find himself a work, but to do so in a socially responsible manner. (The author himself has recognized that giving free rein to the agonal spirit may no longer be socially acceptable). Thirdly, teachers and their students might explore some of the leisure pursuits, which Professor Green recommends chiefly for their potential to yield intrinsic enjoyment, in order to discover whether, when undertaken seriously for the purpose of self-cultivation, these activities could be made to do the work of "work." Since among these activities the author mentions the creation and appreciation of art, aesthetic education would be an appropriate context for such explorations. More objectives and tasks for education may be implicit somewhere in this book, but it is a safe assumption that few, if any, would be approached properly if approached in a spirit of playfulness. And if a metaphor is wanted to characterize the curriculum of the future, the obstacle course with its rigors would conjure up images more fitting than the free-swinging fun of the jungle-gym.

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ON ARISTOTLE AND GREEK TRAGEDY by John Jones. New York: Oxford University Press, Galaxy edition, 1968, 284 pp., $1.75.
TRAGEDY & PHILOSOPHY by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1968, 388 pp., $6.95.

Concerning Aristotle's *Poetics,* John Jones of Oxford writes, "There is nothing very like the fate of this book in all the secular literature of the West." All along it has been profoundly misunderstood. The neo-classicists are notorious for making it the source of their Rules, which aren't there, but despite their knowledge moderns also distort it by reading into it their own interests. A particular reason is our interest in character, above all the tragic hero. Aristotle said plainly: "Tragedy is an imitation not of human beings but of action and life." Jones insists that there is not a shred of evidence that he entertained the concept of the tragic hero; always he focused on action, and in this not on misfortune or disaster but simply on change, mutability. Our author settles down to a favorite kind of scholarly performance, a vigorous demonstration that almost all the scholars before him have misinterpreted a classic. And though he believes that "probably not much of the ancient tragic experience is recoverable by us," he is confident that Aristotle was much closer to the Greek tragic poets than we are. He also insists that we should not force on any of them "the local and no doubt transient self of the modern West."

Although I am no Greek scholar myself, I think Jones makes out a plausible case for his version of the *Poetics.* In his reading of the tragic poets too he shows how much a scholar may illuminate by his close study of an age. I also think, however, that we are entitled to bring our own interests to Greek tragedy, and that he tends seriously to impoverish its meanings by restricting them to what Aristotle and presumably the Greeks saw in them. A particular casualty of his method is *Oedipus Rex.* According to Jones, the action here is the king's search for the truth, which finally vindicates the oracles. "Our

experience is of something decisively accomplished"; since it is "an ultimately fortunate thing that the parricide and incest should be established," the play is a "success-story," and the exposure of the full horror only "demonstrates that things have come out right." As for the appearances of *hubris* in the hero, Aristotle's broad answer was right: it serves only to make the character "more interesting."

Well, maybe so. The play may well have been not so tragic to the Greeks as it seems to us; though in view of Jones's doubt that we can recover their experience one may wonder how he can speak as confidently as he does about the "true" Sophoclean standpoint. Yet generations of readers have found much more in *Oedipus Rex* than this, and they always contribute to the making of masterpieces. I would stress the commonplace too often forgotten by scholars, that great works of art are richly suggestive, always take on meanings that their authors did not consciously intend or their contemporary audience recognize. We have a perfect right to find meanings relevant to our experience — so long as we do not simply force them on the work, or above all insist that our interpretation is the "real" meaning, the "true" standpoint. "It turns out to be our bad luck," Jones concludes, "that Greek tragedy is superficially intelligible in a modern way." As I see it, the drama of Sophocles affords ample grounds for our legitimate interest in the tragic hero.

For nonspecialists, at any rate, Walter Kaufmann's *Tragedy and Philosophy* is a much richer work. While a sensitive reader of the great tragedies, who insists upon the need of paying close attention to their texts before generalizing about Tragedy, he is concerned as well with their philosophical dimension, which Aristotle virtually ignored. He defines tragedy as a symbolic action that takes us into the world of intense human suffering, and that in giving us some sense that suffering is universal also makes us realize that "courage and endurance in suffering or nobility in despair are admirable." In the many Greek tragedies that have happy endings, or in others like *Agamemnon* in which there is strictly no tragic hero, the presentation of intense suffering is still what matters more. Kaufmann accordingly differs from Jones in believing that Aristotle was rather remote from the spirit of the Greek tragic poets. And he finds much more room for our own interests. Greek tragedy, he concludes, is "a collective label for a number of exceedingly bold plays, most of which stand up magnificently after the experience that we have lived through."

As a crucial test of his own poetics, Kaufmann offers his interpretation of *Oedipus Rex,* which Aristotle praised solely for its plot. From his approach he naturally sees something quite different from a "success-story" or the vindication of oracles. The main themes he stresses in it are still wholly relevant to us: "man's radical insecurity," "human blindness," "the curse of honesty," "the inevitability of tragedy," and the issue of "justice." He grants that on the Athenians it had an apparently "sedative effect"; they saw in it the conventional wisdom of moderation and resignation, in keeping with the reputation of Sophocles for piety. Nevertheless he insists that not one of Sophocles's surviving tragedies supports this mellow image. Since "my" Sophocles is substantially like Kaufmann's, I would add only some question about his description of him as the "poet of heroic despair." Despair seems to me too

strong a word, as I sense in him more acceptance of the human condition.

In moving on to a consideration of Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Shakespeare, and some contemporaries, Kaufmann continues to read the text sensitively and so recognizes that tragedies differ greatly — a truism too often forgotten by critics and philosophers who define the "essence" of tragedy. I find him generally sound in his critiques of other philosophers who have had something to say about tragedy, not only Aristotle but Plato, Schopenhauer, Hegel, and Nietzsche. (He is kindest to Hegel, even though remarking that he developed no theory of tragedy.) He observes that we all have the advantage of their insights, and of much more that has been written since their day; so we might reasonably hope for a sounder approach than theirs.

My only complaint is about Kaufmann's spotty treatment of modern tragedy. As he points out, his approach can readily be applied to both modern fiction and drama, and though "black comedy" has become more popular, he rejects the fashionable thesis that tragedy is dead in our age. "What is odd," he writes sensibly, "is not that nobody in the twentieth century writes Greek or Elizabethan tragedies, but rather that so many writers think this calls for comment and regret." The writers he chooses to consider, however, are rather odd — Sartre, Hochhuth, Brecht's *Galileo,* and Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner.* Although Sartre is a natural for him, why Brecht, who he notes is neither tragic nor philosophical? And Styron, about whom his main point is that he does nothing like justice to a great theme? One may wonder why he barely mentions other writers, notably Malraux, much more suited to both his thesis and his exceptional talents.

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PERSPECTIVES IN LITERARY SYMBOLISM (Yearbook of Comparative Criticism, Volume I.) Edited by Joseph Strelka. University Park, Pennsylvania: State University Press, 1968, 257 pp., $8.75.

The essays in this collection represent a middle ground between aesthetics, literary criticism, and the history of ideas — or in the context of the ideal of comparative criticism they perhaps should be described as a synthesis or amalgam of these disciplines. The reviewer is faced with the choice of dealing with the collection itself or with the theory behind the collection as expressed in the preface and the introductory essay, "Comparative Criticism and Literary Symbolism." Since these two concepts are ordinarily not thus joined in a formal way, and since the first one of comparative criticism is in itself somewhat ambiguous, the second alternative would seem to reveal more about the significance of the book.

In the preface, two assumptions are said to underlie the essays in this collection, that literature is an expression of the culture in which it is written, and that literature involves value judgments — another way of describing the contrasting extrinsic and intrinsic approaches to literature. The first of these two assumptions would seem to establish conclusively that aesthetic values are not absolute, but are based on the cultural values of various periods and areas. Probably the fundamental question of all aesthetic theory is whether