within the text, creating not only humorous characters who seem to live by words alone but also derisive characters who parody the original comic dialogue. Austen’s extraordinary ear for timbre in conversation transforms mere gossip into a vibrant parodic art.

Dussinger concludes by entreating Austen readers to listen carefully to how the words are spoken in her novels, for her characters may not be “speaking as they ought.” Though all the major Austen characters should exhibit prowess as listeners, from the beginning both Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse misconstrue what others say and suffer as a consequence. To some extent all six completed novels focus on some problems in communication—several characters in each story have secrets to keep or to reveal and pose a challenge to the heroine’s powers of interpretation—and in each, Austen’s adroit narrative craft in summoning the implied self in the spoken word is evident.

John A. Dussinger is Associate Professor of English at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. He is the author of The Discourse of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century Fiction and several essays on eighteenth-century prose.
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Ohio State University Press  
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ISBN 0-8142-0491-0