The Beast in the Jungle Study Guide

The Beast in the Jungle by Henry James

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Introduction

Literary critics generally agree that Henry James's career can be divided into three periods, the first from 1876 to the mid-1880s, the second from the mid-1880s to 1897, and the third from 1897 to his death. James's "The Beast in the Jungle" was written and published in the final phase of James's career (1903). Like other works composed during this period, this story's style is the product of James's desire to minutely render the permutations of an individual consciousness, in this case the mind of the story's protagonist, John Marcher. Thematically, this story can be linked to one of the greatest novels of his later period, *The Ambassadors,* which was also published in 1903.

Both "The Beast in the Jungle" and *The Ambassadors,* even if in different ways, present the reader with the idea of the failure to live life. "The Beast in the Jungle" is the story of John Marcher, who believes he is destined for a special fate. This conviction is so profound that instead of delving into life, Marcher chooses to live at life's fringe, waiting for this special event to occur. When, at the end of his life, Marcher decides that he was mistaken in his conviction, and that nothing of momentous import was in fact to be his destiny, he is left a broken man. He realizes that his exceptionality is of a purely negative aspect: "The fate he had been marked for he met with a vengeance—he had emptied the cup to the lees; he had been the man of his time, *the* man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened."

Author Biography

Henry James, the second son of well-to-do parents, was born in New York City on April 15, 1843. Like his brother William James (the respected and influential pragmatist philosopher), Henry was destined for greatness. He was educated both in the United States and in Europe, and began his literary career writing fiction and literary criticism for prominent periodicals of his time such as the *Atlantic Monthly, Harper's Weekly,* and the *North American Review.* The great American writer William Dean Howells was an early and enthusiastic champion of James's prose, and James went on to win the admiration, friendship, or acquaintance, of many of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' leading literary talents. James wrote his first novel in 1878 (*Watch and Ward*) and went on to produce many novels, novellas, plays, and short stories during the rest of his life.

While James spent much of his early career in the United States, he traveled frequently to Europe and finally settled in London, which he made his permanent residence in 1875. (In protest of the initial reluctance of the United States to join the Allied cause in World War I, James became a naturalized British citizen in 1915, the year before his death.) James is most famous for his early novels, which have secured him the reputation of being a masterful portrayer of the American character. It was through some of these early works, such as *Daisy Miller* and *The Portrait of a Lady,* that James established himself as the originator of the international novel. These are narratives about Americans abroad who are depicted as naifs within a sophisticated and oftentimes corrupt European society. While James always found the clash of cultures an interesting subject, he moved on to other subjects as well, such as the moral education of children, the expanding consciousness of the individual, and the clash between subjective and external realities (such as is found in "The Beast in the Jungle"). The prolific James was an impressive literary talent who was and is regarded today as a consummate literary craftsman.

Plot Summary

"The Beast in the Jungle" is divided into six sections, each part designated by a roman numeral (I-VI). In the first section, James introduces the protagonist of the story, John Marcher. Marcher is at a manor house in the English countryside where he sees a woman whose face and manner stir his memory, although he is unable to recollect the circumstances of their acquaintance. Before he leaves, Marcher finds himself at close quarters with the woman. The moment she speaks to him he remembers where they met—in Italy where both were vacationing ten years previously. During this short renewal of their acquaintance, she reminds him that he had imparted to her a grave secret in Italy: he had told her that it was his conviction that he was destined to experience a monumental and devastating event, but as to the nature of this event, and when it might occur, he had no inkling. Marcher, who still fervently retains this conviction, is both pleased and shocked to meet the only human being to whom he has ever confided his deepest, and perhaps his only, secret. By the end of their conversation May Bartram has agreed to become his special friend, a friend who will wait and watch with him until the moment his fate is at last revealed.

In Section II Bartram receives an inheritance which allows her to set herself up in a London home. Bartram's and Marcher's proximity leads to a life in which they are constant companions. Most of this part of James's story details Marcher's pleased feelings over having a companion to keep him company during his "vigil." There is a sense of much time passing quickly.

Section III opens with Marcher and Bartram discussing the oddity of their lives (spent waiting for Marcher's "beast" to spring), and the possibility that both of them might have long been a subject of especial interest to those who know them, since they have so long been such inseparable friends, and yet have never married. As in Section II, a sense of the passing of time is brought home to readers when it is learned that May Bartram has fallen ill from "a deep disorder in her blood," a disease which will soon usher her to her death. This calamity leads Marcher to wonder, with some panic, if time is running out for him too, and whether he is correct in believing in a special fate. The section ends with Marcher's bleak hope that he has not been "sold."

Section IV opens with a description of one of Marcher's visits to Bartram. The sight of her wasted "serene" face, and a conversation they have about his "beast," causes him once again to doubt his conviction. During this conversation, it occurs to Marcher that Bartram is attempting to "save" him from his beast, that she is trying to make him forget about it, because if he were to experience it he would not survive the revelation. This new perspective troubles him, and he becomes even more troubled when Bartram proceeds to suggest that he will never experience his beast, that his revelation was something that "*was* to" have happened.

In Section V Bartram is so ill that Marcher is rarely allowed to see her. Eventually, however, he is able to meet with her and, once again, they speak of his beast. This time Bartram tells him that what was to happen to him happened without his knowing it. She

dies without telling him what the beast was, and he attends her funeral. Bartram's opinion about his beast convinces Marcher that he is a failure, a man who waited for an event but who missed its occurrence. He now views his life entirely differently. Since he can no longer wait for his beast, his life seems empty. He is now convinced that he will spend the remainder of his days wondering what it was that he missed. This, in effect, will be his new occupation; he will no longer wait—instead he will wonder what he missed. This desire to know gives rise to a deep feeling of restlessness in Marcher, and soon after Bartram's death, Marcher decides that he must travel.

In Part VI Marcher is once again in London after a year's travel in Asia, during which he did not, as he had hoped, find the answer to his question. He now takes to visiting Bartram's grave on a monthly basis. A year elapses in this manner until an event occurs at the graveyard which, for Marcher, turns out to be the culminating moment of his life. He notices a man nearby who appears to be mourning the recent death of a loved one. The two men leave the cemetery at the same time and their paths cross. As Marcher passes by this man he looks into his face and is shocked at the look of ravaged pain that marks the man's countenance. The man's profound look of one who suffers deeply for having loved deeply is the sight which induces Marcher's illumination. He suddenly realizes his terrible, ironic fate: he is a man to which nothing was to happen, a man who would wait, and who, in waiting, would miss all that life has to offer. In shock and horror Marcher perceives at last the true nature of his beast.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

It is October, and John Marcher goes to lunch with a group of friends to Weatherend, a large, sumptuous country home where a woman of his acquaintance, May Bartram, is staying. Following lunch, there is a tour of house and grounds and the guests move about the rooms of the house, visiting in small groups. The mansion-sized house is filled with collections of unusual objects. John struggles to remember how and where he has known May, who seems to "rank in the house as a poor relation." She seems to be helping out by conducting tours and looking after the guests.

The two end up together alone in one of the many rooms in the house, not entirely accidentally. He describes her in his mind as handsome but older than he remembers.

Then he recalls where and when they had met—eight years ago in Rome. She corrects him—it was in Naples and it was ten years ago. They had sought refuge together from a storm in a cave in Pompeii. She had been 23, he 25. He struggles to find something of significance in their previous encounter—something of a "romantic or critical kind." But he struggles in vain.

And then she supplies the link—he had told her, in their ten-years-ago experience, something that had kept the memory of him alive for her. He does not remember what it was. She is hesitant to remind him because it reveals who he was, what he was like ten years ago, and she is concerned that it might be an embarrassment to him. But he wants her to tell him, so she does. She says that he had told her then that he had felt from an early age that he was destined to experience something strange and rare, a foreboding and a conviction of something that would quite overtake him.

She reveals that she has never told anyone of this, and he responds that he has never told anyone except her. She also tells him that she understands the feeling and asks whether he still has it. He tells her that it hasn't happened yet and that it's not something he will accomplish or be distinguished for; rather, it will not be cataclysmic but will alter everything, will be life changing. She asks him whether the feeling might merely be the expectation and the fear of falling in love. But he answers that he has been in love, and that wasn't the thing. He says he doesn't think it will necessarily be violent but natural and unmistakable. Then he asks her to watch for it with him. "Don't leave me now," he implores.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Because Henry James' life was that of the highly structured, sophisticated American/British upper class, his fiction tends to be set in that milieu, as it is in this story. John Marcher and May Bartram are comfortably well off even if they are not wealthy, and their lives are lived out in the upper-class world of opera and quiet sitting rooms.

James was also interested in the nature of personal relationships, which is what this story is about. It is about excessive reserve on the part of the protagonist, John Marcher, and the devastation that detachment from the people in one's life can bring. James, himself, never married. He was a shy person although his acquaintances considered him friendly, one who enjoyed being with other people. Even so, he tended, just as March does in this story, to be somewhat distant in his relationships and was always careful to avoid becoming involved at a very personal level.

This story was published originally in London in *The Better Sort* in 1903. James had been born in America but educated for the most part in Europe. He spent some years trying out his writing and publishing efforts in America, Italy, and England, settling in 1876 in London. He became well known and popular for his stories set in the society of upper class England during that time, visiting many of the great Victorian houses and country homes. We can see that influence in this story, where the main characters meet in one of the great country homes and where they live out their lives in upper-class society.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

May's aunt dies and leaves her a house and income in London, so she and Marcher are able to see each other frequently now. What binds them together is his secret, his obsession. If she hadn't come along, he would have moved on, would have made a life separate from the feeling he had, but she has brought it forth again, and the two of them are bound together by this shared knowledge.

He is careful to recognize that she has a life of her own. The irony is that because the relationship is based on his obsession, marriage is out the question, he reasons. He feels that he cannot ask a woman to share something that is lying in wait for him "like a crouching beast in the jungle." He believes that an honorable man would not take a lady on a tiger hunt.

So their years together pass with "the beast" being rarely mentioned. He feels sometimes that she is more obsessed and has greater expectations than he does. He works in a government office and has a small inherited income. Her watching with him defines her own existence. He brings her nice gifts; he knows her house as well as his own.

On one of her birthdays they discuss the Beast and he suspects that she is keeping something from him; and in one moment, when her face loses its mask, he sees in her "the very eyes of the Beast." She reassures him that he is a man of courage; he protests that a man of courage knows what he's afraid of. He suspects that she knows the true identity of the Beast.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The Beast in the Jungle was written during what is sometimes called James' middle phase when he was trying to write for the stage. We can see some of that influence in this story. John Marcher lived his life more as an actor than as a participant in life. It is this aloofness, this distance from the real that ultimately causes his downfall.

In this story, the point of view, the eyes through which we see the action, reinforces the story-as-play approach. For the most part, we see the two main characters as players on a stage. We do sometimes get insights into what he is thinking but rarely what May is except as she speaks her "lines." For instance, it would be a much different story if we were told in this chapter what she is thinking when Marcher sees in her "the very eyes of the Beast." We are left to guess, as is Marcher. Only at the point of the revealing climax do we understand that she was trying to make him understand that he has missed out on the most important thing in their lives—her love for him and his for her.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Marcher feels guilty because May's life has been so dominated by the watching, so he takes her often to the opera and spends time in her home. He suggests that people might talk about her and her life, and she confesses that it is true, but she tells him that he has had his woman, and she has had her man. Her only concern, she says, is to help him pass for normal.

He continues to suspect that she knows something that she is not telling him, that it is bad news, and that she is keeping it from him. Then he begins to fear that he might lose her.

One day, she reveals that she is ill, and he fears that she might die without knowing what the Beast is. He realizes suddenly that both of them are old and that time is running out for the revelation they have based their lives upon.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The conflicts are interesting in Beast in the Jungle in that they involve a force that is never actually seen or defined very clearly until the very end, the climax, when the Beast springs. Yet two whole lives are lived out in the struggle to define that lurking combatant. The outcome is foreshadowed early on in chapter 1 when May suggests that the Beast might actually be the expectation and the fear of falling in love. Marcher has already defined love in a superficial way and responds that he has been in love, which again foreshadows the outcome of the story. Detached as he is from his feelings, he is unable to recognize love when he sees it.

In asking May to watch with him, Marcher sets up the conflicts in the story and lays out the way the plot will work itself out. Marcher and May oppose a force that they are unable to see or define. The story is taken up with their struggle together to recognize it and to be prepared for it when it comes. The action is set in motion when John and May meet at the mansion in chapter one. It continues to rise as they are joined together by this common cause. The climax follows her death when, as the result of witnessing the anguish of a man who has truly loved a woman who is lost to him, the realization comes to him that the Beast is, in fact, his detachment, his inability to love, and the life-changing cataclysmic event of her death.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

May's health is failing rapidly now; she has become frail and confined to her house. He goes to see her one afternoon, and they discuss the "thing." She seems to be trying to tell him what she knows—who the Beast is—but is too weak.

Chapter 4 Analysis

There are few characters in this story. The major one, the protagonist, of course, is John Marcher, who is joined by May Bartram, and the two of them become one character, in a sense, in their "watching" for the Beast. They separate and become distinct characters after she becomes ill in this chapter and it is obvious that she knows who the Beast is, yet is unable to communicate that knowledge to the thickheaded Marcher.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Marcher comes to see May, but she is not well enough to see him. He realizes that her dying is, in fact, the Beast in the Jungle—a catastrophe that will change his life. She has been with him every step of the way, and now she is going.

He gets to see her at last and she tells him that the thing they have watched for has come and it has touched him. He just doesn't know it yet. She is grateful, she says, to know what it is not.

"Before, you see, it was always to come. That kept it present," she tells him.

He is even more bereaved in her passing. The attitude toward him by family and friends is that he has no claim to her memory. His position has merely been friend in their eyes. But he feels deep sorrow and loss because their lives have been so intimately entwined; and now that she is gone, he is lost and devastated.

Even worse, he cannot reveal what had united them. And with the Beast gone, he has no purpose for living. So he travels the world in search of the Beast.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In the latter part of the 19th Century, when Henry James was doing most of his writing, a literary movement called Realism emerged. Henry James was a proponent of this movement, which is best defined as an emphasis on detachment, objectivity, and accurate observation. Its clear but restrained criticism of the social environment of the times and the behavior and beliefs of the various segments of society were an important aspect of the modern novel during the height of the movement. This can be clearly seen in the writing of Charles Dickens and his indictment of the social system that made life untenable for the poor. The Realists with speech and actions that depicted every day, normal behavior of real human beings replaced poetic language and extravagant description.

The Beast in the Jungle exemplifies Realism in that it focuses on detachment and in that the characters are believable as people one might know. We come to understand the anguish of both major characters because we have participated in their misspent, purposeless lives that were consumed by an obsession. The message that living an aloof, detached life will rob one of the best that life has to offer and will ultimately lead to anguish and misery is one that applies to all people regardless of life style or social circumstances.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Marcher spends a year in travel, but nothing interests him. When he returns, he tries to reclaim the wonder of his years with May, so he returns to her grave. He feels that it belongs to him, so he comes to visit it regularly. It is where he is most alive. He dwells there on the past—the years they had together. He depends on it for support and identity.

Another man also comes regularly to the cemetery though Marcher scarcely notices him. But one day they meet unexpectedly, and Marcher is stricken with the ravages that the other man's grief has etched on his face and in his eyes. He realizes then that he has lived aloof and above any feeling in his own life and in his life with May. Then he realizes what she was trying to tell him. What had been lurking had been love—hers for him, the possibility of his loving her.

Then, we are told, the Beast springs as Marcher sees what he has missed and what he has denied this special woman. The book closes with the devastated and defeated March sprawled on the grave of the woman that he should have loved. He has become the prey of the Beast.

Chapter 6 Analysis

James uses the term "backward clearness" in one of his novels to explain what happens to a character who sees the pieces of a puzzle come together to provide an understanding after the fact for what has been going on in that character's life. He is also using "backward clearness" in this story when he has his major character, his protagonist, understand suddenly what the answer is to the puzzle of his life. At the end, Marcher sees in retrospect what he has been searching and waiting for. He also sees with remorse that he could have taken action and could have tamed the Beast if he had not been so detached from his relationship with May.

Characters

May Bartram

In "The Beast in the Jungle," May Bartram serves as a companion figure to the story's protagonist, John Marcher. Very little is learned about her from the narrator, as the narrator is mostly concerned with conveying the thoughts of Marcher. (From Marcher's point of view she is an intelligent and charming woman.) And when the story departs from the narrator's rendering of Marcher's point of view, the various dialogues between Marcher and Bartram do little to reveal the depths of her character to the reader. Their exchanges are not only highly abstract and elliptical, with both Bartram and Marcher declining to make direct statements about any one thing, they also consistently revolve around the topic of Marcher's "beast," as he calls his anticipated fate, and never around things specific to Bartram's life. From these highly cautious and ambiguous exchanges, we gain the sense that she is a woman who never relinquishes control of her emotions, and who, very possibly, never expresses her deepest feelings to Marcher. At best, she hints at things, and when she hints she appears to know better than Marcher the truth of his fate. Thus, she can be said to be as reserved and aloof as Marcher, in her own way.

John Marcher

John Marcher is the protagonist of Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle." He is a Londoner of modest private wealth who also holds a minor governmental position. He is characterized by a conviction that he is destined to experience some type of event with consequences that will shake the very foundations of his being. This conviction shapes his character. He goes through life an outsider, quietly self-absorbed, and quietly but determinedly waiting for this moment to occur. Due to his abiding belief that he is different from all other humans, he remains fundamentally aloof from his friends and chooses never to marry. The only person with whom Marcher is truly close is the woman to whom he once confided his secret about his special fate, May Bartram. Since it is only at the story's end that Marcher discovers the truth of his destiny, the reader's sense of Marcher throughout the story is that of a man who dwells at life's fringe, watching what goes on about him.

Themes

Fate

"The Beast in the Jungle" is a story about a man who believes in fate, most particularly his own: "It isn't a matter as to which I can *choose,* I can decide for a change. It isn't one as to which there *can* be a change. It's in the lap of the gods. One's in the hands of one's law—there one is." Arguably, due to Marcher's fate turning out to be the opposite of what he expects, James could be said to be mocking the pretensions of his protagonist. Is his conviction about the "specialness" of his fate the flaw of an egotist? Or, is he a tragic figure who invents a grand fate due to his passion for a life which his circumstances cannot avail him?

Success and Failure

John Marcher believes he fails on two counts. On the one hand, he decides near the end of his life that he has failed to approach life with the correct attitude. He watched and waited and let life pass him by instead of participating directly within it. On the other hand, equally crushing to Marcher, is his having failed to apprehend the moment that his "beast" sprang. At the end of the story he realizes that it "sprang" in May's room on that day in April when she lay near death. This means that his realization of his overall failure would have been the same; that is, to realize that he should have spent his life loving May then, as she lay on her deathbed, would still amount to the realization that he failed to live life properly. Nevertheless, in missing what he believes should have been the "real" moment of this devastating illumination, he thus even fails to "properly" fulfill his negative destiny.

Doubt and Ambiguity

To read any of the dialogues between Marcher and Bartram is to be bereft of certainty as to what his characters have actually said. Readers attempt to decipher the prose but are confounded. What are these two characters referring to? What did May say with those words? The text is full of *lacunae,* passages of prose whose meaning remains opaque. The effect of these lacunae is to produce in the reader a feeling of doubt (what did they say?) and ambiguity (did they say this, or that?). Such a self-conscious authorial practice (James had to work hard at it) suggests that readers are to take note of their uncertainty, to consider themselves in the position of imperfectly knowing subjects. In this respect they are like Marcher, unable to read the signs, confounded in their search for clues.

Self and Other

As numerous critics point out, Marcher's guilty feelings and worries about his potential selfishness in regard to May Bartram, or about his egotistic self-involvement in the circumstances of his own fate, are telling. What he comes to believe, finally, is that it is precisely this self-involvement which robbed him of a full life. Marcher, then, fundamentally misunderstands his relationship to those around him. He learns that he cheated himself of contentment by isolating the significance of his own life and his own self from the lives and selves of all others.

Style

Point of View

Third-person narration, which consistently represents John Marcher's point of view, dominates James's story. The reader is privy to Marcher's thoughts, but the narrating voice declines to comment on these thoughts. In this respect, James is known as an innovator. In comparison with the third-person *omniscience* of the great nineteenth-century realists (for example, George Eliot), whose narration not only conveyed characters' thoughts and actions but also commentary and judgment regarding those thoughts and actions, James's third-person narration limits itself to presenting Marcher's thoughts and stops there. James's innovation, then, is to have introduced a narrative technique which is less regulative of the reader's experience: readers are not necessarily told what to think by James. However, this third-person narration in "The Beast in the Jungle" is occasionally disrupted. In the second section of the story, the narrating voice moves to encompass the reader by the introduction of the word "[o]ur." After this first disruption, "our" and "we" begin to appear more frequently, and in section three, the narrating voice claims the first person singular pronoun, "I." These occasional lapses in the third-person narration invite readers to distance themselves further from Marcher. Once the narrating voice explicitly draws the reader into the position of contemplating Marcher's development ("we"), or, when the narrating voice definite-ly detaches itself as an outsider looking in ("I"), Marcher becomes even more a subject of study, a man whose curious story is held up to the reader's scrutiny.

Setting

The settings which frame this story are highly evocative of the story's theme of a failure to live life. Marcher and Bartram renew their acquaintance and become friends in a manor house that is described as if it were a museum. It is full of treasures and precious old objects which visitors may respectfully contemplate, but since they are treasures, they may not be touched or used. In a way, life itself could be said to be a "museum" for Marcher. He watches life pass by, but does not partake of it, since he will not accept anything that is not the springing of his "beast." That Marcher and Bartram have been together in Italy at the site of the buried city of Pompeii underscores this association of Marcher with a life never lived. This Italian city is most notable for its having been inundated in ancient times by a volcano. Much of its citizenry was buried alive, unable to escape the volcano's sudden and massive torrents of ash and lava. This buried city, then, also evokes Marcher's status of a man whose life is smothered by his passive waiting. It is perhaps no surprise then, that this story ends with Marcher in the cemetery near Bartram's grave. Marcher, who comes to the reader within a museum-like place and who is, still within this space, associated with a buried city, ends the story placed in a cemetery, a burial place for the dead.

Irony

"The Beast in the Jungle" turns on its irony. John Marcher professes to expect an exceptional fate, but its exceptionality is that he is mistaken in his conviction. Literary critic Allen Tate deems James's irony in "The Beast in the Jungle" "classic irony." By this, Tate means that Marcher's disappointment comes as no surprise to the reader, who is fully aware of the story's irony all along. If not after the first section, then probably after having read the second, the reader anticipates the story's (anti-)climax, and realizes that Marcher's perception is flawed. Thus the story's interest for the reader lies not so much in reading about Marcher's final revelation, but rather in watching him make his way to this final disappointment.

Symbolism

The titular "beast" of James's story is, in one respect, as ironic a symbol as the story itself is ironic. Since Marcher believes he is a man who is destined for something exceptional, but is rather a man "to whom nothing on earth was to have happened," it is ironic that the image that haunts his life is an image of a wild and vital creature. In this view, the pathos of Marcher's life is brought home vividly. As a minor governmental functionary, a reserved bachelor, a man who carefully lives within the bounds of middle-class respectability, Marcher lives the most staid of lives. However, insofar as we may imagine this beast as a creature hidden and enclosed within dense jungle growth, it is possible to consider it as a fitting symbol of that buried potential for an existence touched by real passion which lies within Marcher, but which due to his mistaken conviction, he never brings to light.

Historical Context

If one agrees with Virginia Woolf's wry generalization that "in or about December 1910, human character changed," then one has to deem Henry James a man of America's bygone past, or, from the British point of view, "a Victorian" instead of "a Modern." His is the world which gave rise to our own. The years that bound the dates of his birth and death, 1843 and 1916, comprise an era of astounding movements and changes. James witnessed the abolitionist movement (Americans working for the end of slavery), industrialization (the era when John D. Rockefeller, John Pierpont Morgan, and Cornelius Vanderbilt built their fortunes), massive immigrant influxes into America, urbanization (the growth of cities), workers' rights movements, women's rights movements (the feminist movements and the suffragettes), and the pinnacle of European and American imperialism and colonialism. The American Civil War, which also occurred during this time period (when James was still living in New York, not in London), is related to this waning of Europe an dominion, insofar as it resulted in the abolition of slavery, which was a legacy of European imperialism in Africa. The aristocrats who people James's novels were destined for the crash of World War I, which weakened their political power as did the Industrial Revolution's positive effect upon the growth of the middle class. But while the middle class grew in number so did the numbers of an urban working class, who began to demand universal suffrage (voting rights for all adults, regardless of sex). Denying the vote to women, thus, did not only concern feminists, but also working men who realized that their wives' political interests (wives who might have been working in the factories as well) coincided with their own. However, feminists interested in more than suffrage, such as Susan B. Anthony, inaugurated the women's movement, which began to work for equal opportunity and education for women. James's detailed depictions of the lives of his many female protagonists is therefore of great interest to feminist scholars eager to learn of the conditions within which middle- and upper-class women lived during this time.

This era also ushered in numerous new academic disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology, all of which soon entered and flourished within university curricula. James's elder brother, William James, is known mostly for being a philosopher of pragmatism, but he is also known for having been one of the earliest proponents of psychological study. This psychological "move into the interior" of human beings is present in James's own work, as he is known for his detailing of the thoughts, much more so than the actions or material environment, of his characters. This move into the interior of his characters can also be related to James's sensitivity to the anthropological leanings of his time. With imperialism and technology came travel and the comparative study of environments and peoples. Anthropologists cultivated an interest in the cultures and ways of life of diverse peoples. An added impetus to this interest in comparing cultures was the archeological excavations in Egypt, which astonished and enthralled the world. The way Henry James fixed his gaze so steadily upon his community amounts to something of an anthropological study. We learn to the last detail the social relations of his characters' class and world. Indeed, though certain commentators on

James have said that his novels neglect that part of, and those doings of, the world beyond the immediate purview of his characters, one can nevertheless consider Henry James a man of his time.

Critical Overview

From the time of its first appearance in 1903 (in the short story collection *The Better Sort*) "The Beast in the Jungle" has been acclaimed as one of James's most accomplished short stories. Literary critics have found this story evocative and rich in imagery and insight. A reviewer writing in the *Nation* declared himself "amazed at the display of an extensive and impartial observation of life, at the mastery of some dominant human motives with their thousand qualifications and modifications and at the variety of capacity for brilliant representation." Since 1903, "The Beast in the Jungle" has inspired numerous critical studies, many of which, including Allen Tate's in the 1950 *Sewanee Review* and Millicent Bell's in her *Meaning in Henry James,* respond to the story's fable-like quality. A fable is a short story with an easily understood moral thesis, the most common of which are "beast fables," or those stories we read as children in which animals talk and act like human beings. Of course, the only beast in James's story is the beast of Marcher's imagination, and this story of two genteel upper-middle-class Britons creates an atmosphere far different from those of beast fables; yet, perhaps the story's enduring popularity arises, at least in part, from readers' and critics' clear apprehension of a moral thesis in this story. This thesis, in two words, might be deemed *Carpe Diem* ("seize the day").

It has also been argued, however, that the story's allure derives from its element of pathos. In this view, the story of a man who desires the exceptional strikes a cord of recognition in many people who wish that their lives might be somehow extraordinary. In this reading, his final realization that the extraordinary is not to be his lot is less of a lesson and more of a comment on how lives are spent whiling away days in mundane pursuits. Critic Janice H. Harris presents an interesting twist on this question of passion versus passionlessness. She suggests that in *desiring* the extraordinary so intensely, Marcher can be said to have lived a life of intense passion.

Equally as interesting as critics' overarching view of the work is the analysis they do to get there. A critic such as James W. Gargano (writing in the *Arizona Quarterly,* Winter, 1986) for example, develops a reading of James's story from the launching point of John Marcher's and May Bartram's names (they evoke the seasons March and May), and pursues his reading through sustained attention to seasonal imagery, in conjunction with an analysis of light and dark imagery (he argues that May is associated with light, and hence "understanding," in contrast to Marcher's lifelong state of delusion, or state of "darkness"). Other critics have also picked up on Bartram's status as the character who knows the truth before Marcher, and some of these writers have devoted entire essays to a discussion of the function and effect of her characterization within the story. Also of great interest are readings that discuss James's allusions to foreign monuments and locales (e.g. the Palace of the Caesars, Pompeii, and Asia).

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Dell'Amico is a doctoral candidate in English literature at Rutgers University. Her areas of specialization include Modernism, the twentieth-century novel, feminist theory, and theories of Postmodernism. In the following essay, she surveys several of the prominent critical approaches by which "The Beast in the Jungle" has been read in the past, positing that it is a story destined for continued popularity.

Both literary critics and the general reading public find Henry James's short story "The Beast in the Jungle" to be evocative and rich. It has inspired numerous critical studies, many of which respond to the story's fable-like quality. Two well-known critics, for example, have even referred to the story as a "fable." Allen Tate does so in his short, excellent commentary on the story that first appeared in the *Sewanee Review* in 1950 (also reprinted in *Critical Studies on Henry James*), and Millicent Bell does so in her *Meaning in Henry James* (1991). A fable is a short story with an easily understood moral thesis, the most common of which are "beast fables," or those stories we read as children in which animals talk and act like human beings. Of course, the only beast in James's story is the Beast of John Marcher's imagination. Further, this story of two genteel upper-middle-class Britons creates an atmosphere far different from that created in most beast fables; yet, perhaps the story's enduring popularity arises, at least in part, from readers' and critics' clear apprehension of a moral thesis in this story. This thesis, in two words, might be deemed *carpe diem* ("seize the day"). In this view, Marcher's end-of-life insight is seen as this "fable's" final cautionary note and lesson: that he should have loved and cherished May Bartram, and lived a full life cultivating pleasure and passion from what life has to offer *any* human being, rather than waiting for something extraordinary to occur.

However, it is equally arguable that the story's allure derives from its element of pathos. In this view, the story of a man who desires the exceptional strikes a cord of recognition in all of us who wish that our lives might be somehow extraordinary. In this reading, his final realization that the extraordinary is not to be his lot is less of a lesson and more of a comment on how our lives are, in fact, spent whiling away days in mundane pursuits. With the exception of an occasional skateboard adventure or trip to the Bahamas, how many people, after all, enjoy a life of consistently intense pleasure or passion? Critic Janice H. Harris presents an interesting twist on this question of passion versus passionlessness. She suggests that in *desiring* the extraordinary so intensely, Marcher can be said to have lived a life of intense passion. In Harris's essay, the story's irony does not lie in Marcher's realizing that his fate is the opposite of what he expected, but rather in his thinking that he "missed" life when in fact he lived a deeply passionate life. Harris's essay is also interesting for its focus on the significance of May Bartram in the story.

Equally as interesting as critics' overarching view of the work is the analysis they do to get there. A critic such as James W. Gargano, for example, develops a reading of James's story from the launching point of John Marcher's and May Bartram's names (they evoke the seasons March and May), and pursues his reading through sustained

attention to seasonal imagery, in conjunction with an analysis of light and dark imagery (he argues that May is associated with light, and hence "understanding," in contrast to Marcher's lifelong state of delusion, or state of "darkness"). Other critics have also picked up on Bartram's status as the character who knows the truth before Marcher, and some of these writers have devoted entire essays to a discussion of the function and effect of her characterization within the story. Also of great interest are readings that discuss James's allusions to foreign monuments and locales.

One enduring problem for critics is the character of John Marcher. According to Millicent Bell, the reader "may interpret his aspiration for some tragic or heroic end as a recoil from the common goals of his society. At the same time, the story can be read as a representative Jamesian study of the selfishness and passionlessness that may accompany intellectual refinement and good breeding, a reading of fastidiousness as a mask for the evasion of social and personal responsibility." To read this commentary is to remember Marcher's egotism, his desire to shape life to his own ends, his annexing of May Bartram's life as his companion in waiting for nothing, and his self-congratulatory and complacent thoughts that in buying May birthday gifts that cost always a little more than he can afford, he is "paying off" any selfishness he could be accused of by drawing her into his web of "passionlessness." We are also reminded, in this respect, of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (Wharton and James were long-time friends). *The House of Mirth* is the story of Lily Bart who dies young, and who is mourned by a young man who, it has been argued, could have saved her from her sad demise if he had only realized soon enough that he loved her.

Judgments of Marcher aside, James's method of presenting his reader with the tortuous thoughts of a human being attempting to read the signs around him for a message or messages pertaining to his hopes and desires, results in a story in which we are invited to contemplate the idea of the individual consciousness poised in relation to its environment. It is in this respect that James is considered to be an important precursor of certain early twentieth-century Modernist writers, because the Modernists, like James, are considered to be writers who believe that reality is something that comes "to mean" not because of any intrinsic qualities of its own, but only through the application of our subjective interpretation upon it.

Whether as a cautionary tale, for its pathos, or for its status as a literary work which presaged developments to come, James's "The Beast in the Jungle" will undoubtedly capture a reader's attention for many years to come.

Source: Carol Dell'Amico, Overview of "The Beast in the Jungle," for *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Bell looks at "The Beast in the Jungle" as a "dark fable" and examines its treatment of passivity and fate.

"The Beast in the Jungle" may be James's most extreme expression of the theme of human character as potentiality which cannot or will not move out into the world of action, of plot. Published in 1903, the same year as *The Ambassadors*, it bears, as will be seen, a certain relation to that novel, which arises, in a much more complicated way, from the idea of the failure to "live." But the short story is a dark fable, more abstract and pessimistic than the novel. Marcher (whose name differs from hers only by an initial letter) is the farthest James would ever go in illustrating the consequences of Isabel Archer's cult of Being; but where she is heroic in resisting the reductive expectations of others that she will enact herself in some way, he waits for his narrative in mere passive expectation, and—far from being a "marcher"—in the end is trapped in the story of his vain waiting....

The world Marcher inhabits is a chamber of eternity. Like "The Turn of the Screw," the story is a mythical and moral tale, despite its modern tone. It is not for nothing that May . . . is called sphinxlike. Something must happen and, she even says, *has* happened, though Marcher can discover no evidence of it in his life. The conundrum is, like the sphinx's riddles, designed to be solved in a form least expected. The correct answer cannot be anticipated by the man to whom it has been told: "He had been the man of his time, *the* man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened." His fate has arrived, it will turn out, precisely *because* nothing has happened. As allegory, the story is designed to illustrate the idea that no life escapes a destiny.

Mythically, the hero will encounter a "beast"—a figurative image which does not altogether, any more than the ghosts of "The Turn of the Screw," lose its relation to traditions of folklore—and recalls Hawthorne's "bosom serpent" (in "Egotism, or the Bosom Serpent") in its semi-literal, semi-symbolical presence in the story. A further resemblance to "The Turn of the Screw" resides in the fact that James seems to have conceived of Marcher as another absolutist who craves a fairy-tale plot of melodramatic simplicity, like the governess. Marcher, James explains in the New York Edition preface, found

none of the mere usual and normal human adventures, whether delights or disconcertments, appearing to confirm to the great type of his fortune . . . No gathering appearance, no descried or interpreted promise or portent, affects his superstitious soul either as a damnation deep enough (if damnation be in question) for his appointed *quality* of consciousness, or as a translation into bliss sublime enough (on *that* hypothesis) to fill, in vulgar parlance, the bill. Therefore, as each item of experience comes, with its possibilities, into view, he can but dismiss it under this sterilizing habit of the failure to find it good enough and thence to appropriate it.

"His career," James concludes, "thus resolves itself into a great negative adventure." Marcher himself seems to suspect and fear the utter negativity of his adventure when he asks May if she does not foresee that *nothing* will really happen to him.

James's problem, of course, was the difficult one, as Tate puts it, "of dramatizing the insulated ego, of making active what is incapable of action." James does not reduce this problem, however, by exhibiting as incident the succession of challenges summarized in the preface—the preface really promises more drama in the form of "descried or interpreted promises or portents" than the tale ever brings into view. What is suggested instead is simply the might-have-beens which Marcher and May both gaze into, a sweeping stream of negatives. "He knew each of the things of importance he was insidiously kept from doing, but she could add up the amount they made, understand how much, with a lighter weight on his spirit, he might have done." Between them, nearly eventless, flows the story, the *only* story, actually lived, though it is to prove the greatest might-have-been of all.

I say *nearly* eventless for, of course, there are *some* scenic moments which suggest to the reader that Marcher is making his way along a path not only of time but of development. He *has* been launched upon a plot, and James uses the same image of a boat put into the wind and current of its course that he used to describe the initiation of Isabel's destiny by Ralph's putting "wind in her sails": "The recovery, the first day at Weatherend, had served its purpose well, had given them quite enough; so that they were, to Marcher's sense, no longer hovering about the head-waters of their stream, but had felt their boat pushed sharply off and down the current." In the end the story disproves the idea that negativity can be maintained. It suggests that there is always a story, that in not writing one one writes another.

May's first assurance that something *will* happen is an occasion marked for him as "a date" or crisis which already gives some semblance of form to time; "again and again, even after long intervals, other things that passed between them wore in relation to this hour but the character of recalls and result." Marcher comes to believe that she knows what his catastrophe will be. He depends upon her for the validation, somehow, of this ultimate revelation, and when she grows ill begins to fear that she may die without witnessing it at his side, and that perhaps it is already "Too Late" for his Event. He fears that he has been "sold." "It wouldn't have been failure to be bankrupt, dishonoured, pilloried, hanged; it was failure not to be anything." Time is threatening to stop—and all possibility of story cut short; "Since it was in Time that he was to have met his fate, so it was in Time that his fate was to have acted."

It is at this point that the story, which is enacting itself without Marcher's knowledge, exhibits its climax in the exquisite scene in which May seems already beyond time, mythically metamorphosed, *her* story completed and preserved like a lily under a bell jar. Their conversation convinces him that she knows his fate. She knows it as "the worst" thing conceivable, something they've never mentioned in reviewing possibilities. Her reassurance that he will not consciously suffer revives his fear that she has come back to his own early dread—that *nothing* will happen. But she can say no more. As at the start of their friendship, she cannot give him the "thread" of narrative continuity

"without some putting forth of his hand for it." She stands before him with figure and face conveying her own offering before she collapses, with her despairing question, "Don't you know—now?" What has happened is "what *was* to." His story-less life has just achieved its catastrophe, though, as she had warned, he won't give it the right name.

He thinks that it is her death—and the solitude it means for him—that is the promised disaster. But in their last interview she tells him that disaster has already struck, though he asks, in bewilderment, "How can the thing I've never felt at all be the thing I was marked out to feel?" What he does experience, after her death, is extinction of the suspense which had filled his days for so many years. "What was to happen *had* so absolutely and finally happened that he was as little able to know a fear for his future as to know a hope; so absent in short was any question of anything still to come. He was to live entirely with the other question, that of his unidentified past, that of his having to see his fortune impenetrably muffled and masked." Again, as at the start of the story, we realize that the past and future only identify themselves to the kind of vision Marcher lacks. His catastrophe, now past, is as unknown to him as when it was a thing of the future.

A diminished man, with no sense of the shape which gives meaning to a life, he comes to worry less about "whatever had happened." Revelation does arrive at last at his dead friend's graveside, where the face of another mourner, unknown to him, is "the image of scarred passion." He realizes that "he had seen *outside* of his life, not learned it within, the way a woman was mourned when she had been loved for herself." Now he realizes that she had offered him an escape from the Beast; "the escape would have been to love her."

Yes, he had been "*the* man to whom nothing on earth was to have happened . . . That was the rare stroke—that was his visitation," the story states. But James's message is more subtle—or ambiguous. Marcher *is*, after all, the victim of the catastrophe he has been waiting for; the Beast springs at last. The Beast—like the sphinx's creature who walked on four, on two, and then on three feet—is only man, who must live the life of man. Marcher, like everyone, is the man to whom something *has* happened. His is only the disaster that is the outcome of a life that disdains a history but cannot escape one.

That plot overtakes the character who resists it seemed, in the case of Isabel Archer, an acknowledgment that the "free spirit" must be overtaken by a limiting, even diminishing story. James called Isabel "presumptuous," but indulged his heroine for the nobility of her presumptions. James contrasted that nobility with the destinies that would entrap and degrade her. But to presume that one can dispense with "adventure" of some sort, to imagine that there can be a tale without a plot, is delusive. In the story James so often seems to write, the story of the mere witness to life who refuses action, or of the person for whom opportunity comes "too late," refusal itself will turn out to constitute an adventure, for better or for worse. In "The Beast in the Jungle," James redefines that word, "adventure"—a term used both for life's actual tale and for the literary narrative—and makes sense of the oxymoron, "negative adventure." More than Isabel's, Marcher's

presumption amounts to arrogance in its indifference to life's best opportunities—and constitutes a critique of her attitude, from which the novel deliberately refrained.

The argument is perhaps conservative, a refutation of idealist intransigence, for it seems to say that we had better do the possible, after all. In the end, selfishly cherishing our essence, we will have acted somehow, and probably badly. To the literary artist the warning is obvious. There is no way to write stories but by resort to the old tales in the storeroom—tales of love and marriage or whatever, the stories men have been telling from the beginning of human time—stories so inescapable that they will express themselves in the most story-denying fiction we may invent.

Source: Millicent Bell, "The Inaccessible Future: 'The Beast in the Jungle'," in *Meaning in Henry James,* Harvard University Press, 1991, pp. 262-74.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Gargano provides a detailed analysis of the function of imagery in "The Beast in the Jungle," relating it to the story's themes and characterization.

In "The Beast in the Jungle," Henry James attempts to make a formidable dramatic action out of what he calls in one of his most interesting prefaces "a great negative adventure." The point of the story is the pointlessness of John Marcher's subordination of reality to his belief that a unique and possibly terrible destiny awaits him. Marcher's special fate (to be "*the* man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened") is made vivid by his involvement or non-involvement with May Bartram, a devoted companion who represents the possibility of a more fruitful life. In essence, "The Beast in the Jungle" traces Marcher's tortuous route to total negation through a series of episodes in which he fails to perceive, or, as James puts it, "is afraid to recognize what he incidentally misses." Appropriately, Marcher's deathlike withdrawal from life reaches its climax at May's grave where his adventure is completed not in a traditional physical ordeal, but in his shrinking from a monster created by his own psychic urgencies and imagination.

James faced the technical problem inherent in dramatizing non-life by shifting his artistic focus from narrative incidents to clusters of images that mark the stages of his protagonist's psychological evasions. By filling the void resulting from Marcher's inaction, imagery itself becomes a kind of dominant action, an adumbration of the subconscious energies of Marcher's inner life. The inventiveness that most fiction writers expend on plot James thus invests in interrelated images and symbols that tell a tense story of omissions and possibilities rather than accomplished deeds. What emerges is an engrossing tapestry or mosaic made up of roads not taken, wrong turns fearfully followed, and chances missed. Ultimately, all the withdrawals, denials, and suppressions gather paradoxically into a symbol of startling emotional violence.

Both clear and suggestive, James's imagery possesses sharp immediacy and almost endless radiation. Even the most perfunctory reader will grasp the author's purport in naming his contrasting characters Marcher and May. More careful readers, however will see ramifications of meaning in other examples of seasonal imagery: the opening incident at Weatherend with its faint lure of October light; May and Marcher's comedy of terror in April; and the graveyard denouement in the fall that revives, with stunning variation, the April fiasco. The same mixture of obviousness and allusiveness controls most of the images in "The Beast in the Jungle" and keeps the novella from hardening into allegory or evaporating into super-subtle implications. Light, for instance, with all its elemental connotations and its association with seasonal change appears in the autumn sky, enters into the characters' language and shines in May's face. Light changes as seasons, moods, and human exigencies change, and its absence is as full of import as its many manifestations. Misleading, trustworthy, fierce, or positively revelatory, it is part of the labyrinth of images calculated to give readers a sense of mystery that cannot be fully rationalized away. The images, however, finally serve as the threads that conduct to understanding and awareness. Perhaps as convincingly as action in the traditional

play or story, James's imagery quickens or retards narrative pace, provides ironic reversals, and creates climactic tensions.

An examination of James's imagery as the major vehicle of his thought in "The Beast in the Jungle" will reveal its pervasiveness, its closely woven texture, and its function in designating the phases of Marcher's fascinating psychological disintegration. Clearly, James's art depends most heavily on images associated with seasons, links or connections, light, and burial. With metaphysical subtlety, he also employs a complex of sibyl-seeress-sphinx images to elaborate May Bartram's role as a counterintelligence whose glimpses into Marcher's mind date many of the crises of his inner history. Finally, to achieve his almost surrealistic climax, James relies on violent beast imagery to conclude Marcher's negative, actionless adventure.

Of course, other image-symbol patterns wind intricately through James's novella, sometimes fusing with the dominant ones and sometimes modifying them. "The Beast in the Jungle" is, indeed, so fine a web of connotation that it may be described as a vision of life ultimately inseparable from its metaphorical expression.

Although my study will be concerned with James's imagery, I recognize that its dramatic impact is heightened by a style at once elliptical, tortuous, and full of qualifications, intensifications, and suspensefully delayed referents. As David Smit has recently written [in "The Leap of the Beast: The Dramatic Style of Henry James's 'The Beast in the Jungle'," *The Henry James Review* (Spring 1983)], the style of "The Beast in the Jungle" "is not chaotic and it is not dull. It is as dramatic as the leap of the beast in our mind's eye." In fact, James's involute style is the perfect vehicle for his all-informing and, at times, untranslatable imagery.

Because seasonal imagery pervades almost every facet and nuance of the six sections of "The Beast in the Jungle," it deserves special attention. James employs it in naming and defining his characters, setting his scenes, stressing motivation, and giving poetic coloration and resonance to his theme of the unlived life. It is so sensitively stitched into the texture of the work that it might be called the figure in the carpet.

The overall purpose of the seasonal imagery is to contrast the unnatural "law" of Marcher's life with the law governing natural processes. James, of course, associates Marcher with the end of winter and the possibility of spring, but unlike the month of March, the protagonist possesses no new or creative energies. Time passes and he remains immovably constant. James allows him occasional stirrings of life, but these stirrings occur in the depths of his being and are - until the end of the novella - overruled by an emotional rigidity stemming from his view of himself as someone mysteriously placed outside the context of ordinary humanity. Whereas the seasons flow into one another and are part of a changing order, James's main character is first seen at Weatherend, an English country house where natural fluidity seems to end and a kind of stasis prevails. Even May Bartram, who should symbolize growth, typifies pallid possibilities and has little energizing power for Marcher. She affects him as a faded memory to which he can attach no importance: having fully blotted out his past life because in a real sense it has not happened, he cannot even recall that he had met her

in his youth and confided his obsession to her. Indeed, James shows him as pathetically desiring "to invent something, to get her to make-believe with him that some passage of a romantic or critical kind *had* originally occurred. He was really reaching out in imagination - as against time."

As the interval between March and May, April has a sinister importance in James's novella. It looms as the cruelest month not because, as in T. S. Eliot's wasteland, it compels new growth, but because it acts as an unnatural, permanent barrier. For James, April does not serve as a bridge but as a lacuna, a gap never successfully spanned. It represents the germinal vigor almost entirely absent from Marcher's makeup. It represents the unruly and agitated time of the beast which in healthy lives must be lived through and thus accommodated to the procession of the months. To bypass it is to miss the initiating forces that stimulate and assure efflorescence and harvest. Predictably, then, what doesn't happen in "The Beast in the Jungle" actually does and does not take place in April: James shows that, though Marcher is physically present at his unique destiny, he witnesses no action as the beast springs. With his story beginning and ending in the fall, Marcher has more symbolic affinity with that season than with either April or May.

James places his climactic April scene with great care in the fourth section of "The Beast in the Jungle." It therefore begins the second half of the novella with the tragic assurance that the protagonist will never discover in May Bartram the quickening force of the month for which she is named. This conclusion is reached, however, only after three preparatory sections in which highly dramatic images establish the characters' identities, their relations to each other, and their reactions to seasonal change and time.

In the first and least pessimistic section of the novella, the seasonal imagery is closely interwoven with images of linkage, light, and burial. In staging the meeting between Marcher and May at Weatherend after a hiatus of ten years, James plays many imagistic changes on the themes of discontinuity and connection and opens up the slender possibility that his protagonist will end his self-inflicted isolation and enter life's mainstream. May's presence catches Marcher's attention and makes him feel in possession of the "sequel of something of which he had lost the beginning." He prods himself into imagining that the sound of May's voice furnishes him a "missing link," but for all his good will his memory draws a blank. With awkward earnestness, he fumbles toward knowledge as if it might forge a contact he apparently needs. Yet, James carefully shows that it is May and not Marcher who makes contact possible; her direct reminder that he had divulged his secret to her "cleared the air and supplied the link - the link it was so odd he should frivolously have managed to lose." A ray of hope appears when Marcher comforts himself that someone has shared his burden, "and so he wasn't alone a bit." Indeed, May's agreement to "watch" with him as he awaits his fate awakens speculation as to whether Marcher has made a saving connection with a vital woman and entered into what is referred to, at the beginning of the second section, as a "goodly bond" that will enable him to meet April's incitement to union with May when it comes.

Ironically, however, since Marcher has not changed with the years, his new meeting may become a mere reenactment of the earlier, forgotten one. He still practices detachment, entertains a "theory" that keeps him "lost in the crowd," and affects colorless manners that secure him anonymity. His guarded language and circumspect behavior constitute an elaborate series of defenses against comradeship and other distractions that may weaken his commitment to his *idée fixe.* If the "reunion" at Weatherend begins with "the feeling of an occasion missed" and a sense that "all the communities were wanting," it may already stamp Marcher as a hollow man to whom nothing can happen. Indeed, James does not encourage high hopes in his reader: when May stealthily leads up to her daring reminder of his confession, Marcher merely appraises her with "wonder" and stiffly gives "no sign" of support. The man who literally has no past to remember cannot be counted on to form a promising attachment. The question the whole novella will pose is, after all, what kind of link May can establish with someone so adept at dodges and expert in ego-preservation that he has, in a spiritual sense, converted life into an unalterable, arid autumn.

Light imagery, which James develops with a startling "jump" from images of links, affords a clue throughout the novella of the characters' clarity of perception and their fund of vitality. It is indicative of Marcher's original state of mind that he "recalls" the smallest detail of his earlier meeting with May and figuratively sees the dark past suddenly lit. In an artful use of light to give action and movement to his narrative, James compares Marcher's confidence in his memory to an "impression operating like the torch of a lamplighter who touches into flame . . . a long row of gas-jets." Imagery shapes the scene into a neat drama of Marcher's psychic ineptitude and his need to believe he shared a past with May. His brilliant illumination, which should prove a transforming acuteness, only proves to be a trick of his imagination as she refutes his version of their original encounter, leaving him comically in the dark. Imagery continues to function actively when May informs him of his earlier confession and "a light broke for him." Already preparing for later developments, James characterizes the light coming from Marcher's unaided sight as weak and misleading and that coming from May as genuine and revelatory. Her perceptions are, and continue to be, trustworthy and illuminating; before the end of the first section, Marcher himself comes to place implicit faith in "the light in her eyes."

Like his imagery of links and light, James's burial imagery offers a slight hint that Marcher may emerge from his privacy and adopt a creative interest in life. For example, Marcher's conjectures about his first encounter with May turn on the possibility that what happened then may be "too deeply buried - too deeply (didn't it seem?) to sprout after so many years." Yet, sprout it does as May attaches herself to a man whom she has a right to treat as a lunatic. It might not even be extravagant to propose, as some critics have, that James consciously staged one of the initial meetings between the ill-sorted pair "at Pompeii, on an occasion when they had been present there at an important find" - when the past came unexpectedly to light in the present. Marcher, with May's necessary assistance, unearths something precious - a past confidence, a spontaneous approach to a shared life - that had been buried, if not for centuries, at least for ten round years. The vexing question inherent in the burial imagery is, however, whether he will use his knowledge to foster a new relationship or to serve his old monomania.

Obviously, May's freedom to attach herself to him derives from her roots in reality - her roots, if it is not too much of a conceit, in April. Will Marcher, James appears to tease his readers into asking, improve upon the one generous act of his early life and be worthy of May's proffered aid?

In summary, the general effect of the imagery in the opening section of "The Beast in the Jungle" is to highlight the novella's immanent problem: will Marcher achieve the light or warmth and perception to form a link or bond subversive of his estranging narcissism? Except for the ominous implications of Weatherend and the October setting, the images are neither conclusive nor heavily oppressive. Marcher's severance from his own past and his inability to generate "true" light do not augur well for him, but he does constructively desire to be less alone and he does link himself to the potentially regenerative and light-giving May. Rather than pronounce doom on his protagonist at the outset of his fiction, James guides him to the crossroads where the future appears to be "open" and character will determine fate.

The second section, however, moves from the emergence of opportunity to near fatalism as James dramatizes May's certainty that Marcher will never outgrow the fatuity that makes him incapable of change. The section is framed by the opening declaration of May's knowledge ("The fact that she 'knew'") and her closing reliance on his inveterate blindness ("You'll never find out"). Unpromisingly, the goodly bond slackens into a loveless avoidance if not parody of marriage supported by the plausible argument, masking a fear of commitment, that a gentleman cannot ask a lady to accompany him on a "tiger-hunt." James's image patterns make it clear that as May desires the reality rather than the semblance of closeness, Marcher's sensibility narrows and his openness to the world's charm decreases; he retains his "dissimulation" toward the "people in London whose invitations he accepted and repaid," and, worst of all, he values his connection with May only because she supplies him with another pair of eyes with which to scrutinize his obsession. Link and bonding imagery paradoxically convicts Marcher of the cardinal Jamesian sin of exploiting a human being as if he or she were a means or tool to further egotistic ends.

In a little drama all its own, burial imagery also undergoes a radical change in the second section of "The Beast in the Jungle." James presents Marcher as at first buoyed up by the discovery that May is privy to his secret, which figures as "the buried treasure of her knowledge." Almost exuberantly, Marcher savors the good fortune of his new companionship: "He had with his own hands dug up this little hoard, brought to light . . . the object of value the hiding place of which he had, after putting it into the ground himself, so strangely, so long forgotten." By the end of the section, however, James's imagery exposes Marcher's mismanagement of his excavated treasure. Moreover, in possibly the major twist of the second section, May now assumes importance as the possessor of a secret of her own, the closely guarded perception that by ceasing to respond to human vibrations Marcher is well on his way toward his destiny. This second secret, earned by shrewd observation and deeply hidden until the graveyard scene at the end of the novella, extends the burial imagery and serves as the dramatic center of Marcher's curiosity as he seeks to know what she knows. Still, he will pathologically fail

to see that May and not any secret is the real treasure that might liberate him from his fate.

In perhaps the most audacious image in the second section, James begins to transform May into a Cassandra figure, one of the most penetrating of his uncommonly penetrating women. With a metaphysical elan worthy of John Donne, he ascribes to her an "indescribable" art which consists in the "feat of at once - or perhaps it was only alternately - meeting the [Marcher's] eyes from in front and mingling her own vision, as from over his shoulder, with their peep through the apertures." Obviously, May's vision has assumed an almost prophetesslike acuteness enabling her to formulate the law of Marcher's being: in possession of a light denied him, she penetrates his masks and hollow relationships and beholds him changeless and immovable in the flux of time. Indeed, as "they grew older together," her genuine attachment to him helps her to believe that he will never feel enough sympathy with another human being to "find out" what she has learned about him.

In the second section, James's skillful blurring of the time scheme of his novella emphasizes that for his protagonist the years accomplish nothing but their own passing. Though the beast crouches in "the twists and turns of the months and the years," Marcher exists physically *in* time while psychically *out* of it, sinking deeper and deeper into a temporal void, a constant autumn. No action takes place, but James's imagery invests his characters' inaction with developing drama. Unable to see that May comes to him like a new spring, Marcher is a striking example of what Henry Adams, in "The Dynamo and the Virgin," thought of as modern man's insensitivity to woman as a generative and dynamic force. By looking outside of time and beyond his own and May's innate energies, he perverts nature's laws instead of attuning himself to their rhythm. May, in contrast, achieves a kind of consummation through a life of effort and love even though she already assumes the burden of the sphinxlike intelligence who, in the fourth section, ponders the riddle of life and lost opportunities.

In the short third section, James's imagery pushes his vivid drama of consciousness toward its fatal turning point by intensifying the emptiness of the Marcher-May relationship and May's sibyl-like clairvoyance. All is artful preparation for the April scene in which the "negative adventure" reaches its climax of inaction, imperceptiveness, and unfulfillment. With acuteness couched in a wry tone of social satire, James presents May and Marcher almost jesting about the meaning of their longstanding tie. With a levity with undercurrents of mordant irony, she states that in the eyes of the world she seems a woman who has had her man (which she hasn't) while he passes for a man like another (which he isn't). Still, May's secret knowledge makes her sensitive to the double entendre in their banter: her language implies the truth and yet guards her secret, salves his doubts, and still gives him enough encouragement to make a closer and more binding approach. With subtle indirection, she addresses her words to his inner ear or to some recess in him uncontaminated by his obsession. Nevertheless, despite the tactful ministry of her love, he clings to his mock link with her and maintains his separateness under the guise of nearness. There is little likelihood that he will be capable of making use of his approaching April opportunity.

The seasonal imagery in this section, however, indicates that Marcher's sensibility is not impermeable. Although he fails to pick up May's subliminal messages, he begins to heed the increasingly overt lesson of time. He worries that the fleeting months and years will leave him "no margin" for his adventure. He discovers time's predatoriness in May's illness and aging: "She looked older because, inevitably, after so many years, she *was old*, or almost; which was of course true in still greater measure of her companion." He is frightened by the bleak possibility that May will die unprivileged to see the enactment of his doom, and he is appalled that as a victim of time he may have been "sold." Indeed, he almost achieves real feeling and knowledge when he experiences the "dread of losing her by some catastrophe": ultimately, though, his brooding and fear are only new forms of his vast emotional expenditure on the road to inaction.

Nevertheless, the time imagery of the third section marks an important milestone on Marcher's journey. After the first chapter launches him on a fresh start and the second, with a counter-movement, exposes that start as false, the third chapter reveals an incompatibility between his rationalizations about himself and his deeper, subconscious stresses. James ingeniously suspends Marcher in an inconclusive state of semi-apprehension. May's subtle innuendos, the rapacity of the seasons, and the imminence of May's death have so upset his equilibrium that though his mind clings from habit to his own concerns, it is invaded by ambivalences and a new appreciation of May's humanity. He praises her for being "kind" and "beautiful"; he feels "sorry for her"; and he wonders before dismissing the thought, whether her death could be the fatality he has so long expected. He so identifies with her plight that as her health deteriorates, he imagines himself as suffering from "some disfigurement of his outer person." The train of surprises set in motion by her helplessness before time causes him to dread existence without her as an empty prospect.

Clearly, James complicates Marcher's psychological state by showing him as a man of divided sensibility who knows that he does not know what his subconscious is trying to reveal to him; he cannot convert into thought what May has begun to make him grope toward. Marcher thus acts according to earlier, fixed assumptions no longer relevant to his altered situation. He cannot quite grasp the idea that May embodies the primal creativity operating with inevitability in nature but capable of being rejected by narcissistic man. With a greater than usual emphasis, James makes his heroine suggest both a season and a woman, a natural and a human impulse: she affirms an eternal principle of growth and fruition, but as a mere woman, she can only urge by gesture and circumlocution that Marcher break out of himself and live to the fullest reaches of his humanity. Her physical breakdown signals that Marcher is approaching his last chance to "save" himself through her. At the conclusion of the third chapter, however, with her secret intact and her light fading, he appears an unlikely candidate to restore her and himself to health.

With a heavy reliance on light and linkage imagery, James places his climactic April scene in the fourth section of "The Beast in the Jungle." The strange couple meet on an April day whose "light" inauspiciously produces a "sadness sharper than the greyest hours of autumn." The fireplace in May's house has no fire or light, and James declares that "it would never see a fire again." The cold fireplace corresponds to the "cold light" in

May's eyes and both prefigure a fundamental loss of spirit as Marcher imagines that "her light might at any instant go out." With little light at her disposal (and with the "perfect old French clock" ticking time away), May still sees April as a possible saving link between herself and Marcher. Insisting that "It's never too late," she makes a last effort toward union (as she had made the first) and walks toward him "with a gliding step" that "diminishes the distance between them." The reverberations which James's imagery has by this time achieved lend a special emotional power to her desperate effort at connection: her movement brings her "nearer" and "close" to Marcher and all but speaks, with a language all its own, with "some finer emphasis." Nevertheless, he remains frozen in self-concern and, wondering what she has to give him, maintains his separateness.

The ingenuity of the April scene consists in James's creation of an episode of simultaneous action and non-action, tragic recognition and comic blindness, springtime possibilities and autumnal bleakness. Marcher, who keeps waiting for the answer to his question, seals his doom on that crucial April day. For May, with her "face shining at him, her contact imponderably pressing," the negative adventure has been all too positive. His climax has the chill of anticlimax, but as he "gape[s] . . . for her revelation," she closes her eyes as if she has seen too much and then gives way to "a slow fine shudder." Although James does not belabor his point, any reader responsive to the pressure of the novella's imagery can interpret the quiet melodrama of May's "slow fine shudder" and Marcher's "fear that she might die without giving him light." She has seen the beast leap while Marcher innocently and expectantly questions the vacancy. In her resultant collapse, she surrenders her function and all hope for him, and when he explicitly asks what has happened, she makes a sphinx-like pronouncement on his doom: "What *was* to." The light she brought to their affair has been extinguished and her bold experiment at linking him to life has been frustrated.

May's dual role as discerning intelligence and as the rejected spirit of spring culminates in two seemingly strained but entirely successful images. The first, May as sphinx, reveals her possession of the secret to the riddle that has puzzled Marcher since the end of the novella's opening pages; aged, and her face marked with innumerable "fine lines" that might have been "etched by a needle," she resembles "a serene and exquisite but impenetrable sphinx" who has attained ultimate wisdom. But the clue to her helpless sagacity is contained in the image almost implausibly intertwined with that of the sphinx. May's faded "green scarf, her wax-white face, and her soft white draperies" make her look like a lily: "She was a sphinx, yet with her white petals and green fronds she might have been a lily too - only an artificial lily, wonderfully imitated and constantly kept, without dust or stain, though not exempt from a slight droop and a complexity of faint creases, under some clear glass bell."

James's imagistic language resolves itself into a more compelling and intellectual drama than is usually conveyed by crude physical action. It leaves no doubt that Marcher has turned the natural woman into an artificial being preserved in an inviolate, inhuman state. Far from being the free germinal impulse she should naturally be, May is an object in a glass cage, a perfect victim of a monstrous egotist afraid to respond to her unspoken pleas.

The fifth section of "The Beast in the Jungle" begins with a variation on the sphinx motif and ends with Marcher's obsession with the buried secret (no longer likely to prove a treasure) that he must now exhume without May's help. James also weaves light imagery into his expanding psychological mosaic. However, the most moving motif in the special pathos of this section is that of the goodly bond established in the first section as Marcher's link to new possibilities is now permanently dissolved.

First, however, James refines upon the sphinx image and presents May, in her last conversation with Marcher, as a tender sibyl who speaks in riddles and mysteries. Although James describes her as communicating "with the perfect straightness of a sibyl," Marcher feels that her words are "all beyond him." The scene takes on structure, intellectual play, and emotional density from the energy of its controlling image. May tells Marcher strange and bewildering things that he believes without understanding: for instance, she convinces him that, despite his unawareness of it, he has met his fate; she assures him that he has crossed an unseen line and is now firmly established on "the other side" of his experience. She troubles him by warning him away from the knowledge of what has happened because "it's too much"; yet, she minimizes it by declaring it safely past. Her sibylline utterances leave him with the mournful sense of having had his ordeal and, at the same time, having been cheated of it. He suspects her of telling him that "his light has failed" but he ambivalently feels that as she speaks, "some light, hitherto hidden, had shimmered across his vision."

May's death functions as an ironic climax of the linking imagery by leaving Marcher stranded like some Hawthornian outcast of the universe. As if to emphasize the consequences of his mock hero's insensitivity to May's appeals, James shows him as having less claim to be one of her mourners than "the stupidest fourth cousin"; he is bereft, without the dignity of being able to claim any relationship with the woman who has been his mainstay. In terms of hard, practical reality, he and May had had no bond, no real intimacy. So Marcher deplores his outcast state, his banishment to the jungle that has grown more "spacious," stilled, and vacant. Even his visit to May's grave does not change his condition: it is as if the woman who offered him a link with life at Weatherend has broken all connection with him as "her two names [on the tombstone] became a pair of eyes that didn't know him."

The fifth section concludes with intermingled light and burial images that have the ring of a final verdict - Marcher beats "his forehead against the fact of the secret" kept in the grave and, in a bitter echo of May's Weatherend confession when a "light broke for him," now "no palest light broke." Nevertheless, James plants clues that these negative images will be replaced by unnaturally active ones: that his protagonist will see a lurid light, make an unexpected and catastrophic connection, and unearth a new and terrible "treasure." Before her death, May had been distressed that Marcher might be close to seeing his own folly and had put him off with kind ruses. But the accumulating data of his subconscious life will belatedly force him to see what she has seen. In fact, in his final colloquy with May, a "light . . . shimmered across his vision" only to be lost in darkness. Before it vanished, however, "the gleam had already become for him an idea" that would take the shape of a beastly nemesis.

In the last section, James arrives at his psychological climax by recapitulating the major motifs of his novella: The fall day of the concluding graveyard scene recalls the dim October light at Weatherend, where Marcher's alliance with May began; light, however, returns with phantasmagoric effect; the riddle of the buried, sphinx-like woman is spelled out with brutal distinctness; and the April horror Marcher had once failed to see weirdly returns in the deadness of the autumn.

James sets the scene of his protagonist's epiphany in a "garden of death," where Marcher rests "on the low stone table that bore May Bartram's name." Having severed all connection with the world and even with himself, Marcher revisits the cemetery to renew his tie with "the creature beneath the sod" and to get "back into his own presence"; he is ready for the shock given him by a grief-stricken man at a nearby grave, a man whose "ravaged" face expresses the full meaning of the goodly bond. What the sphinx-like woman had tried to tell Marcher becomes manifest: "The sight that had just met his eyes named to him, as in letters of quick flame, something he had utterly, insanely missed." Obviously an alter ego who is blest in spite of his affliction, the mourner conveys a message that Marcher might have learned from Pompeii, from May's constant movement toward him, and from her once bright and then failing light. Significantly, Marcher's enlightenment comes as images of light succeed one another with ghastly coruscations: James refers to "a train of fire," a meaning which "flared," a "smoky torch," an "illumination" that "blazed to the zenith."

As already noted, the opening scene at Weatherend, like the final episode, takes place in the fall of the year "when the leaves were thick in the alleys." The major difference between the two scenes, however, is the difference between a promising prospect and a bitter harvest. May, the original light-bringer and spirit of the "goodly bond," is dead, and the fate she could not save Marcher from has been realized. The last incident also resembles and contrasts with the earlier April scene in section four: April, the symbol of possible connection and actual separation, returns as a surrogate for May and functions as the law of retribution. Moreover, Marcher's imaginary re-creation of the April day ironically completes James's book of hours and seasons with the conversion of a negative adventure into charged sensation. In direct contrast to the earlier April scene, the concluding fall-April episode contains an outburst of melodramatic imagery. The hush becomes a rush, Marcher's avoidances end in confrontation, and his deferred expectations shape themselves into an abnormal reality. In describing the "horror of awakening," James does not sentimentally grant his protagonist a reprieve or allow the violated May to make a redemptive speech from the grave: sickened with self-knowledge, Marcher experiences the full measure of his fate, and the beast, thwarted once, makes his destined leap.

There may, initially, seem to be some imagistic incongruity in the leap of the beast as the culmination of Marcher's anxious, self-probing inactivity and negation. It is almost as if an introspective drama has flared into histrionics. Superficially viewed, James's imagistic drama may have seemed to point to a conclusion in which his protagonist would wither into bewildered nihilism. The failed light, the lost connection, the buried secret, and the sphinxian double entendre have, however, given birth to half-formed alarms and insights in Marcher's subconscious. The beast, in a sense, is the emergence

of those alarms to the level of awareness. James's resolution of his nonhero's negative quest with a sensational hallucinatory "action" does not reverse the drift of his imagistic narrative. He undoubtedly designed his ending to show that Marcher, the skillful evader, cannot in the logic of events escape the consequences of his inaction. Concealed as long as Marcher is not ready to see him, the beast represents, as a metaphor of reality, the shocked recognition of self-devastation. It represents, too, the massed power of those primal energies Marcher had repressed in his offense against the spirit of May and time. In a sense, May, who in her human embodiment wished to protect him from knowledge, cannot shield him from his own nature, which had been slowly organizing a surge of energy in the covert lairs of his being. The beast, then, is only the active climactic image in a book of images remarkable for their intellectual content, emotional depth, and narrative accumulation of suspense and movement.

Source: James W. Gargano, "Imagery as Action in 'The Beast in the Jungle'," in *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Winter, 1986, pp. 351-67.

Critical Essay #4

In the following excerpt, Wagenknecht analyzes the characters of John Marcher and May Bartram.

It must be clearly understood that Marcher is not a "bad" man. It is true that in effect May is sacrificed to him, but this is not his intention; he never deliberately exploits or victimizes anybody. He is "tremendously mindful" of all she does for him and worried over whether he is not receiving more than he gives. He escorts the lady to the opera and observes her birthday with more expensive gifts than he can really afford. He even thinks of asking her to marry him, and in a way it is only his consideration for her that prevents this: he is a man marked by destiny, but he is also a man of feeling, and he cannot believe that a man of feeling would ask a lady to accompany him on a tiger hunt. His egotism coexists with a naivete that almost makes it seem innocent; when she praises his attitude toward his ordeal, he asks, "It's heroic?" and again, "I *am* then a man of courage?" Nevertheless, his egotism is appalling. When May is stricken at last by mortal illness, he wonders momentarily whether her death might be the leap of the Beast for which he has been waiting, but he rejects this idea as he had previously rejected the love experience (it would be, for him, a "drop of dignity") and even goes the length of pitying the "sphinx," the "lily" that May has become, because she may have to die without finding out what is going to happen to him!

While we must never forget in dealing with Marcher that his is a failure in understanding rather than good intentions, it is equally important to remember that this does not completely exonerate him. The consciousness of being set apart, even for misfortune, can easily become a force for distortion, especially when, as in Marcher's case, one does not see it as requiring any action or entailing any obligation. Gamaliel Bradford remarked of the poet Cowper, who thought he had committed the unpardonable sin, that he preferred being damned to being convinced that he had been mistaken, and theologians have always realized that the sinner who supposes his sins to have been so uniquely great as to carry him beyond the bounds of God's mercy is guilty of monstrous presumption as well as of the sin of despair.

May Bartram achieves the near miracle of knowing Marcher thoroughly, loving him, and yet viewing him almost objectively; at the same time she protects him by trying to help him "to pass for a man like another." As for him, he realizes nothing except through her (he has not even grasped his own aging until he sees with the eyes of his flesh that she is visibly growing older), and it is a tragedy for both of them that she cannot communicate to him the most important piece of knowledge she has about him, for the simple reason that this is one of the things a man must learn for himself or die without knowing. For the Beast in Marcher's jungle is not imaginary; it is only different from any beast Marcher had conceived. Marcher is the empty man with whom literature since James's time has become so tiresomely preoccupied, the embodiment of what Hemingway called "Nada," the man "to whom nothing on earth was to have happened," and this he becomes through his inability to love. Life offers its best to him, and he passes it by, not because he does not value or desire it but simply because he does not

recognize it. As children get "warm" from time to time when searching for a companion in a game of hide-and-seek and then veer off again, he experiences flashes of prescience that give us moments of hope for him: the fear of being too late; the thought that not to be anything would be worse than to be bankrupt, hanged, or dishonored. But he fails to follow up these clues because he cannot believe that such things could happen to so marked and exceptional a being as himself.

May, on the other hand, learns the truth as early as the end of the second of the six divisions of the tale, where Marcher accuses her of knowing what is to happen to him and of withholding her knowledge from him because it is too terrible to tell. She will only say that he will never know and never suffer. During her final illness she adds that it has already happened and that he has not recognized it. Why should he seek to know that which he need not know? It is enough that *she* knows and that she can be grateful for having lived to learn what it is not. He continues to experience flashes of perception. He feels that she has more to give him than he has yet received. Once he even asks her if she is dying for him, and in a sense she is, as Milly Theale dies for her friends (or enemies) in *The Wings of the Dove*. But since he also accuses her of deserting him and leaving him alone to meet his fate, it is suitable that he should be left stranded on the periphery as he is at her funeral.

For if he is sometimes perceptive, he is more often blind. He can charge her with withholding information from him and, almost in the same breath, tell himself that, except for her feminine intuitions, she has no more knowledge than he has. Yet her own love and understanding never falter, and some hope remains to the end. "The door's open," she tells him. "It's never too late." She is right when she says, "I've shown you, my dear, nothing," but this is merely because he has no eyes, and she is right again when she says, "I haven't forsaken you" and "I'm with you—don't you see?"

But she is mistaken about one thing. Ultimately Marcher does "know" and suffer too, though this is not until after her death, when everything has become "vulgar and vain" without her, through a chance encounter near her grave, which has become to him something like Stransom's altar of the dead, with a desperately bereaved, "deeply stricken" young widower, visiting the grave of his young wife nearby. This man is one of those who, as Henry Adams, glancing obliquely at his own never-healing wound, once expressed it, "suffer beyond the formulas of expression—who are crushed into silence and beyond pain," and Marcher envies him! "What had the man had to make him by the loss of it so bleed and yet live?" And, by the same token, what had Marcher himself missed? "No passion had ever touched him, for this was what passion meant; he had survived and maundered and pined, but what had been *his* deep ravage? . . . He had seen *outside* of his life, not learned it within, the way a woman was mourned when she had been loved for herself." This man had lived, and May had lived, but Marcher had escaped living, and "*she* was what he had missed." The Beast had sprung at last, and we leave Marcher, in his awakened anguish, flung face downward, upon May's grave. Knowledge has come at last.

Source: Edward Wagenknecht, in *The Tales of Henry James,* Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1984, pp. 145-60.

Adaptations

In 1978, renowned French film director Francois Truffaut adapted *The Altar of the Dead* and *The Beast in the Jungle* into a film entitled *La chambre vert* (*The Green Room*). It is available with English subtitles from Metro Goldwyn Mayer/ United Artists Home Video.

Topics for Further Study

Analyze and discuss the seasonal and/or dark and light imagery in "The Beast in the Jungle." Where does it appear, and how does it contribute to the story's effect?

What can we discern about May Bartram's character, and what is her function in the story?

Research the findings of archeologists at the sites of Pompeii, Carthage, or Troy. Aside from the suddenness of the destruction faced by these cities' inhabitants, what characteristics of their fates are in some ways similar to the fate of Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle" ?

What Do I Read Next?

The Age of Innocence (1920), by Edith Wharton, is a historical novel of aristocratic New York, in which the ranks of class propriety close around Newland Archer, preventing him from breaking his engagement to pursue a woman with whom he falls in love. This woman, though she is an American, has lived much of her life in Europe and returns to America following her estrangement from her aristocratic European husband. In this meeting of Archer and an Europeanized woman, Wharton, like James, stages a fascinating clash of cultures.

A Room with a View (1908), by E. M. Forster, is another tale which treats the opposition between passion and repression. Like James, Forster was a traveler and writer who was often drawn to depicting the meeting of cultures. In this novel we read of Britons in Europe, and in his even more famous novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), Forster depicts the strained relations between the British imperial community and Indians.

The short stories of Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortazar should attract any reader who enjoys Henry James. Borges and Cortazar are widely translated Latin American authors whose short stories are as artful as James's own.

Sister Carrie, by Theodore Dreiser, was published in 1900, three years before James's "The Beast in the Jungle." Like James, Dreiser is a keen realist. As the reader follows the fortunes of Carrie Meeber from her small town to her success as an actress, glimpses at vivid scenes of late nineteenth-century Chicago and New York are offered.

Further Study

Levenson, Michael H. "Consciousness." In *A Genealogy of Modernism,* Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 1-22.

Levenson's chapter explains how Joseph Conrad and Henry James introduced narrative innovations that the next generation of writers built on. A good comparative description of style and narrative point of view (nineteenth-century authorial omniscience versus limited-point-of-view technique).

James, Henry. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces,* New York: Scribners, 1934.

An excellent companion text for the study of James. In this collected edition of critical prefaces, James presents the circumstances which gave rise to some of his narratives' composition, as well as wide-ranging commentary on diverse aspects of each work.

Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." In *The Gender of Modernism,* edited by Bonnie Kime Scott, Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 628-33.

In this brief essay, Virginia Woolf, a Modernist writer, explains which techniques and concerns Modernist writers have in such a way as to make clear why James is considered an important Modernist precursor. While not mentioning James explicitly, Woolf's essay is nevertheless useful for those interested in the history of literary movements.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

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The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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