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Just How Much Maisie Knew

*The Role of Metaphors and Similes in Narrating a
Child's Worldview*

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| FIELD of study: | Stylistics |
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INTRODUCTION: „Unusual“ minds in Stylistics

→ Representation of characters with »unusual minds«

- Deviant linguistic patterns

→ Representation of children's minds

- Limited experience of the world
- Limited knowledge
- Limited linguistic abilities

How to represent a child's point of view?

→ UNDERLEXICALISATION: spare and elementary vocabulary

ALEKOS in Captain Corelli's Mandolin:

„But this time he looked up, perhaps from instinct, and beheld a particularly pretty sight. A sort of white mushroom was drifting down with a tiny man suspended underneath [...]. Perhaps it was an angel . It was certainly garbed in white. He crossed himself and struggled to remember a prayer. He had never heard of an angel that floated about below a mushroom, but you never knew. And it seemed that the angel had a big rock, perhaps a package, hanging from his feet on a rope.“ (333, in Semino 2002)

How to represent a child's point of view?

→ UNDERLEXICALISATION: replacing unfamiliar **words** with familiar ones

- White mushroom = A PARACHUTE
- An angel that floated about below a mushroom = A PARACHUTIST
- A big rock, perhaps a package, hanging from his feet on a rope = WEAPON?

→ METAPHORISATION: replacing unfamiliar **concepts** with familiar ones (Semino 2002)

How to represent a child's point of view?

→ METAPHORISATION: replacing unfamiliar **concepts** with familiar ones (Semino 2002)



How to represent a child's point of view?

MAISIE in *What Maisie Knew*:

„[Maisie] heard one of the ladies she found there — a lady with eyebrows arched like skipping-ropes and thick black stitching, like ruled lines for musical notes on beautiful white gloves — announce to another.“

→ METAPHORISATION with similes:

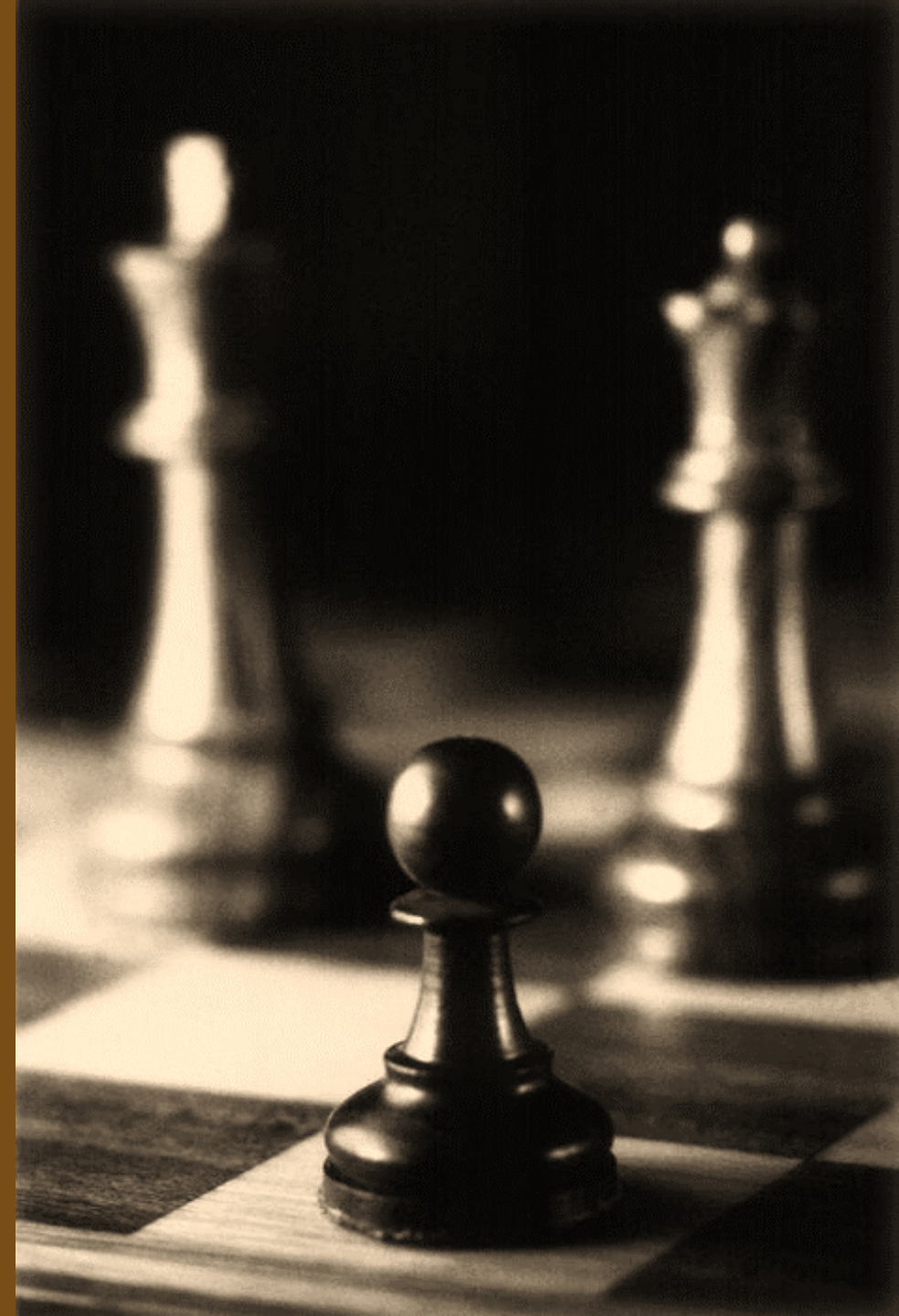
- lady's eyebrows ≈ SKIPPING ROPES
- black stitching on gloves ≈ NOTE LINES

Is there a significant interpretative difference?

Henry James: What Maisie Knew (1897)

Who is Maisie?

- Pawn of her divorced parents
- Passed around from nanny to nanny
- No proper education
- Growing up surrounded by adult intrigues
- Central mystery of the novel: how much can she comprehend what is happening around her



The „Art of Stupidity“

Tension between

MAISIE'S
PERCEPTIVENESS

Tackling adult concepts

MAISIE'S
NAIVETY

Lack of education and
experience

Practising the „art of
stupidity“



Just how much Maisie knows?





Theme of the puzzle and game

→ On two levels:

1. Intradiegetic: the puzzle for Maisie (what is happening),
2. Extradiegetic: the puzzle for the reader (how much Maisie knows)

„They had certainly no idle hours, and the child went to bed each night **as tired as from a long day's play.**“

„Papa, on whose knee she sat, burst into one of **those loud laughs of his that, however prepared she was, seemed always, like some trick in a frightening game,** to leap forth and make her jump. „

Child's perspective: Metaphor & Simile

ALEKOS

Implicit target domain
(METAPHOR IN ABSENTIA)



Confuses one concept for another
and completely blends them

Unaware of metaphorisation

MAISIE

Explicit target domain
(SIMILE)



Recognizes the similarity and
dissimilarity between two
concepts

Aware of metaphorisation

The Double Nature of Similes

SIMILE =

= a device that expresses **similarity** between two **dissimilar** things (Moon 2011)

The Sun is a golden apple.

The Sun is **like** a golden apple.



Marker of similarity and
dissimilarity at the same
time
(EPISTEMIC MODALITY)

Example: Elizabeth Black (1993) on The Inheritors by William Golding

Evolution of Neanderthals:

Metaphor

„Lok drew **the stick** back. There was a little honey and wax on the end.“



Simile

„He [homo sapiens] changes shape **like a bear in a cave.**“

Back to Stylistics of Metaphor in Literature

When does the metaphor become *figurative*?

On the **reader-author** level

„He had never heard of **an angel that floated about below a mushroom,**
but you never knew.“

When does the simile become *figurative*?

On the **character** level

„[Maisie] heard one of the ladies she found there — **a lady with eyebrows arched like skipping-ropes and thick black stitching, like ruled lines for musical notes on beautiful white gloves** — announce to another.“

Narrative modes

What mode is this in?

Direct thought:

„But this time he looked up, perhaps from instinct, and beheld a particularly pretty sight. *A sort of white mushroom* was drifting down with a tiny man suspended underneath [...]. Perhaps it was *an angel* .

Psycho-narration:

It was from something in Mrs. Wix's tone [...] *like a breast-high banister in a place of “drops,”* that would never give way.

Narrative modes

Psycho-narration (Free Indirect Style)

It was from something in Mrs. Wix's tone → NARRATOR

like a breast-high banister in a place of “drops” → MAISIE

„SEE-SAW“ EFFECT of simile (Cohn 1978)



Conclusion: metaphor & simile use in conveying a child's perspective

→ What is the difference between using metaphors and similes to portray child's perspective?

1. Explicitness of similes: self-awareness, shrewdness
2. Change of perspective mid-sentence: the “see-sawing effect”



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Extra examples:

By the time she had grown sharper, as the gentlemen who had criticised her calves used to say, she found in her mind a collection of images and echoes to which meanings were attachable — images and echoes kept for her in the childish dusk, the dim closet, the high drawers, like games she wasn't yet big enough to play. The great strain meanwhile was that of carrying by the right end the things her father said about her mother — things mostly indeed that Moddle, on a glimpse of them, as if they had been complicated toys or difficult books, took out of her hands and put away in the closet. A wonderful assortment of objects of this kind she was to discover there later, all tumbled up too with the things, shuffled into the same receptacle, that her mother had said about her father.

Crudely as they had calculated they were at first justified by the event: she was the little feathered shuttlecock they could fiercely keep flying between them. (more of a metaphor than a simile)

Everything that had happened when she was really little was dormant, everything but the positive certitude, bequeathed from afar by Moddle, that the natural way for a child to have her parents was separate and successive, like her mutton and her pudding or her bath and her nap.

Still excessively abundant, [the hair of Mrs Wix] was dressed in a manner of which the poor lady appeared not yet to have recognised the supersession, with a glossy braid, like a large diadem, on the top of the head, and behind, at the nape of the neck, a dingy rosette like a large button.

At first [Mrs Wix] had looked cross and almost cruel; but this impression passed away with the child's increased perception of her being in the eyes of the world a figure mainly to laugh at. She was as droll as a charade or an animal toward the end of the "natural history" — a person whom people, to make talk lively, described to each other and imitated.