

Martians in Jane Austen?

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Carol: There's a moment we readers of Jane Austen all dread: when a good friend comes up to us, a colleague, a peer, an old lunch crony, a person you *thought* you knew, and says—

Anne: —Says: “You’ve just got to read this fantastic book.”

C: You hold your breath and prepare your facial muscles. If it's *The Bridges of Madison County*, you've already learned the polite response. You refrain from rolling your eyes and say, as vaguely and speculatively as possible—

A: —You say: “Well, it certainly has found a *wide* audience.” And if the book that's changed your friend's life forever, a combined Rosetta stone and road map for human relations, happens to be a 1992 non-fiction book called *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* by John Gray, Ph.D., you may need . . .

C: an even greater dose of diplomacy. Maybe, in fairness, you browse through this book which has sold more than five million copies and is still, four years after publication, on a good many best-seller lists. You scoop it out of the bin at the front of the bookstore and surreptitiously paw through it. As you expect, you find it is full of commonplace thoughts, bromides for daily existence, set out, as they usually are in such books, in a lively enough fashion.

A: But this particular pop-psyche vitamin pill has found a wide and welcoming audience, so we can assume that it reflects some of the preoccupations of our place and time. *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* asserts that men and women are spectacularly, irredeemably different; as different as if they were from different planets.

C: The theme of this gathering here in Richmond is Jane Austen's Men—Could any of these men we've been talking about be Martians?

A: Are men and women as different as Dr. Gray claims?

C: Is the attempt to assert control in the relationship between the sexes a '90s phenomenon?

A: What clues and cues do men and women employ to understand each other in Jane Austen's novels?

C: What do men and women really *want*?

- A: After lengthy and—what’s the opposite of serious and rigorous?—study, we have found the answer to these and other questions—
- C: And the answer is—
- A: —Hold on. First we’d better say a little more about how to spot someone from Mars or Venus in the first place. The most important thing seems to be that they are very, very different.
- C: Writes Dr. Gray: “Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be speaking different languages, needing different nourishment.”
- A: That’s pretty different.
- C: Dr. Gray says that we are unable to fathom, still less fulfill, each other’s needs. Men are inarticulate, withdrawn *cave-dwellers* who come to intimacy only reluctantly and with pain. Women are less focused. More needy. Interfering. Prattling. Smotherers.
- A: Why would anyone in his (or her) right mind seek emotional fortune with someone from another part of the solar system?
- C: Hmmmm. Perhaps you should ask your father.
- Few readers will recognize themselves fully in *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, although the clichés arrive attended by a clout of familiarity. Dr. Gray’s men and women are icons; his images of the behaviour typical of each sex are, we suspect, widely subscribed to—
- A: —They can be sensed or inhaled or imbibed in the drinking water—
- C: —You can see these images acted out on every TV sitcom. This is the way men are and this is what women are like. There is a comic edge in this position—
- A: —and also a tragic disconnection. John Gray, who has made more money in a shorter time than Jane Austen—but might not in the long run—finds his anecdotal evidence in a small pool, mostly himself and his wife, the frequently cited Bonnie. His characters are emblematically *constructed* for a slippery kind of conflict. Only follow the precepts of Dr. Gray and you will learn that the conflict is not hopeless. It can be resolved by beating the swords of discourse into the plowshares of allowance for difference.
- C: Gray theorizes that if men and women could become aware of, and allow for their differences, their relationships with each other would be cured of confusion and profoundly enriched. “Misunderstandings can then be easily dissipated or avoided. Incorrect expectations are easily corrected. When you remember that your partner is as different from you as someone from

another planet, you can relax and cooperate with the differences instead of resisting or trying to change them.”

- A: Dr. Gray is not analytical; he describes how, but not why, men act in certain ways and women in others. He counsels that each sex avoid acting in ways that come naturally and try to anticipate the hard-wired behaviour of the other.
- C: None of this is particularly objectionable—or particularly useful. As in all but the rarest self-help book, the assumptions are enormous, the generalizations breathtaking, the advice simplistic. These are ready solutions for complex issues. Dr. Gray has caught the momentum of the pendulum swing away from the rather utopian hope of twenty years ago—that men and women only differed because of the way they were raised.
- A: And it is a fact of our times that notwithstanding internet and e-mail and voice-mail and faxes and—
- C: —Don't forget cell phones—
- A: —and cell phones. Despite technological assistance, communication between the sexes has not really gotten any easier. The media may be cool, but they are not the entire message; the user must still provide the content.
- C: In fact, the new means of communication may, as critics charge, be barriers to interaction in that they provide a slick facade of *something going on*, of breathless activity, of the exchange of real *stuff*. Face-to-face and lip-to-lip, real conversation is still called for, if only to differentiate this face-to-face encounter from another.
- A: Then, of course, there is the fact—and fear—of the breaking down of barriers between the sexes and the resulting confusion about just *who* is *who*. John Gray is immensely reassuring to the conservative part of all of us who wish we could have a chance to absorb all these changes. *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* proclaims that men and women will always think and communicate differently, no matter how our roles may converge.
- C: If you believe that Jane Austen is a superb novelist, then you must believe that she has created a whole and believable world for her characters. Part of this territory, and for many of us today the most compelling part, is the plane of interaction between men and women.
- A: Many readers have noted that Jane Austen, rare even among novelists, portrays psychologically accurate women and men—
- C: —even if most of the men are seen from a female's point of view.
- A: Dr. Gray can, in an uncomplicated way, be psychologically accurate about men and women, but after comparing *his* examples of male and female behaviours with Austen's Elizabeth, Jane, Emma, Anne, Elinor and Marianne—

- C: —and with Darcy, Knightley, Captain Wentworth, Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon, we have concluded that he apprehends only a puny part of the picture.
- A: In the novels, men and women, at least those we feel Jane Austen admires, are mannerly but passionate.
- C: Cautious yet honest.
- A: Socially-constrained yet, to our sound-bitten ears, strangely—
- C: —Strangely intimate.
- A: Didn't Mr. Knightley say he loves an open temper?
- C: And Anne prizes "the frank, the open-hearted."
- A: Jane Austen's men and women discuss, they debate, they enter into discourse about a wide range of topics and they continue their conversations without interruption by telephone, washing cycle, deadline or newsbreak.
- C: Twentieth century readers and viewers, citizens of what has been called the "Age of Interruption," are enchanted and seduced by the splendours of uninterrupted discourse. Those who inhabit Jane Austen's pages conduct their discourse over tea cups, while walking in the shrubbery, between dances, during impromptu morning visits.
- A: Women are not folding laundry during these conversations—
- C: A little embroidery perhaps, some mending—
- A: They are *not* distracted by wailing sirens or by the exigencies of time, the upcoming meeting—
- C: —the overdue report; they are privileged to turn the whole of their attention to what they say and hear.
- A: The circumstances of discourse between the sexes have changed, that's true, but so has the object of their discourse. At the end of the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th, people sought economic and social success through marriage. A very few at the upper end of the social scale, Emma Woodhouse for instance, pursued a union of what the historian Lawrence Stone calls a "marriage of friendship." Today, as the 20th century yields to the 21st, marriage perhaps meets different needs, primarily emotional.
- C: Dr. Gray says that men "mistakenly offer solutions and invalidate feelings," and cites a woman venting her feelings about an exhausting day at work, to which her husband responds with suggested solutions to her grievances. Instead, Gray says, the husband should have done what a woman would have done—listened patiently and with empathy.
- A: In Jane Austen's *Persuasion* we can see traces of this gender disconnectedness, between Mr. Elliot and Anne, and, more clearly, between the whining housewife Mary (nee Elliot) and

her *sportif*, insensitive husband, Charles. Gray, reductively, exasperatingly, makes every woman a Mary and every man a Charles.

C: Do Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* also fit the Mars and Venus stereotypes?

A: Let's get back to that in a minute.

C: John Gray accuses women of offering unsolicited advice and trying to improve their man. Men interpret this, Gray says, as a challenge to their competence. Instead, women should become skilled at empowering men. "Remember," he warns, "if you give him directions and advice, he will feel corrected and controlled."

A: Well, we wouldn't want *that* to happen.

C: An example perhaps is to be found in the opening pages of *Pride and Prejudice* when Mrs. Bennet is urging her husband to call on the newly-arrived, large-fortuned Mr. Bingley. Mr. Bennet turns the advice away with sarcastic humour and reserve, yet we suspect he is going to make that call. He is the straitened father of five daughters; he knows as well as Mrs. Bennet that the call is necessary.

A: Is this being a Martian? It does not seem to me that his sense of self-worth is at all affronted.

C: But he *is* resisting the notion of being controlled by a woman. Sounds like Martian behaviour to me.

A: A further difference Gray posits is that women use "feeling" words to convey information more than men do. "To fully express their feelings, women assume poetic license and use various superlatives, metaphors, and generalizations. Men mistakenly take these expressions literally." Men, on the other hand, retreat into a cave-like silence when upset.

C: Poetic, or highly expressive, language in Jane Austen's novels is *not* the exclusive property of women; the language of both sexes is fluid, graceful and deeply felt, at least in those characters the author favours.

A: Yet—

C: —Yet it must be admitted that Darcy does retreat to the cave of emotional confusion in *Pride and Prejudice* and so does Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*—

A: —and don't forget bruised and brooding Wentworth for a time in *Persuasion*.

C: Quite a long time!

A: Among Jane Austen's more expressive men there are those who act "sensibly," like Mr. Elton and Captain Benwick; those who act and *are* silly, like Mr. Collins, Mr. Elliot and Mr. Woodhouse; and those who are rogues like Willoughby and, in a less vulgar manner, Henry Crawford. Women of good sense avoid all of

- them, preferring to throw their lot in with the more restrained Knightley, Captain Wentworth, Captain Harville, Edward Ferrars, Edmund Bertram.
- C: Their good sense is, by the way, supported by the fact that they tend to be reading men.
- A: Many of these men-of-reserve do in fact retreat into Gray's cave-like silence, withdrawing maddeningly just when the reader wants them to be expressive—to state their case, to press their claim.
- C: Who could be more trying than *Persuasion's* Captain Wentworth, who suffered discouragement so readily, and who waited more than seven years before wooing Anne again.
- A: Or Mr. Knightley, who lies in the weeds for more than three hundred pages before he is able to acknowledge his feelings for Emma.
- C: Or Mr. Darcy lurking like an untamed creature in his cave of arrogance. And later hiding just as adroitly in the concealment of his good deeds and admirable behaviour.
- A: Well, we agree then that we've identified a Martian or two and a few more men with Martian traits.
- C: But you won't find many of those heedless, helpless Venusians in these novels.
- A: It's on this side of the equation that John Gray falls short.
- C: Austen's heroines are compelling because in a social and economic system that conspires to place them at a disadvantage, they exercise real power. Theirs is the power to alter men's regard, to loosen men's tongues, to stage their own courtships, to plan their strategies, to contrive meetings, to read the language of gesture and glance, to keep themselves buoyant in case of disappointment. Alone or together, they spend a great deal of time "interpreting" men. Before Mr. Collins arrives at Longbourn, the women of the family take turns deconstructing his letter.
- A: Mr. Bennet, in a Martian way, leads off, mistakenly thinking the man will be conscientious and polite.
- C: Mrs. Bennet sees some sense in the letter, in fact, she is flattered by the references to her daughters—
- A: But Jane is sceptical about the letter's vagueness. Elizabeth finds Mr. Collins's style pompous.
- C: Mary spots a cliché but finds it well expressed.
- A: And Catherine and Lydia cannot stir themselves to take any interest. Here's a communal, co-operative approach to character analysis.
- C: Do you think it's significant that the Martian traits appear most often in secondary, or comical characters, or, if they appear in the

- principal characters, these are traits which are ameliorated by the influence of the beloved? Dr. Gray says that men will only come out of their cave when they are ready. But note that when Mr. Knightley, Captain Wentworth and Mr. Darcy are drawn from their caves into the light, what releases them is the permission of women, either a verbal suggestion or a meaningful gesture or glance.
- A: (Looking in *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*) I don't see anything in here about gestures or glances—
- C: —while Jane Austen uses the words “glance” and “glancing” 86 times in her books. There's a whole universe of psychological behaviour that Dr. Gray leaves out; the kinds of behaviour which are particularly key to how men and women relate.
- A: How they understand—
- C: —And misunderstand—
- A: —each other. Gray maintains that surface is reality; a reserved demeanour denotes a reserved personality,
- C: whereas Jane Austen understands that people are not summed up by how much or how little they say. Mere words project only a small part of who people really are and, when they are in the presence of the beloved, words are augmented by gestures and expressions which are clues to their nature.
- A: It is not through what she says, but rather through the changes in her appearance and manners that we learn that the dutiful and obedient Anne is a self-reliant, intelligent woman with a sensual nature and a beauty capable of being recaptured. In Jane Austen, emotions between the women and men we are meant to respect—
- C: —to admire—
- A: —to care about—emotions between them are seldom expressed in ornate language. Instead they reveal themselves through carefully modulated gestures.
- C: Small changes in facial expression. The colour of a complexion. A nuanced smile.
- A: Darcy speaks from his cave when his face pales with anger or fills with colour.
- C: His thoughts are plain when he eyes the dreadful Mr. Collins with unrestrained wonder and treats him to a slight bow.
- A: Austen treats with caution the carefully mannered words and speeches which are so easily misinterpreted. Maria and Julia mistake Henry Crawford's romantic speeches for serious courtship; Fanny never believes them genuine even when they become so.

- C: Gesture tells a truer story. When Darcy first catches Elizabeth's eye, Jane Austen reports that "he withdrew his own," turns and speaks coldly to Bingley. These same eyes, on the occasion of his second proposal to Elizabeth, hold "an expression of heart-felt delight, diffused over his face."
- A: Dr. Gray trucks in signifiers of lesser subtlety. Men are men, and women are women. Me Tarzan; you Jane.
- C: Women are as unlike each other as they are unlike any man, says Jane Austen. Even sisters, think of Elizabeth and Anne Elliot, are never batch processed. Each is unique—
- A: —wise Elizabeth, vain Mary, placid Jane, giddy Lydia, mindless Kitty Bennet. *They* might almost come from different planets. Mr. Darcy and Mr. Collins clearly do.
- C: In *Mansfield Park*, each of Edmund, Tom, Henry, Mr. Rushworth, Mr. Yates and Sir Thomas has his own way of behaving, his own way of talking. Edmund acts for the most part with quiet good sense; Tom is careless and self-indulgent; Henry, charming but egotistical; Mr. Rushworth inane; Mr. Yates foolish; Sir Thomas authoritative.
- A: Austen shows that men and women differ more in the nature of the restraints imposed on them than in their natures. Darcy is as capable of delusion as Elizabeth; Mary Crawford as free from moral self-government as her brother Henry.
- C: Men and women alike use words to mean what they say or to mean something else altogether.
- A: John Gray believes that words are powerful.
- C: Jane Austen demonstrates that discourse is powerful, and so are the gesture and the politics of the glance. Elizabeth and Darcy are not reformed independently; the change in each follows discussions and study of the other.
- A: Darcy is struck by the intelligence of Elizabeth's eyes before he sees that they are also beautiful. Elizabeth's prejudice prevents her from seeing Darcy clearly, but she observes that he is altered, his manners "softened" before she appreciates that he still loves her.
- C: There's such a nineties flavour to *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. Look at the subtitle: *A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships*.
- A: The "getting what you want" seems pretty up-to-date. It's so selfish and direct.
- C: For women in particular, the phrase "I want" has been so long denied or throttled. Its sentence parts are foreign on the female tongue. Women have grown, through habit, through societal pressure, to define the wants of others as needs and their own

needs as—something less. We look at Jane Austen's novels, though, and see that her women not only know what they want, they have evolved a pointed strategy for how to go about getting it. What they want, and the means to obtain it, are so embedded that there is no need for Jane Austen even to state the case. The need and the strategy must be discerned.

- A: We catch her women in the midst of their yearning for a home of their own. This is often stated openly in the novels (and indeed we can think of no other reason for Charlotte to accept Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*).
- C: So we see the Austen women in the midst of their operational planning, their scheming, their—
- A: —Surely you don't mean scheming. Isn't that a rather strong word, a pejorative word, for Jane Austen's polite, intelligent, gently-spoken women?
- C: But she uses the word "scheme" or "scheming" more than 130 times in her novels! I'd say she's well on to its sense. Her women understand their situation acutely. They know that the tide of political and economic power is strongly against them. And so they marshal those few weapons that are available to them and conspire—
- A: —to "get what they want." And here's a theory of why we read books in the first place—to find out how to get what we want and how others arrive there.
- C: There is probably something to this. Leaders of fiction workshops advise their students to describe their characters not in terms of physicality or life experience, but in terms of what they *want*. Desiring can be thought of as the defining principle, the operative verb.
- A: Jane Austen writes of Charlotte: "Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage has always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want" (122-23).
- C: Elizabeth's awakening hopes for the future are boldly stated on page 245: ". . . at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!"
- A: Men are the medium by which women's needs are met. A man provides a home and the right man—with the right woman—will ensure a happy home. With few alternatives—most of them appalling—women are caught up in making a good match; much as parents today are caught up with their children, and for some of the same reasons—they are anxious for the continuation of the familial line, driven, perhaps, by an unconscious need to expand the gene pool.

- C: Always in an upward direction, of course.
- A: Of course.
- C: Here's an example: "On entering the room, he [Bingley] seemed to hesitate; but Jane . . . *happened* to smile: it was decided. He placed himself by her" (340). [Emphasis mine.]
- A: A look, a smile, and Jane *got what she wanted*. Would you call that manipulation?
- C: Well, is it so different from how Charlotte engineers the meeting with Mr. Collins in the lane—
- A: —And convinces him that it was his idea? (121): "Miss Lucas perceived him from an upper window as he walked towards the house, and instantly set out to meet him *accidentally* in the lane." [Emphasis mine.]
- C: She recognized the moment for what it was: Mr. Collins humiliated by his rejection, and she accidentally there to help him save face.
- A: First she does Elizabeth a service by dislodging Mr. Collins and his ill-placed affections. And then she does Mr. Collins a service by presenting him at the right moment with a new possibility.
- C: But what does she get out of it?
- A: *What she wanted*—a home of her own.
- C: Charlotte understands perfectly that women must help men along. "In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew *more* affection than she feels. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on" (22).
- A: "But she does help him on," says Elizabeth, "as much as her nature will allow. If *I* can perceive her regard for him, he must be a simpleton indeed not to discover it too."
- C: Charlotte responds coolly and with calculation. "Jane should therefore make the most of every half hour in which she can command his attention. When she is secure of him, there will be leisure for falling in love as much as she chuses."
- A: "Your plan is a good one," replies Elizabeth, but insists that Jane "is not acting by design." Although the men in Jane Austen have to do the proposing, the women prepare the way—
- C: They melt the hoarfrost which forms on Darcy and Wentworth; they warm the climate for the proposal to be presented.
- A: Or re-presented. Remember how Elizabeth secured Mr. Darcy: Bingley, Jane, Kitty, Darcy and Elizabeth set off for a walk, a party of five. Jane and Bingley, wanting privacy, fall behind.
- C: "Very little was said . . . Elizabeth was secretly forming a desperate resolution; and perhaps he might be doing the same" (365).

- A: A moment later, when Kitty has left them: “Now was the moment for her resolution to be executed, and while her courage was high, she immediately said”—and then she pours forth her gratitude—
- C: —*releasing* him to speak from his defrosted heart. “You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once.”
- A: And recall how in *Northanger Abbey* Catherine contrives her walk with the Tilneys. While Dr. Gray’s thesis is that men and women can—and should—manipulate each other into meeting their emotional requirements—
- C: —Jane Austen appears to believe that men and women can—and should—manipulate each other into meeting economic and social needs.
- A: Witness Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*—
- C: “She was a little revived . . . by his [Darcy’s] bringing back his coffee cup himself; and she seized the opportunity of saying ‘Is your sister at Pemberley still?’” (341).
- A: This polite and seemingly inconsequential inquiry is perfectly understood by both of them, and it is Jane Austen’s genius that she frames her dialogues in such a way that we immediately pick up on the subtext.
- C: Disingenuousness reaches a sort of apogee in chapter 10 of volume II of *Pride and Prejudice*.
- A: “More than once did Elizabeth in her ramble within the Park, *unexpectedly* meet Mr. Darcy.—
- C: “She felt all the perverseness of the mischance that should bring him where no one else was brought; and to prevent its ever happening again, *took care* to inform him at first, that it was a favourite haunt of hers.—
- A: “How it could occur a second time therefore was very odd!—Yet it did, and even a third. It seemed like willful ill-nature, or a voluntary penance” (182).
- C: —Note the word “voluntary”—this is the skillfully designed strategy of a heroine who is after her man but does not want to appear so.
- A: She could, after all, have changed *her* paths.
- C: By chapter 15 of volume III, Elizabeth is as thorough as any general in laying out the battle plan. She weighs Darcy’s probable regard for his aunt and conjectures that Lady Catherine will “address him on his weakest side” (361). Of course she also knows the nature of that weak side: Darcy’s “unblemished” sense of dignity. She then balances her options and prepares herself psychologically for the possibility that Darcy may be

persuaded by his aunt. Finally, she produces what may be the greatest double whammy in literature. “I shall know how to understand it. I shall then give over every expectation, every wish of his constancy. If he is satisfied with only regretting me, when he might have obtained my affections and hand, I shall soon cease to regret him at all” (361).

- A: Jane Austen offers volumes of proofs of how men and women make themselves known, how they *reveal* themselves. There are the small daily proofs of verbal exchange. Added to these are the skillful, scent-laden signifiers of the body, and the focused or unfocused expressions of the face, particularly the eyes, and the powerful, captivating glance.
- C: In *Persuasion*, the glances bestowed and withheld signal the progress of the narrative to an astonishing extent. Here is what happens when Anne first sees Captain Wentworth after more than seven years apart: “Her eye half met Captain Wentworth’s”—
- A: You see? Even a half-glance means something.
- C: The passage continues: “a bow, a curtsy passed; she heard his voice—he talked to Mary, said all that was right; said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing: the room seemed full—full of persons and voices—but a few minutes ended it” (59).
- A: And look at the role the humble glance plays later at the White Hart: “Anne found an unexpected interest here. She felt its application to herself, felt it in a nervous thrill all over her, and at the same moment that her eyes instinctively glanced toward the distant table,
- C: “Captain Wentworth’s pen ceased to move, his head was raised, pausing, listening, and he turned round the next instant to give a look—one quick, conscious look at her” (231).
- A: Yet he passes “out of the room without a look!”
- C: Then he returns and the moment comes when he passes Anne the letter “with eyes of glowing entreaty fixed on her for a moment.”
- A: This is the glance to end all glances—
- C: —except, of course, for the “look” on the street, which Anne commands herself to receive “and not repulsively.”
- A: Now everything is understood between them. Now both have *what they want*.
- C: Shrewd Elizabeth is up to every nuance of her relationship with Darcy; she sometimes describes her psychological acuity as “fancy” and she always buries her strategy under a busy layer of other, less selfish considerations:

- A: "She respected, she esteemed, she was grateful to him, she felt a real interest in his welfare; and she only wanted to know how far she wished that welfare to depend upon herself, and how far it would be for the happiness of both that she should *employ the power*, which her fancy told her she still possessed" (266). [Emphasis mine.]
- C: Many of the minor, comic characters—both men and women—in Austen's novels are excessively careful about what they say and the language they use.
- A: For their pains, they are revealed as vain, or pompous, or artificial or self-concerned.
- C: Anne Elliot rightly concludes that ". . . she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped" (161).
- A: Dr. Gray counsels care in the language Mars and Venus use with each other and care is frequently wise. But Jane Austen shows us that sometimes remarkable things will take place when Mars and Venus reveal themselves each to the other.
- C: In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot protests against books being used to prove women's nature: ". . . if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands" (234).
- A: But Jane Austen shifts the point of view entirely. It is largely confined to women—
- C: —and thus the advantage is earned. John Gray would very likely cry foul, that women are taking "every advantage of us." He misses entirely the irony of power lodged in the ranks of the powerless.
- A: Anne Elliot: "We never can expect to prove any thing upon such a point. It is a difference of opinion which does not admit of proof. We each begin probably with a little bias towards our own sex, and upon that bias build every circumstance in favour of it which has occurred within our own circle . . ." (234).
- C: But whenever in the future I read that lilted beginning: "It is a truth universally acknowledged" I will imagine Jane Austen amending, *sotto voce*, "a truth universally acknowledged by women."

NOTES

We have used R. W. Chapman's edition of *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1932, 1983 reprint). References appear in text.