The 'should be', in whose desperate intensity the essence seeks refuge because it has become an outlaw on earth, can objectivise itself in the intelligible 'I' as the hero's normative psychology, but in the empirical 'I' it remains a 'should be'. The power of this 'should be' is a purely psychological one, and in this it resembles the other elements of the soul; its aims are empirical, and here again it resembles other possible aspirations as given by man himself or by his environment; its contents are historical, similar to others produced in the process of time, and cannot be severed from the soil in which they have grown: they may fade, but they will never awaken to a new, ideal existence. The 'should be' kills life, and the dramatic hero assumes the symbolic attributes of the sensuous manifestations of life only in order to be able to perform the symbolic ceremony of dying in a sensuously perceptible way, making transcendence visible; yet in the epic men must be alive, or else they destroy or exhaust the very element that carries, surrounds and fills them.

(The 'should be' kills life, and every concept expresses a 'should-be' of its object; that is why thought can never arrive at a real definition of life, and why, perhaps, the philosophy of art is so much more adequate to tragedy than it is to the epic.)

The 'should be' kills life, and an epic hero constructed out of what 'should be' will always be but a shadow of the living epic man of historical reality, his shadow but never his original image, and his given world of experience and adventure can only be a watered-down copy of reality, never its core and essence. Utopian stylisation of the epic inevitably creates distance, but such distance lies between two instances of the empirical, so that the sorrow and majesty created by this distance can only make for a rhetorical tone. This distance may produce marvellous elegiac lyricism, but it can never, in itself, put real life into a content that transcends being, or turns such content into self-sufficient reality.

Whether this distance leads forward or backwards, upwards or downwards from life, it is never the creation of a new reality but always only a subjective mirroring of what already exists. Virgil's heroes lead a cool and measured shadow-existence, nourished by the blood of a splendid ardour that has sacrificed itself in order to conjure up what has vanished forever: while Zolaesque monumentality amounts only to monotonous emotion in face of the multiple yet simplified complexity of a sociological system of categories that claims to cover the whole of contemporary life.

There is such a thing as great epic literature, but drama never requires the attribute of greatness and must always resist it. The cosmos of the drama, full of its own substance, rounded with substantiality, ignores the contrast between wholeness and segment, the opposition between event and symptom: for the drama, to exist is to be a cosmos, to grasp the essence, to possess its totality. But the concept of life does not posit the necessity of the totality of life; life contains within itself both the relative independence of every separate living being from any transcendent bond and the likewise relative inevitability and indespensability of such bonds. That is why there can be epic forms whose object is not the totality of life but a segment of it, a fragment capable of independent existence. But, for the same reason, the concept of totality for the epic is not a transcendental one, as it is in drama; it is not born out of the form itself, but is empirical and metaphysical, combining transcendence and immanence inseparably within itself. In the epic, subject and object do not coincide as they do in drama, where creative subjectivity, seen from the perspective of the work, is barely a concept but only a generalised awareness; whereas in the epic subject and object are clearly and unequivocally distinct from one another and present in the work as such. And since an empirical form-giving subject follows from the empirical nature of the object seeking to acquire form, this subject

can never be the basis and guarantee of the totality of the represented world. In the epic, totality can only truly manifest itself in the contents of the object: it is meta-subjective, transcendent, it is a revelation and grace. Living, empirical man is always the subject of the epic, but his creative, life-mastering arrogance is transformed in the great epics into humility, contemplation, speechless wonder at the luminous meaning which, so unexpectedly, so naturally, has become visible to him, an ordinary human being in the midst of ordinary life.

In the minor epic forms, the subject confronts the object in a more dominant and self-sufficient way. The narrator may (we cannot, nor do we intend to establish even a tentative system of epic forms here) adopt the cool and superior demeanour of the chronicler who observes the strange workings of coincidence as it plays with the destinies of men, meaningless and destructive to them, revealing and instructive to us; or he may see a small corner of the world as an ordered flower-garden in the midst of the boundless, chaotic waste-lands of life, and, moved by his vision, elevate it to the status of the sole reality; or he may be moved and impressed by the strange, profound experiences of an individual and pour them into the mould of an objectivised destiny; but whatever he does, it is his own subjectivity that singles out a fragment from the immeasurable infinity of the events of life, endows it with independent life and allows the whole from which this fragment has been taken to enter the work only as the thoughts and feelings of his hero, only as an involuntary continuation of a fragmentary causal series, only as the mirroring of a reality having its own separate existence.

Completeness in the minor epic forms is subjective: a fragment of life is transplanted by the writer into a surrounding world that emphasises it and lifts it out of the totality of life; and this selection, this delimitation, puts

the stamp of its origin in the subject's will and knowledge upon the work itself: it is, more or less, lyrical in nature. The relativity of the independence and the mutual bonds of all living beings and their organic, likewise living associations can be superseded, can be elevated into form, if a conscious decision of the creative subject brings out an immanent meaning within the isolated existence of this particular fragment of life. The subject's form-giving, structuring, delimiting act, his sovereign dominance over the created object, is the lyricism of those epic forms which are without totality. Such lyricism is here the last epic unity; it is not the swallowing of a solitary 'I' in the object-free contemplation of its own self, nor is it the dissolving of the object into sensations and moods; it is born out of form, it creates form, and it sustains everything that has been given form in such a work.

The immediate, flowing power of such lyricism is bound to increase in proportion with the significance and gravity of the life-segment selected; the balance of the work is that between the positing subject and the object he singles out and elevates. In the short story, the narrative form which pin-points the strangeness and ambiguity of life, such lyricism must entirely conceal itself behind the hard outlines of the event; here, lyricism is still pure selection; the utter arbitrariness of chance, which may bring happiness or destruction but whose workings are always without reason, can only be balanced by clear, uncommented, purely objective depiction. The short story is the most purely artistic form; it expresses the ultimate meaning of all artistic creation as *mood*, as the very sense and content of the creative process, but it is rendered abstract for that very reason. It sees absurdity in all its undisguised and unadorned nakedness, and the exorcising power of this view, without fear or hope, gives it the consecration of form; meaninglessness *as meaninglessness* becomes form; it becomes eternal

because it is affirmed, transcended and redeemed by form.

Between the short story and the lyric-epic forms there is a clear distinction. As soon as an event which has been given meaning by its form is, if only relatively, meaningful in its content as well, the subject, falling silent, must again struggle for words with which to build a bridge between the relative meaning of the event and the absolute. In the idyll such lyricism merges almost completely with the contours of the men and things depicted; it is this lyricism that endows these contours with the softness and airiness of a peaceful seclusion, of a blissful isolation from the storms raging in the outside world. Only when the idyll transcends its form and becomes epic, as in Goethe's and Hebbel's 'great idylls', where the whole of life with all its dangers, although modified and softened by distance, enters into the events depicted, must the author's own voice be heard and his hand must create the salutary distances, to ensure that the hard-won happiness of his heroes is not reduced to the unworthy complacency of those who cravenly turn their backs on an all-too-present wretchedness they have not overcome but only escaped, and, equally, to ensure that the dangers of life and the perturbation of its totality do not become a pale schema, reducing the triumph of deliverance to a trivial farce. And such lyricism develops into a limpid, generously flowing, all-embracing message only when the event, in its epic objectivation, becomes the vehicle and symbol of unbounded feeling; when a soul is the hero and that soul's longing is the story (once, speaking of Charles-Louis Philippe, I called such a form '*chantefable*'); when the object, the event that is given form, remains isolated as indeed it should, but when the lived experience that absorbs the event and radiates it out also carries within it the ultimate meaning of life, the artist's sense-giving, life-conquering power. This power, also, is lyrical: the artist's personality, conscious and autonomous, proclaims its own interpretation of the meaning of the uni-

verse; the artist handles events as though they were instruments, he does not listen to them for a secret meaning. What is given form here is not the totality of life but the artist's relationship with that totality, his approving or condemnatory attitude towards it; here, the artist enters the arena of artistic creation as the empirical subject in all its greatness but also with all its creaturely limitations.

Neither can a totality of life which is by definition extensive be achieved by the object's being annihilated—by the subject's making itself the sole ruler of existence. However high the subject may rise above its objects and take them into its sovereign possession, they are still and always only isolated objects, whose sum never equals a real totality. Even such a subject, for all its sublime humour, remains an empirical one and its creation is only the adoption of an attitude towards its objects which, when all is said and done, remain essentially similar to itself; and the circle it draws round the world-segment thus selected and set apart defines only the limits of the subject, not of a cosmos complete in itself. The humorist's soul yearns for a more genuine substantiality than life can offer; and so he smashes all the forms and limits of life's fragile totality in order to reach the sole source of life, the pure, world-dominating 'I'. But as the objective world breaks down, so the subject, too, becomes a fragment; only the 'I' continues to exist, but its existence is then lost in the insubstantiality of its self-created world of ruins. Such subjectivity wants to give form to everything, and precisely for this reason succeeds only in mirroring a segment of the world.

This is the paradox of the subjectivity of the great epic, its 'throwing away in order to win': creative subjectivity becomes lyrical, but, exceptionally, the subjectivity which simply accepts, which humbly transforms itself into a purely receptive organ of the world, can partake of the grace of having the whole revealed to it. This is the leap that Dante

made between the *Vita nuova* and the *Divina commedia*, that Goethe made between *Werther* and *Wilhelm Meister*, the leap Cervantes made when, becoming silent himself, he let the cosmic humour of *Don Quixote* become heard; by contrast, Sterne's and Jean Paul's glorious ringing voices offer no more than reflexions of a world-fragment which is merely subjective and therefore limited, narrow and arbitrary.

This is not a value judgement but an *a priori* definition of genre: the totality of life resists any attempt to find a transcendental centre within it, and refuses any of its constituent cells the right to dominate it. Only when a subject, far removed from all life and from the empirical which is necessarily posited together with life, becomes enthroned in the pure heights of essence, when it has become nothing but the carrier of the transcendental synthesis, can it contain all the conditions for totality within its own structure and transform its own limitations into the frontiers of the world. But such a subject cannot write an epic: the epic *is* life, immanence, the empirical. Dante's *Paradiso* is closer to the essence of life than Shakespeare's exuberant richness.

The synthetic power of the sphere of essence is intensified still further in the constructed totality of the dramatic problem: that which the problem decrees to be necessary, whether it be event or soul, achieves existence through its relation to the centre; the immanent dialectic of this unity accords to each individual phenomenon the essence appropriate to it depending on its distance from the centre and its relative importance to the problem. The problem here is inexpressible because it is the concrete idea of the whole, because only the polyphony of all the voices can carry the full wealth of content concealed in it. For life, the problem is an abstraction; the relationship of a character to a problem can never absorb the whole fullness of that character's life, and every event in the sphere in life can relate only

allegorically to the problem. It is true that in the *Elective Affinities*, which Hebbel rightly called 'dramatic', Goethe's consummate art succeeded in weighing and ordaining everything in relation to the central problem, but even these souls, guided from the start into the problem's narrow channels, cannot attain to real existence; even this action, narrowed and cut down to fit the problem, fails to achieve a rounded totality; to fill even the fragile shell of this small world, the author is forced to introduce extraneous elements, and even if he were as successful throughout the book as he is in certain passages of supremely skilful organisation, the result would not be a totality. Likewise, the 'dramatic' concentration of Hebbel's *Song of the Nibelungs* is a splendid mistake which originated *pro domo*: a great writer's desperate effort to rescue the epic unity—disintegrating in a changed world—of an authentically epic text. Brunhilde's superhuman figure is here reduced to a mixture of woman and valkyrie, who humiliates her weak suitor, Gunther, and makes him completely questionable and feeble; only a few fairy-tale *motifs* survive the transformation of Siegfried the dragon-killer into a knightly figure. The work is saved by the problem of loyalty and revenge, that is to say by Hagen and Kriemhild. But it is a desperate, purely artistic attempt to create, with the means of composition, structuring and organisation, a unity that is no longer organically given: a desperate attempt and a heroic failure. For unity can surely be achieved, but never a real totality. In the story of the Iliad, which has no beginning and no end, a rounded universe blossoms into all-embracing life. The lucidly composed unity of the *Nibelungenlied* conceals life and decay, castles and ruins, behind its skilfully structured façade.