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Re-Walking the Paths of *Pride and Prejudice*: Intersectional Perspectives on Pedestrian Mobility in Jo Baker's *Longbourn*

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Abstract: This paper examines the appropriation of the pedestrian theme from Jane Austen's famous novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) in Jo Baker's rewriting *Longbourn* (2013). First, it analyses walking in Austen's novel, where it appears as a mild but harmless form of female rebellion and emancipated courtship in a coherent pastoral landscape. Subsequently, it moves on to *Longbourn*, which, by focusing on the walking of the servants who remain marginal in Austen's pretext, recasts this pedestrian theme as a mode of intersectional critique and subjectivises and fragments the topography of *Pride and Prejudice*. The paper scrutinises how Baker depicts the differences in and limits of pedestrian mobility in Georgian society under the influence of dominant ideologies of race, gender and class and finally eradicates these inequalities by constructing a female character who transgresses the boundaries that Austen's protagonist Elizabeth Bennet always leaves intact.

Introduction

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is a seminal work in the literary history of female walking. Along with her real-life companion Dorothy Wordsworth, Austen's protagonist Elizabeth Bennet is one of the most well-known female country walkers of early nineteenth-century English prose. "Walks are everywhere in *Pride and Prejudice*. The heroine walks on every possible occasion and in every location, and many of the crucial encounters and conversations in the book take place while two characters are walking together", notes Rebecca Solnit in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2001: 97). Several scholars have examined the multifacetedness of this pedestrian theme: walks function as subtle modes of characterisation and satire; at times walking even serves as an emancipatory tool for the female characters. The manners in which Elizabeth Bennet and the other

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gentry characters walk and comment upon their peers' walking reveal, often in an ironic manner, their temperaments, aesthetic sensibilities and prejudices. This crucial role of walking has not gone unnoticed by the numerous filmmakers and writers who have adapted and rewritten *Pride and Prejudice* in the past three decades. As Julianne Pidduck suggests, since the 1990s, adaptations have displayed a new attentiveness to the politics of gender, space and mobility in Austen's pretexts. They adopt and foreground instances of transgressive female movement that are already present in her works, but equally undermine or even eradicate the spatial constraints faced by her heroines according to their contemporary agendas. Pidduck argues that

Austen adaptations map out the limits of historical feminine middle-class mobility and aspiration, while seeking to overcome them. Rendered through the heightened feminist sensibility of the 1990s adaptations, Austen's female protagonists retrospectively long to partake in the acquisitive ramblings of their male counterparts. (2000: 124)

According to Pidduck, such adaptations consequently assume a critical perspective on the spatiality of their pretexts. They challenge female confinement by deliberately mobilising individual characters. One of her examples is the opening scene of the 1995 BBC miniseries *Pride and Prejudice*, in which – in contradistinction to the indoor conversation in Austen's novel – “Elizabeth (Jennifer Ehle) strides, cheerful and apple-cheeked, through the idyllic countryside” carrying “an independent, dynamic, freethinking force as a compelling heroine. Against costume drama's predominant compression, Lizzie's enjoyment of the walk with its relative physical freedom, *for its own sake*, becomes particularly poignant” (2000: 126; emphasis in original). Furthermore, Elizabeth's elevated panoramic gaze marks the picturesque landscape below her as her (imaginative) own and invokes her future role as the mistress of Pemberley. The 2005 adaptation directed by Joe Wright similarly foregrounds Elizabeth Bennet's pedestrian activity, depicting her strolling through the countryside whilst reading a book, a gesture which gives an intellectual dimension to her walks. Taking its cue from Pidduck's observation above, this paper examines one of the most extensive fictional engagements with Austen's depiction of landscape and pedestrian mobility to date: Jo Baker's novel *Longbourn* from 2013, which retells the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* from the perspective of the servants.

In view of the massive corpus of recent adaptations and reworkings of Austen's oeuvre, a few preliminary remarks on Baker's intertextual agenda are necessary before her engagement with pedestrian mobility can be explored in detail. Baker employs the major events of *Pride and Prejudice* as a backdrop for a new plot. Her novel contains, for instance, the first ball, Jane's invitation to see the Bingleys, Elizabeth's excursion to Netherfield, the appearance of Mr Collins

and Lydia's elopement with Wickham. In contrast to Austen's works where servants "often appear to be no more than background scenery, just as they would have appeared in real life" (Walshe 2014: n. pag.), Baker focuses entirely on the scullery maids, stable men and footmen that keep Longbourn running. As Olivia Murphy maintains, Baker's decision to chart this life "below the stairs" ties in with the recent success of films and television series set precisely in this milieu, as, for instance, in ITV's *Downton Abbey* (2017: 164–165) and proves to be an effective strategy ensuring the commercial success of her novel. Yet, Murphy adds, the novel can also be understood "as participating in a postmodern tradition of critically inflected re-writing of canonical texts" (2017: 156). It excavates conflicts and issues that remain vague or silent in Austen's original but that have advanced as major categories in contemporary scholarly and socio-cultural discourses. Examples are Bingley's involvement in the slave trade in the West Indies, the hardship caused by the Napoleonic Wars and the precarious status of young female servants. Accordingly, *Longbourn* can be classified as an example of a subgenre of historiographic metafiction that Peter Widdowson calls 'revisionary fiction', literature that self-consciously rewrites canonical texts and thereby questions, often from a cultural-political perspective, the dominant worldviews presented in its pretexts. As Widdowson explains, his terminology employs a

tactical slippage between the verb to revise (from the Latin 'revisere': 'to look at again') – 'to examine and correct; to make a new, improved version of; to study anew'; and the verb to re-vision – to see in another light; to re-envision or perceive differently; and thus potentially to recast and re-evaluate ('the original'). (2006: 496)

In Widdowson's framework, revisionary works "keep the pre-text in clear view, so that the original is not just the invisible 'source' of a new modern version but is a constantly invoked intertext for it and is constantly in dialogue with it: the reader, in other words, is forced at all points to recall how the pre-text had it and how the re-vision reinfects this" (2006: 502). This is exactly what happens in *Longbourn*: it confronts its audience with postcolonial, socio-economic and gender-sensitive angles from which Austen's original can be re-read.

Again, such an approach is admittedly not new. Along with postcolonial and feminist rewritings it has, for example, become an established marker of neo-Victorian fiction. *Longbourn* cleverly uses a pretext that must, from a twenty-first century perspective, inevitably contain blanks, silences and instances of political incorrectness and Baker is well-versed in addressing these 'shortcomings'. In other words, *Longbourn* gives its audience exactly what it may expect. While the novel's social criticism is therefore somewhat predictable, this paper aims to show that it is one way in which it articulates these perspectives that is the remarkable aspect of this novel. With reference to Widdowson's definition of the

double-edged agenda of reassessment and correction in revisionary fiction,¹ this paper proposes that *Longbourn* recasts *Pride and Prejudice* to a large extent through its representation of female walking.²

Whereas in *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth Bennet's strolls express self-determination and facilitate aesthetic and sensual pleasure, *Longbourn* relativises this potential by pointing to the inaccessibility of such movement for female servants. It sheds a new light on Elizabeth's walking by reassessing it from a class-conscious perspective. Most previous Austen adaptations focus, as Pidduck above demonstrates, on the apparent gap between the mobility of male and female characters. Baker does this, too, but even more importantly her depiction of pedestrian mobility questions universal conceptions of female movement, whereby she pursues an intersectional perspective. As will be seen, *Longbourn* first clarifies that Elizabeth's independent walks are a rare class privilege and then revises this inequality. In an admittedly contemporary fashion, her main protagonist Sarah, an orphan from a poorhouse who works as a servant at Longbourn, transgresses – quite literally on foot – the boundaries that Elizabeth's strolls always leave intact.

The picturesque grounds that Elizabeth walks on are pleasing and safe. As Michael Crang explains with reference to Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, Austen's topography is "a spatially contained world, and a world socially focused around the institutions of country house life amongst the elite" (2008: 316). He further registers that "Austen calls forth a landscape that [...] authorizes a particular version of English history" (2008: 317). Omitting the impacts of the agricultural revolution and industrialisation, Austen presents a nostalgic and unruptured natural world. Baker's novel, in turn, complicates and fragments this coherent and homogenous landscape. Although Baker retains Austen's setting, she focuses on characters who, due to their class, ethnicity and gender, move through this topography differently and thereby makes visible Austen's omissions. In so doing, *Longbourn* elucidates the contention that space is to be understood as "a *production*, shaped through a variety of social processes and human

1 A more recent term to describe a novel like *Longbourn* is Jeremy Rosen's 'minor character elaboration', "a genre constituted by the conversion of minor characters from canonical texts into the protagonist of new ones" (2016: 2) that "can be executed in a variety of ways in pursuit of different representational goals" (13).

2 Male characters walk in *Longbourn*, too, first and foremost James Smith whose pedestrian journey through Spain takes up several chapters. Smith's working-class masculinity and the hardship he experiences on foot similarly put into perspective the privileges enjoyed by characters like Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. As this paper focuses on Austen's and Baker's female heroines, however, this aspect will not be examined in further detail.

interventions, and a *force* that, in turn, influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of human being in the world” (Wegner 2015: 235; emphasis in original). *Longbourn* presents a contested, far from neutral landscape which segregates and excludes groups of characters and shows that their spatial practices are determined by the social order. This paper reads Baker’s portrayal of walking as a distinct mode of ‘writing back’ to Austen from an intersectional perspective, a technique which is, however, not entirely free of its own ideological entanglements.³ To elucidate this proposition, it will first recapitulate how *Pride and Prejudice* depicts Elizabeth’s walks and constructs them as transgressive but ultimately always obedient spatial practices. Subsequently, this paper will analyse how exactly *Longbourn* dismantles Elizabeth’s walking.

Walking in *Pride and Prejudice*

In *Pride and Prejudice*, walks are an integral part of Elizabeth’s daily routine. She walks together with her sisters but even more frequently she is depicted walking alone in the countryside. Walking is more than a mere necessity to get from one place to another, it is her favourite leisure activity. The narrator notes that walks give Elizabeth the pleasant opportunity “to indulge herself in air and exercise” (*Pride and Prejudice* 135), which, we can assume, is a welcome disruption for a young lady whose life primarily unfolds inside. When the narrator employs Elizabeth as an internal focaliser, her walks are presented as beneficial and healthy, which can be read as an endorsement of this mode of walking on the novel’s behalf. Mary M. Chan explains that the indoor settings in *Pride and Prejudice* are associated both with sociability and social constraints: “interior spaces [...] embody the societal scrutiny under which Austen’s characters operate and indicate the limitations of her heroines’ worlds” (2007: n. pag.). Out of sight of her relatives and neighbours, walks in the countryside provide an emotional and physical outlet for Elizabeth. For short periods, she can escape her chaotic and bustling family home. The narrator observes that “[r]eflection must be reserved for solitary hours; whenever she was alone [...] and not a day went by without a solitary walk” (*Pride and Prejudice* 147). Elizabeth walks to think and reflect rationally on her own, a mode of walking that evokes the peripatetic

³ Due to my focus on the intersections of gender and class in *Longbourn*, which provides more than enough material, it is beyond the scope of this paper to include Baker’s postcolonial mode of ‘writing back’. Fortunately, other scholars have already examined this aspect. For an analysis of Baker’s appropriation of Edward Said’s criticism of Austen’s works, see Corinne Fowler’s article from 2017.

tradition initiated by Aristotle and his fellow philosophers in Ancient Greece (see Solnit 2001: 15). As a subtle but nevertheless tangible indication of her independence, Elizabeth's walking attains a subversive potential in the novel.

By endorsing this introspective mode and escaping from the realm of culture, Elizabeth frequently walks in a semi-Romantic fashion. In the late Georgian period, the concept of cross-country walking as a respectable cultural practice for the (upper) middle-class was still relatively new. For most of the eighteenth century, walking in the countryside (in contrast to walking in gardens or in the city) had a negative image. As Anne D. Wallace puts it,

the greatest suspicion of all fell on pedestrians, whose mode of travel proclaimed their poverty and therefore greater probability of their being wanderers with some illicit or economically disruptive motive. Walking was the cheapest kind of travel, but also the slowest, most physically grueling, and most dangerous. (1993: 29)

Walking was thus associated with the lower ranks of society who could not afford more expensive modes of transport like horses and carriages. Drawing on earlier attempts to reevaluate nature as, for instance, found in the works of William Gilpin and his concept of the 'picturesque' or Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideal of the 'natural state' of the human being, the Romantics began to disseminate the idea of solitary rural walking as a desirable leisure activity and mode of self-exploration: "Romanticism changed walking [...] [it] transformed it for those with means and a certain subjectivity into an elevated vehicle for experiencing nature, the world, and the self" (Amato 2004: 102). For upper-class women, however, this new pedestrian culture was not as readily available as to men. Wallace points out that

[s]pecial difficulties faced women walkers, especially if they walked alone, because their peripeteia translated as sexual wandering. This interpretation derives in part from traditional rural lower-class courtship patterns, in which 'walking out' with someone was the equivalent of steady dating or engagement today. (1993: 30)

In urban contexts, this association was even more pronounced: the solitary female walker was regarded as a prostitute, an association that the very term 'streetwalker' illustrates (see Beaumont 2015: 4; Solnit 2001: 176).

It is against this set of ambivalent notions of walking that Elizabeth's excursions emerge as transgressive spatial practices in Austen's novel. What Elizabeth apparently does so casually, is in fact remarkable with respect to her gender and her class. Palmer consequently interprets Elizabeth's solitary walks as a manifestation of Austen's tentative proto-feminist impulses, since they are "all aimed at expanding women's options. By talking a walk, choosing a direction and destination as well as a pace, a companion, and a time, a woman restless and dissatisfied

with her constructed role could advance toward several enabling social goals” (2001: 157). During her walks Elizabeth experiences relief; she can temporarily escape patriarchal modes of surveillance and her nagging mother. Elizabeth’s excursions attest to her self-determination as a young woman. It is therefore not surprising that literary-historical accounts of walking often present Elizabeth Bennet as a precursor to the independent female pedestrians in the writings of Charlotte Brontë, Amy Levy, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys. From a diachronic perspective, Elizabeth could even be called a rural proto-flâneuse.⁴

Most members of the local community, however, are ignorant to the benefits of her walking or even denigrate it. Focusing on the neighbours’ indignant reactions to one particular walk allows the novel, as Murphy observes, to scrutinise from a critical perspective “the gendered assumptions surrounding walking in the period” (2013: 130). When Elizabeth’s sister Jane falls ill at Netherfield, Elizabeth sets out to visit her on foot. The walk itself is once again described as a pleasant experience:

Elizabeth continued her walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ancles [sic], dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise. (*Pride and Prejudice* 24)

The adjective ‘impatient’ alludes to Elizabeth’s pragmatism and her strong, if not stubborn, will. Her glowing face is indicative of a physical degree of effort that she is willing to make for her sister. This description underlines Elizabeth’s altruism and loyalty.

However, once Elizabeth arrives at Netherfield Hall, her dirty attire stands out; it obviously violates upper-middle class feminine etiquette. It is not a coincidence that the pages following Elizabeth’s appearance show how Mrs Hurst and Miss Bingley, tellingly two of the most unsympathetic characters in the novel,⁵ judge her walk. Mrs Hurst rebukes Elizabeth as follows:

⁴ Ever since Janet Wolff’s controversial article “The Invisible Flâneuse” from 1985, which argued that a female equivalent to the male flâneur did not exist because women were primarily bound to the private sphere, the term ‘flâneuse’ has been hotly debated in criticism. Due to her preference to walk alone, criticism has nevertheless attributed a pioneering role to Elizabeth Bennet on the path towards the emergence of literary heroines who inhabit the streets of metropolises in ways that could be called flânerie. As we shall see, Baker is obviously aware of this association and accentuates it by allowing Elizabeth to stroll, rather anachronistically, through the arcades in London, one of the preferred locales of Walter Benjamin’s flâneur.

⁵ Caroline Bingley’s own walking marks her as an unsympathetic character. She performs a stylised and stiff walk for Mr Darcy, which he fails to admire: “Miss Bingley [...] got up and walked

She has nothing, in short, to recommend her, but being an excellent walker. I shall never forget her appearance this morning. She really looked almost wild. [...] To walk three miles, or four miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles [sic] in dirt, and alone, quite alone! What could she mean by it? It seems to me to shew an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum. (*Pride and Prejudice* 26)

Miss Bingley similarly does not understand “[w]hy must *she* be scampering about the country, because her sister had a cold? Her hair so untidy, so blowsy!” (*Pride and Prejudice* 26; emphasis in original). Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst are troubled because Elizabeth walked alone, and because her clothes are blemished. They cannot see anything positive in her walk; for them it is distasteful, even ‘uncivilised’, as their references to wilderness and messiness infer. Their discomposure suggests that they are unaccustomed to the concept of walking as a liberating activity. What is at stake here is again Elizabeth’s class: her dirty dress evokes manual labour and provinciality. The ladies’ insistence on Elizabeth’s solitariness, in turn, relates back to her reputation as a respectable woman and “the association of female walking with sexual transgression” (Wallace 1993: 130). The exposure of Miss Bingley’s and Mrs Hurst’s slander can be interpreted as another moment in which the novel deconstructs the gender bias of country walking and examines the harsh competition between the female characters.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, walking also appears as a mode of emancipated courtship that facilitates mutual understanding and respect. Mr Darcy not only respects and admires Elizabeth’s solitary strolls. Meeting Elizabeth walking through Rosings Park, Darcy even signals his interest in her by enquiring “about her pleasure in being at Hunsford, her love of solitary walks, and her opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Collins’s happiness” (*Pride and Prejudice* 126). Eventually they walk together and it is through movement on foot that the two future lovers overcome their initial reservations.⁶ During Elizabeth’s “favourite walk”, for instance, Mr Darcy declares that “‘I have been walking in the grove some time in the hope of meeting you. [...]’” (*Pride and Prejudice* 135) and subsequently hands her the letter that resolves

about the room. Her figure was elegant, and she walked well; but Darcy, at whom it was all aimed, was still inflexibly studious” (*Pride and Prejudice* 40). While Elizabeth walks, Caroline promenades. Solnit describes promenading as “a special subset of walking with an emphasis on slow stately movement, socializing and display” (2001: 66). As an unconventional pedestrian, Elizabeth is more attractive to the male hero, which indicates that she represents the novel’s favoured model of femininity.

⁶ Mary Jane Curry demonstrates that Elizabeth’s walks not only serve as a synchronic mode of characterisation but that her development and overcoming of her initial prejudices are also captured in the transformation of her walks in the course of the novel. Curry claims that her walks mirror Elizabeth’s gradual change from a rational to an increasingly tolerant and sensual character (2000: 176).

their misunderstanding surrounding Wickham and Lydia, which prompts Elizabeth to see him in a different light. The first time that Elizabeth notices Mr Darcy's decency and civility is tellingly during a "beautiful walk" that she undertakes with Mr and Mrs Gardiner. Darcy joins them, following the direction that Elizabeth has taken, and together, the narrator tells us, they "walked on in silence; each of them deep in thought" and Elizabeth for the first time in Darcy's presence feels "flattered and pleased" (*Pride and Prejudice* 174). Elizabeth and Darcy's communal walking visualises the novel's concept of an ideal marriage. Palmer infers that these strolls present "the protagonists [...] positioned side by side as equal participants in activity, encountering together both delightful views and obstacles to progress at the same time" (2001: 158). This view is supported by Solnit who argues that it is a "shared taste for scenery that finally provides the literal common ground on which they [Elizabeth and Darcy] resolve their differences" (2001: 100).

In sum, walking provides emancipatory potential for Austen's female protagonist and literally brings the new couple together. However, it must be noted that Elizabeth's walks never pose a serious risk to her reputation or the larger social order. Although she contests some of the normative boundaries of feminine mobility of her time, she never overthrows the status quo (as Lydia momentarily does when she elopes with Wickham, for instance). Even if she explicitly imagines herself as the "mistress of Pemberley" (*Pride and Prejudice* 166) and chooses this new home not least because it gives her space to stroll, as Darcy's wife she will spend her life walking within the patriarchal bounds of his property. As Palmer eloquently observes,

Austen's ideal life is home-centered, and walking along gravel paths, shrubberies, and nearby lanes of a place emphasizes and enhances one's ties to it. By regularly tracing her way back to that place as the center of her daily wanderings, the heroine symbolically strengthens the home and her own grounding in it. Austen's novels involve movement, process, and change [...] [b]ut her heroines always return, like the participants in a round dance. (164)

Elizabeth's walking in *Pride and Prejudice* is ultimately always circular: she walks short distances from and to home but never goes on an extensive pedestrian journey as the most courageous Romantic wanderers did. Her role as pedestrian is perfectly summarised by Charlotte Mathieson who proposes that "[a]lthough Elizabeth Bennet might go against the social order, her wildness is rendered a harmless quirk of character and ultimately has little lasting effect on the perception of her social and sexual reputation" (2015: 29). All in all, walking is certainly more than a plain theme in *Pride and Prejudice*: it provides a subtle and light-hearted mode of social criticism while Austen simultaneously ensures that Elizabeth never unhinges the norms of gender and class of her time.

Walking in *Longbourn*

Longbourn signals its intertextual indebtedness to Austen through direct quotations from *Pride and Prejudice* that precede each chapter as epigraphs as well as the author's note, in which Baker – professing to the fidelity principle and the prestige of her 'urtext' – clarifies that "where the two books overlap, the events of this novel are mapped directly onto Jane Austen's" (445). Baker's new supplementary plot focuses on Sarah who assists housekeeper Mrs Hill at Longbourn. Sarah's dull routine of hard manual labour and sleeping in a modest attic room with scullery maid Polly is stirred up when two new male servants arrive. The first is James Smith who is hired as the new footman at Longbourn. Sarah meets the second servant, Ptolemy Bingley, described as the new "mulatto footman of Mr Bingley's" (106), when he comes to Longbourn to deliver Charles Bingley's invitation to Jane. Both men fascinate Sarah. Smith's mysterious past makes her curious. She even searches his lodgings. Ptolemy's foreignness and his previous life in the West Indies similarly attracts Sarah. One night, when the Bennet sisters are at the ball, they secretly drink together and kiss. When Ptolemy moves to London, Sarah begins an affair with James. The novel reveals that James fought in the Anglo-Spanish War where he was wrongly suspected of being a deserter and identifies him as the illegitimate son of Mrs Hill and Mr Bennet, which James himself remains unaware of. Elizabeth asks Sarah to escort her to Rosings for a few weeks. Upon her return, Sarah finds out that James has disappeared. Subsequently, she moves to Pemberley with the newlywed Darcys. After one year, she meets Ptolemy who tells her that James lives in Northern England. Sarah resigns from her position and walks all the way to Lancaster, where she finds James.

Baker's novel retains the heterodiegetic third-person narrative voice of *Pride and Prejudice*, but it makes more use of free indirect discourse, multiple focalisation and adopts a complex non-linear temporal structure. Sarah provides the narrator's major point of view, but every now and then other characters, Mrs Hill and James in particular, serve as additional focalisers who reveal crucial information from the past. The focalisers contemplate their most intimate inner conflicts, desires and secrets, which brings readers closer to these characters than to Austen's. Like Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the main plot of *Longbourn* is set in the years of 1811/1812. The two long flashbacks from the points of view of Mrs Hill and James in Volume 3 return to the year of 1788 when Mrs Hill is about to give birth to her son as well as James's journey through Spain between 1808 and 1810. This complex narrative and perspectival arrangement functions as an important formal prerequisite for the novel's depiction of space and spatial practices. By accentuating the characters' subjectivity and at times divergent perceptions of the same events, the novel dispenses with the notion of a universal setting for all

characters. In contrast to the coherent landscape panorama that Austen's omniscient narrator constructs, Baker presents several versions of one landscape that vary according to her focalisers' gender, age, race and social status. Numerous envious remarks from Sarah's point of view, for instance her claim that "Jane, of course, could go to London just like that, without it being any great thing: she could go, and having gone, she could still come back" (*Longbourn* 226), indicate that she does not share their entitlement to mobility. *Longbourn* consequently suggests – resonating with the principles of the spatial turn – that space is a subjective and social product. The narrative structure of the novel thus invites an intersectional approach to its setting.

Elizabeth's 'scandalous' walk from *Pride and Prejudice* is reduced to a side note in *Longbourn* and it is presented from Sarah's working-class perspective, which provides an effective strategy to 're-vision' this event. The narrator notes that Elizabeth's excursion to Netherfield is, if at all, only of practical relevance to the servants:

Elizabeth's departure, once the rain had stopped, caused no particular trouble to anyone below stairs. She just put on her walking shoes and buttoned up her good spencer, threw a cape over it all, and grabbed an umbrella just in case the rain came on again. Such self-sufficiency was to be valued in a person, but seeing her set off down the track, and then climb the stile, Sarah could not help to think that those stockings would be perfectly ruined, and that petticoat would never be the same again, no matter how long she soaked it. (*Longbourn* 105)

Longbourn extinguishes the transgressive potential of Elizabeth's walk as found in its pretext. Although Elizabeth may be self-sufficient, as Sarah notes, she is ignorant of the work she produces. *Longbourn* clarifies that Elizabeth's courageous and slightly inappropriate walk only bears symbolic significance within a small and exclusive circle. Moreover, by presenting this walk from Sarah's perspective Baker makes apparent the social gap between the Bennet family and its employees whose realities and concerns could not be more different from another.

The first chapter of *Longbourn* immediately confronts its readers with a mode of 'unromantic' walking that remains unacknowledged in Austen's source text. In the words of Robin Jarvis, such walking is "of a local, repetitious, involuntary and functional character, often connected to the search for, or daily practice of work" (1997: 159). Sarah walks in this manner when she conducts manual labour in the Bennets' household. The reader encounters Sarah for the first time on a particularly busy morning: it is washday and the third-person narrator informs us that Sarah has "been on her feet and hard at work since four thirty" (*Longbourn* 27). The blunt anti-heritage aesthetics and pseudo-realism of the opening pages

quickly puts into perspective Elizabeth's supposedly indecent muddy walk to Netherfield; it can even be read as an ironic comment upon it. Walking across the yard with pails in her hands, Sarah's "foot kidded out from underneath her, and her balance was gone. [...] Sarah landed hard on the stone flags. Her nose confirmed what she had already guessed: she had slipped in hogshit" (*Longbourn* 15). Shortly afterwards, Sarah descends the stairs carrying "a chamber pot down from the Bennets' room, crossing the landing towards the narrow back stairs. She went carefully, head turned aside [...] thinking to herself,] Just nightwater, thankfully; not the dreadful slopping thunk of solids" (*Longbourn* 33). The novel zooms in on an abject Georgian materiality and corporeality that Austen's novel politely omits. Sarah's footsteps could not be further removed from the Romantic concept of self-absorbed cross-country walks. They are neither pleasant, nor are they a form of voluntary physical exercise; they are a socio-economic necessity for Sarah. The destinations and terrains of her task-based walks are all determined by her employers. While walks are an effective method for Elizabeth to escape from ordinary life in *Pride and Prejudice*, in *Longbourn* they connote the exact opposite for Sarah: they are her daily painful duty. This discrepancy suggests, in turn, that Elizabeth Bennet can enjoy her solitary strolls through the countryside because of her class privilege. As a member of the gentry, she has the capital and time to enjoy walking as a leisure activity. In this sense, Sarah's walking operates as a vehicle of what Widdowson calls 'revisioning': Baker's informed readers will notice the pronounced restrictions of Sarah's walking and on this basis they can reevaluate Elizabeth's pedestrian mobility. *Longbourn's* plot relativises the transgressive quality of Elizabeth's walks in *Pride and Prejudice*, for it implies that this is an extravagance that is only available to a small fraction of women in the Regency era.

The novel emphasises the physical strain caused by Sarah's walking in another sequence, in which she is sent to Meryton to buy a sugar loaf from the local grocer. Sarah begins her errand in the spirit of Elizabeth's cheerful walks: "Sarah [...] walked out of the kitchen light of heart: this seemed as good as a fête-day. To be out, with nothing but a mile of fresh air ahead of her, with nothing very much to carry and no one to tell her what to do, this was a pleasure indeed" (*Longbourn* 109). At first, the walk certainly has a liberating effect: Sarah daydreams of the new footman and of London's Vauxhall Gardens, a recurring symbol of urban entertainment and pleasure in the novel. Not unlike Elizabeth, Sarah now has time to think and enjoys the light exercise. Approaching the village, however, she is confronted with a bleak working-class reality:

She passed the tannery, with its death-and-dogshit reek, and the blind walls of the poor-house, where no lights were lit despite the darkness of the day. Back-alleys opened off to left

and right, where half-naked children made dams and pools in the gutters and women hunched on their doorsteps under shawls, bundled babies in their arms. (*Longbourn* 110)

This description of the dark village streets evokes Thomas de Quincey's, Charles Dickens's and Henry Mayhew's descriptions of urban decay in London more so than it does Austen's characteristic "lowland idyll [...], which was well ordered and carefully managed" (Crang 2008: 316), whereby *Longbourn* complicates and diversifies Austen's homogenous countryside. Once again, this walk points to the social inequality and spatial segregation of the different classes that remains marginal in *Pride and Prejudice*. The pouring rain, the "shocking state of the roads" (*Longbourn* 111) and the long distance make this excursion dangerous. Sensing that "the walk back to Longbourn would be entirely too much for her, and that she would be found dead in a ditch in the morning" (*Longbourn* 115), Sarah attempts to return on foot but struggles severely. Sarah is "fatigued, bedraggled, and chilled" (*Longbourn* 119) by the end of this walk and spends several days recovering in bed. Her first cross-country walk in the novel therefore elucidates her existential vulnerability as a solitary working-class pedestrian. Not only is her destination prescribed by her supervisor, but it takes her to her physical limits. *Longbourn* highlights to the contemporary reader why long-distance walks were undesirable for such a long time. Sarah walks because she does not have access to carriages or horses.⁷ Her walk is what Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst have in mind when they gossip about Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* and dissociate themselves from the perilous movement of their subordinates.

Through all this Sarah is aware of her limited spatial scope and possibilities as a servant and experiences – in a distinctly modern manner – as social injustice. She complains to Mrs Hill: "It [labour] makes me feel tired and sore, and though I work so hard, it seems I cannot even take a moment, even a moment's pleasure [...]" (*Longbourn* 157). Halfway through the novel, Sarah articulates the class criticism of *Longbourn* in her own thoughts and speech; as a literary character she is therefore not only an illustrative example of the novel's class criticism – she attains the authoritative voice that expresses this discontent. Interestingly, the narrator once again uses walking as a metaphor to indicate that Sarah is not

⁷ Carriages provide a mode of transportation in the novel that is at least to some extent available to the male servants who drive them for their employers. *Longbourn* frequently draws attention to the advantages that male servants enjoyed due to their gender. Observing that "in the best households they [families of the gentry] had nothing but menservants waiting on the family and guests, on account of everyone knowing that they cost more in the way of wages" (30), Sarah is conscious of her inferior status as a female servant.

willing to restrict herself to the spatial boundaries that Mrs Hill, as a representative of a former generation of female servants, eagerly obeys:

Mrs Hill had never put a foot wrong in all her born days because she never put a foot, not even a toe, anywhere. She had never lived, had never stepped outside this little soap-bubble of a place [...]. Well, Sarah would not turn out like her. No question of it. She would not settle for so little. (*Longbourn* 175)

As will become apparent, Sarah finally puts her plan to transcend the boundaries of her class into action.

The novel captures Sarah's frustration with her restricted working-class mobility in a symbolic daydream. Once again waiting in the rain, Sarah pictures the following scenario:

She tried imagining herself striding down a London street, paved, and lined with glowing windows. Then she was wandering along a glimmering arcade, which was warm and bright and dry. She dawdled at displays of fancy bonnets, glossy jewels, and mountains of confectionary. But then there was a lady walking ahead of her, and the lady – who was, it seemed, Elizabeth all grown up and in a fancy orange spencer and bonnet – handed her a package, and then another, and then a bandbox, and heaped more and more parcels on top of it, and when Sarah tried to refuse the packages and hand them back, grown-up Elizabeth scolded her for being clumsy and not paying proper attention. (163)

The English capital is a recurring theme in the novel. For Sarah, London, with its infinite possibilities, arises as an imaginary counterspace to *Longbourn*. This is how London appears in the passage above: it is glamorous, clean and offers costly consumer goods beyond the bland household necessities found in Meryton. When Sarah imagines herself leisurely dallying along a London arcade like a lady of the upper class, she desires to appropriate a mode of powerful female spectatorship. According to Jane Rendell, London and its newly erected Regent Street offered women in the early nineteenth century new opportunities of “leisure and promenade” and enabled them to experience “anonymous encounter and visual contact, where pleasure and satisfaction were to be found through looking” (2002: 50). She further states that women's new “role of consumer may be seen as an empowering one, a source of self-identity and pleasure in the public realm” (17). Shopping was one of the ways in which women of the upper ranks of society could legitimately walk alone without risking their reputation. However, it must be noted that this leisure activity only became a wide-spread phenomenon in the second half of the nineteenth century when shopping galleries and department stores began to flourish (see Nava 1996: 53). This slight anachronism explains the striking modernity of this scene. Sarah's daydream takes us back to the figure of the flâneuse. With its reference to the luminous arcades, the habitat of Walter

Benjamin's vision of the flâneur, *Longbourn* evokes this particular mode of mid-19th-century urban walking: Sarah imagines herself as a flâneuse. This lush image of strolling the arcades is, however, quickly destroyed by Elizabeth who is literally one step ahead of Sarah. Sarah realises that she is not in the position to purchase the products displayed in the shop windows, that this is a mode of voyeurism and consumption that is once again reserved for Elizabeth alone. Sarah can only follow her direction as a servant, carrying the consumer goods for her. This episode substantiates Elizabeth's role as a proto-flâneuse in Austen's pretext by illustrating that due to her class privilege, her mobility would have even extended to urban environments like arcades.

A few chapters ahead, Sarah's daydream becomes reality and she accompanies Elizabeth and her aunt to London on the back perch of a carriage, enjoying the metropolitan experience of the "great ebbing surging traffic of London, the cabs and barrows and drays and carts and the people, just the endless variousness of the people" (*Longbourn* 253). Sarah's excursion to London indicates that servants could experience mobility by escorting their employers. On the carriage, Sarah briefly merges with the urban crowd. Once again, however, the novel hints at Sarah's precarious position. Because Sarah does not sit in compartment of the carriage like Elizabeth, she is an easy victim for a "dirty-looking youth" slipping through the carriages who "slid his hand over the top of her stocking, and then in between her thighs" (*Longbourn* 253). This is the first time in the novel that Sarah is subject to sexual harassment. This scene suggests that Sarah will never have the carefree touristic experience of her social superiors.

Only a few hours later, the trip to the arcade that Sarah had daydreamed about becomes reality. It turns out to be just as disenchanting as previously imagined:

Sarah followed Elizabeth and her aunt down one arcade, and then up another, and in and out of stores stacked high with bolts of coloured cloth and patterned paper and rolled carpets [...] Sarah was soon lugging pasteboard boxes, paper packages and rolled samples of wallpaper. [...] How could it be that a person needed so much of all of this, and how could it be that one printed paper was so vitally, importantly lovely and another was entirely dismissable? (*Longbourn* 255–256)

The class divide between Sarah and her superiors is again clear. Sarah's main purpose is to make the stroll even more pleasant for her superiors than it already is. As active consumers Elizabeth and her aunt take pleasure in walking and looking (again in a strikingly modern fashion), whereas Sarah only follows their direction and carries their acquisitions. Walking remains labour for Sarah, even in the promising city where she continues to have no spending capacity. The details of the many products that matter so much to Elizabeth's aunt have no

meaning for Sarah, apart from being a physical burden, which highlights the social divide between the two classes.

As already suggested, Sarah not only expresses her discontent with her spatial confinement verbally and mentally, but she deliberately violates normative boundaries of her gender and class. Her spatial transgressions are more resolute than Elizabeth's. As these transgressions become a source of pleasure for Sarah, *Longbourn* initiates Sarah's emancipation according to its revisionist agenda. One of the ways in which this transgression unfolds is by walking with or walking to men: Sarah walks together with Ptolemy Bingley and she secretly sneaks into James Smith's lodgings where she eventually begins an affair with him. By letting Sarah walk with servants of the opposite sex, *Longbourn* adapts Austen's employment of walking as a preferred mode of courtship. By giving it a strong sexual dimension, Baker adopts Austen's romantic plot and sensationalises it for a contemporary readership. As Wallace explains, among members of the rural working class

'walking out' with someone was the equivalent of steady dating or engagement today. Often [...] walking out was understood to include sexual intercourse, and even where complete consummation of pre-marital relationship was frowned upon, the lovers' walk provided the perfect opportunity for such activity. (1993: 29–30)

This is precisely the kind of walking Sarah undertakes with Ptolemy Bingley. In contrast to Darcy and Elizabeth's only subtly flirtatious walks, the walks of Baker's two servants abound with erotic tension and become a means for Sarah to acquire mental and bodily self-determination. Ptolemy asks Sarah if she has time for a stroll and to show him the area "while the big folks are indoors" (*Longbourn* 145). The decision to go out for a short walk together, which is strictly forbidden because they are both on duty, gives Sarah and Ptolemy the rare opportunity to meet each other in private, outside their professional roles as maid and footman. Like Elizabeth, Sarah attempts to temporarily escape the supervision that determines her life. But in doing so, Sarah risks much more. She walks with Ptolemy, a man whom all the characters in the pre-abolitionist world of the novel regard with suspicion because of his skin colour. All of this happens at night, traditionally a time of day that is reserved for 'seedy' modes of walking (see Beaumont 2015: 3). Sarah is aware of the boundaries she crosses when she decides to join him. She risks her reputation and undermines the racist ideology of the Georgian period. Feeling "suddenly giddy with it all: the novelty, the transgression, the thrill of his difference" (*Longbourn* 147), Sarah even accepts a cigarillo from Ptolemy and smokes it, which underlines the seductive aura of their walk. This is Sarah's first truly pleasant pedestrian excursion in the novel. Employing the metaphor of walking, Ptolemy makes the unmistakable suggestion to 'go out' again: "We

could go walking out,' he said. 'When you get your afternoon off'" (*Longbourn* 148), whereby, we can infer, he offers her sex. For the first time Sarah realises that "pleasure was a possibility for her" (*Longbourn* 158).

This nightly excursion does not go unnoticed. Mrs Hill's reminds Sarah that "walking the grounds – not *your* grounds, need I add; you master's property – when you should have been at your work" (*Longbourn* 153) jeopardises her own standing as well as that of her employers. Despite such warnings, Sarah accepts Ptolemy's invitation to jump on the Bingleys' carriage where she experiences, once again in a rather late Victorian fashion, "the luxury of speed" (*Longbourn* 166) that is usually reserved for the gentry. During a second walk in the woods, she drinks alcohol with Ptolemy and kisses him (*Longbourn* 181–182). Sarah's pedestrian transgressions become more daring as the novel proceeds, although nothing ever happens between her and Ptolemy. Her sexual partner turns out to be James Smith. In the liminal, even utopian, space of his hayloft, Sarah discovers her body as a source of sexual pleasure: "Her body had hitherto been a carthorse, dragging her through the days: now she lived in it differently. It had become a thing of luxury and delight" (*Longbourn* 236).

It is striking that Sarah never becomes pregnant. She does not end up as the iconic nineteenth-century fallen woman. Instead, she represents an ideal of contemporary sexual self-determination. As Murphy fittingly proposes, despite her many hardships, Sarah "is nevertheless made to be as capable of pursuing the destiny of her choice as any twenty-first century woman" (2017: 168). Sarah, in other words, is never punished for her spatial and sexual advancement. Quite on the contrary: her transgressions are a preparatory stage for her final decision to quit her position as a servant. She even contemplates the idea "[n]ot to attach [her]self to a man, but to confront instead the open world, the wide fields of France and Spain, the ocean, anything. Not to hitch a lift with the first fellow who looked as though he knew where he was going, but just to go" (*Longbourn* 200; emphasis in original). While Elizabeth attains financial security and relative freedom by marriage, Sarah desires infinite mobility.

For a long time, Sarah never walks beyond "the edge of everything she had ever known" (200). After her brief excursions to London and Kent that temporarily take her beyond these familiar grounds, Sarah finally leaves Longbourn to join Elizabeth and her husband in Pemberley. Here, Sarah experiences social mobility: she climbs up the ladder of servantry. As Elizabeth's personal waiting maid, "the nature of work was light in comparison with what she had been used to at Longbourn [...]; she never saw a pig-bucket, nor a pig" (*Longbourn* 416). Sarah now spends her time sewing or dressing Elizabeth. Moving to Pemberley is the end of hard manual labour. She has her own bed in a generous servants' wing and thus gains personal space. Nevertheless, being "confined to Mrs Darcy's closet

with her sewing” (*Longbourn* 418) she feels less mobile than before. Her confinement is so pressing because in contrast to Longbourn, Pemberley is a vast and lavish property with “ordered grounds, [...] well-managed parks, [...] woods and farms, all full of purpose and comfort and prosperity” (*Longbourn* 420) that Sarah can only look at from her room. Not being in the position to explore this ground, she remains isolated indoors and her wish to escape grows. Sarah concludes that “[i]t was not bad. It was far better than could be expected. But it was not enough” (*Longbourn* 420).

When she meets Ptolemy and he tells her that he saw James Smith in Lancashire, Sarah decides to quit her job and to walk up north on her own – markedly despite warnings expressed by Darcy, the patriarchal authority. Sarah’s emancipation from the boundaries of her class and gender is finally implemented by crossing the outskirts of Pemberley, which is described as follows:

She left Pemberley quietly, unattended, by a servants’ door. Bag on her shoulder, she crossed the stable yard, and took the path that led from the back of the house, away across the park. It wound along the stream, and soon she was walking past clumps of pale daffodils, and then was climbing up through the woods. She reached the edge of the park, where there were stone steps set into the boundary wall. She climbed up. [...] She gathered up her skirts, and stepped over, and slithered down the other side. (*Longbourn* 433)

This is the climax of Sarah’s walking in *Longbourn*. As she crosses the wall of Pemberley, Sarah leaves the grounds that determined and framed her life as a servant. In contrast to Elizabeth’s short-distance strolls, this walk will not have a circular structure – Sarah leaves for good. With the bag on her shoulder, she appears here as the archetypal Romantic wanderer who sets out for a long journey on foot to explore nature and the self. Sarah leaves in the full knowledge of her solitariness and the inconvenience that a long journey on foot will cause. Without any shelter, her journey will be dangerous. Her decision to leave risks her social decline. Mrs Hill repeatedly discourages Sarah from joining “the multitude of young folk out of work, wandering the roads” (*Longbourn* 375).

By turning her back on Pemberley, Sarah gives up her status as a servant and becomes a homeless vagrant. Nineteenth-century vagrants led particularly precarious lives and were criminalised by various Vagrancy Acts that made it illegal for them to loiter in the streets. Matthew Beaumont explains that

[t]he Vagrancy problem reached crisis proportions at the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, when large numbers of discharged soldiers returned to England and, reduced to a homeless and unemployed condition, were forced to beg on streets of towns and cities and lead lonely, itinerant existences on the roadside. [...] A vast, scattered population, hitherto almost invisible, seemed to have been dispossessed or evicted and to be straggling along the public roads and sleeping in barns and abandoned buildings. (2015: 245–246)

Sarah is willing to assume this outsider position and to give up the privileges and security she enjoyed as an upper-scale servant. Indeed, Sarah feels “the fatigues of the road, the nights of ragged sleep in barns and hedgerows, woken by the cold, and the nights of no sleep at all, just walking on and on through the dark” (*Longbourn* 439). By the time she reaches the sea that she aimed to see for the first time in her life, her feet bleed (*ibid.*). In the end, however, Baker rewards Sarah for this decision with a happy ending. Reunited with James Smith, Sarah begins a stable and self-sufficient life with their child. This ending shows that *Longbourn*, although it aims to deconstruct the classist, sexist and racist ideologies of Austen’s time, it is not free of its own ideological subtexts. It is puzzling that Sarah ultimately manages to transgress and leave behind the boundaries of her gender and class that the novel initially describes in such dramatic detail so smoothly and successfully. Sarah’s social mobility not only downplays *Longbourn*’s initial social criticism, but as a contemporary text it also affirms the logic of neo-liberal self-reliance. It is because Sarah works and literally walks so persistently towards her goals despite all obstacles, that she succeeds. Furthermore, as the mother in what appears as a stereotypical middle-class nuclear family, she finally reproduces the social status quo the novel questions in many other passages.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to make a case for the significance of spatial dimensions and strategies of revisionary fiction. While it has been common currency in criticism to analyse the voices of previously silenced characters as modes of ‘writing back’ to canonical texts, this has not been done as explicitly with respect to representations of space and, even more importantly, spatial practices and movement. This paper provided one case study of a rewriting that uses the representation of spatial practices, first and foremost walking, to approach its source text from an intersectional perspective. It first showed that walking is an integral theme in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, where it occurs as a source of aesthetic and physical pleasure as well as a mild form of female rebellion. It subsequently illustrated that Baker’s *Longbourn* recognises the centrality of walking in its pretext, as it appropriates and revises this theme according to its own intertextual and ideological agenda. By drawing attention to the discrepancy between Elizabeth’s and Sarah’s mobility, *Longbourn* initially provides a critical outlook upon its source text. By politicising Sarah’s solitary and sexualising her communal walking, Baker gives her historical novel a contemporary twist and eradicates the inequality it identifies in a first step. Sarah becomes a braver walker

than Austen's heroine could ever be in the Regency era. As a character in a contemporary revisionary work she can attain a desire for female self-determination that is markedly ahead of Austen's times. Nevertheless, through all this *Longbourn* does not manage to escape the hegemonic ideologies of its own time. The path of Baker's female pedestrian may challenge certain norms of the past, but it equally affirms new ideals, as, for instance, the neo-liberal imperative of self-sufficiency.

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