

Read, Mark, Learn

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... and inwardly digest, says the New Testament. I obey these four precepts—defiantly so when it comes to the second. Years ago I bought a little paperback, *The Wonderful World of Books*. I pattered happily through it until I stubbed my toe on the warning that I must not mark books or write in margins.

I am an unrepentant marker and choose to disregard this admonition. Oh, I mark only my own books; all others are safe with me. Though I must say I rather enjoy coming on a neat little comment in a library book. It adds flavour and my mind reaches out with a spurt of delight to my unknown predecessor—provided that the comment is one with which I agree. Otherwise, if it's in pencil, I'm apt to erase.

All of which is meant to lead up to my Chapman set of the *One and Only*. I bought it thirty years ago and it looks it. The six volumes stand on the shelf—stand *out* is more like it. Not that I mind their appearance as much as I perhaps should; I have no distinguished visitors and my books are strictly for use, not decor. But when it got to the point of some being too tattered to hold comfortably, or too stubborn to open properly after my boggling attempts with glue, I knew the time had come for a new set.

So mine is now the joy of reading pristine, virgin copies, mine the exhilaration of marking all over again. It is almost (*only* almost, alas!) like having a new Jane Austen to read. And I am playing a game. When my delight has led to a marginal comment I turn to my original copy and nearly always I find a similar enraptured remark opposite such delicious phrases as: “Your coming just at this time is the greatest comfort and I am very glad to hear what you tell us, of long sleeves.” “If I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has more to give.” “. . . walking, as she concluded, with great elasticity, though she had never thought of it before.” And many more, that cannot be taken out of context.

One phrase has always given me pause: “. . . Mr. Elton, a young man living alone without liking it.” Was Marjorie Hillis a Jane Austen devotee or was it coincidence that she titled a book *Live Alone and Like It*? I wish I knew.

What I find even more invigorating is when I have made a mark in the new copy and find none in the old. That is one more proof of what every true Janeite knows: there is no end to the freshness and discovery in the reading of the novels.

Two problems remain. What do I do with the old set? They're too disreputable—most of them—to give to a library or to anyone, but put Jane Austen out with the garbage? Pitch out the cherished companions of thirty years? I *cannot*.

And do I remove the jackets? I like their pale, delicate colour, with a Hugh Thomson illustration on each one. On the other hand, the dignified dark green of the binding looks well beside the similar binding of Kilvert's *Diaries*.

Oh well, I don't have to decide yet. There's plenty of room in the cellar and a sturdy little carton just the right size. And I'll wait a while about the jackets. The important decision today is—which of the six is due now for still another reading.