

with Orthodoxy or with monastic life—monasticism associated with the struggle against depravity in a large urban community—but new spiritual seeds are being sowed in the capital of Nebraska, a city and a region where people are mindful of their spiritual heritage and the imperatives of human culture for a wholesome society.

From the perspective of the early 1990's, the Plains states are an increasingly important resource for the nation. In a world in which the population may double in size in a few decades, the agricultural capacity of this breadbasket region is of central importance. Its economic destiny will surely be built around its rich agricultural resources. There will be changes, of course, and one of the most important undoubtedly will be a shift in production from raw agricultural commodities to finished agricultural products. It seems inevitable that regional awareness of this will grow and that the process of agricultural development and transformation will involve the creation of a mid-continental economic alliance that will feature interstate cooperation and compacts, widening in time into a true economic community with a formal structure.

A key aspect of the region's potential is the fact that the people of the Plains states have the mental outlook of producers, whereas so many Americans today think of themselves solely as consumers. But it is not only as an agricultural resource base that the region has significance for the nation. With its excellent human stock, sense of community, strong moral base, and absence of the crowding that plagues the two coasts, the

Plains states may well harken back to the spirit and organizational initiatives of a century ago when William Jennings Bryan highlighted the need for a moral revolution in the American system. The strength and character of Plains people were manifested again during and after the Great Flood of 1993.

The national moral landscape is a near-disaster in a once truly free, morally healthy, and vigorous society. To comprehend the depths to which great population centers have sunk, one has only to look at New York City, where the school board, over the objection of concerned parents, imposed a "diversity" curriculum that seeks to erase historic teaching about the evil of sexual perversion and where small children are being subjected to sensitivity training to make them accept the idea of homosexual unions. The depravity involved in this process reminds civilized people of the efforts of Nazi school authorities in the 1930's to subvert Christian teachings. The purveyors of sick ideas seek a "final solution" to Judeo-Christian ethics, and the Plains states, as a morally healthy region, therefore represent a takeoff point for the moral revolution that American society as a whole so desperately needs as we approach the end of the millennium. This is the true and greatest significance of the mid-continental region, which has remained largely uncorrupted. Reformation from within, in the spiritual as well as the geographical sense, is a real possibility and tremendous opportunity for the people of the American interior. It is the challenge facing the mid-continent today and tomorrow.

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Metamorphosis

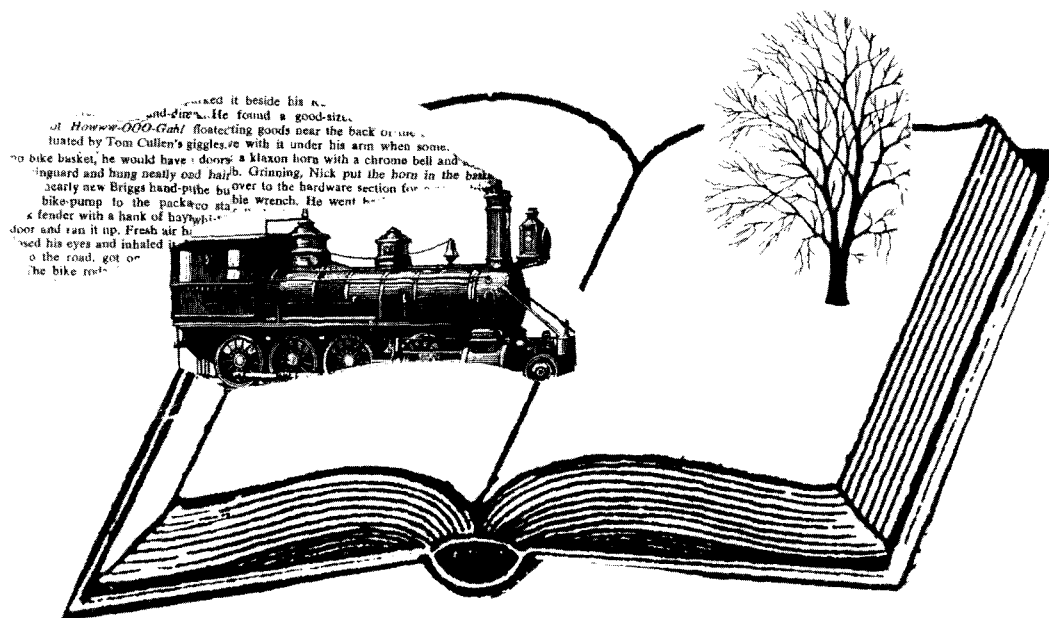
by Rudolph Schirmer

Earthbound, but Heaven-bent.
Schismatic situation!
No wonder that the lark
Became a happy harbinger,
The butterfly a beckoner,
The buttercup a chalice.

So it will be
When after timeless wanderings
Returning home we find
That there have been
Remodelers at work
And what was once a house
Is now a palace.

Louis Bromfield's America

by Allan Carlson



Igor Kupchinsky

Malabar Farm drew a large crowd the summer day I was there, mostly busloads of the elderly on excursion from the “senior centers” of Ohio. They came to see Louis Bromfield’s legacy—the once famous agricultural experiment that is now a state park. Most of their interest centered on the tour of Bromfield’s “Big House,” his attempt to integrate all of Ohio’s historic architectural styles into a single statement of man’s attachment to the land. On the tour, we saw the grand study and desk where Bromfield wrote the essays that were collected in *Pleasant Valley*, *Malabar Farm*, and *Out of the Earth*. We viewed the great hall where Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart, Bromfield’s closest Hollywood friends, exchanged their wedding vows, and we stood in the very room where the couple spent their wedding night (on twin beds).

A favorite of book clubs, publishers, newsreels, and the reading public until his death in 1956, and winner of the Pulitzer Prize 30 years earlier for his novel *Early Autumn*, Bromfield is nearly unknown among Americans below the age of 50. None of his novels has been elevated to the canon taught in American literature classes. While a half-dozen of his books are still in print in the Czech Republic and India, a would-be American reader must prowl the used book stalls to find a comparable selection. Despite a fascinating life spanning the interwar American expatriate community, Europe’s smart set, Hollywood in its Golden Age, and the early environmental move-

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ment, not a single serious biography of Bromfield has been written.

This fate is even more curious, considering the unanimous critical praise he received in the 1920’s, a golden age of American letters. Bromfield’s career itself reads like a fashionable novel of the time. A veteran of World War I who had observed the carnage on the Western Front, he returned in 1924 to live in France, where he was befriended by Gertrude Stein. His early books—*The Green Bay Tree*, *Possession*, *Early Autumn*, and *A Good Woman*—exhibited a deep contempt for the values and hypocrisy of Puritan morality and seemed to celebrate extramarital sexuality. Indeed, he opened *The Green Bay Tree* with an illicit tryst between his heroine, Lily Shane, and Ohio’s governor, a thinly disguised Warren G. Harding. Bromfield relished naturalistic and primitive locales, setting *A Good Woman* partly in the pagan backcountry of East Africa. In all of Bromfield’s fiction, the men are weak and ill-formed, while his female characters are full-blooded and dominant. *Possession*, as example, chronicles the ruthless rise of a small-town girl, Ellen Tolliver, to international fame as a pianist. *A Good Woman* reaches cynical, even nihilistic conclusions about the futility of human effort.

Even more to the critics’ taste, young Bromfield was a strident anticapitalist. He decried the transformation of the Town (a fictionalized Mansfield, Ohio) into an iron-and-steel center with evocative language: “In the fading twilight that now surrounded them the Mill yard became a fantastic world inhabited by monsters of iron and steel. . . . High in the air, lights, red and green, or cold piercing blue-white, like eyes appeared one by one peering down at them wickedly. . . . Dancing malignant