By the same author

THE HISTORICAL NOVEL
THE MEANING OF CONTEMPORARY REALISM
ESSAYS ON THOMAS MANN
GOETHE AND HIS AGE
HISTORY AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS
WRITER AND CRITIC
SOLZHENITSYN

The Theory of the Novel

A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature

by

GEORG LUKÁCS

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY
ANNA BOSTOCK

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I should like to acknowledge my debt to Jean Clairevoye, the translator of this book into French (*La Théorie du roman*, Editions Gonthier, Geneva 1963), whose version I consulted at all stages of my work.

A.B.

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Preface

THE FIRST draft of this study was written in the summer of 1914 and the final version in the winter of 1914-15. It first appeared in Max Dessoir's *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in 1916 and was published in book form by P. Cassirer, Berlin, in 1920.

The immediate motive for writing was supplied by the outbreak of the First World War and the effect which its acclamation by the social-democratic parties had upon the European left. My own deeply personal attitude was one of vehement, global and, especially at the beginning, scarcely articulate rejection of the war and especially of enthusiasm for the war. I recall a conversation with Frau Marianne Weber in the late autumn of 1914. She wanted to challenge my attitude by telling me of individual, concrete acts of heroism. My only reply was: 'The better the worse!' When I tried at this time to put my emotional attitude into conscious terms, I arrived at more or less the following formulation: the Central Powers would probably defeat Russia; this might lead to the downfall of Tsarism; I had no objection to that. There was also some probability that the West would defeat Germany; if this led to the downfall of the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs, I was once again in favour. But then the question arose: who was to save us from Western civilisation? (The prospect of final victory by the Germany of that time was to me nightmarish.)

Such was the mood in which the first draft of *The Theory of the Novel* was written. At first it was meant to take the form of a series of dialogues: a group of young people withdraw from the war psychosis of their environment, just as

the story-tellers of the *Decameron* had withdrawn from the plague; they try to understand themselves and one another by means of conversations which gradually lead to the problems discussed in the book—the outlook on a Dostoevskian world. On closer consideration I dropped this plan and wrote the book as it stands today. Thus it was written in a mood of permanent despair over the state of the world. It was not until 1917 that I found an answer to the problems which, until then, had seemed to me insoluble.

Of course it would be possible to consider this study simply in itself, only from the viewpoint of its objective content, and without reference to the inner factors which conditioned it. But I believe that in looking back over the history of almost five decades it is worth while to describe the mood in which the work was written because this will facilitate a proper understanding of it.

Clearly my rejection of the war and, together with it, of the bourgeois society of that time was purely utopian; nothing, even at the level of the most abstract intellection, helped to mediate between my subjective attitude and objective reality. Methodologically, this had the very important consequence that I did not, at first, feel any need to submit my view of the world, my scientific working method, etc., to critical reassessment. I was then in process of turning from Kant to Hegel, without, however, changing any aspect of my attitude towards the so-called 'intellectual sciences' school, an attitude based essentially on my youthful enthusiasm for the work of Dilthey, Simmel and Max Weber. *The Theory of the Novel* is in effect a typical product of the tendencies of that school. When I met Max Dvorak personally in Vienna in 1920 he told me that he regarded my book as the movement's most important publication.

Today it is no longer difficult to see the limitations of this method. But we are also in a position to appreciate the features which, to a certain extent, justified it historically as

against the petty two-dimensionality of Neo-Kantian (or any other) positivism in the treatment both of historical characters or relations and of intellectual realities (logic, aesthetics, etc.). I am thinking, for example, of the fascination exercised by Dilthey's *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*[1] (Leipzig 1905), a book which seemed in many respects to open up new ground. This new ground appeared to us then as an intellectual world of large-scale syntheses in both the theoretical and the historical fields. We failed to see that the new method had in fact scarcely succeeded in surmounting positivism, or that its syntheses were without objective foundation. (At that time it escaped the notice of the younger ones among us that men of talent were arriving at their genuinely sound conclusions in spite of the method rather than by means of it.) It became the fashion to form general synthetic concepts on the basis of only a few characteristics—in most cases only intuitively grasped—of a school, a period, etc., then to proceed by deduction from these generalisations to the analysis of individual phenomena, and in that way to arrive at what we claimed to be a comprehensive overall view.

This was the method of *The Theory of the Novel*. Let me quote just a few examples. Its typology of novel forms depends to a large extent on whether the chief protagonist's soul is 'too narrow' or 'too broad' in relation to reality. This highly abstract criterion is useful, at most, for illuminating certain aspects of *Don Quixote*, which is chosen to represent the first type. But it is far too general to afford full comprehension of the historical and aesthetic richness of even that one novel. As for the other novelists placed in the same category, such as Balzac or even Pontoppidan, the method puts them into a conceptual straitjacket which completely distorts them. The same is true of the other types. The consequence of the abstract synthesising practised by

[1] 'Lived Experience and Literary Creation' (trans.)

the 'intellectual sciences' school is even more striking in the treatment of Tolstoy. The epilogue in *War and Peace* is, in fact, an authentic conclusion, in terms of ideas, to the period of the Napoleonic Wars; the development of certain figures already foreshadows the Decembrist rising of 1825. But the author of *The Theory of the Novel* sticks so obstinately to the schema of *L'Education sentimentale* that all he can find here is 'a nursery atmosphere where all passion has been spent', 'more melancholy than the ending of the most problematic of novels of disillusionment'. Any number of such examples could be supplied. Suffice it to point out that novelists such as Defoe, Fielding and Stendhal found no place in this schematic pattern, that the arbitrary 'synthetic' method of the author of *The Theory of the Novel* leads him to a completely upside-down view of Balzac and Flaubert or of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, etc., etc.

Such distortions must be mentioned, if only to reveal the limitations of the method of abstract synthesis practised by the 'intellectual sciences' school. That does not mean, of course, that the author of *The Theory of the Novel* was precluded in principle from uncovering any interesting correlations. Here again I will give only the most characteristic example: the analysis of the role of time in *L'Education sentimentale*. The analysis of the concrete work is still an inadequate abstraction. The discovery of a *'recherche du temps perdu'* can be objectively justified, if at all, only with regard to the last part of the novel (after the final defeat of the revolution of 1848). Nevertheless we have here an unambiguous formulation of the new function of time in the novel, based on the Bergsonian concept of *'durée'*. This is the more striking as Proust did not become known in Germany until after 1920, Joyce's *Ulysses* not until 1922, and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* was not published until 1924.

Thus *The Theory of the Novel* is a typical product of

'intellectual science' and does not point the way beyond its methodological limitations. Yet its success (Thomas Mann and Max Weber were among those who read it with approval) was not purely accidental. Although rooted in the 'intellectual sciences' approach, this book shows, within the given limitations, certain new features which were to acquire significance in the light of later developments. We have already pointed out that the author of *The Theory of the Novel* had become a Hegelian. The older leading representatives of the 'intellectual sciences' method based themselves on Kantian philosophy and were not free from traces of positivism; this was particularly true of Dilthey. An attempt to overcome the flat rationalism of the positivists nearly always meant a step in the direction of irrationalism; this applies especially to Simmel, but also to Dilthey himself. It is true that the Hegelian revival had already begun several years before the outbreak of the war. But whatever was of serious scientific interest in that revival was largely confined to the sphere of logic or of the general theory of science. So far as I am aware, *The Theory of the Novel* was the first work belonging to the 'intellectual sciences' school in which the findings of Hegelian philosophy were concretely applied to aesthetic problems. The first, general part of the book is essentially determined by Hegel, e.g. the comparison of modes of totality in epic and dramatic art, the historico-philosophical view of what the epic and the novel have in common and of what differentiates them, etc. But the author of *The Theory of the Novel* was not an exclusive or orthodox Hegelian; Goethe's and Schiller's analyses, certain conceptions of Goethe's in his late period (e.g. the demonic), the young Friedrich Schlegel's and Solger's aesthetic theories (irony as a modern method of form-giving), fill out and concretise the general Hegelian outline.

Perhaps a still more important legacy of Hegel is the historicisation of aesthetic categories. In the sphere of aesthetics,

this is where the return to Hegel yielded its most useful results. Kantians such as Rickert and his school put a methodological chasm between timeless value and historical realisation of value. Dilthey himself saw the contradiction as far less extreme, but did not (in his preliminary sketches for a method of a history of philosophy) get beyond establishing a meta-historical typology of philosophies, which then achieve historical realisation in concrete variations. He succeeds in this in some of his aesthetic analyses, but, in a sense, he does so *per nefas* and is certainly not aware of inventing a new method. The world-view at the root of such philosophical conservatism is the historico-politically conservative attitude of the leading representatives of the 'intellectual sciences'. Intellectually this attitude goes back to Ranke and is thus in sharp contradiction to Hegel's view of the dialectical evolution of the world spirit. Of course there is also the positivist historical relativism, and it was precisely during the war that Spengler combined this with tendencies of the 'intellectual sciences' school by radically historicising all categories and refusing to recognise the existence of any supra-historical validity, whether aesthetic, ethical or logical. Yet by doing so he, in turn, abolished the unity of the historical process: his extreme historical dynamism finally became transformed into a static view, an ultimate abolition of history itself, a succession of completely disconnected cultural cycles which always end and always start again. Thus with Spengler we arrive at a secessionist counterpart to Ranke.

The author of *The Theory of the Novel* did not go so far as that. He was looking for a general dialectic of literary *genres* that was based upon the essential nature of aesthetic categories and literary forms, and aspiring to a more intimate connection between category and history than he found in Hegel himself; he strove towards intellectual comprehension of permanence within change and of inner change within the enduring validity of the essence. But his method remains

extremely abstract in many respects, including certain matters of great importance; it is cut off from concrete socio-historical realities. For that reason, as has already been pointed out, it leads only too often to arbitrary intellectual constructs. It was not until a decade and a half later (by that time, of course, on Marxist ground) that I succeeded in finding a way towards a solution. When M. A. Lifshitz and I, in opposition to the vulgar sociology of a variety of schools during the Stalin period, were trying to uncover Marx's real aesthetic and to develop it further, we arrived at a genuine historico-systematic method. *The Theory of the Novel* remained at the level of an attempt which failed both in design and in execution, but which in its intention came closer to the right solution than its contemporaries were able to do.

The book's aesthetic problematic of the present is also part of the Hegelian legacy: I mean the notion that development from the historico-philosophical viewpoint leads to a kind of abolition of those aesthetic principles which had determined development up to that point. In Hegel himself, however, only art is rendered problematic as a result of this; the 'world of prose', as he aesthetically defines this condition, is one in which the spirit has attained itself both in thought and in social and state praxis. Thus art becomes problematic precisely because reality has become non-problematic. The idea put forward in *The Theory of the Novel*, although formally similar, is in fact the complete opposite of this: the problems of the novel form are here the mirror-image of a world gone out of joint. This is why the 'prose' of life is here only a symptom, among many others, of the fact that reality no longer constitutes a favourable soil for art; that is why the central problem of the novel is the fact that art has to write off the closed and total forms which stem from a rounded totality of being—that art has nothing more to do with any world of forms that is immanently complete in itself. And this is not for artistic but for historico-philosophical reasons:

'there is no longer any spontaneous totality of being', the author of *The Theory of the Novel* says of present-day reality. A few years later Gottfried Benn put the same thought in another way: '. . . there was no reality, only, at most, its distorted image'.[2] Although *The Theory of the Novel* is, in the ontological sense, more critical and more thoughtful than the expressionist poet's view, the fact nevertheless remains that both were expressing similar feelings about life and reacting to the present in a similar way. During the debate between expressionism and realism in the 1930s, this gave rise to a somewhat grotesque situation in which Ernst Bloch invoked *The Theory of the Novel* in his polemic against the Marxist, Georg Lukács.

It is perfectly evident that the contradiction between *The Theory of the Novel* and Hegel, who was its general methodological guide, is primarily social rather than aesthetic or philosophical in nature. It may suffice to recall what has already been said about the author's attitude towards the war. We should add that his conception of social reality was at that time strongly influenced by Sorel. That is why the present in *The Theory of the Novel* is not defined in Hegelian terms but rather by Fichte's formulation, as 'the age of absolute sinfulness'. This ethically-tinged pessimism vis-à-vis the present does not, however, signify a general turning back from Hegel to Fichte, but, rather, a 'Kierkegaardisation' of the Hegelian dialectic of history. Kierkegaard always played an important role for the author of *The Theory of the Novel*, who, long before Kierkegaard had become fashionable, wrote an essay on the relationship between his life and thought.[3] And during his Heidelberg years immediately

[2] From: *Bekenntnis zum Expressionismus* (Expressionist Profession of Faith), in: *Deutsche Zukunft*, 5.11.1933, and *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. D. Wellershoff, Vol. 1, Wiesbaden 1959, p. 245.

[3] *Das Zerschellen der Form am Leben.* (The Shattering of Form against Life.) Written in 1909. Published in German in: *Die Seele und die Formen*, Berlin 1911.

before the war he had been engaged in a study, never to be completed, of Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel. These facts are mentioned here, not for biographical reasons, but to indicate a trend which was later to become important in German thought. It is true that Kierkegaard's direct influence leads to Heidegger's and Jaspers' philosophy of existence and, therefore, to more or less open opposition to Hegel. But it should not be forgotten that the Hegelian revival itself was strenuously concerned with narrowing the gap between Hegel and irrationalism. This tendency is already detectable in Dilthey's researches into the young Hegel (1905) and assumes clearly-defined form in Kroner's statement that Hegel was the greatest irrationalist in the history of philosophy (1924). Kierkegaard's direct influence cannot yet be proved here. But in the 1920s it was present everwhere, in a latent form but to an increasing degree, and even led to a Kierkegaardisation of the young Marx. For example, Karl Löwith wrote in 1941: 'Far as they are from one another (Marx and Kierkegaard, G.L.), they are nevertheless closely connected by their common attack on existing reality and by the fact that both stem from Hegel'. (It is hardly necessary to point out how widespread this tendency is in present-day French philosophy.)

The socio-philosophical basis of such theories is the philosophically as well as politically uncertain attitude of romantic anti-capitalism. Originally, say in the young Carlyle or in Cobbett, this was a genuine critique of the horrors and barbarities of early capitalism—sometimes even, as in Carlyle's *Past and Present*, a preliminary form of a socialist critique. In Germany this attitude gradually transformed itself into a form of apology for the political and social backwardness of the Hohenzollern empire. Viewed superficially, a wartime work as important as Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*[4] (1918) belongs to the same tendency. But

[4] 'Meditations of an Unpolitical Man' (trans.)

Thomas Mann's later development, as early as in the 1920s, justifies his own description of this work: 'It is a retreating action fought in the grand manner, the last and latest stand of a German romantic bourgeois mentality, a battle fought with full awareness of its hopelessness . . . even with insight into the spiritual unhealthiness and immorality of any sympathy with that which is doomed to death'.

No trace of such a mood is to be found in the author of *The Theory of the Novel*, for all that his philosophical starting-point was provided by Hegel, Goethe and Romanticism. His opposition to the barbarity of capitalism allowed no room for any sympathy such as that felt by Thomas Mann for the 'German wretchedness' or its surviving features in the present.

The Theory of the Novel is not conservative but subversive in nature, even if based on a highly naïve and totally unfounded utopianism—the hope that a natural life worthy of man can spring from the disintegration of capitalism and the destruction, seen as identical with that disintegration, of the lifeless and life-denying social and economic categories. The fact that the book culminates in its analysis of Tolstoy, as well as the author's view of Dostoevsky, who, it is claimed, 'did not write novels', clearly indicate that the author was not looking for a new literary form but, quite explicitly, for a 'new world'. We have every right to smile at such primitive utopianism, but it expresses nonetheless an intellectual tendency which was part of the reality of that time.

In the twenties, it is true, attempts to reach beyond the economic world by social means acquired an increasingly pronounced reactionary character. But at the time when *The Theory of the Novel* was written these ideas were still in a completely undifferentiated, germinal phase. If Hilferding, the most celebrated economist of the Second International, could write of communist society in his *Finanzkapital*[5] (1909):

[5] 'Finance Capital' (trans.)

'Exchange (in such a society: trans.) is accidental, not a possible subject for theoretical economic consideration. It cannot be theoretically analysed, but only psychologically understood'; if we think of the utopias, intended to be revolutionary, of the last war years and the immediate post-war period—then we can arrive at a historically juster assessment of the utopia of *The Theory of the Novel*, without in any way modifying our critical attitude towards its lack of theoretical principle.

Such a critical attitude is particularly well suited to enable us to see in its true light a further peculiarity of *The Theory of the Novel*, which made it something new in German literature. (The phenomenon we are about to examine was known much earlier in France.) To put it briefly, the author of *The Theory of the Novel* had a conception of the world which aimed at a fusion of 'left' ethics and 'right' epistemology (ontology, etc.). In so far as Wilhelminian Germany had any principled oppositional literature at all, this literature was based on the traditions of the Enlightenment (in most cases, moreover, on the most shallow epigones of that tradition) and took a globally negative view of Germany's valuable literary and theoretical traditions. (The socialist Franz Mehring constitutes a rare example in that respect.) So far as I am able to judge, *The Theory of the Novel* was the first German book in which a left ethic oriented towards radical revolution was coupled with a traditional-conventional exegesis of reality. From the 1920s onwards this view was to play an increasingly important role. We need only think of Ernst Bloch's *Der Geist der Utopie*[6] (1918, 1925) and *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution*[7], of Walter Benjamin, even of the beginnings of Theodor W. Adorno, etc.

The importance of this movement became even greater in the intellectual struggle against Hitler; many writers,

[6] 'The Spirit of Utopia' (trans.)
[7] 'Thomas Münzer as the Theologian of Revolution' (trans.)

proceeding from a 'left' ethic, attempted to mobilise Nietzsche and even Bismarck as progressive forces against fascist reaction. (Let me mention in passing that France, where this tendency emerged much earlier than in Germany, today possesses an extremely influential representative of it in the person of J.-P. Sartre. For obvious reasons, the social causes of the earlier appearance and more prolonged effectiveness of this phenomenon in France cannot be discussed here.) Hitler had to be defeated and the restoration and the 'economic miracle' had to occur before this function of 'left' ethics in Germany could fall into oblivion, leaving the forum of topicality open to a conformism disguised as non-conformism.

A considerable part of the leading German intelligentsia, including Adorno, have taken up residence in the 'Grand Hotel Abyss' which I described in connection with my critique of Schopenhauer as 'a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity. And the daily contemplation of the abyss between excellent meals or artistic entertainments, can only heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered.' (*Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*[8], Neuwied 1962, p. 219). The fact that Ernst Bloch continued undeterred to cling to his synthesis of 'left' ethics and 'right' epistemology (e.g. cf. *Philosophische Grundfragen I, Zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-Seins*[9], Frankfurt 1961) does honour to his strength of character but cannot modify the outdated nature of his theoretical position. To the extent that an authentic, fruitful and progressive opposition is really stirring in the Western world (including the Federal Republic), this opposition no longer has anything to do with the coupling of 'left' ethics with 'right' epistemology.

Thus, if anyone today reads *The Theory of the Novel* in

[8] 'The Destruction of Reason' (trans.)
[9] 'Fundamental Questions of Philosophy: The Ontology of Not-Yet-Being' (trans.)

order to become more intimately acquainted with the prehistory of the important ideologies of the 1920s and 1930s, he will derive profit from a critical reading of the book along the lines I have suggested. But if he picks up the book in the hope that it will serve him as a guide, the result will only be a still greater disorientation. As a young writer, Arnold Zweig read *The Theory of the Novel* hoping that it would help him to find his way; his healthy instinct led him, rightly, to reject it root and branch.

Georg Lukács

Budapest, July 1962.

Dedicated to Yelena Andreyevna Grabenko

I

THE FORMS OF GREAT EPIC LITERATURE EXAMINED IN RELATION TO WHETHER THE GENERAL CIVILISATION OF THE TIME IS AN INTEGRATED OR A PROBLEMATIC ONE

I

Integrated Civilisations

HAPPY ARE those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light. Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful and rounded in this duality: complete in meaning—in *sense*—and complete for the senses; rounded because the soul rests within itself even while it acts; rounded because its action separates itself from it and, having become itself, finds a centre of its own and draws a closed circumference round itself. 'Philosophy is really homesickness,' says Novalis: 'it is the urge to be at home everywhere.'

That is why philosophy, as a form of life or as that which determines the form and supplies the content of literary creation, is always a symptom of the rift between 'inside' and 'outside', a sign of the essential difference between the self and the world, the incongruence of soul and deed. That is why the happy ages have no philosophy, or why (it comes to the same thing) all men in such ages are philosophers, sharing the utopian aim of every philosophy. For what is the task of true philosophy if not to draw that archetypal map? What is the problem of the transcendental *locus* if not to determine how every impulse which springs from the innermost depths is co-ordinated with a form that it is ignorant of, but that has

been assigned to it from eternity and that must envelop it in liberating symbols? When this is so, passion is the way, predetermined by reason, towards complete self-being and from madness come enigmatic yet decipherable messages of a transcendental power, otherwise condemned to silence. There is not yet any interiority, for there is not yet any exterior, any 'otherness' for the soul. The soul goes out to seek adventure; it lives through adventures, but it does not know the real torment of seeking and the real danger of finding; such a soul never stakes itself; it does not yet know that it can lose itself, it never thinks of having to look for itself. Such an age is the age of the epic.

It is not absence of suffering, not security of being, which in such an age encloses men and deeds in contours that are both joyful and severe (for what is meaningless and tragic in the world has not grown larger since the beginning of time; it is only that the songs of comfort ring out more loudly or are more muffled): it is the adequacy of the deeds to the soul's inner demand for greatness, for unfolding, for wholeness. When the soul does not yet know any abyss within itself which may tempt it to fall or encourage it to discover pathless heights, when the divinity that rules the world and distributes the unknown and unjust gifts of destiny is not yet understood by man, but is familiar and close to him as a father is to his small child, then every action is only a well-fitting garment for the world. Being and destiny, adventure and accomplishment, life and essence are then identical concepts. For the question which engenders the formal answers of the epic is: how can life become essence? And if no one has ever equalled Homer, nor even approached him—for, strictly speaking, his works alone are epics—it is because he found the answer before the progress of the human mind through history had allowed the question to be asked.

This line of thought can, if we wish, take us some way towards understanding the secret of the Greek world: its

perfection, which is unthinkable for us, and the unbridgeable gulf that separates us from it. The Greek knew only answers but no questions, only solutions (even if enigmatic ones) but no riddles, only forms but no chaos. He drew the creative circle of forms this side of paradox, and everything which, in our time of paradox, is bound to lead to triviality, led him to perfection.

When we speak of the Greeks we always confuse the philosophy of history with aesthetics, psychology with metaphysics, and we invent a relationship between Greek forms and our own epoch. Behind those taciturn, now forever silent masks, sensitive souls look for the fugitive, elusive moments when they themselves have dreamed of peace forgetting that the value of those moments is in their very transience and that what they seek to escape from when they turn to the Greeks constitutes their own depth and greatness.

More profound minds, who try to forge an armour of purple steel out of their own streaming blood so that their wounds may be concealed forever and their heroic gesture may become a paradigm of the real heroism that is to come—so that it may call the new heroism into being—compare the fragmentariness of the forms they create with the Greeks' harmony, and their own sufferings, from which their forms have sprung, with torments which they imagine the Greeks' purity had to overcome. Interpreting formal perfection, in their obstinately solipsistic way, as a function of inner devastation, they hope to hear in the Greek words the voice of a torment whose intensity exceeds theirs by as much as Greek art is greater than their own. Yet this is a complete reversal of the transcendental topography of the mind, that topography whose nature and consequences can certainly be described, whose metaphysical significance can be interpreted and grasped, but for which it will always be impossible to find a psychology, whether of empathy or of mere understanding. For all psychological comprehension presupposes a

certain position of the transcendental *loci*, and functions only within their range. Instead of trying to understand the Greek world in this way, which in the end comes to asking unconsciously: what could we do to produce these forms? or: how would we behave if we had produced these forms? it would be more fruitful to inquire into the transcendental topography of the Greek mind, which was essentially different from ours and which made those forms possible and indeed necessary.

We have said that the Greeks' answers came before their questions. This, too, should not be understood psychologically, but, at most, in terms of transcendental psychology. It means that in the ultimate structural relationship which determines all lived experience and all formal creation, there exist no qualitative differences which are insurmountable, which cannot be bridged except by a leap, between the transcendental *loci* among themselves and between them and the subject *a priori* assigned to them; that the ascent to the highest point, as also the descent to the point of utter meaninglessness, is made along the paths of adequation, that is to say, at worst, by means of a long, graduated succession of steps with many transitions from one to the next. Hence the mind's attitude within such a home is a passively visionary acceptance of ready-made, ever-present meaning. The world of meaning can be grasped, it can be taken in at a glance; all that is necessary is to find the *locus* that has been predestined for each individual. Error, here, can only be a matter of too much or too little, only a failure of measure or insight. For knowledge is only the raising of a veil, creation only the copying of visible and eternal essences, virtue a perfect knowledge of the paths; and what is alien to meaning is so only because its distance from meaning is too great.

It is a homogeneous world, and even the separation between man and world, between 'I' and 'you', cannot disturb its homogeneity. Like every other component of this rhythm, the soul stands in the midst of the world; the frontier that

makes up its contours is not different in essence from the contours of things: it draws sharp, sure lines, but it separates only relatively, only in relation to and for the purpose of a homogeneous system of adequate balances. For man does not stand alone, as the sole bearer of substantiality, in the midst of reflexive forms: his relations to others and the structures which arise therefrom are as full of substance as he is himself, indeed they are more truly filled with substance because they are more general, more 'philosophic', closer and more akin to the archetypal home: love, the family, the state. What he should do or be is, for him, only a pedagogical question, an expression of the fact that he has not yet come home; it does not yet express his only, insurmountable relationship with the substance. Nor is there, within man himself, any compulsion to make the leap: he bears the stain of the distance that separates matter from substance, he will be cleansed by an immaterial soaring that will bring him closer to the substance; a long road lies before him, but within him there is no abyss.

Such frontiers necessarily enclose a rounded world. Even if menacing and incomprehensible forces become felt outside the circle which the stars of ever-present meaning draw round the cosmos to be experienced and formed, they cannot displace the presence of meaning; they can destroy life, but never tamper with being; they can cast dark shadows on the formed world, but even these are assimilated by the forms as contrasts that only bring them more clearly into relief.

The circle within which the Greeks led their metaphysical life was smaller than ours: that is why we cannot, as part of our life, place ourselves inside it. Or rather, the circle whose closed nature was the transcendental essence of their life has, for us, been broken; we cannot breathe in a closed world. We have invented the productivity of the spirit: that is why the primaeval images have irrevocably lost their objective self-evidence for us, and our thinking follows the

endless path of an approximation that is never fully accomplished. We have invented the creation of forms: and that is why everything that falls from our weary and despairing hands must always be incomplete. We have found the only true substance within ourselves: that is why we have to place an unbridgeable chasm between cognition and action, between soul and created structure, between self and world, why all substantiality has to be dispersed in reflexivity on the far side of that chasm; that is why our essence had to become a postulate for ourselves and thus create a still deeper, still more menacing abyss between us and our own selves.

Our world has become infinitely large and each of its corners is richer in gifts and dangers than the world of the Greeks, but such wealth cancels out the positive meaning—the totality—upon which their life was based. For totality as the formative prime reality of every individual phenomenon implies that something closed within itself can be completed; completed because everything occurs within it, nothing is excluded from it and nothing points at a higher reality outside it; completed because everything within it ripens to its own perfection and, by attaining itself, submits to limitation. Totality of being is possible only where everything is already homogeneous before it has been contained by forms; where forms are not a constraint but only the becoming conscious, the coming to the surface of everything that had been lying dormant as a vague longing in the innermost depths of that which had to be given form; where knowledge is virtue and virtue is happiness, where beauty is the meaning of the world made visible.

That is the world of Greek philosophy. But such thinking was born only when the substance had already begun to pale. If, properly speaking, there is no such thing as a Greek aesthetic, because metaphysics anticipated everything aesthetic, then there is not, properly speaking, any difference in Greece between history and the philosophy of history: the Greeks

travelled in history itself through all the stages that correspond *a priori* to the great forms; their history of art is a metaphysico-genetic aesthetic, their cultural development a philosophy of history. Within this process, substance was reduced from Homer's absolute immanence of life to Plato's likewise absolute yet tangible and graspable transcendence; and the stages of the process, which are clearly and sharply distinct from one another (no gradual transitions here!) and in which the meaning of the process is laid down as though in eternal hieroglyphics—these stages are the great and timeless paradigmatic forms of world literature: epic, tragedy, philosophy. The world of the epic answers the question: how can life become essential? But the answer ripened into a question only when the substance had retreated to a far horizon. Only when tragedy had supplied the creative answer to the question: how can essence come alive? did men become aware that life as it was (the notion of life as it should be cancels out life) had lost the immanence of the essence. In form-giving destiny and in the hero who, creating himself, finds himself, pure essence awakens to life, mere life sinks into not-being in the face of the only true reality of the essence; a level of being beyond life, full of richly blossoming plentitude, has been reached, to which ordinary life cannot serve even as an antithesis. Nor was it a need or a problem which gave birth to the existence of the essence; the birth of Pallas Athene is the prototype for the emergence of Greek forms. Just as the reality of the essence, as it discharges into life and gives birth to life, betrays the loss of its pure immanence in life, so this problematic basis of tragedy becomes visible, becomes a problem, only in philosophy; only when the essence, having completely divorced itself from life, became the sole and absolute, the transcendent reality, and when the creative act of philosophy had revealed tragic destiny as the cruel and senseless arbitrariness of the empirical, the hero's passion as earth-bound and his self-accomplishment merely as the

limitation of the contingent subject, did tragedy's answer to the question of life and essence appear no longer as natural and self-evident but as a miracle, a slender yet firm rainbow bridging bottomless depths.

The tragic hero takes over from Homer's living man, explaining and transfiguring him precisely because he has taken the almost extinguished torch from his hands and kindled it anew. And Plato's new man, the wise man with his active cognition and his essence-creating vision, does not merely unmask the tragic hero but also illuminates the dark peril the hero has vanquished; Plato's new wise man, by surpassing the hero, transfigures him. This new wise man, however, was the last type of man and his world was the last paradigmatic life-structure the Greek spirit was to produce. The questions which determined and supported Plato's vision became clear, yet they bore no fruit; the world became Greek in the course of time, but the Greek spirit, in that sense, has become less and less Greek; it has created new eternal problems (and solutions, too), but the essential Greek quality of τόπος νοητός is gone forever. The new spirit of destiny would indeed seem 'a folly to the Greeks'.

Truly a folly to the Greeks! Kant's starry firmament now shines only in the dark night of pure cognition, it no longer lights any solitary wanderer's path (for to be a man in the new world is to be solitary). And the inner light affords evidence of security, or its illusion, only to the wanderer's next step. No light radiates any longer from within into the world of events, into its vast complexity to which the soul is a stranger. And who can tell whether the fitness of the action to the essential nature of the subject—the only guide that still remains—really touches upon the essence, when the subject has become a phenomenon, an object unto itself; when his innermost and most particular essential nature appears to him only as a never-ceasing demand written upon the imaginary sky of that which 'should be'; when this innermost

nature must emerge from an unfathomable chasm which lies within the subject himself, when only what comes up from the furthermost depths is his essential nature, and no one can ever sound or even glimpse the bottom of those depths? Art, the visionary reality of the world made to our measure, has thus become independent: it is no longer a copy, for all the models have gone; it is a created totality, for the natural unity of the metaphysical spheres has been destroyed forever.

To propose a philosophy of history relating to this transformation of the structure of the transcendental *loci* is not our intention here, nor would it be possible. This is not the place to inquire whether the reason for the change is to be found in our progress (whether upward or downward, no matter) or whether the gods of Greece were driven away by other forces. Neither do we intend to chart, however approximately, the road that led to our own reality, nor to describe the seductive power of Greece even when dead and its dazzling brilliance which, like Lucifer's, made men forget again and again the irreparable cracks in the edifice of their world and tempted them to dream of new unities—unities which contradicted the world's new essence and were therefore always doomed to come to naught. Thus the Church became a new *polis*, and the paradoxical link between the soul lost in irredeemable sin and its impossible yet certain redemption became an almost platonic ray of heavenly light in the midst of earthly reality: the leap became a ladder of earthly and heavenly hierarchies.

In Giotto and Dante, Wolfram von Eschenbach and Pisano, St. Thomas and St. Francis, the world became round once more, a totality capable of being taken in at a glance; the chasm lost the threat inherent in its actual depth; its whole darkness, without forfeiting any of its sombrely gleaming power, became pure surface and could thus be fitted easily into a closed unity of colours; the cry for redemption became a dissonance in the perfect rhythmic system of the

world and thereby rendered possible a new equilibrium no less perfect than that of the Greeks: an equilibrium of mutually inadequate, heterogeneous intensities. The redeemed world, although incomprehensible and forever unattainable, was in this way brought near and given visible form. The Last Judgement became a present reality, just another element in the harmony of the spheres, which was thought to be already established; its true nature, whereby it transforms the world into a wound of Philoctetus that only the Paraclete can heal, was forgotten. A new and paradoxical Greece came into being: aesthetics became metaphysics once more.

For the first time, but also for the last. Once this unity disintegrated, there could be no more spontaneous totality of being. The source whose flood-waters had swept away the old unity was certainly exhausted; but the river beds, now dry beyond all hope, have marked forever the face of the earth.

Henceforth, any resurrection of the Greek world is a more or less conscious hypostasy of aesthetics into metaphysics—a violence done to the essence of everything that lies outside the sphere of art, and a desire to destroy it; an attempt to forget that art is only one sphere among many, and that the very disintegration and inadequacy of the world is the pre-condition for the existence of art and its becoming conscious. This exaggeration of the substantiality of art is bound to weigh too heavily upon its forms: they have to produce out of themselves all that was once simply accepted as given; in other words, before their own *a priori* effectiveness can begin to manifest itself, they must create by their own power alone the pre-conditions for such effectiveness—an object and its environment. A totality that can be simply accepted is no longer given to the forms of art: therefore they must either narrow down and volatilise whatever has to be given form to the point where they can encompass it, or else they must show polemically the impossibility of achieving their necessary object and the inner nullity of their own means. And in this case they carry the fragmentary nature of the world's structure into the world of forms.

2

The Problems of a Philosophy of the History of Forms

As a result of such a change in the transcendental points of orientation, art forms become subject to a historico-philosophical dialectic; the course of this dialectic will depend, however, on the *a priori* origin or 'home' of each genre. It may happen that the change affects only the object and the conditions under which it came be given form, and does not question the ultimate relationship of the form to its transcendental right to existence; when this is so, only formal changes will occur, and although they may diverge in every technical detail, they will not overturn the original form-giving principle. Sometimes, however, the change occurs precisely in the all-determining *principium stilisationis* of the genre, and then other art-forms must necessarily, for historico-philosophical reasons, correspond to the same artistic intention. This is not a matter of a change in mentality giving rise to a new genre, such as occurred in Greek history when the hero and his destiny became problematic and so brought into being the non-tragic drama of Euripides. In that case there was a complete correspondence between the subject's* *a priori* needs, his metaphysical sufferings, which provided the impulse for creation, and the pre-stabilised, eternal *locus* of the form with which the completed work coincides. The genre-creating principle which is meant here does not imply any change in mentality; rather, it forces the same mentality to turn towards a new aim which is essentially different from the old one. It means that the old parallelism of the transcendental structure

* Throughout this book, 'subject' means 'artist' or 'author', i.e., the individual whose subjectivity creates the work; 'object' means the work itself, or, sometimes, an element in the work, such as a character or plot. TRANS.

of the form-giving subject and the world of created forms has been destroyed, and the ultimate basis of artistic creation has become homeless.

German Romanticism, although it did not always completely clarify its concept of the novel, drew a close connection between it and the concept of the Romantic; and rightly so, for the novel form is, like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness. For the Greeks the fact that their history and the philosophy of history coincided meant that every art form was born only when the sundial of the mind showed that its hour had come, and had to disappear when the fundamental images were no longer visible on the horizon. This philosophical periodicity was lost in later times. Artistic genres now cut across one another, with a complexity that cannot be disentangled, and become traces of authentic or false searching for an aim that is no longer clearly and unequivocally given; their sum total is only a historical totality of the empirical, wherein we may seek (and possibly find) the empirical (sociological) conditions for the ways in which each form came into being, but where the historico-philosophical meaning of periodicity is never again concentrated in the forms themselves (which have become symbolic) and where this meaning can be deciphered and decoded from the totalities of various periods, but not discovered in those totalities themselves. But whereas the smallest disturbance of the transcendental correlations must cause the immanence of meaning in life to vanish beyond recovery, an essence that is divorced from life and alien to life can crown itself with its own existence in such a way that this consecration, even after a more violent upheaval, may pale but will never disappear altogether. That is why tragedy, although changed, has nevertheless survived in our time with its essential nature intact, whereas the epic had to disappear and yield its place to an entirely new form: the novel.

The complete change in our concept of life and in its re-

lationship to essential being has, of course, changed tragedy too. It is one thing when the life-immanence of meaning vanishes with catastrophic suddenness from a pure, uncomplicated world, and quite another when this immanence is banished from the cosmos as though by the gradual working of a spell: in the latter case the longing for its return remains alive but unsatisfied; it never turns into a hopelessness rooted in certainty: therefore, the essence cannot build a tragic stage out of the felled trees of the forest of life, but must either awaken to a brief existence in the flames of a fire lit from the deadwood of a blighted life, or else must resolutely turn its back on the world's chaos and seek refuge in the abstract sphere of pure essentiality. It is the relationship of the essence to a life which, in itself, lies outside the scope of drama that renders necessary the stylistic duality of modern tragedy whose opposite poles are Shakespeare and Alfieri.

Greek tragedy stood beyond the dilemma of nearness to life as against abstraction because, for it, plenitude was not a question of coming closer to life, and transparency of dialogue did not mean the negation of its immediacy. Whatever the historical accidents or necessities that produced the Greek chorus, its artistic meaning consists in that it confers life and plenitude upon the essence situated outside and beyond all life. Thus the chorus was able to provide a background which closes the work in the same way as the marble atmospheric space between figures in a relief closes the frieze, yet the background of the chorus is also full of movement and can adapt itself to all the apparent fluctuations of a dramatic action not born of any abstract scheme, can absorb these into itself and, having enriched them with its own substance, can return them to the drama. It can make the lyrical meaning of the entire drama ring out in splendid words; it can, without suffering collapse, combine within itself the voice of lowly creature-reason, which demands tragic refutation, and the

voice of the higher super-reason of destiny. Speaker and chorus in Greek tragedy are of the same fundamental essence, they are completely homogeneous with one another and can therefore fulfil completely separate functions without destroying the structure of the work; all the lyricism of the situation, of destiny, can be accumulated in the chorus, leaving to the players the all-expressive words and all-embracing gesture of the tragic dialectic laid bare—and yet they will never be separated from one another by anything other than gentle transitions. Not the remotest possibility of a certain nearness-to-life such as might destroy the dramatic form exists for either: that is why both can expand to a plenitude that has nothing schematic about it and yet is laid down *a priori*.

Life is not organically absent from modern drama; at most, it can be banished from it. But the banishment which modern classicists practise implies a recognition, not only of the existence of what is being banished, but also of its power; it is there in all the nervous words, all the gestures outbidding one another in the endeavour to keep life at bay, to remain untainted by it; invisibly and ironically, life nevertheless rules the bare, calculated severity of the structure based *a priori* on abstraction, making it narrow or confused, overexplicit or abstruse.

The other kind of tragedy consumes life. It places its heroes on the stage as living human beings in the midst of a mass of only apparently living beings, so that a clear destiny may gradually emerge incandescent from the confusion of the dramatic action, heavy with the weight of life—so that its fire may reduce to ashes everything that is merely human, so that the inexistent life of mere human beings may disintegrate into nothingness and the affective emotions of the heroic figures may flare up into a blaze of tragic passion that will anneal them into heroes free of human dross. In this way the condition of the hero has become polemical and problem-

atic; to be a hero is no longer the natural form of existence in the sphere of essence, but the act of raising oneself above that which is merely human, whether in the surrounding mass or in the hero's own instincts. The problem of hierarchy as between life and essence, which, for Greek drama, was a formative *a priori* and therefore never became the subject of dramatic action, is thus drawn into the tragic process itself; it rends the drama into two completely heterogeneous parts which are connected with one another only by their reciprocal negation and exclusion, thus making the drama polemical and intellectual and so disturbing its very foundations. The breadth of the ground-plan thus forced upon the work and the length of the road which the hero must travel in his own soul before he discovers himself as a hero are at variance with the slenderness of construction which the dramatic form demands, and bring it closer to the epic forms; and the polemical emphasis on heroism (even in abstract tragedy) leads, of necessity, to an excess of purely lyrical lyricism.

Such lyricism has, however, yet another source which also springs from the displaced relationship between life and essence. For the Greeks, the fact that life ceased to be the home of meaning merely transferred the mutual closeness, the kinship of human beings, to another sphere, but did not destroy it: every figure in Greek drama is at the same distance from the all-sustaining essence and, therefore, is related at his deepest roots to every other figure; all understand one another because all speak the same language, all trust one another, be it as mortal enemies, for all are striving in the same way towards the same centre, and all move at the same level of an existence which is essentially the same. But when, as in modern drama, the essence can manifest and assert itself only after winning a hierarchical contest with life, when every figure carries this contest within himself as a precondition of his existence or as his motive force, then each of the *dramatis personae* can be bound to the destiny that gives

him birth only by his own thread; then each must rise up from solitude and must, in irremediable solitude, hasten, in the midst of all the other lonely creatures, towards the ultimate, tragic aloneness; then, every tragic work must turn to silence without ever being understood, and no tragic deed can ever find a resonance that will adequately absorb it.

But a paradox attaches to loneliness in drama. Loneliness is the very essence of tragedy, for the soul that has attained itself through its destiny can have brothers among the stars, but never an earthly companion; yet the dramatic form of expression—the dialogue—presupposes, if it is to be many-voiced, truly dialogical, dramatic, a high degree of communion among these solitaries. The language of the absolutely lonely man is lyrical, i.e. monological; in the dialogue, the *incognito* of his soul becomes too pronounced, it overloads and swamps the clarity and definition of the words exchanged. Such loneliness is more profound than that required by the tragic form, which deals with the relationship to destiny (a relationship in which the actual, living Greek heroes had their being); loneliness has to become a problem unto itself, deepening and confusing the tragic problem and ultimately taking its place. Such loneliness is not simply the intoxication of a soul gripped by destiny and so made song; it is also the torment of a creature condemned to solitude and devoured by a longing for community.

Such loneliness gives rise to new tragic problems, especially the central problem of modern tragedy—that of trust. The new hero's soul, clothed in life yet filled with essence, can never comprehend that the essence existing within the same shell of life in another person need not be the same as his own; it knows that all those who have found one another are the same, and cannot understand that its knowledge does not come from this world, that the inner certainty of this knowledge cannot guarantee its being a constituent of this life. It has knowledge of the idea of its own self which animates it

and is alive inside it, and so it must believe that the milling crowd of humanity which surrounds it is only a carnival prank and that, at the first word from the essence, the masks will fall and brothers who have hitherto been strangers to one another will fall into each other's arms. It knows this, it searches for it, and it finds only itself alone, in the midst of destiny. And so a note of reproachful, elegiac sorrow enters into its ecstasy at having found itself: a note of disappointment at a life which has not been even a caricature of what its knowledge of destiny had so clairvoyantly heralded and which gave it the strength to travel the long road alone and in darkness. This loneliness is not only dramatic but also psychological, because it is not merely the *a priori* property of all *dramatis personae* but also the lived experience of man in process of becoming a hero; and if psychology is not to remain merely raw material for drama, it can only express itself as lyricism of the soul.

Great epic writing gives form to the extensive totality of life, drama to the intensive totality of essence. That is why, when essence has lost its spontaneously rounded, sensually present totality, drama can nevertheless, in its formal *a priori* nature, find a world that is perhaps problematic but which still is all-embracing and closed within itself. But this is impossible for the great epic. For the epic, the world at any given moment is an ultimate principle; it is empirical at its deepest, most decisive, all-determining transcendental base; it can sometimes accelerate the rhythm of life, can carry something that was hidden or neglected to a utopian end which was always immanent within it, but it can never, while remaining epic, transcend the breadth and depth, the rounded, sensual, richly ordered nature of life as historically given. Any attempt at a properly utopian epic must fail because it is bound, subjectively or objectively, to transcend the empirical and spill over into the lyrical or dramatic; and such overlapping can never be fruitful for the epic.

There have been times, perhaps—certain fairly-tales still retain fragments of these lost worlds—when what today can only be reached through a utopian view was really present to the visionary eye; epic poets in those times did not have to leave the empirical in order to represent transcendent reality as the only existing one, they could be simple narrators of events, just as the Assyrians who drew winged beasts doubtless regarded themselves, and rightly, as naturalists. Already in Homer's time, however, the transcendent was inextricably interwoven with earthly existence, and Homer is inimitable precisely because, in him, this becoming-immanent was so completely successful.

This indestructible bond with reality *as it is*, the crucial difference between the epic and the drama, is a necessary consequence of the object of the epic being life itself. The concept of essence leads to transcendence simply by being posited, and then, in the transcendent, crystallises into a new and higher essence expressing through its form an essence that *should be*—an essence which, because it is born of form, remains independent of the given content of what merely *exists*. The concept of life, on the other hand, has no need of any such transcendence captured and held immobile as an object.

The worlds of essence are held high above existence by the force of forms, and their nature and contents are determined only by the inner potentialities of that force. The worlds of life stay as they are: forms only receive and mould them, only reduce them to their inborn meaning. And so these forms, which, here, can only play the role of Socrates at the birth of thoughts, can never of their own accord charm something into life that was not already present in it.

The character created by drama (this is only another way of expressing the same relationship) is the intelligible 'I' of man, the character created by the epic is the empirical 'I'.