

THE JUXTAPOSITION OF THE DISPOSITION OF INTERIOR SPACES AND SOCIAL STRATA IN THE 18TH CENTURY: AN EXAMINATION OF PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND MANSFIELD PARK

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Abstract: In Austen's novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, there are three houses: Pemberley House, Mansfield Park and Sotherton Court. They are regarded as representative of a proprietor's social status. All the architectural information of domestic spaces offers profound insight into the notion of social relations delineated in the novels. Undoubtedly, the proprietors of these country houses take powerful positions in society. The disposition of domestic spaces is supposed to reveal the proprietors' social class. Besides, the mode of living in the domestic spaces also examines how the disposition of domestic spaces represents the proprietor's social strata. As a whole, the disposition of domestic spaces is full of politics.¹

The arrangement of space in houses communicates information about the status, opulence, power and interests of the owner and his family. Miles Ogborn argues that geographies of the home can answer the questions of 'identity and social status, authority and autonomy,' because house owners give every domestic space special meaning, such as 'making dining rooms and kitchens fit for polite conversation with visitors'.² As Simon Varey mentions 'the disposition of space in eighteenth-century Britain was political, and that in a parallel development the major novelists exploited spatial conceptions in ways that make their novels political as well'.³ Indeed, the disposition of interior spaces that novelists create not only helps us to understand the owner's political status, but also discloses social status or conditions. As a result, this paper will examine how the disposition of domestic spaces in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* is associated with the political aspect, which usually refers to social circumstances around the house's inhabitants. Furthermore, the political space cannot be separated from the owner's authority.

Varey proposes that the analysis of houses and cities can be considered to be 'microcosms of political structure' and concludes 'architectural design embodies a political expression, of the will of designer and patron, and so of the society to which they belong'.⁴ Domestic spaces take a significant role in the geographies of the home, because they not only reveal the owner's social position and his or her relationship to power, but also the owner's true nature. Domestic spaces are supposed to disclose much of the owner's ideology and authority. Hence, one can learn certain meanings from observation of the domestic space, and every

¹ Foremost, my most earnest gratitude must go to Dr. Yasmin Khan, making this intellectual project possible in the first place. Dr. Khan has never failed to be encouraging and critically constructive indeed.

I am also heartily indebted to my friends Ty Rallens, Ernesto Oyarbide, Travis Piper, Alexander Goldsmith and Deirdre Duffy who have kindly taken extra time to comment on my writing. Without their ingenious suggestions, this article could not have reached its present form.

² Miles Ogborn and Charles W. J. Withers. 'Introduction: Georgian Geographies?' *Georgian Geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Miles Ogborn and Charles W. J. Withers. Manchester : Manchester UP, 2004. pp. 10-11.

³ Simon Varey. *Space and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*. New York : Cambridge UP, 1990. p. 200

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

material object placed in the domestic space. As Cynthia Wall points out in 'A Geography of Georgian Narrative Space' the worlds in novels are interesting in not only the events of their characters' lives but also in the spaces they lived and the things that filled those spaces.⁵ Consequently, the observation of domestic spaces in the worlds of novels will bring us some details about political aspects. Descriptions of the domestic spaces in the novels may indicate the owner's status through the design of rooms and the presence of musical instruments and portraits. In other words, through the disposition of the domestic space, one can clearly see whether the owner is wealthy or not. As Cynthia Wall explains, the function of description is to make things, people and spaces visible.⁶ However, gradually over the eighteenth century, this status shifts into the particular, the 'minute circumstances'.⁷ The minute circumstances are particular detail of a person, place or the thing. As Wall notes that '[the] longer the description, the longer the look; the more detailed the description, the more within sight; the more within sight, the richer and multi-dimensional the sense of space'.⁸

One cannot deny that the more descriptions of the space, the more the reader can realise the disposition of space. Wall explains that 'when the space is visualized in detail, it stands out for a particular emblematic purpose'.⁹ Furthermore, the amplex of descriptions on the domestic space will help readers to understand the design of interior space that is associated with the relationship of power, because the design of interior space of house will expose the owner's taste and wealth. To take *Mansfield Park* as example, the narrator describes Fanny's inner perception of dimension of domestic space of the house: 'The grandeur of the house astonished, but could not console her. The rooms were too large for her to move in with ease [...]'.¹⁰ Indeed, the scale of interior space of Mansfield Park for Fanny is substantially larger than her own house at Portsmouth.¹¹

As Varey argues, architecture became a means of glorifying monarchy and state that continues to show up in the books and buildings, although some Englishmen hoped to articulate their thoughts on Restoration by the architectural treatises, even if their hopes paled quickly.¹² Thus architecture is highly relevant to politics, because some writers attempt to honor their states through the writing of architecture as well as the description of it.¹³ Sotherton Court, the Rushworth family's home in *Mansfield Park*, is a better example with interior spaces similar to that of Syon House, according to the narrator's description. Sotherton Court has

[...] a number of rooms, all lofty, and many large, and amply furnished in the taste of fifty years back, with shining floors, solid mahogany, rich damask,

⁵ Cynthia Wall. 'A Geography of Georgian Narrative Space.' *Georgian Geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Miles Ogborn and Charles W. J. Withers. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004. p. 118.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁷ Cynthia Wall. *Georgian Geographies*. p. 117.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁰ Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. New York: Vintage, 2007. p. 15.

¹¹ The disposition of each room of Mansfield Park must be suitable for the Bertram family and visitors, especially since Sir Thomas Bertram is a Member of Parliament. He will have frequent visitors of mostly equal rank, and the rooms must meet expectations.

¹² Simon Varey. *Space and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*. p. 2.

¹³ For example, Syon symbolizes imperial achievements. Robert Adam rebuilt it for the first Duke of Northumberland in the 1760s, and Syon has a classical entrance hall which is full of classical statuary, leading to splendidly classical rooms. Qtd. in Varey p. 18.

marble, gilding and carving, each handsome in its way. Of pictures there were abundance, and some few good, but the larger part were family portraits [...]¹⁴

Moreover, the narrator emphasizes that all the rooms in the house are 'lofty' and 'large,' and even elaborately decorated. Consequently, its interior space of Sotherton Court is filled with political significance from judging the individual's status through the building he lives in. A building can reveal one's social status. After all, a building with lots of exquisite decoration must cost the proprietor a great deal of money, and is indicative of wealth. In short, '[t]he modernized version of Vitruvian decorum extends the analogy to a point where a house represents the wealth, class and occupation of its owner,' Varey proposes; as a result, if a monument stands for the state, a domestic building stands for the private individual.¹⁵

The dining-parlour is well-ornamented and large enough not only to accommodate lots of visitors, but also to make the distinguished guests comfortable to stay and enjoy a variety of views. In addition, the rooms they visit are all 'lofty' and 'handsome'.

The function of every room, the purpose of the domestic space, also takes a significant role in identifying the disposition of interior spaces as a typical example of the proprietor's social position. The purpose of every room is closely related to the owner's power. Henry Aldrich put commercial pragmatism in accordance with the owner's desire to make the spatial design of the building show its purpose.¹⁶ To take Aldrich's term, if you were the noblemen, your sitting room should be 'large' enough for your guest to be comfortable, and your interior decoration has to be 'ornamented' in order to make your guest feel the magnificence and the beauty of everything, and then your rooms should be 'princely' in order to make your guest live as a distinguished guest. Take the drawing room and dining parlour of Sotherton Court as an example to account for this statement:

In the drawing-room they [the whole party] were met with equal cordiality by the mother, and Miss Bertram had all the distinction with each that she could wish. After the business of arriving was over, it was first necessary to eat, and the doors were thrown open to admit them through one or two intermediate rooms into the appointed dining-parlour, where a collation was prepared with abundance and elegance.¹⁷

The dining-parlour of Sotherton Court is indeed grand and splendid. These visitors are surrounded by exquisite collations there. Furthermore, they are going to have a dinner in the dining-parlour later. Consequently, the function of the dining-parlour is not only a place for dinner, but also a place for sitting and having a chat. In addition, the road to the dining-parlour has to go through one or two intermediate rooms from the drawing room, and the dining-parlour is supposed to be elaborately designed for the purpose of privacy. In effect, every room has a different function for the proprietor and family members. For instance, the library, for Mr. Bennet, is not a library, but a private space that can bring him tranquility and much room to think. As Miller and Schlitt argue that '[a] separate room, which is too small to be used for regular activities, or even a large, properly ventilated closet, can become a private room for

¹⁴ Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. pp. 86-87. One can clearly figure out that the domestic space of Sotherton Court is set up for honoring the Rushworth family's position in society, particularly the placement of family portraits in the gallery.

¹⁵ Simon Varey. *Space and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*. p. 19.

¹⁶ Qtd. in Varey p. 20.

¹⁷ Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. pp. 85-86.

meditation and reflective problem solving'.¹⁸ Indeed, the library of Longbourn is a 'separated' room to separate Mr. Bennet from Mrs. Bennet's constant interruptions and complaints.¹⁹

Concerning another function of a room, Women's dressing-rooms may serve as a shelter against intrusions. The dressing room of Longbourn is the best example to account for this argument. After learning of Lydia's elopement with Wickham, 'she [Mrs. Bennet] is upstairs, and [...] she doesn't yet leave her dressing-room'.²⁰ Remarkably, Mrs. Bennet attempts to minimize other family members' interruptions and considerations. She needs the space for privacy. Tita Chico suggests in *Designing Women* that the dressing room in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century was regarded as a domestic space for 'the central paradigm of privacy' and 'dismantlement of surveillance'.²¹ There is one thing worth noting that once women keep themselves in the dressing room, they can escape other people's surveillance, above all male surveillance, and think independently. When Sir Thomas asks Fanny to pay a visit to Portsmouth, Lady Bertram obtained it rather from 'submission' than 'conviction' and she is 'unbiased by his bewildering statements'.²² Indeed, Lady Bertram is submissive to Sir Thomas's 'bewildering statements'. The reader can regard Sir Thomas' statements as the male intervention. When Lady Bertram returns to her own dressing room, she thinks in her own way without paying attention to Sir Thomas's words, and she concludes Fanny doesn't need to go and Sir Thomas's request is unjustifiable. The dressing room certainly brings Lady Bertram the space in which she can have her own thoughts and make her own judgment.

Fanny's East Room was her favourite for self-reflection. 'The comfort of it [the East Room] in her hours of leisure was extreme. She could go there after anything unpleasant below, and find immediate consolation in some pursuit, or some train of thought at hand'.²³ Besides, the disposition of the East Room can show up Fanny's position in the Bertram family.

The room [East Room] had then become useless, and for some time was quite deserted, except by Fanny [...] its greatest elegancies and ornaments were a faded footstool of Julia's work, too ill done for the drawing-room, three transparencies, made in a rage for transparencies, for the three lower panes of one window, where Tintern Abbey held its station between a cave in Italy, and a moonlight lake in Cumberland; a collection of family profiles thought unworthy of being anywhere else, over the mantle-piece, and by their side and pinned against the wall, a small sketch of a ship sent four years ago from the Mediterranean by William [...].²⁴

All the decoration of the East Room is either 'unworthy of being anywhere else'. Even the East Room is 'deserted' and 'useless' to the members of family. The arrangement of the East Room shows Fanny's inferiority to other family members. Every ornamental detail of the room

¹⁸ Stuart Miller and Judith K. Schlitt. *Interior Space: Design Concepts for Personal Needs*. New York: Praeger, 1985. p. 60.

¹⁹ Consequently, one can see that the function of a library, for a proprietor, is a sitting room for working out problems and seeking his freedom from book reading; however, the purpose of the library, for other members, is only a room in which a number of books accumulate on the bookcase, and these family members can find a book to elevate themselves.

²⁰ Jane Austen. *Pride and Prejudice*. Ed. Donald Gary. New York: Norton, 2001. p. 185.

²¹ Tita Chico. 'The Art of Knowing Women: A History of the Dressing Room.' *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Culture*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2005. p. 76.

²² Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. p. 381.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 154.

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 154-155.

definitely becomes a significant clue which will guide us to find the implication concerning the issue of identity.

The disposition of space can evoke and reveal the proprietor's social status. The function of each room and its interior structure are significant elements in analyzing these country houses as the representative of home owner's identity. Willington points out that 'Mansfield Park was [...] a Palladian house dating from the 1730's or 1740's, and was very likely inspired by Godmersham'.²⁵ Thus, Mark Girouard's *Life in the English Country House* will help examine the function of each room and its interior structure in Mansfield Park. Although Austen did not clearly describe the domestic space of Mansfield Park, the reader can still get some details from the narration of characters' perspective on the building. Each room of Mansfield Park has different function, such as billiard room for playing ball, and library for accumulating books, but one or two of them has double purpose, such as drawing room and breakfast-room. Both drawing room and breakfast-room have the function of sitting-room for the family members' daily activity. Firstly, the Bertram Family and Mrs. Norris are talking about Fanny's appearance in the drawing room after Fanny returns to her chamber.²⁶ Secondly, Mr. Bertram was asked to join a card table by Mrs. Norris.²⁷ Thirdly, '[t]hey went together into the breakfast-room, where Edmund prepared her paper, and ruled her lines with all the good will [...]' and Fanny wrote a letter with Edmund there.²⁸ Fourthly, Fanny and William, her brother, and the Bertram Family had a breakfast in the breakfast room.²⁹ From these sentences one can see that the drawing room and the breakfast room not only have their formal function, but also have another purpose for family's and visitor's use.

As Girouard points out, it is common to make a drawing room both informal and formal in a larger country house, and informal daily life often takes place in other rooms. For instance, '[m]any house had a breakfast room or breakfast parlour, used not only for breakfast but also as a morning sitting room'.³⁰ As a result, in addition to the purpose of each room, the mode of life-style in the domestic space can also reveal the proprietor's social identity. In the eighteenth century, the mode of life-style in the domestic space is readily examined in terms of Austen's novels. Besides, this undoubtedly shows Varey's conclusion that '[s]pace has a crucial social function in those novels, just as it has in the architectural theory and practice of the eighteenth century. The major consequence of this for the novel is that it is an expression of the politics of the author's world'.³¹

As a matter of fact, the mode of living in the dining room and the drawing room is full of a great deal of political atmosphere, such as the space of talking about public matters. The way of life in both rooms can give us some implications of the distinction between male and female. Mark Girouard has mentioned that after dessert, the ladies will leave the gentlemen alone, and withdraw from the dining room to the drawing room; as for the gentlemen, they will talk about political matters in the dining room. Thus, the dining room is considered to be 'mainly

²⁵ Qtd. in Lamont p. 228. Lamont, Claire. 'Domestic Architecture.' *Jane Austen in Context*. Ed. Janet Todd. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.

²⁶ Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. p. 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 123.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 288.

³⁰ Mark Girouard. *Life in the English Country House: a Social and Architectural History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1978. p. 234.

³¹ Simon Varey. *Space and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*. p. 208. In short, the interior space in the world of the novel is filled with the political environment in the eighteenth century. The living style in the domestic space can also reveal the proprietor's social class, even an emblem of powerful position.

masculine,' and the drawing room to be a 'mainly feminine' room.³² Taking Mr. Bertram's speaking to Dr. Grant as demonstration: 'A strange business this in America, Dr. Grant! – What is your opinion? – I always come to you to know what I am to think of public matters'.³³ Although the narration does not mention the place the talk takes place, through next paragraph of Mrs. Norris asking Mr. Bertram to play cards, the reader can assume that the place should be the drawing room.

The ball-room can also be the representative of political space. As Girouard suggests, balls are not only planned for enjoyment, but also have other purposes, such as 'planning politics' or 'making matches.' Some parents attempt to introduce their daughters into the social circle for finding the ideal husbands; therefore, '[b]alls in the local Assemble Room were a good venue for striking up a first acquaintance [...]'.³⁴ To take *Mansfield Park* as demonstration:

[Fanny] found herself the next moment conducted by Mr. Crawford to the top of the room, and standing there to be joined by the rest of the dancers, couple after couple as they were formed [...] Young, pretty, and gentle, however, she had no awkwardness that were not as good as graces, and there were few persons present that were not disposed to praise her. She was attractive, she was modest, she was Sir Thomas's niece, and she was soon said to be admired by Mr. Crawford.³⁵

The ball indeed brings Fanny a chance of attracting an ideal gentleman's attention. Without a doubt, Sir Thomas is a representative of an ambitious parent who introduces his nephew into the social circle of *Mansfield Park*, and attempts to achieve the goal of making a match. As a result, the ball-room indeed constructs a domestic space.

Owing to the lack of architectural interior information the reader get from the novels³⁶, one can still collect all the information about the disposition of interior spaces to construct and assume the disposition of domestic spaces in *Pemberley House* and *Sotherton Court*. According to Willington, '[Pemberley] has been taken to be Elizabethan or Jacobean on account for its having a gallery, a long upstairs room in which it was common to hang pictures'.³⁷ However, this kind of argument is just an assumption, because the date of *Pemberley* is not mentioned. It is out of question that the disposition of domestic spaces conforms to the principle of Elizabethan or Jacobean times, but its salon and dining-parlour is on the ground as one of the principles in the architecture of eighteenth century.

Moreover the gallery of *Pemberley House* has also many family portraits which represent the whole family's power as does the gallery of *Sotherton Court*. The drawing room and the dining room of *Sotherton Court* are on the ground floor. Furthermore, 'Sotherton is an old place, and a place of some grandeur [...] The House was built in Elizabeth's time, and is a large, regular, brick building – heavy, but respectable looking, and has many good rooms'.³⁸ According to the architectural traits of Elizabeth's time, its main rooms should be on the first floor.

³² Mark Girouard. *Life in the English Country House: a Social and Architectural History*. pp. 204-205.

³³ Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. p. 122.

³⁴ Mark Girouard. *Life in the English Country House: a Social and Architectural History*. pp. 231-232.

³⁵ Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. p. 282-283.

³⁶ The architectural historian Pevsner was quite critical of Jane Austen's lack of architectural knowledge. See Nikolaus Pevsner, 'The Architectural Setting of Jane Austen's Novels'. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 31. 1968 pp. 404-422.

³⁷ Qtd. in Lamont p227. Lamont, Claire. 'Domestic Architecture.' *Jane Austen in Context*. Ed. Janet Todd. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.

³⁸ Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. pp. 57-58.

However, its main rooms are at ground level. The confusing problem will be worked out by Girouard's investigation. He points out the following:

In Elizabethan times, when the house was built, they [the main rooms] had been up on the first floor in the usually way of the time, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they had been moved down to the parlour floor at ground level. This often happened in Elizabethan and Jacobean houses.³⁹

As a result, the disposition of domestic spaces of Sotherton Court can inform the reader that its interior disposition now follows the architectural principles of the eighteenth century. Moreover, its gallery with lots of family portraits not only honors the Rushworth family, but also symbolizes the whole family's social position.

By and large, Jane Austen uses description of the spaces or rooms, their sizes and locations, their decoration and furnishing, and their different uses to tell her readers about her characters' personalities and the ways in which they act in the political sphere. Indeed, the disposition of interior space not only reflects a proprietor's social status, taste, and nature, but also displays political involvement. Each interior space has its respective representative and meaning. The more the observations on domestic spaces the reader possess, the more information and implication about political issue and the proprietor.

³⁹ Mark Girouard. *Life in the English Country House: a Social and Architectural History*. p. 214.

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