

Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the souls of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another [29] ... Such frontiers necessarily enclose a rounded world ... The circle within which the Greeks led their metaphysical life was smaller than ours: that is why we cannot, as part of our life, place ourselves inside it. Or rather, the circle whose closed nature was the transcendental essence of their life has, for us, been broken; we cannot breathe in a closed world [33] ... The epic had to disappear and yield in its place to an entirely new form: the novel [41] ... 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 [56] ... 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 ... Thus the fundamental form-determining intention of the novel is objectivized as the psychology of the novel's heroes: they are seekers [60] ... The epic hero is, strictly speaking, never an individual [66] ... As for the community, it is an organic—and therefore intrinsically meaningful—concrete totality [67] ... The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God [88] ... 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 [89].

The epic past is absolute and complete. It is as closed as a circle; inside it everything is finished, already over. There is no place in the epic world for any openness, indecision, indeterminacy ... By its very nature the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation [326] ... The present, in all its openness, taken as a starting point and center for artistic and ideological orientation, is an enormous revolution in the creative consciousness ... The novel took shape precisely at the point when epic distance was disintegrating, when both the world and man were assuming a degree of comic familiarity, when the object of artistic representation was being degraded to the level of a contemporary reality that was inconclusive and fluid. From the very beginning the novel was structured not in the distanced image of the absolute past but in the zone of direct contact with inconclusive present-day reality [330].

The idea behind this book ... is that the works just mentioned [= *Moby-Dick*, *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, etc.] ... all belong to a single field that I shall call 'modern epic.' 'Epic,' because of the many structural similarities binding it to a distant past ... But 'modern' epic, because there are quite a few discontinuities [2] ... Between epic and modernity an inversely proportional relation obtains. Where there is the one, the other cannot be—and vice versa. The nearer we come to the present, the more epic loses any meaning [12] ... [This represents] an attempt to turn history back, abolishing the excessive complexity of all modern societies and restoring the unchallenged dominion of an individual [13] ... A modern epic came into being because it was an 'inherited form.' It was the form through which classical antiquity, Christianity and the feudal world had represented the basis of civilizations, their overall meaning, their destiny [36] ... The epic, from Homer on, normally functioned as a veritable encyclopaedia of a society's own culture: a storehouse of its essence and basic knowledge. But modern Europe, which has subdivided and specialized the sphere of knowledge, renders any such ambition anachronistic and almost unreal [37] ... The closed ending ... was the appropriate conclusion for a territorial empire ... But in the case of the [capitalist] world-system, the teleology of this premodern plot is replaced by the perpetual digression of *exploration*: an activity that by no means excludes violence, but that operates in a system with too many variables to obtain definitive results [49] ... Goethe and the others, needing to represent the take-off of the capitalist world-system, are in search of what we might call ... 'world effects': devices that give the reader the impression of being truly in the presence of the world; that make the *text* look

like the world—open, heterogeneous, incomplete ... In the expanding universe of modernity, many things are as yet unclear; and it is necessary to learn to live with the noise: to represent it—and, indeed, to hear it [59].