

tragedy, Gough writes, because it is a “god’s-eye view” of life: a “dirty, funny, violent, repetitive cartoon” of humanity’s flawed self. Tragedy was the mere human perspective: Existence was weighty, sad, and deadly. Comedy allowed humankind to stand on Mount Olympus and laugh at itself. The mismatch in reputation between the two dramatic forms was partly a result of simple survival. Only 11 of Aristophanes’ comedies are extant, vastly outnumbered by the tragic works of Aeschylus and Sophocles—and 18 by Euripides alone. Aristotle’s 350 BC treatise on tragedy is available for \$8.76 online, while his presumed companion volume on comedy has disappeared.

When ancient literature was rediscovered in the Middle Ages, tragedy was at hand, and Europe was receptive. The ascendant Christian Church had been founded on tragedy—the “sadistic murder of a man by those he was trying to save, whose fatal flaw was that he was perfect in an imperfect world.” The Bible, the revealed word of God, “apple to Armageddon, does not contain a single joke,” Gough notes.

From Aphra Behn’s novel *Oroonoko* (1688) to the present day, the novel has been biased toward the serious and the weighty. Outlier comic writers such as Rabelais, Cervantes, and Voltaire stand out for their satiric view of authority, and all three spent time in jail. University creative writing departments teach the heavy touch. But “serious” writing is out of sync with popular culture, Gough writes. The

language of the American literary novel has drifted away from “anything used by human beings anywhere on earth” and has lost its mass audience.

Forget Henry James, Gough argues. His advice to his peers: Steal a page from Bart Simpson and Tony Soprano.

ARTS & LETTERS

Manna from Manhattan

THE SOURCE: “The Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art in Medzilaborce, Slovakia” by Július Gajdos, in *Kosmas*, Spring 2007.

BEFORE BILBAO THERE WAS Medzilaborce. The art world expected Medzilaborceans to be filled with gratitude when the United States, Slovakia, and the Andy Warhol Foundation gave the small mountain town an art museum. But when a boxy white former communist cultural center was reopened as the Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art in 1991, much of the reaction in the impoverished community of 6,000 was hostile and contemptuous, writes Július Gajdos, professor in the Institute of Arts and Design at the University of West Bohemia, in the Czech Republic. Installed in one of the most inaccessible areas of Slovakia, 370

When Andy Warhol was asked about his origins, he answered, “I came from nowhere.”

miles from Bratislava, the capital, the museum aroused jealousy among many Slovaks, who said that the benighted people of Medzilaborce were ill prepared to build a tourist industry, much less to appreciate pop art. Indeed, some deeply religious townspeople denigrated Warhol as a decadent homosexual.

The museum was the brainchild of Warhol’s brother John Warhola and Michal Bycko, a teacher at the Medzilaborce Primary Arts School. Bycko began working to create the museum in 1987, the year Warhol died. Now the curator, Bycko sought to honor not only Warhol but his parents, who were born nearby and immigrated to the United States in 1913. Warhola donated some of his brother’s possessions—a snakeskin jacket, Brooks Brothers ties, and sunglasses. The Warhol Foundation lent about 20 works, including some Marilyn Monroe portraits, Campbell’s Soup I and II, a Red Lenin print, and a painted photo of Queen Ntombi Twala of Swaziland.

Awkwardly, Warhol himself, when asked about his origins, answered, “I came from nowhere.” But his mother’s strong influence—she signed some of his pictures at the beginning of his career—suggests the importance of his Slovakian heritage, Gajdos says. Julia Zavacky Warhola also painted and designed sculpture. A chandelier shaped like an angel in the foyer of the museum was modeled after a drawing, almost a scribble, made by Julia. She had a

whimsical touch, creating paintings of the houses in her village showing them with hens' legs, according to Gajdoš.

Warhol's art—the museum has two concrete Campbell's soup cans flanking the entrance—was not embraced in eastern Slovakia during his lifetime. His mother sent some of Andy's drawings to her family in the 1970s and '80s, but they threw them out when they moved.

But Medzilaborce residents have warmed to Warhol and his fans in the 16 years since the museum opened. A hotel was built across the street, and a fountain erected around a statue of the artist. The number of visitors has gradually increased, most of them coming from abroad, judging by the signatures in a guest book. Gajdoš says the residents of Medzilaborce have come to recognize the value and importance of the museum “through others.”

ARTS & LETTERS

Waiting for Cecil: A Widow's Tale

THE SOURCE: “The Literary Wife: Working With the Widow” by Peter Stanford, in *The Independent*, May 20, 2007.

SOME BIOGRAPHERS PREFER that their work be grounded in the written record, untouched by the memories and myths of family and intimate friends. Most to be shunned, perhaps, is the devoted wife. “The figure of the literary widow, guarding the great man's work and tending the flame of his reputation, is a



Cecil Day-Lewis attends the theater with his second wife, actress Jill Balcon, in 1957. Balcon served as a source for an authorized biography of the late poet and critic that discussed his infidelity.

familiar one,” notes Peter Stanford, a journalist and the author of numerous books.

But Stanford took the opposite tack. To write his authorized biography of lionized poet Cecil Day-Lewis (1904–72), he relied heavily upon the actress Jill Balcon, Day-Lewis's second wife, with whom he had two children (food writer Tamasin and Academy Award-winning actor Daniel). Balcon had been the first reader of much of Day-Lewis's work and, since his death, has edited several editions of his poetry.

But she also carried old hurts. Day-Lewis had a wandering eye that led him to pursue several extramarital affairs during their

more than 20 years of marriage. And Balcon resented the central role the novelist Rosamond Lehmann still occupies in discussions of the poet. (Lehmann and Day-Lewis were lovers for the decade before he met Balcon.)

Balcon was leery, with reason, of helping Stanford to write a book. Indeed, her late husband wrote a gently satirical poem, “The Widow Interviewed” (1965), about a woman who fetishizes her attachment to “The Poet.” After overcoming reservations, however, Balcon proved a game and valuable source, Stanford says. They hit upon a formula to determine what was off limits for treatment in the book, *C. Day-Lewis: A Life*, published earlier