

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:

"I do not know whether it ought to be so, but certainly silly things do cease to be silly if they are done by sensible people in an impudent way" (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966. P. 222).

I have chosen to discuss first Tave's awareness of the "graceful beauty" of Jane Austen as a writer because he himself makes only passing reference to it. Yet after reading such an elegantly written book on the most elegant novelist in English it would seem churlish not to record the principal effect of such a powerful combination. Mr. Tave, however, has more serious business in hand. We soon realize that beauty is by no means all we need to know for a proper appreciation of Jane Austen. He wants above all to show how her delicate handling of certain common English words has always a precise moral definition as its objective. In his pursuit of Jane Austen as moralist extraordinary, Mr. Tave demonstrates the appropriateness of the method of his book. Although each chapter (apart from the opening one) concentrates on a single novel, Tave is able to draw into the discussion, in a richly relevant manner, supporting uses from the other novels of the common words under scrutiny from that specific book. To take an obvious example, in his discussion of the deployment of the word "sensibility" in *Sense and Sensibility*, which constitutes Chapter 3, Tave makes good use of its appearances in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, in particular. In the case of "sensibility," as in the case of all the other words he talks about—among others, "mortification," "amiability," "elegance," "propriety," "imagination"—the word has no absolute meaning from a moral point of view. Everything depends on context; who says it and how and in what circumstances. Consequently, "If there is a false sensibility that is vain and reductive there is also a true one unpretentious and valuable" (p. 76). In like manner, there is a salutary and a silly experience of mortification; there is a brittle and a lovely elegance; there is a restrictive and a liberating use of the imagination. In each case, it is the moral dimension of the term which is explored by Jane Austen.

In a very fine opening chapter, called, appropriately enough, "Limitations and Definitions," Tave introduces us to Jane Austen's way with words by placing it in a more general context. For Jane Austen, there is a clearly defined objective reality

in which her characters have to make moral choices dependent on their ability to interpret correctly what goes on around them. A sure sign of moral fragility, for example, is a frivolous or complacent disregard for the realities of time and space. Those characters who fret because they are restricted to an unpromising locale, or those, who, like Maria Bertram, have contempt for the real time or for the correct distance between two points, those who, in a word, defy an obvious and inescapable reality, live only a half-life. As Tave puts it: "There are, then, coordinates mapping and timing the limits, setting the conditions, demanding action. There is a definable reality, not to be made or unmade, to which Jane Austen's men and women must bring themselves; and it is in proportion to their success that they make or unmake their success that they make or unmake their own lives" (p. 18). At the end of this opening chapter, Mr. Tave returns to his analogy of the dance in order to help explain the effect upon us of our experience of these men and women who are restricted in their actions by realities which cannot be changed or evaded. In the dance, ecstasy and a sense of freedom come from the controlled poise of ordered movement. As Tave says, "The form of the dance does not suppress significant motion: by its order it sets free the dancer" (p. 34). Similarly, those characters in Jane Austen who come to understand, or who have always understood, the necessity of reality's restrictions are given an important freedom and have an impressive moral superiority. Not surprisingly, these are the people who understand the true meaning and proper use of those words of Jane Austen that Tave has shown in this book to be crucial to our own understanding and enjoyment of the subtleties of the moral imagination.

Michael Taylor