# SPACE AND NARRATIVE: THE INN AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE EARLY MODERN NOVEL

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**Abstract**: *The article examines the inn as a fictional* topos *which corroborates apparently random stories in order to make the main narrative complete. I shall argue that the inn appears as a nexus of stories which are engaged in building the early modern novel's architecture upheld by the relationship between road adventures taken as main narrative progression and the interpolated stories told at the inn understood as digressive narrative markers. I claim that this fictional inconsistency is nothing but a strategy adopted by the early modern novel to rework old genres like romance, the picaresque, chivalry books, and the pastoral and, more importantly, to built its own fictional architexture that unravels the intricacies of the main narrative. My analysis will focus on Cervantes'* Don Quixote *and Henry Fielding's* Joseph Andrews*, an English copy of the former, yet enmeshed in the European tradition of the picaresque and comic fiction.*

**Keywords**: *the inn; fictional topos; story; digression; novelistic architecture; fictional architexture*

Generally perceived as a social institution of the road, the inn has always been considered the abode of hospitality so much enjoyed by the travellers who cross its threshold. Be they understood as spaces owned by benevolent hosts or, according to the secular commercial version, as public houses where capitalistic drives are the actual prerequisites for meal and accommodation, inns have recurrently been reduced to the common denominator of community, conviviality, and, by extension, storytelling. Far from being a simple transitory place in the early modern novel, the inn has been converted into a house of "hommes-récits" (Todorov 82), meant to function either as a trope, i.e. metaphor, interpolation, metatext, *mise-en-abîme*, for the main architecture of the narrative or as an emblem of digression in order to strategically protract, if not complicate, the fictional texture.

In what follows, my major concern is to see how the inn, a common *topos* of the road, can disrupt the main narrative through "connective and disconnective" interpolated stories (McMorran 30). Furthermore, I claim that the *topos* of the inn, inextricably related to the adventures of the road, engenders a rhetoric of travelling in the early modern novel, which unveils realistic procedures for fictional construction, rather than a romancification of adventures nourished by the literary world of the castle. As regards realistic



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procedures, William McMorran is right in saying that the inn "constitutes a highly magnetic chronotope in its own right; perfectly placed as a setting for chance encounters and thus for internal storytelling between characters" (1). I take McMorran's suggestion as a handy argumentative tool for analysing the fictional function of the inn in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, written "in Imitation of *The Manner* of Cervantes", as the author makes clear in the subtitle of the novel.

Since ancient times the inn has been perceived as a traditional hospitable place that gradually makes room for the storytelling of everyday happenings or of the travellers' adventures encountered on the road. McMorran suggests that "in its scenes of hospitality as in so many other aspects, the influence of the *Odyssey* upon the fictions of the road … is inescapable" (13). In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, for instance, the inn accommodates a wide range of unrelated, autonomous stories told on the road. It architecturally becomes a *locus amoenus* whose magnetism and attraction will hardly pass unnoticed, despite being placed "on the edge of the road" (Bakhtin 120). The early stage of the fictionalised inn, as is the case of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, in which it seems alien to the knight errant, may very well be the one of the hostels in Chaucer's tales, or in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which does not provide a frame story but only subordinated narratives tightly connected with social classes. Nevertheless, the image of Chaucer's inn as a public space becomes altered by burgeoning commercial interests illustrated by the innkeeper Harry Bailly. Although he proposes the story-telling game as entertainment for the road, he reveals the rules of the game only after the pilgrims have paid their bills. Chaucer's both spiritual and secular space foreshadows the inextricable relation between sociability *and* commercialism in the early modern period, when physical mobility and the emergence of new routes and means of transport led to an ever-growing interest in travel interspersed with stops at inns populated by all walks of life.

Laying emphasis on *Don Quixote* as "the first book of European literature to exploit the full potential of the inn as a vehicle for both internal narrations and burlesque episodes" (McMorran 6), I seek to demonstrate that the version of the modern inn can actually be applied to the novelistic genre translated in Cervantes' work as *burlas* unfolded at the inn in Part 1 and at the ducal castle in Part 2, respectively. In other words, the inn serves as a performative space, exemplified by Don Quixote's eccentric adventures and "disconnective" interpolations like the Dorothea and Cardenio episode. It is a locus meant to disenchant – literally to cure Don Quixote's self-induced state of deception fuelled by books of chivalry – via textual mechanisms and storytelling. Unlike Orlando in Ariosto's poem, it is precisely the Quixote for whom the inn appears as an uncommon presence. Being suffused with chivalric anachronisms, Don Quixote mistakes the first inn for a *castello*. It is



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the first stance of disenchantment, since, once the protagonist sets out on his journey, he comes across the brutal reality which tries to teach him a lesson he strongly refuses to accept. The inn is thus the antithesis of the castle, in that it acquires a comic potential, opposite to what the latter signifies in romances. The inn in *Don Quixote* erases any class difference, yet its hospitality proves to be a precarious one: prostitutes like the servant Maritornes whom the Quixote takes for an aristocratic lady, nothing to eat except some pieces of fish, no accommodation whatsoever. However, it offers entertainment as a *modus vivendi* because it parodically, and for entertaining purposes, recreates the Quixote's fabricated world of romance. The innkeeper becomes a sort of "stage manager" (McMorran 41) who amuses the audience due to the ridiculous presence of the *hidalgo*. He dubs Don Quixote a knight errant and engineers the hero's deception for the fun of the other guests. Throughout Part I, Palomeque's inn becomes the nexus of digressive narratives and related, rather than disjointed, comic incidents plotted by various guests who sojourn here. It prolongs Don Quixote's madness by supplying it with adventures typical of chivalric romances. The Sierra Morena episode metaphorically serves as a "natural inn" interpreted as a syntax of romance features that strengthen the hidalgo's wish for adventure. Dorothea disguises herself as Princess Micomicona so as to take the Spanish hero home. By playing a role dictated by the rules of romance, she nourishes the knight's romantic enthusiasm and, along with Sancho, the priest, the barber, and Cardenio, she takes Don Quixote back to Palomeque's inn, the repository of romance *qua* comic scenes.

The curate's reading of the novella entitled *The Curious Impertinent*, apparently with no connection to the main narrative, is inserted to question the idea of verisimilitude it only allegedly implies. It is told by word of mouth not only to entertain, but also to function as a potential *mise-en-abîme* for what is to happen with the knight. Actually, this story, like the one recounted by Cardenio, or like the episode in Part II related to the printing of Part I, when the Quixote no longer is an author but a character, points to a textual patchwork underlying a metacritical discourse about Don Quixote. Such digressive instances told at the inn are gathered together in order to lay the foundations of an architext translated as the multiple retelling of interpolations and metatexts about the Quixote, who is sidelined from the inn. Edward Dudley summarises this point as follows: "Either *Don Quijote* and the interpolated stories form a symbiosis, a sort of meta-Quijote organized on a larger molecular basis, or the novel must be recognized once and for all as a brilliant but divided masterpiece" (357). As a "divided" work, Cervantes' novel could hardly be a "masterpiece", given the multitude of interpolations and subplots staged by the guests at the inn. However, one should not forget that Cervantes employs them with the purpose of curing the *hidalgo*, on the one hand, and of diversifying the structure of the main narrative viewed as "a larger molecular basis", which



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actually is the basis of the novel as a burgeoning genre, not of romance and chivalry books which constitute the target of Cervantes' parody.

Unlike *The Curious Impertinent* told at Palomeque's inn, which transports the audience from La Mancha to Florence, Part II imposes a fictional stasis enhanced by the ducal castle. Running counter to Don Quixote's chivalric ideals, such stasis "is compounded by the relatively uneventful road travelled by Don Quijote and his squire in Part II" (McMorran 58). Nevertheless, the fame of the Quixote, buttressed after the publication of Part I, transforms him into an honourable guest of the duke and the duchess, whose castle is ready to provide a series of comic episodes that are analogous to those unfolding at Palomeque's inn. In a nutshell, the ducal castle stands for the re-enactment of chivalric romances, with Don Quixote and Sancho taking centre stage. The master of ceremonies at the duke's castle is in charge of all *burlas* with a view to widening the world of romance for entertaining purposes. Don Quixote experiences a ridiculous courtly hospitality in a castle located in the city. The modern castle, just like the inn, accounts once again for the secularised world specific to the novel. However, they can be distinguished by their different functions in the book. According to McMorran, "while events at the inn are seen as the product of forces beyond human control, the adventures in the castle are presented as the invention of the characters themselves" (69). Whereas the inn remains a cosy storytelling home that may well act as a house of fiction, the castle acts as the supplier of comic episodes meant to highlight Cervantes' parodic romancification of Don Quixote's chivalric code.

If the inn in *Don Quixote* "constitutes the geometric center of the individual crisscrossing lines of the novel" (Shklovsky 87) which, in my own reading, represents the very foundation of the novel's architexture, Henry Fielding portrays the same social *topos* of the road as a domestic place of pleasurable and entertaining conversation, sociability, and table talk. Concurrently, the inn in *Joseph Andrews* unveils a well-defined social hierarchy and substantiates consumerism for basic needs. Referred to as an ill-reputed habitat in eighteenth-century England, the inn sheds light on the entire novel's moral architecture, which encompasses a panorama of human types presented as examples of virtue or vice. However, notwithstanding the social and moral features that can be inferred from the topography of the inn and its patrons, respectively, the inn designed by Fielding is tightly connected with the picaresque journey of the main protagonists, which, unlike Don Quixote's sallies, is always hazardous. It may terminate at an inn or in a house, where other incidents are conducive to the separation of the major characters, whose paths do not cross each other for a while. Importantly enough, Fielding's representation of domestic places lays stress on uncertainty and danger, particularly when young heroes like Joseph Andrews is sacked by Lady Booby as a result of his failure to respond to her ridiculous erotic advances.



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Consequently, Joseph develops his taste for adventure the moment he leaves Lady Booby's house.

The household is a good substitute for Fielding's mathematical design of the novel. Its kitchen, either of residences or inns, embodies the space of domesticity mainly dedicated to servants. Yet among them we find Parson Adams, a kitchen lover, not because he is low in rank, but because he needs it as a welcoming place for domestic sociability. Houses act as propitious places for storytelling in *Joseph Andrews*, which means that Fielding, unlike Cervantes, changes the status of the inn as a storytelling home. One can easily notice that the interpolated stories in Fielding's novel are told in someone's house, such as Wilson's moralizing story disguised as an unconnected digression, or on the stagecoach, as is the case of "The History of Leonora", which is interrupted when the coach-and-six arrives at an inn. The inn, on the other hand, is the locus of unexpected encounters between characters that know each other and, most significantly, between Joseph and Adams, on the one hand, and Joseph and Fanny, on the other. In contrast to the inn, the road provides encounters with strangers, being open to dangerous incidents which are at loggerheads with the encounters at an inn, which are orchestrated by the novelist as a *deus ex machina*. For instance, severe storms, which are yet another novelistic artifice designed by Fielding, bring Adams, Mrs Slipslop and Joseph together, and the same happens with Joseph and Fanny. The injured Joseph, who is robbed and thrown into a ditch, is forced to delay his travel, sojourning at The Dragon Inn, where he accidentally meets Parson Adams. At the same time, The Dragon Inn is a space where encounters are sometimes put aside in order for the novelist to offer details about what happens inside. Such is the case of Mr. Tow-wouse, who has a sexual affair with Betty, the chambermaid of the inn. According to McMorran, "illicit sexual encounters provide one example of the way in which the emphasis of inn life may temporarily switch from the foreign or extrinsic to the domestic" (130). Although the inn in Fielding's novel creates a tense relation between private and public conduct, it ensures the progress of the main narrative, in that the incidents taking place at an inn disrupt conviviality and dialogue, such as the one between Adams, Barnabas, and the bookseller, which is interrupted by Tow-wouse's indecent behaviour. Thus, the omniscient narrator overlaps various narrative planes constituting themselves as a labyrinth of stories which accounts for the architecture of Fielding's novel. His representation of the inn echoes the motley portrait of eighteenth-century English society, mentalities, interests, capitalistic drives or quixotism understood as Christian virtues, universal benevolence and morality, as is the case with Parson Adams. "The book-as-building" and, I should add, the inn-as-building, "announces at the start that we readers are invited to enter the house of fiction and so to engage in a fundamentally social act" (Varey 166), which is now predicated on



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hospitality understood as commercial gain, not as a disinterested social practice. In Fielding, much like in Defoe and Smollett, the inn mirrors the social context, accommodating "players, lovers, picaros, sailors, outlaws, travellers of all kinds … when they need to stop not just for food and lodging but to tell their stories to each other, read books aloud, or offer disquisitions to captive audiences" (Adams 225). More than any other eighteenth-century English novelist, Fielding seeks to unmask greedy or hypocritical innkeepers that become the butt of his sympathetic satire, concurrently despising the world of commercial interests. On the other hand, Fielding's preference for conviviality – in stark contrast to the domestic milieu depicted by his arch rival Samuel Richardson – attests to the function of the inn as a social institution of the road frequented by people of various social ranks, wealth and origin. As Michael Webster observes, "for Fielding, the inn as an open space situates characters of varying social segments in a place where anonymity allows for social dialogue to emerge, and often devolve, as part of his overall satiric aim" (100). Not only does Fielding aim to instruct his readers how to read a new kind of writing coined as "comic romance" (Fielding 25), he also proposes them to follow models of virtue, such as those embodied by Parson Adams and Joseph Andrews. In doing so, he establishes a stark contrast between exemplary characters like the parson and Joseph and a wide array of characters or human types acting differently in various situations. To quote Michael Webster again,

> the multifarious characters in *Joseph Andrews*, representative of a society growing increasingly commercial and perhaps more urban, reflect the social fabric and reveal the pervasiveness of affectation that permeates all rungs upon the ladder. The inn works precisely to undermine the caste system by placing in its stead a stage for players to perform in affected manners. (121)

Furthermore, Fielding challenges the readers of his time – who already had a taste for uninstructive romances – and teaches them a moral lesson through digressions and apparently disconnected dialogues between characters that unravel, in their turn, lessons of vice or virtue. Fielding fosters this subtle pedagogical project by shooting satirical arrows at the commercial space of the inn and its venal publicans, on the one hand, and by bringing different characters together in stagecoaches which, much like the welcoming space of the inn, debunk class, rank and social stereotypes with a view to reinforcing the social architecture of the novel as a genre.

Unlike *Don Quixote*, where the inn stands for a space that generates stories or *burlas* meant to keep the hidalgo's imagination alive and to entertain his audience and readers alike, Fielding's inns involve the reader in assessing



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the vanity of various characters, be they parsons, squires, innkeepers and strangers of all kinds who, anonymous as they are in real life, crave attention, which passes for affectation. In addition, "the great good place", as Malcolm Kelsall puts it, takes central stage, corroborating significant or apparently unimportant situations or events that occur in the novel. Its pattern and design, its internal geography, its upstairs/downstairs oppositions (McMorran 135) bring to the fore patricians and plebeians, private and public sphere, high and low, decent sociability and debauchery. If the inn poses as digressive topography, it does so for the purpose of being a related/adjacent interpolation which leads to happy-ending, the sine qua non of comedy and, by extension, of Fielding's novelistic recipe. Starting with Cervantes, the inn has massively contributed to shaping labyrinthine narrative paths that underlie the architecture of the novel's architexture. It turns the reader into an active presence or, better say, into a traveller for whom the inn is only a halt in the complicated network of novelistic plots which, if looked retrospectively, trigger the pleasurable feeling of refreshment able to entitle the reader to take the fictional adventurous road again and follow, if not re-create, its syntax. Or, in Fielding's own words,

> … for first, those little spaces between our chapters may be looked upon as an inn or a resting-place where he may stop and take a glass, or any other refreshment, as it pleases him. Nay, our fine readers will, perhaps, be scarce able to travel farther than through one of them in a day. As to those vacant pages which are placed between our books, they are to be regarded as those stages, where, in long journeys, the traveller stays some time to repose himself, and consider of what he hath seen in the parts he hath already passed through. (Fielding 99)

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