful Mask" is sufficiently striking to account for its "irksome and oppressive" effect upon a sick man already susceptible to thoughts of the figure who will finally complete his procession.

Dickens transforms this phenomenon into a magical mirror in "The Haunted House" (Christmas story for 1859), though here its influence runs through time in the opposite direction. The narrator of the story has taken up residence in a house haunted by "Master B." after disclaimers of belief resembling Dickens's own. Six nights have produced only phenomena that could be "scientifically" explained away. Nonetheless, the suspense and the focus of attention upon the resuscitated dead put him into a state of mind for seeing ghosts; that is, susceptible to the influence of the past. On the seventh morning, "I began to perceive that things were going wrong": "The first appearance that presented itself was early in the morning when it was but just daylight and no more. I was standing shaving at my glass, when I suddenly discovered, to
my consternation and amazement, that I was shaving—not myself—I am fifty—but a boy. Apparently Master B.!” (HH, ch. 2). Greatly disturbed, the narrator takes a few turns around the room before resuming.

Opening my eyes, which I had shut while recovering my firmness, I now met in the glass, looking straight at me, the eyes of a young man of four or five and twenty. Terrified by this new ghost, I closed my eyes, and made a strong effort to recover myself. Opening them again, I saw, shaving his cheek in the glass, my father, who has been long dead. Nay, I even saw my grandfather, too, whom I never did see in my life. (ch. 2)

Thus the images from his personal and familial past trail before him across the mirror.

That night, he has a second visitation when, “waking from an uneasy sleep at exactly two o’clock in the morning, what were my feelings to find that I was sharing my bed with the skeleton of Master B.!” The ghost of Master B. now appears before his eyes, amidst his protestations of disbelief, to explain the meaning of both the figures in the mirror and the skeleton. “Barber!” it apostrophised me when I had finished. . . . ‘Condemned,’ said the ghost, ‘to shave a constant change of customers—now, me—now, a young man—now, thyself as thou art—now, thy father—now, thy grandfather; condemned, too, to lie down with a skeleton every night, and to rise with it every morning—’” In explaining his experience, the narrator in retrospect identifies his visitor as “the ghost of my own childhood, the ghost of my own innocence, the ghost of my own airy belief”—a phantom of the past to be pursued often; but “never with these man’s hands of mine to touch, . . . never more to this man’s heart of mine to hold it in its purity. And here you see me working out, as cheerfully and thankfully as I may, my doom of shaving in the glass a constant change of customers, and of lying down and rising up with the skeleton allotted to me for my mortal companion” (ch. 2). Although Dickens here substitutes the skeleton for the mirrored mask, they are clearly analogues and the unified procession hovers in the imaginative background. In short, the narrator is now a person continuously mindful of both past and future as he pursues his affairs in the present.

Whether appearing as erratic images in a mirror or in their more traditional form, ghosts are always a warning against living unreflectively in the present—an idea more boldly stated in A Christmas
Carol (Christmas book for 1843) by a humanized Scrooge: "'I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach'" (CC, stave IV).

The truth Scrooge learns must also be taught to the chemist Redlaw of The Haunted Man (Christmas book for 1848), who insists that "The past is past" and wishes that he might dispose once and for all of painful remembrance, that "tissue of sorrow and trouble" with its reminders of suffering and loss. When eighty-seven-year-old Philip finds his recollections "merry and happy" and speaks with pleasure of the old motto under the ancient portrait in the great Dinner Hall of the school: "Lord! Keep my memory green" (HM, ch. 1), Redlaw is agitated into the reflective state of mind conducive to seeing ghosts. "My memory" as a faculty he personally possesses begins to slide into the motto meaning of "memory of me" and he is led to reflect on what that memory will be.

When the phantom appears (seen first in the mirror) he and Redlaw scrutinize each other: "The living man, and the animated image of himself dead, might so have looked, the one upon the other." Redlaw thus most significantly "remembers" first the future when he will be dead.

Redlaw insists to the phantom, who is "the animated image of himself dead," that his wish to abolish memory is a benevolent wish for all mankind, who would be far happier without memory of past happiness and misery. Now the phantom not only grants him his personal wish, but also adds the "Gift" that Redlaw's very presence will henceforth destroy memory in all those whom he approaches. He is taken, like Scrooge, on a journey through his familiar world to see the difference made in a humanity without memory and guided only by the circumstances of the present moment: love and compassion, which bind human beings together, have vanished from the race.

With increasing horror, Redlaw sees his philosophy, his touch, contaminate all about him. The monster child (see ch. VI) alone remains impervious to his influence because what he has wished to be, this child already is:

"the last, completest illustration of a human creature, utterly bereft of such remembrances as you have yielded up... Your influence is powerless here, because from this child's bosom you can banish nothing. His thoughts have been in "terrible companionship" with yours,
because you have gone down to his unnatural level. He is the growth of man’s indifference; you are the growth of man’s presumption. The beneficent design of Heaven is, in each case, overthrown, and from the two poles of the immaterial world you come together.” (ch. 3)

And what has this child lost?

“No softening memory of sorrow, wrong, or trouble enters here, because this wretched mortal from his birth has been abandoned to a worse condition than the beasts, and has, within his knowledge, no one contrast, no humanising touch, to make a grain of such a memory spring up in his hardened breast.

All within this desolate creature is barren wilderness. All within the man bereft of what you have resigned, is the same barren wilderness.” (ch. 3)

Phantom and child have shown the chemist that what he himself has taught as true in the material world is likewise true in the immaterial one: “No step or atom in the wondrous structure could be lost, without a blank being made in the great universe. I know, now, that it is the same with good and evil, happiness and sorrow, in the memories of men” (ch. 2). Memory, then, “green” to symbolize continued and full life, joins the fancies and wondering visions of childhood in the humanizing dream world of the spirit, growing ever longer and more important as the individual proceeds through life. Without it, life is a “barren wilderness.”

Another set of images exploring memory analogizes the fact that recollection, like the child’s dream of the future, makes little distinction between what was “only” fancied and dreamed about, and what “really” happened. Both orders of existence play equally decisive roles in shaping the life of an individual, and remembered dreams maintain an integrity of reality at least equivalent to that of remembered events. In his Christmas story for 1851, “What Christmas Is as We Grow Older,” Dickens develops this idea in its discursive form. “Time was, with most of us,” he writes, “when Christmas Day encircling all our limited world like a magic ring, left nothing out for us to miss or seek”—those Christmases of childhood, which as yet made no distinctions between dream and reality—“That was the time for the beatified enjoyment of the things that were to be, and never were, and yet the things that were so real in our resolute hope that it would be hard to say, now, what realities achieved since, have been stronger!” So strong and influential are the visions, in fact, that it is difficult sometimes to realize that the things dreamed of never actually come to pass:
[I]s our life here [hespeculates], at the best, so constituted that, pausing as we advance at such a noticeable milestone in the track as this great birthday, we look back on the things that never were, as naturally and full as gravely as on the things that have been and are gone, or have been and still are? If it be so, and so it seems to be, must we come to the conclusion that life is little better than a dream, and little worth the loves and strivings we crowd into it? (WCI)

The negative answer supplied for the last question once more asserts the real value of the "unaccomplished visions of our youth" as "our teachers to deal gently even with the impalpable nothings of the earth" as we work our way through life.

Memory sometimes plays a further trick with actuality: not only does it grant identical reality to past things actual and imagined, but it also frequently assumes for "things that never were" an ongoing and continuous life extending into the present. Mr. Twemlow in Our Mutual Friend, for example, finds melancholy sustenance for a dreary life in maintaining a youthful dream, ironically unaware of its contradictory counterpart in the actual world:

For, the poor little harmless gentleman once had his fancy, like the rest of us, and she didn't answer (as she often does not), and he thinks the adorable bridesmaid is like the fancy as she was then (which she is not at all), and that if the fancy had not married some one else for money, but had married him for love, he and she would have been happy (which they wouldn't have been), and that she has a tenderness for him still (whereas her toughness is a proverb). (OMF, bk. I, ch. 10)

Similarly, the narrator of "The Poor Relation's Story" (Christmas story for 1852) lives a rich double life. While superficially the poor relation, his "real" life, he explains, is spent in the "Castle . . . in the Air," where the dreams of his youth have confounded actuality to be privately fulfilled. "I really do not know, in my Castle," he continues, "what loneliness is." This airy castle, which must be vacated if one is to mature, may, it seems, be reinkated as a kind of haven from the insupportable disappointments of life. Yet an air of sadness and desiccated futility lingers about the persons of Twemlow and the Poor Relation, who must withdraw from life to find any happiness in it. Arthur Clennam, on the other hand, is picking up the threads of life once more when he perceives the gap between the extended life he has provided for the dream and the unextended life of the actuality: the eighteen-year-old "dream" looks simpering and silly in the middle-aged person of the actual Flora Finching. 7
The same process of extending the dream, however, may color the thinking even of persons vigorously involved in life, providing them with an endearing or amusing eccentricity. Aunt Betsey Trotwood, never shaken in her affectionate belief in the reality of her niece, Miss Betsey Copperfield, holds up that exemplary person as a model for runaway David. “His sister, Betsey Trotwood, never would have run away,” she exclaims. “She would have lived with her godmother, and we should have been devoted to one another” (DC, ch. 13). With similar reasoning she continues to protect and give money to her former husband on the grounds that “for the sake of what I once believed him to be, I wouldn’t have even this shadow of my idle fancy hardly dealt with” (ch. 47). Thus unreal dreams may have permanently real significance in the lives of their possessors.

Another crucial characteristic of memory is its refusal to define experience as a point or moment in time. Actual persons and events of the past, the present, and the future have a contemporaneous reality regardless of intervening change. Furthermore, like oneself, the people one knows are made up of a succession of figures through time. Particularly when asleep, or in illness, or when dead, people slip readily back through time and “are” what they once were, a complex accumulation of all they have ever been that also prefigures what they will be. Two examples will illustrate this point adequately. In “The Haunted House,” the narrator comments on the heightened solemnity of things for him in the early morning hours:

There is something awful in the being surrounded by familiar faces asleep—in the knowledge that those who are dearest to us and to whom we are dearest, are profoundly unconscious of us, in an impassive state, anticipative of that mysterious condition to which we are all tending—the stopped life, the broken threads of yesterday, the deserted seat, the closed book, the unfinished but abandoned occupation, all are images of Death. (HH, ch. 1)

But even as the sleeping face prefigures the “dreadful Mask,” the dead face recapitulates life: “[A] certain air that familiar household objects take upon them when they first emerge from the shadows of the night into the morning, of being newer, and as they used to be long ago, has its counterpart in the subsidence of the worn face of maturity or age, in death, into the old youthful look.” Comparably, as the adult David Copperfield progresses through life, he
envisions the infant in his procession securely asleep in his mother’s arms: “The mother who lay in the grave, was the mother of my infancy; the little creature in her arms, was myself, as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom” (*DC*, ch. 19).

In all its aspects, it seems, memory vigorously reaffirms the dream world’s transcendency over the actual one. The difference, however, between youthful airy visions and memory is profound. In between, the actual world has been not repudiated, but absorbed. When the momentary event, happy or unhappy, is accepted into memory, its meaning expands and develops and it remains permanently alive, like the figures in the procession. Furthermore, although experience has taught the impossibility of personal dream fulfillment, dreams for the future become revitalized by the enlarged view of life, which once more brings childhood and children into the picture. Dickens explains this in his most sententious fashion in “What Christmas Is as We Grow Older” as he welcomes “old aspirations, glittering creatures of an ardent fancy” to their place under the holly:

Welcome, all that was ever real to our hearts; and for the earnestness that made you real, thanks to Heaven! Do we build no Christmas castles in the clouds now? Let our thoughts, fluttering like butterflies among these flowers of children, bear witness! Before this boy, there stretches out a Future, brighter than we ever looked on in our old romantic time, but bright with honour and with truth. . . . We see how, when our graves are old, other hopes than ours are young, other hearts than ours are moved; how other ways are smoothed; how other happiness blooms, ripens, and decays—no, not decays, for other homes and other bands of children, not yet in being nor for ages yet to be, arise, and bloom and ripen to the end of all! (*WCI*)

The equally sententious Mr. Micawber, “full of eloquence,” similarly justifies the addition of a new member to his family: “He gave us to understand,” writes David, “that in our children we lived again, and that, under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, any addition to their number was doubly welcome” (*DC*, ch. 28). It is a persistent idea with Micawber, as he later explains to David that in Miss Micawber “her mother renewed her youth, like the Phoenix” (ch. 36). Ada similarly renews hope in her unborn child. That our children renew our lives is a commonplace idea, to be sure, but one that lies constantly behind Dickens’s portraits of children. Seen in this light, Jo, the soulless child of “The Haunted Man,” and little
Nell all signify as allegorical figures as well as actual children. In children, Dickens preaches, lie our only possible mature hopes and dreams for the future; in each new generation death is joyously negated. In the state or condition of its children is embodied the state or condition of humankind itself.

In the inner world of memory and hope, then, lives all of human experience. The individual who carries such a world within has a perspective that reduces personal mortality to a natural, undisturbing fact. This individual lives in a present dwarfed by the past and the future; yet, paradoxically, that long view charges each present moment with significance. Such a person carries within, in fact, something analogous to the warm, bright fire on the hearth.

It may be that only people who have tried to cope with English damp and cold without benefit of central heating could appreciate fully the centrality of the fireplace in the Dickens imagery. Manner turns dependably into mannerism as every Dickens traveller fleeing from the damp and cold is drawn by lighted window and peers down onto a scene of human congeniality around the cheerful fire on the hearth; and as every householder closes doors and shutters windows to close in light and warmth and push back the freezing dark extending through graveyard and across marsh—no congenial environment for living people.

Betty Higden, a wanderer outside of houses, thinks it a little hard in them when families gathering together for the night close the shutters and blacken the flame. "'Ah me!' she said to herself. 'The dead and I seem to have it pretty much to ourselves in the dark and in this weather'" (OMF, bk. III, ch. 8). David similarly recalls his first childish association with his father's white gravestone in the churchyard and "the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were—almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes—bolted and locked against it" (DC, ch. 1).

Yet, granted the realistic force of the fireplace image, its real power lies in its emblematic and symbolic meanings. Indeed, in the passages just quoted, meaning has already burst its literal bounds and expanded into societal connotations: At the center of the house of life is the fireplace around which human beings gather together and from whose vitalizing warmth none should be excluded.

An even more pervasive analogy, however, is that between the burning fireplace and the living human soul passing through time.
This analogy is hyperbolically and comically depicted in the literal-minded obsession of Mrs. Fibbitson in *David Copperfield*. The boy David encounters her sitting by the fire with another old woman: "'Ah, she's poorly,' said the first old woman. 'It's one of her bad days. If the fire was to go out, through any accident, I verily believe she'd go out too, and never come to life again'" (*DC*, ch. 5). Though it is a warm day, marvels David, she thinks of nothing but the fire—is "jealous even of the saucepan on it"—and sits "screening the fire as if she were sedulously keeping it warm, instead of it keeping her warm, and watching it in a most distrustful manner." The completion of David's breakfast, "by relieving the fire, gave her such extreme joy that she laughed aloud." Mrs. Fibbitson, to be sure, is a caricature. But more thoughtful characters in Dickens's stories are humanized and complete people, or are on their way to being so, when they find personal meaning in the fire. Those who, like Sir Leicester, sit unaware by the burning fire full of signs and omens are dehumanized or subhuman.

The total fire-fireplace configuration is perhaps the most complex in the entire Dickens tapestry. In the fireplace itself, burning wood or coal not only emblematizes one's own life falling away into ashes; it also recalls one's connection with a remote past when the wood stood as living trees not yet felled and coal stood as living trees not yet fallen in the swamp—"Dedlock timber and antediluvian forest." The actual instant at which a large-souled person stares into the fire provides only a point upon which to suspend momentarily the *durée* that makes up "real" life. In the fire, the present moment is projected against the past and future. Here sensitive people find memory and hope, and see their lives in total perspective.

One of the most extended and complete examples of the fireplace associations runs through *Hard Times*, where inability to catch the analogies becomes a gauge of the souls of Mr. Gradgrind and Tom. In the fireplace also is traced the evidence of Louisa's irrepresible soul. The "Ogre" Gradgrind, predictably enough, is singularly insensitive as he tries unsuccessfully to fathom (even with "his cavernous eyes on the fire") what has fostered Louisa's "idle imagination" (see ch. VI). He postulates a corrupting instructor, or an "idle storybook," but the intrusion into his well-ordered household of a "wondering" child is beyond his understanding. The truth of the matter is that he is staring blindly at the culprit, for Louisa finds in the sympathetic fire the only sustenance for her
starved soul. Mrs. Gradgrind, similarly puzzled by her daughter, blames Tom for encouraging her derelictions into the world of fancy. But Louisa quickly explains it otherwise: "I was encouraged by nothing, Mother, but by looking at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying. It made me think, after all, how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it" (HT, bk. I, ch. 8). Thus the log consumed by fire becomes to Louisa analogous to her own life. As the felled tree drops in flakes into the nothingness of dead ashes, she sees her life burning meaninglessly toward death.°

Although Thomas's soul is a weak thing, he takes some strength from Louisa. As they sit by the fire, he rests "his sulky face on his arms," while she watches the bright sparks as they drop upon the hearth. Tom expresses his desperate hatred of everything in his life except his sister. He speaks with special detestation of Mr. Bounderby, with whom it has been arranged he is going to live. As they talk, the fire defines their shadows on the wall and ceiling "as if the brother and sister were overhung by a dark cavern." Or, a fanciful imagination—if such treason could have been there—might have made it out to be the shadow of their subject, and of its lowering association with their future" (bk. I, ch. 8). But in the very shadow of the "Giant" Bounderby and his dark cavern, Loo (Louisa) sits engaged in the forbidden practice of wondering:

"Have you gone to sleep, Loo?"
"No, Tom. I am looking at the fire."
"You seem to find more to look at in it than ever I could find," said Tom. "Another of the advantages, I suppose, of being a girl."
(bk. I, ch. 8)

A little later:

Tom went and leaned on the back of her chair, to contemplate the fire which so engrossed her, from her point of view, and see what he could make of it.
"Except that it is a fire," said Tom, "it looks to me as stupid and blank as everything else looks. What do you see in it? Not a circus?" 10
"I don't see anything in it, Tom, particularly. But since I have been looking at it, I have been wondering about you and me, grown up."
"Wondering again!" said Tom.
"I have such unmanageable thoughts," returned his sister, "that they will wonder." (bk. I, ch. 8)

For the young Louisa, "wondering" about the future brings little hope. But in the calm aftermath of Hard Times, after much suffer-
ing and learning, an adult Louisa seems to find more happy predictions in the fire. She once more sits "watching the fire as in days of yore, though with a gentler and humbler face. How much of the future might arise before her vision?" (bk. III, ch. 9). It will be a future of serenity, not of fairy-tale happiness, but with both a father and a brother returned to humanity.

Most of all, she might see herself among children. The first sight meeting her eyes after the unconsciousness into which she falls on the night she returns to her father is an emblem of reviving hope: her young sister Jane. ("What a beaming face you have, Jane!" said Louisa, as her young sister—timidly still—bent down to kiss her. "Have I? I am very glad you think so. I am sure it must be Sissy's doing" [bk. III, ch. 1].) This one resource comes to be completely restored for Louisa: the perpetual hope to be found in children in the idyllic garden—although they are not to be hers. Had they been, she knows she would have been "very careful that they should have a childhood of the mind no less than a childhood of the body."

But, happy Sissy's happy children loving her; all children loving her; she, grown learned in childish lore; thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised; trying hard to know her humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death, and the plainest national prosperity figures can show will be the writing on the Wall—she holding this course as part of no fantastic vow, or bond, or brotherhood, or sisterhood, or pledge, or covenant, or fancy dress, or fancy fair, but simply as a duty to be done. (bk. III, ch. 9)

As personal dreams of happiness have been relinquished to be replaced by the hope to be found in renewed generations, Louisa can now find in the fire a future life of serene contentment invested with enlarged meaning."

Lizzie Hexam, too, is given to seeing pictures in the fire. Like Louisa, she gently encourages the more sluggish soul of her brother in an interchange of ideas as they sit before the fire. Lizzie is thoughtful:

"... as I sit a looking at the fire, I seem to see in the burning coal—like where that glow is now—"

"That's gas, that is," said the boy, "coming out of a bit of forest that's been under the mud that was under the water in the days of
Noah's Ark. Look here! When I take the poker—so—and give it 
dig—"

"Don't disturb it, Charley, or it'll be all in a blaze. It's that dull 
glow near it, coming and going that I mean. When I look at it of an 
evening, it comes like pictures to me, Charley."

"Show us a picture," said the boy. "Tell us where to look."

"Ah! It wants my eyes, Charley."

"Cut away then, and tell us what your eyes make of it." (OMF, 
bk. I, ch. 3)

Charley's practical interpretation of the glow is more than an 
evidence of his factual turn of mind: his association of it with "the 
mud that was under the water in the days of Noah's Ark" unmistak-
ably brings in the primitive savage world of subhuman amphibians. 
In response to Charley's request, Lizzie "cuts away" to paint for him 
a picture of childhood experiences shared in their memories; and 
in response to another request to "cut away again . . . and give us a 
fortune-telling one; a future one," she depicts her dreams for their 
future. For Lizzie, both memory and hope live in "the hollow down 
by the flare" (bk. I, ch. 3).

Like Tom, Charley will never see with his sister's eyes. In a later 
day, as an ambitious youth who lives opportunistically in the present, 
Charley complains petulantly against his sister's reminders of the 
past, declaring that "'What we have got to do is, to turn our faces 
full in our new direction, and keep straight on'": 12 "'You are such a 
dreamer,' said the boy. . . . 'It was all very well when we sat before 
the fire—when we looked into the hollow down by the flare—but 
we are looking into the real world, now'" (bk. II, ch. 1). To which 
Lizzie replies: "'Ah, we were looking into the real world then, 
Charley.'"

For David Copperfield, also, the fire provides a meeting ground 
for the past and future as he tries to reconstruct his life after the 
death of Dora:

I gradually fell . . . to tracing prospects in the live-coals, and to think-
ing, as they broke and changed, of the principal vicissitudes and sepa-
ratings that had marked my life. I had not seen a coal fire, since I had 
left England three years ago; though many a wood fire had I watched, 
as it crumbled into hoary ashes, 13 and mingled with the feathery heap 
upon the hearth, which not inaply figured to me, in my despondency, 
my own dead hopes.

I could think of the past now, gravely, but not bitterly; and could 
contemplate the future in a brave spirit. (DC, ch. 59)
In all of these interpretations there is the common core of meaning that the world of dreams and the world of actuality coalesce in the fireplace, where they both acquire their significant "reality" through memory and hope.

Other configurations in which fire appears touch and interrelate with the fireplace patterns in rich new ways responding to Dickens's associative imagination. The burning away of human life within the confined, steady control of the fireplace contrasts sharply with the death emblematized in the wild and destructive burning of the warehouse whose flames cast a lurid light across the death struggle of Daniel Quilp; or with the violent and sudden death analogized in the blood-red marsh sunrise or sunset, which seems "filled with the ruins of a forest it had set on fire" (bk. I, ch. 6).

The contrast hovers in young Louisa's mind as she looks across the chimneys of Coketown with their serpents of smoke. Louisa, "so much given to watching the bright ashes at twilight as they fell into the grate and became extinct," tries to discover "first in her own fire within the house and then in the fiery haze without what kind of woof Old Time, that greatest and longest-established spinner of all, would weave from the threads he had already spun into a woman" (HT, bk. I, ch. 14). For suddenly Louisa is a woman, and Mr. Bounderby has proposed marriage. Now, as we have seen, Louisa finds in the smoking chimneys of Coketown a prophetic similarity to herself. Her own repressed fires, Louisa senses, instead of yielding life-giving light and warmth, might explode into a frightening and ravaging force to consume instantly the log in which they burn: "I have often thought that life is very short." But her father, looking unseeing into the fireplace, can't be expected to see the remark's application.

The burning fireplace and the felled tree are of course inseparable; hence, all configurations in which the tree is featured are drawn into this one as well. The mysterious merging of these patterns in the imagination of both writer and reader may well account for some of the crackle of language noted by John Gross (see Introduction) as part of the electrifying effects Dickens can at times produce in his readers. The relevant characteristics of the tree are its greenness, its felling, its burning, and its falling into ashes. Greenness is life; it is also memory. The conventional meaning of the Christmas tree falls readily into the Dickens imagery: its greenness is a reminder of the continued life of Christ and the continued life in his teachings. In "A Christmas Tree," Dickens reports "a
whisper going through the leaves” of the tree as it sinks into the ground: “This, in commemoration of the law of love and kindness, mercy and compassion. This, in remembrance of Me!” One remembers that in The Battle of Life, although the green patches on the ancient battlefield kept memory alive for years, ultimately the “wounded trees had long ago made Christmas logs, and blazed and roared away. The deep green patches were no greener now than the memory of those who lay in dust below.” Echo recalls Redlaw and the old motto under the portrait in the great Dinner Hall of his school: “Lord! Keep my memory green.” Once more comes the subtle fusing of trees and human beings so frequently observed during the course of this study.

Now with a slight shift in point of view, a new pattern emerges. When is the life of the tree really over? The felled Christmas tree is still green. The Yule log burns with vital light and warmth. So does the coal from the antediluvian forest. Is there not comfort in the extended analogy between human life and tree? The individual who in one sense can see life burning away to ashes like the log in the fireplace, in another sense may perceive that the light and warmth that make the ancient life still glow with vitality may have some personal relevance. One’s own green memory, it suggests, may be prolonged if one so lives as to furnish analogous light and warmth for future generations.

For the picture in the fireplace created by the burning log or coal symbolizes the light- and warmth-giving significance of the burning human life. Memory is doubly crucial to the perception of this significance. Within an individual’s own perception, memory of the past, both personal and cultural, humanizes that person so that life possesses these life-giving qualities; in the memory of those who come after rest hopes for personal immortality. The restless ghosts clamoring for recognition are all reiterating the same plea for continued life: “Lord, keep my memory green.”

What, then, is finally the relationship between dream and actuality? Although the actual world is unquestionably the stuff of life, the dream world, by awakening, nourishing, and sustaining the human soul, gives this actuality its meaning. Through childhood fancy, wonder, and airy visions an ideal of human happiness is conceived; through adult memory and hope, the egocentric dream of personal fulfillment and immortality is replaced by an altruistic sense of vital participation in a perennially resurgent human life. Such a reconciliation of the two worlds comes in natural stages for
the fortunate. Some achieve it only after great travail. Some, permanently unable or unwilling to make the transition into full human beings, remain subhuman or dehumanized. For such allegorical characters as Scrooge or Redlaw, the truth, appearing dramatically as supernatural revelation, thaws out the frozen soul to bring about an exhilarating rebirth into the life of society.

Since these views obviously endorse the teachings of Christ, it is not surprising that they find their most overt expression in the Christmas books and stories. But it is worth noting that the images of the Christmas season that attract Dickens are those in harmony with his imaginative mode of experience rather than those heavy with religious symbolism: the Christmas tree rather than the creche; the frozen season giving way to yielding warmth, which brings springtime to this world more than it gives promise of a future existence. It attests to the brotherhood of man, which is a social and humanistic idea, and largely ignores the theological question of the fatherhood of God. The life it celebrates is the essentially comic rhythmic cycle of ongoing humanity.