

A story that is published for the first time in English translation is "The Diary of Miss Sophia" (1927) by Ting Ling, the lonely and unfulfilled authoress who was awarded the Stalin Prize for literature in 1951 but was sent six years later to a labor camp. It is about the dilemma of an emancipated young lady who tries to save—or waste—the rest of her life according to her own wishes and whims.

But as is always the case with the reviewing of collections of stories, there is not enough room here for a discussion of all the themes, motifs, and styles represented in *Straw Sandals*. We can only add that this collection of stories—one play and one poem are also included—should be recommended for young sinologists and students of comparative literature. Harold R. Isaacs' valuable 38-page introduction and the section "About the Authors" will undoubtedly enable the unspecialized reader to understand many aspects of contemporary Chinese literature.

S. Elkhadem

#### MORRIS WEST

##### *Harlequin*

New York: William Morrow, 1974.  
Pp. 324. \$8.75.

In the prefaces to the New York Edition of his collected works Henry James decisively marked—one by definition, the other by implication—the two courses which the modern novel has successively taken. The first was that which, recognizing internal-psychological complexity, has since moved toward the definition of an art of dramatic consciousness in which the universe is virtually a reflex of a person's sensibility (the way followed by James himself, by Forster, Woolf, Richardson, and Joyce). The second was that which, acknowledging the complications of the external world as a primary reality, has organized its structure as a model of that world, reducing human sensibility to a function of its design (the way followed by Huxley, largely by Graham Greene, by Orwell and, most recently, by Ian Fleming). The most sophisticated achievements in prose fiction have followed the former internally ordered method. Conversely,

*Harlequin*, the latest novel in Morris West's extensive chartings over twenty years and through eleven novels of this latter circuitous "way," is severely flawed, partly by virtue of weaknesses inherent in the fictional mode in which the novel is shaped and partly because of a cumbersome structural dichotomy which has been progressively emerging in his work. Namely that of a world institutionalizing itself into ever more complex forms of evil or nihilism on the one hand, while the central characters on the other hand resolve their problems and conflicts through a simplifying Christian vision or in weighty but irrelevant moral pronouncements. What emerges in (to my mind Mr. West's best novel) *The Devil's Advocate* (1959) as a personal quest for salvation at odds with the lives of other flawed characters develops in *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (1963) into a conflict between Russia and America, the threat of nuclear war being resolved by a humble Ukrainian Pope who had once been tortured by the very Russian leader he now negotiates with. This pattern of the simple Christian visionary involved in a naive salvational relationship with a world of proliferating evil is complexified ten years later in *The Salamander* (West's third novel set in Italy yet moving in the course of its plot to innumerable world capitals), and is most racily articulated in *Harlequin*, again hopping from Geneva, to Hamburg, to London, to Washington, to Mexico City, and to New York.

*Harlequin* (its title would suggest as much) derives principally from romance. Throughout the labyrinth of the novel's plot and its elaborately structured imagery of kings, courts, jesters, princesses, wizards, geniuses, puppets, magic, dark woods, and monsters, one is reminded variously of episodes from the world's quest literature: from the *Odyssey*, the Medieval prose *Lancelot*, Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*, Gulliver's *Travels*, even *Alice in Wonderland*. Its hero, a descendant of a master-mummer of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, is a brilliant and cultured owner of a Geneva-based bank with branches in the world's major capitals. The villain is Basil Yanko, cadaverous director of a computer and systems-analysis industry programming the operations of large corporations throughout the world, among them George Harlequin's bank. As one move in a strategy designed to give him global power, Yanko seeks control of the Harlequin bank (to be sold later to the Arabs

for oil power) by surreptitiously programming into its system an act of criminal fraud pointing to its director. Harlequin's attempts to trace the deed back to Yanko and to publicly discredit him initiate a series of international intrigues, assassinations, kidnappings, and stock-market fluctuations in the best mystery-spy-thriller vein. The profound changes in character which West attempts to create in Harlequin and his friends as a result of their deepening confrontation with evil are not convincing, mainly because the plot exigencies of this fiction rush both readers and characters on so swiftly that neither can pause long enough for meditation and suffering to unfold. In the end the hero dispels the evil surrounding him by an act of conjuration worthy both of his comic ancestry and of the Hesse of the magic theater episode in *Steppenwolf*. The novel ends in a Christian symbolical feast, all loose ends tied nicely into a final harmony.

One cannot justify this attempt to modernize the romance-quest with its factitious accumulation of events from the current political scene, its too patent Christian moralizing, its undistinguishable characters who become mouthpieces to outworn ideas by trite evocations of its cleverly designed plot, its narrative skill ("pure entertainment," "a good yarn"). Eventually, every work of fiction (if the art is not to become wholly degraded or dissipated) must stand up to the critical question of how and to what degree it manages the unity and synthesis of all its parts, its own as well as those implied by its form. Henry James's criteria for the modern novel ensure that unity of character and universe which is the indispensable requirement of any work of fiction by identifying both with consciousness and sensibility. The modern popular detective novel with its focus on the fragmentary nature of the institutionalized world essentially dissociates the human spirit from any meaningful relationship to that world and turns its people into moral dwarfs and puppets. Morris West, in spite of the Christian sensibility he attempts to infuse within his writing—indeed as a direct result of his attempting to do so—cannot bridge the gap between the hell without and the peace within. He would have to change his style and hence his vision to do that.

Allen Bentley

STUART M. TAVE

*Some Words of Jane Austen*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973. Pp. xii, 287. \$9.95.

The modest accuracy of Stuart Tave's title must have been designed. It exemplifies in its subjugation of self-advertisement to self-effacing precision that quality which the book goes on to celebrate as the essential art of Jane Austen: a delicate understanding of the range and significance of common English words. What also seems designed is the relative sumptuousness of the book's physical makeup, so that the modesty of its title is balanced by, among other delights, the elegance of its jacket design, the quality of its paper, the varying design in silhouette that graces each new chapter. Not much expense has been spared. Although I would not want to crack the wind of a reasonable analogy, the combination of the plain-speaking and the visually elegant has an obvious relevance to Tave's argument. The common English word he frequently uses to describe his delight in Jane Austen's novels is "lovely." How this loveliness is achieved, he goes on to show, depends upon an exquisite propriety in the use of English. In Jane Austen, beauty is accuracy, and accuracy beauty, and that is almost as much as we need to know.

Tave begins his book with a lovely analogy. Jane Austen, he tells us, "was fond of dancing and excelled in it" (p. 1). Such an avocation need not surprise us, for it parallels her art as a writer, "that enjoyment and ability in moving with significant grace in good time in a restricted space" (p. 1). It is worthwhile to ponder this description, for it illustrates what Tave has in common with the subject of his study, namely a proper reverence for the elegant defining powers of precise English, what Dr. Johnson called the "beauty of propriety," expanded by Tave as follows: "It is the graceful beauty that comes from the delicate adjustment of the minutest parts" (p. 222). It does not matter where we turn in Jane Austen. On every page we are struck by the elegance of those lovely sentences where each minute part is so delicately adjusted. Although Tave does not offer this particular example, here is Emma Woodhouse moralizing to herself Frank Churchill's ostensibly absurd act in travelling to London merely to get his hair cut: