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LOUIS BROMFIELD, AGE ANXIETY, AND THE END OF THE AMERICAN EXPATRIATE

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This article examines two early works by Louis Bromfield (1896-1950), a notable member of the American literary community in Paris in the first half of the XX century. The essay "Expatriate—Vintage 1927" testifies to a novelist who, although privileging traditional narrative forms over modernist experimentation, attempts to disenfranchise himself from a fading nineteenth-century transatlantic tradition, at least in ideological terms. Bromfield returns to the old theme of American identity endangered in Europe (which boasted notable commentators like Jefferson and Emerson) to provokingly argue that «there isn't such thing as American expatriate». To him, notions such as «American expatriate» and «young American girl abroad» (popularized by James's *Daisy Miller*) have become superseded, as they reflect an obsolete kind of internationalism that saw Americans in Europe intimidated and overpowered by a largely alien world. In the 1920s, with the fast pace of Americanization, Europe no longer represented a "threat" for American visitors.
The same argument is fictionalized in the short story "The Apothecary" (from the collection *Awake and Rehearse*, 1929), where Bromfield reworks characters and plots of the transatlantic realist tradition. By focusing on two aging women whom he gently satirizes, Bromfield reflects on the disappearance of an old type of expatriate, while also tackling other contemporary discourses such as creative exhaustion and (gendered) age anxiety. The story depicts these women's unacceptance of aging as deriving from their stubborn belief in an obsolete kind of internationalism, and contrasts their decline with the vitality of young Anne Masterson, who is young and vital because her mindset is. By doing so, the story also implies that youth and age, rather than universal human conditions, can be experienced differently because they are socially constructed.

Keywords: Louis Bromfield; Transatlantic Fiction; Expatriation; Gendered Aging; 1920s.

Questo articolo esamina due opere giovanili di Louis Bromfield (1896-1950), membro di spicco della comunità letteraria americana a Parigi nella prima metà del XX secolo. Il saggio "Expatriate-Vintage 1927" presenta un romanziere che, pur privilegiando forme narrative tradizionali rispetto alla sperimentazione modernista, tenta di svincolarsi da una tradizione transatlantica ottocentesca, almeno in termini ideologici. Bromfield ritorna al vecchio tema dell'identità americana minacciata in Europa (che vantava commentatori notevoli come Jefferson ed Emerson) per sostenere provocatoriamente che l'«espatriato americano» non esiste più. Per lui, nozioni come «American expatriate» e «young American girl abroad» (reso popolari da *Daisy Miller* di James) sono ormai superate, in quanto riflettono un tipo di internazionalismo obsoleto, che

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vedeva gli americani in Europa confrontarsi con un mondo alieno e intimorente. L'Europa di oggi è un luogo ormai americanizzato e non più "minaccioso" per il visitatore statunitense.
La stessa tesi viene ripresa nel racconto "The Apothecary" (dalla raccolta *Awake and Rehearse* del 1929), dove Bromfield rielabora personaggi e trame della tradizione realista transatlantica. Concentrandosi su due *aging women* che egli satireggia con delicatezza, Bromfield riflette sulla scomparsa di un vecchio modello di espatriato, intersecando anche altri discorsi come la preoccupazione per l'invecchiamento (al femminile) e l'esaurimento creativo. Il racconto descrive il rifiuto dell'invecchiamento da parte di queste due donne come derivante dalla loro fede in un tipo di internazionalismo obsoleto, che si contrappone alla vitalità della giovane Anne Masterson, che è giovane e vitale perché è sua mentalità a essere tale. Allo stesso tempo, il racconto mostra anche che la giovinezza e la vecchiaia, piuttosto che condizioni umane universali, possono essere vissute in modi diversi perché sono costruite a livello sociale.

Parole chiave: Louis Bromfield; letteratura transatlantica; espatrio; invecchiamento al femminile; anni Venti.

As Extinct as a Dodo

Louis Bromfield (1896-1956) was one of America's most popular writers of the first half of the twentieth century. In terms of sales, in his lifetime, he surpassed rivals with more lasting recognition like Fitzgerald and Hemingway, and some of his works were adapted into immensely successful films. His fame rapidly declined at the end of the 1930s due to unfavorable critics as diverse as H.L. Mencken and Edmund Wilson, and very few of his works have remained in print, most often exclusively in a foreign language (i.e. French). Ecocritical studies have sparked a renewed interest in his non-fiction, as evident from Stephen Heyman's recent biography *The Planter of Modern Life* (2020), which has rediscovered Bromfield as one of the precursors of sustainable/organic agriculture and the environmental movement. Despite the attention that his visionary thoughts on sustainable farming have received, his large and varied fictional output continues to be almost entirely neglected to the present day[1].

The son of an Ohio farmer, Bromfield enlisted, like Dos Passos and Hemingway, in the US Army Ambulance Service in 1917, spending the following two

1 Heyman condenses the reasons for the neglect as follows: «Generations of literary scholars have ignored his novels, dismissing the early ones as derivative and the later ones as trashy. Lefty environmentalists declined to champion his work because of his conservative politics, Hollywood connections, and shameless self-promotion. Organic purists disapproved of the relatively moderate stance he took toward chemicals and his insistence on an agriculture that could scale. Even his local reputation is thorny» (282). In the only other recent biographical study of the writer, Ivan Scott writes that Bromfield was «middle class, with a taste which critics deprecatingly called "middle brow"» (iii). See also Weber, 174-195.

years in France, where he worked as a reporter and a foreign editor. He found success with the novel *The Green Bay Tree* (1924), the first of a trilogy concluding with *Early Autumn*, which won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1926. The year before, Bromfield had moved with his family to Senlis, a small town out of Paris, where he would remain until 1939, enjoying fame as a notable expatriate and forming permanent friendships with key figures of the new (Gertrude Stein) and old generation (Edith Wharton) of writers and artists. As there was a demand for visibility of promising young writers, Bromfield contributed pieces to collective works commenting on the state of American literature, culture, and society.

The essay "Expatriate—Vintage 1927" testifies to a poised young novelist who, although privileging traditional narrative forms over modernist experimentation, attempts to disenfranchise himself from the fading nineteenth-century transatlantic tradition, at least in ideological terms[2]. Bromfield returns to the old theme of American identity endangered in Europe (which boasted notable commentators like Jefferson and Emerson) to provokingly argue that, in the present day, «there isn't such thing as American expatriate» (657) [3]. The Old World, traumatized by the disaster of World War I, has not only been saved by American money and investment but has forever been transformed by a massive infusion of exported goods and energy. In describing America as providing «all the music for cabarets and music halls, plastering the sides of ancient bridges with signs advertising Veedol and Atlantic gasoline, placing automatic filling-stations (a great convenience, even a luxury) on quiet village streets» (657), Bromfield conveys all the excitement of the new culture which is rapidly changing life rhythms in a sleepy and backward continent. The American traveling in Europe, therefore, is now confronted with a world that is increasingly American («He is, in short, everywhere» [658]). Likening them to the ancient Roman citizens or to «English Milord of the day», Bromfield writes that his «fellow citizens are far more important than they imagine in their most eagle-screaming moments» (657)[4]. Gone are the days of the «hilariously vulgar» American destined to an

2 On the significance of this essay, see also Monk 5 and 9.

3 Bromfield writes that by living abroad, all his «senses and perceptions, have become with regard to America sharpened and more highly sensitive» (657). This idea was scarcely new and echoed nineteenth-century notable transatlantic figures like Henry B. Tuckerman, Margaret Fuller, or Henry James. On Americans and their use of European (Parisian) stay as a site of experimentation and reflection for internal issues in the first half of the 20th century, see Blower.

4 Such a position is plain matter-of-factness: on the result of such Americanization, Bromfield argues that «it is no use being sentimental about what the American is doing to Europe» (658) and is also aware that Americans might be enjoying «only the respect that comes of wealth and power» (658). According to Blower, Europe, and Paris in particular, represented «a new frontier» (34) for Americans.

inferiority complex and to «flounder clumsily». The modern American is knowledgeable, self-confident and «simply commands and buy what he wants when he wants it» (657).

Harvey Levenstein has noticed that, for a new generation of American travelers in France in the 1920s, «what turn-of-the-century tourists had condemned as shocking self-indulgence was now "having fun", something that had become an important goal of middle-class American life» (242). As Nancy Cott further and more pointedly explains:

> in individuals' political and cultural relation to internationalism, as in so much else, generational positioning mattered. Youth as a distinct stage had been recognized earlier, but it was in the 1920s that a sharper and potentially conflictual difference in perspective between the worldviews of "older" and "younger" generations was first theorized and identified as a prominent feature of modern life. The interwar era not only multiplied generational standoffs in schools and families within many nations but also saw glimmerings of an international youth culture, most visible in gender values and sexual behavior (50).

This new generation of fun-seeking youngsters «understood themselves as modern and internationally mobile Americans living in a world of other nations and cultures worth exploring» (Cott 52), showing an unprecedented ease with their fun-seeking attitude. Representative of this new era, for Bromfield, is a new American girl abroad, which radically differs from the type so finely represented by Henry James in his classic *Daisy Miller*[5]. Unlike the latter, this girl

> would be quite on her own, clad in a minimum of clothing, all cut in the most beautiful style by Chanel or Vionnet or Lanvin, with shingled hair and an air of independence and savoir faire sufficiently strong to rout whole regiments of Roman noblesse. One is likely to see her entering the bar at the Ritz or Ciro's, more elegantly dressed than the best of Parisian demi-mondaines […] As to the Italian dukes and princes—they come just the same seeking her fortune, but the new Daisy Miller is not as easy. "Why", she asks herself with brutal realism, "Shall I marry that wop? He dances well but he's only a bum" (658).

The "new Daisy Miller" Bromfield is describing — and whose predecessor did not only quite depart from the actual Jamesian character, but had been already superseded by the New Girl (a younger version of the New Woman[6]) in the last half of the nineteenth century — is nothing but the 1920s icon of the flapper. Unimpressed by European "dukes and princes", this new girl features a "brutal realism" and advocates an unproblematic hedonism, her right to 'have fun'. Not only are American girls the most representative expression of

5 Bromfield became famous for a series of lectures on "American womanhood" he gave in the Midwest, see Heyman 38.

6 See Banta and Mitchell.

this new cultural trend, but they often occupy the center of attention in a new international set:

> Even the smartest of the demi-monde [in Europe] are Americans from New Jersey and Indiana and Oklahoma; their queen is an American girl, covered with huge diamonds, who continues the grand tradition by being known simply as Miss and never being seen without a respectable, elderly lady-companion. […] In a world financed by American money, where every other street corner advertises American products and most of the hotels are filled with Americans, where whole streets advertise wares in English, it is obviously a little absurd to talk of American expatriates. […] The truth is that there aren't any more expatriates: in another ten years even the ghosts of Henry James's days will have passed, and the expatriate will be as extinct as the Dodo (659).

Although Bromfield's essay definitely exudes unrestrained patriotism, a careful reading of the second section provides both an ironic contrast and a corrective to the unmotivated enthusiasms regarding this "fascinating spectacle" of his fellow countrymen abroad. Bromfield is quick to point out or to give details about this new flock of Americans, especially about his fellow writers and artists:

> Most of them can speak no more French than is necessary to buy a drink. They have never left their own country, they have simply brought it with them. They live, surrounded and enveloped by Americans, in a transplanted Greenwich village. […] So far as the corrupting of "a predatory native" is concerned, they remain untouched in their virgin purity. Paris hasn't a chance of ruining them because they really never leave America. The wines out of which are born their oceans of talk are cheaper than in Eighth Street and better, but otherwise the same (658).

In emphasizing the impermeability of the American character in Europe, Bromfield was responding to influential critics like Mencken who were particularly concerned with the development of a truly American art that would address (and satirize) the local, away from the mild tones of the *genteel tradition*, of which Bromfield appeared to be an obvious heir[7]. My point is not to exaggerate Bromfield's irony: he made clear that he had left America on the ground that life in Paris was more affordable and welcoming for a writer and his family, more than for any ideological attachment to Old-World values. His remarks, however, although responding to the long-lasting preoccupation with the possible loss of identity of the American abroad, also offer insight into an international set of Americans for whom self-confidence (derived from an increasingly Americanized world) did not necessarily imply overcoming insularity

7 Mencken found Bromfield irrelevant «Louis Bromfield, [who] interests me too little for me to make war on him» (Val Holley 4).

("untouched in their virgin purity") and for whom mobility did not automatically mean openness to knowledge and self-examination.

Death Smells

A fictional counterpart to the aforementioned essay can be found in "The Apothecary", the concluding piece of the short story collection *Awake and Rehearse* (1929)[8]. The story follows the downfall of Fannie Sackville, a middle-aged expatriate American woman with a long and shadowy past as she attempts to exploit young Anne Masterson, a rich American heiress, by marrying her off to an impoverished (and morally questionable) Italian duke. This is Fannie's last chance to overcome bankruptcy and revamp herself within a decadent international set, which includes fallen aristocrats and nouveau riches in search of social legitimation. In the background, the lurking presence of a mysterious and disquieting figure, an old French apothecary, whose death comes to symbolize the unredeemable corruption and the inevitable vanishing of the world in Fannie Sackville and her circle formerly thrived.

In focusing on the plight of an aging woman character and deploying her as a vehicle for gentle satire, Bromfield's reflection on the end of the nineteenth-century kind of American expatriate (which the protagonist embodies) also intersects broader contemporary discourses regarding (gendered) age anxiety and creative exhaustion. As Margareth Gullette has pointed out, the years between 1910 and 1935 were those in which «the cult of youth» was born, and «that resulted in the creation of the generation gap, and the expansion and elevation of sexuality to formerly unimagined prominence in terms of the whole life [...] Young people who were believed to possess the cultural goods that supposedly made sex so natural for them –"vigor", "health"– were also assumed to own the associated mental qualities: "young" ideas, "vision", "imagination"» (25-26). The cult of youth was paired with an unprecedented preoccupation with physical and mental decline for aging subjects, which, as Gullette claims, was also evident in the literary output of the period, and particularly in a «set of early-century midlife decline novels [mostly with male protagonists, and which] constitutes a cultural meditation on "aging" in that time and place. [...] "Aging" [for these protagonists] means aging into the middle years. And none of these characters can bear the process» (30)[9]. As far as women were concerned, the period offered a remarkable contradiction: interestingly, just as feminism was

8 See also Anderson 63-64.

9 See also Dawson.

gaining ground and many women enjoyed an unprecedentedly active and successful late-life career and visibility, «a debate about late-life female creativity was joined in exactly the same period» (30)[10]. Bromfield's story can be seen as participating in this genre of middle-life decline fiction, as it mercilessly depicts a middle-aged woman's creative exhaustion and unacceptance of aging. The story, however, represents her plight as deriving from the obsolete kind of internationalism she embraces, and contrasts her decline with the vitality of young Anne Masterson, who is young and vital but mostly because her mindset is. Fannie Sackville's ruinous descent into powerless oblivion, in other words, would derive from social rather than biological factors.

The story reworks characters and situations obviously derived from both Wharton and James, not without a caricatural intent. Reminiscent of an older Undine Spragg (the idiosyncratic protagonist of Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*), Fannie Sackville hails from the far west ("Née Tessie Dunker, from Little Rock, Arkansas"), features an unspecified number of husbands ("at least two", 238), and a soon-ended career as an opera singer. Having no beliefs or values and lacking any distinctive trait, she is characterized by «an immense and overflowing vitality [that] for at least ten years, since the beginning of the decay of Continental society, [she has administered] to a whole ruined world» (239). Fannie's material sustainment and spiritual self-esteem largely depend on the recognition of others, which she obtains, from Americans, by preserving for them the myth of «dukes and princesses with names that had been glorious a century or two before» (239) and, from Europeans, by securing the injection of American money from millionaires and entertainment from movie stars and jazz dancers. In the story, her efforts benefit the interests of tradesmen, restaurant owners, and various kinds of profiteers.

Fannie's great and only talent, however, seems to fade as she begins entering middle age:

> At fifty-five Fannie – the indefatigable Fannie who was always the life of the party – had begun to feel tired. […] But for Fannie there was no rest. She knew that if she rested even for a day, people would begin to forget her, and if people forgot her she would be faced only by poverty and old age. In her world people thought only of themselves, living in a morbid terror of boredom. They worked at having a good time, and so nothing that they did gave them any pleasure. It was Fannie who saved them the work by planning everything. […] And so each

10 Gullette writes: «the major ideological factor of the era, for our case, is that as feminism appeared to gain strength, so too did the subversive force of ageism. Aging seen as an unmitigated decline had never started so early in the life course or been made so central to identity and mental accomplishment as in this period—a highly sexualized, biologized, somatized era. This was bad for both men and women writers, and of course for everyone else as well» (44). On modernism, women's writing and aging see French.

> day, like a sick and weary trooper, she had to forget that she was old and sometimes suffered from rheumatism, and, rising wearily, she would paint her face and touch up her hair and do the agonizing exercises which kept her figure slender enough to wring free gown from great dressmakers (239-240).

The above passage conveys all the cruel irony of Fannie's position, as she pretends to be the opposite of what she can no longer afford to be. Like a circus master, she must keep the wheel spinning, providing people with fresh distractions that prevent them from feeling the ultimate emptiness of their lives («it was a world that glittered a good deal. There seemed to be a great deal more in it than there actually was», 237). Her obsession with body fitness as some sort of self-imposed duty ("weary trooper") is paired, in other parts of the story, with references to the emergence of plastic surgery ("facelifts") as a new social trend among aging rich women («Most of the ladies had had their faces lifted», 237).

Her moving into the «ancient and tottering house» in Rue Jacquinot, a significant liminal space between the Faubourg St. Germain, «made fashionable for a second time by Americans» (234) and the poor area of Montparnasse, and the encounter with a «small, bent, ageless little man», a «gnome» (236) whose eyes haunt her as they seem to know «all the long history which she has managed to forget» (242) forces her to an unwanted self-examination. Leading a solitary and mysterious life in the house's basement, the apothecary progressively comes to represent Fannie's *Doppelgänger*. His dubious patented remedies («strange mixtures to restore the vigour, developing the figure, and bringing husbands to young girls without dots», 234) mirror Fanny's equally tottering attempts at restoring vitality in a decaying world of ancient titles. In order not to see herself reflected in the eyes of the apothecary, Fannie repeats to herself, as a mantra, the phrase «The Flower of Europe» (244), which identifies her privileged set as a gratifying source of identification.

Another aging American woman character under the spell of the myth of aristocratic Europe is Fannie's old friend Miss Van Siden, Anne Masterson's chaperone. Like Fannie, she exploits her association with a younger woman to her advantage, so that "the scheming mother" in Bromfield's recollection of James's *Daisy Miller* is replaced in this tale not just by one, but by two anti-mother figures. Strongly reminiscent of Susan Stringham in James's *The Wings of the Dove*, Miss Van Siden is an impoverished living relic of Old New York (she used to be the owner of an imposing abode in Washington Square), proud that her notable grandfather could boast acquaintance with notable members of European aristocracy. The story blatantly unmasks her profound hypocrisy, remarking how the old spinster secretly derives pleasure in seeing

Anne arguing with her beau (264) and dreaming that the young woman becomes «an old maid too» (266) or that she marries a European aristocratic that would allow her to derive vicarious prestige[11].

Fannie and Miss Van Siden embody two different versions of barrenness. However, neither derives from age, but from the fact that the two women have grown more and more estranged from themselves: «it was difficult to say which life had been the more barren or which woman the more haggard and weary. Fannie suffered from an excess of gaiety that was no longer gaiety but only a sort of tiresome hardship, and Miss Van Siden was weary from a life which never belonged to herself but to others fresher, younger, gayer, stronger than herself» (255). Fannie, however, from an intellectual point of view, is less hopeless than "the romantic" (253) Miss Van Siden, «because life had trained [her] to be a realist, and even in the moments when [she] reassured herself by thinking of the Flower of Europe [Fannie] was aware in her deepest heart that the flower was somewhat bedraggled and gone to seed» (253-54). While Miss Van Siden is ultimately ashamed of her provincial, American identity, Fannie tries to keep her balance by «telling risqué stories at the Ritz or the Ambassadeurs with a grand duke on her right and an automobile king on her left» (242)[12].

Caught in a moment of existential crisis, Fannie makes a fatal (moral) slip as she tries to sell her new friend's youthful energy to people who are already doomed. To reprise the story's metaphor, she tries to add a fresh «tall lily» (273) picked from the rich soil of her country to the hopelessly fading bouquet of the Old Word ("the Flower of Europe"). Fannie does not plan to profit from Anne exclusively. When she first meets the dashing and young Tony Sanders, Anne's beau, we learn that «lately [Fannie] had come to pounce upon anything that was young and not tired. She could feed his youth to her

11 «She wanted, despite her knowledge that it was a wicked thing, to see all other women turn from fresh young girls into withered copies of herself. The idea made her condition a less dreary and lonely one» (258).

12 Fannie avoids mentioning to her longtime friend endowed with a «nineteenth-century brain» (271), that her dinner party would also feature a Charleston dancer, a new attraction that Van Siden would certainly disapprove of in a context like that. As Levenstein points out, Charleston «swept Paris trendsetters in 1925. The Charleston craze was an outgrowth of perhaps the only authentically Parisian aspect of this nightlife-a postwar explosion of appreciation for African American music, particularly jazz. Although the origins of jazz in Paris are obscure, its popularity among the French seems connected with a general infatuation with Africa and negritude, at least among the "in crowd", which was fed by postwar disillusionment with the rational-industrialized world. In 1921, Paris night spots began importing Mrican? American jazz musicians for the French patrons, parenthetically giving some Americans their first real exposure to that music form. In Montmartre, American-style bars soon began converting themselves into jazz clubs» (243).

tired world. There were women with tired, sagging faces who would adore him» (245)[13].

In Anne and Tony's imagination, the criterion for measuring the distance between Americans and Europeans is no longer innocence vs. experience, but vitality vs. exhaustion. Anne Masterson's characterization, in particular, reprises and exemplifies Bromfield's argument in the 1927 essay: unlike James's Daisy Miller—we read—she displays a major self-confidence («I'm not a child. I didn't come over here to get a husband and I didn't come to spend my time in the Louvre like a school-girl. I did all that when I was twelve», 253) and considers the Old World's social landscape as inert as the old relics («Fannie Sackville's crowd is very much a part of Europe. They're one of the sights of our time. It's like going to see the ruins of the Coliseum», 257). Hers is a mixture of curiosity to grasp what it was that captivated so much an older generation, and of pity for women like Fannie who are so stuck with that pathetic fascination («she's old and tired», 251). Anne's disappointment lies in the fact that Europe, to her, is ultimately uninteresting and dull: «She was not awed [...] by the array of titles, but by the thing which awed her generation. She fancied that these people were wicked and sophisticated. It never occurred to her that some of them were sordid [...] or merely ill and tired and hopeless, like the Grand Duke» (274). Very much along the same line, as he advises her not to accept Fannie's invitation to dinner, Tony is convinced that Europeans' lack of vitality renders them essentially harmless: «Oh, I'm not afraid that any of them will try to ruin you, they're much too feeble for that» (250). The purpose of Anne's stay in Europe is to «have a good time» (257) and her stubborn determination to accept Fannie's invitation seems to stem more from «a wave of rage at» (267) Tony than from real interest. Meeting with "the Flower of Europe", in other words, is just a backdrop against which the much more exciting quarrel between the two lovers takes place («Certainly I don't want to marry a man who treats me as a half-witted child», 262).

The dinner scene, in which Fannie plans to matchmake Anne with the Duke of Sebastiola, sees the new American girl at the center of interest of the circle, who hails her as the symbol of a new world order. This is also evident in the fact that American English has come to replace French as a means of communication: «the conversation flowing now in French, now in English, but mostly in English because English was now the chic language and because the Grand Duke preferred to speak it. The Princesse de Vignes even affected a

13 When Tom tries to protect Anne from her influence stating that «she's only twenty… a *jeune fille*», Fannie replies that «"There is no such thing" [...]. For a moment something -perhaps the phrase "only twenty" or the words *jeune fille* – gave her a bad turn» (246).

slight American accent» (275). It is up to the Grand Duke to speak about the ultimate moral in the story, acting as a spokesperson for Bromfield's ideas and reconfiguring youth as a cultural rather than age issue. When Anne explains to him that she is «"not really young. Girls in these days know everything"», he replies: «"Age, my dear girl, has nothing to do with years or experience. One is young or one is not. Even age does not make one old if one is young. You are young", he added with a melancholy persistence. "You are the beginning. The rest of us are at the end. Fannie tries to save us, but she can't. She, too, is at the end"» (276).

The conclusion of the story decidedly veers towards the farcical. The scene where the guests first enjoy and then grow terrified by «the talk of poisoning» and of how to put off people («[…] they all hated each other with consuming hatred» [280]) displays a dark cruelty that reminds one of Balzac. Fanny's dinner, as well as her matchmaking plan, is eventually ruined by the sudden disappearance of the jewels of a rich Jewish banker's wife and the concurring diffusion of the mephitic, nauseating stink that stifles the guests in the room. Fannie desperately tries to save the situation, but even the performance of the Charleston dancer is to no avail (281). It turns out that the jewels have been robbed by the Duke of Sebastiola and, as Anne Masterson will discover after running away from the scene, the stink emanates from the corpse of the apothecary, dead from a few days, in the basement.

In Bromfield's story, the "new" American young woman abroad is not doomed to die of malaria fever, like Daisy Miller. The miasmic stench she inhales at the end of the story, which terrifies but ultimately does not affect her, is the odor of a rotten world for which she had too many expectations, but which is no longer able to determine her fate as happened with her nineteenth-century forerunner. Although the story contrasts Fannie and Miss Van Siden's grotesque exhaustion with the vitality of younger Americans abroad, it only partially intersects the literature of middle-life crisis contemplated by Gullette. On the one hand, Bromfield, as a writer, may in fact be remembered for his sensitive portraits of older women endowed with strength and resourcefulness (the Maharani and Mrs. Smiley in *The Rains Came*, and Mrs. Parkington in the homonymous novel, are possibly his best ones). On the other, in this early story, age anxiety is mostly deployed to represent a pernicious attachment to a declining form of internationalism. By doing so, however, the story also implies that youth and age, rather than universal human conditions, can be experienced differently because they are socially constructed and negotiated in a wider discursive arena.

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