subject and object are sharply separated in the experience of remembering; memory, from the viewpoint of present subjectivity, grasps the discrepancy between the object as it was in reality and the subject's ideal image of it. The harsh and depressing quality of such works is therefore due not so much to the intrinsically sad nature of the content as to the unresolved dissonance of the form—to the fact that the object of experience is constructed in accordance with the formal laws of drama, whereas the experiencing subject is a lyrical one.

Drama, lyric poetry and the epic, whatever the hierarchy in which we may place them, are not the thesis, antithesis and synthesis of a dialectical process; each of them is a means, qualitatively quite heterogenous from the others, of giving form to the world. Each form appears positive because it fulfils its own structural laws: the affirmation of life that seems to emanate from it as a mood is nothing other than the resolving of its form-conditioned dissonances, the affirmation of its own, form-created substance.

The objective structure of the world of the novel shows a heterogeneous totality, regulated only by regulative ideas, whose meaning is prescribed but not given. That is why the unity of the personality and the world—a unity which is dimly sensed through memory, yet which once was part of our lived experience—that is why this unity in its subjectively constitutive, objectively reflexive essence is the most profound and authentic means of accomplishing the totality required by the novel form. The subject's return home to itself is to be found in this experience, just as the anticipation of this return and the desire for it lie at the root of the experience of hope. It is this return home that, in retrospect, completes everything that was begun, interrupted and allowed to fall by the way—completes it and turns it into rounded action. The lyrical character of moods is transcended in the mood of experiencing this homecoming because it is related

to the outside world, to the totality of life. And the insight which grasps this unity, because it is thus related to the object, rises above mere analysis; it becomes an intuitive, premonitory comprehension of the unattained and therefore inexpressible meaning of life—the innermost core of all action made manifest.

A natural consequence of the paradoxical nature of this art form is the fact that the really great novels have a tendency to overlap into the epic. *L'Education sentimentale* is the only real exception to this and is therefore best suited to serve as a model of the novel form. The tendency occurs most obviously in the representation of the passage of time and in the relation of time to the artistic centre-point of the entire work. Pontoppidan's *Hans im Glück* (which, of all nineteenth-century novels, comes closest, perhaps, to Flaubert's great achievement) determines the goal, the attaining of which justifies and completes the life totality of the hero, too concretely as to content, with too much emphasis on value, to achieve perfect, genuinely epic unity at the end. For this hero, the journey through life is more than just an inevitable complication of the ideal: it is the necessary detour without which the goal would be empty and abstract and its attainment valueless. But the hero himself has value only in relation to this specific goal, and his value is only that of *having-grown*, not of *growing*. His lived experience of time therefore has a slight tendency to overlap into the dramatic—to separate critically what is sustained by value from what has been abandoned by meaning. Pontoppidan checks this tendency with admirable tact, but its vestiges, as incompletely surmounted dualities, are still present in the work.

Abstract idealism and its intimate relation with the transcendent homeland which lies on the far side of time makes this overlapping of the novel with the epic necessary. That is why the greatest work of this type, *Don Quixote*, overlaps still more obviously into the epic in its formal and historico-

philosophical foundations. The events in *Don Quixote* are almost timeless, a motley series of isolated adventures complete in themselves, and while the ending completes the work as a whole as to its principle and problems, it does so only for the whole and not for the concrete totality of the parts. Therein lies the epic quality of *Don Quixote*, its marvellous hard serenity which is outside any atmosphere. Of course it is only the created work itself that reaches beyond the passage of time and into purer regions: the life base which supports the work is neither timeless nor mythical, it belongs to time passing and everything bears the traces of its origin in time. The light of a demonic, irrational faith in a non-existent transcendent homeland absorbs the shadows and reflections of this origin and puts sharp contours round every image. But it cannot make us forget that origin, for the work owes its inimitable blend of wry serenity and powerful melancholy to this unique and unrepeatable victory over the gravity of time. Here as in everything else, it was not Cervantes, the naïve artist, who surmounted the dangers—unsuspected by him—of his chosen form and found the way to an improbable perfection: it was Cervantes the intuitive visionary of the unique historico-philosophical moment. His vision came into being at the watershed of two historical epochs; it recognised and understood them, and raised the most confused problematic into the radiant sphere of a transcendence which achieved its full flowering as *form*.

The formal ancestor and the formal heir of *Don Quixote* —the chivalrous epic and the adventure novel—both demonstrate the danger inherent in this form, the danger which arises from its overlapping into the epic, from its inability to give form to the *durée*: the danger of triviality, of being reduced to mere entertainment. This is the necessary problematic of this type of novel, just as disintegration and formlessness, which are due to a failure to surmount time as

a too-heavy, too strongly existent factor, are the dangers inherent in the other novel form, the novel of disillusionment.

3

Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship

as an attempted synthesis

Wilhelm Meister stands aesthetically and historico-philosophically between these two types of novel. Its theme is the reconciliation of the problematic individual, guided by his lived experience of the ideal, with concrete social reality. This reconciliation cannot and must not be the result of accommodation or of a harmony existing from the start which would make it a modern humorous novel (a type we have already described), except that, whereas in such novels the pre-existing harmony is a necessary evil, here it would become the central good. (Freytag's *Soll und Haben* is a classic example of such objectivation of the lack of idea and of the anti-poetic principle.)

The type of personality and the structure of the plot are determined by the necessary condition that a reconciliation between interiority and reality, although problematic, is nevertheless possible; that it has to be sought in hard struggles and dangerous adventures, yet is ultimately possible to achieve. For this reason the interiority depicted in such a novel must also stand between the two previously analysed types: its relation to the transcendent world of ideas is neither subjectively nor objectively very strong; the soul is not purely self-dependent, its world is not a reality which is, or should be, complete in itself and can be opposed to the reality of the outside world as a postulate and a competing power; instead, the soul in such a novel carries within itself, as a sign of its tenuous, but not yet severed link with the transcendental order, a longing for an earthly home which may correspond to its ideal—an ideal which eludes positive definition but is clear enough in negative terms. Such an

interiority represents on the one hand a wider and consequently more adaptable, gentler, more concrete idealism, and, on the other hand, a widening of the soul which seeks fulfilment in action, in effective dealings with reality, and not merely in contemplation. It is an interiority which stands halfway between idealism and Romanticism, and its attempt, within itself, to synthesise and overcome both of them is rejected by both as a compromise.

It follows from this possibility, given by the theme itself, of effective action in social reality, that the organisation of the outside world into professions, classes, ranks, etc., is of decisive importance for this particular type of personality as the substratum of its social activity. The content and goal of the ideal which animates the personality and determines his actions is to find responses to the innermost demands of his soul in the structures of society. This means, at least as a postulate, that the inherent loneliness of the soul is surmounted; and this in turn presupposes the possibility of human and interior community among men, of understanding and common action in respect of the essential. Such community is not the result of people being naïvely and naturally rooted in a specific social structure, not of any natural solidarity of kinship (as in the ancient epics), nor is it a mystical experience of community, a sudden illumination which rejects the lonely individuality as something ephemeral, static and sinful; it is achieved by personalities, previously lonely and confined within their own selves, adapting and accustoming themselves to one another; it is the fruit of a rich and enriching resignation, the crowning of a process of education, a maturity attained by struggle and effort.

The content of such maturity is an ideal of free humanity which comprehends and affirms the structures of social life as necessary forms of human community, yet, at the same time, only sees them as an occasion for the active expression of the essential life substance—in other words, which takes

possession of these structures, not in their rigid political and legal being-for-themselves, but as the necessary instruments of aims which go far beyond them. The heroism of abstract idealism and the pure interiority of Romanticism are therefore admitted as relatively justified, but only as tendencies to be surmounted and integrated in the interiorised order; in themselves and for themselves, they appear as reprehensible and doomed to perdition, as also is philistinism—the acceptance of an outside order, however lacking in idea it may be, simply because it is the given order.

This structure of the relationship between the ideal and the soul relativises the hero's central position, which is merely accidental: the hero is picked out of an unlimited number of men who share his aspirations, and is placed at the centre of the narrative only because his seeking and finding reveal the world's totality most clearly. In the tower where Wilhelm Meister's years of apprenticeship are recorded, those of Jarno and Lothario and others—both members and non-members of the League—are recorded too, and the novel itself contains, in the memories of the Canoness, a close parallel to the story of the hero's education. It is true that in the novel of disillusionment, the central character's position is also often accidental (whereas abstract idealism has to make use of a hero marked out and placed at the centre of events by his loneliness); but this is more a means of exposing the corrupting nature of reality: where all interiority is bound to come to grief, any individual destiny is merely an episode, and the world consists of an infinite number of such isolated, mutually heterogeneous episodes which have only the fatality of failure in common. Here, however, the philosophical basis of the relativity of the hero's position is the possibility of success of aspirations aimed at a common goal; the individual characters are closely linked together by this community of destiny, whereas in the novel of disillusionment the parallelism of their lives had only to enhance their loneliness.

This is why Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister* steers a middle course between abstract idealism, which concentrates on pure action, and Romanticism, which interiorises action and reduces it to contemplation. Humanism, the fundamental attitude of this type of work, demands a balance between activity and contemplation, between wanting to mould the world and being purely receptive towards it. This form has been called the 'novel of education'—rightly, because its action has to be a conscious, controlled process aimed at a certain goal: the development of qualities in men which would never blossom without the active intervention of other men and circumstances; whilst the goal thus attained is in itself formative and encouraging to others—is itself a means of education.

A story determined by such a goal has a certain calm based on security. But this is not the calm of an a-prioristic world; the will towards education, a will that is conscious and certain of its aim, is what creates the atmosphere of ultimate security. The world of such a novel in itself and for itself is by no means free from danger. In order to demonstrate the risk which everyone runs and which can be escaped by individual salvation but not by a-prioristic redemption, many characters have to perish because of their inability to adapt themselves, whilst others fade away because of their precipitous and unconditional surrender in the face of reality. Ways towards individual salvation do exist, however, and a whole community of men is seen to arrive successfully at the end of them, helping one another, as well as occasionally falling into error during the process. And what has become a reality for many must be at least potentially accessible to all.

The robust sense of security underlying this type of novel arises, then, from the relativation of its central character, which in turn is determined by a belief in the possibility of common destinies and life-formations. As soon as this belief disappears—which, in formal terms, amounts to saying:

as soon as the action of the novel is constructed out of the destinies of a lonely person who merely passes through various real or illusory communities but whose fate does not finally flow into them—the form of the work must undergo a substantial change, coming closer to that of the novel of disillusionment, in which loneliness is neither accidental nor the fault of the individual, but signifies that the desire for the essence always leads out of the world of social structures and communities and that a community is possible only at the surface of life and can only be based on compromise. The central character becomes problematic, not because of his so-called 'false tendencies', but just because he wants to realise his deepest interiority in the outside world. The educative element which this type of novel still retains and which distinguishes it sharply from the novel of disillusionment is that the hero's ultimate state of resigned loneliness does not signify the total collapse and defilement of all his ideals but a recognition of the discrepancy between the interiority and the world. The hero actively realises this duality: he accommodates himself to society by resigning himself to accept its life forms, and by locking inside himself and keeping entirely to himself the interiority which can only be realised inside the soul. His ultimate arrival expresses the present state of the world but is neither a protest against it nor an affirmation of it, only an understanding and experiencing of it which tries to be fair to both sides and which ascribes the soul's inability to fulfil itself in the world not only to the inessential nature of the world but also to the feebleness of the soul.

In most individual examples the dividing line between this post-Goethean type of novel of education and the novel of disillusionment is often fluid. The first version of *Der Grüne Heinrich* shows this perhaps most clearly, whereas the final version stands definitely upon the course required by its form. But the possibility of such indeterminacy (although it can

be overcome) reveals the one great danger inherent in this form because of its historico-philosophical base: the danger of a subjectivity which is not exemplary, which has not become a symbol, and which is bound to destroy the epic form. The hero and his destiny then have no more than personal interest and the work as a whole becomes a private memoir of how a certain person succeeded in coming to terms with his world. (The novel of disillusionment counteracts the increased subjectivity of the characters by the crushing, equalising universality of fate.) Such a subjectivity is even more difficult to surmount than that of the impersonal narrative: it endows everything—even if the technique is perfectly objectivised—with the fatal, irrelevant and petty character of the merely private; it remains a mere aspect, making the absence of a totality the more painfully obvious as it constantly claims to create one. The overwhelming majority of modern 'novels of education' have completely failed to avoid this pitfall.

The structure of the characters and destinies in *Wilhelm Meister* determines the structure of the social world around them. Here, too, we have an intermediate situation: the structures of social life are not modelled on a stable and secure transcendent world, nor are they in themselves an order, complete and clearly articulated, which substantiates itself to become its own purpose; such a world would exclude any possibility of the hero's seeking or losing his way. But neither do these structures form an amorphous mass, for then the interiority oriented towards finding an order would always remain homeless and the attainment of the goal would be unthinkable from the start. The social world must therefore be shown as a world of convention, which is partially open to penetration by living meaning.

A new principle of heterogeneity is thereby introduced into the outside world: a hierarchy of the various structures and layers of structures according to their penetrability by meaning. This hierarchy is irrational and incapable of being

rationalised; and the meaning, in this particular case, is not objective but is tantamount to the possibility of a personality fulfilling itself in action. Irony here acquires crucial importance as a factor in the creation of the work because no structure in itself and for itself can be said to possess such meaning, nor not to possess it; it is quite impossible to decide from the start whether any structure is thus eligible or not, and only its interaction with the individual can reveal this. The necessary ambiguity is further increased by the fact that in each separate set of interactions it is impossible to tell whether the adequacy or inadequacy of the structure of the individual is due to the individual's success or failure or whether it is a comment on the structure itself. But such an ironic affirmation of reality—for this uncertainty lights up even a reality totally lacking in idea—is, after all, only an intermediate stage: the completion of the process of education must inevitably idealise and romanticise certain parts of reality and abandon others to prose, as being devoid of meaning.

Yet the author must not abandon his ironic attitude, replacing it by unconditional affirmation, even when describing the eventual homecoming. This objectivation of social life is merely the occasion for something which lies outside and beyond it to become visible, fruitful and active, and the earlier ironic homogeneisation of reality, to which the homecoming owes its character of reality—its nature which always remains opaque to subjective views and tendencies, its independent existence vis-à-vis them—cannot be abolished even at the eventual homecoming without endangering the unity of the whole. And so the attained, meaningful and harmonious world is just as real and has the same characteristics of reality as the different degrees of meaninglessness and of partial penetration by meaning which preceded it in the story.

In this ironic tact of the Romantic presentation of reality lies the other great danger inherent in this form of the novel,

which only Goethe—and not always he—succeeded in escaping. It is the danger of romanticising reality to a point where it becomes a sphere totally beyond reality or, still more dangerously from the point of view of artistic form-giving, a sphere completely free from problems, for which the forms of the novel are then no longer sufficient. Novalis, who rejected Goethe's work as prosaic and anti-poetic precisely on these grounds, sets the fairy-tale—transcendence realised in reality—as the goal and canon of epic poetry against the method used in *Wilhelm Meister*. '*Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship*,' he writes, 'is in a sense a completely prosaic and modern work. The Romantic element is absent from it, and so is the poetry of nature—the miraculous. It deals only with ordinary, human things; nature and mysticism are quite forgotten. It is a poeticised story of bourgeois domestic life. The miraculous is dismissed from it as mere poetry and exaltation. Artistic atheism is the spirit of this book . . . It is at bottom . . . unpoetic to the highest degree, however poetical the writing may be.' And again, Novalis' own harking back to the age of the chivalrous epics was not accidental but the result of that enigmatic and yet so deeply rational elective affinity between an author's fundamental intention and the matter of his works. Novalis, like the authors of those epics, wanted to create a totality of revealed transcendence within an earthly reality (although we can speak only of an *a priori* sharing of aims, not of any direct or indirect 'influence'). His stylisation, like that of the chivalrous epics, had therefore to be oriented towards the fairy-tale. But whereas the intention of the authors of the medieval epics was epic in a naïvely natural sense and consisted in giving form directly to real life (the glimpsed presence of the transcendent and, with it, the transfiguration of reality into a fairy-tale being merely a gift they received from their historico-philosophical situation), for Novalis this fairy-tale reality as a re-creation of the broken unity between

reality and transcendence became a conscious goal. And this is precisely why he could not achieve a decisive and complete synthesis. His reality is so much weighed down by the earthly gravity of idealessness, his transcendent world is so airy, so vapid, because it stems too directly from the philosophico-postulative sphere of pure abstraction, that the two are unable to unite in a living totality. And so the artistic fault which Novalis so penetratingly detected in Goethe is even greater —is irreparable—in his own work.

The triumph of poetry, its transfiguring and redeeming domination of the entire universe, has not the constitutive force to make all earthly and prosaic things follow it into paradise; the romanticising of reality merely gives reality a lyrical semblance of poetry, but this semblance cannot be translated into events—into epic terms; and so the genuinely epic in Novalis' work suffers from the same problematic as in Goethe's (but to a more acute degree) or is evaded altogether by lyrical reflexions and mood-pictures. Novalis' stylisation remains a purely reflexive one, superficially disguising the danger but in fact only intensifying it. Lyrical, mood-dominated romanticising of the structures of social reality cannot, given the fact that reality at the present stage of development lacks pre-stabilised harmony, relate to the essential life of the interiority. Since Novalis rejected Goethe's solution of seeking an ironical, fluctuating balance maintained from the point of view of the subject and touching as little as possible upon the actual structures of society, no other way was left open to him but to poeticise these structures in their objective existence and to create a world which was beautiful and harmonious but closed within itself and unrelated to anything outside: a world connected only reflexively, only by mood, not in any epic sense, with the ultimate realised transcendence or with the problematic interiority: a world which therefore could not become a true totality.

The surmounting of this danger is not entirely problem-

free even in Goethe. Although he places strong emphasis on the merely potential and subjective nature of the penetration of meaning into the social sphere in which the hero finds fulfilment, the notion of community on which the whole edifice is based requires that the social structures should here possess a greater, more objective substantiality and, therefore, a more genuine adequation to the normative subjects, than those spheres which have been overcome.

This objective removal of the fundamental problematic brings the novel closer to the epic; yet it is impossible for a work which began as a novel to end as an epic, and it is likewise impossible, once such overlapping has occurred, to make the work homogeneous again by the renewed use of irony. This is why, in *Wilhelm Meister*, the world of the nobility, which does not belong completely to the novel and so is somewhat fragile, has to be set as a symbol of active life-domination against the marvellously unified atmosphere of the theatre, which is born of the true spirit of the novel form. Certainly, by the nature of the marriages which conclude the novel, the nobility as a social estate is interiorised with the maximum epic and sensuous intensity, so that the objective superiority of a class is transformed to mean a better opportunity for a freer, more generous way of life for anyone possessing the necessary inner potentialities. But in spite of this ironic reservation, a social class is nevertheless raised to a height of substantiality to which it cannot inwardly be equal. Within this class, although confined to a small circle of its members, a universal and all-embracing cultural flowering is supposed to occur, capable of absorbing the most varied individual destinies. In other words, the world thus confined within a single class—the nobility—and based upon it, partakes of the problem-free radiance of the epic.

Not even the supreme artistic tact with which Goethe introduces new problems at this late stage in the novel can alter the immanent consequences of the novel's ending. The

world he describes, with its merely relative adequation to essential life, contains no element that can offer a possibility for the necessary stylisation. This is why Goethe was obliged to introduce the much-criticised fantastic apparatus of the last books of the novel, the mysterious tower, the all-knowing initiates with their providential actions, etc. Goethe makes use here of the methods of the (Romantic) epic. He absolutely needed these methods in order to give sensuous significance and gravity to the ending of the novel, and although he tried to rob them of their epic quality by using them lightly and ironically, thus hoping to transform them into elements of the novel form, he failed. With his creative irony, by means of which he was able everywhere else to give substance to things that were in themselves unworthy of artistic treatment and to control any tendency to go beyond the novel form, he devalued the miraculous by revealing its playful, arbitrary and ultimately inessential character. And he could not prevent it from introducing a disrupting dissonance into the total unity of the whole; the miraculous becomes a mystification without hidden meaning, a strongly emphasised narrative element without real importance, a playful ornament without decorative grace. This was more than a concession to the taste of the period (as many have claimed in apology), and after all it is quite impossible to imagine *Wilhelm Meister* without this miraculous element, however inorganic it may be. An essential formal necessity forced Goethe to use it and its use had to fail only because, given the author's fundamental intention, it was oriented towards a less problematic form than that imposed by its substratum – that is to say, the historical epic.

Again, the author's utopian outlook prevents him from stopping at the mere portrayal of the time-given problematic; he cannot be satisfied with a mere glimpse, a merely subjective experience of an unrealisable meaning; he is forced to posit a purely individual experience, which may, postulatively,

have universal validity, as the existent and constitutive meaning of reality. But reality refuses to be forced up to such a level of meaning, and, as with all the decisive problems of great literary forms, no artist's skill is great and masterly enough to bridge the abyss.

4

Tolstoy and the attempts to go beyond the social forms of life

THE OVERLAPPING of the novel form into the epic, such as we have discussed, is rooted in social life; it disrupts the immanence of form only to the extent that, at the crucial point, it imputes a substantiality to the world it describes which that world is in no way capable of sustaining and keeping in a state of balance. The artist's epic intention, his desire to arrive at a world beyond the problematic, is aimed only at an immanently utopian ideal of social forms and structures; therefore it does not transcend these forms and structures generally but only their historically given concrete possibilities—and this is enough to destroy the immanence of form.

This attitude appears first in the novel of disillusionment, where the incongruence of interiority and the conventional world leads to a complete denial of the latter. But so long as this denial signifies no more than an inner attitude, the immanence of the novel—provided the form is successfully achieved—remains intact, and any lack of balance is more a question of a lyrical and psychological general disintegration of the form than of an overlapping of the novel into the epic. (We have already analysed the special case of Novalis.) Such overlapping is, however, unavoidable if the utopian rejection of the conventional world objectivises itself in a likewise existent reality, so that polemical refusal actually becomes the central form of the work. No such possibility was given by the historical development of Western Europe.

This utopian demand of the soul is directed at something unattainable from the start—at an outside world which might

be adequate to a highly differentiated, refined soul that has become an interiority. The rejection of convention is not aimed at conventionality itself but, in part, at its divorce from the soul and, in part, at its lack of refinement. Its character, which is that of civilisation but not of culture, and its dry and arid lack of spirituality are both rejected. Apart from purely anarchistic tendencies which could almost be called mystical, what is desired is always a culture objectivising itself in structures which might be adequate to the interiority. (This is the point at which Goethe's novel connects with this particular development, except that in *Wilhelm Meister* such a culture is actually found, which gives the book its singular rhythm: layers of social structures, which become more and more essential as the hero matures and gradually discards abstract idealism and utopian Romanticism, increasingly surpass his expectations.) Criticism (rejection) of this kind can only express itself lyrically. Even in Rousseau, whose Romantic world view entailed the refusal of all cultural structures, the polemicism takes the form of pure polemicism, i.e. it is rhetorical, lyrical, reflexive. The world of Western European culture is so deeply rooted in the inescapability of its constituent structures that it can never adopt any attitude towards them other than a polemical one.

The greater closeness of nineteenth-century Russian literature to certain organic natural conditions, which were the given substratum of its underlying attitude and creative intention, made it possible for that literature to be *creatively* polemical. Tolstoy, coming after Turgenev—who was an essentially Western European novelist of disillusionment—created a form of novel which overlaps to the maximum extent into the epic. Tolstoy's great and truly epic mentality, which has little to do with the novel form, aspires to a life based on a community of feeling among simple human beings closely bound to nature, a life which is intimately adapted to

the great rhythm of nature, which moves according to nature's cycle of birth and death and excludes all structures which are not natural, which are petty and disruptive, causing disintegration and stagnation. 'The muzhik dies quietly,' Tolstoy wrote to Countess A. A. Tolstoy about his story *Three Deaths*. 'His religion is nature, with which he has spent all his life. He has felled trees, sown rye, reaped it, he has slaughtered sheep and sheep have been born on his farm, children have come into the world, old men have died, and he knows this law from which he has never turned away as the lady of the manor has done, he knows it well and has looked it straight and simply in the eye . . . The tree dies quietly, simply and beautifully. Beautifully because it does not lie, makes no grimaces, is afraid of nothing and regrets nothing.'

The paradoxical nature of Tolstoy's historical situation, which proves better than anything else how much the novel is the necessary epic form of our time, manifests itself in the fact that this world cannot be translated into movement and action, even by an author who not only longs for it but has actually seen and depicted it clearly; it remains only an element of the epic work, but is not epic reality itself. The natural organic world of the old epics was, after all, a culture whose organic character was its specific quality, whereas the nature which Tolstoy posits as the ideal and which he has experienced as existent is, in its innermost essence, meant to be *nature* (and is, therefore, opposed, as such, to *culture*). This necessary opposition is the insoluble problematic of Tolstoy's novels. In other words, his epic intention was bound to result in a problematic novel form, not because he failed to overcome culture within himself, not because his relationship to nature as he experienced and depicted it was a sentimental one—not for psychological reasons—but for reasons of form and of the relationship of form to its historico-philosophical substratum.

A totality of men and events is possible only on the basis of culture, whatever one's attitude towards it. Therefore in Tolstoy's epic works the decisive element belongs, both as framework and as concrete content, to the world of culture which he rejects as problematic. But since nature, although it cannot become an immanently complete totality, is objectively existent, the work contains two layers of realities which are completely heterogeneous from one another both as regards the value attached to them and the quality of their being. And relating them to one another, which would make it possible to construct a work that was a totality, can only take the form of the lived experience of going from one reality to the other. Or, to put it more precisely, since the direction chosen is a given result of the value attached to both realities, it is the experience of going from culture to nature. And so, as a paradoxical consequence of the paradoxical relationship between the writer's mentality and the historical age in which he finds himself, a sentimental, romantic experience finally becomes the centre of the entire work: the central characters' dissatisfaction with whatever the surrounding world of culture can offer them and their seeking and finding of the second, more essential reality of nature. The paradoxy arising from this experience is further increased by the fact that this 'nature' of Tolstoy's does not have a plenitude and perfection that would make it, like the relatively more substantial world at the end of Goethe's novel, a home in which the characters might arrive and come to rest. Rather, it is a factual assurance that an essential life really does exist beyond conventionality—a life which can be reached through the lived experiences of a full and genuine selfhood, the self-experience of the soul, but from which one must irremediably fall back into the world of convention.

With the heroic ruthlessness of a writer of historic greatness, Tolstoy does not flinch from the grim consequences of

his world view; not even the singular position he allocates to love and marriage—a position half-way between nature and culture, at home in both spheres and yet a stranger in each—can mitigate these consequences. In the rhythm of natural life, the rhythm of unpathetic, natural growth and death, love is the point at which the dominant forces of life assume their most concrete and meaningful form. Yet love as a pure force of nature, love as passion, does not belong to Tolstoy's world of nature; passionate love is too much bound up with the relationship between one individual and another and therefore isolates too much, creates too many degrees and nuances; it is too cultural. The love which occupies the really central place in Tolstoy's world is love as marriage, love as union (the fact of being united, of becoming one, being more important than who it is that is thus united), love as the prelude to birth; marriage and the family as a vehicle of the natural continuity of life. That this introduces a conceptual dichotomy into the edifice would be of little importance artistically if it did not create yet another heterogeneous layer of reality, which cannot be compositionally connected with the other two spheres, in themselves heterogeneous from each other. The more authentically this layer of reality is depicted, the more strongly it is bound to be transformed into the opposite of what was intended: the triumph of such love over culture is meant to be a victory of the natural over the falsely, artificially refined, yet it becomes a miserable swallowing-up by nature of everything that is great and noble in man. Nature is alive inside man but, when it is lived as culture, it reduces man to the lowest, most mindless, most idea-forsaken conventionality. This is why the mood of the epilogue to *War and Peace*, with its nursery atmosphere where all passion has been spent and all seeking ended, is more profoundly disconsolate than the endings of the most problematic novels of disillusionment. Nothing is left of what was there before; as the sand of the desert covers the

pyramids, so every spiritual thing has been swamped, annihilated, by animal nature.

This unintentional disconsolateness of the ending combines with an intentional one in the description of the conventional world. Tolstoy's evaluating and rejecting attitude extends to every detail he depicts. The aimlessness and insubstantiality of the life he describes expresses itself not only objectively, for the reader who recognises it, not only as the lived experience of gradual disappointment, but also as an a-prioristic, established, agitated emptiness, a restless *ennui*. Every conversation, every event bears the stamp of the author's verdict.

These two groups of experiences (the private world of marriage and the public world of society) are contrasted with the experience of the essence of nature. At very rare, great moments—generally they are moments of death—a reality reveals itself to man in which he suddenly glimpses and grasps the essence that rules over him and works within him, the meaning of his life. His whole previous life vanishes into nothingness in the face of this experience; all its conflicts, all the sufferings, torments and confusions caused by them, appear petty and inessential. Meaning has made its appearance and the paths into living life are open to the soul. And here again Tolstoy, with the paradoxical ruthlessness of true genius, shows up the profoundly problematic nature of his form and its foundations: these crucial moments of bliss are the great moments of dying—the experience of Andrey Bolkonsky lying mortally wounded on the field of Austerlitz, the sense of unity experienced by Karenin and Vronsky at Anna's deathbed—and it would be true bliss to die now, to die like that. But Anna recovers and Andrey returns to life, and the great moments vanish without trace. Life goes on in the world of convention, an aimless, inessential life. The paths which the great moments had revealed lose their direction, their reality, as the great moment

passes. Such paths cannot be trodden, and when people believe they are treading them, their experience is a bitter caricature of what the revelation of the great moment had shown. (Levin's experience of God and his clinging to what he has thus attained—despite the fact that it is slipping from his grasp—stems more from the will and theory of Tolstoy the thinker than from the vision of Tolstoy the artist. It is programmatic and lacks the immediate conviction of the other great moments.) The few characters who are capable of really living their lived experiences—perhaps Planton Karatayev is the only such character—are, of necessity, secondary characters: events leave them unchanged, their essential nature is never involved in events, their life does not objectivise itself, it cannot be given form but only hinted at, only defined in concrete artistic terms in contrast to the others. They are not realities but marginal aesthetic concepts.

These three layers of reality correspond to the three concepts of time in Tolstoy's world, and the impossibility of uniting them reveals most strongly the inner problematic of his works, rich and profound as they are. The world of convention is essentially timeless; an eternally recurring, self-repeating monotony, it proceeds upon its course in accordance with meaningless laws of its own; eternal movement without direction, without growth, without death. Characters come and go, but nothing happens as a result of this constant flux because each figure is as insubstantial as the next, and any one can be put in the place of any other. Whenever one walks on to this stage, whenever one leaves it, one always finds—or has to reject—the same motley inessentiality. Beneath it flows the stream of Tolstoyan nature: the continuity and monotony of an eternal rhythm. That which changes in nature is the individual destiny, and this, too, is inessential. Individual destiny, caught in the current, rising or sinking with it, possesses no meaning founded upon itself; its relation to the whole does not

assimilate its personality but destroys it; as an individual destiny, rather than as an element of a general rhythm side by side with innumerable other, similar and equivalent lives, it is completely immaterial. The great moments which offer a glimpse of an essential life, a meaningful process, remain mere moments, isolated from the other two worlds and without constitutive reference to them. Thus the three concepts of time are not only mutually heterogeneous and incapable of being united with one another, but moreover none of them expresses real duration, real time, the life-element of the novel.

Going outside and beyond culture has merely destroyed culture but has not put a truer, more essential life in its place; the overlapping into the epic only makes the novel form still more problematic, without coming concretely closer to the desired goal, the problem-free reality of the epic. (In purely artistic terms Tolstoy's novels are novels of disillusionment carried to an extreme, a baroque version of Flaubert's form.) The glimpsed world of essential nature remains an intimation, a lived experience; it is subjective and reflexive so far as the depicted reality is concerned; but in a purely artistic sense, it is nevertheless of the same kind as any other longing for a more adequate reality.

Literary development has not yet gone beyond the novel of disillusionment, and the most recent literature reveals no possibility of creating another type that would be essentially new; what we have now is an eclectic, epigonic imitation of earlier types, whose apparent productive force is confined to the formally inessential areas of lyricism and psychology.

Tolstoy himself, it is true, occupies a dual position. From the point of view purely of form (a point of view which, in Tolstoy's special case, cannot possibly do justice to what matters most in his vision or in his created world), he must be seen as the final expression of European Romanticism. However, in the few overwhelmingly great moments of his

works—moments which must be seen as subjective and reflexive in respect of each particular work as a whole—he shows a clearly differentiated, concrete and existent world, which, if it could spread out into a totality, would be completely inaccessible to the categories of the novel and would require a new form of artistic creation: the form of the renewed epic.

This world is the sphere of pure soul-reality in which man exists as man, neither as a social being nor as an isolated, unique, pure and therefore abstract interiority. If ever this world should come into being as something natural and simply experienced, as the only true reality, a new complete totality could be built out of all its substances and relationships. It would be a world to which our divided reality would be a mere backdrop, a world which would have outstripped our dual world of social reality by as much as we have outstripped the world of nature. But art can never be the agent of such a transformation: the great epic is a form bound to the historical moment, and any attempt to depict the utopian as existent can only end in destroying the form, not in creating reality. The novel is the form of the epoch of absolute sinfulness, as Fichte said, and it must remain the dominant form so long as the world is ruled by the same stars. In Tolstoy, intimations of a breakthrough into a new epoch are visible; but they remain polemical, nostalgic and abstract.

It is in the words of Dostoevsky that this new world, remote from any struggle against what actually exists, is drawn for the first time simply as a seen reality. That is why he, and the form he created, lie outside the scope of this book. Dostoevsky did not write novels, and the creative vision revealed in his works has nothing to do, either as affirmation or as rejection, with European nineteenth-century Romanticism or with the many, likewise Romantic, reactions against it. He belongs to the new world. Only formal analysis of his works can show whether he is already the Homer or the Dante

of that world or whether he merely supplies the songs which, together with the songs of other forerunners, later artists will one day weave into a great unity: whether he is merely a beginning or already a completion. It will then be the task of historico-philosophical interpretation to decide whether we are really about to leave the age of absolute sinfulness or whether the new has no other herald but our hopes: those hopes which are signs of a world to come, still so weak that it can easily be crushed by the sterile power of the merely existent.

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