An Afterword in the form of additional comments on the disquisition on tragedy in Chapter I, it is hoped, would fortify the basic argument of the dissertation; make it a shade clearer and put it in the right perspective. What is intended in the following pages is not a reworking of what was already said but the establishment of additional points of view from which to look at the representation of tragic experience.

The concern of this Afterword is three fold. First it examines the conceptual aspect of tragedy and demonstrates that the basic attitudes of each age conditioned the tragedy it produced and that it has not been possible for tragedy to conform to any single system of belief. Secondly it makes a fairly detailed examination of the representation of tragic experience in novels with special reference to representative American, British, and Continental writers of fiction so that one may compare Henry James’s representation of tragedy with similar instances elsewhere. Thirdly an effort is made here to sketch the 20th century developments in the writing and practice of tragedies and to account for the growing popularity of fiction as a medium for the representation of tragic experience.
The term tragedy usually refers to a play written according to a definite theory or aesthetic principle. For example, the tragic plays of Shakespeare, the revenge plays of Seneca, the domestic tragedies of Miller and the works of Synge and O’Neill are all regular tragedies because they are written in accordance with particular theories of tragedies though they are significantly different in conception, design and narrative technique. However, the term is often loosely applied and in an unrestricted sense to cover all representations of the mournfulness of mortal existence. According to this definition, tragedy can range from the ludicrous fall of Humpty-Dumpty in Lewis Caroll’s book *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* to the sublime death of Achilles in Homer’s *Iliad*. Section VI of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* where each stanza presents a domestic tragedy, ballads like “Sir Patrick Spens,” “Wife of Usher’s Well” and “Twa Brothers” and lyrics and narrative poems like Wordsworth’s “Lucy Grey” and “Michael” and Charles Kingsley’s “Sands of Dee” are also authentic records of the tragic experience and so merit the name tragedy, though only in a limited sense of the term. Novels like Balzac’s *Old Goriot*, Dickens’s *Hard Times*, Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and *the Marble Faun* and short stories like Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *The Cask of Amontillado* can be considered tragedies in the garb of fiction, only that they lack the dramatic form. True tragedy is however a great deal more
than the evocation of tragic feelings or the depiction of tragic scenes. Tragedy is a work of art, a profound experience capable of stirring feelings of pity, fear and other feelings of similar nature. Besides, as we have already seen in Chapter I, it is a celebration of the dignity and greatness that human beings are capable of. Looked at from this point of view, very few of the above works deserve the title tragedy inasmuch as they are not tragedies so much as the representation of tragic incidents. “Lucy Gray,” for instance, is the story of the premature death of a young girl by drowning. However, “The Wife of Usher’s Well” comes closer to the ideal of tragedy though it also lacks certain essential ingredients of the tragedy. This well-known ballad tells the story of an unfortunate widow whose misfortune it is to lose her children twice. She sends her three sons to sea with the intention of making them seamen, perhaps through a wrong judgment of their aptitude. The three sons are lost at sea and this is the price she is made to pay for the misjudgment. Distraught with grief she utters the curse;

I wish the wind may never cease

Nor flashes in the flood

Till my three sons come hame to me

In earthly flesh and blood.
The curse she pronounces is an act of rebellion but at the same time it is an assertion of an indomitable will. But, hubris has its punishment. One night, about the Martinmas, her dead sons return in flesh and blood. The overjoyed mother celebrates their homecoming but they leave her again shortly after the cockcrow. The searing tragedy that visits the mother is rooted in her character, which is more than we can say about the story in "Michael" or "The Sands of Dee." Luke, Michael's only son, falls a victim to the temptation of the world and so is practically lost to Michael whom the tragedy leaves disconsolate. The deaths in "The Sands of Dee" and "Lucy Gray," though tragic, are the results of accidents. "Sir Patrick Spens" has better claims than either "Michael" or "The Sands of Dee" to be called a tragedy and so far as the tragic catastrophe in the poem is concerned, it is the result of the protagonist's choice of a certain course of action spurred by the noble emotions of loyalty and intrepidity.

The foregoing discussion of select narrative poems was intended to help one understand the complexity of the concept of tragedy. It was seen that though true tragedy is independent of the dramatic form, a tragic story seldom makes a tragedy unless it exhibits a tragic pattern in which the protagonist wills his tragedy by hurling defiance in the face of fate. While the protagonist need not necessarily be a larger than life figure, tragedy
should represent an exceptional action which it takes the protagonist’s unusual courage or endurance to undertake or sustain.

According to R.J. Dorius two things that strike us most forcibly when we read a tragedy are, on the one hand, the courage and endurance the protagonist exhibits and, on the other, the inevitable defeat which he encounters in the end. By the second aspect of tragedy, namely the protagonist’s defeat, we mean the inevitable process which transfers the protagonist from prosperity to adversity. The tragedy has got to have a protagonist of exceptional courage and endurance if the play is to deal with an exceptional action. The protagonist’s courage initiates the tragic action and sustains it. We should carefully distinguish it from foolhardiness. In order that the tragic protagonist’s courage should appear credible and astonishing in the extreme, it should be displayed in response to some overpowering challenge. The absence of a challenge of indomitable nature would make the situation absurd and the protagonist’s courage indistinguishable from bravado. As for defeat, if it is to be a compelling spectacle, it should come at the end of a great effort. Again, as R.J. Dorius says, defeat without a great attempt will result in mere pathos. He goes on to point out that the merit of a tragedy as a literary form depends on the two—courage and faith—being brought into aesthetic unity. The better the two are harmonized the more artistic the act becomes. Let us examine how
this is accomplished with special reference to a few select works including novels.

We will begin with a novel since the focal point of the dissertation is the tragic experience in the novels of Henry James. Ernest Hemingway’s *Old Man and the Sea* (1952) can be pointed out as a perfect example of a work where the protagonist’s heroic nature and the tragic destiny that is meted out to him are ideally matched in a perfect unity. The inborn courage of Santiago manifests itself first when he chooses to go farther out into the sea than the other fishermen. It is seen again when he struggles with the marlin determined to conquer it. We see Santiago’s courage at its dazzling best when he battles with the sharks in spite of knowing that the odds are against him. Santiago’s proudest moment comes when he harpoons it but the very same moment is also the beginning of an inexorable *anagnorisis* that precedes a perfect *peripeteia*. Attracted by the scent of the blood, ravenous sharks close in and rip off huge chunks of marlin’s flesh. Santiago knows that the fight is unavailing but he continues to fight the sharks without let up. He loses his prize marlin and is physically broken as is clear from the act of Santiago splitting blood into the water; but paradoxically as it were, he then cries out that, though it is possible to destroy him, it is not possible to defeat him.
In Greek tragedies the catastrophe is dealt by fate though apparently it is perceived as the punishment by the gods for the sin of hubris. Among the works of Aeschylus the most remarkable one from the point of view of the protagonist’s courage and the fate which calls forth the courage is *Prometheus Bound*. The major question the play raises is whether man should obey his own conscience or bow to the rules of an arbitrary deity. Prometheus chooses to stand by his conscience and throws defiance in the face of Zeus. Since the companion plays of the Prometheus Tetralogy are lost, we are at a disadvantage in explaining the full meaning of the play. In Aeschylus’s earlier plays, *Persians* and *Seven against Thebes*, there is no attempt to accentuate the personal heroism of the protagonists or to draw our attention to the tragic fate he undergoes. The Oresteian Trilogy consisting of *Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearer* and *Eumenides* are actually revenge plays and in a play which shows the operation of a curse on a family, there is little scope for personal heroism. The same is the case with O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which is a twentieth century version of the Oresteian Trilogy, a notable point of difference being that in O’Neill’s play the action springs from psychological forces such as complexes, fixations and repressions. As for Euripides’s *Medea*, it is doubtful whether we can call it a tragedy proper; it is a play of violence rather than a regular tragedy. Unlike in a regular tragedy which shows the
end stages, life goes on in *Medea* and neither Medea nor Jason die at the end of the play.

It is not necessary to examine more works. All tragedies may not present a neat pattern of the protagonist confronting his fate with exceptional courage. However, what distinguishes a true tragedy from a play of mere violence and destruction is the moral grandeur of the hero confronting with equanimity and courage the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. The following comments by O'Connor bring out this predicament of the tragic hero.

But not every wail that dies in a whimper, not every anguished cry silenced in death's kingdom, not every agonized scream can be caught up and maintained in the tragic realm. Tragedy is not concerned with the pain or the suffering, but with the dignity with which they are endured. There are no retreats for the tragic protagonist. Neither in madness nor in the self-absolution of confession may he retreat. No single tremor is to be lost even in the "forgetfulness of sleepe." The truly tragic hero "will weep no more" he "will endure." The ecstasy is to be shunned. At the height he is alone, unique and sufficient. This is tragic dignity. (45)
It is not meant here that tragedy consists solely of the protagonist’s heroic confrontation with his destiny. What we have been at pains to demonstrate is that the courage the protagonist shows in the face of defeat is what strikes us most forcibly in a play. Several of the elements remain to be looked into before it is possible to see tragedy in the right perspective. Take for example, the characteristics of tragedy in Aristotle’s definition of the term, which spells out the nature of the tragic action, the concept of the tragic hero, the notion of tragic flaw, the effect of the tragedy on the spectator and such other matters.

Basic to the intensity of tragedy is the question: how is it that one can take pleasure in a tragedy while the response it elicits is bound to be far from pleasant? Worded in different phraseology, the question is how does pleasure stem from the heart of uneasiness. According to Aristotle “the tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear.” How the passions convert themselves to pleasure has been a subject of debate by philosophers and literary theorists and the debate goes on endlessly eluding any finality. Hume is only one of the many theorists but this problem is most profitably approached in the light of what he has said on the subject in works like “A Treatise on Human Nature.”
Hume examines two theories and then throws his weight with the third one. First he tries to explain the appeal of tragedy by pointing out that all human beings love to find themselves in a state of excitement if the alternative is “a languid, listless state of indolence.” It is a fact that, as a rule, human beings tend to prefer the negative emotions of tragedy to a state of emotional inertia. Hume dismisses this argument as inadequate insofar as witnessing real life tragedies is far from being a pleasurable experience. The second theory is that we take pleasure in a tragedy because we know that it is not real. The knowledge, in the words of Le Bobdier de Fontenelle, (whom he quotes) “serves to diminish the pain which we suffer...and to reduce that affliction to such a pitch as converts it to pleasure.” The enjoyment of tragedy consists in the fact that the dramatic representation of a real life tragedy is capable of giving aesthetic pleasure.

The theory Hume advances is that while responding to tragic works we experience both distress and pleasure but that they have different causes and objects. The distress we feel is directed at what is depicted, the suffering of the protagonists, the terror of the events and the atmosphere of gloom that pervades. But the pleasure we feel is directed at the manner of depiction. Hume says that pleasure predominates one’s feelings of distress and converts them into pleasurable experiences.
The genius required to paint objects in a lively manner, the art employed in collecting all the pathetic circumstances, the judgment displayed in disposing them—the exercise, I say, of these noble talents, together with the force of expression, and beauty of oratorical numbers, diffuse the highest satisfaction on the audience, and excite the most delightful movements. By this means, the uneasiness of the melancholy passions is not only overpowered and effaced by something stronger of an opposite kind; but the whole impulse of those passions is converted into pleasure and swells the delight which the eloquence raises in us. The same force of oratory, employed on an uninteresting subject, would not please half so much, or rather would appear altogether ridiculous; and the mind, being left in absolute calmness and indifference, would relish none of those beauties of imagination or expression, which, if joined to passion, gives it such exquisite entertainment. The impulse or vehemence arising from sorrow, compassion, indignation receives a new direction from the sentiments of beauty. The latter, being the predominant motion, seize the whole mind, and convert the former into themselves, at least tincture them so strongly as totally to alter their nature. And the soul, being at the same time roused by passion
and charmed by eloquence, feels on the whole a strong movement which is altogether delightful. (146)

Hume, however, does not make it clear how exactly the transformation of feeling takes place.

From here it is only a short step to the Aristotelian concept of *Catharsis*. Aristotle says that a proper tragedy will succeed in arousing feelings of pity and fear in such a way as to accomplish a purgation (*catharsis*) of feelings. Aristotle made a pointed reference to this useful aspect of tragedy as a fitting response to Plato's argument that poetic drama encourages anarchy on the soul by feeding and watering the passions instead of starving them. An ill service the tragedians do according to Plato is that they instill anarchy in the soul. Aristotle is at pains to establish that, far from encouraging negative passions, tragedy actually keeps them down in a wisely regulated manner. The process of regulating the passions involves two stages. First the passions are excited in the spectators by representing a tragic action which is serious and of some magnitude. Secondly their passions are made to overflow and are thus allayed effecting what may be described as an emotional cure. The tempering of bitter moods tragedy effects in the spectators' minds is appropriately described
by Milton when he makes the chorus say in the last line of *Samson Agonistes* "And calm of mind, all passions spent."

Aristotle is describing in his definition of tragedy, possibly, the emotional effect of tragedy in terms of a medical metaphor. At least, it is in this sense the majority of critics have interpreted this definition. A typical exegesis of what Aristotle means by *catharsis* can be found in the following comment by Milton.

Tragedy, as it was anciently compos’d, hath been ever held the gravest, moraletes, and most profitable of all other Poems; therefore said by *Aristotle* to be of power, by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions; that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight stirr’d up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. Nor is Nature herself wanting in her own effects do make good his assertion; for so, in Physic, things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours. Hence Philosophers and other gravest Writers, as *Cicero, Plutarch* and others, frequently cite out of Tragic Poets, both to adorn and illustrate their discourse. The Apostle *Paul* himself thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of *Euripides* into the text of Holy
Scripture, 1 Cor. 15. 33. and Paraeus commenting on the Revelation, divides the whole Book as a Tragedy, into Acts distinguished each by a Chorus of Heavenly Harpings and Song between. Heretofore Men in highest dignity have labour'd not a little to be thought able to compose a Tragedy. (Milton 505)

Perhaps Aristotle wants us to understand *catharsis* in the same sense as it was used by the Hippocratic School of Medicine. According to the medical notion, when the body loses its state of right proportion, the body's heat recombines and fuses bodily elements in such a way that waste products are generated ready for discharge at proper time. Aristotle would argue that the human psyche is well balanced and serene in the natural condition. But when the mind loses its serenity and lapses into a state of intemperance, a well made tragedy has the power to strike pity and fear into the beholder in such a way that these emotions are digested and a "a new proportion and blend of emotions is produced." This process has emotional and even intellectual ramifications. As Philip Wheelwright has commented:

(S)ince the new blending which is attained in the cathartic process is psychic, not merely physical, it involves a new emotion perspective and even, arising from that, a new intellectual vision. A wisdom is
distilled from tragic suffering: man is *pathei mathos*, “taught by suffering,” as the chorus in the *Agamemnon* sings. The tragic *catharsis* and the ensuing emotional calm have produced in the spectator a new insight into what the plot of the drama most essentially represented what its action—which is to say its meaning in emotion—essentially is. Such insight is what justifies Aristotle’s assertion in Chapter 9 “that poetry is something more philosophical and more highly serious than history, for poetry tends to express universals, history particulars. (107)

If the death of the tragic hero is to produce feelings of pity and fear in the spectators’ mind, the tragic hero should be basically a noble character. The death of a villain will never arouse these passions as the audience feels that he eminently deserves his fate. The fall of the tragic hero fills our mind with tragic emotions only because we are convinced that the hero does not deserve the tragic fate that befalls him. And what is it that brings about the protagonist’s downfall? The tragedies of Aeschylus emphasize the role of fate in bringing about the protagonist’s downfall. *Prometheus Bound*, for example, attributes the hero’s suffering to the will of the gods. Aristotle was the first writer to deal with this question though there is no agreement among the critics concerning the meaning of what he said. Aristotle uses the word *hamartia* (error of judgment) to explain the
hero's fall. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero must be possessed of nobility; that is to say he must be an intermediate kind of person whose tragedy is due, not to wickedness or depravity, but to some error of judgment. Aristotle does not see genuine tragedy as a result of any preordained fate, but as springing from the paradoxical situation of a noble mind being prone to error.

Later critics tended to interpret error of judgment as pride or some other vice of similar nature and they assigned a moralistic function to tragedy in that tragedy is enjoined to keep men away from evil. The emphasis on evil in the Senaccaan plays made the heroes appear less noble. As O. B. Hardison Jr. says "the more vice was emphasized the less noble became the tragic hero" (Princeton Encyclopedia 864). The writer of tragic poems in the Middle Ages traced the protagonist's tragedy to fatalism. They blamed fickle fortune for laying the hero low. Rather than foibles or defects of character, it was the wheel of fortune that transferred the tragic hero from the prosperous position at the top to ignominy and failure at the bottom. This view persisted till the 16th century, but it gradually gave way to the theory of tragic flaw.

Tragic flaw, pushed to a realistic extreme, is seen as the sin which brought on tragedy by way of punishment. Addison's Cato is perhaps the
best example of the tragedy which explicitly assumes the moralistic approach. That the moral theory of tragedy was widely held in the 16th century England can be seen from Philip Sidney’s *Defence*. “Tragedy openeth,” says Sidney, “the greatest wounds and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue, that maketh kings fear to be tyrants and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours” (para-47). Shakespeare and his contemporaries generally tried to accept the didactic theory of tragedy which views *hamartia* more as a moral lapse on the part of the protagonist than an error of judgment. To quote Bradley,

In almost all we observe a marked one-sidedness, a predisposition in some particular direction: a total incapacity, in certain circumstances, of resisting the force which draws in this direction; a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one instinct, object, passion, or habit of mind. This, it would seem, is, for Shakespeare, the fundamental tragic trait. It is present in his early heroes, Romeo and Richard II, infatuated men who otherwise rise comparatively little above the ordinary level. It is a fatal gift, but it carries with it a touch of greatness, and when there is joined to it nobility of mind, or genius, or immense force, we realize the full power and reach of the soul, and the conflict in which it engages acquires that magnitude which
stirs not only sympathy and pity, but admiration, terror and awe.

(Bradley 13-14)

Interpreted in the light of the didactic theory of tragedy, Othello is on the folly of jealousy, Macbeth on ambition, Hamlet on procrastination, Lear on susceptibility to flattery and Antony and Cleopatra on sensuality. Even in Shakespeare tragic flaw, as a principle, appears only in plays from Julius Caesar onwards, for in the early tragedies like Romeo and Juliet, where internal conflict is conspicuously absent, the protagonist is crushed mainly by the circumstances over which they have no control.

The audience will have no sympathy for a protagonist who wills his tragedy through a steadfast adherence to his own evil nature. That is why, as we have already commented, the death of the protagonists in the Senecan plays evokes no more pity than the report of the execution of a criminal. In fact, Othello is the only Shakespearean play that conforms to the Aristotelian view of the tragic protagonist. Macbeth is an evil man and the admiration we feel for him is the admiration due to a courageous man possessed of a poetic mind and remarkable self insight. Richard III is a brilliant but malign protagonist and it is reluctant admiration that we give him. The pity we feel for Lear is the pity we experience when we discover that the punishment meted out to the protagonist is out of all proportion to
his offence and that he has been more sinned against than sinning. The following comment by R.J. Darius presents the problem in the right perspective:

A negative or moralistic approach to tragedy undervalues the hero's strength and in effect short-circuits the tragic experience. The "sin" or weakness of the hero is often inextricably associated with the strength which enables him to struggle or endure; it is a condition of his being. Furthermore, the disparity in tragedy between the protagonist's folly and its consequences in suffering, between the agonizing sense of guilt or loneliness and the remotness of the powers that might acknowledge or forgive him, does not encourage us to form simple moral judgment. It may therefore be more helpful to speak of tragic virtue than of a tragic flaw, of the hero as a man elected or selected for his fate because of his greatness, rather than spotted for it because of his folly, and if the solemn spectacle of his experience as an exalted example—not to be pursued literally, of course—rather than as a warning. The price that the hero pays for his exceptional action is suffering and death, to be sure. But the emphasis is not on his folly or punishment, but on the way in which he responds to the challenge which confronts him, on his daring, or on his ability to bear the worst that heaven and earth can devise.(861)
This, it seems, is the right perspective in which to look at the Jamesian protagonists from the point of view of the tragic weakness in their character. Innocence, which thrives upon ignorance and illusion, is the tragic flaw of the Jamesian protagonists. James looks upon an innocent man who is unaware of the seamy side of life as a man trapped in the darkness of ignorance. Such a man, James believes, is in a state of appalling illusion and is easily deceived. He finds it difficult to make a distinction between appearance and reality and conceives himself as a free person. He also falls into the tendency of idealizing others disregarding their defects and weaknesses. Presumptuousness is yet another weakness displayed by the Jamesian innocents.

Christopher Newman, the protagonist of *The American*, the earliest novel of James, is presented as a typical American Adam, a true embodiment of innocence and ignorance. His life in America, though challenging, was an idyllic one bereft of events incapable of compelling him into a deep self-examination. It was a kind of goody-goody life, with fortune favouring him more often than not. Newman is unaware of his inadequacies in his state of innocence and is self-confident, easy of manner, intelligent, robust in the enjoyment of life, strong-willed and forceful in character. The innocence of Newman turns out to be his
hamartia once he arrives in Europe. Newman, who is blissfully ignorant of the realities of life in Europe, looks upon himself as the master of the world and that leads to his destruction. He begins to judge the Old World with his New World yardsticks. He takes Noemie, a coquette, for a great artist and buys from her worthless copies of painting at an exorbitant price. Newman also falters in his judgment of her father. He makes the greatest mistake of his life while choosing Claire to be his prospective wife, virtually ignoring the differences in their culture and religion. Thus, in Newman one finds an innocent Adam, held at bay by the representatives of a superior and sophisticated culture. Newman expects to surmount them all by his money power and robust optimism, but he is miserably seared in the wheels of fire.

Isabel Archer is the innocent Eve of Henry James. She makes her appearance in the novel The Portrait of a Lady, published by James in 1881. Isabel is young, intelligent, slim, proverbially tall and charming with black hair and gray eyes. Her individualism borders on egotism and presumption with a high sense of freedom. Yet, to partake of the fruit of the forbidden tree, she is blissfully unaware of evil. In her cloistered innocence, she regards the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action. Just like Eve, Isabel feels that the whole world lies before her and she can do whatever she chooses to do with it.
Her sole aim in life is to be the sole free master of her own fate. When Isabel leaves America, the Garden of Eden, she seeks total knowledge, but in her innocence, she hopes to achieve it in her own terms without an encounter with evil. Isabel is subject to the most severe test in her life in Europe when the time comes for her to choose a mate. There are several worthy suitors who long to win her heart but she refuses them all as she fears that they will curtail her freedom and make her their moon. She wants to be a star moving freely on her own orbit. Finally she chooses a man called Gilbert Osmond. She chooses him because she is deluded by his pleasing manners and feels that he will open before her an infinite vista of opportunities. But this man of her choice proves to be a mercenary, a fortune hunter having a daughter and a mistress of his own. Thus Isabel is crushed in the mill of life and is doomed to be a bird in a cage.

Milly Theale the heroine of the novel, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) is lovely, tender, generous, gay and full of zest for life. She is also solitary and stricken by a mysterious disease. Her flaw is also her innocence and total ignorance of evil which eventually leads her to her tragic fate. Money, which Milly has in abundance, makes her feel free and gives her a false sense of superiority. She herself states that she can do what exactly she likes to do and that there is not a finger to stop her. Just like Newman and Isabel Milly is in a state of illusion at the beginning of the story. Milly also
comes to Europe to taste the forbidden fruit. In her innocence she feels that every one in London with whom she associates herself loves and adores her. She constantly ignores evidences and even avoids questions which may bring out the truth. Milly comes to London with the sole purpose of meeting her old acquaintance, Merton Densher whom if possible she would like to marry. Kate with whom Merton is secretly betrothed prompts him to make love to Milly only to possess her wealth as she is expected to die soon. Milly, who loves Densher fervently, finally realizes the treachery practised on her and she turns her face to the wall relinquishing all hope of life. Thus Milly is led to her tragic fate as a result of her innocence and illusion.

Lewis Lambert Strether is the hero of the most proportioned novel of James, The Ambassadors (1902). Strether is also another variant of the Adamic hero led to tragic fate because of his innocence. Strether is a widower, fifty years of age. He has no profession or occupation worth the name. What keeps him going is the editorship of a high-brow magazine subsidized by Mrs. Newsome, a rich puritan lady with whom he has some intimacy. Though he is middle aged, Strether also is ignorant of evil like James’s other protagonists. He is upright and sensitive and receptive to beauty and truth. Like all other Adamic characters of James, Strether is also woefully immature socially and morally when the story begins. His
Woollet notion of man and matters with its insistence on suppressing all human joys and passion has warped him and crippled him socially. Strether experiences a new lease of life as he comes to Paris in search of Chad, the only son of Mrs. Newsome. His mission is to liberate him from the clutches of Madame de Vionette, a Parisian enchantress. The ambience of Paris and the charm of Madame de Vionette bowl Strether over and he becomes an ardent advocate of Chad and his lady. He takes their relationship to be a virtuous one without any vulgar entanglements. But in the end he discovers their association to be a lecherous one and finds himself terribly deceived. He loses all his hope and returns to America to live in anonymity.

What we see is more or less the same pattern of action or progress in most tragedies. It unfolds to us invariably a dim world with the light focused on larger than life figures. In his effort to maintain what Melville calls the "open independence of the soul," the protagonist comes into conflict with forces that succeed in destroying him but in most cases without being able to defeat him. The protagonist's tragic predicament can be the result of his mental make up. But sometimes it arises through the plotting of others. It may arise through the very nature of his environment or through the will of Heaven. In some cases a combination of all these causes is found. The tragic hero is tormented by various other persons
whose destiny is bound up with that of the protagonist. Their response to the protagonist and his cause may not be uniform. Some oppose him, some support him. The protagonist’s downfall may happen abruptly or by stages. The fall in either case brings him to a recognition of his place in the universe. The tragic predicament of the protagonist raises fundamental questions regarding man’s destiny and his place in the universe. Perceivable behind everything is a moral system but it is one in which, though the wages of sin is death, virtue is not always rewarded with happiness. We see the contours of a tragic world in the following description of tragedy by Hamlet who now lies dying.

And let me speak to the yet unknowing world

How these things come about: so shall you hear

Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,

Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters;

Of deaths put on by cunning and forc’d cause,

And in this upshot, purposes mistook

Fall’n on the inventors’ heads; all this can I

Truly deliver. (V. sc. 2. 371-378)

We have already seen that true tragedy is independent of any particular form and that tragedy need not necessarily be expressed in a
dramatic form. In fact 800 years before Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides wrote their plays, Homer presented a first rate tragedy in his *Iliad* in the story of the wrath of Achilles. Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon, his hasty withdrawal from the battle, his stormy return to the battle front and the final overthrow have all the ingredients of a regular tragedy. In the 19th and 20th centuries there was a spurt in the popularity of the novel. Novel has come to be regarded as the proper medium for the expression of tragic experience. It was fashionable in the early years of the 20th century to mourn the death of formal tragedy. The following comment by Henri Peyers on Racine's *Phaedra* is typical of the attitude and reveals the social factors that discounted the value of formal tragedy.

The novel was blamed by some critics and was to be blamed or envied: it had captured the essentials of tragic emotions, while diluting it and often cheapening it. Others thought the fault lay with the modern democratic public: amiable to appreciate the structure, the restraint and the poetry of good tragedy. One of the pervading myths of the age, the myth of progress, seemed more over to make tragedy superannuated and superfluous, a remnant of the era of violence and man's undeveloped ability to control or improve his fate. (*Tragic Themes in Literature* 77)
While the exact reason for the decline of the popularity of formal tragedy is debatable, it is an undeniable fact to say that the tragic muse felt as perfectly at home in the medium of fiction as in the dramatic mode. An attempt is made in the following pages to examine the suitability of fiction for the depiction of tragic experiences with special reference to selected novels—American, Continental and British. Such a discussion, it is hoped, will serve the purpose of comparing Jamesian springs of tragic action with those in other novels.

Foremost among the American novelists who have dealt with tragic stories is Nathaniel Hawthorne. The sense of the frailty and the tragic nature of human life breathe through his novels and short stories. Whether it is a short story or a novel he focuses his attention on the tragic hero, usually a brilliant man possessed of considerable intellectual acumen. Before we come to Hawthorn’s tragic novels, which he calls romances, it is worth while to have a look at his major short stories. Hawthorne’s stories generally focus on the human mind and the moral problems it faces. As Hawthorne himself says, “they have the pale tint of flowers that blossomed in too retired a shade.” They deal with such themes as guilt and secrecy, intellectual and moral pride, strange experiences and supernatural events. “May-pole of Merry Mount,” for example, is an allegorical tale based on a
historical incident. “Endicott and the Red Cross” describes an act of rebellion by Endicott, who tears the red cross from the British ensign on coming to learn that the King is sending an Anglican Governor to rule them. “Minister’s Black Veil” is the story of Rev. Hooper who appears before his congregation wearing a mask and never takes it off on the ground that it is a symbol of the curtain that hides every man. In “Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment” we read about the Doctor’s experiment intended to make four aged people young. In “The Ambitious Guest” a huge landslide buries a group of people while they are discussing their secret ambition. “Ethan Brand” is an enquiry into the source of evil and this enquiry leads the protagonist to the conclusion that evil is generated in the heart of man. This discovery leads him to suicide. “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and “The Birth Mark” present scientific heroes who have severed the silver thread of conscience that links man to God.

“Ethan Brand” is typical of Hawthorn’s tragic tale in that it has a tragic protagonist who like Oedipus looks for his own tragic fate and keeps on looking till he finds it. He has been looking for the “unpardonable sin” and he finds it in his own heart as intellectual pride and in the separation of the mind and the heart. This shocking discovery, which is the discovery of his own tragic flaw, crushes his spirit and induces him to commit suicide.
Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*, though he calls it a romance, is, in fact, a tragic tale. It is the story of Donatello, Count of Monte Beni, and three American friends of his: Kenyan, a sculptor, Hilda, a girl from North England and Miriam, a mysterious character. Donatello is in love with Miriam, who however is haunted by an unrevealed sin and is persecuted by a mysterious character. One day Donatello throws the stranger into his death at an encouraging nod from Miriam, but he remains moody and conscience-stricken ever afterwards. As in the case of Dostoevsky's tragic characters, suffering humanizes Donatello and he finally confesses his crime and turns himself over to justice. Hilda, who is an eye witness to the crime committed by Donatello, is tormented by the thought that she is also involved in the sin. In the end she regains her peace of mind by pouring out her sin at the church confessional. In a sense *Marble Faun* is very similar to James's novels in that Kenyan and Hilda are not unlike the innocents from America and the tragic events they witness are not unrelated to their innocence.

*The Scarlet Letter* is the best among Hawthorne's works both as a tragedy and as a work of art. It is a tale, as it is often called, of human frailty and sorrow. Set in the puritan environment of Boston, not long after the reestablishment of that colony, the *Scarlet Letter* can be described
as a romance of conscience and the tragic consequences of concealed guilt, a feature it shares with *Marble Faun*. Dimmesdale, the protagonist of the novel, suffers mental agony, perhaps as no man ever suffered and this makes the *Scarlet Letter* one of the greatest tragedies of Western Literature. Dimmesdale, who commits adultery with Hester Prynne, is a victim of the repressed sensuality which we see in him and which may be considered his tragic flaw. He complicates the situation by playing the hypocrite and instead of owning up his secret sin tries desperately to keep up his image as a saintly young minister. Pride prevents him from listening to the dictates of his conscience. In the meantime Hester Prynne’s husband manages to discover that the reverend young minister is the father of Hester’s child. Moved by a diabolical desire to revenge himself Chillingworth—he calls himself by that name—aggravates the same guilt that has already taken strong hold of his patient and commits the unpardonable sin of violating in cold blood the privacy of Dimmesdale’s heart. Chillingworth’s own tragedy is that the demonic search morally degrades him and turns him into a monomaniac. Dimmesdale triumphs in the end by overcoming the temptation to flee to Europe along with Hester and by making a public confession of the sin standing at the scaffold of the pillary on which Hester had stood with Pearl in her arms several years before. A story of sin, expiation and moral regeneration, the *Scarlet Letter* presents tragic
experience as leading to moral enhancement. The following analysis by John B. Gerhart helps to understand the moral situation Dimmesdale finds himself in as also the poignant nature of Dimmesdale’s predicament.

The author’s emphasis is more on the phenomenon of guilt that results from the situation than on doctrine. Assume, for instance, the case of man, perhaps in any Christian context, who, having committed himself to the social and religious values of his environment, violates an article of the code to which he has subscribed. Assume also that he contrives to avoid the penalties incurred by the violation and, further, that his original commitment to the code is of no ordinary sort, that is a matter of sincere conviction and true belief. In such a case guilt and extreme manifestations might be expected, and as the nature of guilt is dual, involving a continuing and tormenting awareness of what the self actually is as opposed to what it ought to be, so a sickness of mind that is tragic in its consequences might also be expected. We may observe these consequences in Dimmesdale. It is, first of all, the sin-consciousness of Puritan society and the inflexibility of its code that are the substantive causes of the minister’s guilt. As a hypersensitive being, a fact over which he has no control, his guilt became a demoralizing, if not deranging sickness, for which he knows the
remedy yet cannot grasp it. His tragedy may thus be attributed to the undesirable facts of environment and character. Such tragedy has a certain universality. (1991)

_Moby Dick_ is a much greater tragedy than _The Scarlet Letter_ in that whereas in _The Scarlet Letter_ the tragedy is confined to the protagonist’s mind, here it is as large as the universe itself. Ahab is a larger than life hero—one which belongs to the tribe of Prometheus, Theseus and Perseus. His tragedy is not the result of fate striking a random victim. He falls through pride as do his Greek counterparts. Goaded on by pride he wants to grasp “the ungraspable phantom of life.” He wants to discover the reality which is hidden behind the mask by striking through the mask not realizing that the gods would want the mask to be there. His monomaniac quest is a kind of madness and as John Park says “ it is the madness with which the gods strike those whom they would destroy”(24). Commenting on his tragic flaw John park has observed;

But Ahab, figurehead of the independent mind, scorning to reconcile himself to a fate he can neither control nor avoid, much less understand; Prometheus-like refusing…to acknowledge the everlasting superiority of the cosmic powers concentrated against his
brittleness like an immense careless army; above all knowing his own madness, his pain and his humanity: this is irresistible. (24)

Ahab is not pathetic or grotesque but a tragic figure who faces the nemesis with courage. His effort to revenge himself proves futile and he and his associates perish at sea. Commenting on the kind of tragedy *Moby Dick* typifies John Park continues,

The tragedy is neither Aristotelian nor in the Elizabethan sense personally or politically ethical, nor in the Thomas Hardy sense psychologically deterministic. Ahab’s downfall carries with it more than the undoing of one man and his accomplices. The tone of the ending, to take one of the many indications, is especially grand and out of all proportion to Ahab’s immediate significance as a mere individual. He does indeed ...suggest an allegory of man in a historical predicament. (25)

*Moby Dick* has a recognizable tragic structure. The chapters so configure that it can be easily divided into five sections corresponding to the five acts of a traditional tragedy. Ahab, like Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea*, brings upon himself his downfall as the inevitable retribution due to hubris. Hubris is the sin of pride. The Greeks believed that even a
mild boast could be interpreted as a show of hubris. It is interesting to note that though the death of Agamemnon in the play of that name is a cold blooded murder, Aeschylus presents it as a punishment due at least to partly his hubris. The cunning Clytemnestra sets a trap for Agamemnon so that he would appear guilty of pride in the eyes of the gods. As Agamemnon’s chariot is about to enter the city, Clytemnestra urges her husband to stop it so that the people of the city get time to receive him by spreading purple carpets on the streets. Agamemnon is aware that he would offend the gods if he arrogates to himself the ritual usually reserved for the gods but he yields to Clytemnestra’s loving persuasion. In his *Odyssey* Homer provides an instance of how sensitive the gods are about this matter. When Odysseus kills his wife’s suitors, his old nurse wants to cry out in joy. But Odysseus restrains her by reminding her that killing a man is not a matter to be gloated over. Santiago’s boast (referring to the marlin) “I will kill him... in all his greatness and his glory” (57) assumes a sinister significance in the context of the traditional concept concerning hubris.

How effective a medium the novel can become for the expression of tragic experience can be further illustrated with reference to two novels—Balzac’s *Pere Goriot* and Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*. *Pere Goriot* is one of the most famous works in the series *Comedie Humane* which
presents a panorama of the whole French society. That Belzac intended the
novel to be a tragedy is evident from the opening comments:

But at the point when our drama begins, in 1819, there was a poor
young girl staying there. We have used the word “drama”; and
however discredited the word has become from wanton misuse and
distortion in the gloomy literature of ours, we still must use it here;
not that our story is dramatic in the strict sense of the word; but the
telling of it may well provoke a few private tears, if not public ones.

One might even say that *Fere Goriot* is as poignant a story as
Shakespeare’s *Lear*, Goriot being a working class counterpart of Lear. But
the comparison between Lear and old Goriot cannot be pushed beyond a
certain point. Old Goriot, it is true, is a monolithic character like Lear and
he meets his tragedy by following what may be called a mania of parental
love. But all other similarities are superficial. Both Lear and old Goriot are
deserted by their daughters, but Goriot never approaches the grandeur of
Lear. Lear’s pride, his misjudgment, the tragic breakdown of his
experiences and his resignation; all this is absent in the case of Goriot. Lear
is tragic, but Goriot is only pathetic as in the case of Ahab in *Moby Dick*
and Belzac’s own Grandet in *Eugenie Grandet*. It is really a mania that
kills him. An inordinate desire to satisfy every wish of his daughters reaches the proportion not of a tragic flaw but of a tragic mania in Goriot.

*Pere Goriot* has been called a bourgeois tragedy of money, power and despair and early enough in the novel the story branches into two directions. First we have the tragedy of Goriot whose maniacal compulsions to help his daughters reduce him to utter poverty. Side by side with it, we have the tragedy of Rastignac. He appears originally a man of integrity, but in the course of the story we see him succumbing to the ambition to get rich and turning to immorality and trash.

Like *Pere Goriot* Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* is suffused with an atmosphere of tragedy and pathos. It is the story of old Karamazov and his four sons—Ivan, Dimitry, Aloysha and Smerdyakov. Old Karamazov, as more than one critic has pointed out, is a sensual Falstaff of a man and his children are not basically different from their father. If we take the story up to the murder of old Karamazov, the novel will be found a first rate tragedy. And the rest of the story deals with the need for suffering to chasten and subdue man so that he turns ultimately to God. Why do the Karamazovs suffer? If we are asked to identify the tragic flaw that crushes the Karamazovs under the weight of tragic happenings it is the "Karamazov taint," which is a kind repulsive extremism.
Dickens's *Hard Times* can be considered a tragedy of multiple plot. First, there is the story of Louisa and her marriage to Bounderby. The second story comprises the affair of Stephen and Rachel. The third plot, which presents probably the only positive strand in the story, deals with the conversion of Gradgrind. The first is a domestic story while the second has a pronounced sociological concern. In Dickens usually most of the stories show a man living by a master vice such as miserliness, pride and hypocrisy. The main plot of *The Hard Times* shows a man who lives by a philosophy, the philosophy of Gradgrindism, which is in fact a mixture of Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism and the economic theories of Malthus and Adam Smith. The main plot shows how Gradgrindism operates in family relationships leading to an impoverishment of the moral and emotional life of the individual. Stephen’s story illustrates how it leads to social and economic injustice. In the first story the major characters are Louisa, Gradgrind, Tom and Bounderby. The young Louisa whom we see peeping in at Sleary’s circus is a very normal girl like Sissy. The chapters that follow unfold the slow impoverishment of her emotional life. At school and at home she and her brother find themselves in a world of Gradgrindism which would not allow anything but facts to be planted in the mind. The world of factualism is bare, austere and square on the physical level and it
is loveless and cold on the emotional level. Her marriage to Bounderby is motivated on either side wrongly and so it takes them down to the way of tragedy. Louisa's accusing cry to her father that she was not permitted to nurture even a single dream points to the cause of her tragedy. Tom's exposure as a thief further illustrates the failure of a system which seeks to reduce man to the stature of machines.

The story of Stephen Blackpool, which begins in the tenth chapter, deals with his love for Rachel and highlights social issues like the rigidity of the British divorce laws and the exploitation of the working class. A man of moral integrity, Stephen is misunderstood both by Mr. Bounderby, his employer and by the Union. The charge of robbery against him, his return to Coketown to clear the charges, his fall into the disused mine pit and the belated rescue from there, his disclosure of Tom's involvement in the robbery and his unfortunate death are other important incidents in his story. Though it lacks a hero of tragic stature *The Hard Times* is nevertheless tragic for we find here all the usual ingredients of a tragedy proper.

There is a general view that the best of times are over for tragedy and that it has moved into the worst of times. The modern world is not particularly favourable for tragedy to flourish. It is an age which has no faith in the old worldviews which made tragedy a relevant art form. As
Joseph Wood Krutch argues in his "Tragic Fallacy," modern novel has killed the tragic faith and there is no possibility of recovery" (Muller 244). Herbert J. Muller has paraphrased Wood Krutch's argument as follows:

Man can no longer believe that his fate makes the least influence to a universe he conceives as soulless; he knows that he is a creature of reflexes and complexes determined by heredity and environment. The glory both of God and Man has departed the world and although Krutch later modified his rather melodramatic statement of our plight, his thesis is substantially borne out by many poets and critics who stress only the vulgarity and barbarity of modern civilization and can see no tragic dignity in the calamities that are signaling its collapse; if it now appears that we may end with a bang, we remain hollow men who can only whimper. (244)

The changed environment of the 20th century has necessitated certain changes in our concept of tragedy. A larger than life hero would appear outlandish to the modern audiences and so the protagonists of modern tragedies are either ordinary, commonplace individuals or neurotic, abnormal ones. In either case the hero is unheroic.
In the plays of Ibsen we see European drama in the process of being transformed into what it became in the 20th century. In *Pillars of the Society* (1877) we see him abandoning the verse form in favour of prose. In all his plays he deals with social issues. In *Dolls' House* (1879) he shows a woman asserting her independence by leaving her husband. In *Ghosts* (1881) he follows up the theme and presents the wife as mistakenly remaining with her husband. Further, the play introduces a topic which it was not the custom to discuss in public—the theme of venereal disease. In *Wild Duck* (1884) he returns to the theme of the individualistic woman. Ibsen made a substantial contribution to the theatre. He developed new techniques, discarded old ones; and he dared to present in public ideas considered abhorrent in the past.

Certain ideas typical of the 20th century impacted on all forms of literature and tragedy felt the impact in full force. One such idea was naturalism which is an extreme form of realism. Naturalism applied scientific objectivity to describing things. Its basic methodology is to observe closely and to present things with absolute truthfulness. It seeks to experiment with characters and to study how their development is affected by heredity and environment. The theory of naturalism is not conducive to tragedy. As Herbert J. Muller points out, “if man is merely a creature of brute compulsions, in no sense a free responsible agent, his story can have
no dignity or ideal” (274). How the concept of naturalism affected the mode of tragedy can be seen by examining the tragedies of two representative authors—Strindberg and Hauptmann.

Like a true naturalist Strindberg regarded himself as a victim of fate, environment and heredity. He was a bundle of contradictions and, as some biographers believe, he was a hater of mankind. In his preface to his play *Miss Julia* (1888) he refers to his vision of life as brutal, cynical and heartless. *Miss Julia* shows the main characters as helpless human beings charmed by physical, social and psychological predetermination. Julia, the heroine of the play, yields to her physical desire and has sex with Gean, the butler. Fear of shame and humiliation drives her to commit suicide. Strindberg hated women and this aspect of his personality is reflected in the plays *The Father* (1887) and *The Dance of Death* (1901). Both show the war between the sexes. Strindberg is rather unkind to women in that he shows women as trying to catch men in the trap of love. She turns everything she has—children, her own family—to this end. The trilogy *Demascus* (1898 to 1904) and *A Dream Play* (1902) mark the earliest beginning of the expressionistic plays.

Like Strindberg, Hauptmann too experimented with naturalistic drama although he eventually turned to poetic drama. *His Weavers* (1892)
which portrays the life of the weavers is an interesting play in that in the place of the protagonist we have here a cast of 40 weavers. Powerloom has rendered them jobless and the workers cannot compete with the machines. It is a sprawling play and the playwright has a hard time keeping its various elements in position. Some critics have compared Hauptmann’s *Weavers* with Zola’s epic novel *Germinal* which is on a similar theme. The comparison reveals the weakness of the dramatic form in dealing with topics of this kind; the general view is that the medium of novel was by far better equipped to deal with such situations.

Hauptmann’s *Drayman Hunsfel* (1904) is a more successful naturalistic tragedy. It is a domestic tragedy in which a simple drayman promises his dying wife that he will not remarry. However, the need to have a family makes him remarry. But his second marriage turns out to be an ill assorted one. The drayman kills himself at the end.

It is not thought necessary to follow tragedy through its development in the 20th century. The picture we see is that of constant change. Just as Wagnerian romantic tragedy gave way to the Ibsenite model, Strindberg’s naturalism sobered into Chekhov’s realism and we see the form of tragedy undergoing significant changes with the passage of every decade. The 20th century even experimented with verse tragedy. A detailed discussion of
these developments lies beyond the scope of this study. It is intended to
define the spirit of tragedy so as to show the tragedies of innocents Henry
James deals with in the proper perspective. It is also intended to
demonstrate that real tragedy is independent of form and that the novel is
sometimes found a better medium for the portrayal of at least certain types
of tragic experiences, as Herbert J. Muller has commented;

The tragic spirit has turned to the novel for expression, since it is a
form better suited than drama to a complex age, permitting both
more amplitude and more inwardness. Only two or three dramatists
compare in stature with two or more dozen greater novelists over the
last hundred years. (250)
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