

The Temporal Landscape in the Writing of Louis Bromfield

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Throughout Pulitzer Prize-winning author Louis Bromfield's long career in the first half of the twentieth century, he produced both fiction and non-fiction writings on a wide variety of subjects, but there was one topic that consistently reappeared in novels, short stories, essays, and non-fiction works: the blending of people and nature in the farm landscape. This paper will examine the landscape concept and its relationship to ideas of both nature and time, as illustrated by examples from Louis Bromfield's writing. It will first review traditional understandings of landscape and time, particularly discussions of landscape memory or vision, and explain the significance of a more complete temporal perspective. This will be followed by examples gleaned from four of Bromfield's works: a novel, a novella, a short story, and a personal narrative. Finally, the paper will conclude with a discussion of implications of the temporal perspective on landscape as it applies to people and nature.

Keywords: Landscape, literature, Louis Bromfield, nature, time, Malabar Farm

Throughout Pulitzer Prize-winning author Louis Bromfield's long career in the first half of the twentieth century, he produced both fiction and non-fiction writings on a wide variety of subjects, but there was one topic that consistently reappeared in novels, short stories, essays, and non-fiction works: the blending of people and nature in the farm landscape. He was passionate about this subject, which originated with his childhood experiences in rural Ohio, where he developed a love of nature and collected fond memories of life on a farm. This proved to be a powerful foundation that kept the farm landscape in his mind even after he left Ohio. During the years when Bromfield was living abroad, his memories provided material for several stories, including *The Farm*, which he declared was written in "a fit of homesickness" (Bromfield 1945a, 10). The subject further developed in his mind until he made the decision to return to Ohio in 1939 to establish a farm of his own. This time, he not only turned his experiences into stories, but he also became increasingly active and vocal in issues of agriculture and conservation as a "rural visionary" (Nelson 2001, 29). In the series of non-fiction works collectively known as the "farm books" that became increasingly important to him in his last years, "he constantly extolled the dignity, wisdom, and freedom inherent in the life close to nature" (Anderson 1964, 176-7).

Bromfield placed great significance on this life close to nature. In his own life, he found that there was no better place to achieve such a relationship than on a farm in which one could experience, interact with, and become a part of nature on a daily basis. He knew as well as anyone, however, what had taken place in Ohio and in other places throughout the country. The life close to nature had been forsaken. Farms had been mined for all they were worth and then abandoned. People had been separated from nature. As a result, Bromfield began to explore in his writing different perspectives on landscapes that shaped the type of relationships people had with nature. One such perspective that received particular consideration in both his fiction and non-fiction works was the temporal perspective. The purpose of this paper is to examine Bromfield's use of perspectives of time on farm landscapes to illustrate different understandings of nature and to promote the life close to nature on a farm.

This paper will first examine the landscape concept and its relationship to ideas of both nature and time. The focus will then turn to the temporal perspectives in selected works by Bromfield that were set in a farm landscape, including: *The Farm* (1933), a novel, "The Pond," a short story from *The World We Live In* (1940), *Pleasant Valley* (1943), a personal narrative and the first of the "farm books," and *Kenny* (1944), a novella. The discussion will be

divided between characters in the fictional works that have a single temporal perspective in the landscape and characters with a more complete temporal perspective. In addition, *Pleasant Valley*, the non-fiction work in which Bromfield expresses his opinions and personal complete temporal perspective, will be discussed. This will clarify Bromfield's own attitudes toward the integration of people and nature in the farm landscape. Finally, the paper will conclude with a discussion of implications of the temporal perspective on landscape as it applies to people and nature.

Landscape, Nature and Time

According to Cosgrove (2003, 249), “[l]andscape has a complex history as an organizing and analytical concept within cultural geography.” One tradition of landscape can be traced back to the fifteenth century when the concept became associated with the artistic and literary representation of the visible world (Cosgrove 1984). The techniques of perspective drawing were employed to give form to natural qualities, values, or ideals. In effect, artists created an image of natural scenery by depicting specific features of the natural world in ways that symbolized classical values of idealized environments (Olwig 1996) and brought about a new way of looking at, experiencing, and judging place (Baker 2003). Landscape, therefore, became associated with the art of depicting natural scenery and ultimately with nature itself (Olwig 1996). Landscape, and nature, was positioned as an object for a spectator. A particular view, often elevated and from a distance, was encouraged for contemplation (Baker 2003) and aesthetic response.

This intended experience was personal and private to allow the individual to reflect on the landscape. Their response to it, however, would be based on not only personal factors but also cultural ones. Such personal factors would include the ordering of landscape features in ways pleasing to the individual's preferences, previous experiences or images, memories, associations, intentions, and visions. Cultural factors would include culturally conditioned norms, values, ideas, and appropriate reactions to landscape properties. From the idea of the aesthetic response based on a combination of these factors, the development of a landscape sensibility emerged that promoted a means of engaging with and expressing feelings toward the natural world (Cosgrove 1984; Olwig 1996).

This tradition of landscape promoted an aesthetic appreciation for nature, but it also perpetuated the separation of people from nature, physically and conceptually. Based upon the idea of landscape as a framed scene, the gaze, preferably from a certain physical distance, became the principal means of interacting with nature. The primary purpose of this landscape scene was to be viewed and judged by human spectators who were conceptually positioned outside of and above nature. If the scene did not suit particular preferences, people had the ability to modify it through artistic representation or even landscape transformation. Furthermore, the idealized and sanitized nature of this landscape concept became a place of pleasure and recreation rather than a place to live and work. Even in landscape paintings, if any people are present, they are likely to be at leisure so that they “seem to be in but not of their surroundings” (Cosgrove 1984, 26).

Much of the work coming out of this landscape tradition has also reinforced the separation of people from nature in landscape. In Carl Sauer's work on landscape, he made a distinction between natural landscapes, those landscapes that had been largely unaffected by humans, and cultural landscapes, those that had been transformed by humans through their activities and attitudes (Baker 2003). Although Sauer's work has since been critiqued by cultural geographers, Demeritt (1994) notes that the new landscape metaphors that have come out of this critique also keep the nature-culture dualism in place. These metaphors “make landscapes malleable cultural projections, whose shape and meaning are determined ultimately by the linguistic and social contexts associated with them” (Demeritt 1994, 164).

The nature-culture dualism is so deeply entrenched in the Western consciousness that it is difficult to transcend entirely, and various attempts to do so have been criticized for only shifting or reinstalling the dualism at another level (Castree and MacMillan 2001; Demeritt 2002). Nonetheless, the limitations of dividing people and nature in landscape have been recognized, and various researchers sought to re-conceptualize the nature-culture dualism or at least bring people and nature closer together. For example, Cosgrove (1984) cites J.B. Jackson for his approach to landscape that attempted to blend people and nature. The landscape was not something to look at but a place to live and work. In Demeritt's (1994) critique of landscape metaphors, he suggests the use of alternative metaphors such as Bruno Latour's hybrids or quasi-objects and Donna Haraway's cyborgs that, applied to a landscape, would imagine it in new ways without reducing it to one pole or

the other of the dualism. Castree and MacMillan (2001, 211) offer actor-network theory that is specifically intended to address the “habit of understanding the world in terms of conceptual dichotomies” and to reconfigure the idea of actors as both social and natural. Finally, Tress and Tress (2001) propose a transdisciplinary landscape concept to understand landscape as a system made up of different dimensions. This includes not only the dimensions of nature and culture but also physical and conceptual dimensions and different dimensions of time.

These approaches encourage the reintegration of ideas traditionally held separate and provide the means of thinking beyond existing frameworks in order to begin to understand landscape as a complex tapestry of meanings. The various factors are woven together so that an in-depth examination of one will yield reflections on another. Time is frequently recognized as an important factor in landscape (see Roskill 1997; Schein 1997; Muir 1999; Simpson 1999; Head 2000; Tress and Tress 2001); however, it is typically treated independently of the other factors, such as the relationship between nature and culture. Furthermore, time is traditionally fragmented into past or future dimensions despite acknowledgments that landscapes are not static (Demeritt 1994; Schein 1997).

In particular, the past has been used as a powerful tool for understanding landscapes both in terms of the creation of landscapes and in the perception of them. For example, Simpson (1999) argues that landscape is the visible expression of heritage because it provides a record of the physical and human forces that contributed to its creation. Schama (1995,7) specifically argues that “landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.” These landscapes of memory have been described as layers or patchworks of meaning that results from actions and experiences as well as myths, legends, and folklore that can be both enduring and powerful in shaping the institutions of the present (Schama 1995; Simpson 1999; Head 2000). Although this allows landscape to provide the focus for both national and personal identity (Muir 1999), this paper is particularly concerned with the individual, and the specific role landscape plays in a person’s life through the actualization of memories, emotions, and associations in connection with it that have been formed over time (Roskill 1997).

Associations with landscapes of the past can be powerful in leading an individual “to see the ghostly outline of an old landscape beneath the superficial covering of the contemporary” (Schama 1995, 16). Lowenthal (1976; 1985)

clearly makes the argument for why the past may be such an attractive force, which is often a direct reflection of the present. First, dissatisfaction or disenchantment with the present, perhaps as a result of increasing change, often leads people to seek refuge in the past, or at least a perception of the past. Second, nostalgia is a factor, particularly nostalgia for the romanticized places of one’s youth. “Life back then seems brighter not because things were better but because we lived more vividly when young” (Lowenthal 1985). Third, individuals may turn to the past for the lessons it may provide that would allow them to challenge the problems of the present and perhaps even change the course of the future. These impetuses draw people into a past that has the potential to become more familiar to them than the present and is typically not integrated with the present (Lowenthal 1976; 1985).

The future, on the other hand, has also been utilized in landscape studies for the purpose of understanding how landscapes are shaped and how perceptions have shaped them. Landscape planning, for example, has the capacity to shape landscape through policies intended to protect or improve them in various ways. Associated with landscape planning is landscape evaluation, which emphasizes the importance of perception in shaping the future character of the landscape (Muir 1999). Early American attitudes are frequently cited as the prime example of how landscape perceptions had a direct influence on the landscape. In particular, the focus was not on the past but on the future. Many Americans believed that their landscape lacked historical associations, or they simply rejected the past that they felt burdened Europeans. The past constituted a constraint on the future and on progress, and it eventually had to yield in order to allow new ideas to develop (Lowenthal 1976; 1985). “The uncultivated scene brought to mind what would happen rather than what had happened; the wilderness was admired not for itself, but for what could be done with it” (Lowenthal 1976, 96). In addition to casting aside the past, the present was also dismissed in light of this obsession over the future.

Simpson (1999) recognizes this narrow view of the future in American landscape history, but he, too, invokes the future in terms of landscape vision. “The word vision reflects the belief that through better understanding of a landscape, through better landscape vision, we become better connected to that landscape and so derive greater fulfillment and satisfaction” (Simpson 1999, 8). Understanding the landscape and seeing it for more than it currently is, then, would allow the individual to be a positive

shaping force rather than simply a negative one. Freeman (1999), in particular, highlights the ability of influential personalities to shape landscapes and establish lasting legacies according to their personal visions. Lowenthal (1976; 1985), however, argues that this future vision of the landscape is difficult for many people. The consequences of individual actions on a landscape are not always predictable, let alone the effects of a society. Furthermore, images of the future are too often hazy, uncertain, and inconsistent.

Time clearly plays an important role in understanding landscape, where “[t]he landscape tells a story of many meanings, written by many hands, that reveals the past, explains the present, and foreshadows the future” (Simpson 1999, 1); however, these three dimensions of time have traditionally been kept separate. Landscape studies have typically attempted to reveal the past, to explain the present, *or* to foreshadow the future without considering the implications of all three together, while individuals also tend to view the landscape in terms of one aspect of time based on personal experiences, motivations, and assumptions. For example, certain individuals may form an attachment to the landscape the way it was in the past at the time of a meaningful experience. Others may create a vision of the landscape, precluding their ability to see it in any other way, in terms of how the landscape will be after it has been shaped according to their particular motivations, be it preservation or profit. Furthermore, overriding assumptions may also play a part in determining the temporal perspective of the landscape. Landscape changes tend to go unnoticed because they take place slowly over time (Tress and Tress 2001), which may lead individuals to “freeze” a particular snapshot of the landscape in their imagination, although landscapes are not static.

The temporal perspective of landscape calls into question the ability to separate different dimensions of time, and adopting a complete temporal perspective—the integration of past, present and future perspectives—would move landscape beyond the existing framework of understanding that is based on a single perspective, either past or future. This would provide a means of moving closer toward the understanding of landscape as a complex system through a more complete knowledge of what the landscape was, what it is, and what it could be. A complete temporal landscape perspective would provide insight into the meanings and values that have come out of what the landscape was in the past. It would contribute to the ways in which the landscape can be appreciated for what it is in

the present, and it would provide a guide for interactions that will make landscape what it could be in the future. Finally, considering the different dimensions of time through a temporal perspective of landscape has the ability to illuminate the experiences, motivations, and assumptions identified above that are tied to other landscape factors as well, including that of nature-culture relations.

In order to illustrate this idea, the temporal perspective of landscape will be discussed using examples from Louis Bromfield’s writing. The different dimensions of time frequently appear in the context of people-nature interactions, in both his fiction and non-fiction works. This section of the paper will begin with a brief biographic sketch and overview of the selected works. From this foundation, the discussion will first look at the relationships between people and nature in terms of characters who particularly view the landscape in one dimension of time. This will be followed by an examination of the relationships between characters who integrate their understandings of the past, present, and future of the landscape into one complete perspective. Since Bromfield himself fits into this category, the discussion will conclude with the *Pleasant Valley* narrative, in which his personal perspective of time and his relationship with landscape and nature is clearly expressed in his own words.

Louis Bromfield’s Writing

Although Louis Bromfield lived in the town of Mansfield, Ohio as a child, the type of landscape that influenced him the most was that of the farm. His parents, Charles Bromfield and Annette Coulter, had both been raised on farms. In his childhood, Bromfield played on the Coulter farm and helped his father with various farm restoration projects (Bromfield 1945a).

In 1914, Bromfield’s family decided to make one last attempt at a life of farming. They sold their house in Mansfield and moved to a worn-out farm, but the venture proved to be a failure. At the encouragement of his mother, Louis Bromfield left Ohio in 1916 not planning to return (Brown 1957; Anderson 1964). He then developed his writing career, traveled the world, and settled in the French countryside with his wife and children. There, his interest in farming was re-kindled. He became active in gardening and even began to talk about buying a farm in America.

Six years later, when World War II was upon Europe, Bromfield finally left France and ultimately decided to return to Ohio. The land was perhaps more degraded than it had been when he left and the rural population smaller, but he purchased three worn-out farms in Richland County. From these farms, he created Malabar Farm with the hopes of proving that the degraded fields could be restored to their former fertility and productivity (Brown 1957; Owings 1997). It was intended to be a working, experimental farm that would search for and implement innovative methods that were practical and replicable for all farmers. The farm would then provide examples of these and other appropriate methods in practice, as well as their tangible results, for other farmers to see (Bromfield 1945a).

These events from Bromfield's life provide the basis for the writings discussed here. *The Farm*, described as "a thinly disguised autobiography" (Owings 1997, 128), is a family history. The tale begins with the Colonel's creation of the Farm from the Ohio wilderness and traces each generation through his great-grandson, Johnny, who feels that the Farm is his home but leaves it in the end. "The Pond" is set on a farm in the Great Plains that has the only pond for miles around. The pond is meaningful for Annie and her son Tom, but her husband drains it to put the land into production. Upon Tom's death in the war in the Pacific, however, the pond miraculously returns. *Pleasant Valley* describes Bromfield's return to Ohio and establishment of Malabar Farm. It is a combination of romantic nature writing and utilitarian agricultural practices. Finally, *Kenny* is a fairy tale about a mysterious boy who becomes a part of a farm and touches the lives of the farm families.

The Singular Temporal Perspective

In the selected works by Louis Bromfield described above, time is an important factor in the way the characters understand the farm landscape that provides the setting for each work. The particular perspective of time also has implications in the way the characters interact with this landscape. The characters are, of course, capable of viewing the landscape in different perspectives of time; however, in Bromfield's fiction, most characters have particular influencing factors that cause one aspect of time to dominate their perspective. This singular perspective of time clearly shapes the ways they think about and relate to the landscape. Examples of characters with a dominant

past perspective, present perspective, or future perspective on the landscape will be discussed.

The Farm, for example, has a prevailing tone of the past, and this is particularly applicable to the boy, Johnny. For him, the Farm is a landscape of memory. The story does not initially begin with the family patriarch, the Colonel, but opens with Johnny's earliest memory of the Farm. In fact, nearly three-fourths of the novel is made up of Johnny's recollections. For him, the landscape was frozen in the time of his childhood. "Johnny knew each farm along the road which led at the end of his grandfather's house. He knew them as they were and so they will always exist for him, no matter what has happened to them since" (Bromfield 1955, 128). Moreover, he rarely saw the landscape for what it was or what it could be, even at the time. "For a child it was a fascinating journey made with impatience to reach the end, and in his impatience and his childishness Johnny never saw the signs of change which were taking place day by day before his eyes" (Bromfield 1955, 131).

Johnny was too young to know Ohio as his ancestors had known it, as a wilderness, yet that is what he imagined it to be. He loved the overgrown brush and abandoned thickets because they were the only wild places he had ever known. They were romantic and adventurous landscapes to him, just like a jungle, or the savage, primitive experience of his great-grandfather's arrival in the Ohio country. The land was starting to return to a natural state, while Johnny's father was attempting to turn it into productive farms once more. As a child, Johnny participated in this effort because he enjoyed these places, but "[h]e had no desire to see them restored to their former neatness and fertility" (Bromfield 1955, 250).

As a young man, Johnny participated in the plan conceived by his father and grandfather to recreate the Colonel's dream for the Farm that had been passed down through the generations. This revived dream ultimately died because it was a legacy of the past. In the end Johnny finally, reluctantly, allowed himself to see the Farm for what it was in the present and what it would become in the future.

It came to him in an instant, out of the air itself...It was a dull, rhythmic, muffled sound, measured and monotonous, not sharp and piercing and solitary, like the sound of a cannon. It possessed the whole air. Standing quite still, he listened, puzzled and astonished, and then

slowly he knew what it was. It came from the new rolling-mills which were pounding out shells to be shipped to France and the War. He felt a sudden sickness, and at the same time he knew that it was all over and that the Farm was finished (Bromfield 1955, 317).

The mills and factories had been slowly coming closer and closer to the world of the Farm. At last, it came close enough to “invade” the Farm, and Johnny could no longer see the landscape for what it had been or what he imagined it to have been. Things had changed, and he finally had to recognize that. He then left the Farm behind with the knowledge that it would soon be sold and would cease to exist outside of his memories.

For Pete, the farm owner in *Kenny*, the past also dominates his view of the landscape. Although the story is told from his perspective as a recollection, his view of the landscape is shaped by myth rather than memory. This was not a past that he himself had experienced but a past that had become so vivid in his mind through myth and legend that he ultimately felt as though it was something from a former life. As he lived and worked on the farm, this past became real to him and became an authentic element of the perceived landscape. He was occasionally startled by his own ability to see such a distant past in the landscape, and he wondered if time had somehow been altered. The farm became an almost unreal and magical place for him. This different perspective of time immediately becomes clear with the first scene in the story.

Up there on the lonely hill the action of time seemed at moments to have been suspended. You were out of the world, and time and space seemed of no great importance. It was a beautiful and primitive world in which the solid harsh world of reality at times became distant and hazy and the very trees and stones seemed possessed of spirits (Bromfield 1947, 10).

From this point, Pete’s life on the farm has been changed, and typical scenes in the farm environment suddenly appear different to him. When he saw the silhouettes of farm children and animals moving through the pastures high on the farm against the backdrop of blue sky, he saw something “ancient and Bacchic” (Bromfield 1947, 42). When he saw one of his farmhands, Vincent, leading a bull across the farm, scattering geese along the

way, he saw a scene of beauty and satisfaction but not in itself. He believed that he had witnessed “a moment which, curiously, went backward into time far beyond the borders of the epoch in which I lived, back indeed to the pastoral beginnings of man’s civilization” (Bromfield 1947, 17).

The story is set from the Great Depression through the Second World War. The farm is better off than most, but it is not isolated from the difficulties faced by farms across the country. Pete’s perspective allowed him to see beyond the reality of the present, including the long-degraded soil, the destruction left behind by shiftless tenant farmers, the shortage of strong young farmhands to work the fields, and the litter of machinery that more often than not seemed to be in disrepair. However, this perspective plays a small part in the story. Instead, his perspective continues to focus on the landscape as he believed it was in the “remote and misty past when man was far nearer to Nature and its laws than he is today” (Bromfield 1947, 64). This is largely nostalgia, though, because Pete did not appear to believe that such a life could be recreated and he did not attempt to. Nonetheless, he envied those who had a closer relationship to the natural environment, such as the boy, Kenny. Pete believed that it was people like Kenny who had brought about the good fortune that led his farm to be called the “lucky farm.”

Vincent, also from the story *Kenny*, is the best example of a character that had the singular perspective of the present. Pete considered Vincent to be particularly gifted in working with the animals on the farm. His relationship with the animals, and other aspects of the natural environment, was largely based on intuition. His understanding beyond this was restricted, perhaps as a result of his circumstances. Vincent had no past worth remembering until he married Martha and started a family. Because of the Great Depression, however, they had little future as well. They found that they were unable to stay together as a family when the children were boarded in one city and the parents were working in another city or even different cities. They were desperate when they came to Pete to ask for work and were happy to become a family once more when they came to live on the farm. Vincent had suffered through such a transitory existence for so long, though, that he lived for the present, and that was the way he approached nature. The farm’s manager “said that when Vincent went into the chicken house he became a chicken and when he went into the barns he became a cow or a horse” (Bromfield 1947, 43).

Vincent approached his home on the farm in this manner as well. He bought a pony for his children instead of clothes, and he brought a veal calf to be raised at his farmhouse because the children liked it. There was no planning for the future; he saw the happiness of the present in the landscape on the farm and was content just to keep it that way. Vincent “worked, voluntarily, long hours, with enthusiasm and a desperate desire to make good and preserve the fantastic, happy little world which was growing up around the old farmhouse on the Hubert Place” (Bromfield 1947, 42). He wanted to be in that place at that time and no where else, because the farm landscape around his home was filled with both animals and children. For him and his family, it was “unadulterated Paradise” (Bromfield 1947, 41). Even as the years passed and things changed, Vincent and his family continued to live in the moment. As World War II approached, Pete commented that “there was a cloud growing in the world outside which in the beginning touched directly and immediately neither Vincent, nor his family... In their simplicity and the intimacy in which they lived with the animals and the fields and the trees, they were, I think, never aware of what was happening in Europe, in Asia, in all the world” (Bromfield 1947, 66).

Two characters particularly exemplify the future perspective, but the future they envision is quite different. Axel Peterson, a character in “The Pond,” is in direct opposition with all of the other characters in the story. His wife Annie, his son Tom, and his daughter-in-law Sally each had a rich cache of memories from their lives in which the pond, an essential component of the farm landscape, played a significant part. Peterson had no memories, no pleasant associations with the pond. He had inherited the land, good rich land, and he had become preoccupied with producing cattle and wheat. He had long since drilled wells to provide water for his operations, so he had no use for the pond. He never took the time to appreciate the landscape for what it was: “...he never saw the beauty that lay in the sheen of a mallard’s wing, in the lettuce green of the cottonwood leaves in spring or the warmth that came of a calf’s nose nuzzling your hand. He had made all of his land and the animals that lived upon it no more than a factory” (Bromfield 1945b, 11). Peterson implemented his landscape vision; he drained the pond because it was “good land going to waste” (Bromfield 1945b, 11). After the pond reappeared, it was no longer simply a low place where water collected but a “live” pond that was fed by an underground spring. People came from all over the county to bear

witness to the event, but even then, Peterson was the only one unable to see the miracle. Looking at the landscape, he not only saw good land wasted but also money wasted on draining the pond in the first place.

James Willingdon, Johnny’s father in *The Farm*, also had a landscape vision but of a far different nature. James also wanted to shape the landscape, but instead of turning it into simply another commodity, James intended to bring health back to the environment that had been stripped of its fertility by profit-minded farmers, like Peterson. James had a great fondness for experiencing the landscapes of the farm; however, his vision was so comprehensive that it obscured his ability to understand the landscape in any other way. According to *The Farm*’s narrator, “I do not think James Willingdon ever saw these places as they really were—bare, deserted, weed-grown, and desolate; he saw them only in his imagination as they would be when he had finished with them and made them livable and fertile once more” (Bromfield 1955, 251). Furthermore, his vision was frustrated because he was never able to fully implement his plan and see the tangible results of his dream imprinted on the landscape. It became more than a dream, “almost a mission,” but because he, too, had a narrow perspective of the landscape, “[t]he adventure became a flight from reality in which the self-deception of optimism, at once a great virtue and the greatest of faults, ran riot” (Bromfield 1955, 277).

The Complete Temporal Perspective

A life close to nature was important to Louis Bromfield, and several of his characters display this relationship. These characters appear to have little in common, with different backgrounds and experiences with their environments. There is an old man who had carved his farm out of the forest wilderness, a lonely housewife who found respite in the only pond on the dry plains, and Bromfield himself, a famous man who could have gone anywhere and done anything but chose to return to the place where he grew up despite the poor conditions that had originally driven him away. Their perspectives on the landscapes of their respective farms provide the link between them. For each of them, the past, present, and future are all a part of the landscape. The past allows them to understand the legacy of the landscape. It helps them to form attachments and establish roots with nature because the landscape has meaning for them, in terms of how it represents myths or

reflects memories. The present allows them to appreciate what the landscape actually is. It helps them to clearly see the landscape, for the good and the bad, rather than only what they want to see. The future allows them to know that human actions influence what the landscape will become, and the complete perspective allows them to form that close relationship in which they interact with nature in ways they understand to be respectful and appropriate.

In *The Farm*, the character simply known as the Colonel had a complete temporal perspective of the landscape that allowed him to form a meaningful relationship with his environment. When the Colonel first arrived in Ohio, he had to “conquer” the wilderness and create a farm from the forest. Nonetheless, he did not approach the landscape with the same exploitative future-dominated perspective as many of the pioneers on the seemingly limitless frontier early in the nineteenth century. Instead, his balanced perspective successfully directed his interactions with the environment, at first physical interactions as he created and maintained the farm, and later intellectual interactions as he investigated and studied the landscape.

Like the rest of the new nation, the Ohio frontier was seen as a landscape without history. There was no history and there were no memories to make the past meaningful for the pioneers. The Colonel, however, was frequently considered to be an eighteenth century man living in the nineteenth century. He brought the past with him to the new country in terms of values that he instilled in the landscape, and he had an active interest in the past, collecting “flint arrowheads and dried botanical specimens and glacial fossils and polished stones which existed in such abundance on his farm” (Bromfield 1955, 51). Furthermore, he always remembered the landscape as it was when he was one of the first pioneers to arrive. Despite accusations of living entirely in the past, however, he also clearly saw and reflected on the landscape in the present.

It was a brilliant spring morning, with the nip of the frost still in the air, and as they rode the vague sense of depression flowed away from the Colonel. It was beautiful, mellow country, all low hills and pleasant wooded valleys, and the little swollen streams flowed between banks where the pussywillows were in flower and the tropical green of the skunk cabbages pushed through the brown of last year's leaves (Bromfield 1955, 20).

Finally, the Colonel planned and dreamed and worried about his farm in the future. He immediately knew what he wanted the farm to be, and he constantly developed ideas for new things and new ways that would ultimately create the pastoral idea he always imagined. At the same time, he had “that faint, agreeable savor of cynicism which touched all the thought of his century” (Bromfield 1955, 310) that kept him questioning and searching for answers. “And in his heart he knew that for all its newness, this was the kind of country to which he belonged—a country, gentle, smiling, well-watered and fertile, out of which man might make a new paradise if he were good and wise enough” (Bromfield 1955, 20).

Annie Wallace Peterson's relationship with nature in “The Pond” was highly personal. She had followed her husband to the monotonous prairie, though she realized that “[s]he didn't belong in this bleak, flat, treeless country. At home there had been groves of trees and springs and streams and hills. In hill country one lived always with mystery and romance, for over each hill there was a new and unknown world” (Bromfield 1945b, 10-11). Her husband eventually came to resent her, and she was left with little in her life, especially after her only son, Tom, went away to war. The pond became the center of Annie's existence then, and it was perhaps the only thing that made her life endurable. Out of affection for the natural world in her home landscape grew an intimate relationship with the pond that created its own small landscape amidst the larger farm environment. It was filled with memories for her. For so long, her life had consisted of Tom and the pond, and as a result, the pond was ultimately tied to her son in her mind. Annie had watched him grow up playing beside the pond and falling in love with his future wife. She felt that Tom would always be with her at least in memory because she associated him so closely with the pond.

The pond took Annie back in time, but it was also a place where she could find herself in the present. She appreciated every aspect of the pond; it was not only the water but the entire landscape that surrounded it—the trees, shrubs, and flowers as well as the wildlife that was drawn to it. She would immerse herself in the pond's surroundings, almost becoming a part of the landscape. “Sometimes she would sit in the grass, dreaming, very still, half-hidden in the bushes watching the wild birds for hours at a time” (Bromfield 1945b, 11). Even when the pond had been drained and she could remember it as it had been, she saw the landscape for what it was in the present. She was even surprised that her daughter-in-law could not.

The odd thing was that neither Sally nor her mother said anything about it. They acted as if the ancient trees had not been cut down, as if they did not see the scars in the brown soil where they had once stood nor the ugly gashes in the sun-burnt grass where the caterpillar tractors had moved about their ruthless task. They never spoke of the baked mud where the lovely water of the pond had once been (Bromfield 1945b, 14).

Later, when the pond returns, Annie sees it for the miracle that it is, and she begins to envision what the landscape will be when the vegetation has grown up around it once more. She knew that she would not be able to restore the great cottonwood trees that had grown up over a hundred years, but she would plant new trees and shrubs and flowers that would bring the wildlife back and bring people to enjoy the beautiful landscape.

Finally, in *Pleasant Valley*, Bromfield provided a first-person narrative of his return to Ohio. He revealed his opinions about the relations between people and nature, as well as his personal temporal perspective of the landscape in Pleasant Valley, the area of Richland County where his grandfather had his farm and where Bromfield established Malabar Farm. He outlined this perspective when he described the three farms that were combined to create Malabar—the Ferguson place, the Anson place, and the Fleming place.

There were at least three reasons why we bought these farms. One was that I loved Pleasant Valley and had never been able to escape it. Another was that life in a flat country was intolerable to me... 'In hill country there's a new world over the crest of every hill...' But there was a third reason, more profound than either of the others. There were things I wanted to prove; that worn-out farms could be restored again and that if you only farmed hill country in the proper way, you could grow as much as on any of the flat land where something rich was lacking from life (Bromfield 1945a, 47).

The past proved to be a considerable force in drawing Bromfield back to Ohio. His initial reaction upon seeing the valley for the first time when he returned was that he had come home. "I was coming home to a country which

I had never really left, for in all those years away from the Valley it had kept returning to me. It was the only place in the world for which I had ever been homesick" (Bromfield 1945a, 3). He reflected on his memories of the landscape from his childhood, when he had come to know it through fishing and swimming in the ponds and streams, hiking in the woods, and exploring the old Indian caves. He had his wife and manager with him and found that they only had a present perspective of the landscape. "They could not see what I was seeing for the Valley had no place in their memories" (Bromfield 1945a, 11). Furthermore, the more time Bromfield spent there as he began to develop Malabar, the more of the past returned to him. He began to remember the myths and the legends that permeated the landscape, such as the stories of Johnny Appleseed who not only had a presence in the region but also had an imprint on the landscape through the trees that he planted.

Bromfield often had conflicted feelings about the past. He had an interest in the stories of the past and, of course, a distinct fondness for his life in Ohio years before. At times, glimpses of the landscapes on the farm reminded him of a different time, a time that he perhaps occasionally wished to return to. He wrote, "I am not yet old enough to sit dreaming of the past but I know that life had values in those days which are gone forever, unless someday the world begins all over again" (Bromfield 1945a, 215). He was, however, also aware of the legacy that farmers of the past had left on the landscape. The damage to the environment had begun with the pioneers of the frontier and carried on through the last tenant farmers to occupy the land before it would produce nothing more. Bromfield made his feelings about past farming practices clear. "In the space of a little over a century those first pioneers and their descendants had passed over the surface of America like a plague of locusts, 'mining' and destroying the land as they went until at last they reached the Pacific Ocean. And then suddenly there was no more free and virgin land to destroy" (Bromfield 1943, 48).

Bromfield recognized that the Ohio country had become a landscape of memory for him, and at first he was afraid that reality would fail to live up to the expectations that he had held in his mind for so long. He was delighted to discover that he found the valley to be as enchanting as ever. Much of *Pleasant Valley* is nature writing as Bromfield described every corner of the valley. "It is a pleasant land all about you, valleys where the bottom land is rich, bordered by hills covered with wild and luxuriant forest, the whole filigreed with the silver of the streams... and far down

lies the blue shield of Pleasant Hill Lake bordered by the deep red sandstone bluffs and the blue black of hemlock trees” (Bromfield 1945a, 20). He had an eye for romantic natural beauty, but that did not preclude him from seeing the reality of the present as well. The three farms that he initially purchased were worn-out; other farms in the valley were even worse off. Bromfield described the Mason place nearby as “a tragic liability” (Bromfield 1945a, 119). He wrote, “That farm is finished, fit only for reforestation in pine trees. A few hardwoods—beech, maple and oak have seeded themselves in the gullied fields, but they do not flourish. There is too little soil” (Bromfield 1945a, 117).

Despite the pull of the past and the reality of the present, it was perhaps the future that had most captured Bromfield’s attention, as indicated in the passage cited above. He had a landscape vision.

What I wanted was a piece of land which I could love passionately, which I could spend the rest of my life in cultivating, cherishing and improving, which I might leave together, perhaps with my own feeling for it, to my children who might in time leave it to their children, a piece of land upon which I might leave the mark of my character, my ingenuity, my intelligence, my sense of beauty—perhaps the only real immortality man can have (Bromfield 1945a, 8).

The first part of this vision was influenced by his recent experience in Europe. He wrote, “I think no intelligent American, no foreign correspondent, living abroad during those years between the wars, wholly escaped the European sickness, a malady compounded of anxiety and dread, difficult to define, tinged by the knowledge that some horrifying experience lay inevitably ahead for all the human race” (Bromfield 1945a, 4-5). Bromfield had lived through war, inflation, food shortages, and rationing. Because he felt haunted by this instability, security was an integral part of his plan. He continuously invoked the image of refuge in the Ohio country and the “sense of being sheltered from the winter winds, from the snow, from the buffeting and storms of the outside world” (Bromfield 1945a, 11). An important expression of this type of security on the farm landscape was diversity. He wanted to create a farm with crops and livestock, poultry and fish, honey bees and maple sugar trees.

The second part of Bromfield’s vision primarily focused on the soil, which he considered to be the foundation of security. “We had first of all to stop that destruction and heal the gullies which made ugly scars in every sloping field” (Bromfield 1945a, 54). They needed to restore the nitrogen, humus, lime, phosphorus, and potassium that had been lost to erosion and “mining” in which farmers had taken from the land without giving anything back. This involved a process of laying minerals, planting green manures such as clovers and rye grass, and raising livestock that would also provide manure to be returned to the fields for increasing fertility. They needed to begin reforestation of the land that had long ago been logged in order to encourage water absorption and to prevent erosion that had become an increasing problem. Bromfield imagined a new type of pioneer who would recreate the forests and restore the richness of the land that the first pioneers had taken away. He wrote, “[t]here is a tremendous job ahead of reconstruction and restoration, a job quite as big and infinitely more complicated than the job of subduing the wilderness by the first settlers” (Bromfield 1945a, 300). Bromfield wanted to be one of the new pioneers.

Bromfield believed that the history of American agriculture was the story of farmers fighting nature as opposed to working with nature and interacting positively with the environment. He wanted to change this story, to shape the landscape, and to build a sense of stability that he felt came from a close relationship with nature. “It seemed to me that real continuity, real love of one’s country, real permanence had to do not with mechanical inventions and high wages but with the earth and man’s love of the soil upon which he lived” (Bromfield 1945a, 7). Out of his affection for the past, his ability to understand the present, and his vision for the future, Bromfield began to see tangible results.

One of the great changes in the landscape in our part of the Valley is in the quality of its greenness. Each year it has grown a little deeper, a little darker, a little richer. It is a new and healthy greenness born of many things, of work, of humus, of element restored to the soil, of intelligence, of love, of water, of working with Nature instead of fighting her (Bromfield 1945a, 296).

In the end, he believed that he had seen the rewards “of finding again the earth and the life which was always so profoundly a part of an inescapable destiny” (Bromfield 1945a, 272).

Landscape, Nature & the Complete Temporal Perspective

As illustrated above in the examples from Louis Bromfield’s writings, individuals hold different temporal perspectives in the landscape, even in the same landscape. This paper has argued that these temporal perspectives affect the ways in which that individual interacts with and relates to nature. Some individuals may be predisposed to a complete perspective of time that will lead to a life closer to nature, whether it is part of their personality or an influencing factor at some point in their life, such as the times Bromfield spent with his father in the country as a child.

This does not mean that those who have a particular singular temporal perspective in the landscape do not appreciate nature or are likely to have a negative impact on the environment. It is simply suggesting that appropriate interaction or management of the environment requires a more inclusive understanding of the landscape. Johnny had a deep affection for nature in *The Farm*; however, he could not find the appropriate means of making the Farm productive in the present when he continued to see it only as it was in the past. Likewise, his father, James, also had a passion for farms but was equally unable to achieve success when he only envisioned the Farm as it could be, without taking into consideration the factors of the past and present. On the other hand, Bromfield’s complete temporal perspective allowed him to fully understand the natural environment in which he lived and worked and allowed him to put together a successful plan for sustainable agriculture.

The idea of a temporal perspective for landscape has three primary implications for re-conceptualizing people



Louis Bromfield’s Malabar Farm, Richland County, Ohio
Photograph by the author

and nature in landscape. First, the temporal perspective necessitates recognition of the influence that the perspective of time has on the ways in which people understand and position themselves with respect to nature. Time is only one factor in landscape as a complex system, but as demonstrated above, it is clearly tied to other factors as well. Further exploring the relationship between time and nature in landscape is an important step in gaining a more holistic understanding of how people view, relate to, and interact with nature. It is not intended to transcend the nature-culture dualism, only to shed light on issues that arise from it, for example, the appropriate management of nature. Bromfield clearly understood the different perspectives of landscape that influence the type of relationships people have with nature, as indicated by the range of characters in his writing. This understanding allowed him to hold a more complete perspective of time in the landscape and therefore develop appropriate management schemes to be tested and implemented at Malabar Farm.

Second, the idea of a temporal perspective can provide insight into the points of conflict involved in environmental issues. Individuals hold different temporal perspectives, and these differences are likely to come into direct conflict with each other. The best example of this is in "The Pond," where Peterson's future vision of the pond landscape as a productive part of his factory-like farm directly conflicts with Tom's memories of the pond and Annie's more complete temporal perspective. Neither Tom nor Annie has any leverage in the situation, and Peterson drains the pond while both are away. In many debates concerning nature, however, different stakeholders are competing for their perspective to prevail. Without an understanding of these competing perspectives, no effective compromise can be reached.

The final implication for the temporal perspective of landscape is that it has the potential to encourage people to expand their perspectives of the landscape or at least to consider the perspectives that other individuals with an interest in the landscape might hold. The concept does not require that everyone hold a complete temporal perspective; rather, the emphasis is on recognizing how different perspectives of time affect people-nature relations and how a more complete perspective lends itself to more meaningful and appropriate interactions.

Conclusion

Various critics received Louis Bromfield's writing in different and sometimes contradictory ways. Some criticized Bromfield for being a reactionary that they believed wished to return entirely to the past. In stories like *The Farm* and *Kenny*, he romanticized farm life from the past. Other critics, however, praised him for being a visionary. His "farm books," starting with *Pleasant Valley*, advocated innovative agricultural practices that emphasized conservation and sustainability (Anderson 1964; Nelson 2001). These conflicting opinions begin to make sense in light of this discussion of Bromfield's temporal perspective of the landscape. He believed that the values of the past had been lost, especially the value of a life close to nature. At the same time, he attempted to update and modernize the values of the past in order to have an influence on the "new agriculture" with which he ultimately became associated (Owings 1997; Nelson 2001). In order to be able to accomplish this, Bromfield needed to have a more complete perspective that would allow him to consider the past, present, and future.

Bromfield poured himself into his writing, and his beliefs, specifically expressed in *Pleasant Valley*, can also be seen throughout his stories. His ideas about the relationships between people and nature became an important subject, particularly in those stories set on a farm landscape, including *The Farm*, "The Pond," "Up Ferguson Way," and *Kenny*. The different temporal perspectives of landscape held by the characters in these stories and by Bromfield himself become a key aspect of the relationships that they have with the farm landscape.

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the significance of the temporal perspective in a complex landscape. Although time generally is recognized as an important part of landscape, only one aspect of time is typically considered, such as memory or vision. This singular temporal perspective prevents people from fully understanding the landscape and interacting with it appropriately, whether that perspective is oriented toward the past, present or future. This is illustrated by the example of characters in Bromfield's writing such as Johnny, Vincent, and Peterson. The complete temporal perspective of the landscape, the ability to see the landscape in its past, present, and future forms, has implications for improving the understanding of nature-culture relations. Demonstrated by characters like the Colonel, Annie, and Bromfield himself, the complete temporal perspective is intended to bring people closer to nature once again in the life Bromfield advocated.

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