On integrated civilizations:

Lukács opposes what he takes to be the projection of Romanticism to ancient Greece in the work of Nietzsche,* but then he is assuming that the Greeks were an "integrated civilization", a curious mixture of culture and nature. This too sounds like a Romantic myth, coming from Vico through Hegel (indeed, the idea of reflexivity succeeding to substantiality, the spirit to the harmony of the form, is pure Hegel). But it is an older myth, and Lukács takes it to be factual truth. Nietzsche's view of the Greeks has (at least) the merit of seeing in them a dynamic tension between the constructive forces of civilization and the darker pull of nature. His Greeks are a culture and not
good savages, they are not placidly ignorant of chaos: they are painfully pulling themselves away from it. Both are aesthetic idealizations of Greece and do not have much to do with sociology. Only, Lukacs' aesthetic is already dated.

**On the epic as the genre of absolute immanence:**

This may of course apply to Homeric epic and maybe to medieval epic. But it is more difficult to see that in Virgil, not to speak of the Christian epic of Dante and the Renaissance (Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, Milton). Maybe Lukács would restrict his claim to Homeric epic, at one point (30) he says that Homer is the only epic poet, while Ariosto's epic is "mere lyrical play" (59).** But then he is not speaking about "the epic", only about "the epic of integrated civilizations". We would have to find a new name for the epics of civilizations disintegrated by an abstract concept of patriotism (Virgil) or by Christianity. Still, I like this ideal succession of epic-tragedy-philosophy; it is a great insight, even if is not wholly Lukács's own. It has a Hegelian neatness about it which makes it a little suspect, but I think it would not be completely spoiled by fitting concrete historical data in it, as far as Greece is concerned. And I would have liked to know Lukacs' opinion of the Greek "novels" of the Alexandrine age, and their place in this scheme.

**On form in the novel:**

The idea that the "content" of the novel, the existential search of the problematic individual, is also the basic form-principle of the novel is simply great. I think it is not only illuminating on the
specific problem of the novel; it is also a new conception of literary form, which belongs with the formalists' attempts to see content as form. It is a pity there was no communication between the two conceptions at the time, as Lukács seems to go far beyond the formalist ideas in this particular conception of ideological content as form. I think that the meeting point of formalist theories and this idea of Lukács (and its attendant ones: the plot as a kind of resolution of tensions between two opposed ideological principles, the hero as a challenge to the prevailing ideology, etc.) is to be found in Baxtin's book on Dostoevskij. I think that much of later work on literary form (Lotman's, Weimann's, Kristeva's) owes much to these ideas of Lukács's.

Still, he is leaving out the more "superficial" elements of form; he is talking about the story, but not about the narrator and point of view. Let me say that I believe that this perspective will enable in the long run to develop an entirely new approach to point of view; for instance, Weimann speaks about the difference of point of view between the public point of view of the epic and its "fragmentation" into the protean point of view of the novel in a way that is obviously indebted to Lukács. But Lukács himself simply ignores everything in the novel which is not the story (apart from some remarks on the difference between prose and verse, a difference which cannot have failed to strike his eye). He is ignoring the "surface structure" of form, narrative voice and point of view, a shaping principle and revelation of creative subjectivity which is (let us be moderate) just as important as the marriage of plot and ideological conflict. Rather, this conflict can only be significant when it is conveyed through an adequate use of voice and point of view.

"The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by
On the novel as the form of art of our age:

This is written in the second decade of the twentieth century, and as such would be perfectly acceptable. But then Lukács is not thinking of the kind of novels which would become the form of art of our age; he is obviously disconnected from the avant-garde of his times. Lukács is dreaming of that second "organic civilization" of the early 19th century, when the bourgeoisie was still a progressive class, the hero of a novel written by Hegel. I think Lukács never quite got over this nostalgia, at least as far as his aesthetic theory is concerned.

—oOo—

Notes

* I take Lukács's sarcastic allusion to "[m]ore profound minds, who try to forge an armour of purple steel out of their own streaming blood" (31) to refer to Nietzsche.

** This idea of Lukács that Renaissance epics are either lyric poetry or novels may be an useful overstatement in a book on the novel, but it simply would not do in a book on Renaissance epic.

(Notes for a course on "Marxist Literary Theory", Brown University, Fall 1988).