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著者	Bratton Daniel
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Ruined Landscapes in Three Novels by Louis Bromfield

Daniel Bratton

ルイ・ブルムフィールドの小説に現れる風景は、ハミルトンの産業金権体質がジャクソンの平等主義に力を得てジェフェアソンの土地均分論を次第に蝕んで行く過程を象徴的に表現している。すなわちアメリカに広く見られたところの、19世紀初期オハイオに見られた手付かずの未開地の田園風の状態となり、最後に広大な農地に変貌する、という変化である。拜金主義が力を持った時代にも、工場は僅かずつしかし確実にこの長閑な舞台を侵し、世紀の変わり目までには遂にあのビジネスマンと産業が覇を執る新専制政治がその姿をすっかり変えてしまった。ブルムフィールドはこの成長の過程を癌細胞の増殖にたとえ、次の発展段階として、都市開発が拡散し郊外が拡大してゆくのを方向を誤られた理想も思想もない力の結果であると見る。ブルムフィールドの三篇の小説("The Green Bay Tree (1924)", "The Farm (1934)" and "Mr. Smith (1951)")はこの作者の発展過程の始発点、経過点、そして終着点を表し、社会の均質傾向と物質主義が生み出したところの、土着の文化・多様性容認・人間の尊厳への脅威を意味するものである。ここでブルムフィールドはまた土地との新しい結び付きを通して、従来の価値体系に回帰すべきことを説いているのである。

The landscapes of Louis Bromfield's fiction symbolize the progressive destruction of Jeffersonian agrarian ideals by a Hamiltonian industrial plutocracy allied with the forces of Jacksonian egalitarianism. Paradigmatic of changes in America in general, the pristine wilderness of early nineteenth-century Ohio developed into a pastoral half-wilderness and then into the landscape of a great agricultural democracy. During the Gilded Age, however, this bucolic setting was gradually but steadily encroached upon by mills and factories, so that by the turn of the century it had been indelibly altered by the triumphant "new autocracy of businessmen and industry." Likening this growth to the proliferation of a malignant cancer, Bromfield regarded the next stage in this evolution, urban sprawl and the spread of suburbs, as the culmination of a violent, misguided energy without ideals or philosophy. The landscapes in three novels representing the beginning, middle, and end of Bromfield's career--*The Green Bay Tree* (1924), *The Farm* (1934) and *Mr. Smith* (1951)--signify the threats to local culture, diversity and human dignity posed by the forces of conformity and materialism. At the same time Bromfield argued for a return to traditional values through renewed contact with the land.

The titles of two life studies of Louis Bromfield that appeared in 1998 testify to the rise and fall of the literary reputation of this Ohio native son. The first of these works, a documentary produced for public television, was called *The Man Who Had Everything*, the title of a 1935 fiction by Bromfield but also an allusion to his early and immediate ascendancy to fame with the publication of his first novel, *The Green Bay Tree* (1924), written when he was still in his twenties. This best seller was followed by a string of immensely popular novels, including the Pulitzer-Prize winning *Early Autumn* (1926), *The Rains Came* (1937), and *Mrs. Parkington* (1943). Bromfield did indeed appear to have everything, and in 1928 he was featured in the year-end issue of *Vanity Fair*, along with Thomas Mann and Hemingway, as "the most prominent of our younger novelists." By this time he had moved to France, where he, his wife and daughters would tenant the ancient Presbytère de St. Étienne in Senlis, north of Paris. Here, in addition to producing a book every year and creating a garden that drew extravagant praise from leading horticulturists, he lavishly entertained the forerunners of today's international jet set, at the same time cultivating deep friendships with Edith Wharton, Gertrude Stein, and Edna Ferber.

On the other hand, *Louis Bromfield, Novelist and Agrarian Reformer: Forgotten Author*, the title of Professor Ivan Scott's recent biography, signifies the fate that befell Bromfield in his later years and following his death in 1956. It is not the purpose of this paper to trace the demise of Bromfield's literary reputation, which began in the 1930s and resulted from shifting tastes in literature as well as the widespread critical notion that he had sold out, writing too easily and too prolifically. Suffice it to say that by the time Bromfield returned to Ohio at the advent of World War II and established Malabar Farm, his famous experiment in ecological farming, he was no longer satisfied expressing his spiritual longings and outspoken polemics through the writing of fiction. Agriculture became the passionate focus of his life, and he increasingly turned to this subject, the best-known of his non-fictional works being *Pleasant Valley* (1945), *Malabar Farm* (1948), and *Out of the Earth* (1950).

Although a minor Bromfield revival is currently taking place, as evidenced by these two life studies, few readers outside Ohio are familiar with his novels, and even in Ohio, where Malabar Farm is now both a state park and working farm, he is best remembered as the writer of books on the virtues of soil conservation and contour plowing—and as the host to Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart's nuptials. Yet Bromfield's fiction offers a wide-ranging, highly perceptive critique of those forces in American society that were hostile to the agrarian vision of devotees of Thomas Jefferson, men such as his great grandfather, who entered the Ohio wilderness in 1815 hoping to realize the democratic ideals of the Enlightenment. These hostile forces led to an industrial plutocracy, and a recurrent argument in Bromfield's writing is that the gospel of prosperity and progress that was promulgated during the Gilded Age was the work of New England shopkeepers and bankers whose ideology came from Alexander Hamilton.

Bromfield's literary landscapes encode and dramatize this historical shift from Jeffersonian to Hamiltonian values. The environments in three novels belonging to the beginning, middle, and end of his career—*The Green Bay Tree*, *The Farm* (1934) and *Mr. Smith* (1951)—provide a broad canvas on which Bromfield portrays not only the progressive destruction of what had been a pristine wilderness, but also the less tangible but equally profound betrayal of an ideology. The open spaces of the frontier, the setting of the first phase of the family history detailed in *The Farm*, signify the tail end of the Enlightenment, a time when Man and Nature had room to breath and social institutions had accommodated the Jeffersonian belief in a government that lay in the hands of democrats and natural aristocrats.¹ On the other hand, the Town, the primary setting of *The Green Bay Tree* and the antipodean locale to the ancestral home in *The Farm*, embodies the ongoing and relentless destruction of the rural environment by oppressive social institutions controlled by the industrial plutocracy. This urban setting then gives way to the suburbs in *Mr. Smith*. Bromfield regarded these changes in Ohio as paradigmatic of developments in the nation at large. Winfield H. Rogers has observed in an introduction to *The Farm*, "The Ohio scene might be considered the best medium through which to view the American scene and its evolution, for Ohio was only on the way toward social stability when the state became a sort of pivot in every movement of the country—migratory, political, social, intellectual...America and Ohio were transforming themselves under increasing immigration, protective tariffs, and mechanical advance, into [an] industrial commonwealth" (xiii-xiv).

The Green Bay Tree was the first of what Bromfield described as "panel novels in a screen which, when complete, will consist of at least a half-dozen panels, all interrelated and each giving a certain phase of the ungainly, swarming, glittering spectacle of American life" (*The Farm* xix). He in fact completed only four novels of his proposed series, which David D. Anderson suggests were "attempts to define the nature of the defeat of the agrarian Jeffersonian dream and to proclaim the ultimate triumph of the natural aristocrat over materialism," but which had to be abandoned when Bromfield "recognized the futility of the attempt to escape through adapting the premise of natural aristocracy to a modern, post-Darwinian world."² *The Green Bay Tree* chronicles one distinct phase in this spectacle, the routing of Jeffersonian democratic ideals by the Hamiltonian forces of "wealth, prosperity and bigness" (*The Green Bay Tree* 220). The novel spans the fin de siècle to the conclusion of World War I. Its primary locale is "the Town," an industrial center in Ohio clearly based upon the city of Mansfield in which Bromfield was born in 1896.³

Julia Shane, one in a string of Bromfieldian natural aristocrats, observes "it's the Town that counts nowadays. The day of the farmer is past" (69). When she dies midway through the novel the narrator observes that the forces she had embodied "had passed with the coming of the Mills and the vulgar, noisy aristocracy of progress and prosperity" (167). The tradition represented by Julia Shane is physically embodied by Cypress Hill, a large and square mansion in which Georgian and Gothic architectural details are bound together in one harmonious whole by the woodbine, Virginia creeper and wisteria that clamber over its exterior, investing it with "a surprising look of age, considering the fact that the house stood in the midst of a community which less than a century before had been a complete and trackless wilderness" (2).

Now Cypress Hill is surrounded by the Flats, a nightmarish industrial area spewing forth toxic wastes that systematically destroy the house's enclosed garden. "If you can picture a little park," the novel begins, "bright for the moment with the flush of early summer flowers and peopled with men and women in the costumes of the late nineties—If you can picture such a park set down in the midst of an inferno of fire, steel and smoke, there is no need to describe Cypress Hill . . ." (1). Mill houses "uniform and unvaryingly ugly in architecture and cheap in construction" have sprung up like fungi outside the gate, in "the shadows of the furnace towers and the resounding steel sheds" (43). In the course of the novel the flowers and lawn are destroyed by industrial pollution, as are the wisteria vines and arbor vitae, the symbolic desecration of the tree of life underscoring Bromfield's thematic concerns. Finally the house mysteriously burns to the ground, leaving nothing behind but a hole filled with the blackened fragments of "all the beautiful things which encumbered the site of the proposed railroad station" (258).

Throughout the novel Bromfield foregrounds the expansionist industrial phase represented by the growth of the Flats. The Harrisons, the leading plutocratic family in the Town, finally sell their steel works to a giant corporation of capitalist stockholders, thus initiating yet another phase as the "day of the small private enterprise" passes (266). Lily Shane, Julia's daughter and the heroine of the story, manages to escape the Town by moving to France, yet she discovers the impossibility of fleeing the forces of the Mills. When Lily becomes trapped in a country house during the Battle of the Marne, a German officer demands of her,

"And where have we to go? If we sought to escape where have we to go? There is no place. Because the monkeys...have civilized all the world....They have created a monster which is destroying them. There is no longer any peace....It is the monsters, Madame, who are at the bottom of all this. Ah, commerce, industry, wealth, power." (301)

At the war's end the people in the Town haven't had time to build the new railroad station on the site of Cypress Hill—they've been too busy making money from the manufacture of gas shells and high explosives. The townspeople deem the war a great purifier that has brought out the best in men: "What was prosperous was right. Wasn't success its own vindication?" (319)

Like his heroine, Bromfield eluded the Town and the symbolic wasteland of the Flats by moving to France. Ten years later, in his autobiographical novel *The Farm*, the protagonist also leaves his birthplace for Europe.⁴ Yet, in *Pleasant Valley*, Bromfield acknowledged that in writing *The Farm* he had reopened the possibility of returning to Ohio. During this period it was "as if I were under a compulsion. And [my] dreams were associated with a sensation of warmth and security and satisfaction that was almost physical....Toward the end I found myself spending more and more of my sleeping hours in the country where I was born and always what I dreamed of was Ohio and my own county."⁵ A clue as to how this change in attitude evolved is provided by a letter he sent to Edith Wharton during a visit to the United States in January 1934. Writing from Princeton, where the Bromfields had rented a house, he remarked of a trip to the District of Columbia:

I saw Washington for the first time last week and returned home bedazzled by the scale and beauty of it....The scale is magnificent and I do like scale when united with taste and beauty. I have never loved America so profoundly—principally, I think because with the crisis [the Great Depression] and the sudden brutal shift of power and ideals, it has become for a while my America. The Bankers and Merchants are out! It is very amusing finding bankers looked upon as pariahs. It is very odd to go out to dinner and find the financial geni of yesterday, eating humbly and seated with meekness, no longer uttering pronouncements on everything from cooking to Statecraft with the pompousness of which only bankers are capable. Jefferson is back and with him the shadows of Voltaire and Rousseau.⁶

When he wrote this letter to Wharton *The Farm* had already been completed, yet it is clear that at the time of his novel's composition Bromfield was experiencing a change of heart confirmed by his visit to Washington.

In a foreword to *The Farm* that Bromfield added some thirteen years after its publication, he observed that the note of pessimism in the last chapter, when Johnny, the protagonist, leaves the ancestral farm and heads off to the war in Europe, was "authentic and justified in the year 1914" (viii). At that time agriculture in America appeared to have no future. *The Farm* explains why.

When in 1815 the Colonel traveled by horseback from Maryland to northeastern Ohio, he arrived in a frontier that was politically and socially prelapsarian. Yet the very evening of the Colonel's arrival this edenic setting was invaded by one Silas Bentham of Massachusetts, a Yankee peddler in the tradition of Sam Slick. The opposition between the Jeffersonian farmer and the Hamiltonian shopkeeper was already in place. Still, at this stage in the development of Ohio's Western Reserve Bentham was only an irritant, and when the aristocratic Colonel married one of his daughters to a strapping self-made man from Pennsylvania named Jamie Ferguson, the pastoral half-wilderness had progressed to a great agricultural democracy.

Jamie had fled Philadelphia, "for it was in his nature to distrust and even to hate cities, and until the end of his life they always made him uneasy and restless and filled him with an odd sense of contamination" (47). His dream—in typology the "type" to the "antitype" of Bromfield's subsequent agricultural experiments at Malabar Farm—had been of a self-sufficient farm. Thus his arrival fulfills the Colonel's mission of finding an heir to his ideological estate: "Here was the kind of young man he had been hoping for—big, virile, healthy, with honesty and naïveté in his glowing blue eyes."⁷ Here was the perfect gentry ideal of the natural aristocrat, the Jeffersonian self-made man, the honest yeoman, rising through the ranks through his own virtue and talent.

But in the end it is Bentham, the New England peddler, who wins the battle in the new country. Old Jamie, Johnny's grandfather, lives not only to see the decay of the world of the farmer,⁸ but also the triumph of the "new autocracy of businessmen and industry" (309). In this multigenerational narrative, it is Johnny, the descendant of stewards of the land, who is displaced by the descendants of Bentham as the Town symbolically devours the Farm.

Bromfield delineates these forces through his houses and landscapes. At the center of the novel, arguably its true protagonist, is the Farm. The author painstakingly reconstructs his ancestors' rural life in nineteenth-century Ohio, investing the old cabin built by the Colonel, which gradually acquires wings to accommodate the succeeding generations, with an almost human presence. In contrast to the Farm's warmth and bounty is the ugly, sterile Victorian house in the Town to which one of Old Jamie's daughters, Johnny's mother, moves upon her marriage. Within the Town's new autocracy of wealth there is "no room for old houses, for old customs, or for old habits of mind" (309). Johnny finds himself living among hideous turreted monuments to Veblenian conspicuous consumption: "he disliked the prosperous world of these battlemented houses because he was aware dimly that the people in them had betrayed something which was fine and destroyed something that would not soon come into the world again. And they had done it for money" (310).

Their houses are located as far as possible from the source of this money, the same factories, blast furnaces, and rolling mills that surrounded Cypress Hill in *The Green Bay Tree*. (Indeed, Trefusis Castle, the "Strawberry Hill Gothic house" in which Johnny's Great-aunt Jane lives, has identical features to Cypress Hill, and like the latter, is surrounded by factories and mill houses so that it is "in a state of siege."⁹) These parts of the town include the Flats and the Syndicate, and there are few landscapes in American literature that can rival them for metaphorical desolation.

The Flats make the Valley of Ashes in *The Great Gatsby* look like an eco-theme park. The narrator observes that "Afterward Johnny came to know many kinds of ugliness, but none that was more uncompromising and abandoned than the hideousness of the Flats":

Long ago the old shade trees had died in that atmosphere of soot and carbon dioxide, but instead of being cut down and mercifully removed from sight, they remained to contribute their share to the desolation. In the old dooryards behind the rotting wooden fences, the grass turned yellow and died, until where once there had been a green lawn there was only trampled patches of yellow clay littered with old newspapers, tin cans, and even garbage. Whatever sanitary arrangements had once existed soon became clogged and abandoned,

and the immigrant tenants, pleased to be free of such affectations, set up makeshift privies in the desolate back gardens...the sewage and bedpans of the ancient rookeries had been dumped into the open gutters. Sometimes in the spring, behind one of the rotting fences, a lilac still persisted and sent forth a cluster of sickly blossoms. (156)

Just beyond the Flats, toward the open country, is the Syndicate, its name derived from the group of citizens who with the rise of industrialism bought out farms to build slums for the newly-arrived immigrants, the whole affair being premised on "speculation contrived with the smallest possible investment, to yield the largest possible return" (157).

In the foreword which he added to the novel in 1945, Bromfield remarked that "*The Farm* is concerned only with the history of one phase of American life up to the year 1914 and as such a record it must stand" (vii). He believed the phase of industrial growth represented by the Flats and Syndicate to have passed, adding

Years later in *Pleasant Valley* I wrote with optimism, a glowing optimism, regarding the future and importance of American agriculture. I did so not from any change in conviction or point of view, but because of the great advances which had taken place and because in the intervening period the science of agriculture has probably made more progress than in all the preceding history of the world. (viii)

At the same time he expressed his belief that "[t]he capitalist and the industrialist have been curbed and rendered comparatively harmless" (vii).

Certainly his non-fictional writing from this period espouses a buoyant belief that Jeffersonian agrarian ideals can counter the destructive forces of industrialism that culminated in two world wars. Bromfield had returned to Ohio knowing that "permanence, continuity, alone was what I wanted...a piece of land which I could love passionately, which I could spend the rest of my life in cultivating, cherishing and improving..." (*Pleasant Valley* 8). In his agricultural writings he would advocate a return to nature, the land and country life, where permanence and continuity might be found.

Although Bromfield initially supported the New Deal, believing it "would lead to a Jeffersonian rejection of materialism and industrialism" (Anderson 173), by the early 1950s he had grown cynical and distrustful of the possibilities of mass action. In *Mr. Smith*, his final novel, he had traveled almost full circle from *The Green Bay Tree*, though the causes of his despair had broadened. The blighted landscape of turn-of-the-century industrialism had now become an equally blighted scene of urban sprawl and cancerous suburban growth in which nearly identical houses symbolized the stultifying effects of dull conformity. Until the end of his life Bromfield argued for a return to traditional values through renewed contact with the land, but *Mr. Smith* in many ways belies the optimism he expressed in his public speeches, newspaper columns, and agricultural writings.¹⁰

Mr. Smith is written in the form of a journal, the ruminations of a good-looking, upper-middle class Midwesterner who at around the age of forty discovers his prosperous life as a businessman and family man to be utterly sterile and superficial. His sense of futility is mirrored by his surroundings. Wolcott Ferris—your average Mr. Smith—lives in Oakdale, a wealthy suburb of Crescent City, the Town in its next stage of evolution. His house, like those of his neighbors, has been professionally decorated in rich-looking muddy colors and "off-white," an expression that becomes fixed in Wolcott's consciousness as "a symbol of so many

things in the lives of all my friends and of Enid [his wife] and myself."¹¹ The large, ornate Victorian house in Crescent City in which Ferris was born—its towers and cupolas suggesting the architectural elephants of Johnny's neighborhood in the Town—belongs

to the era which lay between the frontier when Crescent City was a village and the day when, as factories moved in, the village grew to be a town and then to be a city, and finally the people who once would have lived on main street in such a house as ours took to the suburbs and the main street became a 'dead area'...a phrase which might well describe much of American life. (36)

The way of living embodied by these rotting and neglected old houses has become moribund. Significantly, some have been pulled down to make way for shiny filling stations that service the cars carrying businessmen from the downtown area to the surrounding suburbs; others have become funeral homes.

Recalling the lives of his paternal grandparents, Ferris realizes that the country they knew "has become a shrunken thing," so that more and more its inhabitants suffer from an increasing claustrophobia:

The next town is too near and the distance between it and our own town is built up with bungalows or their successors—the ranch-type house. Great cities which seemed to me as a child romantic and distant places are only a few hours away by plane or even automobile. Europe is too near and Asia threatens us. More and more we feel a sense of uneasiness at this mechanically projected process of shrinking the world. More and more there is a universal and shadowy psychological sense of alarm and even dread, as if there were no longer enough room in the world. And all the time there are more and more of us...(43)

Whereas Ferris's grandfather—known, like Johnny's progenitor, as the Colonel—lived in "a world filled with a sense of space and of boundless opportunity" (43), his grandson finds himself living in "a world of short cuts, many of them brutally contradictory of natural law"; the planet has become a "swarming ant-mass" (44).

Trapped in a loveless marriage devoid of passion and spirituality, Ferris turns to the solace of reading and creative writing and eventually of a wildly sensual relationship with Mary Raeburn, the daughter of one of Crescent City's old families that is allied, in spite of great wealth, to conspicuous leisure rather than conspicuous consumption. Even here Bromfield subverts the reader's expectations, for rather than providing Ferris with a meaningful alternative to his empty life, Mary turns out to be a neurotic drug addict and nymphomaniac. Fortunately World War II provides Ferris with the perfect excuse for escaping the claustrophobic suburbs, and he finds himself a Captain on a remote island in the South Pacific. Bromfield's hero is spared further decisions when one of his own men, an ignorant Southern dirt farmer whose idea of fun is participating in KKK lynchings, shoots Ferris while claiming to have mistaken his captain for a stray Japanese soldier. The final sentence in all of Bromfield's novels reads "It just may be that there is a kind of symbolism in the fact that middle-class 'Mr. Smith,' with all his limitations, his weaknesses, his aspirations, was destroyed by Homer...one of the swarming ever-increasing 'underprivileged'" (278). Bromfield's ire had by now extended from the Hamiltonian industrial plutocracy to mass cultural Jacksonian democracy and the welfare state, for he saw both forces as allied in opposition to Jeffersonian agrarianism.

Mr. Smith is not one of Bromfield's better fictions. It is too strident in tone and polemical in its social analysis to make very satisfying reading. Yet it can be argued that it in many ways constitutes the final panel of the screen on which the author portrayed the "ungainly, swarming, glittering spectacle of American life," and thus it is a valuable addition to Bromfield's highly individualistic and always provocative analysis of American culture. A recurrent theme in Bromfield's writing is the individual "caught in a period of social transition during which he can find no spiritual home" (see Rogers in *The Farm* xvi). Wolcott Ferris is the last in a long line of Bromfieldian protagonists victimized by forces inimical to the twentieth-century fertilization of Jeffersonian ideals: his fate is the inevitable result of Bromfield's historical determinism.

Once again Bromfield uses landscape to symbolize his central character's cultural deracination. Situated on the veranda of Mary Raeburn's grand old Victorian house, in which it seems that "the corroding flight of time and change" has been arrested, Wolcott Ferris observes the panorama of Crescent City from the same vantage point as when he stood there with his father on a visit some twenty years ago. He realizes how much the vista has altered:

Here and there rose the towers of new tall buildings. The familiar roofs of whole streets had disappeared and in their place were the broad wide roofs and sheds of factories and warehouses with the late afternoon sun painting whole sheets of their windows the color of fresh blood. The hills beyond the river, which once were covered with trees and only a scattering of houses, were now bare of trees. Where the virgin forest had been in my grandfather's time there were rows of streets lined with houses all exactly alike. The change had been going on steadily and so gradually that I had not noticed the complete transformation until now when I saw it all at once from the same angle after almost a generation. (218)

The Town, now a great city in which all its inhabitants find themselves lost, is a stranger to Ferris. The scene before him, though one of great vitality, is beyond control, for the city is "possessed of an empty dynamism which forced it to grow and change but without order or direction in a kind of cancerous fashion in the midst of the once rural, almost primitive landscape."¹²

In his epiphany Ferris realizes why Mary has kept the "immense and flamboyant" ancestral house exactly as it had been:

It was a monument, a rock, past which had swept the torrent of mediocrity and uniformity, a torrent of ranch-type and bungalow houses, and picture windows and scatter rugs and dull conforming minds, of universities like ant heaps turning out clod-brained athletes and hordes of uneducated and mediocre drones, and clubs and government bureaus and do-gooding and taxes, worse than those of the ruined and decayed Roman Empire. (219)

Here Bromfield expresses overwhelming despair at what had befallen the pastoral landscape so lovingly detailed in *The Farm*, suggesting a cognizance that in espousing the cause of Jeffersonian agrarianism in his non-fiction he was, like Old Jamie, fighting a losing battle.

It can be argued that *Mr. Smith*, when placed alongside Bromfield's sanguine writings and broadcasts on farming, was a cautionary rallying cry articulating the threats to local culture, diversity, and human dignity posed by the conformity and materialism of the day. After all, Bromfield was no Mr. Smith: rugged individualism, a great reverence for living things, and the determination to cultivate his own virtues and talents had always dictated the bold pattern of his life.

Still, it would seem that Bromfield had to a certain extent come to regard himself as victimized by the same historical forces that had overwhelmed so many of his characters, the very individuals most capable of perpetuating the intellectual and spiritual ideals of Jeffersonian democracy.

Bromfield died at sixty, but his work as a pioneering environmentalist lives on at Malabar Farm and through his writing. His discernment of the fundamental opposition between the ideologies of Hamilton and Jefferson continues to speak to the way we view our relation to our communities and to the earth, and should we fail to see anything tragic in the lives of the Colonel, Old Jamie, or even Mr. Smith, this is perhaps the result of our living in an age of irony and parody and having become accustomed to the terrain of Bromfield's shifting landscapes.

Notes

¹ In *Jefferson and Nature*, Charles A. Miller has observed, "To speak generally, if the ages preceding and following the Enlightenment are viewed with respect to their dominating social institutions, then what stand out are the church and feudalism on one side and large corporate enterprise on the other side" (8).

² The other three novels in Bromfield's panel series—*Possession*, *Early Autumn*, and *A Good Woman*—were collected in a volume appropriately titled *Escape*. *Possession* (1925) belongs to the same historical setting as *The Green Bay Tree*, focussing on the musical career of Lily Shane's talented cousin Ellen Tolliver, who wages a determined, though ruthless and self-destructive, battle against the Mammon-worship and dull conformity of the Town by first eloping to New York and then fleeing to Europe. *Early Autumn* (1926) details the now desiccated spiritual values of the New Englanders whose forefathers settled Ohio's Western Reserve. *A Good Woman* (1927), in which Bromfield returned to the Town with its dark satanic mills and debased Puritanism, explores the futile attempt of Philip Downes to escape the destructive influence of his domineering and self-righteous mother. Philip's failure encapsulates Bromfield's reasons for abandoning his proposed series of six panel novels. Arguing that the superficial triumphs of Bromfield's natural aristocrats in the first of the panel novels had only led to their divorce from the natural world and humanity, Anderson remarks,

In *The Green Bay Tree* Lily Shane had apparently escaped the dehumanizing influence of the town, but at the end she has nothing with which to fill her life except melancholy waiting; in *Possession* Ellen Tolliver is completely dehumanized by the goal she has attained, and she is as dominated and isolated by her music as the people of the town are by materialism. In *Early Autumn* there is no victory but a graceful defeat as Olivia Pentland [the protagonist] finds herself trapped by dead tradition. *A Good Woman* marks the ultimate defeat as Philip Downes seeks his fulfillment in death after having recognized the transience and the meaninglessness of a victory gained at the expense of human values. (172)

³ Bromfield transmutes certain facts about the Midwest to meet his fictional requirements. For example, in developing his attack upon the American preoccupation with progress, prosperity and giantism, he has the Town become the largest city in the state; and in *The Farm* he makes the Town part of Ohio's Western Reserve, a minor geographical sleight of hand.

⁴ Bromfield prefaces both *The Green Bay Tree* and *Possession* with a speech made by Julia Shane in the former novel: "Life is hard for our children. It isn't as simple as it was for us. Their grandfathers were pioneers and the same blood runs in their veins, only they haven't a frontier any longer. They stand...these children of ours...with their backs toward this rough-hewn middle west and their faces toward Europe and the East and they belong to neither. They are lost somewhere between."

⁵ *Pleasant Valley* 4-5. In one of his national radio broadcasts included in the documentary *The Man Who Had Everything*, Bromfield read "country" instead of "county" in delivering the above quotation.

⁶ Bromfield's letter of 18 January 1934 is quoted by permission of the Lilly Library, Indiana University. See *'Yrs, Ever Affly': The Correspondence of Edith Wharton and Louis Bromfield*, ed. Daniel Bratton (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1999) for the complete text of this letter as well as all extant Wharton-Bromfield correspondence.

⁷ *The Farm* 59. Much to the Colonel's consternation, Jacob, his only son, has married an heiress, the daughter of a local banker: "the old man knew that he was lost, and in the worst way, for Jacob went to work airily in the bank and joined the forces of 'that confounded upstart, Hamilton'" (58).

⁸ Bromfield postulates that during the 'nineties and the beginning of the twentieth century the struggle between the farmer and industrialist, the country and the city, was won by the latter side as a result of its "power, wealth, dishonor, corruption, tariffs, and all the instruments of great manufacturers and bankers, many of whom, in another time and in another country, would have been judged criminals" (*The Farm* 231).

⁹ Bromfield writes,

by the time Johnny was old enough to register impressions of the life around him the mills and factories had already come to the marshes and Trefusis Castle and the park around it stood isolated from the respectable part of Town. The railroad passed just beyond the iron fence, and the smoke and soot and scores of chimneys drifted over the garden. All round it were the houses of the mill-workers, abandoned respectable houses belonging to another day, used now as rookeries and falling into ruin, or cheap new dwellings surrounded by patches of yellow clay. Leaving the park, that bleak area always gave Johnny an odd, indescribable sensation of uneasiness and fear. The two warring elements, the old and the new, sat embattled side by side. Through the pretentious wrought-iron gateway, the eighteenth century looked out upon the twentieth. (113-14)

¹⁰ One is reminded that in his final years Bromfield saw his dream slipping away as his two youngest daughters and their husbands moved far afield to agricultural ventures of their own, and finally, against every principle for which his life stood, he was forced to sell timber rights for Malabar Farm in order to pay his own hospital bills.

¹¹ *Mr Smith* 8. Later Wolcott observes of his wife,

Sometimes it seems to me that Enid is the perfect product of the age in which we live. She leads an existence which is almost wholly material and even mechanical, without depth or perception, without questioning anything save those who rebel against her kind of living. She lives in a world of conformity in which she herself has no freedom (although the

thought never occurs to her.) She has no right to be an individual or a character or an eccentric because this is the unforgivable crime. The character, the eccentric, has gone out of American life and it is the poorer for it. If one questions the routine materialist world, one is a Red or a Fascist, a crackpot or fit only to be committed. (67)

¹² *Mr. Smith* 218. At this point in the narrative Bromfield has Ferris restate and expand upon the epigraph to *The Green Bay Tree* and *Possession*:

And somewhere in the midst of it I, and many others like me, was lost and confused, belonging neither to the old strong dominant generations which had cleared the way out of a desert wilderness nor to a new generation which might, if God willed it, dominate and channel and bring to a real fruitfulness all the violent and dynamic forces which were loose, growing, expanding, spreading aimlessly like the growth of a cancer, a growth which did not know where it was going, unguided by any ideal or philosophy save that of bigness and speed and material wealth. Perhaps it was more like a plant growing on an unbalanced diet, rapidly and aimlessly until at last, without order or support, it collapsed to earth once more. (218-19)

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