

Landscapes of The Mind: The Setting
as Psyche in Nathaniel Hawthorne's
The Scarlet Letter And F. Scott
Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

Cruze Stark

(University of Delaware/UFSC)

In the closing moment of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Nick returns for one last look at what once was Gatsby's house. But instead of physical buildings, he has a vision of an earlier time, a vision of the "old island" that "flowered once for Dutch sailor's eyes — a fresh green breast of the new world." "For a transitory enchanted moment," Nick thinks, "man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder (182)."

There is something in all of us, Fitzgerald is suggesting, a need for wonder, for renewal, that the outside world is simply unable to provide. Yet Nick acknowledges that we must look to that outside world, if not for fulfillments, at least for correlatives of those internal needs. And Fitzgerald, in the very structure of his novel, uses that outside world, the physical setting, as a means of objectifying psychological options. In *The Great Gatsby*, the only way both Nick and the reader can understand those needs is through making them tangible in the fresh green breast of a new world — or perhaps in a Daisy — or even a Gatsby.

This objectification occurs, of course, in all literatures. But today, I am most concerned with that of the United States. We

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are all familiar with the propensity of United States authors to present geographical polarities: Cooper's prairie as opposed to eastern settlements; Melville's open ocean as distinct from the securities of the shore; Twain's river in contrast to the societal restrictions of the bank; Faulkner's big woods, so far from women and plowed fields, the only place it is possible to encounter the wonders of the bear. And, of course, the examples I'm concerned with today, Nathaniel Hawthorne's use of the forest and the town in **The Scarlet Letter** and F. Scott Fitzgerald's presentation of the midwest and east in **The Great Gatsby**.

Of course, I am not suggesting that an emphasis on the psychological use of place is the only — or even primary — way of approaching the two novels. As is true of every fine work of literature, these novels have elicited — and will continue to do so — innumerable and at times seemingly conflicting responses. What I am suggesting is that a concern with place is one way of entering Hawthorne's and Fitzgerald's fictional worlds. In this paper, I hope to demonstrate an example of how such an approach might work, and then to make a tentative statement about the psychological use of fictional place.

In most of the novels I've mentioned, there are opposing locales — town, forest; ocean, shore; east, west. And in most of these works, the physical oppositions represent what the authors consider conflicting urges within human nature. The most common of these in the works I've mentioned is that between the securities of externally imposed boundaries and the freedom to follow one's own impulses and desires. It is oversimplifying, I think, to consider this opposition merely in sociological terms — that is, the oppressiveness of society's limiting individual freedom. In each of these works, there is a clear insistence that there is something *within* us that needs the securities of societal boundaries just as there is an equal, and conflicting, demand to be free. I can think of no clearer presentation of this conflict than in the opening of **The Scarlet Letter**.

In the first chapter, the narrator tells us that "the founder of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their

earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil, as a cemetery, and another portion as a site of a prison" (p.75). It is, of course, readily apparent why a town needs a cemetery. It is quite unfortunate, yet nevertheless natural, that people die. Certainly, there is slight stigma against its normal occurrence. Yet Hawthorne places the need for a prison in the same category. It is inescapable, he insists, no matter what utopia one might project, that there be a jail. Just as the cemetery relates to a physical necessity, so a prison responds to a psychological inevitability.

The narrator's intention is clarified as he describes Boston's jail. Beside the door, giving solace to those who enter — or, as in Hester's case, those who leave — there grows a rosebush. In a seeming digression, the narrator offers two possibilities for its presence. It could be the final remnant of the forest, left behind when the town was carved from the wilderness. This juxtaposition of forest and prison is significant, for continually Hawthorne will allude to those urges that necessitate jails as the forest aspect of human nature.

The second possibility of the rosebush's origin is presented supposedly in opposition to the first. Actually, it is a further clarification of the way Hawthorne will use the forest throughout the novel. "There is fair authority," the narrator informs us, that "it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson" (p.76). Hawthorne insists he will take no sides in this "controversy"; but, of course, for his thematic purposes no opposing sides exist. Ann Hutchinson was banished from the colony for declaring that the elect — or at least those who visibly seemed most likely — had no need to follow civil law. They need only look within themselves to discover God's will.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Hawthorne was not greatly concerned in his fiction about God's will. But he is using Hutchinson's antinomianism to represent a reliance on an inner, subjective authority rather than on external restrictions. In this sense, the forest is the antinomian part of ourselves. It is no coincidence that when the Reverend Mr. Wilson asks Pearl who made her, she answers that no one did, that her mother plucked her from

a rosebush. For the adultery was a forest act. It is not merely from plot necessity that when Hester and Dimmesdale finally converse in private, they do so in the forest. From a societal viewpoint, they have no right to such intimacy. So, in the world of the novel, no matter where they meet, they are in the forest. In this sense, the inner reality, the characterization, is actually controlling the physical plot. What I'm trying to say is there is simply no division between external reality and internal states. Although we are not told where the adultery took place, in the context of Hawthorne's geographical representation, their affair inevitably was, had to be, consummated in the forest.

It is important that we not make the forest and town either/or values. Both represent aspects of human nature that are simply there. Neither is good nor bad in itself, but only in relation to the fulfillment of the other need. Because there is an inevitable opposition, there is an unresolvable conflict between the two urges. We must be free, yet we cannot long bear being lonely. The only problem is that we must have, but we cannot have, both. As a result, we never fully have either.

Hester is perfectly free to leave Boston, taking Pearl and discarding the letter. But she stays because occasionally she shares a glance with Dimmesdale, and then she feels a momentary relief, as if half of her agony were removed. And when Hester persuades Dimmesdale to flee Boston, they have a choice as to where they will fulfill their companionship — to travel deeper into the forest or even further into structured society, eastward to Europe. There is never any doubt as to the direction they will take. But although when forced to choose, the character will act in ways he or she hopes will preclude loneliness, no character ever escapes the demands of the forest. No one is ever reconciled to the restrictions on his individual subjective urges.

To use a very unHawthorne-like example, let us imagine that you are involved with someone you care about very much. But before you entered this involvement, one of your greatest daily pleasures was squeezing your toothpaste from the top of the tube. You have now discovered, however, that the one you care about cannot abide a toothpaste tube that has been squeezed from the top. Now, there is

no question as to which is more important — your relationship to your friend or your relationship to your toothpaste. So, of course, you change your squeezing habits. But that doesn't mean that, every morning, as you stand in front of the bathroom mirror, you don't look at the top of that toothpaste tube with longing.

In Hawthorne's world, any society, whether between two or among multitudes, involves giving up part of one's freedom. And although we agree to this social contract, we are never truly free of the forest. There remains a constant tension between the need to be free and the need not to be lonely.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, we can understand the characters perhaps most clearly through this town-forest dichotomy. But I want to emphasize that this is a felt distinction. Dimmesdale, obviously, is a town person. "Mr. Dimmesdale was a true priest, a true religionist, with the reverential sentiment largely developed, and an order of mind that impelled itself powerfully along the track of a creed, and wore its passage continually deeper with the lapse of time. In no state of society would he have been what is called a man of liberal views; it would always be essential to his peace to feel the pressure of a faith about him, supporting, while it confined him within its iron framework." (p.145).

The first time we see Dimmesdale, he is on the balcony with the civil and spiritual leaders of Boston, looking down not only on Hester and Pearl, but on the other townspeople as well. But unlike the other ministers and magistrates, Dimmesdale has been forced to acknowledge privately, if not publically, the forest portion of himself. His companions on the balcony, Hawthorne tells us, "were doubtless good men, just and sage. But out of the whole human family, it would not have been easy to select the same number of wise and virtuous persons, who should be less capable of sitting in judgement on an erring woman's heart, and disentangling its mesh of good and evil, than the sages of rigid aspect towards whom Hester Prynne now turned her face" (p.91). The eyes of the Reverend Mr. Wilson, more accustomed to the abstractions of his study, were as inexperienced as Pearl's in dealing with the "unadulterated sunshine" of the outside world. "He looked," Hawthorne writes, "like the darkly engraved portraits which we see prefixed to old

volumes of sermons; and had no more right than one of those portraits would have, to step forth, as he now did, and meddle with a question of human guilt, passion, and anguish" (91-2).

Dimmesdale, on the other hand, is very much aware of the ambiguities of the complexities of the heart. He has been forced into an acknowledgment of the reality of the forest within all of us, whether we wish to confront it or not. As a result, he is not able to maintain a sense of moral superiority. His guilt has humanized him. Without it, he would have joined the other clergy on "their high mountain-peaks of faith and sanctity." But his sense of sin "kept him down, on a level with the lowest; him, the man of ethereal attributes, whose voice the angels might else have listened to and answered! But this very burden it was, that gave him sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind: so that his heart vibrated in unison with theirs, and received their pain into itself, and sent its own throb of pain through a thousand other hearts, in gushes of sad, persuasive eloquence" (pp.162-3).

Dimmesdale has no choice but to acknowledge the forest portion of himself — to himself. Yet he fears publicly to do so, since his identity, his sense of himself, is dependent on his role within the societal structure. When Hester persuades him to flee Boston, she, in a sense, is not upholding her side of her social contract with Dimmesdale. For although she is sufficiently strong to live beyond the strictest boundaries of the town, she doesn't appropriately consider what such an escape will do to Dimmesdale's psyche. Hester and Dimmesdale think they are returning to an even more solidified societal framework by fleeing to Europe. "It had been determined between them, that the the Old World, with its crowds and cities, offered them a more eligible shelter and concealment than the wilds of New England, or all America, with its alternatives of an Indian wigwam, or the few settlements of Europeans, scattered thinly along the seaboard. Not to speak of the clergyman's health, so inadequate to sustain the hardships of a forest life, his native gifts, his culture, and his entire development and refinement; the higher the state, the more delicately adapted to it the man" (p.230). However, the desire to have it both ways, to embrace both the town and the forest without disclosure is in itself a forest act. So

there is no actual way they can avoid the moral chaos of the forest. Not only are the sailors who will accompany them described very much as pirates and associated with those inhabiting the forest, the Indians; but the scourge of Chillingworth will be ever present.

More importantly, however, we see even earlier that disregarding societal expectations is self-defeating for one whose identity is so linked to the town. After Dimmesdale has agreed to escape with Hester, he feels a new energy, but only so long as he is in the forest. For the decision to flee is a forest act. But as soon as he reaches town, he loses control. He has attempted a direction that does not coincide with his vision of himself. The result is psychological chaos. He desires to whisper blasphemies, obscenities, doubts, and confusion to those he passes by. Without conscious boundaries, he has no self-definition. Therefore, in attempting to escape the town, Dimmesdale is destroying the only self with which he is familiar. That self is simply unable to maintain control within the context of the freedom of the forest.

Hester is clearly stronger. But even she does not choose fully to live within the forest. She is not so dependent on the societal structure in its broadest sense, but she needs specific, individual linkages — the occasional exchanged glance with Dimmesdale, the continual presence of Pearl. We need to remember that in Hawthorne's fictional world, any relationship places one at least partially in the town, since any working relationship involves relinquishing freedom in order to sustain the reciprocal linkage. A major distinction between the individual society and the broader, institutional one is that on the smaller scale, our acquiescence to the needs of others comes from within. We want to maintain the relationship; we want what is best for our companion; therefore, we relinquish freedom willingly, with understanding. Once the "society" expands, however, there is, of course, the necessity of external law — to which an individual, if he wishes to remain within the broader society, must conform whether he agrees to the rules or not.

Therefore, in order to maintain her more intimate societies, Hester adjusts to the demands of the larger one. Hawthorne

demonstrates this clearly in the scene at the Governor's Hall. Hester, aware that the authorities are considering taking Pearl from her, urgently pleads her case to both the civil and religious authorities. Initially, it seems as though the authorities have placed Hester in an untenable position. If, they reason, Pearl is a child of the devil, then her presence will deter Hester from spiritual growth. On the other hand, if Pearl is a normal child, then Hester's presence might endanger her spiritual and moral upbringing. In other words, whatever the case, there's a danger of less than total commitment to the societal order.

Hester pleads her case and, of course, succeeds through Dimmesdale's intervention. But as Hester is leaving the hall, the governor's sister, Mistress Hibbens, a historical figure who was subsequently executed as a witch, calls from a window, inviting Hester to enter the forest with her to commune with the devil. Hester answers, "Make my excuse to him [the devil], so please you!... I must tarry at home, and keep watch over my little Pearl. Had they taken her from me, I would willingly have gone with thee into the forest, and signed my name in the Black Man's book too, and that with mine own blood" (p.139)! In other words, Hester's responsibility to Pearl, in and of itself, keeps her within the psychological state represented by the town. Later, Hawthorne delineates this societal link by suggesting that "had little Pearl never come to her from the spiritual world... [Hester] might have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Ann Hutchinson..." (p.183). But because of Pearl, Hester cannot merely consult her own needs as a source for action. Therefore, her house is neither in the town nor in the forest. Hester and Pearl live in between, beyond the boundaries of the town, not yet within the shadows of the forest.

Hester's ambivalent position is emphasized in the pivotal forest scene. Although her purpose initially is merely to warn Dimmesdale about Chillingworth's true role, not to urge him to flee, still the private meeting is, in itself, a forest act. Yet as she and Pearl follow the narrow footpath which to Hester's mind — as well as for Hawthorne's thematic purposes — "Imaged the moral wilderness" (p.201), the sun refuses to shine on her. Pearl, the offspring of the rosebush, explains: "Mother,... the

sun does not love you. It runs and hides itself, because it is afraid of something on your bosom" (p.201). By wearing the "A," Hester is succumbing to town requirements. Looked at from the forest perspective, she would have been untrue had she remained faithful to Chillingworth, a man she does not love, and refrained from union with Dimmesdale, a man she does. Therefore, agreeing to wear the "A" is defining herself by the town aspects of her psyche. It is only when she flings the "A" aside that the sun beams down upon her. She has decided to flee, she has discarded the "A," both forest acts, and now she is accepted by the sun.

But what Hester and Dimmesdale have both forgotten is that their society is no longer limited to themselves. They no longer have the luxury of merely considering their joint and individual needs. While the two of them have been planning, Pearl has been playing, as is her custom, with fellow creatures of the forest. For Pearl is the only character in the novel denied the opportunity to choose between town and forest. From the beginning, she has been trapped within the wilderness. What this means, of course, is loneliness, and alienation from the broader linkages beyond her own threshold. But even more important, as a result of this displacement, there is almost a non-existent sense of self. Her controlling trait is unpredictability. There are no boundaries, there is little sense of who one is. So it is Pearl who is continually asking Dimmesdale to acknowledge her in front of the community, for the three of them to stand together on the scaffold, admitting their acquiescence to societal demands, giving her an entry into the world of the town.

So, for Pearl, Hester's removal of the letter is serious indeed. For if Hester and Dimmesdale reject the authority of the town, then Pearl is trapped within the forest, forever excluded from the companionship which the two adults at least share with one another. Hawthorne graphically demonstrates her plight: "Hester and Dimmesdale together on one side of the brook; Pearl trapped on the other, screaming desperately, unable to cross until Hester replaces the emblem. Significantly, after the three of them stand in front of the community as a family, the basic societal unit, after Chillingworth leaves her his wealth, she goes from being trapped within the forest to becoming the wealthiest heiress

in the colony. Moreover, given the chance to enter society, she embraces it firmly. After she returns years later, Hester (significantly sewing baby clothes) receives letters bearing armorial seals, the implication, of course, being that Pearl has married into the aristocracy.

Given a choice, Pearl has unequivocally chosen the town. Had she not been given such a choice, Hester and Dimmesdale would have been in danger of committing a sin much worse than adultery. The adultery, they agree, had a consecration of its own. In other words, they were breaking a societal law; but one that, in and of itself, was justifiable. No one was undeservedly hurt; their motives were benign. It was not so much a question of basic ethics as it was of abiding by the assumptions of a social contract. The betrayal of Pearl would have been something else entirely.

As, of course, were the purposes of Roger Chillingworth, who, as Hester and Dimmesdale agree, has violated the sanctity of a human heart. Chillingworth can hardly be faulted with being initially annoyed. After all, he had been captured by Indians and held for ransom; and when he returns, the first thing he sees is his wife standing on a scaffold before the congregated town, holding a baby. Now, Chillingworth doesn't know who the father is, but one thing he knows for sure is that he knows who the father isn't. So his initial irritation is understandable. But Hawthorne has warned us from the outset of Chillingworth's propensities. Our first view of Chillingworth is as he emerges from the forest, accompanying an Indian. This fits the plot demands of having Chillingworth absent from town to facilitate the adultery, but it also identifies Chillingworth as a forest character. He seems to be upholding societal mores by seeking the father's identity — after all, that's what the town fathers asked Hester to supply. But his motives are far different. Unlike a true town personality, Chillingworth has appointed himself both judge and jury. He has taken it upon himself to administer his own form of judgement and punishment.

More importantly, his motives become altered. If at first, he wanted to know the father so both guilty parties could receive equal punishment, by the middle of the novel, the public revelation of the father is the last thing Chillingworth desires; for, as he says after Dimmesdale's confession, "there was no place so secret —

no high place nor lowly place, where thou wouldst have escaped me, — save on this very scaffold."

Chillingworth wants it both ways. He desires to be a law unto himself. Yet he cannot exist without human connections. The town part of his humanity demands some acknowledgment, no matter how perverse. "Here, on this wild outskirts of the earth, I shall pitch my tent," he tells Hester. "For elsewhere a wanderer, and isolated from human interests, I find here a woman, a man, a child, amongst whom and myself there exist the closest ligaments. No matter whether of right or wrong" (101). Even if the linkage is one of hate, it is, at least, a human connection. "It is a curious subject of observation and inquiry, whether hatred and love be not the same thing at bottom. Each in its utmost development, supposes a high degree of intimacy and heart knowledge; each renders one individual dependent for the food of his affections and spiritual life upon another; each leaves the passionate lover, or the no less passionate hater, forlorn and desolate by the withdrawal of his object. Philosophically considered, therefore, the two passions seem essentially the same, except that one happens to be seen in a celestial radiance, and the other in a dusky and lurid glow" (p.272).

Philosophically considered, perhaps, but as Hawthorne demonstrates Chillingworth's attempt to combine the forest and town is self-defeating, for he is attempting to receive the values of the town without sacrifice of freedom. And without reciprocity, any relationship must necessarily be one-sided, and therefore eventually unfulfilling.

Of course, we may differ on details of interpretation here. But my major concern is to suggest the extent to which Hawthorne incorporated geographical representation of internal needs into the very core of the novel. There is almost no aspect of **The Scarlet Letter** that is unaffected by Hawthorne's use of the forest-town dichotomy.

Any transition from **The Scarlet Letter** to **The Great Gatsby** must necessarily be abrupt. But I think the juxtaposition can be informative. Now, for those of you who are glancing at your watches, let me reassure you that I intend to be much less detailed about this

second novel. What I want merely to suggest is that what I may have belabored in **The Scarlet Letter** is no isolated case. In **The Great Gatsby** there are almost identical polarities. But it is clearly a different age. The physical frontier is over. A new representation of what the forest represented for Hawthorne is in order. Ironically, the directions are now reversed. The absence of boundaries is no longer westward. The only plausible locale of individual freedom for Fitzgerald is New York, the East, the city. His model for restraint is the midwest, a place where Nick says one may be "in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (p.2). It is a place, as Nick says, where "dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name" (p.177). In this midwest, there is security, there is comfort, there is predictability: But there is just the rub. For in a world of predictability, there is no room for change. And of course, that's fine if one is satisfied with what one is. Which, of course, Nick Carraway isn't.

Nick comes East because "instead of being the warm center of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe" (p.3). Nick travels east because he fears the world is passing him by, because he fears that he may be trapped in the predictability of his present. Perhaps the clearest indication of what the East means to Nick occurs when Nick and Gatsby drive into Manhattan for the first time. "The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty of the world... Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge, I thought, anything at all... Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder" (p.69).

It is important to remember that the midwest and the east are aspects of Nick's psyche. There is a part of him that wants the possibilities of the East. There is a part of him that desires the securities of the way he sees the midwest. These, of course, are not so much geographical locations as psychological options. Now, even though Nick has traveled to the East — which there would have been no reason to do had not there been an "Eastern" part of his nature — he brings the midwestern urges with him intact.

Only once does Nick describe his everyday life in New York, the life separate from the glamor he seeks in the presence of Tom and Daisy and Gatsby. And in this description, his ambivalence toward

what he wants the East to represent is obvious. "I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye. I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others — poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner — young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life" (p.57).

This, I think, is the central conflict of **The Great Gatsby** — the part of Nick that wants to experience, that wants the possibility of change — and the part of Nick that fears disappointment, that fears disapproval. The part that insists that "reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope" (p.1), as though any sort of decision, any sort of commitment could bring only disappointment. As he says during the party with Tom and his mistress in Manhattan, "Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (p.36).

It is just this inexhaustible variety of life that the East represents to Huck, and Gatsby is its primary spokesman — Gatsby who contains "some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (p.2). For it is Gatsby who is not constrained by predictability, it is Gatsby who demands responsibility not for the expected, but for the possible. It is he who is determined to create "his Platonic conception of himself" (p.99).

There are problems, of course. The East represents possibility, variety, freedom from boundaries. But the concomitant liability is the East of the ash heap that one must pass while entering the city, "...the valley of ashes — fantastic farm where ashes grow like

wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens" (p.23). A moral wasteland overseen only by the image of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg. "But above the gray land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic, their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but instead from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days under sun and rain, brood over the solemn dumping ground" (p.23).

The only God of the east is outdated, blind. The price of freedom, of the possibility of dreams, is the lack of an external order. Living inside this world, any order must originate from within, must be imposed by the individual. And it is this that makes Gatsby great. In his flawed way Gatsby is a moral person in the midst of a moral wasteland. His code is precise. Anything that furthers the fulfillment of his dream is good. Anything that deters it is unacceptable. Nick, of course, fears this sort of commitment. To take the leap, to pursue the dream, he fears, is to invite disillusion. And from Fitzgerald's view, Nick is, in a sense, correct. Only the Dutch sailors had the luxury of confronting "for the last time in history... something commensurate to [our] capacity for wonder." And even they were fated to disappointment. Certainly, Daisy is unequal to Gatsby's dream.

But it is the dream itself, not the possibilities of fulfillment that makes Gatsby great, that makes Nick's return to the Midwest a moral surrender. For, in a sense, his return to the midwest is an attempted retreat to the lost securities of adolescence, a refusal to confront the ambiguities of maturity. Among other things then, **The Great Gatsby** is an initiation story, or more accurately, a failed initiation story. Fitzgerald is convinced that, regardless of our desires for the securities of the town, we are condemned to the freedoms of the forest. A return to the midwest is an attempt at arrested development. All the

characters in **The Great Gatsby** originally came from the Midwest. But with adulthood they traveled East. Nick tells Gatsby that, in his pursuit of Daisy, one cannot repeat the past (p.111). Yet in returning to the Midwest, that is precisely what Nick himself is doing.

"One of my most vivid memories," he tells us near the conclusion, "is coming back West from prep school and later from college at Christmas time... When we pulled out into the winter night and the real snow, our snow, began to stretch out beside us and twinkle against the windows and the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by, a sharp wild brace came suddenly into the air. We drew in deep breaths of it we walked back from dinner through the cold vestibules, unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour, before we melted indistinguishably into it again.

"That's my Middle West — not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning train of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow" (p.118). This is the Middle West that Nick seeks to return to. But of course, it is illusion. For better or worse, being adult, according to Fitzgerald, is confronting the ash heap, is pursuing the dream.

It seems clear that both Hawthorne and Fitzgerald were both using geographical locations to represent internal states. There are, of course, intriguing differences. But those must wait for another day. At the moment, I am concerned with the similarities, with the concept of projecting psychological options onto external settings. (Admittedly, to repeat, such externalizations are not unique to any national literature, but I would like to suggest a context—one, I suspect, among many, for the United States.) From the beginnings of the national literature, the outside world was, at least from one perspective, a means of confronting an inner truth. Even before the Puritans sighted land, they were looking at their venture not only in terms of secular history, but also as representative of spiritual truth. John Winthrop, aboard the *Arabella*, urged the future colonists to regard themselves not

merely as the founders of a temporal community, but also as the settlers of a city set upon a hill. Their external activities were to point toward an internal state.

But even day-to-day activities were not allowed to be taken merely at face value. No event, no matter now seemingly insignificant, was devoid of potentially meaningful spiritual import. For instance, mice intruded on a library which included a volume of the psalms bound with an Anglican prayer book. That the mice ate only the prayer book, leaving the psalms intact, was not merely coincidence but a clear demarcation of spiritual reality. In other words, external reality, if viewed correctly, would lead beyond itself to more intangible yet more universal truths.

Those of you familiar with the Puritan use of typology can see how their view of history relates to their emphasis on spirit. Or to put it in Jonathan Edwards's terms, how objects and events in the external world are but "images and shadows of divine things."

Now, such an attitude toward empirical experience is part and parcel of Puritan thought no matter where located. But it has a special reference in the new world. Nowhere in their experience had the colonists confronted any landscape vaguely similar. Accustomed to settled, domesticated communities, the wilds of the new land were more than foreign; they defined the unknown. But the ability to translate this unknown into human terms, into a spiritual language, gave a sense of control that was strongly, perhaps, at times, desperately needed.

The tendency continued. Thoreau urged that we sit in front of a fact until it turned into a truth. For Emerson, a natural fact was a symbol of a spiritual one, but as the century progressed, the nature of the unknown changed. Writers became much more concerned, not with the discrepancies, the confusions of the outer world, but with the ambiguities within. As the primary focus of fiction became psychological, writers probed deeper and deeper into the tensions, the conflicts, resolvable or not, existing within the individual, which of course, meant themselves. And just as an earlier generation had used internal securities to provide control over an external unknown, the writers of psychological fiction tended to use the concreteness of the external world as a means of

objectifying the intangibles of inner mysteries. By so doing, they were giving the ungraspable a form. For the reader and the author as well, at least for the moments within the book, the intangible has shape, the psychological maintains a place. Even if we cannot control, much less understand the darker sides of our psyche, at least for those moments, we know not only that they exist, but we know where they are.