

Who's Afraid of the Beast in the Jamesian Closet?

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Abstract

Building upon the Foucauldian insight that sexuality is a discourse and thereby refusing to be chained to the Freudian repressive hypothesis, this paper aims to ascertain how the closet is made and how the homosexual comes to be seen in the act of reading the literary text, "The Beast in the Jungle," written by Henry James. It will examine the power relationships between the characters and between the narrator and the reader, surrounding the protagonist's sexual secret, which is linked to fear.

Keywords

Henry James, homosexuality, queer theory, psychoanalysis

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Whose Fear?

Since the queer reading methodology was introduced to literary studies in the early 1990s, scholars of Henry James have frequently referred to a suppressed homoeroticism in his life and works, in most cases aiming to bring him “out” of the closet. According to Leland S. Person Jr. (1993), “[m]any recent James scholars (especially [Eve Kosovsky] Sedgwick and Fred Kaplan) have brought James and James studies out of the closet to the point where we can almost take James’s homosexuality for granted” (188). ² To assert that James was homosexual has required the marshalling of evidence. This has included the biographical information that he was a bachelor for his entire life, the intimate relationships he had with his same-sex friends and the letters that confirm his special feelings toward them, as well as the emotional closeness between male characters depicted in his works. The claim by biographer Leon Edel (1985) that James never had a sexual relationship of any kind, while it undermines the sense of a heterosexual identity, does not have quite the same effect where homosexual identity might be concerned since the latter would necessarily have been hidden, thus feeding the homosexual speculation around James. Yet when we think of homosexuality not as an identity but as a practice, there is nothing to verify James’s “true” sexuality. This problematic of verification exists not only in James’s case; it presents a serious challenge to any endeavor to establish the “truth” of someone’s sexuality.

When people describe someone as homosexual, what proof is presented or implied in support of that claim concerning sexual identity? Is it sexual conduct? Is it a feeling? Is it a

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sexual orientation? Or is it a desire? We cannot say exactly where, on what level, a certain kind of sexuality may be attached to a person. At the same time, if someone claims to “know” the other person’s sexual identity, that knowledge depends on judgments made by the perceiver and does not in itself constitute truth. One of the surest ways, we believe, to know another person’s sexuality is to receive a direct confession by that person about his/her sexual desire and/or sexual conduct. This idea explains why coming out is so important for LGBT activism; at the same time, as Judith Butler (1991) points out in her essay “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” coming out is highly problematic (16). In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault (1978) famously discusses how the sexual identity supposedly *confirmed* in confessions is actually *constructed* through them. He also points out that discourse around sexuality is the effect of the will and power to know the other person’s sexual identity, and this will to knowledge determines the process of discourse construction through which sexuality comes to be regarded as a human truth.

Foucault’s concept of sexuality is based on his criticism of the Freudian repressive hypothesis, the idea that sexual desire originally exists and is then suppressed. Contrary to the repressive hypothesis that draws on an ontology of sexuality and reinforces it, Foucault argues sexuality is not a thing but a discourse, which is constructed when people examine repressed sexuality. If we employ Foucault’s concept of sexuality in our interpretation of literary texts, our reading would not to posit sexuality as an object of knowledge by bringing writers and works out of the closet. Sedgwick’s essays on James in her *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and *Tendencies* (1993) are important studies to contemplate what queer reading could do with sexuality described in literary texts in this sense. When she reads “The Beast in the Jungle” (1947) in *Epistemology*, she assumes that Marcher’s secret inevitably relates to his sexuality and develops her argument that he “lives as one who is *in the closet*” (205). In doing so, she makes

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the closet visible to readers while she carefully avoids defining the protagonist's sexual identity. Criticizing Sedgwick by indicating that this closet is "the mere possibility of homosexual meaning," David Van Leer (1989) insists that "the salient feature of Sedgwick's closet, and its difference from the closet of gay propaganda, is not only that there is no homosexual inside it but that there must never be" (596). However, to me, when "outing" is in question, the two approaches toward the Jamesian closet are not as different from each other as Van Leer assumes since whether the person in the closet is truly gay or not does not actually matter. Because "outing" does not mean proving one's sexuality, it does not necessarily need evidence or at least the evidence does not need to be examined. Rather, when the closet becomes visible and the person inside becomes stigmatized, the "outing" becomes complete. In this sense, therefore, although Sedgwick carefully evades "outing," the closet she gives him "outs" Marcher.

Citing Carlo Ginzburg, Foucault scholar Arnold I. Davidson (2001) refers to the ancient concept of *enargeia*, "the idea that the historian must produce accounts that are clear and palpable, that are living narratives conveying an impression of life that will move and convince their readers" (143). If outing involves visualizing the closet, and *vice versa*, it somehow requires *enargeia*, in the sense that *enargeia* is "linked to a rhetorical tradition in which the orator made some nonexistent object visible to his audience" (143). Consequently, while the process of outing engages the person who outs in stigmatizing the victim, spreading a rumor, feeling fear or some other kind of emotion, the evidence is left unquestioned. In this sense, outing is in its nature *enargeia*. Even when certain evidence is offered, it can never be neutral but is rather always "distorted," since between the one who outs and the other who is outed, there always lies a gap, cultivated within the power relationship between them.

Our project here is to figure out this power relationship surrounding the closet by reading the gap. The process sometimes requires a historiographic technique of decoding that "distorted"

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evidence which Davidson introduces in his discussion of Ginzburg. The closet that conceals the homosexual secret is the product of heterosexism, which controls the power game over the knowledge about the truth of human sexuality and socially produces the gap between who outs and who is outed. Therefore, our concern will be not to decode a secret but to figure out how the closet is made and how the homosexual comes to be seen. In other words, our focus will be on the very act of decoding the secret, or deciphering “a nonobjective source” (Davidson 2001, 155) which is employed as distorted evidence of homosexual desire. In “The Beast in the Jungle,” Marcher’s sexual identity is presented as a secret, which, as the title indicates, is linked to a fearful beast. While the secret, or the beast, functions as distorted evidence of Marcher’s homosexuality, its revelation is suspended until the end so that enthralled readers must wait for the moment when the truth will be exposed. If the secret, or the beast, is in the closet until the end of the story, what kind of power relationship is constructed between Marcher and May Bartrum, and between the narrator and the reader, surrounding this closet? How is it related to the fear? Who is most afraid of the beast in the closet?

The Primal Scene

The interpretation of “The Beast in the Jungle” as a drama reflecting the repressive hypothesis originates in the will to knowledge of the reader. The reasons why this kind of interpretation is pursued by some queer readers, and is accepted to a certain degree, can be found in elements residing both inside and outside of the text. Biographically, there is a suspicion that James might be driven by homosexual desire; historically, as Alan Bray (1982) describes in *The History of Homosexuality*, Molly Houses became more and more visible in the 18th century; socially, the Oscar Wilde case influenced the situation surrounding homosexuals. This biographical and socio-historical background is assembled to make the fiction appear as a drama

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of sexual oppression. At the same time, these elements are incorporated into the text as a knowledge of sexuality that constructs the basic structure of the narrative: readers are encouraged to read the story as an inscription of the repressive hypothesis and to infer the protagonist's repressed sexuality.

One example of this approach is Kaja Silverman's interpretation (1992), which employs psychoanalysis to consider Marcher's encounter of a strange man in the graveyard as a primal scene.

With the light before him he knew that even of late his ache had only been smothered. It was strangely drugged, but it throbbed; at the touch it began to bleed. And the touch, in the event, was the face of a fellow-mortal. This face, one grey afternoon when the leaves were thick in the alleys, looked into Marcher's own, at the cemetery, with an expression like the cut of a blade. He felt it, that is, so deep down that he winced at the steady thrust. The person who so mutely assaulted him was a figure he had noticed, on reaching his own goal, absorbed by a grave a short distance away, a grave apparently fresh, so that the emotion of the visitor would probably match it for frankness. (James 1947, 430, emphasis added)

In this scene, the man's mournful expression wounds Marcher as if it were a sharp blade. Later, he feels envy.

What Marcher was at all events conscious of was, in the first place, that the image of scarred passion presented to him was conscious too—of something that profaned the air; and, in the second, that, roused, startled, shocked, he was yet the next moment

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looking after it, as it went, with envy. The most extraordinary thing that had happened to him—though he had given that name to other matters as well—took place, after his immediate vague stare, as a consequence of this impression. The stranger passed, but the raw glare of his grief remained, making our friend wonder in pity what wrong, what wound it expressed, what injury not to be healed. What had the man *had* to make him, by the loss of it, so bleed and yet live. (430-1, emphasis added)

Marcher notices that the man has been emotionally wounded by the recent loss of the woman he loved. He feels envious of the passion that the man might have had toward her, because it is this passion that Marcher had never experienced with May Bartrum. Silverman observes that this can be read as a primal scene in which first May Bartrum takes the place of that woman, making herself and the stranger a heterosexual couple, and then Marcher takes the place of the stranger. Through this displacement, Marcher identifies himself with the man and assumes the man's heterosexual desire as his own.

In her reading of this scene, Silverman distinguishes a positive Oedipus complex, characterized by desire for the parent of the opposite sex and identification with the parent of the same sex from a negative version, the desire for the parent of the same sex and identification with the parent of the opposite sex. Employing these two versions of the Oedipal complex, she tries to explain how the metaphor of the "blade" works here. First, the blade is thrust into Marcher, with an implication that he is the one who is penetrated. Then the text refers to the man's bloody scar, indicating he is now penetrated.

Whereas in the first passage the stranger is the one who penetrates Marcher with the knife of his vision, in the second passage he has become the one who is penetrated,

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and, in the process, feminized. The former marks the maternal point of entry into the Jamesian fantasmatic—that turning, in other words, upon identification with the “mother”—and the latter the point of entry which occurs through what I have called “sodomitical identification” with the “father.” (Silverman 174)

In her attempt to demonstrate an interplay between the positive Oedipus complex, a “normal” heterosexual version, and its counterpart, the negative Oedipus complex, a homosexual version, in the interpretation of the critical moment in “The Beast in the Jungle,” Silverman focuses on the relationship between the child and the parents, putting emphasis on the reaction of the child—in this case Marcher—to the scene.

By contrast, Sedgwick (1990) considers the very same scene as one that evokes homosexual panic, and interprets it as the moment in which Marcher undergoes a change from identification with homosexuality/femininity to identification with heterosexuality/masculinity. By introducing the notion of homosexual panic, Sedgwick seeks to clarify “how central to that process is man’s desire for man—and the denial of that desire” (211). She then writes:

The path traveled by Marcher’s desire in this brief and cryptic nonencounter reenacts a classical trajectory of male entitlement. Marcher begins with the possibility of *desire for the man*, in response to the man’s open “hunger” (“which,” afterward, “still flared for him like a smoky torch.”). Deflecting that desire under a fear of profanation, he then replaces it with envy, with an *identification with the man* in that man’s (baffled) desire for some other, presumed female, dead object. “The stranger passed, but the raw glare of his grief remained, making our friend wonder in pity what wrong, what wound it expressed, what injury not to be healed. What had the man *had*, to make him

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by the loss of it so bleed and yet live?" (211)

Although they take different approaches toward Marcher's problematic self-identification, in one case a primal scene, in the other homosexual panic, Silverman and Sedgwick both explicate it in terms of gender and sexuality based on dichotomies of masculine/feminine and homosexual/heterosexual.

The problem of self-identification in a literary text, however, is not only relevant to the characters. Therefore, had Silverman not reduced the primal scene to the relationship between Marcher and the stranger, she could perhaps have explored the no less interesting psychological relationship between the narrator and the reader using the concepts of transference and countertransference. She might also have been able to provide a more persuasive example of the application of psychoanalysis to the interpretation of literature. Sedgwick (1993) criticizes this deficiency in Silverman's argument:

Yet I would summarize the damages in her essay, for example, by saying that the transferential relations surrounding the analyst/critic—indeed, that *any* relations surrounding that figure—remain rigidly unexamined there; that, concomitantly, the understanding of James's literary production relied on a severely reproductive, indeed a rather insulting model of repression and the unconscious; that it renders the formal and stylistic agency of James's texts invisible; that it excludes, or rather repels consideration of, every historical dimension involving power, oppression, and the consolidation or resistance of marked identities; and that its explorations of gay possibility occur exclusively within a framework (that of the "primal scene" and of the "positive" and "negative" Oedipal complex) whose structuration already, tacitly

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installs the procreative monogamous heterosexual couple as the origin, telos, and norm of sexuality as a whole. (74)

Unfortunately, Sedgwick herself does not attempt to develop the idea of “the transference relations surrounding the analyst/critic.” Yet if we accept her suggestion and employ that model to analyze the relationship between the reader and the narrator, the primal scene may serve as a valid and useful concept for interpreting the literary text. For example, what if we re-examine Silverman’s reading by asking if the primal scene really belongs to Marcher? Is it possible to see the scene from a totally different perspective? For example, given that the cemetery scene *is* a primal scene, should it not be necessary for us to discuss for whom it really works as such? The answer to the question is we have at least three parties who are engaged in the primal scene—Marcher, the narrator and the reader.

Silverman’s interpretation of the cemetery scene does not draw a clear distinction between Marcher’s perception of the man’s facial expression, the narrator’s description of their encounter, and the reader’s interpretation of the scene. Neither does she specify which of the three the primal scene accounts for. To confine understanding of the primal scene to the relationship between the stranger and the protagonist is not quite reasonable because the primal scene involves the stranger’s expression, the protagonist who sees it, the narrator who understands and depicts the protagonist’s mental state, and the reader who reads the narrative.

Therefore, to understand the primal scene of this story, it is necessary to look carefully into its narrative structure. With the reader and the narrator being taken into consideration, the primal scene model would offer a useful paradigm for literary interpretation, especially when the psychoanalytic view of transference and countertransference is applied to the problematic relationship between the narrator and the reader. Asking for whom the scene in question functions

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as a primal scene, I believe, would lead us to the crucial subject: what is the meaning of Marcher's secret which remains in the story as a "secret," around which the story develops.

The Closet of Secrecy

The presence of Marcher's secret is implied for the first time in the narrative when May Bartram tells him that she "knows" it. May Bartram starts talking about the secret as an unforgettable story she heard from Marcher:

"You know you told me something that I've never forgotten and that again and again has made me think of you since; it was that tremendously hot day when we went to Sorrento, across the bay, for the breeze. What I allude to was what you said to me, on the way back, as we sat, under the awning of the boat, enjoying the cool. Have you forgotten?"

He had forgotten, and he was even more surprised than ashamed. But the great thing was that he saw it was no vulgar reminder of any "sweet" speech. (James 387)

May Bartram reminds Marcher of something he himself has forgotten, and tells him that she shares it with him as his secret. The fact she "knows" the secret serves to create a division between "those who know" and "those who are known," privileging "those who know" as knowing more. She asks Marcher what happened to him since he disclosed the secret to her, and Marcher, occupying the position of "those who are known," is forced to make another confession about the secret. Within this power relationship, however, the fact that she knows his secret does not stigmatize him, but provides him with a sense of freedom:

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“Has it ever happened?”

Then it was that, while he continued to stare, a light broke for him and the blood slowly came to his face, which began to burn with recognition. “Do you mean I told you—?” But he faltered, lest what came to him shouldn't be right, lest he should only give himself away.

“It was something about yourself that it was natural one shouldn't forget—that is if one remembered you at all. That's why I ask you,” she smiled, “if the thing you then spoke of has ever come to pass?”

Oh, then he saw, but he was lost in wonder and found himself embarrassed. . . . After the first little shock of it her knowledge on the contrary began, even if rather strangely, to taste sweet to him. She was the only other person in the world then who would have it, and she had had it all these years, while the fact of his having so breathed his secret had unaccountably faded from him. No wonder they couldn't have met as if nothing had happened. “I judge,” he finally said, “that I know what you mean. Only I had strangely enough lost the consciousness of having taken you so far into my confidence.”

“Is it because you've taken so many others as well?”

“I've taken nobody. Not a creature since then.”

“So that I'm the only person who knows?”

“The only person in the world.” (James 388-9)

Throughout the story, Marcher and May Bartram do not mention how the secret matters, nor does the narrator. They do not even discuss whether or not they refer to the same thing when they mention it. Similarly, whether or not the narrator really knows what the “secret” is has never

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been questioned in the story. The secret, without being clarified, is accepted as a given fact by Marcher and May Bartram as well as the narrator and the reader.

Therefore, it is only through interpretation that the secret is understood in regard to Marcher's sexuality. If so, we need to ask what makes this possible. Sedgwick's suggestion of Marcher's homosexual panic does not indicate a reality but accounts for how she reads the text. Her expectation that Marcher's secret exclusively concerns sexuality determines her assumption, which, as Philip Horne (1995) points out, is not fully supported within her essay. Yet, in order to be fair to Sedgwick, we should first examine if there are really elements, whether inside or outside the text, that contribute to such a reading. A question to ask is: who is encouraging the reader to interpret Marcher's "secret" as a suspicion about his being homosexual? In other words, who presents the secret as distorted evidence of Marcher's homosexual closet? Is it May Bartram? The narrator? Or Sedgwick?

Assuming, or not assuming, that Marcher's secret concerns his sexuality, his feeling towards the "secret" in question is the same as what Sedgwick (1990) presents as the psyche of a person in the closet:

This is how it happens that the outer secret, the secret of having a secret, functions, in Marcher's life, precisely as *the closet*. It is not a closet in which there is a homosexual man, for Marcher is not a homosexual man. Instead, it is the closet of, simply, the homosexual secret—the closet of imagining *a* homosexual secret. Yet it is unmistakable that Marcher lives as one who is *in the closet*. His angle on daily existence and intercourse is that of the closeted person. (205)

Sedgwick's interpretation here is quite rhetorical. Marcher's secret might be one that concerns

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sexuality only because it can be expressed by using the metaphor of the closet. However, if we understand Marcher's having the secret as his being in the closet, we can say May Bartram is the one who makes him conscious of that closet. It is also the presence of May Bartram that makes this closet function as a closet of homosexuality. Assuring the reader that they are not likely to marry, the narrative identifies Marcher as a man who lacks heterosexual desire, and therefore who could be homosexual. In consequence, we might be able to say that it is only in his relationship with May Bartram that Marcher could be homosexual.

The following passage, which Sedgwick quotes as a proof of Marcher's being in the closet, reveals that it is the narrator who sees Marcher as a person in the closet:

Above all she was in the secret of the difference between the forms he went through—those of his little office under Government, those of caring for his modest patrimony, for his library, for his garden in the country, for the people in London whose invitations he accepted and repaid—and the detachment that reigned beneath them and that made of all behaviour, all that could in the least be called behaviour, a long act of dissimulation. What it had come to was that he wore a mask painted with the social simper, out of the eye-holes of which there looked eyes of an expression not in the least matching the other features. This the stupid world, even after years, had never more than half discovered. (James 399)

The narrator, in describing the expression concealed by a mask, reveals a certain pride in disclosing Marcher's truth, which "stupid" others "had never more than half discovered." Though it is of course May Bartram, as the narrator admits, who is aware of the difference in Marcher's attitudes, as it is written from the narrator's point of view, so does the impression of Marcher's

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eyes belong to the narrator.

In addition, although Marcher's "secret" is described as something to be "afraid" of, Marcher himself is not afraid. While he is not perfectly sure of the true meaning of his "secret," he does not deny its presence. He is not willing to uncover it, but at the same time, he is not afraid of its meaning. When May Bartram asks if he has fear, Marcher never says he does. Her question about fear does not necessarily prove the existence of actual fear in her interlocutor. Rather, this is a rhetorical device, intended to have the effect of positing that Marcher's secret is a fearful one. If so, the person who is afraid of the meaning of Marcher's secret should be either May Bartram, who asks about fear, or the narrator, who describes May's asking, or both. While May Bartram seems very sure that she *knows* what his secret is, the narrator's knowledge remains unclear. So it is necessary to clarify if the narrator really knows Marcher's "secret," and then, if the narrator recognizes it as something fearful.

To summarize Sedgwick's argument, Marcher, who is afraid of becoming homosexual, is not actually homosexual but rather homophobic. However, we should not agree with her on this point, since if Marcher had something that he should be afraid of, it might not be the fear of homosexuality but rather the fear of "ignorance" about his own future. Furthermore, if he could recognize himself as being homosexual, this fear could disappear, and then another fear, the fear of "knowledge," would make him anxious that his homosexuality might be uncovered. These fears concern less what the secret indicates than knowing and not knowing what would happen to him. In the story, the presence of May Bartram serves to maintain a balance between this knowing and not knowing. By sharing his secret with her, and letting her know who he is, Marcher can liberate himself from the fear of ignorance, the fear of not knowing who he really is. At the same time, the fact she *already* knows the secret releases him from the oppression that his secret should never be known to anyone. As a result, he can confront and overcome his anxiety in

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the presence of May Bartram. Therefore, when May Bartram asks if he is afraid, there is an essential difference between them concerning what they perceive as the object of fear. While May Bartram refers to homophobia, what matters to Marcher are knowledge and ignorance concerning his own secret.

What the narrator is concerned with is the meaning of the secret that May Bartram holds, and in that sense the narrator refers to the secret in the same manner as May Bartram. However, their attitudes are totally different. Whereas May Bartram tries to understand Marcher's "secret," share it with him, and reduce his "fear," the narrator presents it to the reader as something unnamable, something to be afraid of, and something that cannot be erased. The narrator warns the reader of a terrible event that will eventually happen to Marcher using the metaphor of the beast lurking in the jungle. Marcher, however, is entirely ignorant of his own future, and this ignorance causes his anxiety. In this sense, it is unlikely that Marcher has already seen the beast himself or can foresee its advent. Actually, except for the narrator, no one in the text is aware of the presence of the fearful beast. Therefore, we can conclude that it should be the narrator who embodies Marcher's insubstantial "secret" with the figure of the beast in the jungle.

The Beast in the Closet

Sedgwick's failure lies in employing the distorted evidence presented by the narrator, who gives *one* specific meaning to the "beast." In the narrative, the beast emerges when May Bartram, severely ill, approaches Marcher:

The beast had lurked indeed, and the beast, at its hour, had sprung; it had sprung in that twilight of the cold April when, pale, ill, wasted, but all beautiful, and perhaps even then recoverable, she had risen from her chair to stand before him and let him

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imaginably guess. It had sprung as he didn't guess; it had sprung as she hopelessly turned from him, and the mark, by the time he left her, had fallen where it was to fall. He had justified his fear and achieved his fate; he had failed, with the last exactitude, of all he was to fail of; and a moan now rose to his lips as he remembered she had prayed he mightn't know. This horror of waking—this was knowledge, knowledge under the breath of which the very tears in his eyes seemed to freeze. (James 433)

The narrator presents this scene in flashback, and retrospectively interprets it as a critical moment in May Bartram's heterosexual seduction and Marcher's refusal. As the narrator writes, the beast shows up at this moment giving an implication that Marcher's refusal means his failure in becoming a heterosexual man, and that he might be homosexual. The beast, an object of fear, serves as a metaphor of homosexuality, which is at that time also an object of fear. However, what Marcher actually sees when May Bartram approaches him is her face; he himself does not witness the beast jumping out. If the beast should jump out, it should be the narrator who saw the beast first. Its emergence is recognized only in the narrative, which is presented from the narrator's point of view. In this scene, the narrator passes judgment on Marcher's life: loving May Bartram was the only way for Marcher to prevent the advent of the beast, but he failed. Using the gap between the narrator, the subject of the narrative, and Marcher, the object, the narrator presents the beast as distorted evidence of Marcher's homosexuality, which should be decoded through a cooperative act of reading by the reader.

The story concludes with the scene in which Marcher sees the beast for the first time.

He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast; then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise, huge and hideous, for the leap that was to settle

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him. His eyes darkened—it was close; and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself, on his face, on the tomb. (James 433)

Obviously, the emergence of the beast renders the moment of Marcher's awareness of his "true" sexuality. However, what is important here is that the narrator sees the beast before Marcher does. This means that the reader, too, who reads the narrator's description, sees the beast before Marcher. Strictly speaking, when the readers start reading the story, they must have already seen the "beast" in its title, "The Beast in the Jungle."

In the last scene, Marcher is lying on the grave face down when the beast attacks him from behind, which could imply both the pleasure and/or the fear of sodomy for some readers. For example, Daniel T. O'Hara (2013) finds "approaching ecstasy" in Marcher's darkening eyes when he "permits the Beast to have him, from the rear" (247). Similarly, as a narrative technique, the narrator offers a catharsis in this final scene, as a scene of terror, giving pain to the reader, and at the same time, providing the pleasure of knowing the "true" meaning of the story. Translating pain into pleasure is a characteristic of the primal scene, when a child witnesses the sexual act between his/her parents for the first time and later learns its meaning. To explore the possibility of understanding a literary text as a primal scene, we need to regard it as one that projects not only the desires of the characters but also those of the narrator and the reader. In addition, we need to observe closely how the primal scene is related to the pleasure of the narrative.

The pleasure of the narrative offered in this male homosexual primal scene could be the homosexual pleasure of being penetrated. In this sense, it is safe to say that this text is quite a queer one. The reader might be at a loss for a while how to comprehend the pleasure in this scene, just as a child would be when witnessing his/her parents' sexual acts for the first time. If the advent of the beast renders the exposure of Marcher's secret, for readers who associate it with

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sexuality and “know” its meaning, the beast shows up “too late.” For those who do not, it comes “too early.” As Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (1986) point out, events that disclose oppressed desire are always either “too early” or “too late” (10). Similarly, the narrative pleasure bestowed when the reader finally knows the “true” meaning of the story is, after all, either “too early” or “too late.” Thus the act of reading a story in search of the “true” meaning is to some extent, linked, if not directly, to the “repressed sexuality” that psychoanalysis should always presuppose, but that we needn’t.

In this essay I have discussed how the closet is constructed in James’s “The Beast in the Jungle.” In the text, Marcher’s secret is presented as a mystery, and the beast in the jungle functions as a motif to infuse this mystery with a sense of fear. In this sense the narrator is a skillful animal trainer, whose narrative intensifies suspense in its instillation of fear into the consciousness of the reader by a constant indication of the beast, and by its limited exposure. When the story reaches its climax, the fearful beast leaps out. But whether the last scene brings fear or pleasure depends on how the reader reads the narrative. Who is really afraid of the beast? Marcher, the narrator, or the reader? The answer is not present in the text. It comes into existence only through the act of interpretation. Thus, just as the “wound” in the cemetery scene could be “displaceable” (Silverman, 174), from Marcher to the stranger, the “fear” can also be displaced, from the narrator to the reader. If the fear is displaceable, then, the last scene also enables the narrator and the reader to project their own desires upon that of Marcher, and to identify their own primal scenes with his.

¹ This essay is the translated and revised version of a chapter in my previously published book, *Kuia Monogatari* (Queer Narratologies), winner of the Fukuhara Award for studies of English literature, originally written in Japanese under the name Chikako Matsushita (Kyoto: Jim-bun Shoin, 2009). I thank Tsuyoshi Nakajima for his help translating it into English and Mark Weeks for his many useful comments on the structure and expression.

² Most recently, Matthew Helmers discusses the queerness of John Marcher in relation to time, knowledge and subjectivity. Carolyn Tate suggests the possibility that May Bartram also has her own homosexual desire and that she is actually Marcher's "gay pal" (27). Both arguments are based on Sedgwick's reading of "The Beast in the Jungle."

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