3

The Epic and the Novel

THE EPIC and the novel, these two major forms of great epic literature, differ from one another not by their authors' fundamental intentions but by the given historico-philosophical realities with which the authors were confronted. The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality. It would be superficial—a matter of a mere artistic technicality—to look for the only and decisive genre-defining criterion in the question of whether a work is written in verse or prose.

Verse is not an ultimate constituent either of the epic or of tragedy, although it is indeed a profound symptom by which the true nature of these forms is most truly and genuinely revealed. Tragic verse is sharp and hard, it isolates, it creates distance. It clothes the heroes in the full depth of their solitude, which is born of the form itself; it does not allow of any relationships between them except those of struggle and annihilation; its lyricism can contain notes of despair or excitement about the road yet to be travelled and its ending, it can show glimpses of the abyss over which the essential is suspended, but a purely human understanding between the tragic characters' souls will never break through, as it sometimes does in prose; the despair will never turn into elegy, nor the excitement into a longing for lost heights; the soul can never seek to plumb its own depths with psychologistic vanity, nor admire itself in the mirror of its own profundity.

Dramatic verse, as Schiller wrote to Goethe, reveals whatever triviality there may be in the artistic invention: it has a specific sharpness, a gravity all its own, in face of which nothing that is merely lifelike—which is to say nothing that is dramatically trivial—can survive: if the artist's creative mentality has anything trivial about it, the contrast between the weight of the language and that of the content will betray him.

Epic verse, too, creates distances, but in the sphere of the epic (which is the sphere of life) distance means happiness and lightness, a loosening of the bonds that tie men and objects to the ground, a lifting of the heaviness, the dullness, which are integral to life and which are dispersed only in scattered happy moments. The created distances of epic verse transform such moments into the true level of life. And so the effect of verse is here the opposite just because its immediate consequences—that of abolishing triviality and coming closer to the essence—is the same. Heaviness is trivial in the sphere of life—the epic—just as lightness is trivial in tragedy. An objective guarantee that the complete removal of everything life-like does not mean an empty abstraction from life but the becoming essence, can only be given the consistency with which these unlifelike forms are created; only if they are incomparably more fulfilled, more rounded, more fraught with substance than we could ever dream of in real life, can it be said that tragic stylisation has been successfully achieved. Everything light or pallid (which of course has nothing to do with the banal concept of unlifelikeness) reveals the absence of a normative tragic intention and so demonstrates the triviality of the work, whatever the psychological subtlety and/or lyrical delicacy of its parts.

In life, however, heaviness means the absence of present meaning, a hopeless entanglement in senseless casual connections, a withered sterile existence too close to the earth and too far from heaven, a plodding on, an inability to

liberate oneself from the bonds of sheer brutal materiality, everything that, for the finest immanent forces of life, represents a challenge which must be constantly overcome—it is, in terms of formal value judgement, triviality. A pre-stabilised harmony decrees that epic verse should sing of the blessedly existent totality of life; the pre-poetic process of embracing all life in a mythology had liberated existence from all trivial heaviness; in Homer, the spring buds were only just opening, ready to blossom. Verse itself, however, can only tentatively encourage the bud to open; verse can only weave a garland of freedom round something that has already been liberated from all fetters. If the author's action consists in disclosing buried meaning, if his heroes must first break out of their prisons and, in desperate struggles or long, wearisome wanderings, attain the home of their dreams—their freedom from terrestrial gravity—then the power of verse, which can spread a carpet of flowers over the chasm, is not sufficient to build a practicable road across it. The lightness of great epic literature is only the concretely immanent utopia of the historical hour, and the form-giving detachment which verse as a vehicle confers upon whatever it carries must, therefore, rob the epic of its great totality, its subjectlessness, and transform it into an idyll or a piece of playful lyricism. The lightness of great epic literature is a positive value and a reality-creating force only if the restraining bonds have really been thrown off. Great epic literature is never the result of men forgetting their enslavement in the lovely play of a liberated imagination or in tranquil retirement to happy isles not to be found on the map of this world of trivial attachment. In times to which such lightness is no longer given, verse is banished from the great epic, or else it transforms itself, unexpectedly and unintentionally, into lyric verse. Only prose can then encompass the suffering and the laurels, the struggle and the crown, with equal power; only its unfettered plasticity and

its non-rhythmic rigour can, with equal power, embrace the fetters and the freedom, the given heaviness and the conquered lightness of a world henceforth immanently radiant with found meaning. It is no accident that the disintegration of a reality-become-song led, in Cervantes' prose, to the sorrowful lightness of a great epic, whereas the serene dance of Ariosto's verse remained mere lyrical play; it is no accident that Goethe, the epic poet, poured his idylls into the mould of verse but chose prose for the totality of his *Meister* (master) novel. In the world of distances, all epic verse turns into lyric poetry (*Don Juan* and *Onegin*, although written in verse, belong to the company of the great humorous novels), for, in verse, everything hidden becomes manifest, and the swift flight of verse makes the distance over which prose travels with its deliberate pace as it gradually approaches meaning appear naked, mocked, trampled, or merely a forgotten dream.

Dante's verse, too, is not lyrical although it is more lyrical than Homer's; it intensifies and concentrates the ballad tone into an epic one. The immanence of the meaning of life is present and existent in Dante's world, but only in the beyond: it is the perfect immanence of the transcendent.

Distance in the ordinary world of life is extended to the point where it cannot be overcome, but beyond that world every lost wanderer finds the home that has awaited him since all eternity; every solitary voice that falls silent on earth is there awaited by a chorus that takes it up, carries it towards harmony and, through it, becomes harmony itself.

The world of distances lies sprawling and chaotic beneath the radiant celestial rose of sense made sensuous; it is visible and undisguised at every moment. Every inhabitant of that home in the beyond has come from this world, each is bound to it by the indissoluble force of destiny, but each

recognises it, sees it in its fragility and heaviness, only when he has travelled to the end of his path thereby made meaningful; every figure sings of its isolated destiny, the isolated event in which its apportioned lot was made manifest: a ballad. And just as the totality of the transcendent world-structure is the pre-determined sense-giving, all-embracing *a priori* of each individual destiny, so the increasing comprehension of this edifice, its structure and its beauty—the great experience of Dante the traveller—envelops everything in the unity of its meaning, now revealed. Dante's insight transforms the individual into a component of the whole, and so the ballads become epic songs. The meaning of this world becomes distanceless, visible and immanent only in the beyond. Totality, in this world, is bound to be a fragile or merely a longed-for one: the verse passages in Wolfram von Eschenbach or Gottfried von Strassburg are only lyrical ornaments to their novels, and the ballad quality of the *Song of the Nibelungs* can be disguised by compositional means, but cannot be rounded so that it achieves world-embracing totality.

The epic gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within; the novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life. The given structure of the object (i.e. the search, which is only a way of expressing the subject's recognition that neither objective life nor its relationship to the subject is spontaneously harmonious in itself) supplies an indication of the form-giving intention. All the fissures and rents which are inherent in the historical situation must be drawn into the form-giving process and cannot nor should be disguised by compositional means. Thus the fundamental form-determining intention of the novel is objectivised as the psychology of the novel's heroes: they are seekers. The simple fact of seeking implies that neither the goals nor the way leading to them can be directly given, or else that, if they are given in a

psychologically direct and solid manner, this is not evidence of really existent relations or ethical necessities but only of a psychological fact to which nothing in the world of objects or norms need necessarily correspond. To put it another way, this 'givenness' may be crime or madness; the boundaries which separate crime from acclaimed heroism and madness from life-mastering wisdom are tentative, purely psychological ones, although at the end, when the aberration makes itself terribly manifest and clear, there is no longer any confusion.

In this sense, the epic and the tragedy know neither crime nor madness. What the customary concepts of everyday life call crime is, for them, either not there at all, or it is nothing other than the point, symbolically fixed and sensually perceptible from afar, at which the soul's relationship to its destiny, the vehicle of its metaphysical homesickness, becomes visible. The epic world is either a purely childlike one in which the transgression of stable, traditional norms has to entail vengeance which again must be avenged *ad infinitum*, or else it is the perfect theodicy in which crime and punishment lie in the scales of world justice as equal, mutually homogeneous weights.

In tragedy crime is either nothing at all or a symbol—it is either a mere element of the action, demanded and determined by technical laws, or it is the breaking down of forms on this side of the essence, it is the entrance through which the soul comes into its own. Of madness the epic knows nothing, unless it be the generally incomprehensible language of a superworld that possesses no other means of expression. In non-problematic tragedy, madness can be the symbolic expression of an end, equivalent to physical death or to the living death of a soul consumed by the essential fire of selfhood. For crime and madness are objectivations of transcendental homelessness—the homelessness of an action in the human order of social relations, the

homelessness of a soul in the ideal order of a supra-personal system of values. Every form is the resolution of a fundamental dissonance of existence; every form restores the absurd to its proper place as the vehicle, the necessary condition of meaning. When the peak of absurdity, the futility of genuine and profound human aspirations, or the possibility of the ultimate nothingness of man has to be absorbed into literary form as a basic vehicular fact, and when what is in itself absurd has to be explained and analysed and, consequently, recognised as being irreducibly *there*, then, although some streams within such a form may flow into a sea of fulfilment, the absence of any manifest aim, the determining lack of direction of life as a whole, must be the basic *a priori* constituent, the fundamental structural element of the characters and events within it.

Where no aims are directly given, the structures which the soul, in the process of *becoming-man*, encounters as the arena and sub-stratum of its activity among men lose their obvious roots in supra-personal ideal necessities; they are simply existent, perhaps powerful, perhaps frail, but they neither carry the consecration of the absolute within them nor are they the natural containers for the overflowing interiority of the soul. They form the world of convention, a world from whose all-embracing power only the innermost recesses of the soul are exempt, a world which is present everywhere in a multiplicity of forms too complex for understanding. Its strict laws, both in becoming and in being, are necessarily evident to the cognisant subject, but despite its regularity, it is a world that does not offer itself either as meaning to the aim-seeking subject or as matter, in sensuous immediacy, to the active subject. It is a second nature, and, like nature (first nature), it is determinable only as the embodiment of recognised but senseless necessities and therefore it is incomprehensible, unknowable in its real substance. Yet for creative literature substance alone has existence and only substances

which are profoundly homogeneous with one another can enter into the fighting union of reciprocal compositional relationships.

Lyric poetry can ignore the phenomenalisation of the first nature and can create a protean mythology of substantial subjectivity out of the constitutive strength of its ignorance. In lyric poetry, only the great moment exists, the moment at which the meaningful unity of nature and soul or their meaningful divorce, the necessary and affirmed loneliness of the soul becomes eternal. At the lyrical moment the purest interiority of the soul, set apart from duration without choice, lifted above the obscurely-determined multiplicity of things, solidifies into substance; whilst alien, unknowable nature is driven from within, to agglomerate into a symbol that is illuminated throughout. Yet this relationship between soul and nature can be produced only at lyrical moments. Otherwise, nature is transformed—because of its lack of meaning—into a kind of picturesque lumber-room of sensuous symbols for literature; it seems to be fixed in its bewitched mobility and can only be reduced to a meaningfully animated calm by the magic word of lyricism. Such moments are constitutive and form-determining only for lyric poetry; only in lyric poetry do these direct, sudden flashes of the substance become like lost original manuscripts suddenly made legible; only in lyric poetry is the subject, the vehicle of such experiences, transformed into the sole carrier of meaning, the only true reality. Drama is played out in a sphere that lies beyond such reality, and in the epic forms the subjective experience remains inside the subject: it becomes mood. And nature, bereft of its 'senseless' autonomous life as well of its meaningful symbolism, becomes a background, a piece of scenery, an accompanying voice; it has lost its independence and is only a sensually perceptible projection of the essential—of interiority.

The second nature, the nature of man-made structures, has

no lyrical substantiality; its forms are too rigid to adapt themselves to the symbol-creating moment; the content of the second nature, precipitated by its own laws, is too definite to be able to rid itself of those elements which, in lyric poetry, are bound to become essayistic; furthermore, these elements are so much at the mercy of laws, are so absolutely devoid of any sensuous valency of existence independent from laws, that without them they can only disintegrate into nothingness. This second nature is not dumb, sensuous and yet senseless like the first: it is a complex of senses—meanings—which has become rigid and strange, and which no longer awakens interiority; it is a charnel-house of long-dead interiorities; this second nature could only be brought to life—if this were possible—by the metaphysical act of reawakening the souls which, in an early or ideal existence, created or preserved it; it can never be animated by another interiority. It is too akin to the soul's aspirations to be treated by the soul as mere raw material for moods, yet too alien to those aspirations ever to become their appropriate and adequate expression. Estrangement from nature (the first nature), the modern sentimental attitude to nature, is only a projection of man's experience of his self-made environment as a prison instead of as a parental home.

When the structures made by man for man are really adequate to man, they are his necessary and native home; and he does not know the nostalgia that posits and experiences nature as the object of its own seeking and finding. The first nature, nature as a set of laws for pure cognition, nature as the bringer of comfort to pure feeling, is nothing other than the historico-philosophical objectivation of man's alienation from his own constructs.

When the soul-content of these constructs can no longer directly become soul, when the constructs no longer appear as the agglomerate and concentrate of interiorities which can at any moment be transformed back into a soul, then they

must, in order to subsist, achieve a power which dominates men blindly, without exception or choice. And so men call 'law' the recognition of the power that holds them in thrall, and they conceptualise as 'law' their despair at its omnipotence and universality: conceptualise it into a sublime and exalting logic, a necessity that is eternal, immutable and beyond the reach of man.

The nature of laws and the nature of moods stem from the same *locus* in the soul: they presuppose the impossibility of an attained and meaningful substance, the impossibility of finding a constitutive object adequate to the constitutive subject. In its experience of nature, the subject, which alone is real, dissolves the whole outside world in mood, and itself becomes mood by virtue of the inexorable identity of essence between the contemplative subject and its object. The desire to know a world cleansed of all wanting and all willing transforms the subject into an a-subjective, constructive and constructing embodiment of cognitive functions. This is bound to be so, for the subject is constitutive only when it acts from within—i.e. only the ethical subject is constitutive. It can only avoid falling prey to laws and moods if the arena of its actions, the normative object of its actions, is made of the stuff of pure ethics: if right and custom are identical with morality: if no more of the soul has to be put into the man-made structures to make them serve as man's proper sphere of action than can be released, by action, from those structures. Under such conditions the soul has no need to recognise any laws, for the soul itself is the law of man and man will behold the same face of the same soul upon every substance against which he may have to prove himself. Under such conditions, it would seem petty and futile to try to overcome the strangeness of the non-human world by the mood-arousing power of the subject: the world of man that matters is the one where the soul, as man, god or demon, is at home: then the soul finds everything it needs, it does not have to create or

animate anything out of its own self, for its existence is filled to overbrimming with the finding, gathering and moulding of all that is given as cognate to the soul.

The epic individual, the hero of the novel, is the product of estrangement from the outside world. When the world is internally homogeneous, men do not differ qualitatively from one another; there are of course heroes and villains, pious men and criminals, but even the greatest hero is only a head taller than the mass of his fellows, and the wise man's dignified words are heard even by the most foolish. The autonomous life of interiority is possible and necessary only when the distinctions between men have made an unbridgeable chasm; when the gods are silent and neither sacrifices nor the ecstatic gift of tongues can solve their riddle; when the world of deeds separates itself from men and, because of this independence, becomes hollow and incapable of absorbing the true meaning of deeds in itself, incapable of becoming a symbol through deeds and dissolving them in turn into symbols; when interiority and adventure are forever divorced from one another.

The epic hero is, strictly speaking, never an individual. It is traditionally thought that one of the essential characteristics of the epic is the fact that its theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community. And rightly so, for the completeness, the roundness of the value system which determines the epic cosmos creates a whole which is too organic for any part of it to become so enclosed within itself, so dependent upon itself, as to find itself as an interiority—i.e. to become a personality. The omnipotence of ethics, which posits every soul as autonomous and incomparable, is still unknown in such a world. When life *quae* life finds an immanent meaning in itself, the categories of the organic determine everything: an individual structure and physiognomy is simply the product of a balance between the part and the whole, mutually determining one another; it is never

the product of polemical self-contemplation by the lost and lonely personality. The significance which an event can have in a world that is rounded in this way is therefore always a quantitative one; the series of adventures in which the event expresses itself has weight in so far as it is significant to a great organic life complex—a nation or a family.

Epic heroes have to be kings for different reasons from the heroes of tragedy (although these reasons are also formal). In tragedy the hero must be a king simply because of the need to sweep all the petty causalities of life from the ontological path of destiny—because the socially dominant figure is the only one whose conflicts, while retaining the sensuous illusion of a symbolic existence, grow solely out of the tragic problem; because only such a figure can be surrounded, even as to the forms of its external appearance, with the required atmosphere of significant isolation.

What is a symbol in tragedy becomes a reality in the epic: the weight of the bonds linking an individual destiny to a totality. World destiny, which in tragedy is merely the number of noughts that have to be added to 1 to transform it into a million, is what actually gives the events of the epic their content; the epic hero, as bearer of his destiny, is not lonely, for this destiny connects him by indissoluble threads to the community whose fate is crystallised in his own.

As for the community, it is an organic—and therefore intrinsically meaningful—concrete totality; that is why the substance of adventure in an epic is always articulated, never strictly closed; this substance is an organism of infinite interior richness, and in this is identical or similar to the substance of other adventure.

The way Homer's epics begin in the middle and do not finish at the end is a reflexion of the truly epic mentality's total indifference to any form of architectural construction, and the introduction of extraneous themes—such as that of

Dietrich von Born in the Song of the Nibelungs—can never disturb this balance, for everything in the epic has a life of its own and derives its completeness from its own inner significance. The extraneous can calmly hold out its hand to the central; mere contact between concrete things creates concrete relationships, and the extraneous, because of its perspectival distance and its not yet realised richness, does not endanger the unity of the whole and yet has obvious organic existence.

Dante is the only great example in which we see the architectural clearly conquering the organic, and therefore he represents a historico-philosophical transition from the pure epic to the novel. In Dante there is still the perfect immanent distancelessness and completeness of the true epic, but his figures are already individuals, consciously and energetically placing themselves in opposition to a reality that is becoming closed to them, individuals who, through this opposition, become real personalities. The constituent principle of Dante's totality is a highly systematic one, abolishing the epic independence of the organic part-unities and transforming them into hierarchically ordered, autonomous parts. Such individuality, it is true, is found more in the secondary figures than in the hero. The tendency of each part-unity to retain its autonomous lyrical life (a category unknown and unknowable in the old epic) increases towards the periphery as the distance from the centre becomes greater.

The combination of the presuppositions of the epic and the novel and their synthesis to an *epopoeia* is based on the dual structure of Dante's world: the break between life and meaning is surpassed and cancelled by the coincidence of life and meaning in a present, actually experienced transcendence. To the postulate-free organic nature of the older epics, Dante opposes a hierarchy of fulfilled postulates. Dante—and only Dante—did not have to endow his hero with visible social superiority or with a heroic destiny that co-

determined the destiny of the community—because his hero's lived experience was the symbolic unity of human destiny in general.

4

The Inner Form of the Novel

THE TOTALITY of Dante's world is the totality of a visual system of concepts. It is because of this sensual 'thingness', this substantiality both of the concepts themselves and of their hierarchical order within the system, that completeness and totality can become constitutive structural categories rather than regulative ones: because of it, the progression through the totality is a voyage which, although full of suspense, is a well-conducted and safe one; and, because of it, it was possible for an epic to be created at a time when the historico-philosophical situation was already beginning to demand the novel. In a novel, totality can be systematised only in abstract terms, which is why any system that could be established in the novel—a system being, after the final disappearance of the organic, the only possible form of a rounded totality—had to be one of abstract concepts and therefore not directly suitable for aesthetic form-giving. Such abstract systematisation is, it is true, the ultimate basis of the entire structure, but in the created reality of the novel all that becomes visible is the distance separating the systematisation from concrete life: a systematisation which emphasises the conventionality of the objective world and the interiority of the subjective one. Thus the elements of the novel are, in the Hegelian sense, entirely abstract; abstract, the nostalgia of the characters for utopian perfection, a nostalgia that feels itself and its desires to be the only true reality; abstract, the existence of social structures based only upon their factual presence and their sheer ability to continue; abstract, finally, the form-giving intention which, instead of surmounting the distance between these two abstract groups of elements,

allows it to subsist, which does not even attempt to surmount it but renders it sensuous as the lived experience of the novel's characters, uses it as a means of connecting the two groups and so turns it into an instrument of composition.

We have already recognised the dangers that arise from the fundamentally abstract nature of the novel: the risk of overlapping into lyricism or drama, the risk of narrowing reality so that the work becomes an idyll, the risk of sinking to the level of mere entertainment literature. These dangers can be resisted only by positing the fragile and incomplete nature of the world as ultimate reality: by recognising, consciously and consistently, everything that points outside and beyond the confines of the world.

Every art form is defined by the metaphysical dissonance of life which it accepts and organises as the basis of a totality complete in itself; the mood of the resulting world, and the atmosphere in which the persons and events thus created have their being, are determined by the danger which arises from this incompletely resolved dissonance and which therefore threatens the form. The dissonance special to the novel, the refusal of the immanence of being to enter into empirical life, produces a problem of form whose formal nature is much less obvious than in other kinds of art, and which, because it looks like a problem of content, needs to be approached by both ethical and aesthetic arguments, even more than do problems which are obviously purely formal.

The novel is the art-form of virile maturity, in contrast to the normative childlikeness of the epic (the drama form, being in the margin of life, is outside the ages of man even if these are conceived as *a priori* categories or normative stages). The novel is the art-form of virile maturity: this means that the completeness of the novel's world, if seen objectively, is an imperfection, and if subjectively experienced, it amounts to resignation. The danger by which the novel is determined is twofold: either the fragility of the world

may manifest itself so crudely that it will cancel out the immanence of meaning which the form demands, or else the longing for the dissonance to be resolved, affirmed and absorbed into the work may be so great that it will lead to a premature closing of the circle of the novel's world, causing the form to disintegrate into disparate, heterogeneous parts. The fragility of the world may be superficially disguised but it cannot be abolished; consequently this fragility will appear in the novel as unprocessed raw material, whose weak cohesion will have been destroyed. In either case the structure remains abstract: the abstract basis of the novel assumes form as a result of the abstraction seeing through itself; the immanence of meaning required by the form is attained precisely when the author goes all the way, ruthlessly, towards exposing its absence.

Art always says 'And yet!' to life. The creation of forms is the most profound confirmation of the existence of a dissonance. But in all other genres—even, for reasons we can now understand, in the epic—this affirmation of a dissonance precedes the act of form-giving, whereas in the novel it is the form itself. That is why the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in the creative process of the novel is different from what it is in other kinds of literature. There, ethic is a purely formal pre-condition which, by its depth, allows the form-determined essence to be attained and, by its breadth, renders possible a totality which is likewise determined by the form and which, by its all-embracing nature, establishes a balance between the constituent elements—a balance for which 'justice' is only a term in the language of pure ethics. In the novel, on the other hand, ethic—the ethical intention—is visible in the creation of every detail and hence is, in its most concrete content, an effective structural element of the work itself.

Thus, the novel, in contrast to others genres whose existence resides within the finished form, appears as something in

process of becoming. That is why, from the artistic viewpoint, the novel is the most hazardous genre, and why it has been described as only half an art by many who equate *having a problematic* with *being problematic*. The description may seem convincing because the novel—unlike other genres—has a caricatural twin almost indistinguishable from itself in all inessential formal characteristics: the entertainment novel, which has all the outward features of the novel but which, in essence, is bound to nothing and based on nothing, i.e. is entirely meaningless. Other genres, where being is treated as already attained, cannot have such a caricatural twin because the extra-artistic element of its creation can never be disguised even for a moment; whereas with the novel, because of the regulative, hidden nature of the effective binding and forming ideas, because of the apparent resemblance of empty animation to a process whose ultimate content cannot be rationalised, superficial likeness can almost lead to the caricature being mistaken for the real thing. But a closer look will always, in any concrete case, reveal the caricature for what it is.

Other arguments used to deny the genuinely artistic nature of the novel likewise enjoy only a semblance of truth—not only because the normative incompleteness, the problematic nature of the novel is a true-born form in the historico-philosophical sense and proves its legitimacy by attaining its substratum, the true condition of the contemporary spirit, but also because its nature as a process excludes completeness only so far as content is concerned. As form, the novel establishes a fluctuating yet firm balance between becoming and being; as the idea of becoming, it becomes a state. Thus the novel, by transforming itself into a normative being of becoming, surmounts itself. 'The voyage is completed: the way begins.'

The 'half-art' of the novel, therefore, prescribes still stricter, still more inviolable artistic laws for itself than do the

'closed' art form, and these laws are the more binding, the more indefinable and unformulable they are in their very essence: they are laws of tact. Tact and taste, in themselves subordinate categories which belong wholly to the sphere of mere life and are irrelevant to an essential ethical world, here acquire great constitutive significance: only through them is subjectivity, at the beginning of the novel's totality and at its end, capable of maintaining itself in equilibrium, of positing itself as epically normative objectivity and thus of surmounting abstraction, the inherent danger of the novel form.

This danger can also be formulated in another way: where ethic has to carry the structure of a form as a matter of content and not merely as a formal *a priori*, and where a coincidence, or at least a marked convergence between ethic as an interior factor of life and its substratum of action in the social structures, is not given as it was in the epic ages, there is a danger that, instead of an existent totality, only a subjective aspect of that totality will be given form, obscuring or even destroying the creative intention of acceptance and objectivity which the great epic demands. This danger cannot be circumvented but can only be overcome from within. For such subjectivity is not eliminated if it remains unexpressed or is transformed into a will for objectivity: such a silence, such a will, is even more subjective than the overt manifestation of a clearly conscious subjectivity, and therefore, in the Hegelian sense, even more abstract.

The self-recognition and, with it, self-abolition of subjectivity was called irony by the first theoreticians of the novel, the aesthetic philosophers of early Romanticism. As a formal constituent of the novel form this signifies an interior diversion of the normatively creative subject into a subjectivity as interiority, which opposes power complexes that are alien to it and which strives to imprint the contents of its longing upon the alien world, and a subjectivity which sees through the abstract and, therefore, limited nature of the

mutually alien worlds of subject and object, understand these worlds by seeing their limitations as necessary conditions of their existence and, by thus seeing through them, allows the duality of the world to subsist. At the same time the creative subjectivity glimpses a unified world in the mutual relativity of elements essentially alien to one another, and gives form to this world. Yet this glimpsed unified world is nevertheless purely formal; the antagonistic nature of the inner and outer worlds is not abolished but only recognised as necessary; the subject which recognises it as such is just as empirical—just as much part of the outside world, confined in its own interiority—as the characters which have become its objects. Such irony is free from that cold and abstract superiority which narrows down the objective form to a subjective one and reduces the totality to a mere aspect of itself; this is the case in satire. In the novel the subject, as observer and creator, is compelled by irony to apply its recognition of the world to itself and to treat itself, like its own creatures, as a free object of free irony: it must transform itself into a purely receptive subject, as is normatively required for great epic literature.

The irony of the novel is the self-correction of the world's fragility: inadequate relations can transform themselves into a fanciful yet well-ordered round of misunderstandings and cross-purposes, within which everything is seen as many-sided, within which things appear as isolated and yet connected, as full of value and yet totally devoid of it, as abstract fragments and as concrete autonomous life, as flowering and as decaying, as the infliction of suffering and as suffering itself.

Thus a new perspective of life is reached on an entirely new basis—that of the indissoluble connection between the relative independence of the parts and their attachment to the whole. But the parts, despite this attachment, can never lose their inexorable, abstract self-dependence: and their

relationship to the totality, although it approximates as closely as possible to an organic one, is nevertheless not a true-born organic relationship but a conceptual one which is abolished again and again.

The consequence of this, from the compositional point of view, is that, although the characters and their actions possess the infinity of authentic epic literature, their structure is essentially different from that of the epic. The structural difference in which this fundamentally conceptual pseudo-organic nature of the material of the novel finds expression is the difference between something that is homogeneously organic and stable and something that is heterogeneously contingent and discrete. Because of this contingent nature, the relatively independent parts are more independent, more self-contained than those of the epic and must therefore, if they are not to destroy the whole, be inserted into it by means which transcend their mere presence. In contrast to the epic, they must have a strict compositional and architectural significance, whether this takes the form of contrasting lights thrown upon the central problem (as with the *novellas* included in *Don Quixote*) or of the introduction, by way of a prelude, of hidden motifs which are to be decisive at the end (as with the *Confessions of a Beautiful Soul*). The existence of the relatively independent parts can never be justified by their mere presence.

The ability of parts which are only compositionally united to have discrete autonomous life is, of course, significant only as a symptom, in that it renders the structure of the novel's totality clearly visible. It is by no means necessary in itself for every exemplary novel to exhibit this extreme consequence of the novel's structure. Any attempt to surmount the problematic of the novel by insisting exclusively on this specific aspect must, in fact, lead to artificiality and to excessive obviousness of composition, as with the Romantics or with the first novel of Paul Ernst.

This aspect is only a symptom of contingency; it merely sheds light upon a state of affairs which is necessarily present at all times and everywhere, but which is covered over, by skilfully ironic compositional tact, by a semblance of organic quality which is revealed again and again as illusory.

The outward form of the novel is essentially biographical. The fluctuation between a conceptual system which can never completely capture life and a life complex which can never attain completeness because completeness is immanently utopian, can be objectivised only in that organic quality which is the aim of biography. In a world situation where the organic was the all-dominating category of existence, to make the individuality of a living being, with all its limitations, the starting point of stylisation and the centre of form-giving would have seemed foolish—a gratuitous violence inflicted upon the organic. In an age of constitutive systems, the exemplary significance of an individual life could never be anything more than an example: to represent it as the vehicle of values rather than as their substratum, assuming even that such a project might have been conceived, would have been an act of the most ridiculous arrogance. In the biographical form, the separate being—the individual—has a specific weight which would have been too high for the predominance of life, too low for the absolute predominance of the system; his degree of isolation would have been too great for the former, meaningless for the latter; his relationship to the ideal of which he is the carrier and the agent would have been overemphatic for the former, insufficiently subordinated for the latter.

In the biographical form, the unfulfillable, sentimental striving both for the immediate unity of life and for a completely rounded architecture of the system is balanced and brought to rest: it is transformed into being. The central character of a biography is significant only by his relationship to a world of ideals that stands above him: but this

world, in turn, is realised only through its existence within that individual and his lived experience. Thus in the biographical form the balance of both spheres which are unrealised and unrealisable in isolation produces a new and autonomous life that is, however paradoxically, complete in itself and immanently meaningful: the life of the problematic individual.

The contingent world and the problematic individual are realities which mutually determine one another. If the individual is unproblematic, then his aims are given to him with immediate obviousness, and the realisation of the world constructed by these given aims may involve hindrances and difficulties but never any serious threat to his interior life. Such a threat arises only when the outside world is no longer adapted to the individual's ideas and the ideas become subjective facts—*ideals*—in his soul. The positing of ideas as unrealisable and, in the empirical sense, as unreal, i.e. their transformation into ideals, destroys the immediate problem-free organic nature of the individual. Individuality then becomes an aim unto itself because it finds within itself everything that is essential to it and that make its life autonomous —even if what it finds can never be a firm possession or the basis of its life, but is an object of search. The surrounding world of the individual, however, is the substratum and material of the same categorical forms upon which his interior world is based, and differs from them only in its content; therefore the unbridgeable chasm between the reality that is and the ideal that should be must represent the essence of the outside world, the difference of their materials being only a structural one. This difference manifests itself most clearly in the pure negativity of the ideal. In the subjective world of the soul the ideal is as much at home as the soul's other realities, But, at the level of the soul, the ideal by entering lived experience can play, even in its content, a directly positive role; whereas in the outside world the gap between

reality and the ideal becomes apparent only by the absence of the ideal, in the immanent self-criticism of mere reality caused by that absence; in the self-revelation of the nothingness of mere reality without an immanent ideal.

This self-destruction of reality, which, as given, is of an entirely intellectual dialectical nature and is not immediately evident in a poetic and sensuous way, appears in two different forms. First, as disharmony between the interiority of the individual and the substratum of his actions; the more genuine is the interiority and the nearer its sources are to the ideas of life which, in the soul, have turned into ideals, the more clearly this disharmony will appear. Second, as the inability of the outside world, which is a stranger to ideals and an enemy of interiority, to achieve real completeness; an inability to find either the form of totality for itself as a whole, or any form of coherence for its own relationship to its elements and their relationship to one another: in other words, the outside world cannot be represented. Both the parts and the whole of such an outside world defy any forms of directly sensuous representation. They acquire life only when they can be related either to the life-experiencing interiority of the individual lost in their labyrinth, or to the observing and creative eye of the artist's subjectivity: when they become objects of mood or reflexion.

This is the formal reason and the literary justification for the Romantics' demand that the novel, combining all genres within itself, should include pure lyric poetry and pure thought in its structure. The discrete nature of the outside world demands, for the sake of epic significance and sensuous valency, the inclusion of elements some of which are essentially alien to epic literature while others are alien to imaginative literature in general. The inclusion of these elements is not merely a question of lyrical atmosphere and intellectual significance being added to otherwise prosaic, isolated and inessential events. Only in these elements can the ultimate

basis of the whole, the basis which holds the entire work together, become visible: the system of regulative ideas which constitutes the totality. For the discrete structure of the outside world is due, in the last analysis, to the fact that any system of ideas has only regulative power vis-à-vis reality. The incapacity of ideas to penetrate reality makes reality heterogeneous and discrete. And this incapacity creates a still more profound need for the elements of reality to have some definite relationship to a system of ideas than was the case in Dante's world. There, life and meaning were conferred upon each event by allocating to each its place in the world's architecture, just as directly as, in Homer's organic world, life and meaning were present with perfect immanence in every manifestation of life.

The inner form of the novel has been understood as the process of the problematic individual's journeying towards himself, the road from dull captivity within a merely present reality—a reality that is heterogeneous in itself and meaningless to the individual—towards clear self-recognition. After such self-recognition has been attained, the ideal thus formed irradiates the individual's life as its immanent meaning; but the conflict between what is and what should be has not been abolished and cannot be abolished in the sphere wherein these events take place—the life sphere of the novel; only a maximum conciliation—the profound and intensive irradiation of a man by his life's meaning—is attainable. The immanence of meaning which the form of the novel requires lies in the hero's finding out through experience that a mere glimpse of meaning is the highest that life has to offer, and that this glimpse is the only thing worth the commitment of an entire life, the only thing by which the struggle will have been justified. The process of finding out extends over a lifetime, and its direction and scope are given with its normative content, the way towards a man's recognition of himself. The inner shape of the process and the most adequate

means of shaping it—the biographical form—reveal the great difference between the discrete, unlimited nature of the material of the novel and the continuum-like infinity of the material of the epic. This lack of limits in the novel has a 'bad' infinity about it: therefore it needs certain imposed limits in order to become form; whereas the infinity of purely epic matter is an inner, organic one, it is itself a carrier of value, it puts emphasis on value, it sets its own limits for itself and from within itself, and the outward infinity of its range is almost immaterial to it—only a consequence and, at most, a symptom.

The novel overcomes its 'bad' infinity by recourse to the biographical form. On the one hand, the scope of the world is limited by the scope of the hero's possible experiences and its mass is organised by the orientation of his development towards finding the meaning of life in self-recognition; on the other hand, the discretely heterogeneous mass of isolated persons, non-sensuous structures and meaningless events receives a unified articulation by the relating of each separate element to the central character and the problem symbolised by the story of his life.

The beginning and the end of the world of a novel, which are determined by the beginning and end of the process which supplies the content of the novel, thus become significant landmarks along a clearly mapped road. The novel in itself and for itself is by no means bound to the natural beginning and end of life—to birth and death; yet by the points at which it begins and ends, it indicates the only essential segment of life, that segment which is determined by the central problem, and it touches upon whatever lies before or after that segment only in perspective and only as it relates to that problem; it tends to unfold its full epic totality only within that span of life which is essential to it.

When the beginning and the end of this segment of life do not coincide with those of a human life, this merely shows

that the biographical form is oriented towards ideas: the development of a man is still the thread upon which the whole world of the novel is strung and along which it unrolls, but now this development acquires significance only because it is typical of that system of ideas and experienced ideals which regulatively determines the inner and outer world of the novel.

Wilhelm Meister's existence in literature stretches from the point at which his crisis in face of the given circumstances of his life becomes acute to the point at which he finds the profession which is appropriate to his essence; but the underlying principle of this biographical structure is the same as in Pontoppidan's *Hans im Glück*, which begins with the hero's first significant childhood experience and ends with his death. In either case the stylisation differs radically from that of the epic. In the epic, the central figure and its significant adventures are a mass organised in itself and for itself, so that the beginning and the end mean something quite different there, something essentially less important: they are moments of great intensity, homogeneous with other points which are the high points of the whole; they never signify anything more than the commencement or the resolution of great tensions.

Once more Dante's position is a special one; in Dante, principles of structuration which tend towards the novel are re-transformed back into the epic. The beginning and the end in Dante represent the decisive points of essential life, and everything that can acquire significance by having meaning conferred upon it takes place between those points; before the beginning there lay unredeemable chaos, after the end lies the no longer threatened certainty of redemption. But what is contained between the beginning and the end escapes the biographical categories of the process: it is the *eternally existent becoming* of ecstasy; whatever the novel might have taken hold of and structured is, in

Dante, condemned to absolute inessentiality by the paramount significance of this experience.

The novel comprises the essence of its totality between the beginning and the end, and thereby raises an individual to the infinite heights of one who must create an entire world through his experience and who must maintain that world in equilibrium—heights which no epic individual, not even Dante's, could reach, because the epic individual owed his significance to the grace accorded him, not to his pure individuality. But just because the novel can only comprise the individual in this way, he becomes a mere instrument, and his central position in the work means only that he is particularly well suited to reveal a certain problematic of life.

5

The Historico-philosophical Conditioning of the Novel and its Significance

THE COMPOSITION of the novel is the paradoxical fusion of heterogeneous and discrete components into an organic whole which is then abolished over and over again. The relationships which create cohesion between the abstract components are abstractly pure and formal, and the ultimate unifying principle therefore has to be the ethic of the creative subjectivity, an ethic which the content reveals. But because this ethic must surmount itself so that the author's normative objectivity may be realised, and because it cannot, when all is said and done, completely penetrate the objects of form-giving, and therefore cannot completely rid itself of its subjectivity and so appear as the immanent meaning of the objective world—because of this, it needs a new ethical self-correction, again determined by the work's content, in order to achieve the 'tact' which will create a proper balance. This interaction of two ethical complexes, their duality as to form and their unity in being given form, is the content of irony, which is the normative mentality of the novel. The novel is condemned to great complexity by the structure of its given nature. What happens to an idea in the world of reality need not become the object of dialectical reflexion in every kind of literary creation in which an idea is given form as reality. The relationship between idea and reality can be dealt with by means of purely sensuous form-giving, and then no empty space or distance is left between the two which would have to be filled with the author's consciousness and wisdom. Wisdom can be expressed through the act of form-giving: it can conceal itself behind the forms and does not necessarily have to surmount itself, as irony, in the work.

For the creative individual's reflexion, the novelist's ethic vis-à-vis the content, is a double one. His reflexion consists of giving form to what happens to the idea in real life, of describing the actual nature of this process and of evaluating and considering its reality. This reflexion, however, in turn becomes an object for reflexion; it is itself only an ideal, only subjective and postulative; it, too, has a certain destiny in a reality which is alien to it; and this destiny, now purely reflexive and contained within the narrator himself, must also be given form.

The need for reflexion is the deepest melancholy of every great and genuine novel. Through it, the writer's naïvety suffers extreme violence and is changed into its opposite. (This is only another way of saying that pure reflexion is profoundly inartistic.) And the hard-won equalisation, the unstable balance of mutually surmounting reflexions—the second naïvety, which is the novelist's objectivity—is only a formal substitute for the first: it makes form-giving possible and it rounds off the form, but the very manner in which it does so points eloquently at the sacrifice that has had to be made, at the paradise forever lost, sought and never found. This vain search and then the resignation with which it is abandoned make the circle that completes the form.

The novel is the form of mature virility: its author has lost the poet's radiant youthful faith 'that destiny and soul are twin names for a single concept' (Novalis); and the deeper and more painful his need to set this most essential creed of all literature as a demand against life, the more deeply and painfully he must learn to understand that it is only a demand and not an effective reality. This insight, this irony, is directed both at his heroes, who, in their poetically necessary youthfulness, are destroyed by trying to turn his faith into reality, and against his own wisdom, which has been forced to see the uselessness of the struggle and the final victory of reality. Indeed, the irony is a double one in both directions. It extends

not only to the profound hopelessness of the struggle but also to the still more profound hopelessness of its abandonment —the pitiful failure of the intention to adapt to a world which is a stranger to ideals, to abandon the unreal ideality of the soul for the sake of achieving mastery over reality. And whilst irony depicts reality as victorious, it reveals not only that reality is as nothing in face of its defeated opponent, not only that the victory of reality can never be a final one, that it will always, again and again, be challenged by new rebellions of the idea, but also that reality owes its advantage not so much to its own strength, which is too crude and directionless to maintain the advantage, as to the inner (although necessary) problematic of the soul weighed down by its ideals.

The melancholy of the adult state arises from our dual, conflicting experience that, on the one hand, our absolute, youthful confidence in an inner voice has diminished or died, and, on the other hand, that the outside world to which we now devote ourselves in our desire to learn its ways and dominate it will never speak to us in a voice that will clearly tell us our way and determine our goal. The heroes of youth are guided by the gods: whether what awaits them at the end of the road are the embers of annihilation or the joys of success, or both at once, they never walk alone, they are always led. Hence the deep certainty with which they proceed: they may weep and mourn, forsaken by everyone, on a desert island, they may stumble to the very gates of hell in desperate blindness, yet an atmosphere of security always surrounds them; a god always plots the hero's paths and always walks ahead of him.

Fallen gods, and gods whose kingdom is not yet, become demons; their power is effective and alive, but it no longer penetrates the world, or does not yet do so: the world has a coherence of meaning, a causality, which is incomprehensible to the vital, effective force of a god-become-demon;

from the demon's viewpoint, the affairs of such a world appear purely senseless. The demon's power remains effective because it cannot be overthrown; the passing of the old god supports the being of the new; and for this reason the one possesses the same valency of reality (in the sphere of the only essential being, which is metaphysical being) as the other. 'It was not divine,' Goethe wrote about the daemonic, 'for it seemed irrational; it was not human, for it had no reason; not devilish, for it was beneficent; not angelic, for it often allowed room for malice. It resembled the accidental, for it was without consequence; it looked like providence, for it hinted at hidden connections. Everything that restricts us seemed permeable by it; it seemed to arrange at will the necessary elements of our existence; it contracted time, it expanded space. It seemed at ease only in the impossible, and it thrust the possible from itself with contempt.'

But there is an essential aspiration of the soul which is concerned only with the essential, no matter where it comes from or where it leads; there is a nostalgia of the soul when the longing for home is so violent that the soul must, with blind impetuousness, take the first path that seems to lead there; and so powerful is this yearning that it can always pursue its road to the end. For such a soul, every road leads to the essence—leads home—for to this soul its selfhood *is* its home. That is why tragedy knows no real difference between God and demon, whereas, if a demon enters the domain of the epic at all, he has to be a powerless, defeated higher being, a deposed divinity. Tragedy destroys the hierarchy of the higher worlds; in it there is no God and no demon, for the outside world is only the occasion for the soul to find itself, for the hero to become a hero; in itself and for itself, it is neither perfectly nor imperfectly penetrated by meaning; it is a tangle of blind happenings, indifferent to objective existing forms of meaning. But the soul transforms every happening into destiny, and the soul alone does this

for everyone. Only when the tragedy is over, when the dramatic meaning has become transcendent, do gods and demons appear on the stage; it is only in the drama of grace that the *tabula rasa* of the higher world is filled once more with superior and subordinate figures.

The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God. The novel hero's psychology is demonic; the objectivity of the novel is the mature man's knowledge that meaning can never quite penetrate reality, but that, without meaning, reality would disintegrate into the nothingness of inessentiality. These are merely different ways of saying the same thing. They define the productive limits of the possibilities of the novel—limits which are drawn from within—and, at the same time, they define the historico-philosophical moment at which great novels become possible, at which they grow into a symbol of the essential thing that needs to be said. The mental attitude of the novel is virile maturity, and the characteristic structure of its matter is discreteness, the separation between interiority and adventure.

'I go to prove my soul,' says Browning's Paracelsus, and if the marvellous line is out of place it is only because it is spoken by a dramatic hero. The dramatic hero knows no adventure, for, through the force of his attained soul that is hallowed by destiny, the event which should have been his adventure becomes destiny upon the merest contact with that soul, becomes a simple occasion for him to prove himself, a simple excuse for disclosing what was prefigured in the act of his attaining the soul. The dramatic hero knows no interiority, for interiority is the product of the antagonistic duality of soul and world, the agonising distance between psyche and soul, and the tragic hero has attained his soul and therefore does not know any hostile reality: everything exterior is, for him, merely an expression of a predetermined and adequate destiny. Therefore the dramatic hero does not set out to prove himself: he is a hero because

his inner security is given *a priori*, beyond the reach of any test or proof; the destiny-forming event is, for him, only a symbolic objectivation, a profound and dignified ceremony.

(The essential inner stylelessness of modern drama, and of Ibsen in particular, derives from the fact that his major figures have to be tested, that they sense within themselves the distance between themselves and their soul, and, in their desperate desire to pass the tests with which events confront them, try to bridge that distance. The heroes of modern drama experience the preconditions of drama; the drama itself unfolds in the process of stylisation which the dramatist should have completed, as a phenomenological precondition of his work, before beginning to write it.)

The novel tells of the adventure of interiority; the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence. The inner security of the epic world excludes adventure in this essential sense: the heroes of the epic live through a whole variety of adventures, but the fact that they will pass the test, both inwardly and outwardly, is never in doubt; the world-dominating gods must always triumph over the demons ('the divinities of impediment', as Indian mythology calls them). Hence the passivity of the epic hero that Goethe and Schiller insisted on: the adventures that fill and embellish his life are the form taken by the objective and extensive totality of the world; he himself is only the luminous centre around which this unfolded totality revolves, the inwardly most immobile point of the world's rhythmic movement. By contrast, the novel hero's passivity is not a necessity; it characterises the hero's relationship to his soul and to the outside world. The novel hero does not have to be passive: that is why his passivity has a specific psychological and sociological nature and represents a distinct type in the structural possibilities of the novel.