dens lifted morale at home and overseas.

By the early 1960s, however, photojournalism was on the way out. Once-popular illustrated magazines began to lose readers to TV competition, and Washington had long since lost interest in FSA-like projects. Photographers themselves, meanwhile, began to regard their work as art and their business as self-expression. They began trying to "convey what was behind the lens, rather than what was in front of it," argues Lemann. A leader in the new "art" photography was Diane Arbus (1924–71), famed chronicler of midgets, transvestites, and other oddballs. Even Arbus's pictures of "normal" people convey her private conviction that "all of us are freaks."

Today, a photographer's place is supposed to be in the studio; a photograph's in a museum, art gallery, or up-scale fashion magazine. Only newspaper and newsmagazine photographers—long the "poor relations" of photojournalists—still carry cameras around their necks. "I can't think of an image that stays in my mind as a symbol of poverty [under] the Reagan administration," Lemann laments. He blames the demise of photojournalism. When the occasional powerful image does appear (e.g., in pictures of the 1984 Olympics), it only serves as a poignant reminder of what has been lost.

Defending Modern Literature

"Venerable Complications: Why Literature Is a Little Hard to Read" by Richard Poirier, in *Raritan* (Summer 1984), 165 College Ave., New Brunswick, N.J. 08901.

Modern literature is frequently denounced for its obscurity and impenetrability. That is to mistake virtues for vices, argues Poirier, editor of *Raritan*, for the opacity of literature is "essential to its value."

Serious literature has always been created for the few rather than the many. The spread of literacy during the 19th century created a broader potential audience, but also precipitated fears among writers that, as Henry James put it, the "monstrous masses" would undermine the "tradition of sensibility." In a kind of holding action against popularization, literature after the mid-19th century increasingly became "an extraordinarily demanding and self-conscious inquiry into its own resources and procedures," often requiring "translation" by a literary critic.

Today, literature is more exclusive than ever before. Poirier cautions against blaming TV or the arrival of a technological society in general for literature's isolation. In fact, he contends, technology is as much tormented by, as it is the tormentor of, literature. Writers and poets have always been nostalgic for a mythical unsullied past, and from the time that book two of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* was published in 1589, they have made modern industry and its products the scapegoat for their sense of loss.

"Literature's distaste for Technology reveals, at last, a squeamishness about its own operations," Poirier contends. Literature, created out of language and shaped by religious, economic, and political influences, is no more "natural" than is technology. And yet literature *is* different, he insists. While TV and other products of technology impose themselves with "force and indifference," reading requires active human involvement.

That quality, in Poirier's view, elevates literature above even the other arts—painting, music, dance. He writes: "More than any other form of art or expression it demonstrates what can be made, what can be done with something [language] shared by everyone, used by everyone in the daily conduct of life, and something which, moreover, carries most subtly and yet measurably within itself, its vocabulary and syntax, the governing assumptions of a society's social, political, and economic arrangements."

Tragedy for Our Times

"What Is Happening to Tragedy Today?" by James Mark, in *Journal of European Studies* (June 1984), Alpha Academic, Halfpenny Furze, Mill Lane, Chalfont St. Giles, Bucks HP8 4NR, England.

Tragedies on the grand scale of the ancient Greeks and Shakespeare are no longer written. Of late, literary critics on both sides of the Atlantic have argued that tragedy itself is dead. Mark, a British writer, insists that tragedy lives on.

During the fifth century B.C., Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides portrayed awesome human suffering. They challenged their audiences to affirm their faith in "an ultimate order that transcends our understanding," writes Mark. Shakespeare's tragedies likewise suggested an orderly but implacable universe, in which flawed heroes who violate sacred trusts of love or duty die terrible deaths.

In an "atomized, fluid" society, it is not possible for playwrights to people the stage with the noble figures—kings, queens, warriors—of more traditional tragedies. The hero of a serious contemporary play is more likely to be a kind of Everyman, and an unsympathetic one to boot. And the modern tragic universe is almost always meaningless, rife with absurdity and cosmic injustice.

The avatar of modern drama may well be *Waiting for Godot* (1952), by Samuel Beckett, in which two pathetic characters, Vladimir and Estragon, cling together unhappily in a kind of limbo waiting reluctantly for a character (Godot) whose identity is a mystery. Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* (1945) portrays three characters in hell, whose sentence it is to endure one another's company. Mother Courage, the heroine of Bertolt Brecht's 1941 play of the same name, is forced to prostitute her daughter as the price of holding her family together during the Thirty Years' War (1618–48).

How can these works of despair be considered tragedies? The playwright's own attempt to impose order on the chaos of modern life and the sympathy that audiences feel for the plays' characters are both affirmations of the human struggle. This is a greatly diminished view of tragedy, Mark concedes. But as long as man must grapple with uncertainty and the question of his ultimate fate, tragedy will survive.