



WHAT MAISIE KNEW UNDER LINGUISTIC STYLISTIC LENS

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Henry James significantly contributed to the criticism of fiction, particularly in his insistence that writers be allowed the greatest freedom possible in presenting their view of the world. His imaginative use of point of view, interior monologue and possibly unreliable narrators in his own novels and tales brought a new depth and interest to narrative fiction.

He is one of the major figures of trans-Atlantic literature. His works frequently juxtapose characters from different worlds – the Old World (Europe), simultaneously artistic, corrupting, and alluring; and the New World (United States), where people are often brash, open, and assertive – and explore how this clash of personalities and cultures affects the two worlds.

James favored internal, psychological drama, and his work is often about conflicts between imaginative protagonists and their difficult environments.

His earlier work is considered realist because of the carefully described details of his characters' physical surroundings. However, throughout his long career, James maintained a strong interest in a variety of artistic effects and movements. His work gradually became more metaphorical and symbolic as he entered more deeply into the minds of his characters. In its intense focus on the consciousness of his major characters, James's later work foreshadows extensive developments in 20th century fiction. The prose of the later works is marked by long, digressive sentences that defer the verb and include many qualifying adverbs, prepositional phrases, and subordinate clauses as James seeks to pin down the bifurcating streams of his characters' consciousness.

Henry James, coming to fiction through an apprenticeship in criticism, brought an attitude more consciously that of the artist. His restricted personal experience as well as his special interests imposed upon him a more narrowed range of material and themes. His great concern became the revelation of thought and emotion, the penetration into the meaning of human relationships and concerns. More and more he devoted his art to revealing such fine shades of meaning as completely as possible.

The author relied on the more involved, psychological approach to his fiction in *What Maisie Knew* (1897), the story of the sensitive daughter of divorced and irresponsible parents. The novel has great contemporary relevance as an unflinching account of a wildly dysfunctional family. The book is also a notable technical achievement by James, as it follows the title character from earliest childhood to precocious maturity.

It's not surprising from the book's title that knowledge and education form a major theme in this bittersweet tale of Maisie's development. Her keen observation of the irresponsible behavior of almost all the adults she lives with eventually persuades her to rely on her most devoted friend, Mrs. Wix, even though the frumpy governess is by far the least superficially attractive adult in her life.

The common reading of *What Maisie Knew* is that of a species of *bildungsroman*, as the story of Maisie's emotional and intellectual development at the hands of her divorced parents, and the subsequent machinations of their various partners and surrogate-

figures, is undoubtedly the core theme of the novel. The realization of such dimensions of the novel relies heavily on the linguistic devices employed to create a certain message meant to reach the reader.

Nevertheless, the focus of the present study is laid on the intricate ways of pleating stylistic functions, analyzing the artful manipulation that James exerts on the language used in the novel, with a view to discovering the stylistic effects created at text level and accounting for his being a step closer to the stream-of-consciousness linguistic techniques.

The excerpts taken into consideration for analysis are grouped according to the purpose of the present study to prove how stylistic functions of the language pleat at the level of the text in order to create the desired impact on the reader. Another reason behind the grouping of the text is the need to show how James's dependence on tradition and the linguistic cannon already turns into what the stream-of-consciousness represents. He takes a further step closer to the linguistic and graphological techniques involved in the textual realization of the trend under discussion.

Text 1. "Miss Overmore considered; she coloured a little; then she embraced her ingenious friend. 'You are too sweet! I'm a *real* governess.'

'And couldn't he be a real tutor?'

'Of course not. He's ignorant and bad.'

'Bad - ?' Maisie echoed with wonder.

Her companion gave a queer little laugh at her tone. 'He's ever so much younger -'
'But that was all.

'Younger than you?'

Miss Overmore laughed again; it was the first time Maisie had seen her approach so nearly to a giggle. 'Younger than - no matter whom. I don't know anything about him and don't want to,' she rather inconsequently added. 'He's not my sort, and I'm sure, my own darling, he's not yours.' And she repeated the free caress into which her colloquies with Maisie almost always broke and which made the child feel that *her* affection at least was a gage of safety. Parents had seemed too vague, but governesses were evidently to be trusted. Maisie's faith in Mrs. Wix, for instance, had suffered no lapse from the fact that all communication with her had temporarily dropped." (James, 1985:59)

Text 2. "'You must allow me to reply to that,' cried Mrs. Wix, 'that you knew nothing of the sort, and that you rather basely failed to back me up last night when you pretended so plump that you did! You hoped in fact, exactly as much as I did and as in my senseless passion I even hope now, that this may be the beginning of better things.'

Oh yes, Mrs. Wix was indeed, for the first time, sharp; so that there at last stirred in our heroine the sense not so much of being proved disingenuous as of being precisely accused of the meanness that had brought everything down on her through her very desire to shake herself clear of it. She suddenly felt herself swell with a passion of protest. 'I never, *never* hoped I wasn't going again to see Mrs. Beale! I didn't, I didn't!' she repeated. Mrs. Wix bounced about with the force of rejoinder of which she also felt that she must anticipate the concussion and which, though the good lady was evidently charged to the brim, hung fire long enough to give time for an aggravation. 'She's beautiful and I love her! I love her and she's beautiful!'" (p. 209)

Text 3. "Here again they were delayed by another sharp thought of Mrs. Wix's 'But what will she live on meanwhile?'

Maisie stopped short. 'Till Sir Claude comes?'

It was nothing to the violence with which her friend had been arrested. ‘Who’ll pay the bills?’

Maisie thought. ‘Can’t *she*?’

‘She? She hasn’t a penny.’

The child wondered. ‘But didn’t papa – ?’

‘Leave her a fortune?’ Mrs. Wix would have appeared to speak of papa as dead had she not immediately added: ‘Why he lives on other women!’

Oh, yes, Maisie remembered. ‘Then can’t he send – ?’ She faltered again; even to herself it sounded queer.

‘Some of their money to his wife?’ Mrs. Wix gave a laugh still stranger than the weird suggestion. ‘I daresay she’d take it!’

They hurried on again; yet again, on the stairs, Maisie pulled up. ‘Well, if she had stopped in England – !’ she threw out.

Mrs. Wix considered. ‘And he had come over instead?’

‘Yes, as we expected.’ Maisie launched her speculation. ‘What, then, would she have lived on?’

Mrs. Wix hung fire but an instant. ‘On other men!’ And she marched downstairs.” (p. 224)

The first group of three texts considered may be regarded as displaying the highest degree of James’s traditional dimension, although stream-of-consciousness techniques already ‘sabotage’ the text, in that the stylistic pleating of functions hinders meaning recovery on the part of the reader at times.

Most of the vocabulary is formal, but intrusions of the consultative and the informal, corresponding to everyday conversation register especially in Maisie’s lines and her interlocutors’, when engaged in speaking to the child. Thus, *until* is replaced by *till* and contracted forms work their way in the body of the formal text, e.g. *I’m, couldn’t, He’s, don’t* (Text 1); *wasn’t, didn’t, She’s* (Text 2); *Who’ll pay the bills?* (Text 3).

The nouns in the texts reveal a subtle stylistic play upon the real world and the inner world of human thought and mind. In our case, the former is employed so as to identify Maisie’s relationships to other people and their place in her life, whereas the latter displays a rich array of needs, sensations, feelings and experiences that the child undergoes: *friend, governess, tutor, wonder, companion, laugh, tone, giggle, caress, colloquies, child, affection, safety, gage, Parents, governesses, faith, lapse, fact, communication* (Text 1); *night, passion, things, heroine, sense, meanness, desire, protest, force, concussion, lady, brim, aggravation* (Text 2); *thought, violence, friend, bills, penny, child, papa, fortune, women, money, laugh, suggestion, stairs, speculation* (Text 3).

Along the same line of opposing inner universe to reality, the adjectives in the texts, apparently dominated by the graphologically marked *real*, are used to qualify parts of the child’s world as opposed to pieces of the real one, e.g. *ingenious, sweet, real, ignorant, bad, queer, little, younger, free, vague* (Text 1); *senseless, better, sharp, disingenuous, swell, good, beautiful* (Text 2); *sharp, dead, queer, stranger, weird* (Text 3). The obvious repetition of the synonymic series *queer, stranger, weird* may stylistically signal the child’s confusion about matters in the real world and her trying to grasp how things work.

Moreover, the abundance of adverbs, either making up superlative degrees or setting space and time boundaries for actions, also serve the stylistic purpose of rendering the Maisie’s attempts to make sense of the real world, e.g. *too, so much, ever, again, inconsequently, almost always, evidently, temporarily* (Text 1); *so, even, so much, precisely, very, never, again, evidently* (Text 2); *again, immediately* (Text 3).

The great number of verbs in the excerpts enhances the dynamic dimension of discourse, while also corresponding to the pattern of human speech, which makes up most of the body of the texts, e.g. *considered, coloured, embraced, are, I'm, couldn't he be, echoed, gave, was, laughed, had seen, approach, don't know, don't want, added, repeated, broke, made, feel, had seemed, were, to be, had suffered, had temporarily dropped* (Text 1); *must, allow, to reply, knew, failed, to back me up, pretended, did, hoped, may be, was, stirred, had brought, to shake, felt, wasn't going, to see, didn't, repeated, bounced, anticipate, to give* (Text 2); *were, live, stopped, comes, was, had been arrested, pay, thought, Can't, hasn't, wondered, Leave, would have appeared, to speak, had she not immediately added, lives, remembered, can't he send, faltered, sounded, hurried, pulled up, threw, expected, launched, hung, marched* (Text 3). Thus, James takes a step further in depicting human behaviour as speech and thought.

The sentence structure also observes the rules of human speech, i.e. the sentences are short, simple sentences most often. A clear distinction is imposed, as the authorial intrusions are marked by longer simple, compound or complex sentences.

Furthermore, the human speech dimension of discourse is even better rendered by the elliptical sentences that seem to have suddenly been cut off, as interlocutors often break communication all of a sudden or are interrupted abruptly, e.g. *'Of course not. He's ignorant and bad.'* *'Bad – ?'* *Maisie echoed with wonder. Her companion gave a queer little laugh at her tone. 'He's ever so much younger –'* *But that was all.* (Text 1); *The child wondered. 'But didn't papa – ?'* *'Then can't he send – ?'* *She faltered again; even to herself it sounded queer. 'Well, if she had stopped in England – !'* *she threw out.* (Text 3).

The disruptions register at a further graphological level, considering the choice of the author to write the three words in italics in the three fragments analyzed, e.g. *real, never, she*. The option of the author in the contexts the words in italics are used is meant to emphasize the importance of the entity or concept in the narrative thread.

Thus, much like Forster but taking a step closer to the stream-of-consciousness, James's discourse displays the same linguistic battle between tradition and the cannon, on the one side, and the desire to set language free from any constraints.

Disruptions of traditional discourse are more obvious with James at various levels of the text. Thus, the formal register is at times (violently) interrupted by intrusions of the informal up to the colloquial vocabulary, even insults.

Moreover, the traditional long, well-formed sentences alternate with short, sometimes abruptly cut off simple sentences, which struggle to render human thought and speech.

Graphological disruptions are not to be neglected either, as there are numerous instances of graphic emphasis achieved by the author's use of italics for specific words that play an important role in the context or that may help render the intonation of everyday speech.

Last but definitely not least, James's use of barbarisms and of what we dare call 'erudisms', i.e. larger fragments encoded in foreign languages that disrupt the body of the English text, anticipates the complex Joycean encoding. The numerous texts in various foreign languages to be found in Joyce's discourse represent the linguistic climax of selecting readership according to the knowledge they possess.

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Abstract

The essence of this approach finds itself in the complex ways of putting together the stylistic functions investigating the artistic manipulation by means of which Henry James influences the language he makes use of in this novel, trying to discover the stylistic effects created at the text level and to consider which of these ways is the closest to the stream-of-consciousness technique. The fragments which were selected for analysis are grouped according to the aim of this approach, i.e., to reveal the assembling procedures of the language stylistic functions at text level in order to create a certain impact on the reader. The excerpts structuring is also accounted for by the necessity of showing how James's depending upon the tradition of the linguistic canon has already become the essence of the stream-of-consciousness technique. One more step need to be taken to get closer to the graphic and linguistic techniques involved in the technical achievement of the trend in discussion.

Resumé

Le noyau de cette étude-ci est représenté des modalités complexes d'assembler les fonctions stylistiques, en analysant la manipulation artistique avec laquelle Henry James influence le langage utilisé dans le roman, en essayant de découvrir les effets stylistiques créés au niveau du texte, et de considérer qu'il est plus proche des techniques linguistiques du « stream-of-consciousness ». Les fragments choisis pour l'analyse sont groupés en conformité avec le but de cette étude-ci pour démontrer la modalité d'assemblage des fonctions stylistiques du langage au niveau du texte, pour créer l'impact désiré avec le lecteur. Un autre motive justifiant le groupage du texte est le besoin de montrer comme la dépendance de James de la tradition et du canon linguistique se transforme déjà en l'essence du « stream-of-consciousness ». Il fait encore un pas pour s'approcher aux techniques linguistiques et graphologiques impliquées dans la réalisation technique du courant en discussion.

Rezumat

Acest studiu are ca element esențial analizarea complexelor modalități de asamblare a funcțiilor stilistice, analizând manipularea artistică prin care Henry James influențează limba folosită în roman, încercând să descopere efecte stilistice create la nivelul textului. Fragmentele selectate pentru analiză sunt grupate conform obiectivelor prezentului studiu, pentru a crea impactul dorit asupra cititorului. Un alt motiv care justifică gruparea propusă a textelor îl constituie nevoia de a descrie maniera în care dependența lui James de tradiție și de canonul lingvistic se transformă deja în esența tehnicii curentului de conștiință. Nu mai este nevoie decât de un pas pentru ca autorul să se apropie de tehnicile lingvistice și grafice implicate în realizarea tehnicii curentului în discuție.