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Facebook as an implied author: an investigation into the characterization techniques employed by users of the social networking site, Facebook, through a comparative study with Jane Austen's Emma

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2010-12-14
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Facebook as an implied author: an investigation into the characterization techniques employed by users of the social networking site, Facebook, through a comparative study with Jane Austen's *Emma.*

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.

Johannesburg, August 2010

Abstract

This research investigates how Facebook guides its users to characterize themselves. By using Jane Austen, and specifically her characterization techniques in *Emma* as a framework, Facebook is shown to use many of the same techniques to guide its co-authors into certain characters. Comparing a 21st century social networking site to a 19th century novel is unusual, but will show how in many ways Facebook functions as an implied author. The comparison is also used to suggest that, contrary to previous research into online social networking which focussed on profiles being used as an expresson of a users identity, Facebook profiles are a fictionalised version of the users and their lives. A case study, a young female studying at a private university in Johannesburg, South Africa, is used to illustrate this. She is shown to have created a fictionalised and idealized Facebook character for herself, mostly through the use of photographs. Using her photos as examples, the importance of photographic representation as a Facebook characterization technique, including accompanying skills such posing for photographs and editing photographs, is explored, as are the implications of this visually based representation, for example the difficulty in portraying depth of character or a believable inner life. The research employs Barthes' writings on photography to guide these explorations.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree Masters of Digital Art in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Isolde Carmen Schaefer

Acknowledgements

I thank Professor Jane Taylor for supervising me during the proposal stages, and for believing in me and this topic, Professor Christo Doherty for being a consistently amazing supervisor and for teaching me so much, Sofia Kostelac in the English department for her help on Jane Austen, and Linda Retief, for editing. Thank you also to my super-cool students and Emma[FB] in particular for befriending me on Facebook, and to all my friends and family for their rock-solid support.

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Introduction

This research investigates how privileged and creative South African students, studying at an exclusive private university[1] in 2009, are using the social networking website Facebook[2], to shape their online characters. The investigation is conducted by using Jane Austen's characterization of Emma, in the novel of the same name (1816), as a framework. The choice of this framework might be unexpected, but will be explained extensively later on in the introduction. I am hopeful that this framework will challenge the way Facebook studies are usually approached, and lead to new insights.

About character

To begin, why investigate the concept of 'character'? Sherry Turkle's[3] groundbreaking research since the 1980's into the psychology of our human interaction with technology inspired and influenced this research. She states that "information technology is identity technology" ("How Computers Change" *n. pag*). I have found her various case studies into the shaping of online identity fascinating, but have chosen to settle on the idea of 'character' as opposed to 'identity' because of her insights: she also says that "the culture in which our children are raised is increasingly a culture of presentation,… in which appearance is often more important than reality" ("How Computers Change" *n. pag*). Throughout the years she has investigated many issues relating to this condition, such as the difficulty people have in developing "authentic selves" and in sharing "their real feelings with other people" and "having the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship" to

valuing intricate PowerPoint presentation effects over a real discussion ("How Computers Change" *n. pag*).

It is because of this prevalent culture of cultivating presentation above reality, of illusion above authenticity, that I have decided to investigate the creation of Facebook 'character' (specifically in a work of fiction), as opposed to Facebook 'identity'.

The word 'character' is used in many different ways, all of which can pertain in some way to this research. 'Character' is used to describe "the combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person from another" (*thefreedictionary.com*). These distinguishing qualities are referred to as 'characteristics'. The word 'character' in this way is often used synonymously or convoluted with the word 'personality' which is defined as "the totality of qualities and traits, as of character or behaviour, that are peculiar to a specific person", "the pattern of collective character, behavioural, temperamental, emotional and mental traits of a person", or "distinctive qualities of a person, especially those distinguishing personal characteristics that make one socially appealing" (*thefreedictionary.com*). 'Character' is also used to describe someone's reputation, or the strength of their morals and ethics (*thefreedictionary.com*).

A person portrayed in an artistic and/or fictional piece is also called a 'character'. An author therefore creates a character, and writes them into a specific character (meaning with distinguishing qualities; a specific set of morals and ethics) and personality (meaning distinguishing personal characteristics that make one socially appealing or not). In Austen's *Emma,* Emma declares: "The older a person grows, Harriet, the more important it is that their manners should not be bad – the more glaring and disgusting any loudness, or coarseness, or awkwardness

becomes." Of Mr. Martin she says: "He will be a completely gross, vulgar farmer, totally inattentive to appearances…" (30; ch. 4). This shows that to Austen, a person's character had much to do with their manners, their 'air', and their public behaviour. Paula Byrne explains that this was a view specific to the time:

> The word 'manners' had a variety of meanings in the late eighteenth century, ranging from 'character of mind' and 'general way of life; morals; habits', to ceremonious behaviour, studied civility'. Austen's novels were written on this spectrum: she was always interested in 'character of mind'. (Byrne 297)

Mr. Knightley focuses more on Mr. Martin's character in terms of ethics and principles, and not so much on his manner. He says: "His good sense and good principles would delight you." Emma replies: "*Her* connections may be worse than *his*: in respectability of character, there can be no doubt that they are" (Austen 486; ch. 54). Here her reference to character is that of the public estimation of someone, or his or her reputation (*thefreedictionary.com*), specifically based on their family's social status. Austen's characters do not always have the ideal public manner, such as Mr. Martin, or Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice,* but the heroes are always men of good character, meaning their morals and ethics are beyond reproach.

In a recent article by Rachel Sylvester, she advises Gordon Brown to be more like a character in a Jane Austen novel; someone whose good sense and good principles underpin a personable public image, and who does not let their emotions run away with them ("Mr Angry at No 10"). Sylvester specifically distinguishes between character, meaning morals and ethics, and personality, meaning interesting distinguishing features and likeability (she mentions iPod playlists and favourite pasta dishes). This research will show that for characterization on Facebook,

portraying a personality is more important than portraying a strong character. (The same, Sylvester points out, applies to modern day politicians ("Mr Angry at No 10")).

After having read the novel *Emma,* one has a very specific idea in mind of who Emma is, what she looks like, what one likes and dislikes about her, and what her personality is like. Emma really exists only in text, which is the presentation, and this text triggers an image in one's imagination. One imagines fictional characters, but also characters one encounters in real life: "Nothing is simpler than to create for oneself the idea of a human being, a figure and a character, from a series of glimpses and anecdotes. Creation of this kind we practice every day; we are continually piecing together our fragmentary evidence about the people around us and moulding their images in thought" (Lubbock qtd. in "Story and Discourse" 128).

Even though one's online presence can be argued (for example by Turkle, in some of the case studies she describes in "Life on the screen") as forming another aspect of a persons integrated identity, another role, i.e. 'wife', 'career woman', 'online seductress" etc, the perspective of my argument is slightly different. I am likening Facebook to both a book and to an implied author, and therefore its users to co-narrators and characters.

Facebook as an implied author

Firstly, Facebook is a book in name and in function. (I am referring to the definition of a book being in this instance a composition that is intended for publishing, or a source of knowledge (*thefreedictionary.com*)). Facebook was named after the sheets of paper that were distributed to Harvard freshmen, which profiled students and staff, and so helped students to get to know their fellow-students and faculty (Phillips "A brief history"). Certain features such as the prominent Profile

picture, or the list of Profile Pictures on a Friends list, or the "About me" field are very yearbook-like, and colleges have been reported to stop printing yearbooks as Facebook has replaced their function (Sampson "In Facebook age").

To me, Facebook fulfils a very different role from a yearbook. Facebook has many inter-related chapters (profiles) and can be said to fulfil the same function today as a novel did in the nineteenth century: it is used for entertainment and as an escape. It has the same immersive qualities; in fact, Marie-Laure Ryan specifically compares the immersive qualities of the Internet to the immersive qualities of the nineteenth century novel. The three areas of immersion are spatial, emotional and temporal (349). All three types of immersion happen when reading an Austen novel or whilst spending time on Facebook. I would therefore argue the kind of engagement both in the time spent on it, and the emotional connection users have with Facebook, is more like the engagement with a novel than a yearbook.

A novel was considered as the new media (it was a new literary style (Jones 5)) of the eighteenth century, and Darryl Jones talks about "numerous attacks on the novel … where it was figured as a prime example of disreputable and possibly harmful popular culture" (7), in much the same way as Facebook is criticized today.

According to structuralist theory, a narrative consists of two parts: the story (the chain of events, the characters, and the settings) and the discourse, which is the expression or the means by which the story is communicated (Chatman, "Story and Discourse" 19). Based on this explanation, I believe that Facebook can be considered a narrative: every profile has a plot, characters and events, as well as a discourse, which are the Facebook user conventions. I will compare these conventions to novelistic conventions in Chapters 1 and 2.

Secondly Facebook is an implied author, and co-author together with its users. The word 'author' not only means to be the writer of a text in the traditional sense, but also to write or construct an electronic document or system, such as a website. (*thefreedictionary.com*). To "assume responsibility for the content of (a published text)" is to 'author' it (*thefreedictionary.com*). The concept of an 'implied author' was developed in literary criticism in the twentieth century. It is different from the idea of 'author' insofar the implied author consists solely of what can be deduced from the work (*thefreedictionary.com*). Chatman describes the implied author as follows: "In cinema as in literature, the implied author is the agent intrinsic to the story whose responsibility is the overall design – including the decision to communicate it through one or more narrators" ("Coming to terms" 132). I will show how Facebook can be seen as co-authoring its content, how it's precence is intrinsic in the narratives, and how it is responsible for its content and design.

In a similar manner that the author of a novel develops a character through the use of various techniques, Facebook, as an implied author, assists its users to portray themselves within its set conventions. In other words it turns them into Facebook characters. The characters can either follow or transcend the conventions in the way they portray themselves.

According to Joel Weinsheimer, "the sole difference between fictive characters and real (historical) persons is that the former belong to static, complete texts and the latter to open-ended rewritable texts" (188). In their attempts to work with the character Emma, all researchers are restricted to same text, and have to formulate their interpretations within that given text. "All the evidence is always already given" (Weinsheimer 189). Facebook on the other hand is an open text, which its co-authors are continuously updating.

To reaffirm the use of a novel as the framework for the comparison and not for example an autobiography (as the Facebook characters exist in reality after all), be reminded of the aforementioned culture of presentation and correct appearance, which is especially evident on Facebook. It is my opinion that these students are not trying to represent themselves accurately, as in an autobiography, but as an idealized and imagined version of themselves, which sometimes has very little to do with reality. The careful ommission of certain facts, and constructed twists in the plot and in the characterization (that will be tested in the case study), results in a work of fiction rather than in an authentic autobiography, even though the basic identity of the student, for example their name, sex, location is still the same as in reality. I will also test if Facebook conventions support the idea of 'character.'

In this research the 'character' that will be used as a case study is an authentic person with an authentic Facebook profile, who did not purposely portray herself to emulate Emma, (she has in fact never read the book) but who happens to have some very similar characteristics and circumstances, for example the protected and privileged life, and her popularity. As a comparison to Emma, all similarities between the two characters will be noted and analysed, but not manufactured.

Why Austen's *Emma?*

There are several reasons why out of all the written characters and novels, I have selected Austen's *Emma* as the framework. Like a Facebook profile, the novel is named after its main character, and this novel specifically is famous for this character. In fact, Emma is often seen as the ultimate characterization by an author. As the character Jocelyn in the best-selling novel *The Jane Austen Book Club* exclaims: "But she's the only one of Austen's heroines who gets the book named

after her, so I think she must be the favourite" (Fowler 15). Emma is one of the most famous, loved, disliked and discussed characters in literary history. David Lodge says: "…there has been a growing measure of agreement through the years among her more devoted and discriminating readers that it is her most perfect and fully representative work", one of the reasons for this being her "vivid characterization" (11). Reginald Farrer in an article about *Emma* entitled *The book of books* says that it "is *the* novel of character, and of character alone, and of one dominating character in particular". He continues to explain that the character Emma takes centre stage in the entire book, except for one scene in which Mrs Weston is having a conversation with Mr Knightley (qtd. in Lodge 64).

Jane Austen's narrative form is often regarded as the culmination of the development of the novel up until that time (the first half of the nineteenth century). Today her narrative style, free indirect discourse, is still the one preferred by novelists. Ira Konigsberg explains that she is the author that had, at the time; best approached the novel as a compositional whole (244). Similarly, Facebook can be seen as employing the most successful form of online social networking.

Novels (like social networking sites) are often a reflection of the major cultural issues of their time, and the fictional methods of their writers and the development of their narrative technique were a direct outgrowth of these issues. Konigsberg explains that Austen's novels were "concerned with the problem of personal identity; in its focus upon character…" and they were "the literary form which confronted human identity from psychological and social perspectives" (215). Austen writes about the relationship between the individual and social values, and in her narratives "personal identity can be found and asserted only through interpersonal relationships" (234), hence the importance of behaviour in public. Konigsberg further

explains that the focus of Austen's novels is the internal consciousness of the heroine, and that this intimately relates to societal relationships (214 – 215). Similar to Austen's characterization, on Facebook one's 'character,' is of great importance and with or without 'inner consciousness' is shaped within the context of a social network.

In using an Austen novel, a world of academic discourse to draw upon unfolds. Austen has been used extensively as a site in the fields of literature, history, woman's studies, cultural studies, post-colonial studies and more. Her novels have been analysed to show her superb use of irony and wit, they have also been read as being feminist, didactic, moralistic and universal[4]. I want to clearly delineate that none of these Austen discourses will be implemented in this research except those pertaining to characterization, including writings on how Austen characters are interpreted and adapted into other media.

Austen's novels seem to be a particularly popular choice to adapt into contemporary pop-culture. Aspects of her and her writing are used in other novels, (Fielding's *The diary of Bridget Jones* and Fowler's *The Jane Austen Book Club*) and all of her novels have been adapted to film. The reason for this seems to be the universal themes, the flawed heroine who betters herself and is then rewarded with a good man and a happy ending. The character adaptation which is of most interest to me, is that of Emma into Cher, depicted by Alicia Silverstone in the 1995 film *Clueless*, directed by Amy Heckerling. John Wiltshire says: "…anyone familiar with *Emma* viewing the film enjoys the possession of two orders of cultural capital and aesthetic pleasure at once – both connection to the authorizing past (the classic text read at college) and participation in a youth culture apparently at the cutting edge of (post)modernity" (53). If Emma, (in a novel) the 'first lady' of society in Highbury,

England, can translate into Cher, (in a film) the most popular and stylish girl in a Beverly Hills High School, then she is certainly an appropriate character to use as a framework for the study of a popular student's profile on Facebook.

Lastly, *Emma* is used purely for creative inspiration and to distinguish this report, which is being written for a Masters in the Arts degree, from similar studies conducted in a sociological/psychological paradigm. Although the way in which my case study is conducted is much the same as those in research originating in the human sciences, my personal background is creative, not psychological or sociological, therefore I felt the creative slant necessary. Because of all the afore-mentioned reasons I think that comparing characterization techniques between the two forms will be both helpful and appropriate.

Methodology

The way in which Sherry Turkle conducts her research into people's relationships with technology and via technology, will inform the way my own research is conducted. In conducting her research over the years she has used individual case studies. She observes her subject's behaviours with technology, for example whilst playing computer games with a young boy (Turkle, "The second self" 1984). She also conducts extensive interviews with her participants in order to understand their actions and motives better. In many cases personal relationships are built.

Similarly, I will use a specific student's Facebook as a case study, with her informed consent. I will also conduct an open-ended interview with her about it, with a pre-set questionnaire as basis. I wish to compare her use of Facebook conventions

with the characterization techniques used by Austen for Emma. Her identity, as well as the identities of her Friends will remain a secret. A pseudonym, namely Emma^{FB}, will be used throughout, just asTurkle uses pseudonyms for her participants, for example in the case studies described in *Life on the screen*. All names and faces will be blocked out on screen captures from Facebook, which were taken during 2009 only.

A summary of the chapters

The first chapter will investigate the way in which Jane Austen characterized her implied author, and Emma, using the conventions of novel writing. The second chapter will focus on Facebook as an implied author, the constraints it creates for characterization, and how these conventions are used by participants to write themselves into a character. Facebook idiosyncrasies, for example the importance of photographs in conveying identity, as well as the significance of what information is revealed or not, will be explored.

Chapter three will provide an in-depth discussion of the specific case study, and will elaborate on the techniques named in Chapter 2. Here some comparisons with the character Emma in the novel will be noted. The conclusion will summarize the outcomes, which could possibly be that in some ways characters are constructed by Facebook as an implied author in a manner similar to that used by Austen in her novels, possibly through the use of dialogue, or social relationships. There will also be differences, for example the emphasis in Facebook on the visual aspect such as photography versus the textuality of the novel.

Chapter 1

Characterization techniques as used by Jane Austen in the novel, *Emma.*

The concept of 'character' in narrative theory is much debated and contested. In the seminal books *Narrative Fiction; Contemporary Poetics* by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and *Story and Discourse* by Seymour Chatman, some of these issues are discussed: are characters text or persons that can be psychologically analysed; are characters dependent or independent of actions; how does one reconstruct character from text; are characters open or closed constructs (Rimmon-Kenan 31-37, Chatman "Story and Discourse" 107-145) ?

Both Rimmon-Kenan and Chatman cite Roland Barthes' work on character. For the sake of brevity I quote from Barthes's interpretation: "When identical semes (*qualities or traits*) traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle upon it, a character is created" ("S/Z" 67). This research will not contribute to debates surrounding what 'character' constitutes in narrative theory, but will use Rimmon-Kenan's methods as a basis for the Austen/Facebook comparison.

The role of Austen's implied author in *Emma*

In *Emma,* the implied voice of Jane Austen creates an unmistakable identity for the book with her subtle and ironic views.

An implied author, represented in *Emma* by a reliable narrator, directs ones intellectual, moral, and emotional progress (Booth 215). Konigsberg explains how Austen also controls our involvement with her characters: "Much of the time we are unaware that we are being manipulated and controlled, that our degree of

involvement… is being altered, or that we are being given information and perspectives that allow us to understand her [Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*] better than she does herself" (220). He also shows that the turning point in Austen's novels are her main character's self-discovery, and that her plots are ordered around this (215). The events in her novels are always a result of the main character's actions and reactions (254).

To Austen's implied author, knowing oneself is of the utmost importance (Konigsberg 242). Austen always conveyed both "the personal drama of her characters and the interpersonal tensions and conflicts of the social world" (253). Her heroes and heroines achieve their self-discovery only in a way that fits in with their society, i.e. in a socially responsible way.

Austen was one of the first authors to use third person narration. Konigsberg describes the advantages: firstly, it allows her to insert a narrator's commentary in an unobtrusive way; secondly, it allows her to transcend her heroine's point of view to show a more objective view of the social world; thirdly, it allows her to comment on the heroine from a distance so that readers can see her in a way that she cannot see herself; and lastly, it allows the implied author to describe other points of view (235).

Wayne Booth is of the opinion that Austen's implied author most importantly reinforces "both aspects of the double vision that operates throughout the book: our inside views of Emma's worth and our objective view of her great faults." He uses an example from the first paragraph of the book: Emma "*seemed* to unite some of the best blessings of existence." The word "seemed" indicates a judgment and deeper understanding of the character (205). He elaborates on Austen as author:

> When we read this novel we accept her as representing everything we admire most. ……She is, in short, a perfect human being, within the

> concept of perfection established by the book she writes; …… Her omniscience' is thus a much more remarkable thing than is ordinarily implied by the term. All good novelists know all about their characters – all they need to know. And the question of how their narrators are to find out all *they* need to know, the question of 'authority', is a relatively simple one…… 'Jane Austen' has learned nothing at the end of the novel that she did not know at the beginning. She needed to learn nothing. She knew everything of importance already…… The dramatic illusion of her presence as a character is thus fully as important as any other element in the story. (Booth 214 – 215)

Notice that Booth makes the point that the presence of the author becomes a character in itself. On meeting Harriet for the first time Austen describes Emma's impression of her:

> – not inconveniently shy, not unwilling to talk, and yet so far from pushing; showing so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of everything in so superior a style to what she had been used to, that she must have good sense, and deserve encouragement. (20; ch. 3)

This is a good example of how subtly irony is used, because even though Emma's thoughts are being portrayed, the words used to portray them ("pleasantly grateful", "artlessly impressed") makes the tone clearly Austen's.

Austen disliked detailed description, "whether of setting, character or action" (Konigsberg 222). This restraint in description intensifies the plot and advances the plot faster (Konigsberg 252). Her narrative voice is dominant so that the "novel's

pace can be accelerated when necessary, and the rhythmic unity of the book be maintained" (Konigsberg 242).

Because she does not go into great detail, Austen involves the reader as she relies on the "reader's accurate perceptions from the start" (Konigsberg 225), (which adds to the reading pleasure) and because her novels demand that the reader participate by using their imagination (Konigsberg 256).

Characterization methods

Rimmon-Kenan divides the methods of characterization into two types of textual indicators of character: direct definition and indirect presentation. Direct definition "names the trait by an adjective, an abstract noun, or possibly some other kind of noun or part of speech". Indirect presentation "does not mention the trait, but displays and exemplifies it in various ways, leaving to the reader the task of inferring the quality they imply". She then sub-divides indirect presentation into action, speech, external appearance and the environment (59-70). She sees analogy as the reinforcement of characterization and not as a separate character-indicator. She says there are three ways that analogy can reinforce characterization: through analogous names, analogous landscapes and analogous characters (67-68). Rimmon-Kenan also investigates the classification of characters, by studying their complexity, their development, and the penetration into their 'inner life' (41).

Direct definition

Austen's prose is ordered and well structured. On the first page of *Emma,* Austen's narrator gives a direct presentation of who Emma is: "handsome, clever and rich", with a "comfortable home and happy disposition". This is followed by a

short description of her family background: her mother died long ago; she has a sister; and she was raised by a devoted governess. This description is immediately followed by listing the two "evils" of her character: "the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself".

So the first page serves as a summary of who Emma is at the beginning of the narrative, by a direct presentation of the narrator. It is clear from this first introduction that Emma is not a conventional idealized heroine, but instead, a flawed one (Kettle 94). Rimmon-Kenan says of such definition that it is "akin to generalization and conceptualisation", "explicit and supra-temporal", and is "liable to produce a rational, authoritative and static impression" (60). She also explains that direct definition is economical and guides a reader's response, which is why traditional novelists (such as Austen) employ it (61).

Indirect presentation: Action

Rimmon-Kenan divides actions into one-time actions and habitual actions, and explains that both of these can fall into the category of commission, omission, and contemplated act (which is an unrealised plan or intention) (61-62).

I find that Emma's actions are sometimes opposed to her misguided thoughts, and show the endearing values in her character: she always makes sure all her guests are well taken care of, she visits the poor, plays with her sister's children with no hidden agendas, sends Mrs. Bates gifts - all of these show that she has generosity. In some instances her actions reinforce her snobbery, for example waiting in the carriage whilst affording Harriet a mere fifteen-minute visit to the Martins, whom she deems to be below her (Austen 186; ch. 23).

Often Emma's actions also reinforce greater themes in the book, she loves riddles, and playing word and card games. Of course she also plays the matchmaking game with poor Harriet, but in return is also used by Frank Churchill in his game to disguise his relationship with Jane Fairfax. "Emma imagines herself mistress of the game, the one who knows all the answers" (Jones 152), when in reality she is mistaken in every instance. Austen uses Emma's actions here to show her lack of understanding of the seriousness and gravity of love, relationships and marriage, which ultimately are not 'games'.

Austen also uses actions to create a neat structure, which in addition shapes the character Emma. Edgar Shannon says: "rhythm in a novel has been defined as repetition plus variation, and Jane Austen unfolds the reorientation of Emma's character, just traced, by means of rhythmic structure of situation and incident." He shows how all her repetitions appear in sequences of three or a multiple thereof. There are six major social events, all-important to the plot. The plot centres on "Emma's three experiences with mutations of love": Mr. Elton, Frank Churchill, and Mr. Knightley (141-143). In the final scene, the opening scene of the book is repeated, emphasizing the growth the heroine has undergone in a year.

Indirect presentation: Speech

"A character's speech, whether in conversation or as a silent activity of the mind, can be indicative of a trait or traits both through its content and through its form," explains Rimmon-Kenan (63). According to Konigsberg, the combination of Austen's lively dialogue and her third-person narrative voice is her biggest achievement (223). He says "Austen was the first novelist to employ a third-person narrative voice for creating in a sustained, convincing, and dramatic way the psychic

dimension of character" (234). He praises her "dramatic interplay of dialogue," and the way "individual lines and intentions play off one another" (221).

She uses dialogue to disclose the personality and thoughts, both conscious and unconscious, of her characters. Emma, speaking to herself after Frank Churchill leaves her, says:

> This sensation of listlessness, weariness, stupidity, this disinclination to sit down and employ myself, this feeling of everything being dull and insipid about the house! I must be in love. I should be the oddest creature in the world if I were not – for a few weeks at least. (Austen 266; ch. 30)

This piece of internal dialogue cleverly demonstrates Emma's youth, naivety and lack of self-knowledge.

Konigsberg explains that Austen's skill lies in the seamless integration of multiple perspectives. Often the reader is not aware of the shifts between a subtle third person narrator ("giving us on occasion information and insights denied the heroine" (229)); a first person account or interior monologue; or a perspective from another character (known as free indirect discourse). She manages this by a using a formalistic sentence structure, and by having the characters and the narrator speak in a very similar tone of voice.

Mark Schorer (177) uses the following excerpt to illustrate this:

> Emma perceived that her taste was not the only taste on which Mr Weston depended, and felt that to be the favourite and intimate of a man who had so many intimates and confidantes*, was not the very first distinction in the scale of vanity (Austen's thoughts, not Emma's*) She liked his open manners, but a little less of open-heartedness would

> have made him a higher character. General benevolence, but not general friendship, made a man what he ought to be. She could fancy such a man (*immediately back to Emma's thoughts).* (Austen 324; ch 38)

The manner in which Emma, the character, expresses herself, even when emotional and distressed, is very similar to the narrator's expression, and to other character's for example Mrs. Weston, creating a seamless flow between the subjective interior and the objective exterior.

Indirect presentation: Appearance

A detailed description of Emma's physical appearance occurs only in Chapter 5 of the novel. Austen's structure in the novel is often based on the juxtaposition of different characters and the juxtaposition in sections of dialogue (Konigsberg 221). For example, Emma's physical attributes are conveyed by indirect presentation, namely in a dialogue between Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley:

> "Very well; I shall not attempt to deny Emma's being pretty."
>
> "Pretty! Say beautiful rather. Can you imagine anything nearer perfect beauty than Emma altogether – face and figure?"

And then a more detailed description of her specific features follows: "the true hazel eye", "regular features", an "open countenance", "a pretty height and size", a "firm and upright figure", and that she is "the complete picture of grown-up health" (Austen 36; ch 5).

Austen juxtaposes Emma - the complete picture of grown-up health - with the 'elegance' of Jane Fairfax, showing how Emma, for all her games and meddling, is the country innocent, really understanding nothing about love and strategic matches,

whereas quiet Jane is the one who has been secretly engaged and is the true game-player. I also think that by the time the conversation between Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley occurs; Emma's snobbishness and manipulating ways have been made clear, so perhaps Austen needs to emphasize her physical desirability as a heroine.

Indirect presentation: Environment

By 'environment' Rimmon-Kenan means both the physical (man-made) and human surroundings. Human surroundings could be a character's family or social class. The environment can create a character trait (if surrounded by caring people, it may indicate a character's own caring nature) or conversely, a character trait can create the environment (if a character is created as neglectful, their man-made surroundings might be messy) (66). Emma's environment, people and buildings, say much about her character. She is mistress of a beautiful and well-kept home, with many rooms, good furniture, beautiful gardens and carriages. This speaks of her being spoilt and used to comforts, but also of the confidence, taste and good sense she has in order to manage such an estate at a young age. She socializes only with a small group of friends, most of whom she has known since birth. She has never ventured from her family home. This shows that however privileged her life has been, it has also been very insular, and explains that she must be desperate for variation and entertainment. Darryl Jones points out that in Highbury "normally nothing ever happens" (143).

The activities that her and her friends partake in are wholesome and seemingly harmless: walks; card games; little dinners; going to church on a Sunday. There is nothing dramatic in the environment, the people that she knows, or in the action. This is a life where a girl has no choice but to entertain herself. They are the

upper class of Highbury, and she is very aware of this, hence her snobbery towards the farmer, Robert Martin: "A young farmer, whether on horseback or on foot, is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do" (Austen 26; ch. 4).

Rimmon-Kenan explains that the following analogous techniques of characterization reinforce the traits that have already been established by direct definition and indirect presentation (67).

Analogous landscapes

"Landscape… is independent of man, and hence does not normally entertain a relation of story-causality with the characters" (Rimmon-Kenan 69). Shannon explains that in *Emma,* Austen increases social activity in a rural community, (crucial to the plot and characterization), as the seasons advance and become more conducive to it. He also explains how emotions are reinforced by the seasons and the weather, for example Mr Elton's "insincere, fruitless proposal vents itself not only in the confined dark of the carriage, but on a bleak, snowy December night". In stark contrast to this incident "Mr. Knightley discloses his love among the shrubbery of Hartfield in the slanting sunlight of a July evening" (142 – 143).

Lionel Trilling calls Highbury "the world of the pastoral idyll" (162), which of course is an indication of Emma's (although misguided with snobbish tendencies in most of the narrative) being a pure and beautiful country lady, who will come to realize the error of her ways, and be the perfect ideal of the happily and well-married woman at the end of the narrative herself.

Analogous characters

"When two characters are presented in similar circumstances, the similarity or contrast between their behaviour emphasizes traits characteristic of both" (Rimmon-Kenan 70). Schorer (180- 181) calls these 'symbolic relationships' and he identifies a couple of these relationships: A contrasting character to show off Emma is Miss Bates: also single, but poor, middle-aged and plain. Where Emma represents the best in 'singlehood', Miss Bates represents the worst. Emma is compared with Harriet and Mrs. Elton. Harriet is her friend and they do most activities in the book together, and feel much the same about most things. In the two young companions, Emma's decisive and headstrong nature is shown in the way that she guides Harriet's opinions and decisions. Mrs. Elton, who is Emma's replacement after her refusal of Mr. Elton, is like Emma, a snob who tries to control people's lives: "self-important, presuming, familiar, ignorant and ill-bred. She had little beauty and a little accomplishment, but so little judgment that she thought herself coming with superior knowledge of the world to enliven and improve a country neighbourhood" (Austen 285; ch 33). Emma is sometimes dangerously close to being as insufferable.

Schorer calls Emma and Jane Fairfax's relationship a contrasting-comparative relationship (181). They are both beautiful, well bred and accomplished. Emma has fortune, where Jane has none, yet Emma dislikes Jane for her closed and reserved nature, where she herself is much too open. Of course Mr. Knightley is the perfect counter male character for Emma, he is the sensor: whenever she errs, he berates her; whenever she acts well, he praises her. He is the implied author's right-hand man in shaping judgment of Emma.

Weinsheimer is of the opinion that a set of characteristics often applies to an unlimited number of characters (205). He also argues that characters conflate in the

novel: as units of Emma/Harriet, Emma/Mr. Woodhouse, Emma/Mr. Knightley. He says:

> …characters in a closed text can never be posited as unique, since the words of which each are constituted are the same. Closure maximizes the overlapping of characteristics among characters; and even where a character is identified not by a single characteristic but a complex of them, overlapping ensures that the boundaries separating one character from another will be inexact and fuzzy (205).

Reinforced characterization: Analogous names

Novelists, especially traditional ones, use names to reinforce traits, in *Emma* Mr Knightley is the most obvious example: he is a true 'knight', the best-behaved, most sensible and gentlemanly man in the book. Of course he also 'saves' Harriet at the dance when she is so obviously shunned by Mr. Elton (Austen 333; ch. 38).

I am not sure if a character's name can only be seen as Rimmon-Kenan (68) suggests as a reinforcement of characterization rather than an indirect indication of character in itself. Both Barthes and Weinsheimer are of the opinion that the proper name is significant in the formulation of character. Barthes believes that a proper name aids in creating a realistic illusion of a 'person' (S/Z 68, 94). Weinsheimer says: "a powerful motive for the reader's complicity in the illusion that characters have a life independent of the text is the mistaken (though commonsense) notion that proper names refer directly to objects independently of texts" (187).

The title of the novel is a proper name: Emma. The title being a first name only, already implies an intimacy with the character, and an affinity with the author. The first words of the novel are the name 'Emma Woodhouse'. According to

Weinsheimer, this name becomes a contrast to 'Harriet Smith', who because of her unknown parentage has a generic name, whilst Emma is clearly shown to be the daughter of Mr. Woodhouse, established and wealthy, and owner of the beautiful Hartfield estate (196). The Woodhouses were "first in consequence" in Highbury (Austen 3; ch. 1).

According to Barthes: "The proper name acts as a magnetic field for the semes (qualities); referring in fact to a body" ("S/Z" 67). Rimmon-Kenan states that "character names often serve as 'labels' for a trait or cluster of traits characteristic of non-fictional human beings…" (33), 'Emma Woodhouse' for example, becomes a label for a blundering matchmaker (it being her most memorable trait).

Rimmon-Kenan also classifies characters according to their complexity, their development, and the penetration into their 'inner life' (40). If one were to analyse Emma according to these criteria, one would see that Austen has created a complex, developed character with a rich inner life.

Complexity

Trilling says of Mr Woodhouse and Miss Bates that they are "created on a system of character portrayal that we regard as primitive, but the reality of existence that fictional characters may claim does not depend only upon what they do, but also what others do to or about them, upon the way they are regarded and responded to" (162). He says this of course because Mr Woodhouse and Miss Bate are not complex characters, they are constructed around a few basic traits and could easily just be seen only as an insipid hypochondriac and a silly talkative spinster

respectively (caricatures), if it were not that the other characters in the book treated them with respect and deference.

Emma on the other hand can be seen as a complex character. She has a wide range of characteristics, not all 'typical', and sometimes conflicting. She is extremely snobbish, class-conscious and convinced of her own value. In his much disputed essay *Irony as form: Emma*, Marvin Mudrich writes:

> …much of Emma's unpleasantness can be attributed to her consciousness of rank. In her class, family is the base, property the outward symbol, and suitable marriage the goal; and family and property are the chief criteria of acceptability for Emma" (109).

Even so, she can still poke fun at herself, for example in this scene at the beginning of the novel: ""Especially when one of those two is such a fanciful, troublesome creature!" said Emma playfully" (of herself) (Austen 7; ch. 1). In terms of personality, Emma is not conceited (at least not regarding her looks). "Considering how very handsome she is, she appears to be little occupied by it", says Mr. Knightley (Austen 36, ch. 5). But Mr. Knightley also says, "Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest of her family" (Austen 34; ch 5). She is quick of understanding, cares very attentively for her sweet but rather frustrating father, is good with her sister's children, and makes an effort for the poor. She can be kind and unkind, foolish and wise.

Development

The titles of two essays on the subject of *Emma,* both clearly indicate that the character Emma goes through a developmental process: Schorer's *The humiliation of Emma Woodhouse*, and R.E. Hughes's *The education of Emma Woodhouse*.

Austen in her narrative makes Emma realize her faults and become a better person in the end. She develops from being an utter snob to accepting the farmer Robert Martin as a suitable match for her friend Harriet. She develops from being absolutely confident in her judgments to admitting that she made grave mistakes, has injured people, and that she regrets this.

Most of all she develops from proclaiming never to want to marry, to being happily marrying in the end:

> I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing; but I never have been in love… And without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want, consequence I do not want;… (85; ch. 10)

In Austen's time the "…unspoken assumption was that a woman's primary function in life was to please men; her worth was to be measured by her ability to attract them" (Mukherjee: 137). Mukerjee explains: "Among Jane Austen's heroines only Emma Woodhouse with her £30,000 can afford to think of marriage in an uninvolved detached manner, as a game she can play with other people's lives" (30).

In the narrative she makes two serious mistakes about love with regard to Harriet (causing her much distress) and herself (Mr. Elton and Frank Churchill), realizes she loves Mr. Knightley, and happily settles down with him at the end. Mr. Knightley says in Chapter 5: "I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return; it would do her good". Of course this is exactly what happens: "She had no hope, nothing to deserve the name of hope, that he [Mr. Knightley] could have that sort of affection for herself…" (425). This shows how neatly Austen makes Emma develop fully.

Penetration into 'inner life'

Many critics agree that one of the truly skilled aspects in Austen's portrayal of Emma is that she keeps the reader's sympathy engaged, even though Emma behaves so badly to Mr. Martin; to Mrs. Bates; and to Jane Fairfax (Ferrar 66). Lodge mentions how, in his essay, Booth "…shows how Jane Austen ensures our sympathetic identification with the heroine by making her the primary centre of consciousness, through which most of the experience of the novel is mediated, but controls and checks such identification by discreet authorial interventions, ironic deflations of Emma, and well-timed comments from the most morally reliable character in the book, Mr. Knightley" (Lodge 23). After Mr. Knightley reprimands her for her unfelt remark to Miss Bates at the Box Hill outing, Austen writes the following: "She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel, to Miss Bates? How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in anyone she valued?… As she reflected more, she seemed but to feel it more. She never had been so depressed" (385; ch. 43). This is an excellent example of what Booth discusses: the author showing us the characters inner life, and thereby maintaining our sympathy, even after her having made such a cruel remark.

Film interpretations of 'Emma.'

Film adaptations of Austen's novels have been hotly debated in academia. For this report I have found John Wiltshire's *Recreating Jane Austen* and Gina and Andrew Macdonald's *Jane Austen on screen* most useful. John Mosier claims that "no film has yet been made worthy of Austen" (251). In a novel, the reader's imagination is always employed. Even though it is clearly stated that Emma had a

perfect figure and the perfect hazel eye, this might look differently in each of our minds' eyes. When an actress is chosen, nothing much is left to the imagination in terms of appearances.

In the film *Clueless* (1995) Alicia Silverstone was picked to be the Emma character and in the 1996 period drama *Emma*, Gwyneth Paltrow portrayed the role (fig. 1 and 2). Both are longhaired blonde American beauties. Since it is not stated anywhere in the novel that Emma was light-haired or blonde, the use of these two iconic blonde actresses to portray Emma, says more of the Western myth of what the appearance of a rich beautiful heiress should be, than about an accurate portrayal of the character. Mosier for example criticizes the choice of Gwyneth Paltrow as being mis-cast according to Austen's description (235).

Both their portrayals of the character were cute and funny, therefore Emma's wrongful opinions and behaviour came across as entertaining and endearing, rather than something to be curbed.



Fig. 1: 'Clueles's film poster



Fig. 2: 'Emma' film poster

In a film, showing the complexity and development of the character through appearance, speech, environment and action is relatively easy, but portraying the 'inner life' becomes a lot more difficult, and can easily seem to be contrived: "a screen treatment is an exterior or "voyeur" experience, and as a result much depiction of inner life must be cast aside" (Selby qtd. in "Jane Austen on screen" 6). The tone and comment of an implied author or narrator, such as Austen's, is also difficult to convey in film. Chatman explains: "A narrating voice-over of any sort is unfashionable, but especially one that moralizes, or interprets" ("Story and Discourse" 247).

In *Emma* an authorial narrating voice-over is used to set up and conclude the story. The character Emma is also given a 'dear diary' inner voice-over (that does not match the book) in an attempt to convey her inner life. Similarly in *Clueless* an attempt at a portrayal of the inner life was made by giving Cher an 'inner voice' voic-eover, in this film creating a comic effect. Wiltshire explains that "the contrast

between her spoken appraisals and what the screen itself shows parallels Emma's equally mistaken assessment of the world delineated in the novel", and that "thus the use of the voice-over in *Clueless* avails itself of some of the effects of free indirect speech in the novel. Just as the shifts between narrator and character in the novel make for irony, so does the shifting match or mismatch between verbal and visual representations" (Wiltshire 54, 55). Even so, the character Cher is much sillier and more banal than Emma ever was. In both films there can only be an attempt to convey Austen's irony in the manner the actress delivers her lines, but her subtle commentary is lost.

Wiltshire points out that: "though Emma begins with a series of near-farcical cross-purposes, it is a novel deeply embedded in realism: *Clueless* is a fantasy/burlesque" (53), and: "Clueless allows Cher and Dionne an indulgence in matchmaking success that Emma Woodhouse could only dream of" (54).

Even though *Clueless* is thought by both Wiltshire and Mosier to be a better interpretation of the essence of *Emma,* to me it is clear that in *Clueless* a different medium and a different century, leading to add-ons and omissions, have created a different character (Emma into Cher) altogether.

In this chapter the significant role the implied author plays in Austen's novels has been made clear. Employing the methods described by Rimmon-Kenan, I have shown how Austen characterized Emma, especially using sparkling dialogue and subtle and ironic narrators comments. In the next chapter I will test how Facebook operates as an implied author, and how, and if, Rimmon-Kenan's characterization methods are used by Facebook and its users.

Chapter 2

Characterization techniques as established by the social networking site, Facebook.

Social networking sites can be seen as the defining medium of the early 2000s, just as the novel can be seen as the defining medium of the early 1800s, 200 years ago. According to Ellison and Steinfield, social networking sites are media that "allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others" (*n. pag* "Introduction").

The two sites that attracted more users than anyone could have anticipated, Facebook (*facebook.com*) and MySpace (*myspace.com),* were both first launched in 2004. Facebook was developed by Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard college student, who intended it as a networking tool for college students.

Facebook and MySpace are not the first social networking sites, the first so-called Web 2.0 social networking site, *Six.Degrees.com* was launched in 1997 (Boyd and Ellison, *n. pag* "The early years"). Belinda Lewis defines Web 2.0 as "any technology that aids and encourages simple intuitive user interaction through an architecture of participation. These technologies enable user feedback, and are thus constantly improved and exist within the ethos of a perpetual beta" (92).

Facebook and MySpace are the sites that have attracted the most users, and are maintaining their popularity. MySpace currently has about 125 million active users (*myspace.com* fact sheet) and Facebook boasts over 400 million active users around the globe (*facebook.com* fact sheet). It seems that both Facebook and MySpace have maintained the personality linked to their origins. Facebook, originating as an Ivy League college network, slowly opened up to more users in

2005, initially through institutions such as universities, schools and corporate networks (Boyd and Ellison, *n. pag* "Expanding niche communities"). Even though anyone can join up today, it still appears to have users who cite their schools, colleges and employers as an important part of their character. Danah Boyd describes how MySpace originated as a band/fan website and still has an identity with a music-focus ("WhyYouthHeart" 4). Because of a security hole, MySpace also allows users to change the appearance of their page with coding, resulting in the design of the pages being very different from each other and being creatively crafted to reflect the user's character ("WhyYouthHeart" 11). On Facebook the user has no choice but to construct their character within the set appearance and design of the site.

Facebook, because of its immense popularity and central role in contemporary society, is the subject of much media coverage and social conversations, as Austen's novels were upon publication. Facebook is a corporation with a board of directors, about 1200 employees, and 15 offices both in the U.S. and in other countries (*facebook.com* fact sheet). Yet it is presented if it were an implied author character in itself, just as Austen is in her novels as was explained in the previous chapter. Facebook has its own Facebook Profile (fig.3) on which it keeps users updated about its latest developments and other activities such as charities that it as a company is involved with.

Users interact with Facebook as a person, or often address Mark Zuckerberg, the original founder. They praise, complain or just chat. Austen also received a barrage of positive and negative letters and reviews on publication of her works (Lodge 29 – 46). Both are used as examples of social behaviour in their times, and both have been used as a text, and as source for academic research.



Fig. 3: Facebook's own Page

True to the Lewis's previously quoted definition of Web 2.0 technology the developers of Facebook have made several adjustments to its design since 2004 in response to the way its members were using it, and also to how other social networking sites were developing.

In September 2006 Facebook first launched the News Feed and Mini Feed. The product manager explains: "News Feed highlights what's happening in your social circles on Facebook. It updates a personalized list of news stories throughout the day…" (Sanghvi "Facebook gets a facelift"). There was a storm of protest from users against the next big re-design, the so-called "new Facebook", before its launch in July 2008. The new tabbed Profile organizes the character's book much more efficiently. The Wall on one's Profile was changed to display "the most recent and relevant information – in the form of posts of stories – about you" (Slee "Check out the new Facebook"). Facebook also launched the Publisher, which meant that photos, videos, status updates and notes could become part of a character's narrative on the Wall. In essence these developments have given users the opportunity to make their Facebook Walls more informative and media-rich without

having to write more or better information about themselves.

In October 2009 the Live Feed was launched, this appears on the Home page and is a ‘real-time’ feed from one’s Friends. Again, this can be anything from photographs to updates that one’s Friends have just completed. Farhad Manjoo describes the reaction to Facebook’s re-designs:

> In 2006, Facebook added the original news feed to its site… People hated it. …… In time, the news feed became Facebook's signature feature, the part of the site that everyone checked first. Last summer, Facebook redesigned its front page to give more weight to the news feed. Again, millions protested. But once more, people learned to love the new site — stats show members started using Facebook more often. Now, instead of a summary of what your friends have been up to in the last few hours you get what Zuckerberg calls a "stream"—a continuously updated timeline that shows every little thing that someone in your network does. (“Stop whining”)

Austenbook (fig. 4), based on *Pride and Prejudice*, shows how a News Feed was used to recreate the narrative using for example, status updates from various ‘characters’. The author, Deedee Baldwin, a librarian from Mississippi, acknowledges that the story is the wrong way round, as on Facebook the latest happening is displayed at the top of the page, but explains that she wrote it in reverse for ‘easier reading’. This is just one book that has been re-enacted through a Facebook News Feed. An attempt was also made with *Hamlet* (Schmelling, “Hamlet Facebook News Feed Edition”). These websites are examples of what Kate Bowles calls “fan fiction” which have condemned Austen to “the hamster-wheel of posthumous productivity, publication (if not

quality) guaranteed" (16). *Austenbook* certainly proves that without the inner thoughts and observations of the characters, and the many subtleties, the story is brief and rather basic.

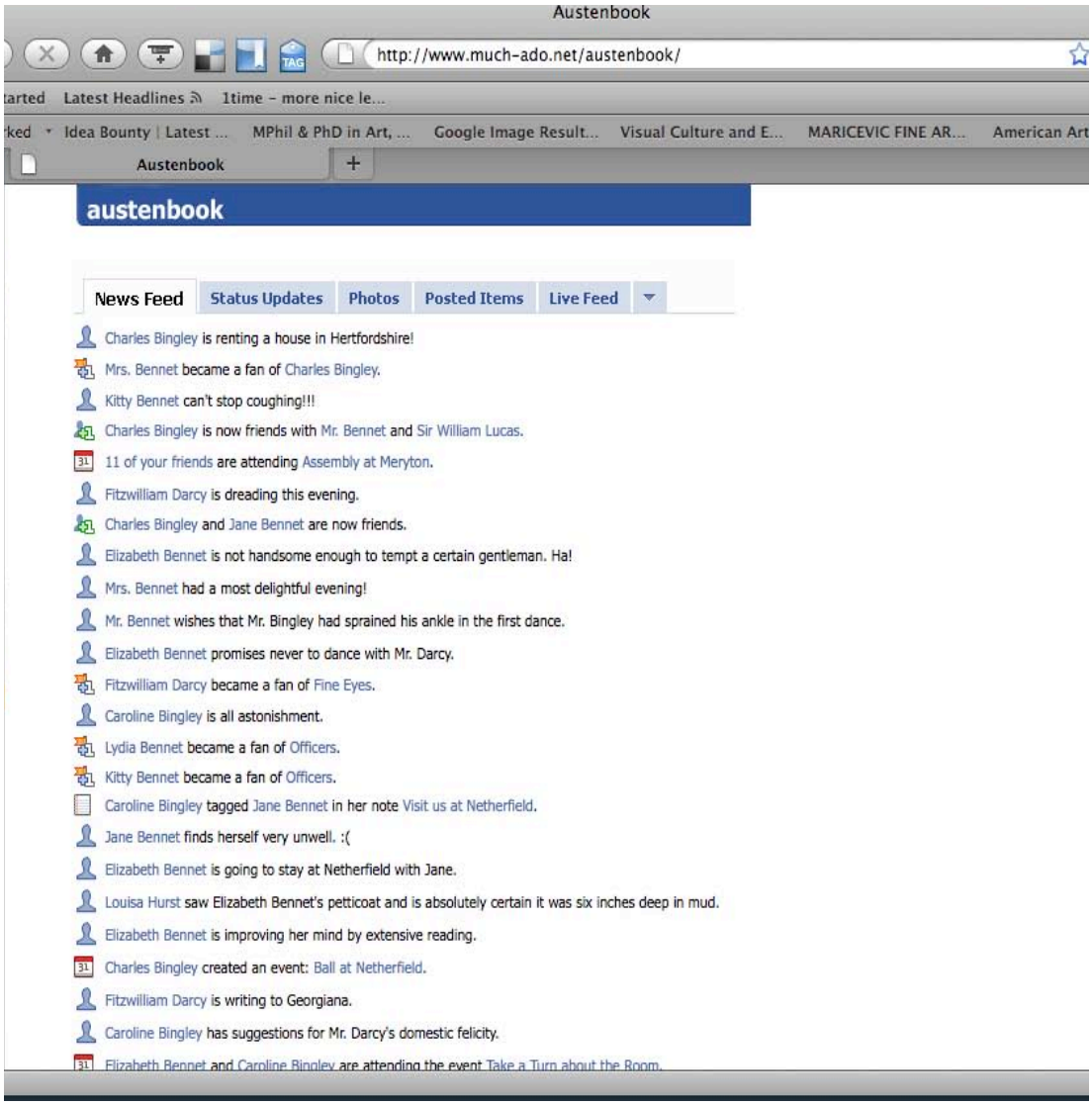


Fig. 4: 'Austenbook': An example of how Facebook's news stream has been used to re-enact Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice'

This focus on a 'stream' of updates clearly reflects how Facebook users need to feel constantly connected and updated. Many users log onto Facebook from their mobile phones. Tyler Reed describes a friend who drives to and from university with his mobile phone with Facebook open on it, taped to his steering wheel (Digital

natives). The News Feed shows by means of a phone icon if an update has been made from a mobile phone (fig. 5). From this it is clear that Facebooking from one's mobile has become common. The illusion is created that one's Friends are always present, and, in return, Facebook is the place where one constructs one's public life.



Fig. 5: Facebook update from a mobile phone

Facebook is also a political space. A study by Ellison and Steinfeld proves that the intensive use of Facebook accumulates social capital, and is used to support, maintain and strengthen offline connections. In 2004 Turkle expressed the opinion that online chat rooms and role-playing games create a moratorium or 'time out' for young people, an opportunity where they can be wild, experimental and thoughtless, that they do not have in offline life any more ("How computers change" *n. pag*). Nowadays, social networking sites have been established as excellent marketing tools: celebrities, companies, organizations, causes and ordinary individuals all use their Facebooks to promote themselves. Young people are under as much pressure to make the right decisions, to characterize themselves favourably (which might be as wildly crazy and creative), and to build their social capital on Facebook as they are in 'real' life. This is definitely not a 'time out' any more, but yet another space in which strategic decisions have to be made.

An ideal audience

Boyd defines four properties that are present in networked publics but not in "face-to-face public life: persistence, searchability, exact copyability, and invisible audiences". She explains:

> By imagining an audience, regardless of its accuracy, teens are able to navigate the social situation required in crafting a profile. Because of the intricate connection between offline and online social worlds, the audience that teens envision online is connected to their social world offline, or to their hopes about the possible alternatives online. ("WhyYouthHeart" 15)

The imagined audience is more than likely an idealized peer group, not parents, marketing companies or perverts. The way in which users characterize themselves on Facebook versus other online social media is different, because the imagined audience is different. In an online space people characterize themselves, just as in offline life, according to the role they wish to portray: party-animal, femme fatale, family man, responsible executive, ideal partner. Facebook panders to the Friend's gaze, so the photographs and tone of writing is casual, personal and fun, and if one is part of a creative community, then creative photographs and status updates are essential.

The photograph that is used on an internet dating site, where attracting a potential partner is the main aim, might not be suitable for a professional networking site such as LinkedIn (*linkedin.com)*, where one is represented in one's professional capacity and where a photograph of oneself at a party with friends would not be appropriate. Alice Marwick says "one's identity, then, is inscribed within the software, rather than being inherently tied to one's "self" or "body"" ("I'm more than").

A fictionalized version of reality

One of the reasons that Austen's novels are acclaimed is because of their realism. In fact, some of her contemporaries, like Charlotte Brontë (50), felt they were much too realistic, narrow in scope and emotionally superficial. Lodge explains: " 'Real' and 'natural' were the most common epithets of praise bestowed upon her work, the art of which was seen to consist principally of investing fictitious characters and actions with the kind of interest that we take in people and events within our own actual experience" (17). Previously, novels were romantic, and described dramatic scenarios that 'normal' people would hardly ever be involved in. In Austen's novels interest is created by the portrayal of the character's inner lives, and the subtle irony of the author.

In 1995 Turkle published her second book *Life on the screen, Identity in the age of Internet*. In this book she addresses issues regarding identity on the Internet using people's experiences with MUD's, or Multi User Dungeons, as her subject matter. MUD's are text-driven online communities, where a language had to be learnt in order to participate, mostly in games. Like most Web 2.0 sites, Facebook functions on a combination of photographs (referenced or uploaded by the user) and the written word, and requires no programming knowledge. Popular technology in the early nineties did not facilitate the use of photographs to convey identity, nor was the Internet as widely used as today. The case studies she investigated were therefore college students or professionals with at least basic programming skills and mostly also writing and typing skills. On Facebook these are not limitations that apply to users at all: one needs Internet access (even if from a cell phone), and a digital camera.

Some of the issues Turkle investigates with MUD users are role-playing; the creation of a false sense of intimacy; gender swapping and other online deceptions; online sex and rape; and being in a different social class online than offline. In many of the case studies she describes in the book, the participants characterize themselves very differently from what they are in the 'real' world. Either their personalities are written completely differently, or they describe themselves differently in terms of physical appearance, age, race or even sex.

She says: "Multiplicity is not acceptable if it means being confused to a point of immobility. How can we be multiple and coherent at the same time?" ("Life on the screen" 259). On other hand she says: "In our time, health is described in terms of fluidity rather than stability. What matters now is the ability to adapt and change..." (Life on the screen: 255), and that "…a more fluid sense of self allows a greater capacity for acknowledging diversity" (Life on the screen: 261).

Looking at users characterizations of themselves on Facebook, many of the issues that Turkle discusses in her experience of the MUD's seem not to be a factor at all. Because a Facebook characterization is so photo dependant, and one cannot control or make adjustments to the photographs uploaded of one by one's friends, it becomes quite difficult to be somebody one is not. Also, as was pointed out earlier, Facebook is not intended for, and is not often used as, a space for interacting with strangers, but for Friends and Friends of Friends. Amongst the students researched most, are friends with the people online that they also know offline (also found by Ellison and Steinfield, *n. pag* "Findings"), so obvious role-playing or deception would be pointless. The variations in identity online versus 'real' life are more in the healthy category of 'fluid' than 'multiple'.

Fictional characterization has become a lot more subtle and sophisticated with Web 2.0. As already discussed in the Introduction, users create an ideal character for themselves, but, just like an Austen character, this 'character' must always seem believable, as if it is a truthful version of the offline self. I have observed that the moment the character treads into the territory of appearing too contrived, or of taking him/herself too seriously, this character is mocked by the Friends, especially off-line. So the creation of a character that appears to be realistic, but has none of the 'real-life' drawbacks (for example acne, or struggling to cope with a mental disease or a handicapped sibling, or failing at university), becomes quite a skill.

The role of the Facebook as the implied author

Facebook as an implied author has certain similarities to Austen as in implied author (discussed in the previous chapter). It dictates the overall design of the narrative, including the choice it made to have co-narrators (users), which complies with the role of the implied author described by Chatman in the Introduction ("Coming to terms" 132). In Barthes' *The Death of the Author* (1968), he disputes the notion of an authorial authority, and the idea that a text has an ultimate meaning, for the reasons that language has multiple meanings, and that the state of the author's mind can seldom be known (Ryan: 7). Facebook gives new meaning to this interpretation, as it does not write or control the ultimate meaning, but responds, implies or suggests to both users (co-narrators) and viewers what it could or should be.

Its underlying authoritative voice manifests itself in the image the site has as a company, the way in which it develops and manages the site, in the layout and aesthetics of the site, and the fields and interactions that are made available.

Freedom of expression is only possible within these restraints, which guides the way in which the co-narrators or users write themselves.

Like Austen, Facebook guides the readers or viewers progress through the book, for example one cannot but engage with the latest News Feed on the home page, and one is always informed of one's new messages or friend requests which results in going to check these.

Joshua Porter explains:

> Every web application is an interface through which people lead increasingly remarkable lifelets (lifelet = a slice of life). The users of Digg and Facebook rely on their respective application interfaces to let them know…well…everything! In the same way that you can't shop at a physical Amazon store, you cannot do anything with Digg or Facebook without having access to the interface they provide. Thus the users are subject to whatever (and *only* whatever) the interface allows. If information is in the interface that day, it's part of their world. If it's not in the interface that day, it doesn't exist. The interface therefore becomes the arbiter of their existence in that world. (Joshua Porter, Facebook, Lifelets, and Designer Responsibility")

For example, Facebook has become the space for many where they are reminded of Friends birthdays and where resulting birthday wishes are composed and shared. Users have come to rely on the birthday prompt so that they can respond in character.

Like Austen, Facebook dictates the rhythm of the book, for example by the amount or content of the menu tabs, the amount of words that are allowed in status updates and messages, or the size of pictures that may be uploaded. And like

Austen, Facebook also does not support lengthy and detailed descriptions, so the fields that users can fill out have pre-scripted options, or word limits. It does however allow for many (short) comments on status updates, promoting snappy dialogue between characters, and one can have up to 100 photo's per album (many users have up to 50 albums) which makes lengthy visual character development possible.

As was shown earlier in this chapter, Facebook constantly develops its design in response to users needs, and to developments in social networking behaviours and technology. Austen assumed her reader's intelligence, imagination and power of understanding; Facebook does this as well, in a different way. It assumes its users to have friends and things to say for themselves, and photographs with which to portray themselves. The fact that readers will imagine the rest of the story implied by status updates, comments and photographs is also assumed.

In Chapter 1 I described how Austen's irony and moral opinions subtly become part of her text. The voice of Facebook is not ironic, but uses contemporary vocabulary and conventional attitudes, it is inclusive (any one can open an account) but exclusive - one has to be a certain type of character to fit in. It is this voice that imbues all characterization.

Facebook's interface is very neat and ordered, and has a very domineering and specific blue colour, that has indeed become "Facebook blue". If one wanted to associate oneself with another colour, or wanted to characterize oneself as a chaotic artist by re-arranging the layout of one's Facebook, this would not be possible. Everyone has to have the recognizable author's tone: blue and neat. One can upload one's own photographs and write one's own updates and comments, but everyone's photographs and writing is displayed in exactly the same way.

By the areas made available for characterization such as Info, Photos and Wall, Facebook (like Austen) controls our involvement with a character. It also gives it's co-narrators/characters the power to limit certain information to certain viewers. Facebook as an author, like many social networking sites, even from the days of the MUDs, monitors behaviour. One can write sexual innuendoes or be cheeky up to a point, but the moment language, groups, or photographs appear that Friends complain about because they find them offensive, damaging or dangerous, Facebook removes this character altogether.

Austen's plots were centred on a character's self-discovery. It's co-narrators/characters dictate plots around social activities or events, and an adherence to a certain peer group behaviour. The similarity to Austen is that character development happens strictly within the context of a social group, which strongly contributes to this development. As in Austen's novels, events on Facebook are the result of the characters actions and reactions.

To Austen knowing oneself was of the utmost importance, and by continuously prompting users to share what is on one's mind, Facebook seems also to encourage its characters knowledge of self. Facebook's characters just do not seem to contemplate this as deeply as Austen's characters do.

The interplay of the voice of the implied author and the voice of the character, the objective exterior and subjective interior, so notable in Austen's writing, is also evident on Facebook. The sentences are started by the voice of the implied author, and completed by the voice of the character. Unlike Austen's technique where the author's tone is much the same as the character's, the characters on Facebook comply more with the tone of the co-narrators/characters they esteem, than with the tone of Facebook.

A sense of irony, similar to Austen's, comes from the co-narrators: the Facebook users. Boyd explains in her article *WhyYouthHeart* (10) how first time users of social networking sites study the Profiles of other members to learn the desired and acceptable social presentations and behaviours from them. The preferred tone used on Facebook by a social group is determined by that same social group. Often an ironic twist is given on Facebook's proper voice (this will be explained further in the characterization techniques), resulting in comic effect. Marwick refers to such users as 'Authentic Ironic'. She explains that such users are "*generally* performing as themselves, but use sarcasm, irony, or satire as a modifying strategy," by for example uploading a picture of a celebrity as their profile picture, but in the rest of their information, they do not try to be that celebrity ("I'm a lot more interesting" 19).

Austen's great skill was in writing the brilliant dialogues between her characters, and this was also her main characterization method. As neither Facebook nor its co-narrators have the same writing genius, its dialogues are hardly ever as insightful, witty and clever.

Facebook dictates a third person writing style, which similarly to Austen, makes the voice of the implied author less obtrusive, and creates a distance between the reader and the characters, so that readers can see the character more objectively, and it allows the implied author to add other points of view, as in the Comment prompt (fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Third person writing style

Next, the novelistic characterization techniques, as defined by Rimmon-Kenan, will be used to explain characterization techniques on Facebook.

Direct definition

Facebook gives users the opportunity of direct definition under the Profile Info section. 'Info' is divided into four sections: 'Basic Information' (demographic information), 'Personal Information' (interests etc), 'Contact Information' and 'Education and Work'.

Under 'Basic Information' the first field is 'Networks': this is the first opportunity for an affiliation with an institution. Most users pick their country as their Network (so Network becomes indicative of nationality) others are more specific and enter their school, university or employer. Immediately this gives someone a social context. The next field is 'Sex'. Boyd talks about the limitations of this field: the options are simply 'male' or 'female,' which does not allow for transgender people to classify themselves, for example. Boyd says that the ideal of the 1990s, that academics like Turkle hoped for, "of life online as a way to transcend physical identity and marked bodies" has been forgotten ("Sexing the Internet" 4). Convention is the norm. Of course one is not asked to declare one's race, but this will be evident

from the Name, Profile picture, and even Friends list. The next field is 'Birthday' (fig. 7). One can choose to give only the day of the month (if you're old enough not to want people to know how old you are) or the date and year. From a birth date one can deduct the star sign, which provides ample astrological information with which to analyse peoples' personalities. After 'Birthday' comes 'Hometown', where one can also enter 'Home Neighbourhood', this of course indicates where one lives, which is a very easy way to start identifying social class.

Next is 'Relationship Status'. This is possibly the field that attracts the most attention from users. Again, the options here are pre-defined by Facebook: one can select 'Single'; 'In a Relationship'; 'Engaged'; 'Married'; 'It's Complicated'; or 'In an Open Relationship'. If one selects 'In a Relationship'; 'Engaged'; or 'Married'; one is given the option of entering one's partner's name, and Facebook will then contact them to confirm that this relationship claim is indeed true. Imaginary partners or untrue claims on a partner are strongly disapproved of by this author (fig. 7)! Judith Butler mentions relationships that fall outside of the conventional:

> …people who are on their own without sexual relationships, single mothers or single fathers, people who have undergone divorce, people that are in relationships that are not marital in kind or in status, other lesbian, gay and transgender people whose sexual relations are multiple (which does not mean unsafe), whose lives are not monogamous, whose sexuality and desire do not have the conjugal home as their (primary) venue, whose lives are considered less real or less legitimate, who inhabit the more shadowy regions of social reality. (Butler, Laclau and Zizek, 176)

How are the people described in this quote supposed to complete "Relationship Status" truthfully? All of the above kinds of relationships could perhaps be described by either 'Single'; 'It's Complicated'; or 'In an Open Relationship' but these definitions are problematic and ideologically laden; for example, would polygamy necessarily be 'complicated'? The term 'Open Relationship' connotes stigmatised suburban 'swinging' rather than giving someone on option that is free from judgment.

Facebook readers judge users by their Relationship Status. (Think of the many Profile pictures that show people together with their (heterosexual) partners.) To be 'in a relationship', even better with a defined and traceable Facebook partner, is the ideal. This is evident because many singles would rather skip this field altogether than enter 'single'. Interestingly enough being in a relationship was also the ideal in Jane Austen's world, think of the way Miss Bates is ridiculed as a poor old maid in *Emma.*

In the box 'Interested In' one can either tick 'Men' or 'Women' (fig. 7). This is a perfect example where users choose to subvert the implied author's voice. Facebook has intended this field to designate sexual preference, but have piously called it 'Interested in'. Brave users with a sense of irony tick both options, which is technically more correct, as anyone with friendships with both sexes is, in the strict sense of the word, 'interested in' both. Of course ticking both is often interpreted by conventional users as indicating bisexuality.

'Looking For' is the field where a user can indicate what type of relationships they are looking for. The options are: 'Friendship'; 'Dating'; 'A Relationship'; and 'Networking'. Here one can tick one, several or all. The options are again an indication of a conservative author: 'Casual sex' has not been given as an option;

and since when is 'Friendship' not a relationship (fig. 7)? The last two fields are 'Political Views' and 'Religious Views'. Under both fields a long list of known religions and political affiliations are given, but one can also choose to script one's own. The moment Facebook allows for self-scripting, creative users use the opportunity to be witty and ironic. The Authentic Ironic girl (Marwick, "I'm a lot more interesting" 19) in the example I have included (fig. 7) states that her Religious Views are "I believe in love". The bottom line amongst the students I observed is that neither of these two fields is supposed to be taken too seriously.

The next section is called 'Personal Information'. Again Facebook gives guidelines as to what constitutes personal information: 'Activities'; 'Interests'; 'Favorite Music'; 'Favorite Movies'; 'Favorite Books'; 'Favorite Quotations'; and 'About Me' are the given fields here. So the defining specifics, according to Facebook, reside in Books, Movies, Music and Quotes. This is, as a young person, where, together with one's Photos, one can really write one's identity. Other than most of those in the 'Basic' section, the answers are not pre-determined to choose from. One can script one's own answers, at length and passionately (fig. 7), if one so wishes.

'Contact Information' is the next section. There has been much negative press on how contact information has been abused. Youth have been very well informed about this, (don't talk to strangers, don't tell them where you live) so that an e-mail address is the only information one will mostly find here (fig. 7).

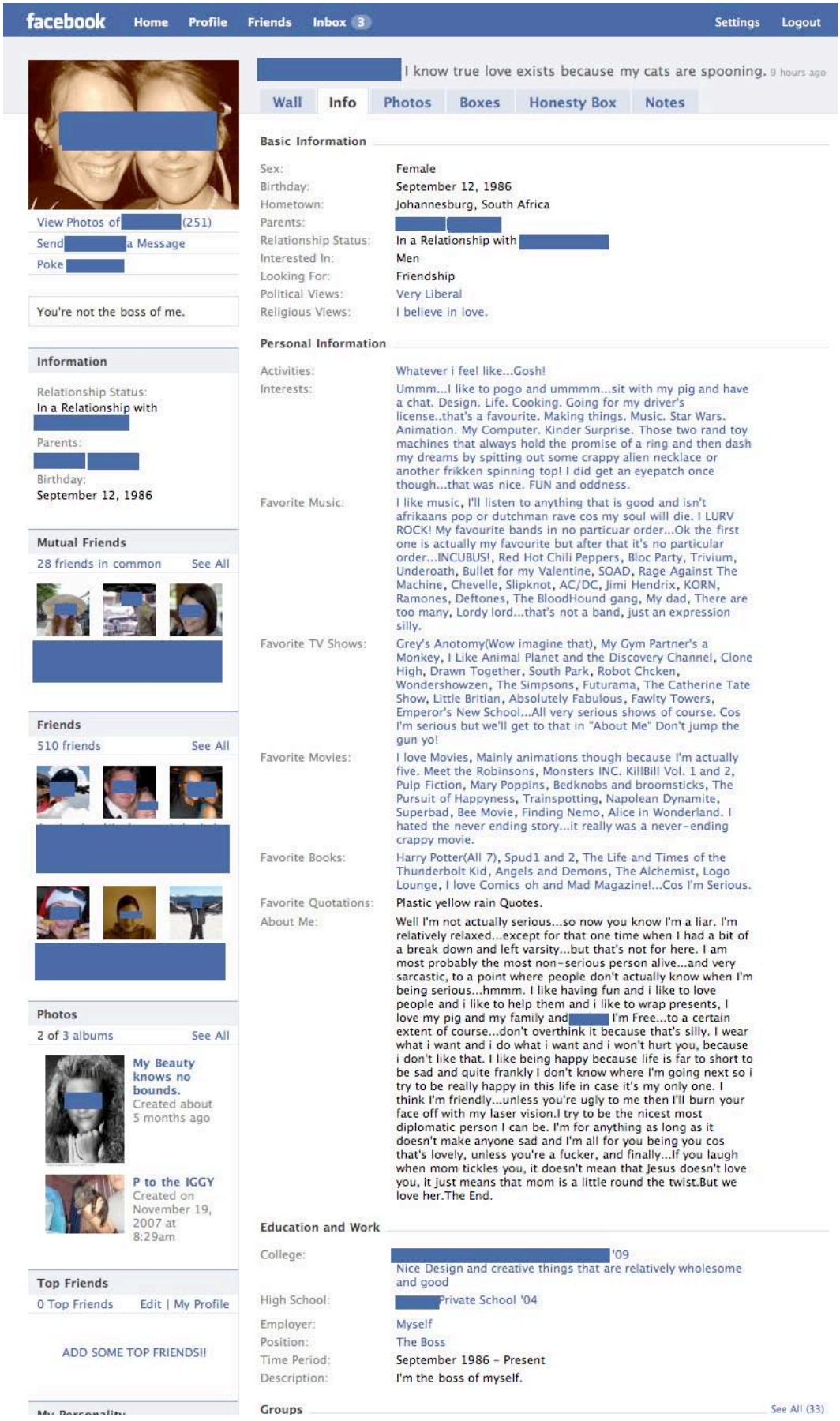


Fig. 7: Example of a Facebook Info page

The last section under 'Info' is 'Education and Work'. This section allows one to fill in all the schools one has ever attended, starting with pre-school. One is also prompted to fill in the qualifications received. One can add every single workplace where one has ever been employed including dates and positions held. This mini CV is indicative of Facebook's emphasis on enabling members to connect with old friends, but also of its heritage of traditional affiliations and norms such as educational institutions, company culture and being employed, ideally as a professional. The Authentic Ironic Girl in fig. 7 uses this section to be ironic: "I am the boss of myself", which becomes a theme for her page (it is also the final statement underneath her photograph).

As can be seen from this section Facebook offers its characters very conventional ways of direct definition: age; place of residence; sex; relationship status; education; and profession. This is the same information required on every official form one has to fill out, and on Facebook these fields mostly become clear indicators of social status.

Indirect presentation: Speech

The most prominent area where Facebook allows users to characterize themselves through speech is in on the Wall. A prominent field entitled 'What's on your mind' prompts one to share exactly this with all your Friends. This update will feature in the Friends stream of news, one can share updates all the time, although about once a day seems to be the norm in the group of students I am investigating. The updates always start with one's name and surname e.g. 'John Doe…is hung-over', 'John Doe party tonight', 'John Doe is missing his mommy' etc. As already mentioned, the fact that Facebook forces the statement in the third person mediates

the idea of 'character'. That every inane thought, feeling, action or intention, becomes published to an audience, very much encourages the sense of being a celebrity in one's own life. As Boyd explains, mediated publics take any public expression and make them hyper-public. She likens this to one's own version of a reality television show ("WhyYouthHeart," 22).

The Wall serves as a space to charm, to vent, to be honest, random, poetic, angry, unique and clever, although the norm is to keep it short. Friends have the opportunity to either Like or Dislike what's on your mind, as well as comment on it. If one has posted an update that is commented on extensively, one is either extremely popular, or has posted something really good. In fig. 8 one sees the positive response this endearing statement received. The statement makes the writer appear like a sweet and quirky girl. The Wall serves as a public narrative pertaining to a specific character: writing what's on one's mind and commenting on your Friends' updates. The other space where one can define one's character through speech is to comment on Friends' Photos. If one has a unique writing style, it will be evident in all of these short statements.



Fig. 8: Example of Wall post and Comments on it

Specific use of slang is also evident here, as is the use of emoticons (fig. 9). One has to choose wisely where and on what one comments. If one keeps on commenting on Photo albums that one is not included in, for example, it will make for a character who wants to be included in social activities but is not.



Fig. 9: Example of a Photo Comment

The other form of characterization through speech happens in private, when sending someone, or more than one person a private Message. No one can see to whom you send messages or who you have received messages from: this characterization is not aimed at an audience but at one person at a time. The accepted norm, even for private messages, is to keep it short and casual. Danah Boyd describes how people write private messages to each other in a public space, making arrangements to meet for example, knowing full well that all the Friends can see this, even though they are not involved in these arrangements ("WhyYouthHeart" 5). In my study of the students' Facebook behaviour, I found that Messages are not often used, which confirms Boyd's observation that arrangements are much rather made in public. These private interactions in public serve to demonstrate who the 'real' or 'close' Friends are, who you talk to and socialize with offline. It is a method of showing which other characters one is involved with and in which way.

Indirect presentation: Appearance

Profile pictures are almost always (depending on the user's privacy settings) the picture that the whole world can see on Facebook. If one searches a name, the Profile Photo will appear with the search result, or when one scrolls through peoples Friends Lists, the names and Profile Photos of the Friends are visible. Together with a person's name, this picture is their main identifier. The picture appears prominently at the top left of one's Profile page, and a mini version of the picture appears with all one's comments and actions in the News Stream. This photograph is carefully considered, as more often than not, judgments are made according to it. After all, old high school rivals and high school sweethearts, as well as potential new lovers, might see these photographs.

With photographs as the main form of characterization on Facebook, appearance has become much more important. I would argue even more so than offline, where one's appearance is supported by a body, movement, expression and a voice. One does not have to upload a photograph of oneself in order to be on Facebook, in the absence of an uploaded picture, Facebook provides a generic placeholder, but having this generic placeholder is certainly not a good way to increase one's social capital. As already discussed, Facebook's design is very ordered and structured, and does not allow for much freedom of expression. The content of the photographs is one of the only places where one can be creative and make a visual impact.

One could also upload a photograph of a landscape or an avatar. This presents another opportunity for wit and irony, ('Authentic Ironics' as defined by Marwick and described earlier in this chapter); if a scrawny man uploads a photograph of a bodybuilder as his profile picture, for example. Creative people,

especially, seem to be more fluid in their presentation of appearance and tend to change their Profile Photos quite often. Extensive and playful Profile Photo albums are certainly not the norm on Facebook (one can view all the Profile Photos used, in the Profile Photo album.) Most users post a recent snapshot of themselves when they first join, and then stick with it. Changing photographs often and using interesting ideas, poses and effects, is where one can really develop one's character.



Fig. 10: Profile pictures

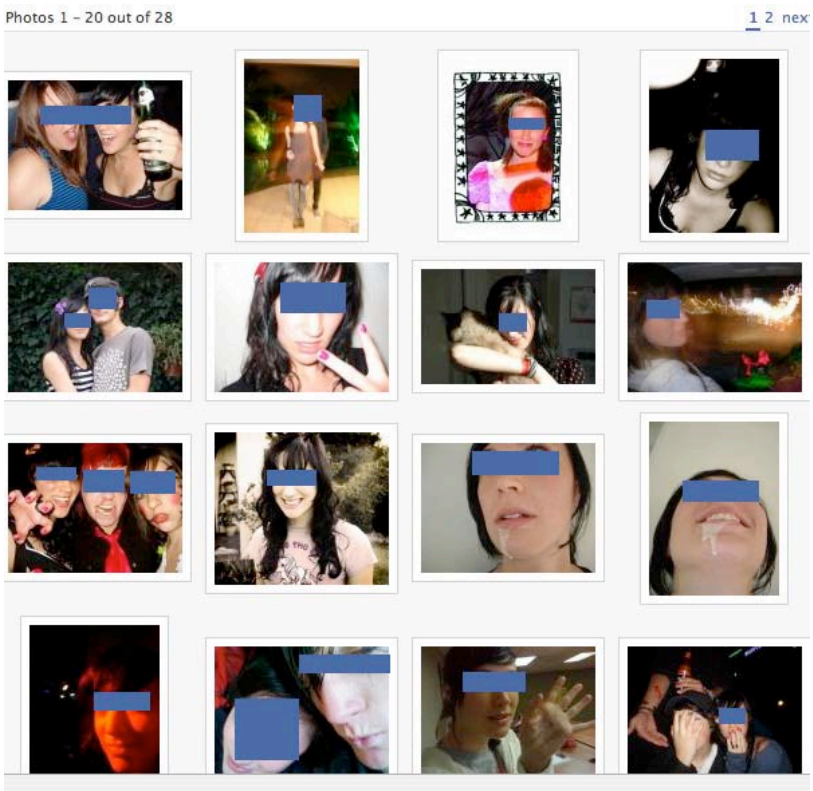


Fig. 11: Profile pictures of student

Compare the three Profile Photos in fig. 10 with the first twenty out of twenty-eight in fig. 11. In fig. 10 the photographs are standard family and portrait photographs, where in fig. 11 the character experiments with her Profile picture quite a lot, for example uploading different poses of the same situation.

One's own Profile picture and other photographs that one uploads of oneself in one's Facebook Photo albums can be retouched and carefully composed, even if the end result looks spontaneous. One is in control of one's character's appearance. This is not the case with the photographs that other people upload and tag of one. Entire dialogues evolve about Facebook tagging: "Please take that picture of me off Facebook, I look so fat" etc. Tamar Weinberg suggests that good Facebook etiquette requires not "…tagging individuals in unflattering pictures that may end up costing your friends their jobs. Avoid the unnecessary commentary also, especially on your childhood pictures that portray your tagged friends as chubby and not so popular. Further, if your friends request to be untagged, don't make a stink of it" ("The Ultimate Social Media"). This clearly shows that looking attractive on Facebook is of the utmost importance.

Indirect presentation: Action

On Facebook one can characterize oneself with actions in two ways. Firstly, one's online actions, e.g., sending digital gifts (drinks, such as beer and cocktails, hugs, tattoos, cupcakes, shoes, flowers, or even eggs that hatch into kittens over time, can be sent to Friends), or using Facebook applications such as games. Both can be done privately or publicly. In my experience on Facebook, digital gift giving seems to go through phases. In the beginning the throwing of sheep at each other

was popular, then there was a phase when everyone was playing Scrabulous (the Facebook version of Scrabble).

One chooses digital gifts as carefully as one would a physical gift, and the emotions that are evoked on receiving such a digital gift are much the same as in 'real' life even though one cannot consume the gift in the same way. One can choose to have the gifts and other digital objects one has been sent displayed on one's Profile, like trophies (fig. 12). These days gifts that simulate real life gifts or even gifts such as an interesting website link, or YouTube movie, are displayed on the Wall. The character that sent the kitten and chocolate cake is clearly very different from the character that sent the girls kissing (fig. 13).

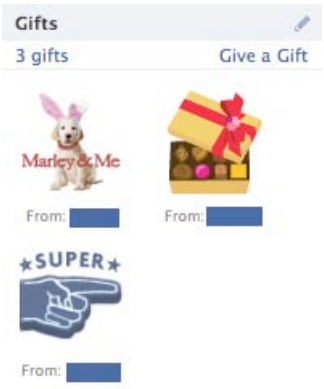


Fig 12: Digital gifts



Fig 13: Digital gifts displayed on the Wall

The giving of gifts is also a prominent action and indication of character in *Emma*, think of the fuss that is made of the piano that Jane Fairfax receives from a

secret benefactor, the apples Mr. Knightley sends to the Bates or Emma's sending them pork.

The second, much more powerful way of characterization by action is by the displaying of evidence of one's offline actions. A prominent and important Facebook application is 'Events'. This is used to invite people to mostly offline events. One can see exactly who else has been invited to the Event, and who will be there if they have RSVP'd. If one has RSVP'd that one will be attending, one can choose to publish it to ones Profile and so the News Stream. This is one way in which offline social activities are tracked. Even more ideal is when Friends upload photographs of one attending parties or other desirable events and tagging one in them. Susan Sontag declared: "Photographs furnish instant history, instant sociology, instant participation" (75). Nowhere is this truer than on Facebook. A user's Photos, (a collection of online Photo albums) creates 'instant history'. 'Instant society' is created by who is captured in the photographs and where, and 'instant participation' by the ability that all the Friends have to comment on the photographs even if they were not part of the moment captured.

On Facebook everyone becomes a published photographer, especially of the society variety. There has never been such a proliferation of photographs of people having a good time with their friends to gaze at. Most of these photographs are taken with a digital or cellphone camera. The casual snapshot has become an art form: it is a skill to take trendy-looking party pictures of one's Friends at events for Facebook. A gathering is not deemed a gathering any more until it has been recorded and uploaded onto Facebook. What is happenings at the actual event seems less important: announcements, speeches, or conversing with other attendees play second fiddle to posing and photographing your Friends for Facebook. It is as if the

event is only affirmed by being published on Facebook when the extended Friends group has seen and commented on the photographs.

The way the offline actions are photographed often make them seem a lot more interesting and exciting than they really were, much in the same way as Austen would make a simple walk appear exciting in the way she composes it in words.

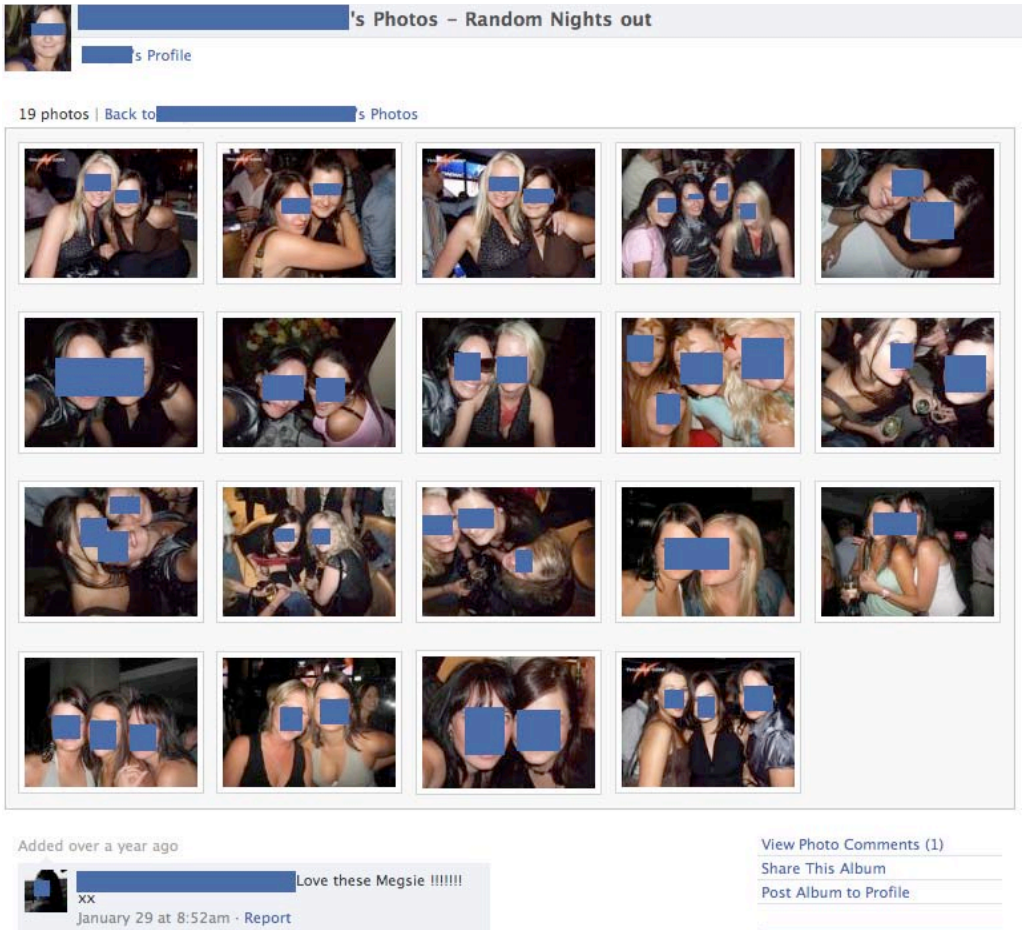


Fig. 14: Party photographs

Fig. 14 is an example of a Photo album the character has named "Random Nights out". It consists of photographs of her and her girlfriends at several venues having drinks, normal behaviour for single working girls. The photographs are carefully posed and composed to make cocktail nights appear to be the most fun that

is to be had, with everyone looking as attractive and desirable as possible. The final touch is the approving comment from a Friend at the bottom.

Like a status update, a Photo that elicits a Comment is more successful than a Photo that does not. The Facebook Photo album has become a personal version of the society page in a glossy magazine, where oneself and one's Friends have become the main characters and can comment on the good times, and good looks.

Indirect presentation: Environment

Rimmon-Kenan explains that "A character's physical surrounding (room, house, street, town) as well as his human environment (family, social class) are also often used as trait-connoting metonymies" (66). Similarly to characterization through action, characterization through the depiction of environment happens mostly through the photographs one uploads. Of course declaring one's Network, Hometown, and place of study and work does give an indication of one's environment, but these statements are certainly not as prosaic as being depicted at a party at a glamorous or exotic venue together with attractive and desirable friends. Sontag says about photographs: "They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of information. Photography has become the quintessential art of affluent, wasteful, restless societies – an indispensable tool of the new mass culture…" (69).

In fig. 15 the Photos of two different characters are shown. One can deduct from the environment in the top set that this character is well educated and socializes with other smart young people in stylish bars and on ski-boats. The bottom set shows yoga at a beach in Goa (Photo album title) together with other yoga-enthusiasts. One can also gather from the album titles that this character is a vegan animal-lover. Even though from the environments depicted

in these Photos it is evident that the characters are significantly different, both sets of Photos contain "pellets' of information and much fantasy, and both are evidence of the affluence and restlessness that Sontag describes.

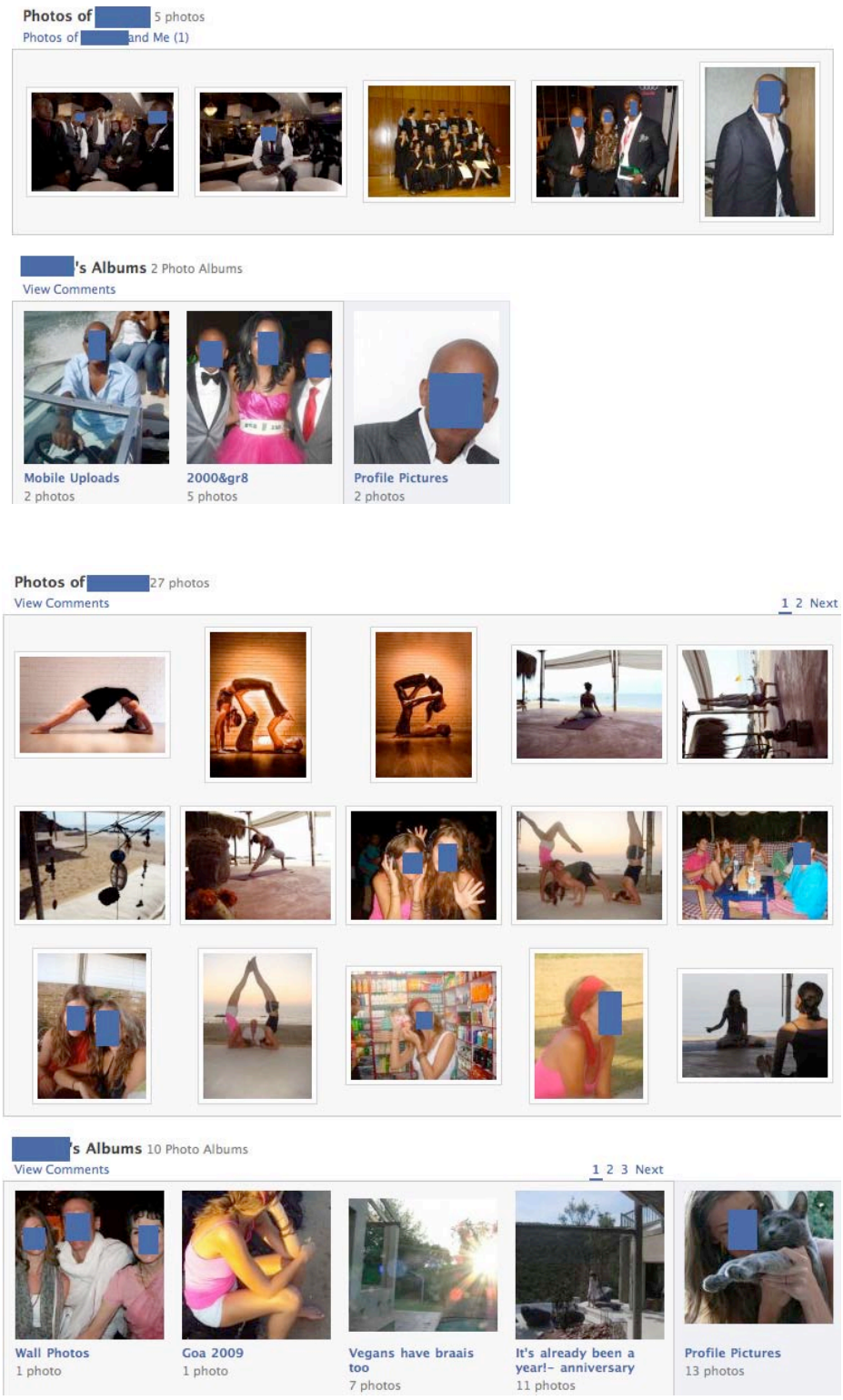


Fig. 15: Two Photo albums showing two characters in completely different environments

Analogous characters

Characterization through analogous characters is of extreme importance on Facebook. One is known absolutely by one's Friends list. Boyd finds this as well in her study of My Space: "…people judge others based on their associations: group identities form around and are reinforced by the collective tastes and attitudes of those who identify with the group" ("WhyYouthHeart" 13). Analogous characters are not necessarily close friends, as Lewis and West observe: "Facebook Friends may run the gamut between close relationships and very distant and/or weak acquaintances" (1211).

As explained before, if someone is searching for someone, the information they can normally see (i.e. the 'normal' privacy settings) is one's name, profile picture, and list of Friends. By simply scrolling down someone's Friends list (pictures and names) one can immediately gage what kind of character he or she is. I have found that social capital is determined by the number of Friends on one's Friend list, who those Friends are, (the quality of your Friends) and how these Friends interact with one on Facebook, how many pictures of one are posted and tagged, how many Wall posts one gets from Friends and what the content of those Wall posts are (Friends commenting on one's having been at a good party, or coercing one to come to these events, are good Wall posts to have, for example.) From the Wall post shown in fig. 16 one can clearly see that it is not ideal if no one writes on one's Wall.



Fig. 16: Wall post

The number of one's Friends is significant. In my observation of the students I found that anything below 150 is not recommended, 300 - 400 is ideal. (Similar numbers are reported by the Lewis & West study). Rosenbloom announces that research has shown "that while people perceive someone who has a high number of friends as popular, attractive and self-confident, people who accumulate "too many" friends (about 800 or more) are seen as insecure" ("On Facebook, Scholars"). The Facebook interaction design prompts that Friends should be recommended to each other. One would get a notification stating that 'Joe Doe' has recommended 'Jane Smith' as a Friend. If one esteems the friend that has made the recommendation one would normally act on the recommendation and send a Friend Request to the recommended person. If matchmaking were to be made between strangers this would probably be the most obvious way to start.

Boyd explains that one of the attractions of social networking sites for teenagers is the "ability to visualize their social world through the networked collection of profiles" ("WhyYouthHeart" 4). Facebook facilitates this neat visualization by making it possible for users to organise Friends into different groupings. Facebook also keeps on prompting users to reconnect with their Friends (fig. 17). This author prompts its characters to interact with as many other characters as possible.



Fig. 17: Facebook suggest a reconnection

If one obtains a new Friend, it is publicly declared on ones Profile. 'Jane Smith' is now Friends with whomever. Losing a Friend is silent, one does not get

notified that one has been deleted, and it is not stated on the Profile or on the News Feed. One notices only by the number of Friends: one had 85, now there are only 84. If the number of Friends becomes vast, and one regularly receives friend requests, and do not keep track of the number of one's Friends, losing a Friend can go unnoticed. Or alternatively, with a vast number of Friends, one can tell the number has diminished, but cannot begin to tell who has been lost amongst the hundreds.

Even so, deleting a Friend is not lightly done. One has to be deeply offended by something said or done either in 'real' life or on Facebook. To 'Block' someone is even worse. This is done when you think that their intentions are harmful or if you are scared. 'Blocking' someone will appear to the person blocked as if one has disappeared off Facebook completely, they will not be able to search you, or find you through mutual Friends Lists. If one receives a Friend request that one ignores (as opposed to accepting it) one is immediately given the option to Block or Report that person, as if ignoring a friend request clearly signifies that there is something seriously wrong with that person. Lewis and West also report that the "whole etiquette of 'friending' and the possibility of 'de-freinding' or 'un-friending' on Facebook was an issue for most of the respondents" (1220).

As explained in previous sections, the closest analogous characters are the Friends whom one appears with in Photo albums. It is interesting that users often select Profile Photos that portray them either with a Friend, having a good time, or with their partner, so that this information is first and foremost proclaimed. These are the offline friends, and more often than not, people that are photographed together will have the same look, dress the same, and pose the same. Fig. 18 is an example of a student who has chosen a profile picture of herself with a friend. One can see

from this how important analogous characters are deemed to be. It is clear from the Profile picture and the photographs of the friends on the Friends list, that her friends are mostly female, about the same age, wear the same type of clothes and like the same kind of photographs of themselves.



Fig. 18: Profile Photo and the beginning of a Friends list.

Often, as in novels, the ultimate analogous character is one's partner, who is declared in the Relationship Status, and to whose Profile one can significantly hyperlink. Stephanie Rosenbloom reports how a Facebook user declared: "One isn't dating until it's on Facebook." ("On Facebook, Scholars").

Reinforced characterization: analogous names

The title of one's Facebook is always a proper name, or an alias, which sounds like a proper name. The name and the surname are important because they

make one searchable. Searchability is one of the four properties that Danah Boyd argues makes networked publics different from face-to-face public life ("WhyYouthHeart" 2). Often users will include their maiden name in their Facebook title even if it is not still legally theirs, just to make themselves 'findable' by old friends (fig. 19). On the other hand, the use of an alias makes one not so findable, except by people 'in the know' (fig. 20). In summary, the choice of one's book title can either make the book more or less available for reading by the public.

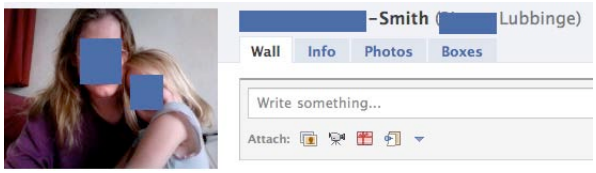


Fig. 19: The grey writing after the black writing declares the maiden name



Fig 20: A pseudonym as a proper name and an illustration used for a profile picture

Complexity

A complex character is one that is not a stereotype or a caricature, but one that has many different facets and traits, which can sometimes be contradictory and unexpected (Rimmon-Kenan 40 - 41). One can characterize oneself as a stereotype on Facebook, by always looking the same in every photograph, being photographed at events with the same people, only having Friends from one sphere of life, for example work, and only having one kind of discourse on one's Wall, for example complaining about work pressures.

Alternatively one can portray oneself as complex. This means having Friends from different spheres and stages of life: having photographs showing one in different environments, with different people, engaged in a variety of activities. In fig. 21 one can see that this character has photographs with family and friends, both individuals and groups taken in different styles and at different locations. She poses differently in all of them. A complex character's Wall posts are varied in tone and subject matter, and do not always engage the same people. Fig. 21 shows three Wall posts all concerning different subject matter. Each of the Wall posts elicited comments from different people. In addition the direct definition or Info should be honest and unique, and not writing what one thinks is expected by the idealized audience.



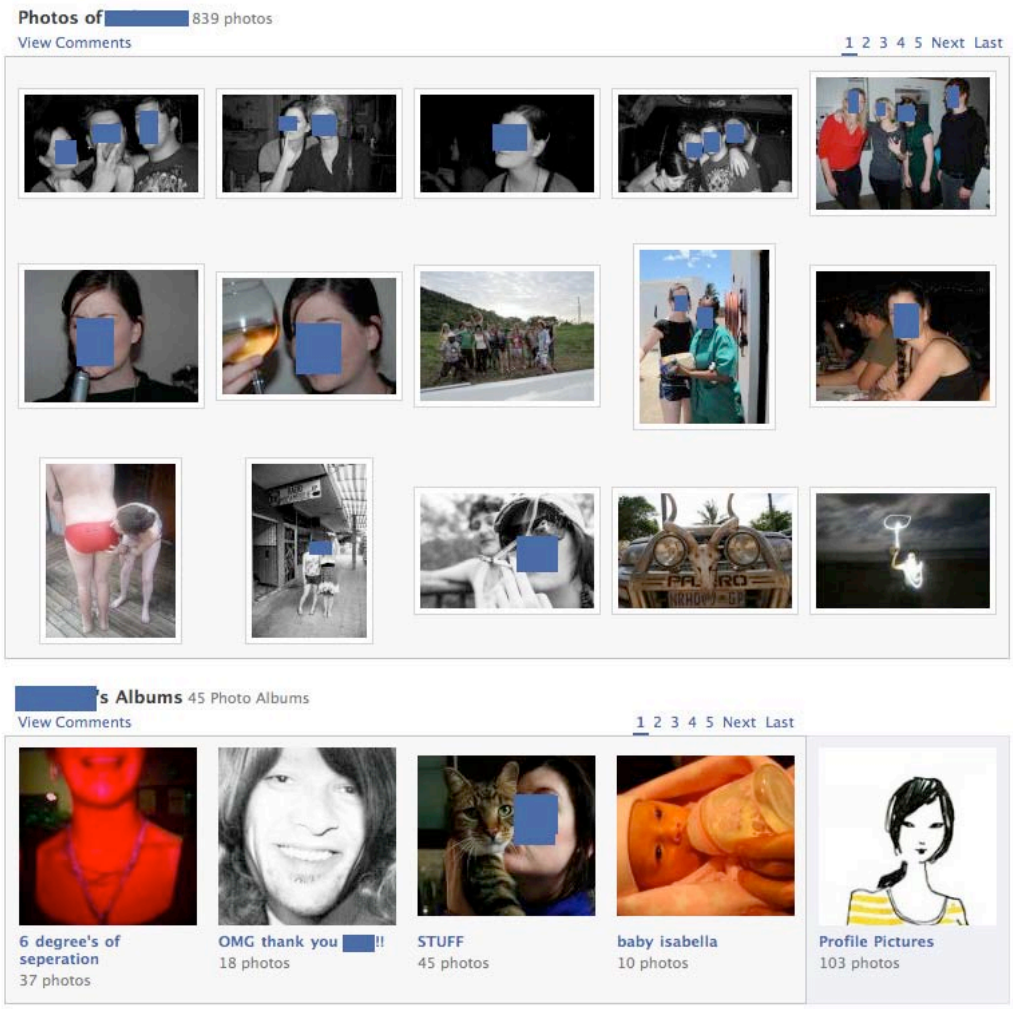


Fig. 21: The Wall and Photos of a complex character

Development

A developed character is one that has undergone growth or change of some sort, as opposed to remaining static. One's development as a character on Facebook is dependant on the time one has been active on Facebook.

In some instances, this character development is evidenced in how relationships with other characters grow or change. The novel *Emma* might take two days to read, but in the book, the relationship between Emma and Mr. Knightley develops over the period of a year. Sherry Turkle has researched and written much about the development of people's relationships online and compares friendships

online with friendship in the 'real' world. She says "technology has made it possible to have the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship" ("How computers change" *n. pag*). Writing about MUD's in the 1990s she says: "like other meeting places, (they) can breed a kind of easy intimacy... MUD players feel the excitement of a rapidly deepening relationship..." ("Life on the screen" 206). She found that online, relationships seem to develop in a more condensed time frame.

I find that exactly the same occurs on Facebook as it did on the MUD's: one might have a spurt of quite serious private messaging or less serious Wall flirting with someone that seems to build up to an intimate friendship or romantic relationship, which all of sudden dissipates as if nothing ever happened. I have spoken to some disillusioned users who thought that a real relationship had been forged, and might have invested some time in composing and typing messages or sending gifts, only to find after a couple of days, or at the most weeks, that it was indeed only an illusion.

Not only do relationships develop and dissolve faster, but in my experience every Facebook action also has a sense of nonchalance to it. Lewis & West conclude that Facebook is for "broad, low pressure and low commitment communication" and a "fun and not serious" supplement to other communication (1223). Events may be RSVP'd to, but this is also not taken seriously if not backed up by an offline invitation. Some time ago one of my students only had four guests arrive for her twenty-first birthday party, after she had invited about forty friends to it on Facebook. Her friends told me afterwards that if she had really wanted them to come, she would have text messaged or e-mailed them, or asked them in person. This anecdote supports the view that Facebook is indeed a work of fiction, as the readers treated the invitation as fictional, if it were 'real' or 'serious', another method

of invitation would have been used. I have noticed that users do still create their Events on Facebook but then make it a 'real' invitation by talking about it offline.

Other ways to track a character's development on Facebook rather than the sometimes treacherous relationships with other characters, is in the history of a person's Wall posts: this is the textual expression of their narrative. However, I find that the student's status updates, comments and Facebook activities are often quite random and thoughtless, and perhaps not an honest reflection of their character's development. To me a more truthful way of tracking someone's development is by looking at his or her Photo albums. A developed character will have created several Photo albums over time. From this one can see whom they dated and socialized with, how their hair and fashion styles have changed, how they have come to prefer one type of activity above the next, and get a sense of their emotion in the photographs. As Sontag says: "photos provide instant history" (75).

In fig. 22 one can see the various Profile pictures this character has chosen over about a two-year time frame. The first picture is at the bottom right, the latest one at the top left. She started out by posting pictures of her sticking her tongue out at a rugby game or lying on a bed surrounded by empty beer bottles, then progressed to clichéd 'model' poses, then to experimenting with different creative software effects, to lately choosing a well-styled studio shot, interestingly posed and cropped. Not only is her development as a person evident, but also her development as an art director.

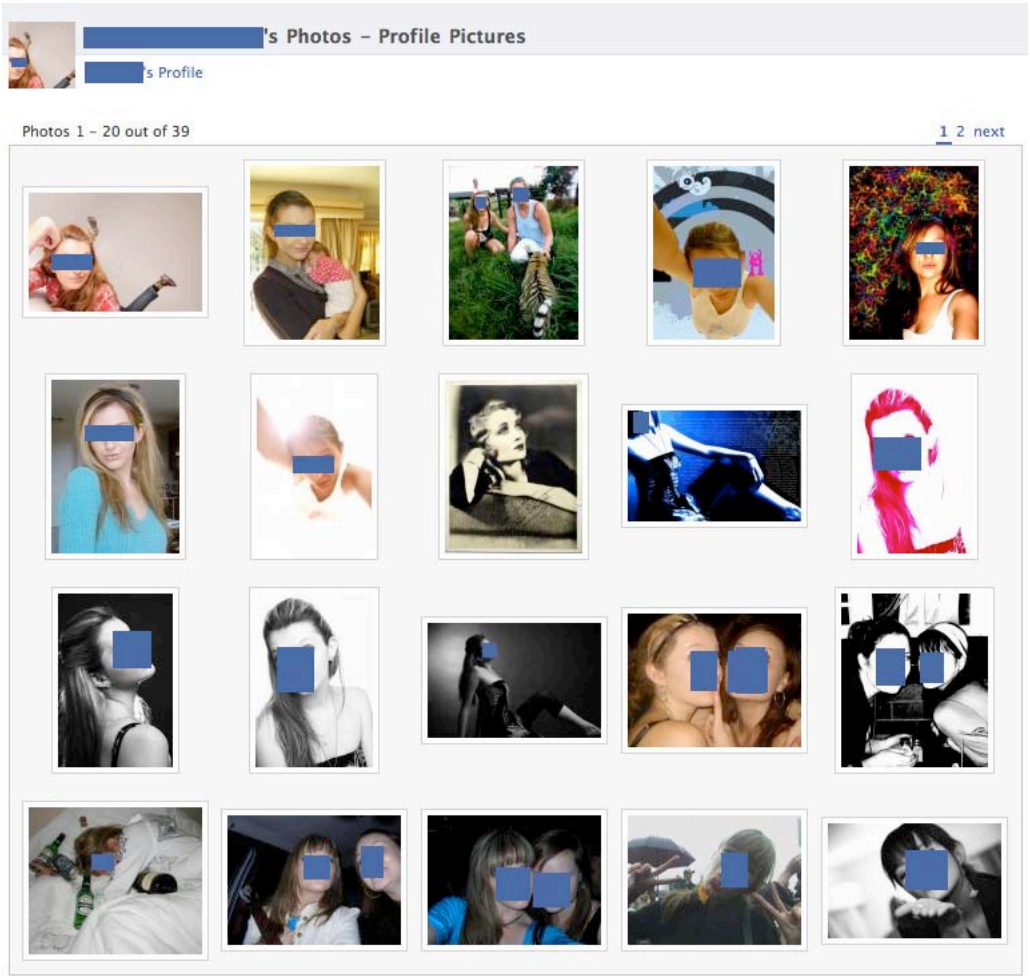


Fig. 22: A history of Profile pictures over about two years

Penetration into 'inner life'

Rimmon-Kenan means that a representation of a character's 'inner life' is for example a character whose "consciousness is presented from within" (42). Sherry Turkle says in her first book, *The Second Self*, written in 1984: "We are insecure in our understanding of ourselves, and this insecurity breeds a new preoccupation with the question of who we are. We search for ways to see ourselves. The computer is a new mirror, the first psychological machine" ("The second self" 306). I believe that shaping oneself as a character on Facebook gives one an opportunity to see oneself in a better or more attractive way.

Facebook as an implied author demands that its characters reveal what is on their minds and that they share this (fig. 23). The Wall prompt appears both at the top of the News Feed and on one's Profile page, so it's very hard to ignore.

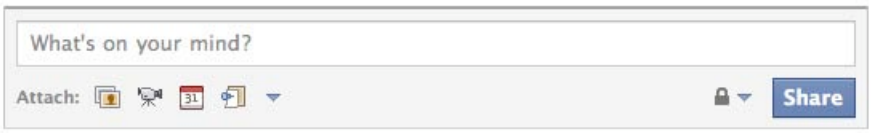


Fig. 23: Wall post prompt

Sharing what is on one's mind results in the Wall, the News Feed, and comment-conversations. This is where 'inner life' could be revealed, but as I have already stated under the 'complexity' section, it seems that these status updates are used more for superficial comments, complaining, celebrating and announcements to Friends. Of course all of these account for "What's on your mind", but not in a thoughtful sense.

Underneath the Profile Photo there is an additional field that asks one to "write something about yourself" (fig. 24). Again the implied author is demanding the portrayal of an "inner life". It seems to me that the statements in this field remain for much longer than Wall posts, which are constantly updated, and users seem to put a lot more thought into what they say in this field.



Fig. 24: Another prompt to reveal one's 'inner life'

In fig. 25 one can see that this character is making fun, in his unique lingo, of revealing and meaningful statements in both the Wall posts (I wish I were a microwave, deep freezer, pair of sandals) and the statement below the Profile picture ("these stupid irrelivent (sic) things…, my friends know me and my money"). The statements, even though being "random shit" as his friend calls them, do reveal some true concerns: "Maintaining a life is hard work. Someone better start paying me". The character shown in fig. 21 revealed significant contrast in the content of the Wall posts (two minute noodles and looking forward to camera experimentation) versus the statement below the Profile picture, which was considered.



Fig. 25: Wall post and Something about yourself

In this chapter I have sketched the history and development of Facebook so far, and described how users imagine an ideal audience for themselves. I have also shown how Facebook narratives, (in a manner similar to Austen's), even if fictional, have to be written to seem realistic. I have also investigated the similarities and

differences between Austen and Facebook as implied authors. The similarities are their focus on the character within a social context; events that are the result of characters' actions; and the focus on a character's self-knowledge. Both employ third person narration; interplay the voice of an implied author with that of a character; and control their reader's involvement with the character. They both anticipate the reader's understanding, participation and use of imagination, and favour brevity of textual description.

The differences between them are that whereas Austen's implied author and characters have a similar voice, on Facebook they do not. Austen uses much subtle irony, which is absent in Facebook's voice and is left up to its individual co-narrators if they so choose. I have also shown, through the use of examples, how Facebook uses the novelistic characterization techniques defined by Rimmon-Kenan. However, Austen's main characterization happens through dialogue, and she focuses on her main character's development and inner life; Facebook's co-narrators and characters prefer to define themselves by appearances, events and analogous friends, using mainly photographs.

Chapter 3

Facebook characterization techniques as used by the case study 'Emma^{FB}.'

In this chapter I will be studying the Facebook Profile of a student, Emma^{FB}, to show how she has turned herself into a character. Over the last few months, I have established a relationship with this student, and we have had many informal discussions about her Facebook usage. I also conducted a formal, recorded interview with her to probe certain of her behaviours on Facebook, and during the course of this interview we looked at her Facebook pages together.

Emma^{FB} remembers first joining Facebook in high school, in about Grade 10/11 (2005/2006), because all her friends were joining, and it was "cool" and if you "weren't it wasn't cool"(sic). Her parents at that time were worried about people online obtaining private information about her, so she struggled to get their permission. This corresponds with the findings of the Lewis and West study, conducted with sixteen London undergraduate students, in which all of them admitted to joining Facebook because of peer group pressure (1214).

Emma^{FB} is not on any other social networking sites. She selected Facebook specifically because that was what her friends were joining. She did have a look at MySpace but found the interface very confusing ("don't know how it works"). She finds Facebook's interface straightforward and structured and so she feels confident in negotiating her way around it. She does not "do" Twitter, which is very status update based. She never "puts up statutes" on Facebook, because she thinks they're "weird" and she does not know what to say. Because Twitter is all about statuses, it does not appeal to her ("I really don't mind what you're doing every five

seconds of your day!"). She does find other peoples statuses on Facebook interesting, and enjoys reading them. Because status updates for this group rely very much on expressing oneself verbally in preferably an original and witty way, it seems as if Emma^{FB} steers away from status updates because she is insecure about expressing herself in this manner. Because of Austen's superb writing skills and own wit, her character 'Emma' was every self-assured and witty in her verbal expressions.

Emma^{FB} in contrast to the novelistic version, is quite a disciplined student, so during the semester only logs onto Facebook sporadically. In fact, when I first approached her to be my case study, she was worried that she was not active enough on Facebook to fulfil the requirements of my research. During exam and holiday times she finds herself logging on several times a day. This behaviour matches that of the London students, who logged on more whilst working at boring holiday jobs and during examination periods when Facebook became a "displacement activity" (Lewis and West 1213).

She explains that her previous boyfriend had 'issues' with Facebook, so while they were dating, she never logged on. She says that since their break-up she is learning to use Facebook more "effectively", for example "checking out" her friends in Cape Town.

Emma^{FB} logs onto Facebook from her study, and explains that when she logs onto the Internet for work purposes she always goes onto Facebook and then forgets to do anything else because Facebook is more interesting. When asked if she enjoyed being on Facebook; she was unsure of the answer. She finally replied that "it's fun stalking friends who you haven't seen in a while, but its weird, it becomes this obsessive weird thing when you're always on it, there's nothing to do and there's

no point to being on, you're just sitting there back on Facebook again, it's a bit weird".

This answer reflects the habit-forming, addictive and immersive qualities that have been connoted to Internet usage: "…pictures have reached an unprecedented level of immersivity, … But electronic technology can prevent this heat from frying up the brain by making the visual image more interactive" (Ryan 348).

Interestingly enough the London students also refer to checking up on friends as 'stalking' (Lewis and West 1215), and have a similarly ambivalent attitude to their activity on Facebook: not wanting to come across as spending too much time on it; or being dismissive of certain features, but then still using it; or associating feelings ranging from guilt to 'quite fun' to their Facebook experiences (Lewis and West 1216).

Next I asked her if she thought her Facebook was an accurate reflection of who she was: "I don't think so, it's very superficial. I wouldn't have personal, personal conversations over the Wall. Maybe in the pictures, they can see what you're doing, but a picture also isn't always a true representation". I think it will be evident further on that she has chosen, perhaps inadvertently, not to make her Facebook character an accurate reflection of her offline self.

Info

Emma^{FB} does not convey anything about herself on the Info page (fig. 26) except her birthday, (without the year) and her sex. In addition, there is an e-mail address, the Groups she belongs to, and the Pages she's linked to. Groups[4] are quite non-committal, it does not say much about one's character except that one is too polite to refuse invitations to join Groups. She explains that most of the Groups

are because of a Vega project, where one had to create Groups and solicit members. The two Pages[4] are for a popular beauty salon chain, and a popular South African band, which could infer that she is well groomed and likes Goldfish (there is a photograph of her on Facebook tagged dancing at a Goldfish concert).

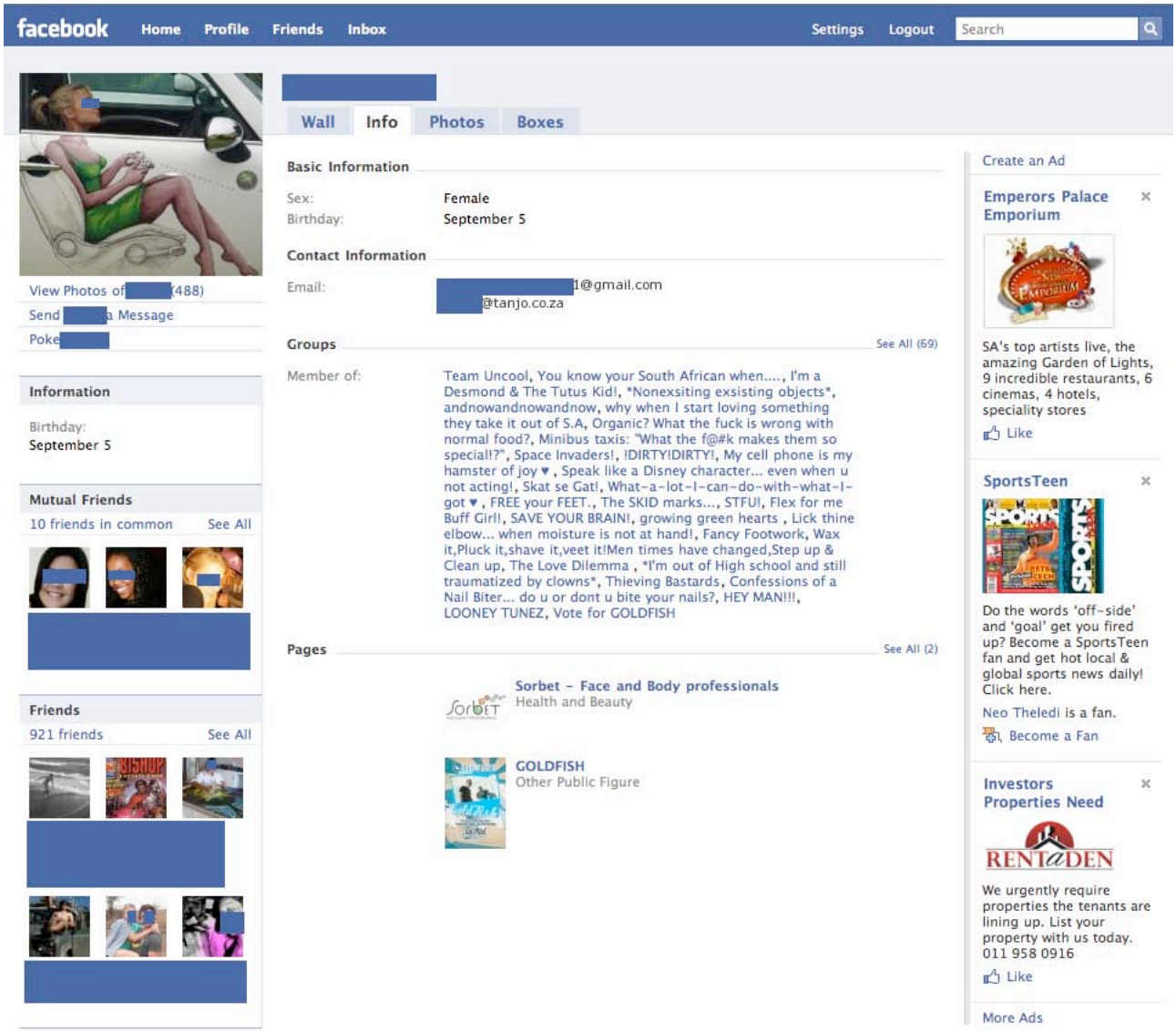


Fig. 26: Emma[FB]'s Info

She explains that initially she did not put up any Info as her parents advised her to have as little information about herself as possible on Facebook, but that she still has limited Info as she is also quite private (one of the London students also had

to be made aware of privacy issues and the extent of a possible audience by a parent (Lewis and West 1221)). I asked her if she had any favourite books or bands that she could communicate if she so wished, but she did not answer this question. Some of the London students also opted for "a more minimalist approach because they disliked the impression it conveyed", they did not want to come across as publicising themselves. (Lewis and West 1222). As explained in Chapter 2, Info is where one could establish some complexity and depth of character, and to be able to do this, one must be able to establish and articulate some likes, dislikes and opinions. Perhaps Emma^{FB} is again unsure of how to write herself into character using Info. On the other hand, she might have a sense, like the London girl, that too much direct definition amounts to a too obvious advertisement of oneself.

Why sex and birthday and nothing else?

She laughingly admits to revealing her birth date because she wants to get birthday messages. She had ignored the 'sex' field for some time, but when she added the Honesty Box application (fig. 31) where sex is proclaimed by colour, as 'sexless' she came up as a black strip, by this everyone knew which comments came from her, as she was the only 'sexless' person! Interestingly she does not declare her Relationship Status, even though she is currently in a relationship. For many of her peers, updating this field is one of the first things they do when they start dating someone, including changing their Profile picture to one portraying them as a couple. It is possible that contrary to her friends, Emma^{FB} does not want to characterize herself too conspicuously as someone to whom it is important to be in a relationship. Austen, who herself was never engaged or married, portrays her views on marriage in the characterization of her heroines like Emma: for most of the

narrative in the novel, Emma is proudly the ultimate single girl: Austen has ascribed her a fortune and therefore the rare privilege not to *need* to get married.

Have you ever looked at a Friend's Info and found out something about them you never knew before? Did you look at your boyfriend's Info and Photos before or when you started dating?

She admits that she did read his Info, but did not learn anything she had not known before, she already knew him well enough. She does not trust Info: she thinks that people are not being completely honest, and are portraying themselves as something else here. "I don't really find that you get to know people on Facebook," she says, and continues to explain that especially in the art community people try so hard to be "arty", for example making a point of going to Newtown and not to FTV (a more main-stream club in the Northern Suburbs).

She tells me that she once read someone's description of himself that was along the lines of: "I'm a sporty South African boy with dark tanned skin and brown hair and brown eyes", she thought that sounded "so weird". From this I get the sense that she expects people's Info to be genuine, to correlate with who that person is offline. She does not like false or pretentious sounding Info, and would rather under-express her character than sound false or pretentious herself. The London students' views of this were mixed, some felt the need to present themselves in a positive way, and accepted that this sometimes included "jokey or false profiles", whilst others felt that "it would be embarrassing to misrepresent themselves" (Lewis and West 1223). The character Emma in the novel was very sure of her likes and dislikes, but had the good breeding not to proclaim these constantly like the ill-bred Mrs. Elton. I think that Emma^{FB} might agree that less Info is in better taste.

Wall

Emma[FB] proclaims that she only writes on close Friends' Walls. She never used to comment on statuses before but says that recently, fellow-students' statuses that she could relate to and that were humorous, have led her into commenting. She says she uses Walls more now because it is another way of interacting.



Fig. 27: Emma[FB]'s Wall, the first thing one sees when going to her profile

She explains that when she attends classes she does not always feel like socializing, she never "chills around at the canteen" for example, as she is in "work mode". She even prefers to go home for long lunch breaks. She likes sitting by herself in lectures, and gets irritated when people try and talk to her then.

I wonder that she can be so 'stand-offish' and yet so popular, as everyone is trying to be her friend. She firmly states that she only likes sitting with and interacting with her close friends, and not with their friends, and that she would not be nice to someone unless she really liked them. She mentions two girls that she dislikes and says that they "don't know private boundaries of people's like space and it frustrates me." She likes to have a bit of privacy, even when attending university. This part of the conversation starts to remind me very much of Austen's Emma who was very class conscious and particular about whom she socialised with, and liked people to behave correctly towards her. Because of her beauty, wealth and social status, she was a sought-after guest. Facebook gives Emma^{FB} a way to interact socially with the university friends of her choice, during a time that suits her.

Do you know what's written on your Wall at the moment?

Emma^{FB} has a good idea of what has been written on her Wall, she mentions the Wall posts from her boyfriend, a good family friend who lives in England, and another good friend who lives in Stellenbosch. I point out a post from her boyfriend (fig. 28, third post from the top) and ask if she minded him saying that ("hey grumpy worker" etc.) on the Wall (after all, she has mentioned the word 'private' so many times in the interview so far). She replies that she told him that she did not like the way he writes on her Wall. I question her as to why people write private things on the Wall instead of sending it to the Inbox, like invitations to private lunches. She seems quite perplexed by the question, but then admits that she does the same. She

explains that she wrote "miss you" on her boyfriend's Wall, hence the reply (fig. 27, fifth post from the top: "miss u too my babes"). Later on in the interview she explains that she does not mind her boyfriend being personal on her Wall per se, but that they had only been dating for two months, and that as she gets more comfortable with the relationship, she minds his posts less and less.



Fig. 28: Private and public Wall Comments

On her Wall it is evident that people make private Comments in public to stake ownership and demonstrate alliances. Out of her massive amount of friends she will have lunch with only a few, this makes them 'special' and this closer affiliation is then publicly demonstrated on the Wall. The extended Friends list can

see that there might be many Facebook friends, but the selected few that have an offline relationship with Emma^{FB} are the analogous characters. Emma^{FB} affirms this by adding: "Maybe the Wall is a bit like publicly letting other people know as well, not consciously, that she is a very good friend and that I do want to keep in contact".

This interesting social habit is not specific to Facebook: in the novel *Emma,* private letters are read out to a group of friends throughout (for example the letter Mrs. Weston receives from Frank Churchill on the occasion of her marriage (Austen 14; ch. 2)). The friends eagerly listen, knowing that the letter was not addressed to them, and that they are not privy to that relationship, but enjoying conversing about the content and style amongst themselves nonetheless.

Have you ever been annoyed by something written on your Wall, and where do you draw the line with Wall posts? Have you ever apologized to someone on their Wall?

Emma^{FB} dislikes it when people use Statuses to publicly announce feelings about a disagreement or other conflict situation. "Snarky comments", she calls them and says "if you want to say it, say it to my face". She has never posted a straight-out apology, but if wanting to make amends would just post something "very nice" on that person's Wall. Similarly, Austen's Emma, after insulting Miss Bates, does not outright apologize to her, but tries to make amends by sending her gifts and by calling on her.

Inbox

She says that she does not really use Inbox messaging much, as she finds it so impersonal. She has a lot of unread messages in her Inbox, that she just is not interested in reading. "I'd rather SMS or phone someone I really want to talk to." She

will only communicate with her friend in London through Inbox Messages because it is cheaper.

Profile picture and Photos

The history of Emma^{FB}'s Profile pictures is shown in fig. 29 and 30 (both are included to show that over a period of time she has deleted a Photo from her album, namely the one where she is pictured with a male friend). Except for the most recent Profile shot, she usually portrays herself with friends, i.e. as a collective. Most of the Profile shots seem to have been taken at similar events. The most recent photograph (top left) clearly shows a departure from the norm. The latest photograph is conceptual and creative, which is perhaps an indication of her growth as a student studying a creative course. The kind of 'creativity' evident in this Profile picture is playful and superficial. I have noticed that even though the student's Facebook Profile Photos are often experimental and innovative in the style of photography, added graphics and retouching, as well as in the pose, they mostly still include a resemblance of the face. The attractive face still seems to be an essential part of their characterization.

You're studying towards a creative degree, do you think that you can express yourself on Facebook, it being so structured?

She does not understand the question as it was meant and starts explaining that putting up one's creative work on Facebook as Photos is useless when the only people seeing it are one's friends, and this is not ideal for marketing. She explains that she also never looks at the advertisements that are placed on the sides of the pages, and that are mostly linked to a word or phrase that appears on one's Facebook pages. I explain that I actually wanted to know if she felt she could use

Facebook as a place for self-expression, for example by writing a piece of poetry as one's status update. She seems completely phased by this suggestion, as if she has never thought beyond the Facebook norms.

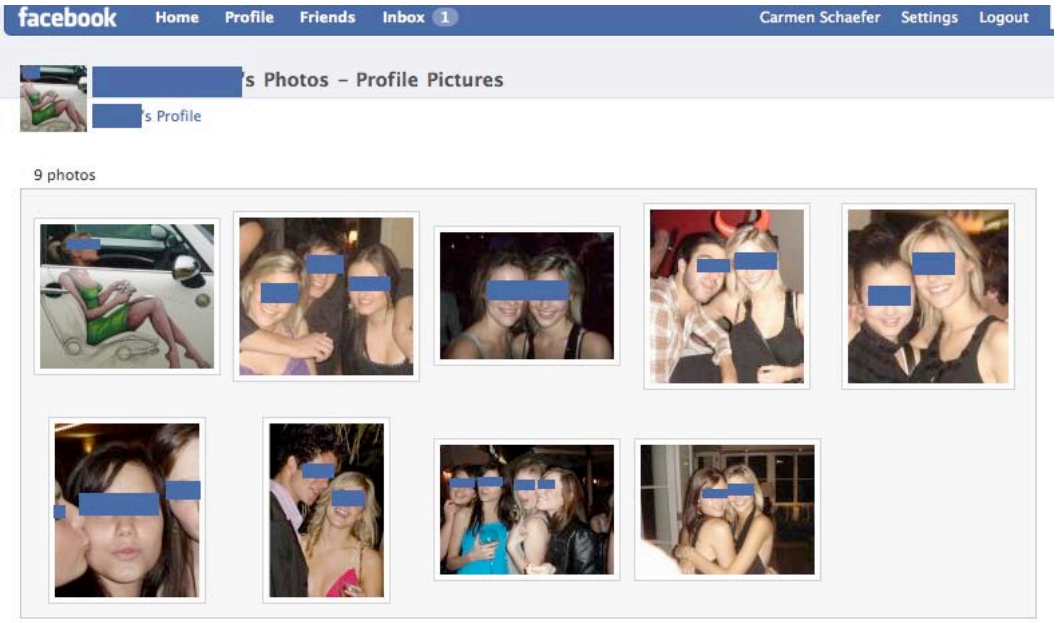


Fig. 29: Emma[FB]'s' Profile picture album: June 2009

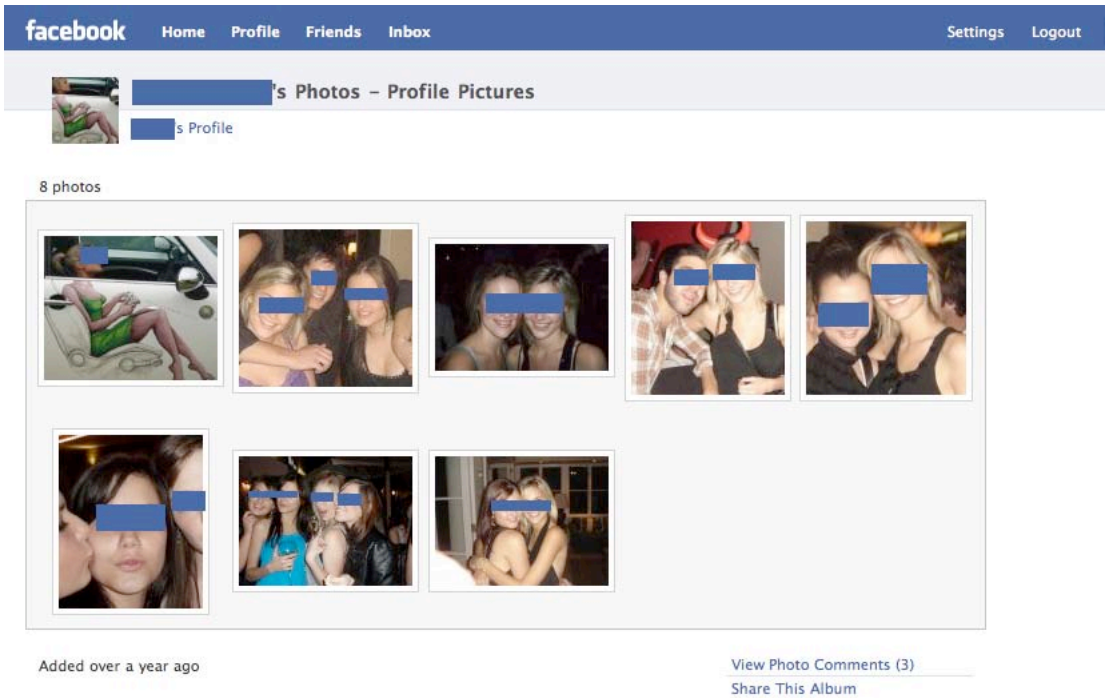


Fig. 30: Emma[FB]'s Profile picture album: November 2009

After thinking about it some more Emma[FB] says she hates Profile pictures in which people try to "look hot or whatever". She portrays herself with friends because then "it's not you by yourself trying to look hot," but you with your friends, "fun" pictures. Her current profile is her posing in a car cut-out as part of an X-Box promotion whilst on holiday. From the first time she saw the car, all she wanted to do was to have a picture of herself in the car. On the last day of the holiday, she finally had the picture taken and her sister suggested she use it for her Profile picture. She feels its "kind of fun", and since then has just left it (it has been her Profile picture for longer than a year, which is unusual for students studying at the same institution who tend to change their Profile photographs quite often). She mentions a girl who changes her Profile picture almost every day, and every time it is a different picture of her posing in a bikini, she finds this "lame". She prefers profile pictures in which she does not come across as being too serious about herself. She wants to portray a character, like Austen's Emma, who, for all her beauty, is not personally vain.

Are you aware of the Comments on your Profile picture?

She affirms that she thinks a lot of people said that it's a "cool" Profile picture, "but weird people, people I haven't spoken to in ages".

Do you judge people by their Profile pictures?

Emma[FB] does, because she believes people upload pictures of how they want their friends, and everyone else that might encounter them on a mutual Wall, to see them. She finds that people judge you by all the pictures you put up on Facebook. Her sister, who is a photography student, asked her to model for her, which she agreed to do but only if the pictures were not uploaded onto Facebook, as she did not want people to perceive her as a 'model'. It is not only about privacy, but

again about not being characterized as just a pretty face, who is conceited about her appearance.

She tells the story about a message she received in her Honesty Box (fig. 31) (this in an application where Friends can tell you what they think of you without revealing their identity, so you only know if the comment came from a boy (coloured blue) or a girl (coloured pink)) calling her "something like an arrogant bitch", this offended her because she feels that she is not that at all. But she accepts that by adding the Honesty Box to her applications she was "asking" for it", people are "either going to be really nice or really awful." She was hurt by the comment, but told herself that the message had come from someone in her group of friends who does not really know her. Perhaps this episode is one of the reasons she is so careful of not characterizing herself as a conceited beauty.



Fig. 31: The Honesty Box application

When she gets invited by people she calls "weird", who have Profile pictures of a celebrity rather than of themselves, she knows "it's sort of a jokey thing", but "it freaks me out because I don't know who you are", "you're trying so hard to hide", she says. It is clear that she needs to see a representation of the real person to make her estimation of them. When her friends sometimes change their picture into something

else it is acceptable, as she knows what they really look like, but when people constantly change their pictures, it "freaks her out".

Who looks at your profile, or whom do you imagine looks at your profile?

She thinks her friends, "my real friends, real people".

Don't you think guys check you out?

"Sure, everyone does that, I do that, but I don't think that's like a daily basis thing. People that look at my profile are the same people whose profile I look at, close friends. They would be the people that write on your Wall." This is a good example of her idealising her audience. This affirms previous research (WhyYouthHeart 16) that there is a great difference between who people imagine is looking at their profiles, and who is really looking at their profiles.

Did you check out your boyfriend's pictures before you started dating?

When Emma^{FB} decided she did like him after having been friends for some months, she did look at his Photos. After initially meeting him on holiday, as part of a group of friends spending the holiday together, he started dating another friend of hers for a couple of months during which time she hardly ever saw him. She explains that they actually have very different lives and groups of friends. When he broke up with the other girl, they started running into each other again, and then she finally looked at his Facebook and saw all the pictures of him and the other girl together, which made their having dated much more of a reality than it had been to her before, even though she had known all about it. She and her ex-boyfriend had broken up a year ago, so those pictures were not in the recent albums, but her new boyfriend's ex-girlfriend was right there, in the Photos. It is interesting that the Facebook Photos made the relationship more real to her than reality. It is possible that this is the

reason for her removing one of her profile pictures (fig. 29 and 30); she did not want her new boyfriend to see her with that specific friend/ ex-boyfriend.

Photos

"Film gives us plenitude without specificity. Its descriptive offerings are at once visually rich and verbally impoverished" (Chatman "Coming to Terms" 39). So far we have seen that Emma^{FB} struggles to characterize herself verbally. She has completed virtually no fields in the Info section, and she hardly ever posts statuses or Comments. As we will see, it is in her Photos, as in a film, that she characterizes herself best.

When I first started investigating Emma^{FB}'s Facebook, there were 468 pictures of her tagged. At the time of our interview, there are 317 Photos that she has been tagged in (fig. 32). She had in the elapsed time period untagged herself or deleted (if the photographs were in her own albums) over 100 pictures of herself, but a plenitude of Photos still remain.

I ask her if she knows all of the Photos of herself; "I think I know what's up there", she says, and continues that she is interested to know what other people would see. From our conversation it seems that even with the vast number of Photos of herself, she seems to have a good idea of what Photos she is portrayed in, as she freely refers to some, and when I refer to others she instantly knows which ones I mean. Previously she had made a point of saying that she does not spend much time on Facebook, but to know 317 Photos that well and to untag so many Photos indicates a lot more Facebook activity than she admits to. Several of the London students also "seemed uncomfortable admitting either to long hours of use or to

stalking" (Lewis and West 1215). It seems that if one makes an effort to characterize oneself it has to be a secret.

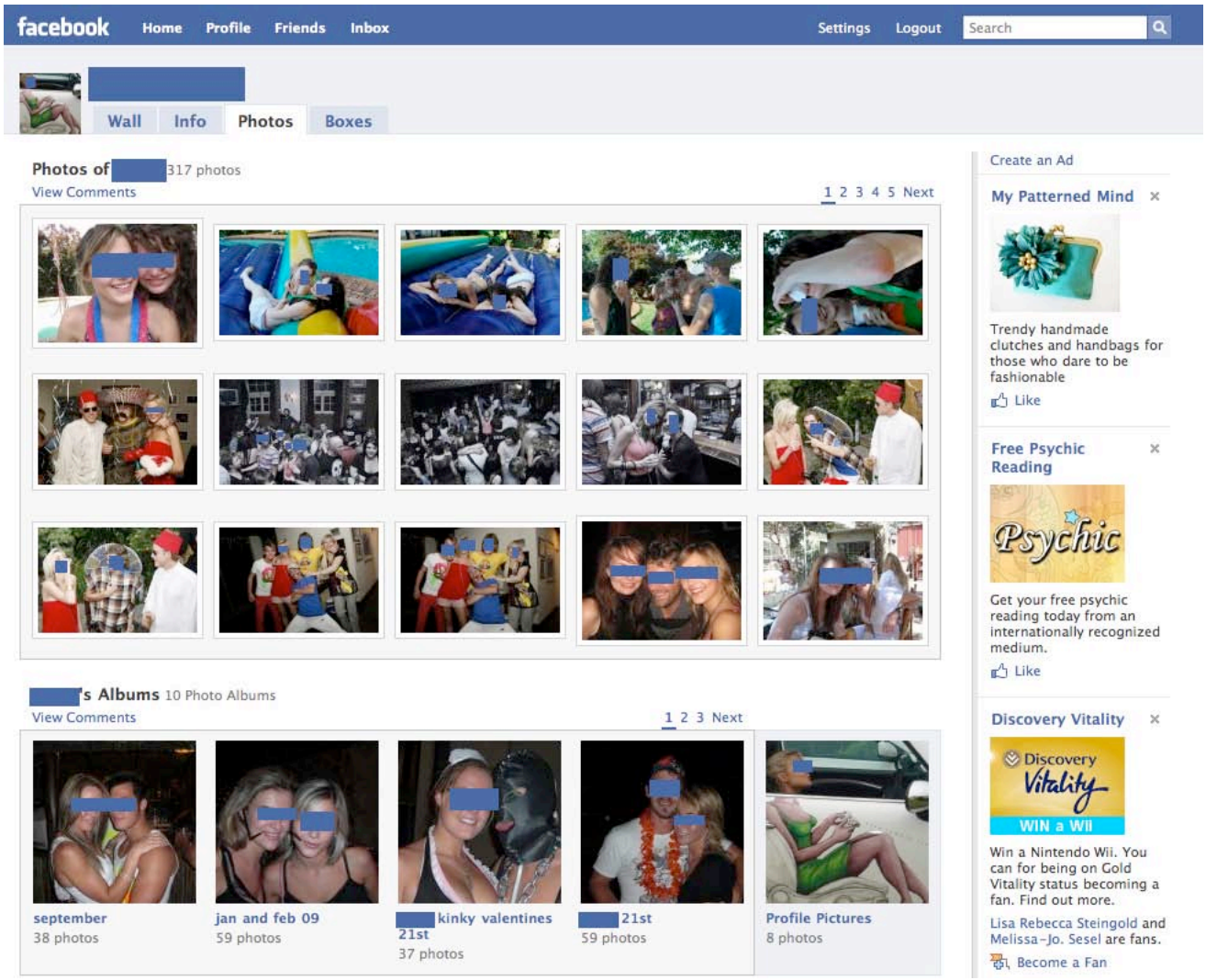


Fig. 32: Emma[FB]'s Photos

Have you ever untagged yourself?

She explains that a friend of hers once told her that Facebook is a marketing tool, so she thought she might as well just market herself well. She says that in some Photos one just does not look good, and she knows how she looks at other people's Photos so she knows people do the same with her, therefore she untags herself on

all the Photos she does not approve of herself in. Similarly, a male respondent in the London study admitted to changing his privacy settings after realizing that people might be commenting about his Photos in the same way he was commenting about theirs (Lewis and West 1222).

Most of the female London students also admitted to untagging themselves on unflattering Photos, but the male respondents felt that untagging themselves in unflattering Photos was "unwarranted vanity" (Lewis and West 1223). Emma[FB] describes that when she broke up with her boyfriend a year ago, she lost a lot of weight, and in all of the photographs taken at the time she looks very gaunt, so she untagged herself in all the Photos taken during that period, for example.

Do you have any favourite Facebook Photos? Do you prefer the normal looking photographs or the more "arty" ones taken by university friends?

She points out the "arty" photographs are by friends that are passionate about photography. She mentions that Photos are a way that you and the photographer can market themselves and that her university is an "arty" school where there are lots of "arty" people, who will inevitably be taking "arty" photographs of one. She knows exactly who took which photograph.

She has never thought about having favourites, but then explains that she likes the "arty" photographs (for example fig. 33 and fig. 34) more because of her friendship with the people who took them, than because of the actual photograph. After having thought about the question more, she remembers that she really likes the pictures of her and her whole family on a boat in Greece (fig. 35). Her grandfather had taken the entire family of about 30 people, including cousins that live in foreign countries, on a holiday in Greece, and the photographs of this holiday are her favourites, because they remind her of time spent with her family. Like Austen's

Emma, Emma[FB] prefers to be characterized with beloved friends and family, rather than alone in a flattering portrait.

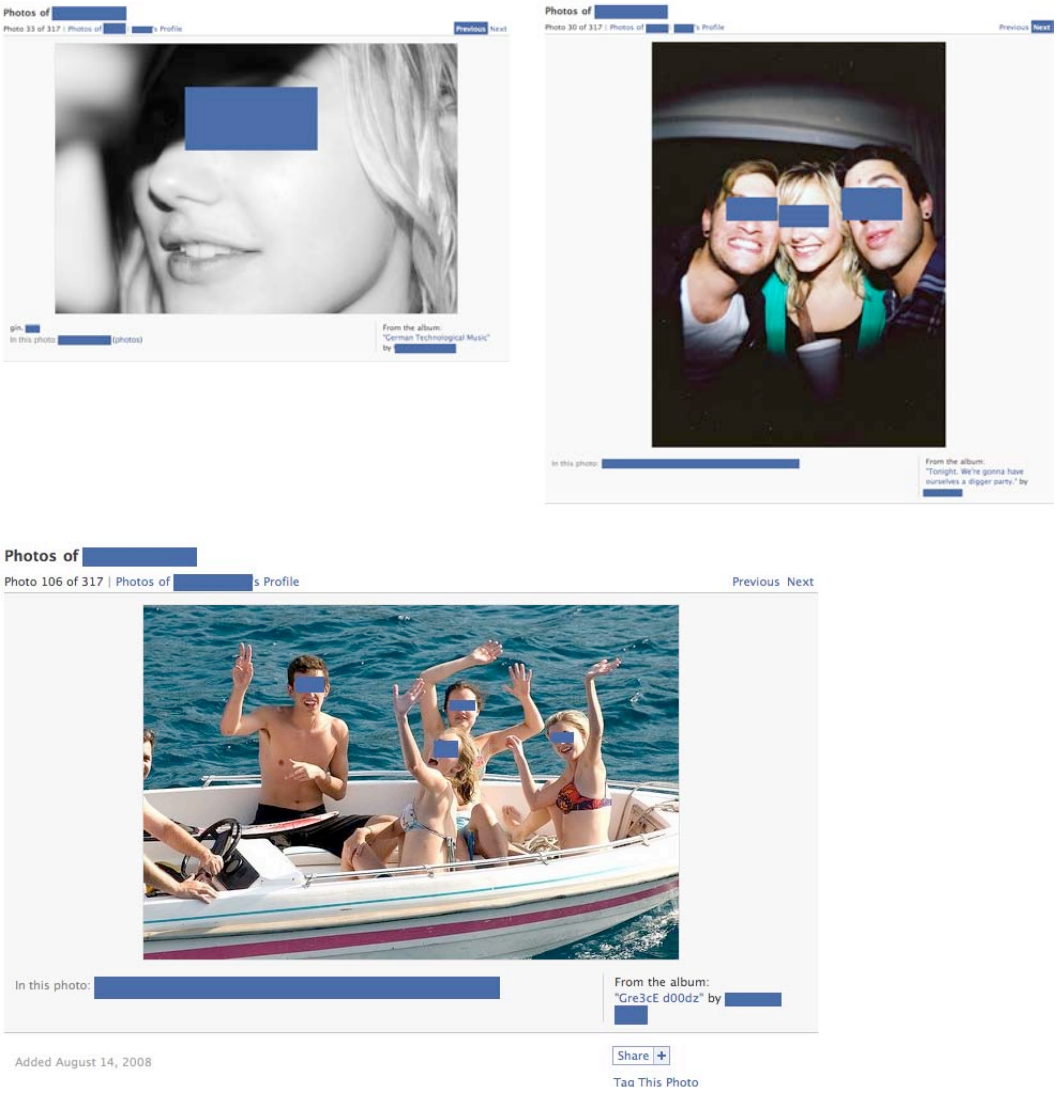


Fig. 33-35 'Arty' photographs by university friends, and the favoured family holiday photograph

If you look at your Photos can you see your development as a person?

She affirms that she thinks so, and that she thinks that even the way she dresses has changed. She does not expand any further. As explained in the previous chapter, a fleshed out character develops in the narrative. In the following photograph sequence (fig 36 - 41) one can gather some extent of Emma[FB]'s

development and history. A friend had posted a primary school picture with all her little friends, there is one of her as a fresh-faced teenager, when she experimented with being a brunette, with her beloved sister, doing research into a charity for a university project, and lastly with the new boyfriend. Each of these photographs shows a different aspect of her character, which certainly seems multi-faceted. She is smiling and happy in all the photographs, no matter at what age and with whom she was portrayed. If there are any photographs of her not looking happy, she certainly is not tagged in them. Like Austen's Emma, keeping up the proper pleasant appearance is of the utmost importance.




Photos of [redacted]
Photo 317 of 317 | Photos of [redacted] | [redacted]'s Profile
Previous Next
In this photo: [redacted] (photos)
From the album:
"December Holidays and Roadtrip" by [redacted]


Photos of [redacted]
Photo 230 of 317 | Photos of [redacted] | [redacted]'s Profile
Previous Next
In this photo: [redacted]
From the album:
[redacted] 18th jol" by [redacted]


Photos of [redacted]
Photo 43 of 317 | Photos of [redacted] | [redacted]'s Profile
Previous Next
In this photo: [redacted] photos)
From the album:
"snap crackle pop" by [redacted]
Added February 5
[redacted] oh my beautiful girls! miss you
May 28 at 6:53am
Share
Tag This Photo
Report This Photo



Fig. 35-41: Emma[FB]'s history and development

Are you aware that pictures will be posted on Facebook when you're at events?

"More and more so", she says. She relates the story of how, when her ex-boyfriend moved to London and broke up with her, she took photographs for three months especially for Facebook, to show him that she was having a good time, and then asked her sister and friends to upload them, so that it did not seem as if she were doing the posting. This is an excellent example of how she, with effort, created a fictional narrative on Facebook. I have observed that when my students upload

photographs they will tag all their friends in them, but not themselves, instead ones friends are expected to then tag one in return. It seems as if it is better to be tagged by someone else, rather than to be constantly shown in the News Feed to have tagged onself, which can appear too self-obsessed.

Fig. 42 is an example of a picture that was taken at an Event to which everyone was invited via Facebook, where all the attendees had Facebook profiles, where everyone knew beforehand who was attending the Event, and where everyone knew that the pictures that were taken would be uploaded onto Facebook, and extensively commented on. This Event was also extensively talked about offline, before and after it happened.



Fig. 42: Emma[FB], at an Event, spontaneously demanding that a photograph of her be taken

Lewis and West report that looking at one's Friends' Photos and seeing what they are doing, is a way of making sure that one is not "missing exciting social

events" (1219). Austen's character Emma becomes extremely agitated if she feels she might not be invited to an event that all her friends are attending (Austen 209; ch. 24). In fact, as I described in Chapter 1, Austen structures the entire plot around a series of events which stem from her character's actions. From her Photos it is evident that Events have the same significance for the characterization of Emma^{FB}.

Photo Comments

Emma^{FB} does not seem to think that people comment much on her Photos. She herself will comment only when she is not busy, and only on close friends' pictures, with statements like 'you look nice' or 'haha', but will not comment on photographs uploaded by "random people". She points out the picture on the computer screen on which she commented: "Ah, my favourite boys" (fig. 43) as an example. Unbeknownst to Emma^{FB}, a mutual friend afterwards told me that she was irritated by this Comment, as the boys portrayed with Emma^{FB} are more "her favourite boys" than Emma^{FB}'s and she felt that Emma^{FB} had fictionalised an ownership she was not entitled to. This anecdote illustrates the important role Facebook Photos and their Comments play in this society.

When I ask her if it is important with whom she appears in photographs, (characterization by analogous friends), she declares that it's not important, and that she would not untag herself on Photos because of the people she is with. But then she did untag herself on many pictures she appears on with her ex-boyfriend, but says that this was because of 'other' people (the new boyfriend perhaps) so as to not "rub the relationship in their face" (this confirms the deleted Profile picture in fig. 30). She has had fall-outs with other friends over the years, but has never untagged herself on a picture because of it.

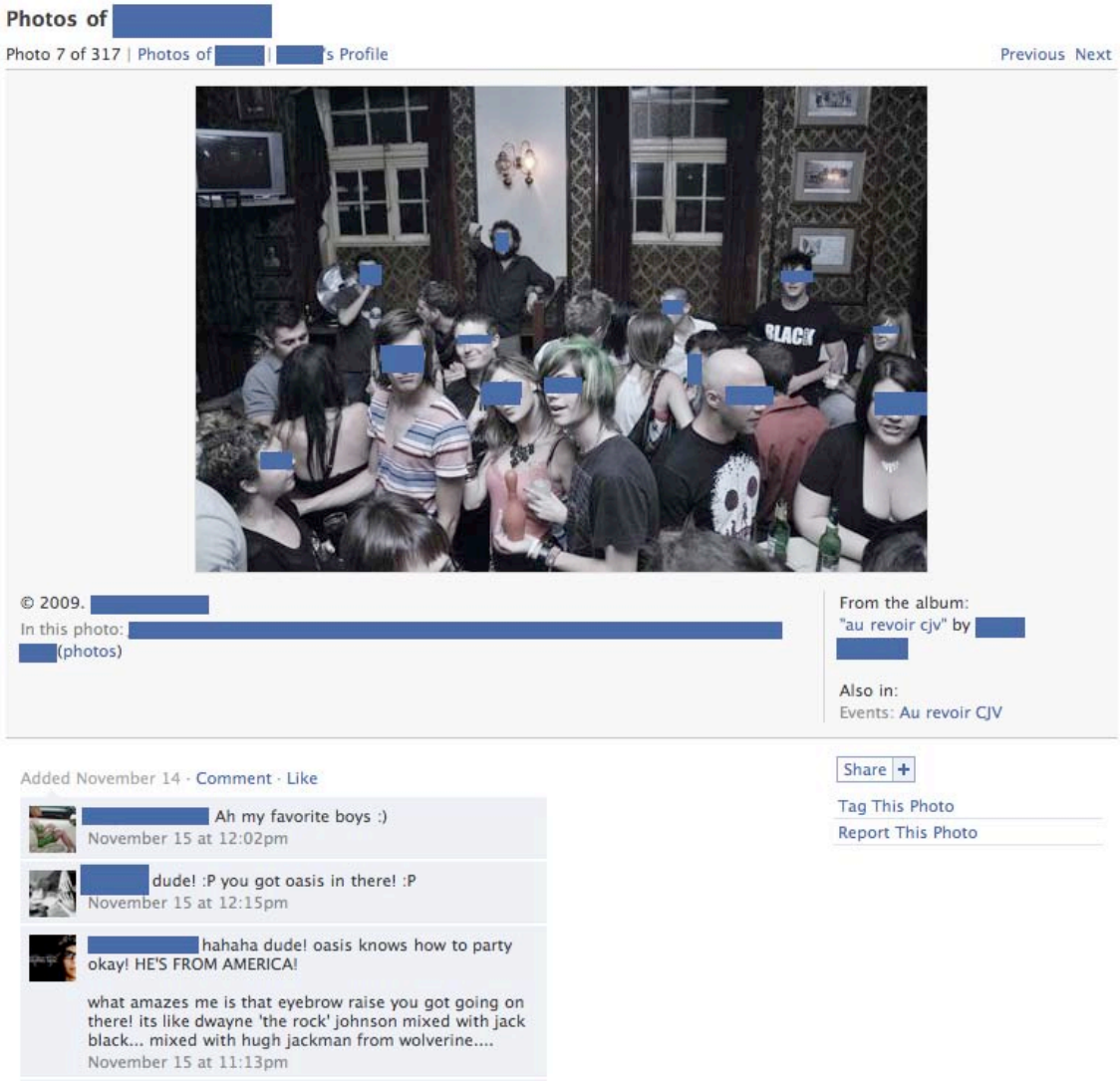


Fig. 43: With her "favourite boys"

It seems as if various activities on Facebook involve previous relationships. Some of the female London students reported that they or their friends "followed what ex-boyfriends were doing by checking their profiles." In fact, for some girls this constituted their main activity on Facebook (Lewis and West 1215). The study also finds that "the information flows on Facebook make it difficult to close any relationship," and that this could cause depression (Lewis and West 1221).

The story of how she untagged herself on pictures with her boyfriend is a perfect example of how she is controlling her own narrative and character. Those

that do not know her personally from that time will never know about the previous boyfriend at all.

Studying Emma[FB]'s Photo albums and realizing how much of her Facebook time is invested in these photographs, it is clear how important photographic representation is when writing one's character on Facebook. Photos are important in creating identity, in establishing social status and in revealing one's activities.

Using a specific photograph (fig. 44) of Emma[FB] at her matric dance the year before she started attending university as an example, I would like to explore the theories and writings of a pertinent critic of photography: Roland Barthes. Barthes, even though more famous as a literary theorist and semiotician, had a life long interest in photography, and often wrote about it.

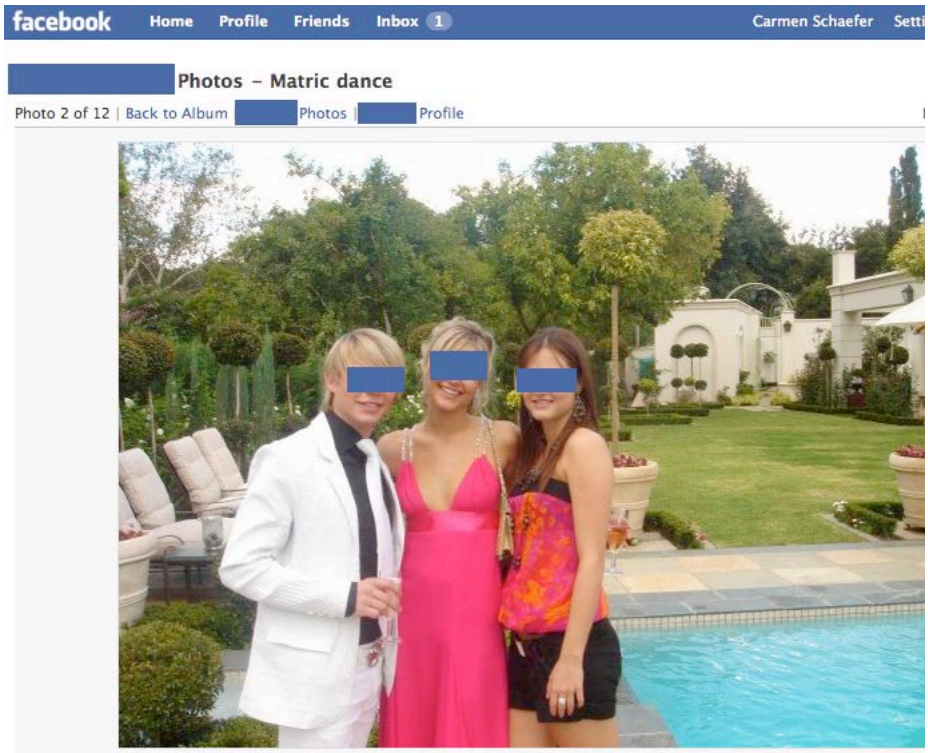


Fig. 44: The perfect pose (She has subsequently untagged herself or deleted this picture)

Barthes defined ideas around 'denotation' and 'connotation', and the photographic paradox that exists here. 'Denotation' is the literal or primary content of the photograph ("Responsibility of form" 7, 8). In fig. 44 the denoted message can be conveyed as a photograph of three young people, a boy and two girls, the boy and middle girl are dressed formally, in evening wear, the girl on the right is dressed casually, in shorts. The girl in the middle is embracing the other two. They are standing next to a swimming pool, in a garden with topiary bushes, and a building in the distance.

Barthes says:

> …in front of a photograph, the feeling of "denotation," or if you prefer, of analogical plenitude, is so powerful that the description of a photograph is literally impossible; for to describe consists precisely in joining to the denoted message….. a connotation in relation to the photographic analogue ("Responsibility of form" 7, 8).

Chatman finds the same in film, where the visual is so overwhelming that it becomes difficult to focus on the details that are so effectively focused on in text ("Coming to terms" 40).

The connotation is the deeper and implied meaning of the 'signs' in the photograph. According to Barthes a photograph is already connoted in the way it is conceived, (many photographs today are conceived specifically with Facebook in mind) produced, and in the way it will be received. He identifies certain connotation procedures such as trick and technical effects (Barthes calls this photogeny) (with the availability of photograph editing software such as Photoshop, trick and technical effects have become a lot more prevalent),

the pose, the objects in the photograph, the aesthetics, and syntax of the photograph.

The connoted message in fig. 44 is that the age of the girl and boy, together with their attire, in a South African context, clearly implies a couple on their way to their matric dance. The vast manicured garden, the elegant style of the building in the background and the designer clothing, all signify wealth and luxury. Supported by the relaxed attitudes of the three in the photograph in such a setting signifies that they are rich, i.e. they seem very comfortable in these surroundings. The way they are posed, together with the third girl in casual dress, Emma^{FB}'s sister, signifies that the couple going to the dance know each other quite well, and that their relationship is supported by friends and family.

Every photograph is "read… – more or less consciously by the public which consumes it – to a traditional stock of signs" ("Responsibility of form" 7, 8). Barthes believes a paradox exists precisely in the fact that a photograph can simultaneously be "natural" (that is just the way that situation happened to be when the photograph was taken) and "cultural". These connoted messages feed, and feed off, cultural myths that exist in society. Barthes of course was seminal in exposing these myths in the series of essays assembled in his 1957 *Mythologies*. Fig. 44 demonstrates a deeply entrenched South African myth: the perfect matric dance. It shows the happy, healthy, wealthy and beautiful white young couple, exquisitely dressed, about to end off their school years on a high note and celebrating this by going to a matric dance, where they will most certainly be the belles of the ball, and afterwards will pursue their blessed and privileged adult lives. It is the same myth that is portrayed in popular American TV series like *The OC* (2003) and *Gossip Girl* (2007).

In his book *Camera Lucida*, written in 1980, Barthes also defines the concepts of 'studium' and 'punctum', born out of analysing his personal fascination for, and emotional involvement with, certain details (or other factors) in a particular photograph. The 'studium' can be described as the general interest one might have in a genre of photography, for example in society photographs. One might study and understand these photographs because of a "general, enthusiastic commitment, … but without special acuity" ("Camera Lucida" 26). To invest one's 'studium' in a photograph is to understand its connotations; signs; and the photographer's intentions. It is linked to one's education and cultural comprehension. With the entrenchment of Facebook in popular culture, many thousands of people have made their 'studium' that of Facebook Photos: studying, contemplating and interpreting them.

But the 'studium' has a major limitation: it does not invoke intense emotion. The 'punctum' is the word Barthes uses for the feeling of being 'pierced' or deeply touched by a detail or element in a photograph. This might be something unexpected and is the thing that keeps one entranced in the photograph, and stays with one after having stopped looking at the photograph. "The studium is ultimately always coded, the punctum is not … what I can name cannot really prick me" ("Camera Lucida" 51). Being pierced by a photograph is a personal experience and will be different for everyone. Having one's friends' and acquaintances' personal photographs so readily available on Facebook to look at for however long one wishes, increases the chances for most readers to be 'pierced' by a photograph.

Barthes discusses the functions of the photograph: it can inform; it can paint; it can surprise; it can signify; and it can awaken desire ("Camera Lucida" 28). These

functions, together with the concept of the 'punctum' lead into what Barthes calls the fetish of the partial object.

> Photography… allows me to accede to an infra-knowledge; it supplies me with a collection of partial objects and can flatter a certain fetishism of mine: for this "me" which likes knowledge, which nourishes a certain amorous preference for it ("Camera Lucida" 30).

Looking at Facebook Photos fuels the sleuth, the stalker and the voyeur. Even though Emma^{FB}, in accepting me as her Facebook Friend, knows that I can see her Photo albums, she does not know if I have looked at them, or for how long, and with what guilty pleasure. One can stare at and analyse the partial objects in Photos, like clues in solving a murder mystery. Gaining arbitrary or significant knowledge from details (for example in fig. 44) can make one's day, like being able to recognise the earrings, and knowing at which shop she bought them. Or trying to figure out if the boy she is pictured with is just a friend, or her boyfriend. One can look through all the other Photos in her albums carefully analysing gestures to try and find answers to these questions. As discussed before, Emma^{FB} has made an effort to hide these clues, so some things will remain a mystery.

Susan Sontag comments on the role photography plays in identifying the modern society: "Life is not about significant details, illuminated in a flash, fixed forever. Photographs are" (81). Sontag's point is that being able to spend so much energy and time on a past moment, creates a false relationship with reality, which keeps on moving. As explained before, Sherry Turkle investigates the psychological effects that intense interaction with online life, or relationships with digital objects, have on people. My study affirms that the time spent on the Photo object for Emma^{FB}

could create a disconnection from reality, as that time is spent in creating a fictional reality with photographs.

The pose

Barthes writes extensively on the moment of posing, (which as mentioned before, he explains as being a connotation procedure) "I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one: I feel the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice…" ("Camera Lucida" 10,11). This is certainly a sentiment that most people who have had photographs of themselves posted on Facebook can identify with; the photograph has either "created" or "mortified" their body. When a picture is taken for Facebook, the image on Facebook is in everyone's mind's eye whilst posing. After the pictures are taken everyone immediately runs to the camera to make sure that a photograph where the body is "mortified" is deleted before it can be uploaded.

Barthes continues: "I want a history of Looking. For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity" ("Camera Lucida" 12). This quote reinforces my argument that in posing for Facebook photographs one attempts to create for oneself a character, and not a true representation of identity. Posing for a Facebook Photo has become an essential ingredient in the young person's repertoire of social skills. Embracing a friend with one arm, the other holding a digital camera up to capture the moment is a skill that needs some practice to perfect.

Emma^{FB} admits that she has become more aware of posing. She explains that some people always look good to her on Facebook, but that she has a very

pretty friend who always slouches in Facebook pictures, which causes her to look so much worse than in reality, so she has become more aware of her own poses. Looking at all the photographs of her included in this chapter, she is posing in every single one, even the one from primary school. Mostly it's a 'natural' pose, looking straight ahead into the camera and smiling brightly. There are poses where she's waving, and quintessential Facebook poses like the arm around a friend, or pouting. Pouting as an expression seems particularly popular amongst girls on Facebook.

Barthes proclaims: "I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know that I am posing, but … this additional message must in no way alter the precious essence of my individuality…" ("Camera Lucida" 11).

The typical poses on Facebook are mostly in complete acknowledgement of the viewer; one knows that one is posing for the benefit of one's entire Friends list. The Friends know you were posing for them, therefore eye contact with the camera is the norm, as well as poses that play up to set expectations, for example hugging one's friends. From Emma^{FB}'s Photos and poses, it does not seem as if her individuality as a character is as important to her as her being accepted by her social group.

> In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. …… I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity. ("Camera Lucida" 13)

In the black and white photograph, fig. 33, Emma^{FB} is posing as whom she wants to portray, thinking that she is posing as herself. The photographer, in taking such a close-up is seeing her as someone else, his muse, or perhaps

someone he has a crush on. Maybe Emma^{FB} knows this in posing as she does. Posing for Facebook Photos is complicated and fictional, and has very little to do with authenticity.

News Feed

When one logs onto Facebook one first gets to the Home page where one can read the News Feed, and be alerted to new Notifications. If Emma^{FB} sees something in the News Feed that looks interesting she'll go to that page. Facebook as an author is therefore responsible for alerting her to news upon which she might want to act. Otherwise, she will visit the Profiles of about five or six of her closest Friends to see what they are up to.

She does check her Notifications in the hope that "something's going on" but many times it is a Notification from an application or a group, which she just feels bombarded by and instantly deletes. She finds "random" invitations irritating. She is much more excited if she is notified that she or a friend have been tagged in a Photo, have been invited to a specific Event, or have had a Photo commented on. Only News items/ Actions relating to her and her Friends' offline activities interest her.

Friends

So far Emma^{FB} has 921 Facebook Friends (fig. 26 and 27). She is quite overwhelmed by the amount of activity required from her by her Friends. Every time she logs on, there are vast amounts of pending friend requests, Messages and other invitations and requests. She brought me a printed list of her 50 pending friend requests, and a myriad of unread Messages.

Why do you have so many friends?

The friends have accumulated over the years, from pre- and primary school, high school, university, going out, friends of Friends, and now also aunts and other older family members who have recently joined Facebook (both the Ellison and Steinfield and the Lewis and West studies confirm that students have this range of Friends). She goes out a lot, meets people and then is what she calls "invited" (sent a Friend Request) by them on Facebook the next day. At that point she says: "sweet, they're my friend, I'll accept them".

Recently, "some chicks' birthday got announced, and I couldn't work out who she was, so I can't really say all of the people are my friends". She explains it becomes more complicated because when friends from primary school "invite" her, she wonders if she should accept them, but then she thinks "what's the harm in accepting them"? She has become very private about her Info and wall posts on Facebook because she does have so many Facebook Friends that are not close friends. Lewis and West report that most of the students in their study who had realised the problems attached to multiple audiences have tried to manage these by controlling the information in their Facebook, especially in terms of personal details (1222). Emma^{FB} is restricting the content of her narrative because of who might read it.

I ask Emma^{FB} about Limited Profiles, I explain that I accept people's friend requests but then assign them to a Limited Profile so that they see I've accepted them, but cannot see any of my Info, Photos or even Wall. She says she thinks that is meaner than rejecting someone's Friend Request outright, as it's giving someone the illusion that they have access to one's Facebook, when in fact they do not. She

does not keep track of whom she has sent friend requests to, and who of those have accepted her or not.

I site research ("On Facebook, Scholars") that claims that people having so many friends are seen as insecure. She replies by telling the story of how she was Friend Requested by guys who are quite good looking in their Profile pictures, and then she would have four friends in common but they were always the same specific girls who would just accept anyone. She explains that if she does not know someone she will look at the friends in common, and if it is those girls she will ignore the request. She has forty-six friend requests just "chilling there". In other words, she does not just accept anyone. She cannot remember how or if she has met the "pending" Friends and then relies on the friends in common list and Photos for hints on how she knows or at least has met them. If she cannot ascertain who they are, she rather leaves them pending than decline the request, which she thinks is rude and would only do to someone she definitely does not know. Sometimes she realises who one of the "pendings" is, but then she thinks she might as well remove them because they are obviously "not such a big deal" to her.

The London students who were anxious about accepting friend requests, especially from family, said that "they would let the request go unanswered rather than reject it". Just like Emma[FB], these students had strong views about rejecting a friend request. Most thought it was a complete no-no and accepted all friend requests, others had them "pending" forever, and some only rejected Requests if they did not know or disliked the person and "could not envision talking to in the future" (Lewis and West 1220).

When asked if she thinks people judge her by her Friends and if she considers this when accepting or declining friend requests, she answers that she

does believe that people judge one by one's Friends, but that this has never been a reason why she has not accepted someone. She tells me about her two groups of friends, her "jocky/preppy" friends, and her "arty" friends. She confesses that she has had a hard time trying to figure out where she fits in with these two very different groups of friends, but that she has reached a nice medium, because her "arty" university friends already know that she is not a "typical arty farty", and the "jocky people" know that she is not a "typical jocky person". So she can "just chill in the middle" and be whoever she wants to be. Her boyfriend is a "jocky". He goes out to very specific places and only has experiences of other "jocky" people, so when he accompanied her to one of her university parties she had to explain to him beforehand that all her friends are "weird emo kids" that wear "skinny" jeans. Apparently he was still a bit shocked on the night. This part of the interview is a clear illustration of how she struggled to characterize herself between two different sub-cultures. Austen characterized her Emma to be someone who is very concerned with social status, she feels she is too "upper-class" to attend certain parties, or to socialize with Harriet's farmer friends, but is forced to mix with people she perceives as "below" her in order to have any social life at all, the alternative being staying at home with her invalid father, whilst her less snobbish friends are enjoying themselves. Austen develops Emma to become less of a snob, through the aid of the Mr. Knightley character.

Emma^{FB} has added the application Top Friends (fig. 45), where one can, as the title says, list and display one's 'top friends'. Boyd discusses the same application on MySpace and how it dramatically affects teenagers' lives: "there are social consequences in publicly announcing one's friends, best friends, and *bestests*

friends. Feelings are hurt when individuals find that someone they feel close with does not reciprocate" ("WhyYouthHeart" 13, 14).



Fig. 45: Top friends

This application, in addition to only privately/ publicly engaging the same Friends on Walls, and being portrayed in Photos with only certain friends, seems to indicate that she wants to define her character by only certain other analogous characters, and wants to clearly indicate who these chosen ones are.

Do you mind the older family members you mentioned before seeing your party pictures?

If her mom were on Facebook she would not mind because she has a very open and honest relationship with her, and shows her all the pictures any way. (Only two of the London students "positively welcomed parents", most felt that having parents on Facebook was a "step too far" as Facebook is a social space reserved for their social life with friends (Lewis and West 1218). Emma[FB]'s great aunt, whom she

does not tell anything about herself and her life in person, is now seeing things that she would not purposefully tell her. This family member especially irritates her on Facebook. They do not see her often, but she seems to be on Facebook all day long and comments on pictures of her and her sister for example "you girls look so nice", and when they do see her she always mentions that she has been looking at their Facebooks which causes Emma^{FB} to think "I don't really want you to know", but afterwards it does not bother her all that much. It is interesting how Emma^{FB} eradicates references from a non-ideal audience and rather prefers imagining her Facebook for the friends she believes go to her pages regularly.

Emma^{FB} never deletes anybody. If she ever were to do a clean-up it would be to delete the people whom she cannot remember, and therefore thinks it pointless to have them on her Friends list. But then she thinks that that would be such a "mission" and she could not be bothered, because one has to scroll through 900 people and "work out who you know and don't know," and then confirm the delete in prompt boxes. She has only ever deleted her ex-boyfriend out of anger. He is also the only person she has ever had a Facebook 'rivalry' with (mentioned previously by who had the most fun at the most events as demonstrated in uploaded Photos). She reiterates that Facebook is not a true reflection of who she is, so if she's only semi-friends with someone on her list, it is not worth her while to delete them. She explains it is also convenient to have people there in case one day one would need to get in touch with them for some reason or other and then one would have contact with them on Facebook.

Her attitude towards deleting friends seems to be universal, the London students also explained that they "cannot be bothered" to delete friends, or left them

for "in case" or as a security blanket, one respondent also blocked an ex-boyfriend from seeing her Profile (Lewis and West 1220, 1221).

Do you get requested more than what you friend request?

She thinks she gets requested more, as she does not want everyone to be her Friend, therefore she does not invite just anyone. Lewis and West found that "there seemed to be more status involved in being added as a friend than on doing the adding" (1220). She mentions that once a couple of university friends were tagged in Photos she was viewing, she realized they were not Facebook Friends and then she friend requested them, as she actually wants to be their Friend and they're all at the same university. But she would not ever invite an old school friend from high school, for example.

She does not think having 900 friends is that many. (Even though it is much more than any of the London students (Lewis and West 1214)). She has a very good idea of how many Friends each of her close friends have, and knows that she has 230 Mutual Friends with her best friend. Again she refers to her many groups of Friends, but that she is not really part of any group, and calls herself a "lone ranger". When she started Facebooking at age 15 or 16 she admits that she did want a "trillion" Friends and she did "go and invite a whole bunch of people" to get her "numbers up in a sense". Now she would not mind getting to a 1000 just to get there, but as a matter of principle she would not accept anyone she is not 'friends' with. She has had Facebook over the years of her life where the "soul thing was to go out partying." Every time she went out and met someone new they would add her on Facebook: "It's a way of socializing with people you wouldn't normally have contact with" she says.

To Emma^{FB}, Facebook is not about the fact that you have to be "really friends with the person" (offline), it is "like literally social networking". The London students saw Friends on Facebook in a similar light: "it enabled the respondents to keep in contact with people they had met once or twice in a bar or club," without going through the formality of exchanging phone numbers, or keeping in touch with people "you just don't see socially that much, but it doesn't necessarily mean you don't want to hear from them ever again," or "a way of continuing friendships without making that much effort" (Lewis and West 1218, 1219).

I think Emma^{FB} likes having so many Friends, and receiving many more friend requests. She might not realise it, but she likes being that popular. In contrast to Facebook and Emma^{FB}, Austen manages to characterize her Emma as being popular by only employing about a dozen other characters.

Emma^{FB} is clearly more comfortable with her character being shaped through other peoples' representation of her, which she can simply acknowledge, or reject (untag), than she is with having to characterize herself in her own words, for example with status updates or Comments. She is a character who is not a great wit or intellectual, but a wealthy and beautiful girl who tries hard not to come across as being obsessed with her looks, but rather as a lovely girl who is a good friend and is therefore very popular. In our conversations, Emma^{FB} insists on a casual involvement with Facebook, but her behaviour on Facebook - the scrupulous attitude to Photos of herself; the way she uses Facebook to make her ex-boyfriend jealous; the time she spends on it; and the effect that Facebook has on her offline socialising - testifies to a deeper and more intense emotional connection.

Conclusion

I have argued that Facebook is an implied author that gives its users or characters clear and unavoidable guidelines to aid their characterization, which I have demonstrated, using Rimmon-Kenan's definitions, to be similar to novelistic characterization techniques. Facebook as an implied author has been compared with Jane Austen, not to prove that they are alike, but to frame Facebook's authorial power and techniques. Facebook dictates the design of the narrative, chooses to have co-narrators, has a conventional authoritative voice, and guides and controls the reader's progress through the narrative, by for example showing certain News Feed items on the Home page. It controls the reader's involvement with characters and relies on the reader's participation. It uses a third person narrative style, which makes it's voice as an implied author less intrusive and makes the interplay between the author's voice and the character's voice possible. The third person narrative also creates distance between the reader/viewer and the characters.

As the implied author, Facebook encourages it's co-narrators, who are also the characters, to know themselves and share this knowledge: by giving them the opportunity to define themselves in writing, for example by completing the Info section; the 'what's on your mind' updates on the Wall; and by commenting on other character's updates. They can demonstrate their appearance and activities by uploading photographs into the Profile picture and Photo albums.

Demonstrative relationships with other characters are actively encouraged by this author, in its requiring the addition of a list of other characters, and constantly prompting communication with them. In this way the analogous characters prominently become character-indicators. Actions, particularly the attendance of

social Events, that are, using the author's directions, proclaimed, chronicled and discussed by the characters, are another pivotal characterization technique.

The students' whose Facebook behaviour I have observed generally, and specifically that of the case study Emma[FB], affirm many of the findings by the research completed in London (Lewis and West) and in the USA (Ellison, Steinfield, Boyd, Marwick) in terms of normative Facebook behaviours amongst teenagers and young adults, such as managing different levels of friendship, and building profiles.

The focus of my research, namely an author's characterization techniques, shows that these South African students have used the guidelines of the author in specific ways to characterize themselves. Even though writing can be used in the Info, in Wall posts and in Comments, the main characterization technique is photographic, which is a departure from a textual novelistic approach towards a richly visual and voyeuristic experience.

My research has shown that Facebook Photos have become an ideology. I do not use the word ideology lightly, but in the true dictionary sense of it: I mean that Facebook Photos have indeed come to encapsulate a "body of ideas reflecting the social needs and aspirations of an individual, group, class or culture", and can be seen as "a set of doctrines or beliefs that form the basis of a political, economic or other *(social)* system" (*thefreedictionary.com*). The photograph will testify to an Event, it is conceived as part of the Event, and has become more important than the Event itself. In fact, I would go as far as to argue that without a Facebook Photo, the Event never occurred. In the characterization of a person, the Photos are crucial. The Profile picture is the most considered and valued characterization technique on Facebook, and acts as a visual summary of the character. The Profile picture is the

one character indicator that is available to search functions, and much time is spent by the students used in the study to get it just right.

Photos define not only the quality of character but also their depth, history and development. Specific poses have been invented for Facebook, as have specific photographic techniques, such as holding up the camera with one arm. Photos are closely evaluated, and characters will distance themselves, i.e. untag or delete, from any photographic representation that does not fit in with the character they are trying to create.

Creating an inner life for one's character is difficult to do on Facebook, where in Austen's novels it is the emphasis of the narrative. Austen does not describe people, places or environments much, but characterizes by describing the feelings, thoughts and speech of her characters. Even though Facebook as the implied author prompts the expression of an inner life through writing, excellent writing is not a skill that the co-narrator/characters necessarily possess or deem important. This seems to be the reason why their dialogues, comments and status updates are not as indicative of personality and character as Austen's character's dialogues are.

The preferred mode of characterization is photographic, which can be argued to be a more superficial way of expressing character. Chatman explains that "our capacity to interpret faces is not innately up to our capacity to image from words", and that a visual medium's "natural focus is the surface appearance of things" ("Coming to terms" 162). Roger Gard emphasizes the same shortcomings of the visual in a discussion of adaptations of Jane Austen's novels into films. He lists a "mess of things" pictures cannot do:

> "They can't make jokes, or pun, or allude to the Bible, or Shakespeare or Cowper; their pace is inflexible – they can't easily be fleeting or

> dismissive; they can't comment … they can't span the years; they can't condense; they can't moralize; they can't conduct sustained arguments without cluttering the mind with irrelevant visual detail" etc. etc. (11)

I do not necessarily agree with every item on his list: a photograph could be a comment, or a joke, or a pun, and can span the years, but not as easily or as 'naturally' as in writing.

In a recent New York Times article about a Jane Austen exhibition, *Emma* is described as "really a book about moral and social education, about learning how to read the inner lives of others in the outward traces on display, and then to draw appropriate conclusions" (Rothstein "At the Morgan"). On Facebook, users like Emma^{FB} carefully construct a character, the word character also meaning public manner; a considered outward display, which they know will be read and interpreted by their idealized audience. In turn, they meticulously analyse other characters Facebooks and draw conclusion from what they see, especially by studying their Photos. Detecting the inner life of characters through their photographs becomes much more of a semiotic skill, if one is interested in doing this at all. The readers or viewers of the photographic narratives are not as interested in the inner life or self-discovery of the character portrayed as they are in what the character looks like, what they are doing, where they are doing it, and with whom they doing it, as these are regarded as the important character indicators.

I have shown how this emphasis on the photographic, and by implication on the body, has been a departure from the text-driven MUD's Turkle investigated in *Life on the screen,* that were an escape from the body and from appearance and became a safe place in which to experiment. The students I studied do not use their

Facebook characters as any kind of experimentation but as a strategic marketing tool to potential mates, friends and even employers.

Even though I have pointed out the superficial and marketing aspects of photographic characterization on Facebook, I want to emphasize that I have observed in my students an intense emotional connection with their Facebook character and the narratives that these characters are involved in, and that the Facebook stories sometimes have drastic implications in offline life. This, together with a more in-depth semiotic study of Facebook photography, would be a valid subject for future study.

Notes

1. The students that were observed, and the case study 'Emma$^{FB'}$ specifically, are all studying at a small (about 400 students in total) private university where the author of this study lectures. The vocational degree courses at this university are aimed to equip students for the advertising, design and marketing industries; they can specialize in marketing strategy, multimedia design, copywriting, art direction or graphic design. The fees are expensive, and not many bursaries are allocated, therefore most of the students are from a privileged background.
2. Because Facebook in this study is used both as an author and a text, the decision to italicise or not, becomes difficult. Because I focus more on its role as an author, I have chosen not to italicise.
3. Sherry Turkle is Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology in the Program in Science, Technology, and Society at MIT and the founder (2001) and current director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, a centre of research and reflection on the evolving connections between people and artifacts. Professor Turkle received a joint doctorate in sociology and personality psychology from Harvard University and is a licensed clinical psychologist. She is the author of The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit (1984), Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet (1997), Evocative Objects: Things We Think With (2007), Falling For Science: Objects in Mind (2008), The Inner History of Devices (2008), and Simulation and Its Discontents (2009) (Turkle biography).
4. Visiting the Austen shelf in the university library I am confronted with, to name just a few: *The post-colonial Jane Austen* by Yu-me Park and Sunder Rajeswari (2000), *Jane Austen and the fiction of her time* by Mary Waldron (1999), *Jane*

Austen and the theatre by Paula Byrne (2002), *Jane Austen and the romantic poets* by William Deresiewicz (2004), *Jane Austen and the English landscape* by Mavis Baley (1996), *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* by Margaret Kirkham (1983*), The language of Jane Austen* by Myra Stokes (1991) and *Jane Austen: Irony as defense and discovery* by Marvin Mudrick (1968). I did not read more than the back cover or inside flap of most of these books, the ones that informed this report are listed in the Works Cited section.

5. Facebook Groups "can be created by any user and about any topic, as a space for users to share their opinions and interest in that subject. Groups can be kept closed or secret. Facebook Pages can only be created to represent a real organization, business, celebrity, or band, and may only be created by an official representative of that entity" (Facebook Help Centre).

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Fig. 1. *Clueless* film poster; *Funny Vegetarian quotes*; Groovyvegetarian.com, 12 Nov 2007; Web; 25 Jan. 2010.

Fig. 2. *Emma* film poster; Products; hometheaterforum.com; Web. 24 Jan. 2010.

Fig. 3, 5-45. Screen captures taken from facebook.com, of Carmen Schaefer's Friends profiles. Web. 2009.

Fig. 4. Baldwin, Deedee. *Austenbook*; Fanfiction; Much-Ado.net [http://www.much-ado.net/austenbook/] Web. 19 March 2010.

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