Surely, Socrates must have been up to some characteristic ironic trick of his when late one night he told his young audience that tragedy and comedy are essentially akin. Perhaps he wanted to provoke his disciples to challenge him so that he could strike back with some telling observations about the aesthetics in general and the dramatic genres in particular. But, alas, his tired and possibly inebriated audience just nodded in consent and thus for the inspired ideas the womb became their tomb as well. Ah, only if a Hogarth were there to catch the grotesque spectacle of the drowsily yawning people sprawling in various postures even as the mentor's one eye still twinkled with the glow of a fresh and brilliant insight while the other started drooping at the want of response!

Of course, the world is poorer for that Hogarthian masterpiece but poorer still for the unspelt dialectical distinction in non-distinction that might have possibly made Plato more charitable to poetry, Aristotle less obsessed with pity and fear, and later Western aesthetics more Socratic than Aristotelian. But that was not to be—one of those big ifs and buts of history! However, what should one call it—that one moment of epiphany which was immaculately conceived and then aborted in the process of delivery itself? Tragic? Comic? Or Ironic? Maybe, that was precisely Socrates' point—not that the tragic and the comic mean the same thing but that the same thing might be at once tragic and comic!
Be that what it may, even twenty-five centuries after Socrates, it is not yet possible to spell out the difference because every effort leads inevitably to that same old question, which is more easily raised than answered: what is a tragedy? After all, who can define for good a genre that has been continually enlarging its scope so as to cover once the Greek paganism, the Roman stoicism, the Medieval didacticism, the Renaissance individualism, the neo-classical poetic justice, the romantic neo-Platonism, and what not. Even if one could perform the miracle of forging a definition that may be comprehensive and eclectic enough to accommodate all the tragedies to date, certainly it would be rendered inadequate, if not exactly redundant, by the future works. And yet, despite this apparent flexibility, the intriguing fact remains that in literary criticism, the tragedy and the tragic have had such specific meanings that some of the works labelled tragedies by their authors have been denied that title by posterity even as some others that have come to establish themselves as great tragedies were never conceived as such! In such a complex

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The controversy regarding the essence of tragedy has been raging since Plato’s time, and perhaps the last word will never be said. Daniel Peter Garcia in “Theories of Catharsis in Modern Literary Criticism: the Influences of Psycho-Analysis, Anthropology and the New Criticism” (Unpublished thesis for Ph.D., University of Oregon, 1962), shows how in our own time, numerous attempts have been made to answer the question. And as should have been expected, Dr. Garcia fails to arrive at any definite conclusion. The last chapter of the thesis is entitled “Synthesis”, but in fact it is a summary of the various strands of Kenneth Burke’s views, which, as Garcia admits, are yet to be synthesized. No attempt is made by Garcia also to effect such a synthesis.

**For example, Shakespeare subitled King Lear as “The True Chronicle Historie” and Hamlet as “The Tragical Historie”, while he chose to call Cymbeline as “Tragedy” and Romeo and Juliet as “Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedie.” It is only to be wondered what conclusions Dr. A.C. Bradley might have arrived at regarding the Shakespearean Tragedy if he had gone strictly by the author’s subtitiles.**
situation when one knows what tragedy is and yet cannot define it, and when distinctions have to be made even though no distinction can be absolute, the critics, aesthetes and theoreticians can at best help only marginally. Therefore, perhaps the best thing would be to steer clear of them.

Anyway, whatever different positions people might take with respect to such critical paraphernalia as tragic vision, tragic pattern, tragic hero, tragic conflict, tragic knowledge, etc., none dare deny that all tragedies evoke a uniquely distinct aesthetic response—a mysterious impact which is at once painful and pleasurable. Perhaps that unanimity can be our starting point, too. Probed further it would be seen that the response is not just a blend of pain and pleasure but something deeper—a pleasure born of pain. A still closer analysis might show that a tragedy touches one at every level and leaves the audience emotionally shattered, intellectually benumbed but spiritually exalted. Against this, the comic appeals mainly to the intellect and touches the emotions tangentially without having any spiritual dimension whatsoever.

Indeed, the tragic and the comic differ as responses because not only they have diverse modes of apprehension, but at a deeper level their very realms of experience, too, are different. Of course, these realms are intimately related to each other because, after

*How vague and contradictory these terms are would become clear when we put together the views of some critics about one specific issue—say, what type of age would be ideally suited for tragedy? For Unamuno, tragic sense of life is the perogative of a dying society; for M. Goldmann, it is characteristic of sick and maladjusted section of healthy society, whereas Geoffrey Eberston believes that since a declining culture is too afraid of being hurt, and a precarious minority dare not ask questions for fear of possible answers, only a healthy, confident society can afford to tolerate the subversion of a tragedy.
all, they pertain to the various levels of human existence.

*A mere freak in the big world of nature and continually threatened with extinction, man has been evolving a small, parallel world of his own. The laws and institutions of his own making give him the central position in his own world and thus help him escape the position of utter insignificance in the universe. But, unfortunately, he continues to be a part of the world of nature and, by as hard as he might, he cannot completely break away from it. As a denizen of the macrocosmic universe and the microcosmic world of his own, man's life is beset with existential dichotomy. Man's tragedy lies in the fact that his finite, relative, imperfect and even illusive microcosm can never acquire the infinite, absolute and universal dimensions of the macrocosm, and still he has to persist with his labours to make his little world as glorious as possible because that is the only way to survive in the struggle for existence. The pity, however, is that in his efforts to circumvent nature, man has created such values and institutions as are mutually incompatible and thus the microcosm itself is full of incongruities.

With the passage of time, the layers of microcosmic illusions have grown so thick that ordinarily men remain so preoccupied with microcosmic pursuits that the macrocosmic reality and the precarious relationship between the two worlds remain unperceived. But on some rare occasions of intense experience, the microcosmic values come into clash with the macrocosmic laws and the man is forced to shed off his usual complacency and face the terrible reality. This rude
shock of recognition normally makes one sad, but if it is followed by the realisation that man's glory lies in this dichotomy itself, the painful knowledge gets transmuted into something pleasurable. That is precisely the alchemy that the tragic art effects.

A tragedy starts at the microcosmic level, but when the protagonist, scrupulously following some microcosmic laws, does something that brings him into conflict with the macrocosmic laws, he becomes, a symbol of the existential dichotomy. Since his fortunes epitomize the fate of all mankind, including ours, we identify ourselves with him and share his subsequent glory as well as his present doom. Eventually the weakling man does go down, but in the struggle we are prompted to perceive a will rather to break than to band, to be rather an imperfect creator in his own right than a mere creature of no significance. This wresting of glory from a sure defeat is a sort of spiritual triumph which we share with the protagonist. That is what makes the tragic response so elevating.

In a tragic experience, thus, we learn to regard microcosm as a tribute to the creative ability of man who has converted an initial handicap into a glorious advantage. Having had a glimpse already into the terrible reality of human existence, now when we affirm life, we exercise an authentic choice in full awareness, rather than in ignorance, of the macrocosmic aspect of the human existence. We don't deny the animal in man, but glory in the fact that although an animal he is more than that—almost a god. So to say, the humanistic experience of tragedy enables us to see man's glory as he brings good out of evil, the spiritual out of the sensual, freedom out of
determinism, something divine out of the animal state. Shocked earlier at man's animality, now we approve of it, for in this itself lies the very origin of his divinity. Perhaps there is a glory in being born an angel, but there is a greater glory in transcending one's bestial origin to attain a position very near the angels. In this perception of victory-in-defeat, of order-in-chaos, of meaning-in-absurdity, of spirit-in-flesh, of unity-in-diversity lies the very essence of the paradoxical pleasure-in-pain which we call tragic pleasure.

As can be seen in the above account, the response involves at once the sensuous, the spiritual and the intellectual levels of existence. The microcosmic growth may vary in respect of individuals, but macrocosmically, all men are the same. Thus sharing the macrocosmic traits of the protagonist implies the stirring of our corresponding passions. This state of empathy, once it has been acquired, persists. And, thus, when the hero is driven to the boundary situation, the shock of recognition benumbs and confuses our mind. Similarly, when the hero meets his inevitable defeat, we are emotionally shattered. But as he reaps the spiritual glory from this experience, we, in empathy, share a spiritual exaltation. We thus feel immortality in the finiteness of our existence. In this conflict with the eternal powers, the hero denies them the credit of victory by raising the issue beyond defeat and triumph. For a moment, the temporal and the eternal, the material and the spiritual, the mortal and the immortal come to terms with each other. Without denying or compromising either, tragedy resolves the tension between spirit and flesh by making one look an integral part of the other. Of course, the
existential ambiguities remain, but for the moment we learn to transcend them in the higher vision which shows not only that goodness and evil co-exist, but also that good is born out of the evil itself and that animalism alone is the justification of our microcosm. That is why, at the early stages when terrible questions are raised and when everything appears to be in a jeopardy, we do wish that "tragedy" could be averted, but at the end we have no such desire. There is no longer any sense of grief, indignation, anger or a wish that things should have been otherwise. Without this transcendence, which enables us to rise from the narrow personal self and also above such considerations as determine our normal attitudes, there could be no tragedy.*

*My avoiding quotations of tragic philosophers, critics etc. does not imply either total ignorance of mine with regard to the theory of tragedy, or my having said something altogether fresh. In fact, in what I have said could be heard a series of echoes from the past. That again does not mean a conscious synthesis; only our talking about the same genre naturally suggests parallels here and there as if we were all reworking and extending one another's formulations. For example, there could be a suggestion of Aristotelian Catharsis in the way of explain the process as purgation of animalism and purification of the soul. Likewise, in my concept of existential dichotomy, there is scope for reading Seawall's "secret cause", Henn's Freedom vs Determinism, Ellis-Fermor's balancing of man against the universe. Perhaps there is something Hegelian in the clash between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic values, even as one might label my idea of transcendence as "spiritual regeneration" (Maxwell Anderson) or "spiritual cross-ventilation" (John Mason Brown). The initial shock of recognition and eventual affirmation might possibly recall Raymond William's "bridge between the shores of negation and affirmation," and Glicksberg's "denial of the myth of nothingness." The inter-relationship of the passionall, the intellectual and the spiritual is very much inherent in Nietzsche's Dionysian-Apollonian reconciliation, in Ferguson's rhythm of Purpose, Passion and Perception, in Unamuno's truths felt and truths thought, and in Gassner's "aristocracy of passionate souls." Similarly whether Steiner welcomes tragic suffering as a fire that hallows, or F.L. Lucas welcomes it as the experimental banquet, they are not very far from what I have been saying.
In short, tragedy is the bulwark of human self-respect against the superhuman and inhuman forces of the macrocosm pressing from all sides. By underscoring the wonderful, the heroic and the individual in man, tragedy gives our spirit the courage never to submit or yield. In other words, contrary to the popular belief, tragedy is deeply optimistic and sings praises of the spirit of man. Comedy, on the other hand, feels sorry for him. It offers merely the knowledge of the world, especially its imperfections. It underlines the microcosmic incongruities by highlighting the contrast between the abstract ideal of what man wanted the world to be and the imperfect way that ideal has been attained. Since this incongruity does not involve the macrocosmic, the comic experience does not strike deep enough to touch our emotions. The comic response demands what is usually called anaesthesia of the heart—a sort of detachment which is effected by fixing the focus so much on the intellectual perception that feelings are not allowed to get involved. What is more, since the macrocosm is not involved, there is neither the sense of universality and inevitability, nor does the ideal appear unattainable. The comic hero thus battles not against any basic law, but against what A.N. Kaul calls "some part of cultural superstructure." The comic thus leaves a superficial rather than a profound impact on the mind. What makes us feel amused is the realisation that the microcosm of which man is so proud has so many ludicrous aspects too. The comic is, so to say, a weapon against the forces of disintegration within the human society. Our interest in the comic, therefore, is limited to the men and manners of a society in a particular age.

Thus whereas the tragic involves all levels of experience and is
born of the incompatibility of macrocosmic and microcosmic values, the comic involves only the intellectual level and has for its realm only the affairs of the microcosm. To put it differently, whereas comic is an experience in which we perceive intellectually the microcosmic incongruities, the tragic is an experience of spiritual exaltation in which we transcend the existential dichotomy.

Of course, comic and tragic here signify the total impact of a comedy or a tragedy, and not the momentary responses, in which sense even Bergson, Freud and Kant have treated the comic, as if comedy were a synonym of laughter. That is a mistaken notion; for, as one can easily see, comedy offers a unified experience and is not merely a series of jokes, nor is every character in a comedy the source of the comic.

Contrary to this intellectual skating in the comic, the tragic is akin to a voyage—a voyage of the soul through the storms of macrocosmic passions, amid the treacherous rocks of microcosmic values. No wonder, whereas comic is often confused with laughter, the tragic is not identified with any one particular mood or passion, for it is by no means one-dimensional. What is more, whereas in a comedy, the comic spirit pervades throughout as we view the whole thing with detachment, in a tragedy, our responsive moods vary from stage to stage. Thus what we call tragic pleasure is climactic result of what is perceived and experienced, through empathy, in the course of tragic action. Before we reach that stage when we can affirm life spiritually, we pass through a terribly emotional experience. That is to say, the tragic pleasure is not a simple response but the end-product of a process that involves numerous perceptual responses.
How the microcosmic incongruities not only change with the evolution of an ever-developing human world but also vary from society to society and from time to time; the macrocosmic laws, on the other hand, are eternal, inexorable and universal. Thus it is inherent in the very nature of things that the comedy of a particular age should be related to its peculiarities. In a tragedy, too, the spirit of the age plays a major role because the conflict lies between a certain variable factor in the microcosm and a corresponding, although invariable, feature of the macrocosm. That is why in the Greek, the Elizabethan and the French tragedies, natures of the conflict are different. Nevertheless, in all cases, one of the conflicting factors represents the macrocosm, and the other the microcosm. Indeed, not all

*It may well be argued that if tragedy is universal, why there is not a single tragedy in Sanskrit drama which is so rich otherwise? Tragedy, as we have explained, is an attempt to reinstate man against existential nothingness. But that much-avoided Nothingness of the West is exactly what the Hindu seeks at all costs. For a Hindu, the world is not man-centered; rather, it has been created for God who thus seeks to amuse Himself. In this Lila of His, man must play his role without questioning the why and wherefore of his existence. Again, when sufferings appear disproportionate or unmerited, a Hindu, believing in the Law of Karma and knowing that the gods are always just, never questions God's justice; rather, since being punished now means settling a part of the final account, suffering here is welcome as it would bring one nearer the ultimate end of the Moksha. Equally welcome is death which is to bring that Salvation. In a religion which bestows divinity on all creatures, in which the subject and the object (I and Thou) are phases of the same spirit, in which what the Westerners call the evil is but an element of health, there can never be the problems born of the "existential dichotomy." With such a faith, there cannot be a sense of mystery or questioning of the ways of God. Certainly, there could have been no tragedy in the Hindu literature where gods, instead of being capricious and wanton, are absolutely just, where individual, social and natural desires are incapable of entering into a conflict, where personal flaws are mere errors and not existential evil, and, above all, where man turns from Samsar to seek Nothingness itself!
but only such of the conflicts can be tragic as, on the one hand,
involve macrocosmic forces and, on the other, yield spiritual victory
to man. Since an experience that shows man in conflict with a
microcosmic force, however disastrous, cannot suggest inevitability,
it can never produce the impact of tragedy proper. Nor can an
experience that ends in an inglorious defeat of man be called tragic
in the true sense. To be truly tragic, a play must show man's depths
and heights, his spirituality as well as his animality, his perverseness
and nobility—and these polarities intertwined with each other.
A play that suggests one without the other, or depicts both but without
relating them as inalienably interdependent, may be a great drama, but
it cannot yield tragic pleasure. It is, therefore, desirable that
such a play be treated as distinct from tragedy.

The pity, however, is that often there is a tendency to fix the
labels of tragedy or comedy without any regard, either to the total
impact, or the realm of experience, or even the mode of perception—
moreso in the plays where the dominant mood is ironic, possibly
because such playwriting is of more recent origin. Of course, irony
is by no means a stranger in the realms of drama, for there have always
been verbal irony, tragic irony, comic irony, dramatic irony, etc., but
only as stray elements rather than as the dominant mood of a play.*

*In fact, although we have elements of irony in the poets and
dramatists of the earliest times—even Homer and Sophocles—the
very concept of irony as an independent aesthetic response is something
of more recent origin. No wonder, "Ironologists" today—to coin a
new word, if it doesn't exist already—are finding it difficult to
formulate the quality of such diverse things as the Swiftian masc-
chistic probing of wounds, Fielding's robust sense of life, Sterne's
jesting, Leacock's wand of enchantment, Butler's turning mazes,
Thackeray's iconoclastic devices, Twain's mingling of various planes
of life, Strachey's debunking technique, etc. Even its modes are so
Now, the core of irony is not an incongruity or a dichotomy but a contrast. Since we may see a contrast in the microcosmic incongruity or in the existential dichotomy, irony can belong to both comedy and tragedy. In fact, even in respect of apprehension, it is an ambivalent mode which constantly changes colour and texture, encompassing both farce and tragedy. Partly tragic, partly comic, it may be both simultaneously. In ironic perception, we feel pained and yet there is no tragic exaltation; on the other hand, we feel amused and yet we don't laugh. Irony is, so to say, an emotional discord felt when something is both funny and painful. In the words of A.R. Thompson, "Laughter rises but is withered on the lips. Someone or something we cherish is cruelly made game of; we see the joke but are hurt by it." That is why, "Comedy becomes ironic when there is pain. Irony is mockery in tragedy."*

*Dry Mock, p. 47. This description is paralleled by what was said by Jankelevitch and Anatol France, both of whom are quoted by Thompson on the very opening page of his book. According to the former, "Irony is melancholic gaiety which the discovery of plurality inspires in us." For the latter, irony is "Gaiety of meditation and joy of wisdom." "Gay contempt" and "amused sense of iniquity" are some other expressive phrases used to sum up the spirit of irony.
Essentially an intellectual mode, irony falls short of the purely comic because, instead of accepting the microcosm as real and highlighting its incongruities, it prefers to show such an aspect of microcosm as may give us the impression that the so-called reality is but an appearance, and that either the reality is exactly the opposite of it or its opposite too is equally real. On the other hand, unlike tragedy that would involve us emotively, it points the contradictory and contrasted levels of truth from a viewpoint detached from both. If in a comedy irony prevents callous detachment, in a tragedy it prevents complete identification. The ironic mode is, thus, the way of perceiving intellectually what would overwhelm us in the tragic mode. Indeed, as A.E. Dyson put it, in an ironic state, our instinct is to laugh aloud at something which would normally appal us. We don't laugh, however; it changes into a dry mock.

Representing the line on which the planes of the tragic and the comic intersect, irony affords a vantage point from where we can view man's existence microscopically as well as macroscopically. Through ironic mode, so to say, we can see at a single glance macrocosm and microcosm juxtaposed together. This is what tragedy too represents at the point of the boundary situation, but in the ironic mode we do the viewing intellectually rather than emotively. Thus conceived, ironic is the intellectual perception of the tragic knowledge, but even as the infinite beckons, the reason mocks at it.

*That is what made Kierkegaard observe, "Irony arises from the constant placing of the peculiarities of the finite together with the infinite ethical requirements" (Concluding Unscientific Postscripts, Princeton, 1944, p.448). Koestler too implies this when he suggests that in irony we look at eternity through time and thus experience the trivial in the perspective of the tragic. (Insight and Outlook, cited by Glicksberg in Tragic Vision in The Twentieth Century, p.149).
Everything appears ambiguous, equivocal, paradoxical and uncertain. In fact, viewed from this angle, everything seems important and yet nothing really matters. The ironic observer does realize that the universe consists of two intertwined and yet incompatible systems; but since this realization is intellectual, it does not shock or horrify him. Consequently, he does not come out of it emotionally shattered and intellectually benumbed as he would in the tragic experience. In other words, tragic dichotomy intellectually perceived would produce ironic impact, and thus a play that fails to evoke empathy and stirs instead intellectual perception, may have for its theme existential dichotomy but it will evoke an ironic rather than a tragic response. To call such play a tragedy would obviously mean travestying the spirit of the tragic. Equally questionable should be the label of tragedy for a play that stops short at the "boundary situation", that is, without showing the spiritual transcendence and heroic affirmation which alone could make it tragic and but for which the whole thing sounds ironic.

Thus seen, it is worth-noting that more than the comic it is the ironic which offers itself as the antithesis of the tragic. If the ironic discovers the duality of ambivalence in unity, the tragic seeks to effect—in fact, re-effect—equivalence. Tragedy affirms life spiritually, irony only debunks it intellectually. Again, if the tragic strikes a note of optimism and exalts us with the realization that man, despite his existential helplessness, is a great creator, the ironic leaves us with an uncomfortable feeling that, despite his much-brilled greatness, man is a mere animal. Moreover, the ironic is free from the emotional shock of recognition as it pricks the
bubble of the microcosm rather playfully. The ironic breaks the illusion, the tragic reconstructs it; the ironist is a realist, the tragic artist a humanist. The ironist removes the layers of microcosm one by one as in onion-peeling and smiles at the end as if to say, "Look, how pompous yet absurdly empty is this life of man--an animal with irrational passions." The tragic artist might retort, "An animal; indeed; but a noble animal--a Titan in passions. What a wonderful creation of God is Man!" The ironist would repeat the closing sentence with a chuckle, underscoring "What!" by accompanying it with a most contemptuous laughter.
If a tragedy leaves one emotionally shattered, intellectually benumbed and spiritually exalted, how far do the modern plays qualify for that label? More often than not, a naturalistic play leaves us emotionally unpurged, after an expressionistic drama we feel as if awakened from a nightmare, the epic theatre makes an activist of us, a production in the "form" theatre leaves us psychologically strung, even as an absurdist piece leaves us more amused than enlightened. Indeed, none of the typically modern types of drama has the genuinely tragic power.

Is it, then, the time to join George Steiner in singing a requiem to the genre called tragedy? By no means! Tragedy cannot die because it is rooted in the existential dichotomy which is as inexorable as it is eternal. It is, of course, an entirely different issue whether or not the temper of an age is particularly suited to the tragic expression. After all, during the last twenty-five centuries, tragedy has had only three high moments—in the Periclean Greece, the Elizabethan England, and the seventeenth-century France. It is time, therefore, not for lamentation but for explanation as to why tragedy and the modern temper have proved incompatible. This question acquires a measure of urgency when it is realised that never was tragedy the centre of so much critical concern, theoretical attention and willful pursuit as in the twentieth century!
Of course, numerous attempts have already been made to discover reasons for the fact that, despite so much effort, the moderns have little to boast about tragedies. It has been argued by some that our age satisfies neither MacNeil e Dixon's formula for the birth of tragedy, viz. the spirit of poetry meeting the spirit of enquiry, nor William O'Connor's condition of "restricted individuality." According to Elder Olson, tragedy failed to thrive because it fell in the hands of such poets as were not dramatists, the dramatists being too realistic to be poets. Walter Kaufmann's thesis is that the moderns are too infatuated with success to have sympathy for the failure. Erich Fromm would, on the other hand, shove the blame on to the modern man's suppression of the "awareness of the reality of death." For Lewis Mumford, ours is "an age of plight"—a viewpoint echoed in Charles I. Glicksberg's blaming the nihilism of the age, and Alan S. Downer's stressing the want of faith and courage. Elmer Rice terms the factors responsible anti-intellectualism and spiritual negation; we have taken apart the human mechanism but have yet to discover the formula to reassemble it. And then there was that prophetic proclamation of Joseph Wood Krutch, way back in 1929, declaring that the modern man is groping without a moral staff in a world devoid of sustaining illusions and long-cherished values, and that in an age without faith in man as well as in God, one cannot affirm life tragically.

Now Krutch's view was challenged most vehemently and led to controversies that yielded book-length studies on the one hand by E.E. Stoll and Mark Harris, and on the other by George Steiner, John Gassner and Herbert Muller. In fact, the controversy still continues, but it goes to Krutch's credit that the half-century of playwriting
since his prophecy has only served to endorse his viewpoint. Perhaps one can do nothing better than examine the modern temper once again, now with the benefit of hindsight.

It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that by modernism we don't imply just contemporaneity, nor do we mean modernity which signifies drift from the past. Every age has "modernity" of its own because, serving the evolutionary process, it adds something to, subtracts something from, or reinterprets, whatever it has inherited from the preceding age. In this sense, modernity denotes the transitional change in a tradition, i.e., shift in values. In the early twentieth century, however, this normally transitional mood acquired the permanent temper of a revolution. Shattering, and even reversing, the foundation of the traditional values, this age claimed traditionlessness itself as a new tradition. This meant a schism in our microcosm—dissociation of culture and civilisation.

Of course, consequent upon incessant advancements in civilisation, culture has always been under constant strain to cope with the latest; modernity thus usually implies what Franz Alexander calls "cultural lag" which normally gets adjusted in due course within the basic framework of a current culture. But in apocalyptic times, the revolutionary changes in the pattern of civilisation are too quick

*In fact, Harry Levin has talked of "What Was Modernism?" as if it were a matter of the past (Some Varieties of Literary Experience, ed., Stanley Burnshaw, London, 1963, 307-29). And for all we know even Frank Kermode, who divided modernism in two phases ("The New Apocalypticists," Partisan Review, XXIII, Summer 1966, 339-61), may not extend his second phase to the present times. However, our belief is that, the last eight decades of the twentieth century represent several moods of the modern temper. Hence the use of present tense when talking about modern age in this chapter, or even later.
for the culture to catch up with them; thus the cultural lag becomes a cultural vacuum. That is precisely what happened at the turn of the century. Thanks to the technological, sociological and psychological discoveries, one by one most of the cultural values stood discarded necessitating a cultural reorientation of almost radical nature. Since the birth of the new culture did not materialize for decades, the phoenix hour stretched into a whole age. As a consequence, the modern man's microcosm tended to become one-dimensional—a civilization without culture.

Indeed, the more man progressed on the scale of civilization, the more he degenerated in the realm of culture. It almost gave the impression that there was what Krutch called "Grand Strategy" to dispossess man of the position of significance as a creator. Through its ever-new discoveries, Science made living more comfortable but human life more meaningless. It also unmasked man's life-sustaining illusions, exposed the relativity of human values, and proved that man, far from building, is himself being built. Social engineering reduced the individual to a social unit subject to other-direction and the tyranny of the majority. Even the philosophy of the age, accommodating the scientific spirit, ousted man and his ideals. No wonder, the bases of Marxism, pragmatism, positivism, and evolutionism are scientific, utilitarian, materialistic, practical and realistic attitudes—all of which deny idealism which has hitherto been the very foundation of all humanistic thought. Even the neo-humanistic existentialism gives existence precedence over essence. Modern psychology too has revealed the irrational subconscious and thus made suspect the very rationality of human institutions. Besides, by
displaying the inevitability of psychological drives, it has brought about a cataclysmic change in modern man's attitudes, especially towards sex and crime. Similarly, explorations in the fields of anthropology and social sciences have further indicated the absurdity of considering any human convention as immutable. In short, thanks to the present state of cultural entropy, man has fallen "from A to X". 

The moderns, in their zeal to restore the balance, have been experimenting with diverse substitutes and sometimes even trying the very opposite of the discarded values. That explains at once the changing moods of the modern temper as also the deification of the perverse and the abnormal. That is why, at the zenith of civilisation and the nadir of culture, modern man complains of being alienated, sickly and fearful of future. In fact, he behaves as if he were a neurotic bewildered by the forces around him, knowing not what he really is. The technological progress flatters him into believing that he is an omniscient god, but all else points to his utter insignificance. Evolutionary forces predict his onward progress but the nuclear inventions threaten his extinction. Likewise, modern psychology underlines his irrationality in the age when he claims to have acquired most rational, i.e., scientific, outlook. On the other hand, existentialism renders him free in a godless world to choose for the entire universe at a time when he has lost control over his own microcosm. Both communism and capitalism highlight the importance

*People do talk of mass-culture but that, in fact, is a euphemism for no-culture. Rightly did Harold J. Laski maintain that it is essential for the health of a culture that it should continue as a minority culture. (The Dilemma of Our Times, London, 1952). Indeed, culture-for-the-common-man means having the lowest common denominator as the idol-on-the-altar. Every New Yorker is civilized, but how many of them are cultured? Using H.G. Wells’s expression, they are "cannibals plus education."
of the economic, materialistic values when his parched soul needs the spiritual balm. Greater facilities of speedier communication only make him feel lonely in a crowd. Thus subjected to diverse pulls, modern man has grown a paranoid personality because the sense of superiority that derives from technological progress is matched only by the lack of confidence in himself. Here is a creature rich in intellect but weak in rationality, morally bankrupt but spiritually anguished, emotionally desublimated but incapable of Titanic passions.

All this has resulted in what Ihab Hassan calls a "revolution of sensibility."\(^1\) Emotionally, he is an outsider, an alienated, rootless neurotic suffering from nightmarish anxiety; morally, he is an empirical, other-directed, Organisation Man, a debublimated android; spiritually, he is incapable of faith in anything—not even in his own self; intellectually, he is a Protean, an all-absorbing machine, a sort of computer who can solve problems but is incapable of sturdy thinking. To put it differently, as a civilised man he is an eclectic, secular, cosmopolitan genius, but culturally has has nothing heroic about himself. Having rejected all faiths, categories, laws and traditions of the past, he is decrystallized.\(^1\) Lust without love, defeat without loss, and victory without hope characterize his spiritual state. Reduced to a mathematical symbol, the modern man is at best a "kingly dupe of the cosmos."\(^1\) Having convinced himself of his mean origin and meaner existence now, the modern chooses not to think and would rather lose himself in hurried, even though meaningless, activity. What could cure him of his malaise is a cultural elixir, but that is precisely what he has lost in the explosion of knowledge which has made his mind, in the words of H.G. Wells,
"like a scattered jigpuzzle, bits of knowledge here and bits of
knowledge there, and no common pattern."16

Bewildered at the sight of his own staggering technological
progress on the one hand and spiritual denudation on the other, the
modern man knows not how to relate the two. What is worse, he faces
the unenviable choice between becoming either a robot or an ant.
The only alternative to Nature being Machine, he loses humanity in
either case. The irony of it all is that this abject position of a
mere creature he has reached as a result of his efforts to become a
mighty creator in his own right. Not content with the existential
insignificance, man had revolted against the macrocosm; must the modern
man now accept a similar position of meaningless existence in the
microcosm of his own making? It is, indeed, a tragic dilemma, but
since the affirmation of microcosm here would mean living as a robot,
he cannot affirm it tragically. Tragic, therefore, though the modern
man's experience is, it cannot offer the tragic exaltation. The
plays that depict this situation may naturally compel comparison with
tragedies, but they are not tragedies proper. This dilemma involves
all levels of our being, but not the way of a tragedy: we feel
intellectually roused rather than benumbed, emotionally tense rather
than purged, spiritually depressed rather than exalted.

Indeed, we have in the modern drama tragic melancholy without
its imagination, tragic revolt without its idealism, tragic wisdom
without its experience. Tragedy needs mythology, modernism offers
pathology; tragedy insists on experience, modernism can supply
"problems." Tragedy demands robust yea-saying, modernism prompts
Protean acceptance and eclectic coexistence. Tragedy breaks illusions to induce authentic reaffirmation; modern man knows too well the intrinsic absurdity to accept the tragic consolation. An age that has ousted humanism cannot breed tragedy which must sing hymns in praise of Man. Indeed, as Joseph Wood Krutch pointed out, a tragic writer need not have faith in God but he must believe in man. Tragedy, a mode of hero-worship, cannot thrive in an age that takes pride in breaking idols. Nor can it prosper in an age of spiritual nihilism, for its very essence lies in the denial of the myth of nothingness. Certainly the age that consecrates faceless masses and hallows quantity and materialism cannot be an age congenial for an art that elevates individualism, quality, and idealism. Nor can a pragmatic age that prides itself upon serene rationality allow glorification of non-compromise which is celebrated in tragedy under the name of hybris.

Perhaps a comparison between the tempers of the ages of high tragedy with ours would help us to know better why the twentieth century failed to prove another high moment. Taken together, both the Periclean and the Elizabethan ages were times of thrilling possibilities: neither was a period of darkness and defeat. Our age, on the contrary, holds a sordid view of man. Indeed, "when humanity is seen as devoid of dignity and significance, mean and sunk in dreary hopelessness, then the spirit of tragedy departs." Whereas the Greeks could lend a divine dimension to the irrational and see in human mind a tragic anomaly, the moderns try to condemn the irrational and seek to cure it. As Lane Cooper points out, the Greeks saw clearly, felt keenly and refrained from much—an attitude that
enabled them to look long and steadily at every object, including man, whom they could thus see both as an individual, and in combination with others of his kind as well as of other species. For modern man there exists no such organic relationship, and therefore he cannot see the whole as well as the parts individually. In our age of specialisation, the philosopher, the scientist, the artist and the theologian—each concerns himself to an exclusive field thus preventing the emergence of a unified view of life. Indeed, the tragic drama has to wait until "the dramatists with sufficient ability will give up their a priori inhibitions and see human nature steadily and see it whole."21

Again, as Sir Livingstone has pointed out, the Greeks were quite aware of the possibilities of technology but stopped short in their pursuits because, to them, life was essentially a human problem; the modern man in his craze, is ignoring Man instead. Kitto's study reveals yet another point of contrast: whereas the Greeks tried to discover unity in diversity, the modern man's analytical mind sees diversity even in unity. Also whereas the Greeks, believing firmly in reason of the universe, saw a law governing it, for the moderns the fundamental basis of existence is a chance-combination of atoms. Above all, the Greeks, knowing that life is bitter as well as sweet, accepted its joys and sorrows, whereas the moderns resist the suffering, both natural as well as self-caused. The glorious vision of tragedy that equates truth with beauty could be the privilege of the Greeks who gloriéd in man's Arete even when aware of his imperfections; it cannot be the privilege of modern man who either gives existence precedence over essence or else follows the naturalists to emphasize man's helplessness!
The Elizabethan Age, linking Medievalism to Renaissance, looked at once backward and forward like Janus and thus embodied in it new learning and old ignorance, superstition and enlightenment, savagery and humanism. Since Copernicus, Montaigne and Luther had raised discordant notes by posing disturbing questions, the Elizabethans reconciled the general and the particular, the mind and the spirit, the flesh and the ethereal, in the chain of Being. The old was not turned out as undesirable; rather it was accommodated with the new. Our age, on the other hand, being schismatic, is totally iconoclastic and rejective of all that was sacred in the past. An age like ours that has lost faith in man, that needs to be told the importance of existence, that has lost key to the authentic living, cannot affirm life tragically.

Now, the literary output of an age corresponds to its temper. Ballads, lyrics, novels had had their ages. Certainly, after the shock of recognition and the concomitant realisation that human existence is determined by blind forces of history, heredity, cultural past and irrational subconscious, the modern man can seek expression of his time neither in supercilious comicality nor in tragic affirmation. Such an age as ours may produce debunking naturalism, schizophrenic expressionism, faceless cubism, desperate dadaism, mechanistic futurism, neurotic surrealism, the grotesque and the absurd, but not tragedy that exalts, synthesizes, affirms, glorifies and restores our faith in man. No wonder, instead of tragic affirmation, what characterizes modern literature is the nightmarish anti-utopianism and dominance of abnormality and eccentricity. Gone is the Promethean image of man;
In its place, the typical modern man is "minimal" man, an anti-hero—nameless in Kafka, anti-human in Beckett, non-human in C.P. Snow, non-heroic in Saul Bellow, unheroic like Eliot's Prufrock, perverse, criminal, morone, animal-like, hysterical and sterile. As Faulkner pointed out in his speech accepting the Nobel Prize, modern writer writes not of heart but of glands, not of love but of lust, of defeats in which no one loses anything of value, of victories without hope—and, worst of all, without pity and compassion. V.W. Brooks compared the modern writer to a grasshopper looking for dung to stick its nose in. Indeed, as Charles I. Glicksberg points out, in the modern literature we get the impression that man today is doomed, though not exactly damned.

Of course, in tragedy, too, we cry with Lear, "Is man no more than this?" But later we learn to answer the question affirmatively. In the modern literature, especially in the latest absurdist and the grotesque variety, we only keep repeating the question to ourselves. In the existentialist literature, situations are more important than human nature; thus what we learn to admire is man's role and not his tragic place in the universe. Tragedy reckons with absurdity as an element of existence and seeks to transcend it; existentialism justifies it and gives it the status of the Absolute. The existentialist's distrust of idealism and refusal to sugarcoat the absurd reality is matched by the naturalist's craze for a slice of life in which fiddling with the petty and the trivial is as characteristic as idealization in tragedy. Expressionistic literature, on the other hand, goes to another extreme: abolishing time and space, it effects nightmarish distortion which may involve us but cannot thrill or exalt us in the way of a tragedy. Similarly in psychological literature, we have exploration of so exclusive a realm of psyche that instead of
experience, we have "cases"; instead of a hero suffering from pride, we have obsessions made up as persons. In short, the literature of the twentieth century highlights only the absurdity, triviality, abnormality and perversity of human nature. Tragedy can accommodate them all, but only as foils to the sublimity of human soul. A work that celebrates only the abnormal, however great it may be otherwise, shall be essentially the antithesis of the tragic. To redefine tragedy to accommodate such literature means travestying the spirit of the genre.*

The fact is that "modernism" cannot be contained in any one of the traditional genres like tragedy and comedy. In a world in which one is torn by the ambivalent intensity of half-truths, when one does not know whether to trust the past or the future, whether one is becoming cultured or rough primitive, whether to hope for the best or expect the very worst, whether to eulogize science and the concomitant

*Our thesis here is that there is in modern drama something resembling the tragic but the plays don't produce the tragic impact. Redefining tragedy to embrace these partially tragic plays can open pandora's box. For example, for Sartre ("Forgers of Myth"), the essence of tragedy lies not in the conflict of characters but in the clash of systems. For him, since men don't share ready-made nature, universality lies not in human nature but in situations. For Durrenmatt ("Problems of Theatre"), courage is not universal, chaos is and thus tragic essence lies in responsibility. Arthur Miller (Introduction to Collected Plays) insists that seeking dignity in society even by a common man is enough to lend him the tragic stature. For Tennessee Williams (Preface to Rose Tattoo), any intense moment of existence is tragedy. Now the clash of interests and systems, responsibility, search for dignity and significance, and intensity of existence—all are, no doubt, elements encountered in tragedies, but none of them represents the sole essence of tragedy. It is worth recalling that Raymond Williams (Modern Tragedy) starts talking about Modern Tragedy but ends up by classifying plays into several types. A deeper probe could show him that his types represent various stages of a complete tragedy.
sister-faith of materialism or prefer art and spiritualism, whether
to trust tradition or discard it, whether to practise Puritanism or
violate its tenets outrageously, one is so puzzled that one's
thinking and feeling are benumbed as it were, and one does not know
whether to laugh or cry. In such a neurotic state, the head may
blunder into the regions of the heart, or the heart may knock at the
mansions exclusively reserved for the head. No wonder, in modern age,
neither tragedy nor comedy exists in pristine purity and there is
discernible in modern drama a tendency on the part of both so to
interpenetrate each other that the basis of the tragic is something
comic, and vice versa.

This confounding of the genres has made the critics' task of
classifying modern plays extremely difficult. Witness, [italics mine] on
Cocteau's Les Parents Terribles:

> It is a realistic tragedy, bare in outline, devoid of
  those flamboyant trills which cocteau often delights in;
  it is pure melodrama admirable in its intensity . . .
  the play is a biting social comedy.28 (italics mine)

If the same work is at once a realistic tragedy, a pure melodrama
and a social comedy, it means that either the old genres have acquired
new meanings or lost all meaning. Similarly, it is on record that
the same production of The Tobacco Road appealed so differently to
such sophisticated critics as John Gassner and Joseph Wood Krutch
that whereas the former applauded it as a poem of dignity, the latter
could see in it a comedy of the grotesque. The legitimate deduction
from all this is neither that the dramatic artists have dissolved
the old genres nor that the critics read things according to their
own temperaments; rather it only proves that the play had in it
enough of both the tragic and the comic.
Of course, it was natural that in the changed context of the technological civilisation, the old forms should be found inadequate. Moreover, in an age of dehumanised civilisation, laughter, as an expression of triumph, is beyond the reach of modern man. Nell in Beckett's *Endgame* shocks Nagg by declaring that nothing is funnier than unhappiness and goes on to say, "Yes, it's the funny story we have heard too often; we still find it funny, but we don't laugh any more." Indeed, we, the moderns, don't laugh any more even where we perceive the comic. The whole thing looks at once amusing and painful. We cannot laugh without weeping or weep without laughing. Our laughter is not merely bitter but also tearful. No wonder the drama of our age evokes a response that oscillates between tragic empathy and comic sense of superiority. In the past, the two had been kept apart; the moderns mix them by "making us laugh at that which hurts us most, making us weep at that which is most foolish in our nature." This shudder laugh is the most characteristic response of our age because its own quintessence lies in clear-sighted irony.

Now irony has been there in drama always but only as an element; in modern times, it has come to embody the vision of the age as also the very quality of our response. That is why irony is the only link among the plays of different natures. Chekhov sees it in decadent society, Pirandello in personality, Genet in illusive masks, Galsworthy in futility of social activity, Strindberg in human nerves, and so on. In fact, the different phases of modernism in modern drama, from naturalism to the Absurd, are only vicissitudes of this dry mock. What we perceive in the contemporary theatre is but the culmination of what started in the nineteenth century with the
playwrights who are credited with the fatherhood of the modern drama.

The most interesting thing about Ibsen is that although he has been hailed as the first modern tragedian, he never claimed to have written a tragedy. Perhaps a dispassionate view would reveal that his plays are dark satires on human institutions, and in witnessing them we stand half-way at a point where tears and laughter are balanced so precariously that a slight shift might completely tilt the balance on either side. No wonder, G.B. Shaw thought he was emulating Ibsen when he wrote his comedies! If the social aspect of microcosm is Ibsen's concern, in Strindberg's plays we have the physical and the spiritual excluding the social altogether. That is why his plays deal with the crimes unrecognised by the criminal codes. Anyway, to present the moments of intense ambivalence, he turns to the battle of sexes which has traditionally been a primary source of the social comedies. Against Strindberg's nightmarish experience at an explosive moment, Chekhov chooses such moments of existence as are flat and featureless. Like comedy, a Chekhovian play points to what must be destroyed but, at the same time, like tragedy, it stresses how essential it is to retain that for life's growth. One does not know whether to feel sorry for the dying system or exultant at the prospect of a new one. Thus, indeed, Chekhov modifies laughter by pity and neutralizes the pathetic with the comic.

Pirandello presents the tragic hunt for meaning in the form of an infinite comedy of illusions. It is like viewing the distorted images of one's face in a hall made of mirrors. The total impact is more like hallucination—at once gripping like a tragedy and
fantastic like a comedy. No wonder although Pirandello was initially
treated as a jester, now he is more often clubbed with the exis-
tentialists. Brecht's epic theatre, on the other hand, is a theatre
of judgement in which involvement being an enemy, empathy has to be
prevented through Alienation-effects. Now the words and the situations
do move us, but since the empathy is prevented half-way, we move from
alienation to involvement to alienation. Consequently, there is no
unified response, tragic or comic.

This modernistic transcending of the traditional genres and
discarding of the one-dimensional responses has now culminated in
the emergence of the grotesque which, according to William Van
O'Connor, is characteristic of the modern sensibility. Tragic
becomes grotesque when all the alternatives appear meaningless. In
the comic counterpart of the grotesque, the Absurd, the world is seen
to be not only dichotomous and imperfect but also without any logic.
Thus here the comic and the tragic get so balanced against each other
that the whole thing appears at once painful, terrifying and funny.
Anyway, despite clownish mockery, the essential concern of the Absurd
is with the tragic situation. That explains why the greatest master-
piece in the absurdist playwriting, Waiting for Godot, has been
found the funniest theatre piece as well as the most depressing drama.
But if Beckett's anti-drama presents man's horrible existence,
Ionesco's anti-theatre offers a nightmarish experience in which
distinction between horror and laughter ceases to exist. For
Adamov, life is a childish game, for Genet it is a masquerade; but
as these absurdists break our long-cherished illusions, their
blasphemous games become at once ironic, bizarre and grotesque—absurdly
tragic and tragically absurd.

In short, although the European drama of the last hundred years is marked by dizzy variety and experimentation in form, and eclectic heterogeneity in themes, the only common thing is scanty regard for

*The position in America is, however, different because the dramatists there have been keen not only on the revival of tragedy but also on accommodating the tragic within the modernistic framework. This is quite understandable, for a nation with practically no cultural heritage would naturally aspire for what is supposed to be the highest in a cultural field—for example, tragedy in the field of drama—and at the same time, for fear of being dubbed a backward-looking nation, it would also try to keep pace with the latest. In other words, creating modern tragedy was a psychological need of the American nation. But despite a plenty of striving, they have not succeeded much; their record is "impressive" only comparatively. What is worse, not infrequently, considerations of success on the stage have been responsible for the playwrights of this success-worshipping nation replacing dramatic art by the dramatic engineering.

Why the Americans have failed is a question answered at length by John von Szélessi in his Tragedy and Fear which bears the sub-title: Why Modern Tragic Drama Fails? Even though a sympathetic study that is prepared to accommodate even semitragedies, would-be tragedies, borderline tragedies, even pseudo-tragedies, it shows that the experiences dramatized are too personalized, the stories too full of empty crises, the heroes too, low to be worth-identifying with, the action too commonplace and spiritless, the language too weak and drab, the world presented too amoral and soul-less, and the enlightenment too clinical and psychotherapeutic to yield properly tragic impact. In one of the Appendixes, Von Szélessi lists sixty representative American plays and tries to sum up their themes in one sentence each. How basically untragic the vision inspiring these "tragedies" is would become clear from the fact that if one were to create a paragraph out of these statements to formulate the vision of the entire American tragic drama, it would read something like this:

Being a sexual and psychological hell, life is a meaningless and inescapable treadmill of sin and guilt. Trapped thus, man cannot control his hatreds and prejudices and thus he has neither the right nor the ability to climbout of his low position. Weakness, pride and guilt being his heritage, man is not responsible for his aberrations; nor can he realise his dreams of peace. In fact, all his dreams and aspirations destroy the right to survive. Thus, the able and the ambitions perish, while the world is left to the petty and mean. The sensitive do not succeed; they are always destroyed by the insensitive majority. In this situation, justice, nobility and humanity are crushed, and love and life rendered meaningless. In such a corrupt world, social complexity destroys humanity. Maybe man will learn humanity only from witnessing the ultimate act of his present inhumanity.
the purity of old genres. With Ibsen started the process of confounding the hallowed forms of comedy and tragedy, and by now the two have lost completely their old individual identities. Strindberg's ambivalence, Chekhov's modifying laughter by pity, Pirandello's writing as comedies what he conceived as tragedies, Shaw's dialectic of feeling, Synge's swinging between tragedy and farce, Brecht's pincer of contrasting planes of sensibility, Anouilh's merry violence, Beckett's funny emptiness, Ionesco's comic nightmares—all show how the modern drama has broken from the old shackles of Aristotelian tenets and how the modern playwrights have experimented away from the magnetic field of that Greek master.

That it has meant a setback to the revival of tragedy may be the lament of some tradition-crazy critics but to us it appears to be a stroke of good fortune. Modern psychology, philosophy, sociology and science provided themes and material of such fresh nature that most of the playwrights rightly preferred to retain the vigour of modernism by inventing new forms rather than impose on them the old, dubious moulds—Aristotelian or otherwise. Some of them even went to the extent of propounding new concepts of theatre to accommodate the modernity of the age. Thus we have had Brecht's epic theatre, Archer's theatre of anti-conflict, and Yeats's that aimed at the emotion-of-multitude. In any case, this attitude has enabled the modern

*Of course, some playwrights in their zeal to revive tragedy did turn to the classical myths (e.g., Anouilh, Sartre, McLeish, O'Neill), to the historical past (e.g., Maxwell Anderson, Eliot), or to such primitive preserves of our civilisation as retain the natural levels of existence (e.g., Lorca, Synge, Robert Sherwood), and some of them did succeed in their efforts; but the very fact that they had to turn to mythology, history and primitivism is an indirect admission that the modern experience as such lacks the tragic potential.
playwrights to discover new avenues, new combination of effects, and new responses in the audiences—and all by letting the comic penetrate the tragic. By whatever name we may call them, essentially these plays signify the inability of the modern experience to settle into either purely comic or purely tragic mould.

Indeed, the modern audience know from their theatre experience what it means to feel like Jimmy Porter when he says, "I want to stand up in your tears and splash about in them and sing." To effect this mood, the dramatist creates a chiaroscuro of tone that is both gentle and violent—a style that at once tickles and shocks. Jumping from one plane of reality to another, mixing slapstick melodrama with unsentimental sermon, we have pieces that distil the tragic out of a comic situation, and vice versa. Similarly, in respect of characterisation, the traditional modes have been reversed. Since the central character tends to evoke an unequivocal response, in the typically modern plays we have either no protagonist at all, or a central figure who is at once a clown and a hero—an anti-hero. We at once laugh at him for his antics and feel sorry for his plight. Yoking the sacred to the profane, the sublime to the ridiculous, the permanent to the transient, the finite to the infinite, the passionate to the bawdy, the modern playwright shows man at once nobly enduring, stubbornly unyielding and yet blindly foolish. We, as audience, are aroused in turn to laughter, to pity, to fear, and to all possible combinations of these.

Now admixture of the hornpipes and funerals is nothing absolutely new: it was there in Satyr plays, in near-blasphemous interludes,
In the farcical cruelty of Marlowe, in the problem comedies of Shakespeare, in the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century. But whereas earlier this was a matter of juxtaposition or alternation, now it is something subtler, an inter-penetration: we laugh at what is normally tearful and weep at what is obviously funny. In the trivia of life are sounded the echoes of tragedy. The switching of the mood or the tone is so sudden that we have no time to release the tension in tear or laughter. We view things impersonally from a distance, but being at the same time within immediate call, we are strangely involved, too. This is the level of ironic apprehension!*

*Northrop Frye said this when he observed, "The ironic tone is central to the modern literature." Charles I. Glicksberg quotes Frye in a footnote on the opening page of The Ironic Vision in Modern Literature (Hague, 1969), which not only traces the history of irony from a rhetoric device to the present position of metaphysics, but also shows through analyses of the works of modern philosophers and writers how irony is a form of creative therapy—irony to eliminate the need for irony!*