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On and Off the Page: Mapping Space in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice

Edward. T. Hall argues that, "we treat Space (somewhat) as we treat Sex. It is "there" but we don't talk about it" (in Felipe 210). Understandably so, talking about space or sex might indeed appear as the first attempt to shatter these borders or boundaries that protect ourselves from the others' intrusion onto our individual need for privacy.

Borders, it is true, are useful, even necessary. They tell us where one thing ends and another begins. They draw the line between what belongs to whom and what does not. They tell us who claims what and how far these claims extend. And if it is true that Sex is not openly treated in Jane Austen's novels (we can easily imagine how the society of her time would have reacted), the question of space, however, is of prime importance, for indeed the borders that "situate" and often "limit" or "contain" our heroes and heroines do play a very important role in Austenian plots, if not the most important one. As Johnson argues: Austen's characters always experience embarrassment, expectations, anger, agitation, discomfort, and pleasure in small but very intense spaces" (46).

The social boundaries, in particular, are of utmost importance since they often impose order on chaos, as members of the upper-classes, for instance, need to secure their own privacy, for fear that they would have to receive all the Bennets in the world, as Miss Bingley would complain.[1] To use Sherry's terms, "to downplay or ignore this sense of social life, of

[1] Literally, the search for Privacy is the search for another space deprived of people (not surprisingly, the words "privacy" and "deprived" share the same Latin root).

other people, is to lose something important in any of Jane Austen's novels, particularly in the case of *Pride and Prejudice* where the aura of a small, enclosed community of talking, visiting, and company is so strong" (611).

If borders are useful, the borders that delimit Derbyshire—the setting of *Pride and Prejudice*—however remains unclear: "It is not the object of this work," the narrator tells, "to give a description of Derbyshire, nor of any of the remarkable places through which their route thither lay" (183). If writers like Balzac can draw "maps" of cities, streets, houses, and even rooftops, it must be noted that, " Jane Austen's style, as generally remarked, is spare in spatial imagery—or for that matter in any imagery at all" (Hart 310). Estates like Pemberley, Longbourn, for instance, and even these exteriors like the natural landscapes, the gardens, etc. are "there" but Jane Austen purposefully refuses to talk or at least to describe these settings with enough concrete detail to enable the readers to visualize them with accuracy.[2] We do know that Pemberley is grand and of exceptional beauty. We learn that the furniture is "neither gaudy nor uselessly fine. . . with less of splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings," (246) yet the narrator prefers—it seems—to keep us in the intimacy of Elizabeth's inner feelings, showing how she responds to the place; not what she sees in detail.

For Selwyn, "Jane Austen's world is one of interiors" (89) precisely because "Austen's landscape writing," as Bodenheimer remarks, "is related to romantic narrative and poetic technique in the sense that it points inward consistently pulling the emphasis away from pictorial description itself to the feeling of the viewer" and because "Jane Austen's landscapes [. . .] suggest a region of character that is not really expressible in social or moral terms" (622). Placing the emphasis on the interior—on what is felt, rather than what is

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[2] The same is true of Austen's characters: "Jane Austen never introduces characters merely to be described. Nor does she ever describe a character simply because he figures in the action of the novel" (Sherry 613).

seen—encourages readers to imagine and draw the "maps" of Pemberley, Rosings, and Longbourn according to their own wishes; but it also encourages our characters to constantly define and redefine the limited and limiting boundaries of their own inaccurate perceptions.

Jane Austen understood that sometimes, indeed, we can respect borders too much. Some borders, we must admit, are essentially arbitrary, imposed by force, compromise, and sometimes accident. Many exist despite common sense; they divide common ground and often discourage travel, frustrate discourse or impede understanding. Not surprisingly it is only by accepting to revise their own limiting boundaries—whether we call it, pride, prejudice, or else—that the two lovers can finally meet. It is inside Darcy and Elizabeth, Austen suggests, that the borders need to be pushed, transgressed, and even destroyed, in turn challenging readers to "an academic skeptical particularization of being, knowledge, and love," in which each individual chapter "present[s] readjustments of the opinions of various characters in the interpretation of what has happened" (Mckeon 514).

Of course, the spaces of text and film are of a different nature. Any movie adaptation will need to "remap" the text, and the camera will inevitably transgress and deconstruct the borders established by the narrator. Indeed, "in the grammar of film, the shot equal[s] the word" (Smith 36), and this mode of storytelling automatically entails a "loss of the narrational voices," which, as Brian McFarlane comments, "may . . . be felt as the chief casualty of the novel's enunciation" (29). Because of this absence, some critics argue that film adaptations "are absolutely incapable of representing inner life" (Chiaromonte 46) because "dream, memory and imagination cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language …for the moment thought is externalized, it is no longer thought" (Bluestone 47-48). One of the main problems, Chatman argues, "is to transform narrative features that come easily to language but hard to a medium that operates in 'real time' and whose natural focus is the

surface appearance of things" (162). The task is further complicated by the fact that visual images are not transparent. In other words, if Jane Austen can afford to treat space much like she treats sex, i.e. as a "there", the filmmaker will have to transpose the "there" into the "here" of the image.

If any adaptation inevitably entails a necessary—yet destructive—transgression of the physical, social, or moral borders that the narrative; If indeed, Austen's world is one of interiors, "what, for example, does it mean for public knowledge of Jane Austen to experience her work in a form which omits the narrative voice [. . .] in favor of scenes of tea-drinking and dancing?" (Smith 35) Is it even possible to adapt *Pride and Prejudice* on screen? As Thomas Leitch notes, it might simply be "a hopeless endeavor to adapt Jane Austen's novels to film" (161).

This paper will attempt to show the opposite. Through careful attention to these scenes of "tea-drinking and dancing" (that is, social mixing) I will explore what it means to deconstruct the authoritative and delimiting perspectives offered by the narrator and to remap a physical[3] as well as narrative[4] space into a "visual" space, which will need to transcend the lack of a narrator's voice, including Austen's use of free-indirect speech and inner focalization, in what we could call the allegorical figuration or appropriation of the body on screen.

1. On the Page:

[3] I am using the word "physical" to refer to the space **on** the page, whose borders "limit" the characters to their given—social, physical, or moral—environment : interiors (salons, ballrooms, bedrooms, estates, etc) as well as exteriors (gardens, landscapes, roads, towns, etc).

[4] I am using the word « narrative space » to refer to this space **off** the page, where the reader's knowledge and imagination are created through the clues and signs given by the narrator.

The novel underscores that the public space—and particularly, the social or familial space—is stifling for the individual. Elizabeth, we understand, is constrained by social conventions and family duty to marry well. As Daniel Cottom remarks, it is striking to notice how seldom Elizabeth spends time alone; an occasional moment in the park is quickly interrupted by a meeting with Darcy, or with Collins, if not Lady de Bourgh; unaccompanied trips are rare, and "the only time we see Elizabeth Bennet reading a book, she does so in a drawing room full of other people, one of whom soon interrupts her to demand her engagement in another kind of activity" (Spacks 309). Privacy is an issue, if not a goal.

Not surprisingly, "small-scaled interiors" (Hart 305) like Mr. Bennet's library or Charlotte's parlor become spaces able to protect from Mrs. Bennet and her nerves, from husbands like Collins, or from intruders of all sorts. It is there that privacy is sought (and sometimes found). Crowded interiors, however, can also become source of tension. The noisy and busy atmosphere of dinners, parties, and balls do not allow for privacy or solitary reflection. People expose themselves: to ridicule, to the mockery of Miss Bingley, and to a public display of misconduct. If "it is Darcy whose reserve, privacy, and discretion are, in fact, protective of the individual" (Sherry 612), Wickham, on the contrary, prefers to expose his misfortune to the world.[5] We understand that public exposure of the self will lead to false intimacies, and eventually to Lydia's downfall and elopement at the end of the narrative. These social spaces, are constructive of identity, of masks, and repressed gestures. It also stresses that not abiding by the rules of etiquette will create other identities, and respect will be lost forever. In this sense, privacy is equated with an insistence on propriety, "a kind of behavior which is particularly careful not to violate the privacy, the integrity, and the right to respectability of every individual" (Sherry 618).

[5] Darcy (who refuses to "perform to strangers") chooses to give a "faithful narrative of all his dealings with Mr Wickham" in the privacy of a sealed-letter.

Because "the maintenance of social forms demands that considerations of propriety outweigh considerations of truth," (Cottom 157) Elizabeth and Darcy become "victims" of these boundaries, as they are unable to know each other with the intimacy needed for the truth to be fully discovered. As a consequence, we must understand that the spaces of social encounters—balls, dinners, tea-parties, walks—do stress the difficulty for our two lovers to really know each other. As Lloyd. W. Brown remarks, "the most crucial exchanges between Jane Austen's characters are based on conflict and misunderstanding rather than the positive transmission of personal interests and values" (Cottom 157).

Dancing, for Austen, emphasizes such a conflict: people need to respect the physical space imposed by customs and traditions; men need to remain courteous and gallant, and to maintain a certain physical distance with the lady. At the same time, the "space" of dancing enables the exploration of these borders: hands touch, physical borders shrink, and differences are explored. It is through dancing, Lizzie remarks, that she tries to make out Darcy's true character; in other words, to shatter the borders that prevent her from knowing Darcy.

Because crowded spaces often result in tension, it is easy to understand why Jane Austen places so much emphasis on nature. In "Looking at the Landscape in Jane Austen," Bodenheimer argues, "going out to the landscape, the self is reassured of its own virtue, and of its faith in the process of living" (623). Elizabeth's propensity for long solitary walks, therefore, "partly reflects her need to find space for private reflection" (Spacks 309). It is when Elizabeth is left alone that she can reflect on Darcy's letter; an example of her many "poetical responses to nature" in which "we discover her ability to put them in the service of wit" (Bodenheimer 622).[6] In other words, the way Jane Austen's characters negotiate

[6] For Barbara Wenner, "landscapes provide Austen's heroines with spaces to reflect knowledgeably—even psychically—upon their situations" (95). Kaplan's fascinating article, "Inside Out/Outside In: *Pride & Prejudice* on Film 2005" emphasizes in great detail the importance of nature in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*,

inner/outer borders and spaces, their own interiors, gardens, fences, crowded ballrooms, connect us to these characters' social, physical, and mental landscapes.

2. Off the Page:

If viewers attempt to judge the adaptation by the fidelity to its source text, they will probably be most disappointed for we need to admit that Joe Wright fails to render a space-for-space adaptation of Jane Austen's novel. As Kaplan remarks, the film "fails to capture the coherent thematic relationship between interior and exterior spaces that Austen so carefully delineates" (1). By transposing key interior scenes outdoors and key outdoor scenes indoor, for instance, Joe Wright does miss "the balanced interior/exterior structure that reveals the larger implication of the ways that Austen uses Nature and artifice as elements of the settings, ideas that the film disregards to the point of incoherence".[7]

Of course, "[f]idelity to its source text . . . is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is attainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in the trivial sense" (Leitch 161). And for Jane Austen, what matters is not so much the place itself but rather the effect of the place on the focalizer. Tea-drinking and dancing scenes are important, not because people drink or dance, but because these scenes of human encounters "always suggest for Jane Austen the presence of other individuals with whom it is either a

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showing that when people find refuge or comfort in nature, it usually serves a greater purpose that the pure love of nature. It is there, for instance, that the feeling of confinement is evacuated, and that Lizzie reflects on Darcy's letter in the garden, an open space, which allows her to open her mind to Darcy's explanation. Colonel Fitzwilliam's revelations of Darcy's role in separating Jane from Bingley, also occur in the garden. The nature becomes symbolic of the contemplative mood of Elizabeth's world. It is the characters' response to nature which tells about its inhabitants. It is Darcy's response to nature, for instance, his respectful use of the grounds of Pemberley that tells us (and Elizabeth) about his true character

[7] For a detailed and fascinating analysis of the interior/exterior dynamics of the movie adaptation, refer to Laurie Kaplan's "Inside Out/Outside In: *Pride & Prejudice* on Film 2005" *Persuasions-On-Line* 27 (2007)

duty or a pleasure to mix" (Sherry 611). It is these feelings that the filmmaker will have to transpose on screen.

Elizabeth's visit to Netherfield emphasizes this sense of duty mixed with pleasure: the pleasure of Elizabeth who, concerned with Jane's health, comes to see her sister and the duty of Elizabeth who must suffer Miss Bingley's scornful remarks. Unable (or unwilling) to move, the camera here follows Elizabeth's body as she enters a breakfast room in which Miss Bingley and Darcy are sitting. If it is not a scene of tea-drinking per se, it is nonetheless a very important scene in which the camera manages to translate how a group is significantly trying to reassert its own boundaries and to recontain the deviant presence, here Elizabeth's body, that has come to trespass on their territory. For André Bazin, "the changes in the camera's point of view … present reality in a more effective manner. First by permitting a better view, then by putting the accent where it belongs" (in Guzzetti 379). In this scene, the camera eye is located behind the table. Lizzie enters through the door and we become aligned with Miss Bingley's point of view as she stares at Lizzie, therefore at the one trespassing on Netherfield. To use Warhol's terms, "the female body, therefore, comes into the narrative foreground, not just as a vehicle of looking into the novel, but also as the object of the gaze of other characters" (7).

In this case, "the cut, like the glance, registers intention; it externalizes something that happens in the character's mind" (Guzzetti 383) Lizzie remains in the background, (for Miss Bingley, it will be the foreground) as if unwilling to step in. Miss Bingley, we could say, attempts to frame Lizzie,[8] but the camera does not register the whole of Lizzie. We have a waist-up shot on Lizzie's face and shoulders, as to emphasize her lack of space.

[8] "The frame is a gestalt, the outer boundary that establishes and organizes the internal components of the image, such as foreground-background relations" (*Projecting A Camera*, 103).

On the contrary, the table where Miss Bingley and Darcy are seated seems extremely far from Lizzie: the commentary on the space separating Lizzie from the world of Netherfield here extends beyond the boundaries of the frame. The shot simultaneously promotes and suppresses Lizzie's framing. As we have said, only parts of Elizabeth's body belong to the scene (we do not see her feet or her legs), as if the film deprived us of our sense of what safe ground looks like or feels like. The camera seems to be asking if Netherfield is a safe ground to even walk on. Elizabeth does not move forward (or inward) and stays on the edge—here near the door (therefore near the exit) as if refusing to join the assembly.

In this scene, the changes in camera movements (Lizzie is brought closer while the table is moved away and the shots alternate between Lizzie and the table) alter the relationship between spectator and spectacle: Lizzie becomes spectator of the social relationships at stake here and at the same time, becomes a spectacle to look at.[9] We visualize "the actions now of one character and now of another, the events now in one place and now in another, the observing of large panoramas and then, of minute details. It also objectifies [. . .] the wish to come closer, to see more clearly and intimately" (Pichel 139).

Discussing Jean Renoir's 1936 film version of the story "Une Partie de Campagne" and the presentation of Henriette, Chatman shows how the camera is placed behind Rodolphe's back, and in turn, how the camera and hence the narrative point of view identifies with him: "It conspires, invites us to conspire, with his voyeurism" (Chatman 132). Seen in this light, what happens in the frame, at the Bingley's in the breakfast room, is also what happens behind Miss Bingley's back.

[9] Cf. Irving Pichel, *Seeing With the Camera*.

To resist Lizzie's exposure to the voyeurism of Miss Bingley, Joe Wright shuts out the social difference, by appropriating Lizzie's body, effacing it (we never see her body entirely) and by containing it within a frame which refuses to include Darcy and Miss Bingley. The frame seems to posit Lizzie's identity as fluid, mobile, and resistant (non-compliant with, and even subversive of the organized system of meaning-production). In other words, Lizzie is not a participant and will not be. The camera angle, we could say, translates the feelings of the focalizer and functions as a "projection of a character's sense of self or view of others" (Bodenheimer 622), illustrating an example of how the body on screen struggles to impose and protect the boundaries of its individual privacy.

This sense of "violation" of the individual privacy will reach another climax when Lady de Bourgh visits Longbourn. Not only will she come at night, (violating the intimacy of the Bennet's family) but the camera movements used in that scene, convey the inner feelings that Elizabeth is desperately trying to contain. In Lady de Bourgh's presence, the camera starts shaking, translating here the tension that Elizabeth is experiencing; a tension that will literally explode when Kera Knightley (playing Elizabeth Bennet) running upstairs, will shout to the rest of her family, "leave me alone."

If Netherfield is visually bare, the tea-drinking scene or should we call it, the wine-drinking scene at Longbourn (as well as the "hangover scene" after the first ball) is filled with detail. In the opening scene, for instance, the camera follows Elizabeth's body and moves us from one room to the other: entering through the back door (and the detail has its importance), it moves across the walls, peeps through the hole of the doorknob, to listen to a private conversation, and visits the Bennet's family in the intimacy of their everyday life activities (linen is hanging, animals are running free, the table is still covered with glasses and crumbs, etc.). Joe Wright chooses a case of what Seymour Chatman calls the wandering camera,

"those moments when the camera as a narrating entity wanders on its own, detached from supporting the story through a character's point of view" (Johnson 49) The camera here allegorically functions as a body, a wandering eye which becomes an independent presence, and the viewers get pleasure in being a voyeur, for the camera "goes where no human eye could possibly go" (Pichel 142), in turn suggesting the lack of privacy that characterizes the life at Longbourn.

Dancing scenes in movies are usually rich in visual detail and this adaptation is no exception. Again, with a sort of anthropomorphic camera movement, we follow Elizabeth across the ballroom. The close-shot gives us the feeling that we are lost amidst these conversations, details, and crowds. Refusing to rest and to stop, the camera conveys a sense of vertigo, because there is too much to hear and too much to see. Again, the ballroom does not offer privacy. Johnson, discussing *The Red Desert* (1964) explains the purpose of using the wandering camera: "the subject interest has to do not with an individual's personality, rather it has to do with the issue of *dasein*, of being-in-the-world. Like the wandering camera, a "presence" that does not belong to the story world, Giuliana wanders from setting to setting, social role to social role, but never really fits in" (Johnson 52). We have the same type of wandering movement during the ball. The camera never seems ready to stand still and moves us through the space, among Collins (and his flower), Jane and Bingley (daringly reaching for Jane's ribbons), Mrs Bennet, the Bennet sisters… The camera, here, becomes a natural observer (social observer in this case).

Like it did at Netherfield, the camera re-appropriates for itself the body on screen—in this scene, the bodies of Darcy and Elizabeth—and removes them from the stifling society and setting that surround them. Carroll, describing how dance is used by filmmakers, explains how "long-shots obscures details" (Carroll 55). To make the dance and its qualities

accessible to the viewer, the reconstructor (filmmaker) “will deploy multiple camera positions, editing, close-ups, and the like in order to recreate the impression of dance” (56). Significantly, it is a long-shot which slowly removes the bodies of our two lovers from their background. Indeed, the other couples gradually become blurry, before they disappear completely from the screen. The dance for Joe Wright, we could say, becomes this true space of intimacy where bodies are explored and distance (social and physical) reduced. The camera, because it moves with our lovers, gives the impression of a natural observer who is itself dancing with them : “this movement may be of elements inside the frame or it may be an impression of movement generated by technical means [. . .] in these cases, we are apt to describe the movement as dance-like” (Carroll 58). The depth of field, here, corresponds to what Thomas Leitch defines as “the sense of intimacy with fictional characters that makes them more memorable than most people,” since viewers can project onto these characters “a life that seems more vivid, more realistic, and complex than their explicitly specified thoughts and actions” (159).

Much more could be said about these scenes of “tea-drinking and dancing” that we find in the movie. Deprived of a narrator’s voice, the borders of the text do not collapse, but are remapped in a composition of shots which, following the body of the focalizer, translates his or her feelings on the screen. In its shaking and its wandering, in its framing or removal of the bodies on screen, the camera recreates the tensions and conflicts, the duty or the pleasure experienced in the presence of Jane Austen’s society. In doing so, the boundaries of her text are alternately dissolved and reinstated on screen in terms of camera angles and foci. The camera thus becomes this new space, which invites the viewer to a voyeuristic pleasure, this same pleasure that readers feels in the intimacy of this “witty and intrusive narrator who

negotiates the space between the heroine's subjective experience, other characters' perspectives, and something that may be called objective reality" (Morrison 2)!

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