

and conjectures, implicit or stated in his work—would have become clear, and the tribute thereby more fitting. It might also have led to a meaningful grouping (as in Jakobson's own *Collected Works*) rather than mere alphabetical ordering of articles, so that the festschrift would be more manageable even in physical terms. Some editorial discretion might have been used to limit the number of purely mechanical exercises on vowel alternations, grammatical cases, and single words, thereby also reducing the ratio of linguistic to nonlinguistic articles (more than two to one), a ratio which is disproportionate in terms of Jakobson's work and which slights various areas like Old Russian literature, the epic, and others. Perhaps these were insurmountable problems for editorial and other reasons. Finally, not everyone can receive these handsome but cumbersome volumes as a gift and might therefore well examine its teeth, for the bite is outrageous—\$128.00 the set.

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### ***Tragedy and Philosophy***

By WALTER KAUFMANN. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1968. xvii + 388 pp.

This book will please a great variety of thinkers, just as it will irritate others, for a number of different reasons. Be that as it may, it is difficult to think of a reader who will fail to find Kaufmann's themes and ideas unworthy of debate and lacking in importance. There is much in this book to justify the judgment that Kaufmann's treatment is often brilliant, imaginative, and learned, although there are enough errors, slips, and dubious insights. When his commentary becomes rushed, he tends to indulge in frequent mixing of heterogeneous elements from all periods of Western intellectual history.

It seems that Kaufmann's main reason for writing this book is closely connected with his reserved attitude toward the classical heritage. He tells us on page 74: "Aristotle went beyond Plato a long time ago, and it is high time for us to move beyond both Plato and Aristotle." To no one's surprise, Chapter 3 bears the title "Toward a New Poetics." What the reader evidently does not know is what led Kaufmann to believe this to be high time for such tasks and why he has decided that to do so is good for us. One of the tasks that the reader must do for himself is to ascertain, independently of what Kaufmann says, whether the author of this book has in fact been able to go beyond Plato and Aristotle.

Although we shall return to the main ideas expressed in that third chapter, suffice it here to say that on first reading, one has the unmistakable impression of a hastily written diatribe replete with disconnected aesthetics, insights, strong metaphors, numerous aphorisms ranging from the trivial to the wise, and views loosely put together about "art in general." If anything, Kaufmann's own philosophy of poetics is that of the creative person, a position urging a shift of

interest from the art work to the person and from the public objective to the subjective activity. In his eagerness to convince the reader of the correctness of his position, Kaufmann appears almost eager to overlook the broader ethical flavor of Plato's and Aristotle's approaches to art in general and tragedy in particular. For Kaufmann, Plato is not simply a non-artist; he is a biased moralistic critic. More often than not, he compels the reader to think of Aristotle as one who defines tragedy and understands it only in terms of the emotions it elicits (p. 87). Fortunately Kaufmann manages in some miraculous way to correct himself later in the book and come closer to the real issue that underlies Aristotle's functional approach to tragedy when he says: "Aristotle . . . came far closer than recent writers to doing justice to the wide range of Greek tragedy when he said that tragedies are plays that evoke *eleos* and *phobos* but provide a sobering emotional relief" (pp. 180-191).

Aside from Kaufmann's interest in the theoretical problem of the nature of tragedy and philosophical poetics, his other main goal is cultural interpretation. However, whether it is possible for him to give us enough wisdom in this area that we may regard his book as a work of lasting significance depends mainly on what he has said or failed to say and on the quality and scope of the tragic vision of life once the tragedians have disclosed it in poetry and, particularly, once the philosophers have elucidated it in prose. But if we are to trust Kaufmann's own warning about the value of philosophical pronouncements in this area, we would do wisely not to read his own philosophical book. Yet Kaufmann as a philosopher takes an anti-Platonic stand, not only in his efforts to give us a poetic beyond Plato and Aristotle, but also in his determination to show Plato's failure to rise to an understanding of tragedy comparable to that of the tragic poets.

There is something paradoxical in Kaufmann's attitude: while he expresses a desire for a new poetics and claims to have given it in essential outline, he does so only through philosophical debate and exposition rather than through what he admittedly most admires, namely, creating tragedies. Be that as it may, one must not dismiss lightly his concrete proposal of a new poetics and one must take him seriously when he says that his "central aim is to develop a sound and fruitful approach to tragedy, to try it out and thus illuminate Greek tragedy and some problems relating to the possibility and actuality of tragedy in our time" (p. xii). In his effort to do so, he wrote Chapter 4 to show how the birth of tragedy is traceable to Homer, who constitutes the background for the fundamental themes and features of tragedy as practiced by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. He has discussed in separate chapters not only the Greek tragedians and Shakespeare but also the leading philosophers of tragedy—Plato, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Hegel, and also Hume and Schopenhauer. The effort is made to present the main interpretations of the nature of tragedy and to debate the merits of these theories through a comparative examination of methods and conclusions. The controlling assumption is that the philosophers of tragedy need not

be regarded as necessarily wiser than the tragic poets. He has stated this much in the introduction: "I have more respect for [Sophocles'] wisdom than Plato or Aristotle did." In the last analysis, one would say that the thrust of this book is to demonstrate two things: the viability of Kaufmann's sketch of a new poetics, and the view that tragedies can be, and in fact have been, written today.

It is best to leave to the individual reader the appraisal of Kaufmann's analyses of the major philosophies of tragedy and turn our attention to the kernel of his view on the "new poetics." Tragedy, Kaufmann's definition runs, "is (1) a form of literature that (2) presents a symbolic action as performed by actors and (3) moves into the center immense human suffering, (4) in such a way that it brings to our minds our own forgotten and repressed sorrows as well as those of our kin and humanity, (5) releasing us with some sense (a) that suffering is universal—not a mere accident in our experience, (b) that courage and endurance in suffering or nobility in despair are admirable—not ridiculous—and usually also (c) that fates worse than our own can be experienced as exhilarating. (6) In length, performances range from a little under two hours to about four, and the experience is highly concentrated" (p. 85). What this definition purports to accomplish is to accommodate two dimensions Plato and Aristotle ignored: the work's relation to its author and to the context of its time. The merits of Kaufmann's definition will be scrutinized in ways a book review does not permit, but whether it is a substantial improvement over Aristotle's is something that only Kaufmann's strictest followers will readily concede.

Close to the end, Kaufmann raises the important question of "why the immense sufferings of our time are hardly ever dealt with in a play?" In the last chapter he provides an answer and defends the thesis that "tragedies *can* be written in our time, and the Hochhuth [*The Deputy*] has proved it." His discussion is illuminating, but the relevance of his "new poetics" to the writing of tragedies is not—he admits as much on page 357. And this is only one of the many puzzles Kaufmann creates for his readers. Yet these shortcomings should not cause the reader to ignore the many exciting and daring insights the author has generously set down in this challenging opus.

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***The Theory of the Modern Stage:  
An Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama***

Edited by ERIC BENTLEY. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968. 493 pp.

Nowhere does the theory of the comparative find better justification than in an anthology devoted to the subject of modern stage theory and practice. For, in our modern world of instant communication, world theater has become a provable reality. The widespread dissemination of