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—Dryden, Mr. Empson is making good conversation about poetry. Good conversation is gay, witty, often extravagant and contradictory, given to aperçus rather than system. Like any other kind of discourse, it has its necessities. It does not matter much, for example, if Professor Olson is boring; in his kind of discourse the important thing is to be systematic, not amusing. In Mr. Empson's kind of discourse, though system does not matter much, it would be fatal to be boring. To hold Mr. Empson's kind of discourse to strict theoretical account is to miss the point.

Neither of these defects would perhaps matter very much if "Critics and Criticism" did not itself make a major point of them by opening with 150 pages of attack on such critics. This looks like a mistake in the formal presentation of their subject, despite the wit and justice of some of their attacks. Professor Keast's essay on Robert Heilman's study of "King Lear," for example, is both just and beautifully written. But his assumption that in demolishing Professor Heilman on "King Lear" he has disposed of "'The New Criticism' and 'King Lear'" is like supposing that you dispose of Pastoral Poetry by demolishing Ambrose Philips.

In any event, what is important here is not the mistakes of "New Critics," which are doubtless sufficient; what is important here is the virtues of the "Aristotelians." What New Critics may have done is not enough to the point to make a good beginning. The proper beginning is the Aristotelian theory, which we get only in fits and starts until page 546, where Professor Olson begins his "Outline of Poetic Theory." What ought to follow is illustrations of how the theory works in practice, and of this we get almost nothing except Professor MacLean's very good essay on "Lear" and a part of Professor Crane's on "Tom Jones." To make room for such illustration of how Aristotelians write criticism we could easily have spared the two-hundred odd pages of Professor McKeon's historical studies of Aristotle; these studies have only a remote bearing on the subject, and that bearing is no part of Professor McKeon's concern.

Between a formally questionable beginning and a McKeon middle which is at best out of all proper proportion, "Critics and Criticism" obscures its subject in a very trying way. That these Aristotelian critics should have failed formally is ironic; more than that it is unfortunate, because they have something of genuine value to say and they have great abilities as critical theorists.

## Belles-Lettres Notes

**SHE MADE THE BIG TOWN AND OTHER STORIES.** By Frank Brookhouser. University of Kansas City-Twayne Publishers. \$2.95. Twenty short stories, many of them reprinted from such diverse literary outlets as the little magazines, the quality magazines, and the slick magazines, comprise this highly skilled but somewhat monotonous collection. Mr. Brookhouser's skill as a story teller is considerable, and he has provided a pleasing variety of settings, characters, and situations. It is the mood, the narrowness of emotional range that produces the monotony. In almost all the stories the principal character, or the author, is looking back on a past that was brighter with hope: In "She Did Not Cry At All," "Say That Jimmy Kissed Me," and the title story, it is on a past love that was destined to be unfulfilled; in "My Father and the Circus," "A Life Going By," and "Easter Egg" it is on the lost ambitions of youth. A number of the stories—"The Inn was Promises," "Triumph with Bells and Laughter," and "Pierre"—deal with the war or the war's aftermath, and the mood is again one of gentle nostalgia. Two of the stories break successfully from this mold: "The Bereaved" is a morosely ironic vignette; "Epilogue in the Blues for Joey" while it shares the prevailing mood is a highly interesting experiment in the use of jazz rhythms in prose. Only one story—"Mr. Timothy and the Model," a whimsical fantasy that slips over into coyness—seemed less than successful in its own right. But the collection as a whole suffers from the lack of variety in its theme. The old cliché, not-to-be-read-at-one-sitting, applies here.

**FAIRACRES.** By G. Poe Waters. University of Denver Press. \$4. The settling of Missouri, the establishment of its plantations, and the founding of the city of Independence provide the broad background for this novel—the first by Miss Waters and the first to be published by the University of Denver Press. In the foreground are a number of love stories; in particular that of Mary Bard and John Strother, and that of Sue Lee and William Catrell. The former is a pastel romance which suffers somewhat from the lack of conflict. The latter is a more interesting affair, involving a Negro slave and a plantation owner. It is further complicated by the fact that Sue Lee is a secret worker in the Missouri underground, helping in the transmission of slaves from the deep South to Kansas, and William is a

leader in the Sons of the South, fighting to keep Missouri a slave state.

Miss Waters, who has used the history of her own family as material for her novel and has peopled it with historical personages, has a pleasant way with scenes of not too great dramatic intensity. Her characterizations are also pleasantly serviceable if on a rather superficial level. She tends to explain away any contradictions in their actions by vague references to the black mind, the mulatto mind, the Scot's mind, and even the South Carolina and Maryland mind. Toward the Negro characters she is, to use her own phrase, friendly but patronizing. Her principal white characters are all noble in intention if their actions sometimes belie this. But her story keeps you reading.

While not quite the significant contribution to Americana that the publishers feel it, "Fairacres" is an above average historical romance.

—EDWARD J. FITZGERALD.

**GREEK LITERATURE FOR THE MODERN READER.** By H. C. Baldry. Cambridge University Press. \$3.75. In recent years there has been a decline in the study of classical language and, almost as a compensation, a spate of new, lively translations of their classics. For the reader who is modern in being alive today and in being dead to the "dead" languages, further aid is offered by the kind of book that Professor Baldry has written. One of the initial difficulties to a reader of Greek translation is his lack of familiarity with the "mental fur-

niture" of Hellenic culture; and so here there are two opening chapters to sketch its political history—from the beginnings in Crete to the decline in the Alexandrian period—and its social, literary, and religious backgrounds.

After that the book settles down to the inevitable progression: Homer and the epic tradition, lyric poetry, the writers of tragedy (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides) and of comedy (Aristophanes), the prose writers and historians (Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon), the dialogue writers (Plato), and finally a brief epilogue on the Alexandrian writers. The discussion is fresh and always stimulating—in the sense of inducing a desire to read the literature itself; and it is informal and informed, never patronizing or pedantic. Especially good is the section on tragedy, which describes a production of the "Oresteia" in fifth-century Athens so vividly that the printed play takes on added splendor. Altogether a fine introduction, it is more elementary and less erudite than Professor Moses Hadas's "History of Greek Literature" published two years ago.

**STEELE AT DRURY LANE.** By John Loftis. University of California Press. \$4. Sir Richard Steele, most widely known through his essays in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* and his letters to his Dear Prue, has additional importance. In recent years Professor Rae Blanchard has diligently and admirably edited some of his works and all of his correspondence; and now Professor Loftis examines his career as theatre manager and his last comedy, "The Conscious Lovers," produced in 1722. For painstaking method, thorough background, and impartiality the book is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of Steele and the stage of his day.

In the theatre his career had two phases—as theatrical manager and as advocate of the new sentimental comedy (with an exemplary or didactic purpose). Professor Loftis is aware of all the ironic differences between Steele's practice and his theory, and— even more commendably—he is impartial in finding him less than lovable. For the facts, based on extensive materials in archives and in print, show that although Steele advocated a reformed comedy with a high didactic purpose and showed it with his own last play, in his management of the theatre he was a failure—neglectful of his duties, tolerant of vaudeville bills and "immoral" Restoration comedies, and reluctant to produce new plays. Although Professor Loftis accuses him of intellectual dishon-

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PA GULP, PA GUNS; PA

CWAMPK, PA CWMAPT;

PA BUNN, PA BNAME; PA

OMAKK, PA OMAEP.

—E. GTPP.

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