man was made for. This could be seen, Huxley felt, in the way the Selenite community and the Ford factory, two separately conceived manifestations of the coming age, made no satisfactory provision for the "outstanding individual," such as the mind-expanding mystic, who might be the salvation of the race.

Huxley's "Preface" is brief but extraordinary. It gives a concise statement of his views on education and records his anxieties for the future of this vital process. The Swiftian satirist suggests that man's Final End, enrichment and expansion of consciousness, may soon be at odds with "the purpose of the Genius of the Species," or the common good. "Thanks largely to our present wastefulness and extravagance," Huxley laments, the inhuman laws of nature are reasserting themselves. These laws may soon compel "insect-like self-sacrifice to the Genius of the Species." Ironically, the system employed by Mond and the brave new world is *natural:* it is in accord with nature, where the individual ant's or termite's claims are never permitted to overrule the needs of the group. No ant is more important than the anthill. Group needs will soon be met, Huxley prophesied, by mass production, mass culture, mass education. Hence the immodest proposal of a termite-ideal. "Go to the termite, thou individualist"—this, says Huxley, "will be the advice of the wise men" in the future, wizards such as Mustapha Mond and the Grand Lunar; "and to the termite the individualists will duly go."

Comparing modern schools of the 1920s with "child-taming establishments" such as Dotheboys Hall, Huxley concedes that children of his generation are certainly no worse off than the adult products of old-fashioned educational methods. But they soon will be. "Our world," his "Preface" begins, "is a world of humanitarians and individualists." It is rapidly coming to an end. "Luckily," Huxley's "Preface" concludes, his generation can still educate its children to believe in liberty and individual rights. Perhaps they will be among the last to do so. The so-called "Genius of the Species" seems to be unsympathetic toward individual genius. If forced to conform to the mediocre majority, exceptional beings like Helmholtz Watson, a salutary psychological mutation, will be prevented from taking humanity forward. The "Preface" betrays an uncertainty about evolution not as evident in the subsequent novel. In ***Brave New World,*** the termite-ideal appears to have triumphed, but Watson can discover the Atman within himself and begin to mature spiritually in spite of unfavorable circumstances. Thus, man's evolution toward his Final End, namely a participatory awareness of the Divine Ground, cannot be stopped. Exceptional individuals *are* made, not born (Helvétius was right); but they are self-made, not turned out by society. They will continue to appear. The "Preface" is not so sure about continuing evolution. Heard's influence is not yet at work. Comparing the harbinger "Preface" with the completed ***Brave New World*** furnishes the earliest indication of the tremendous change Heard was to work on Huxley's thought. By the time he finishes his dystopia, Huxley believes that the "Genius of the Species" need not be ascertained zoologically by analogies with the insect kingdom. Unlike Mond and the Controllers, he prefers to position that Genius within the soul of the exceptional man and encourages this individual to find Vedanta's version of the Life Force by spirited introspection. The sardonic critic might interject that the Huxley-Heard fascination with genius is dreamier than Helvétius. But the "Preface" cannot manage anything of the kind; it is actually less optimistic than the novel. In 1929 Huxley expects the worst. Four years later, when he looks ahead to A.F. 632, the worst has already happened; but some men refuse artificial contentment; one of them seems strong enough to continue toward the best.

Brave New World does not merely signal the start of a new era, an era of enlightened individuals versus the termite-ideal. It also marks the end of the old one, the period of unchallenged individualism and comfortable humanitarianism. Burns's *Vision,* despite its forward-looking title, belongs to the old era; ***Brave New World*** anticipates and tries to see beyond the new. (pp. 1-17)

Jerome Meckier, "A Neglected Huxley 'Preface': His Earliest Synopsis of 'Brave New World'," in Twentieth Century Literature, *Vol. 25, No. 1, Spring, 1979, pp. 1-20.*

Edward Lobb (essay date Summer 1984)

[*In the essay below, Lobb—who considers* Brave New World *to be a meditation on the political and metaphysical dimensions of freedom—examines how plots within the novel undermine the ostensible happiness offered by the utopian state depicted.*]

Aldous Huxley's ***Brave New World*** (1932) is usually and rightly called a novel, but it is a novel of a problematic type. Satirical in technique, it is torn between the exaggeration peculiar to satire and the realism which is characteristic of the novel. Moreover, as a work in the tradition of utopian and dystopian literature, Huxley's fable walks a line between the overt discussion of ideas, which is normal in the utopian tradition, and the novel's tendency towards more dramatized conflict.

A highly conscious artist and an omnivorous reader, Huxley was well aware of the difficulties involved in writing a work of this type. There were few precedents for the juxtaposition of the novel form, the satiric mode, and the utopian debate (*Erewhon* is one possible example), so Huxley was in territory which was not only dangerous but largely uncharted. It is a measure of his success that ***Brave New World*** not only overcomes its potentially centrifugal tendencies, but actually uses its various traditions to work out, in subtle fashion, themes which are more directly stated elsewhere in the novel. ***Brave New World*** is thus—against the odds, and contrary to the opinions of several critics—a work in which form and content are artfully combined.

The themes are stated most overtly in the long dialogue between the World Controller and the Savage which forms the climax of the novel as a utopian debate. Despite the clarity of that dialogue, there has been much confusion about what the themes of ***Brave New World*** are, and it has been aggravated, unwittingly, by Huxley himself. In 1946,

Huxley wrote a "Foreword" for a new edition of ***Brave New World.*** He admitted the novel's defects as a work of art and acknowledged the distance between his present self and "the amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete who was the author of the fable," but had decided that the book could not be rewritten: " . . . in the process of rewriting, as an older, other person, I should probably get rid not only of some of the faults of the story, but also of such merits as it originally possessed." Whatever its faults, Huxley insisted, the novel should be read for what it was. "The theme of ***Brave New World*** is not the advancement of science as such; it is the advancement of science as it affects human individuals. . . . The only scientific advances to be specifically described are those involving the application to human beings of the results of future research in biology, physiology and psychology."

Huxley made this point, one year after Hiroshima, to explain the absence from the novel of phenomena such as atomic energy, which was a theoretical possibility even in 1932. His specifying of "the theme," however, has led to unfortunately narrow interpretations of ***Brave New World.*** It is generally treated now as a scientific dystopia, a cautionary reply to H. G. Wells's vision of infinite social progress under the aegis of a benevolent caste of scientist-samurai. Although this level of meaning does exist, it is almost entirely overt and requires little comment. The Huxley who adapted the "conversation-novel" of Peacock to the twentieth century knew how to make his points clearly and wittily.

But Huxley was an artist as well as an intellectual; despite his obvious concern with contemporary issues, his novels are never (as Shaw's plays sometimes are) merely vehicles of debate. Thus, while ***Brave New World*** deals with the effects of science on human beings, its larger theme is the political and metaphysical dimensions of freedom. Critics generally treat the limitation of freedom in the novel in scientific terms, simply because the means of scientific control are so thoroughly and entertainingly described. Nevertheless, to paraphrase Huxley's own foreword, we could say that he is not interested in the limitation of freedom as such, but in the effect of this limitation on human beings. If conditioning and ceaseless propaganda effectively deprive us of freedom, what significance can human actions have? The question is almost absurdly large, but Huxley never shrank from large questions, and his treatment of this one is brilliantly "literary": it explores the issues through the use and parody of literary forms and particular works, and reflects in its own form the problems of free action in the world it depicts.

The best means of approach to Huxley's use of literary forms is Northrop Frye's outline of the four *mythoi* or generic plots. In using this, I am not assuming the correctness of Frye's system as a whole, but employing a system of classification which seems uncontroversial in itself and peculiarly well suited to discussion of ***Brave New World.*** Frye sees all literature as a large circle which is divided in half horizontally: "The top half of the natural cycle is the world of romance and the analogy of innocence; the lower half is the world of 'realism' and the analogy of experience. There are thus four main types of mythical movement: within romance, within experience, down, and up. The downward movement is the tragic movement, the wheel of fortune falling from innocence toward hamartia and from hamartia to catastrophe. The upward movement is the comic movement, from threatening complications to a happy ending and a general assumption of post-dated innocence in which everyone lives happily ever after" [Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays,* 1957]. It is important to note that only two of the *mythoi* involve change. Within the world of "romance," of the ideal, change is unnecessary; within the world of "irony," it is impossible. These two realms, modeled on heaven and hell, are immutable. Normal human life, which occupies the middle ground, can move in either direction and issue in comedy or tragedy.

Huxley involves all four *mythoi* in portraying the world of A. F. 632, which presents itself as "romance." It is, in its own terms, idyllic—a realm of static, perfected social forms. In the reader's terms, on the other hand, the World State is a parody of romance; it is changeless but infernal, the nightmare world of what Frye calls irony. This antithesis not only emphasizes the contrast between what the World State claims to be and what it is, but also reinforces the theme of freedom, for the protagonist of ironic narrative (*The Trial,* for example) is defined by his lack of freedom. "If inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the *ironic* mode. This is still true when the reader feels that he is or might be in the same situation, as the situation is being judged by the norms of a greater freedom" (Frye). The inhabitants of the World State and the Savage who serves as the novel's protagonist display different sorts of bondage.

But Huxley is not content to present us with a romantic fiction and an ironic reality. Much of the latter part of ***Brave New World*** involves burlesques of the other two *mythoi,* those of tragedy and comedy. It is easy to see why. Comedy and tragedy are both social in focus: one deals with the reconciliation of individual desire and social good, the other with their sundering and conflict, and both take for granted the freedom to make choices. It is fitting, therefore, that a novel about freedom and society should show us the fate of tragedy and comedy in a world which denies individual freedom.

Let us begin with tragedy. The Savage, also known as John Savage, comes to the heart of the World State from the New Mexico Reservation, and is appalled by everything he sees. His "pity and fear" suggest that he is witnessing a tragedy, and despite his ignorance of critical terminology (he argues from Shakespeare, not Aristotle) he suggests that the narcotized efficiency of A. F. 632 is tragic in implication:

> "Do you remember that bit in *King Lear?*" said the Savage at last. " 'The gods are just and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us; the dark and vicious place where thee he got cost him his eyes,' and Edmund answers—you remember, he's wounded, he's dying—'Thou hast spoken right; 'tis true. The wheel has come full circle, I am here ' What about that now? Doesn't

there seem to be a God managing things, punishing, rewarding?"

"Well, does there?" questioned the Controller in his turn. " . . . 'The wheel has come full circle; I am here.' But where would Edmund be nowadays? Sitting in a pneumatic chair, with his arm round a girl's waist, sucking away at his sex-hormone chewing-gum and looking at the feelies. The gods are just. No doubt. But their code of law is dictated, in the last resort, by the people who organize society; Providence takes its cue from men."

"Are you sure?" asked the Savage. "Are you quite sure that the Edmund in that pneumatic chair hasn't been just as heavily punished as the Edmund who's wounded and bleeding to death? The gods are just. Haven't they used his pleasant vices as an instrument to degrade him?"

This is a good point, but a bad definition of tragedy. Without conflict and isolation there can be no tragedy, and the World Controller makes this point in questioning the idea of "degradation." A properly organized society simply precludes tragedy; nobility and heroism are useless gestures or "symptoms of political inefficiency." The words of Shakespeare and other old writers are banned in the World State, presumably because, like nature, they encourage contemplation rather than consumption. But, as the World Controller points out, they are virtually incomprehensible anyway.

If the postulates of the World State make tragedy impossible for its inhabitants, there remains the possibility that the encounter of the Savage and the State has tragic potential. The plot of ***Brave New World*** in fact includes most of the elements of classical and Shakespearean tragedy: conflict, isolation, the reestablishment of order at the cost of the protagonist's life. There is a doomed romance (that of the Savage and Lenina Crowne) and, as I shall show later, a whole host of allusions to situations in Shakespeare's plays, as well as the direct quotations which make up a large part of the Savage's speech.

But the Savage's tragic potential is subverted, for reasons which he himself has unwittingly made clear. When Edmund says "The wheel has come full circle; I am here," he makes his tragedy comprehensible: his end is plausibly related to his own actions and to a cosmology. But the Savage can make no such connections, nor can we. His actions are innocent, unrelated to his fate, and the forces which drive him to madness and suicide are arbitrary, not inevitable. His "enlightenment" is of a wholly negative and destructive kind. What undoes the Savage is not his introduction to alien values, which he could reject or assimilate in altered forms, but the vision of a society without real values of any kind. Huxley's undercutting of the tragic vision is not meant to deny the values of Shakespeare's world, but to increase our horror at their irrelevance in the "scientific" world order of the future.

The supplanting of the tragic by the ironic—of the intelligible by the absurd—is underlined by the discussion of *Othello* in Chapter XVI. The World Controller attempts to explain why literature in general and tragedy in particular are dead letters: " 'Because our world is not the same as Othello's world. You can't make flivvers without steel—and you can't make tragedies without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. . . . ' The Savage was silent for a little. 'All the same,' he insisted obstinately, '*Othello*'s good, *Othello*'s better than those feelies.' 'Of course it is,' the Controller agreed. 'But that's the price we have to pay for stability. You've got to choose between happiness and high art. We've sacrificed the high art.' " But the novel has in fact provided its own version of *Othello* five chapters earlier in the "feely" film *Three Weeks in a Helicopter.* It is the story of "a gigantic Negro and a golden-haired young brachycephalic Beta-Plus female" whose affair goes awry when the man has a helicopter accident and falls on his head:

> The concussion knocked all the Negro's conditioning into a cocked hat. He developed for the Beta blonde an exclusive and maniacal passion. She protested. He persisted. There were struggles, pursuits, an assault on a rival, finally a sensational kidnapping. The Beta blonde was ravished away into the sky and kept there, hovering, for three weeks in a wildly anti-social *tête-à-tête* with the black madman. Finally, after a whole series of adventures and much aerial acrobacy three handsome young Alphas succeeded in rescuing her. The Negro was packed off to an Adult Re-Conditioning Centre and the film ended happily and decorously, with the Beta blonde becoming the mistress of all her three rescuers.

Still earlier, Bernard Marx has stopped his helicopter over the English Channel at night and attempted, unsuccessfully, to interest Lenina Crowne in the beauties of nature. Lenina and the Beta-Plus blonde are thoroughly modern, unromantic, and hedonistic; Bernard and "the black madman" are absurd figures whose anachronistic values mock Othello's (and the Savage's) tragic earnestness.

Another tragedy of passion, *Romeo and Juliet,* is travestied in the relationship of the Savage and Lenina Crowne. They are truly the representatives of different worlds, but their affair, if they were to have one, would be a matter of no importance to either family, since there are no families. The Savage's Elizabethan courting is laughably out of place, and creates, as George Woodcock has noted [in his *Dawn and the Darkest Hour: A Study of Aldous Huxley,* 1972], "an extraordinarily comic scene of crossed purposes, in which the Savage declares his love in resounding Shakespearean terms, whereupon Lenina, reacting in the only way she knows, unzips her garment and advances upon him in all her pneumatic nakedness, and the Savage, shouting Elizabethan curses, drives her from him."

If the potential for tragedy is systematically reduced to farce, the possibility of true comedy is similarly undercut, for comedy no less than tragedy issues in enlightenment. A familiar pattern in Shakespearean comedy is that of the journey from city or court to a strange and freer world, often associated with dream and magic, and a journey back which results in the reconciliation of reason and imagination, law and love, etc. The most obvious example is *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* but *As You Like It, The*

Winter's Tale, and *The Tempest* take the same form. In ***Brave New World*** these journeys are entirely fruitless. Bernard and Lenina travel to the New Mexico Reservation as tourists, but Lenina is disgusted by everything she sees, and Bernard, despite his attraction to some of the features of Indian life, remains one of Huxley's contemptible intellectuals, incapable of changing his dishonest life in any real way. The opposite journey, that of the Savage to the heart of the World State, results in "enlightenment" of only the bitterest sort, as we have seen.

The Shakespearean comedy which Huxley alludes to more often than any other, directly and indirectly, is *The Tempest.* It is quoted at least ten times, usually in contexts which make use only of a line's immediate meaning. The Savage's echoing of Miranda's words, which give the novel its title, are typical of Huxley's occasionally heavy-handed irony:

> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
> That has such people in't!

But *The Tempest* has a more complex function in ***Brave New World.*** As a play, it shows us a genuine near-utopia—one which works by education, not conditioning—and thereby underlines the inadequacies of the World State. Huxley also develops a series of parallels between ***Brave New World*** and *The Tempest* which emphasizes the difference between comic growth in Shakespeare and the immobility of the characters in Huxley's novel.

In *The Tempest,* we learn that Prospero's Island was once the home of Sycorax, a witch. Abandoned on the island by sailors, she gave birth to Caliban, the "natural man" haunted by dreams of beauty. In ***Brave New World,*** the Savage's mother is Linda, a Beta-Minus from the World State who was left behind on the New Mexico Reservation during a storm—a tempest. On the reservation she gave birth to John, the "natural man" of Huxley's fable, who is troubled by dreams of beauty inspired in large part by Shakespeare himself. Caliban is governed by appetite, superstition, and credulity; after drinking Stephano's liquor, he offers to worship Stephano as a god. The Savage keeps his appetites strictly under control, but his syncretistic religion is superstitious and barbarous, little better than a nature-cult which demands ritual punishment and sacrificial victims. These parallels underline the fact that the Savage, like Caliban, is incapable of change, and cannot therefore undergo the redemptive trials of a Ferdinand. He can only rail at the rulers of a world he does not understand, and attempt to overturn them. In *The Tempest,* Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo plot against Prospero; in ***Brave New World,*** the Savage throws boxes of *soma* tablets out the window. Neither rebellion constitutes the slightest threat to the established order.

We balk, of course, at the implied identification of the Savage with the brute Caliban. For all his limited understanding, the Savage is concerned with moral values and strikes most readers as the most sympathetic character in the novel—in part, of course, because of the "noble savage" tradition which Huxley also invokes. But in either capacity, as brutish victim or noble savage, he is a static figure incapable of comic or tragic growth, and this is part of Huxley's ironic design. There is no point of contact between the Savage and the society he is at odds with, and therefore no point from which comic reconciliation or tragic conflict might begin. As a result, the Savage's encounter with the World State is not a tragedy but a farce of mutual incomprehension. The *dynamis* of drama has been replaced by the stasis of irony, the frozen world of Frye's winter *mythos.*

A similar conflation of roles can be seen in the portrayal of Mustapha Mond, the World Controller. In the system of ironic allusions to *The Tempest,* the World Controller is Prospero, but he is a Prospero who is not interested in effecting a "sea-change" in anyone's life. His sole object is to keep things exactly as they are; he has broken his wand—his free-ranging intelligence—in the interest of the higher social good. As he explains to Helmholtz Watson, " 'Happiness has got to be paid for. You're paying for it, Mr. Watson—paying because you happen to be too much interested in beauty. I was too much interested in truth; I paid too.' 'But *you* didn't go to an island,' said the Savage, breaking a long silence. The Controller smiled. 'That's how I paid. By choosing to serve happiness. Other people's—not mine.' " In *The Tempest,* Antonio took advantage of Prospero's absorption in his studies to usurp his position as Duke of Milan, an implied warning to intellectuals of the danger of ivory-tower attitudes. In ***Brave New World,*** the *trahison des clercs* is complete: not only does Mond reject the modern equivalent of Prospero's island (one of the few places where free intellectual inquiry is still allowed), but chooses instead to serve the new order and perfect its "happiness."

If Mond is a demonic travesty of Prospero, he is almost a mirror-image of that earlier World-Controller, the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov,* who promises to relieve men of the burden of freedom. At the conclusion of ***Brave New World Revisited*** (1958), Huxley cited the essence of Dostoevsky's parable: " 'in the end,' says the Grand Inquisitor . . . 'in the end they will lay their freedom at our feet and say to us, "make us your slaves, but feed us.' " And when Alyosha Karamazov asks his brother, the teller of the story, if the Grand Inquisitor is speaking ironically, Ivan answers " 'Not a bit of it! He claims it as a merit for himself and his Church that they have vanquished freedom and done so to make men happy.' " The meaning of this in the novel is clear. Change and growth are possible only with freedom, which can result in comedy or tragedy. A society which is "perfect," and which denies the need for growth and change, is frozen in the logic of its own assumptions and doomed to the stasis of incomprehension and irony. It is therefore our responsibility, paradoxically, to avoid utopia. The epigraph to ***Brave New World,*** a passage from Berdayev, sums up the problem: "La vie marche vers les utopies. Et peut-être un siècle nouveau commence-t-il, un siècle ou les intellectuels et la classe cultivée rêveront aux moyens d'éviter les utopies et de retourner à une société non utopique, moins 'parfaite' et plus libre."

To summarize: Huxley's theme, the meaning of freedom, is developed not only through the final debate between the Savage and Mustapha Mond, but also through the struc-

ture of ***Brave New World,*** which is not a moving picture but a series of frozen tableaux. The "stability" of the World State is ironically reflected in the immobility of the novel and the failure of its plot to resolve itself meaningfully. Its deliberate burlesque of the more active plots of tragedy and comedy further emphasizes the lack of freedom and the death of tragedy, the death of meaning itself, which results from it.

For all the seriousness of its theme, however, ***Brave New World*** remains a remarkably lighthearted book. Huxley's talents as wit and farceur are everywhere in evidence, for he was less concerned with the prophetic aspects of his fable than with its depiction of mental attitudes. The masters of the World State are enthusiasts in the old sense—zealots possessed by a single idea. As such they are the legitimate descendants of the projectors in *Gulliver's Travels* and part of a particular tradition of intellectual satire to which Huxley contributed throughout his writing career. ***Brave New World*** is best read as Menippean satire, in which evil and folly are seen not as social or moral problems but as diseases of the intellect, "as a kind of maddened pedantry which the *philosophus gloriosus* at once symbolizes and defines" [Frye]. It is satire of this kind, in fact, which ties together the various literary elements (prose narrative, utopian debate, parody, burlesque, etc.) which make up Huxley's novel, and which suggests the possibility of a generic approach to it. It is therefore peculiarly fitting that the last act of Huxley's novel should allude to the most satirical of Shakespeare's tragedies, *Timon of Athens.*

Disgusted by the amorality of London, the Savage retreats to an old "air-lighthouse" near Puttenham in Surrey, much as Timon withdraws from Athens after cursing its inhabitants. The "air-lighthouse" itself seems a deliberate recollection of Timon's hermitage,

> His everlasting mansion
> Upon the beachèd verge of the salt flood,
> Who once a day with his embossèd froth
> The turbulent surge shall cover

Just before this, his last speech, Timon has promised to help the Athenians avoid the wrath of Alcibiades. The senators are encouraged, but Timon's solution is brutally cynical:

> Tell my friends,
> Tell Athens, in the sequence of degree
> From high to low throughout, that whoso please
> To stop affliction, let him take his haste,
> Come hither ere my tree hath felt the axe—
> And hang himself!

The Savage has read his Shakespeare well, and has earlier thought of a line from *Timon.* He hangs himself in the lighthouse—an abandoned beacon—and the discovery of his death concludes ***Brave New World,*** not with a sounding curtain speech but with scientific detachment: "Slowly, very slowly, like two unhurried compass needles, the feet turned towards the right; north, north-east, east, south-east, south-south-west; then paused, and, after a few seconds, turned as unhurriedly back towards the left. South-south-west, south, south-east, east. . . . " Even in death, the Savage is pursued by ironies: the inability of his compass-needle feet to find true north is the final "amused, Pyrrhonic" comment of Aldous Huxley on the fortunes of his unenlightened hero. (pp. 94-101)

Edward Lobb, "The Subversion of Drama in Huxley's 'Brave New World'," in The International Fiction Review, *Vol. 11, No. 2, Summer, 1984, pp. 94-101.*

Peter Edgerly Firchow (essay date 1984)

[*An American educator and critic, Firchow is the author of* Aldous Huxley: Satirist and Novelist *(1972) and* The End of Utopia: A Study of Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World." *In the following excerpt from the latter work, he examines narrative technique, literary allusions, and characterization in* Brave New World, *which he considers a modernist novel.*]

If there are plenty of good scientific and technological reasons—ectogenesis, cloning, serial mass production, TV—why ***Brave New World*** could not have been written before it was, there are also some very good literary reasons. For ***Brave New World*** is, literarily speaking, a very modern book; modern not only because it deals frankly with a typically "modern" subject like sex, but modern in the very ways it conceives of and presents its subject and characters.

There are in ***Brave New World*** no long introductory descriptions of landscape or environment in the Victorian or Edwardian manner; there is, initially, no attempt to give more than a very rudimentary outline of the physical and psychological traits of the characters. There is no elaborate explanation of how we came to be where we are, nor even at first an explanation at all why we are where we are: six-hundred-odd years in the future. The starting assumption is simply that it is quite normal to be in a big factory in the middle of London. Only gradually and indirectly does that assumption also become startling, as it becomes clear to us what the products of this factory are and what kind of a world we have entered.

This technique of indirection is one that Virginia Woolf ascribes, in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924), to the moderns. For her—and by extension for the modern novelist—the way to get at the heart of a character and a situation is not to add up every item of information we can gather about them; the whole is not to be found in the summing up of all of the parts. That way lies dullness—and Arnold Bennett. The better way is to try to get at the whole by being, as it were, paradoxically content with the part. To get at the essence of Mrs. Brown—Woolf 's hypothetical example—we need to be told nothing directly of her history and background; we merely need to overhear her conversation in a railway compartment for an hour or so. Out of the apparently random odds and ends of this conversation, we can, by an act of the imagination, reconstruct her life and penetrate her soul.

What happens when a modern novelist resolves to transfer a Mrs. Brown or any other person into a work of fiction is that, inevitably, the author himself more or less disappears; the reader is left alone, seemingly at least, with the